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Learning community
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Teacher as researcher:
The reflective processes

The need for
readiness-based
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Teacher as researcher

By the time this issue of *Professional educator* is in your hands, the outcome of the federal election will be known and we will have a new government for Australia. What will be less clear is what this will mean for the educational enterprise right around the country. During the campaign we heard a lot about the opportunities in the new economy, the threats of financial instability, the challenges to our national security and the risks to essential services such as health. We heard very little about what the educational building blocks, that are so essential for a robust, productive and competitive economy and a just, tolerant and inclusive society will be. All of the promises made in the election campaign are dependent on the capacity of educated individuals, who are equipped to work together, to build a stronger Australia.

During the election campaign the British people also voted to leave the European Union. Much of the commentary suggested that a large part of the leave lobby's success relied on poorer people believing that migrants were taking their jobs and driving wages growth down and also undermining social cohesion. Where people feel disengaged from society and not equipped to participate in the new economy, they can be easily mobilised by those who peddle the politics of fear. I believe that greater investment in education, particularly for those young people, who are at risk of disengagement, or have extra social barriers to overcome, is fundamental to ensure that communities do not succumb to the lowest common denominator of values.

The role of teacher as researcher is developed in this *Professional educator*. Aside from engaging in research to improve the quality of professional practice in the classroom, teachers can also be agents of change and actively participate in the education community of ideas. Teachers can influence public

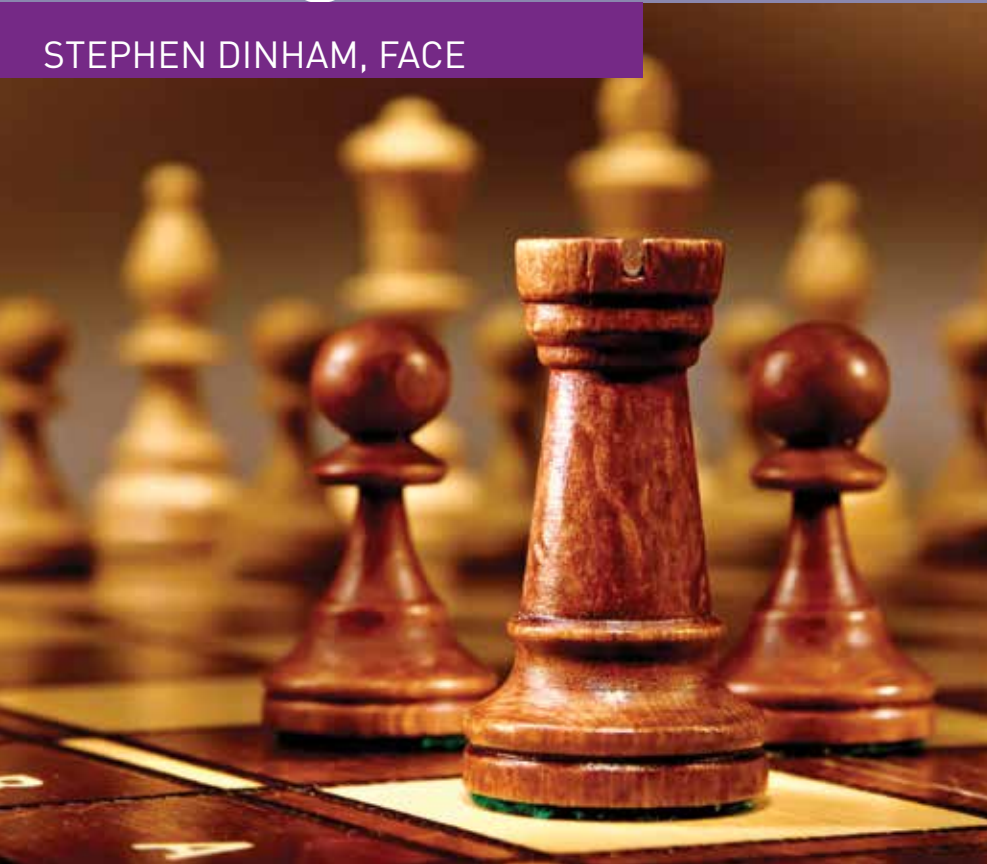
policy debates by demonstrating the nexus between a highly educated community and a strong commitment to civil society. On a daily basis they are able to observe the consequences when young people fall behind and are denied the resources to maximize their educational opportunities and outcomes. In this scenario, society is robbed of a productive economic contributor and an active and informed citizen.

I commend this edition of *Professional educator* to you and trust that all educators will continue to remind decision makers about the enormous value of investment in education and that this voice will be informed by the teacher as researcher. Researchers are able to make the connections between the outcomes people desire for Australia's future and the inputs that will bring those aspirations to life.

The Hon. Bronwyn Pike, MACE
ACE National President

Learning community formation through action learning

STEPHEN DINHAM, FACE



Teachers' professional learning has been shown to be central to successful teaching, student learning and effective schools. John Hattie found from his meta-analyses that professional development had an effect size of 0.50, teachers engaging in micro-teaching had an effect size of 0.88, and providing teachers with formative evaluation on their performance had an effect size of 0.90 in respect of student learning.¹

It has also been increasingly recognised that the professional learning needs of students should be recognised in identifying and addressing the learning needs of teachers and school leaders.²

Whilst professional learning is often thought of as externally provided in service or formal courses, it frequently

occurs through teachers talking about their teaching and working together in various ways at department, grade or school level.

This article reviews traditional and emerging approaches to teachers' ongoing professional learning before presenting a framework for developing and maintaining a learning community in education.

Traditional and emerging approaches to teacher professional learning

Traditional approaches to teachers' professional learning tend to be linear, reflecting the stages of a teacher's career:

- Formal pre-service teacher education
- On the job, *ad hoc*, professional experience
- Involvement with professional associations
- Informal self-directed professional reading and learning
- Formal in-service courses provided by employers (in school, out of school)
- Formal postgraduate study
- Other short courses.

More recent approaches to teacher professional learning, to augment the above, have included the following. Running across these is greater use of online learning, including the use of social media, learning 'blogs' and the development of online learning communities. Highlighting that various commercial interests, including both large international publishers and private consulting firms, have become much more active in the provision of 'for profit' professional learning:

- Action research
- Action learning
- Formal mentoring and coaching
- Professional standards and certification (mandatory, voluntary)
- University accredited professional learning modules
- Learning communities and communities of practice
- Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

In Australia, the widespread provision of professional in-service learning for teachers, really only dates back to the

early 1970s, when Commonwealth funding for professional learning, became available.

In the early stages, the focus of professional learning in Australia was more on inputs—dollars spent, courses offered, number of teachers participating. More recently the emphasis has shifted to measurable outcomes and in particular, the impacts of professional learning on student learning and development.

Table 1 provides an overview of the major characteristics of professional development for teachers from the 1970s, contrasted with current trends.

This paper is mainly concerned with the concepts of *building learning communities* and *action learning*, the latter a particular type of professional learning and research that has been found to be very effective in the right circumstances.

Kilpatrick, Barrett and Jones proposed the following definition of learning communities:

*Learning communities are made up of people who share a common purpose. They collaborate to draw on individual strengths, respect a variety of perspectives, and actively promote learning opportunities. The outcomes are the creation of a vibrant, synergistic environment, enhanced potential for all members, and the possibility that new knowledge will be created.*⁴

In education, research into the performance of individual teachers has revealed the importance of learning communities in influencing individual teacher effectiveness. Building collaboration and community amongst teachers has been found to be effective both in promoting teacher professional development and enhancing educational outcomes for students.⁵

Voulalas and Sharpe noted that the concept of the school as a learning community, while almost universally accepted as desirable, is still vague and ambiguous, as is the case with the concept of learning communities more generally. This lack of clarity can make attempts to develop learning communities in education and elsewhere problematic. Following a review of the literature on school learning communities

and interviews with principals, Voulalas and Sharpe found that:

*When all the definitions were pieced together the school as a learning community was perceived as a place where life-long learning takes place for all stakeholders for their own continuous growth and development, teachers act as exemplary learners, students are prepared adequately for the future, and mistakes become agents for further learning and improvement. Furthermore, it is a place where collaboration and mutual support is nurtured, clear shared visions for the future are built, and the physical environment contributes to learning.*⁶

However, while we now have a workable understanding of what an educational learning community looks like, operationalising the concept can be challenging. A key weakness to date has been the failure to address the ‘how’ aspects of establishing and maintaining learning communities.

Action learning has been defined by Aubusson, Brady and Dinham as follows:

‘Action learning is a process by which teachers meet together, whether spontaneously or deliberately to share their experiences and thereby learn from

each other. While this has always occurred in school staff rooms on an ad hoc basis, action learning is typically regarded as more systematic: as teams of teachers approaching a common task. There may be at times a ‘critical friend’, ‘mentor’, or facilitator. Action learning is commonly viewed as a less formal and less structured approach to addressing the problem than action research. The two terms have become increasingly fused and are now often used interchangeably...

*The following are noteworthy characteristics that apply equally to action research and action learning:*⁷

- *It is an approach to improving practice by changing it through self-reflective enquiry.*
- *It is participatory in that it involves teams of teachers working towards the improvement of their own practices. It is typically generated by individual or collective practitioner interest, so it is not ‘done’ to other people.*
- *It involves the learning/research operating within the context in which the learning/research is to occur. Rather than seeking a panacea, it seeks to investigate what is effective in a particular classroom or school.*

From	To
Centralised	Decentralised professional learning
System responsibility	Individual, collective responsibility
Off the shelf (‘one size’)	Tailored learning
Generalised	Contextualised
Offsite, apart	Onsite, embedded
Inputs	Emphasis on outcomes
Passive	Interactive learning
External expert	External partners, advisors
Individual learning	Community learning
Theory based	Problem based
Transactional	Relational
Changing things	Changing people
Learning by seeing, hearing	Action learning
University degrees	Learning modules and short courses
Using research	Doing research
Paper based	Online learning
Broad focus	Student learning focus

Table 1: Trends in teacher professional learning since the 1970s³



- *It is a systematic learning process in which the participants act responsibly. The collaborative and systematic nature of the process differentiates it from the more common thinking teachers experience when they think about their teaching.*
- *It operates through cycles of action and reflection that are typically repeated, that is, action, reflection, review, and action. Each step is informed by preceding steps to produce a continuing cycle of improvement.*
- *It is methodologically eclectic, yet typically involves collecting compelling evidence to be used as a basis for improving practice. LaBoskey describes it as improvement-oriented, interactive, using multiple methods, and viewed as constructing, testing, sharing and retesting exemplars of teaching.⁸*

Case studies of learning communities in practice

Over the past decades I have been involved in a range of research projects that have examined aspects of quality or successful teaching and effective schools. The following studies (see references for full details) revealed commonalities with respect to educational learning communities that are outlined below, with implications and conclusions explored.

1. Senior secondary teaching success⁹
2. AESOP: An Exceptional Schooling Outcomes Project¹⁰
3. Evaluation of the Australian Government Quality Teaching Program¹¹
4. NSW Quality Teaching Awards - learning communities and distributed leadership¹²

Drawing from the case studies: How does a learning community develop and sustain itself?

What then can we conclude about learning communities from the various research studies? What works? To answer these questions, the following commonalities were identified from the four studies:

Focus on teaching and learning

1. Learning communities have a focus on learning and a desire to learn about learning and teaching; there is use of pedagogic terminology, models and theory, coupled with a conscious effort to deprioritise administration and management and prioritise learning within the group.
2. Members of learning communities see themselves and their students as going somewhere, with learning being an ongoing process; learning becomes contagious, with others catching the 'bug'.
3. Within the group there is recognition that it is necessary to change the way people think if there is to be change in how they act, and thus learning, reflection and questioning are important.
4. Members of the group are concerned with establishing and maintaining upward, continuous cycles of improvement; they are not satisfied with the *status quo*.

Individual and collective belief and support

5. Group members possess and demonstrate belief and respect for their profession and discipline; they believe in, even love their area and communicate this to others.
6. Members of the group pay attention to social maintenance, trying to make their school, department, or faculty a 'good place';¹³ members respect and care for each other and their students as people, and social and professional relationships are important to group performance.

Problem solving

7. There is an emphasis on problem or issue based learning and recognition of what is important, with dialogue around identified issues and potential solutions.
8. Experimentation, risk taking and innovation in teaching and learning are encouraged and are a feature of learning communities; there is questioning rather than acceptance of constraints or problems.

9. Teaching and learning are context and person specific, with efforts to contextualise and modify as necessary externally derived solutions or approaches.
10. There is ongoing reflection on and evaluation of existing and new measures within the learning community, coupled with data-informed decision making.

Internal expectations and accountability

11. The group creates a climate of high expectations and professionalism which members rise to, not wanting to let anyone down, not least their students.
12. Members of the group empower each other to take the lead in learning, in turn enhancing individual and group leadership capacity and effectiveness.
13. Accountability is to the group, more than to externally imposed accountability measures; group accountability and self-accountability are powerful influences on the learning community's ethos, and action.

Leadership and outside influence

14. Leadership outside and inside the group is important in stimulating and facilitating the learning community.
15. While learning communities can develop without stimulus or action from above or outside, assistance, guidance, resources and encouragement from others within and in some cases outside the organisation can facilitate the learning process.

Overall dynamics

16. Time, place, space and language are important elements in creating a learning community.
17. Overall, what seems to work most effectively is a combination of external understanding, advice, assistance and recognition ('top-down'), coupled with a focus on internal issues and solutions, with teacher and group learning to address these through empowerment and with internal action and accountability ('bottom-up').

Implications and conclusions

The research evidence on learning communities and how these can support teachers' professional learning and improve student achievement is encouraging.

Building a learning community is more like agriculture or gardening than engineering or chemistry. Learning communities need to be nourished and supported in the manner of an organic system.

Thus, educational leaders cannot, nor should they, attempt to mandate or force the development of learning communities. As Andy Hargreaves has noted, collegiality should not and cannot be contrived or forced¹⁴. Leaders can however assist organisational members to come together, focus, and collaborate on issues of importance. Educational leaders need to ensure that teaching and learning are central concerns of the educational organisation and do all in their power to ensure that nothing is allowed to obstruct or distort this central focus.

Some organisations and groups appear to suffer from learning disabilities.¹⁵ These disabilities need to be diagnosed, assessed and addressed through suitable interventions in the same ways in which we would help a student.

There is a challenge for educational leaders to deal with situations where learning has atrophied. As McBeath has noted:

*'It is hard for teachers to shed an outer skin which has calcified over many years in the classroom where dialogue is a rare commodity no matter how hard teachers strive for it, and in which 'instruction' is the norm.'*¹⁶

Educational leaders, within and outside the group, need to act judiciously to wear away this 'outer skin', so that learning can once again flourish. However, building a learning community should not be construed or seen by others as being about 'fixing' teachers. Educational leaders should look to themselves, their strengths, weaknesses and actions, as well as to others, for problems and solutions.

The voluntary and empowering nature of learning communities is important. One of the most encouraging outcomes of these and other related studies has been the extent to which dialogue about and focus on quality teaching have emerged and been seen to reinvigorate jaded, mid-to-late career teachers who are now active participants in learning communities. Other teachers, of course, have never stopped learning.

Another important outcome of the case studies is the degree to which latent leadership potential has been released through the development of the learning communities, in turn providing both a stimulus and resource for further change and improvement.

Finally, to complete the circle, what the various studies and work by others have confirmed is that teachers and groups of teachers can learn, and are more 'made' than 'born', although the 'making' needs to continue career-long. It seems that it is never too late to nourish the learning community if the right conditions are provided.

This article is drawn from Stephen's book *Leading learning and teaching*, ACER Press which has been reviewed on page 30.

Stephen Dinham, FACE is the Associate Dean (Strategic Partnerships), Melbourne Graduate School of Education, Victoria.

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Practical, professional, participative

PATRICK O'REILLY



Applied learning at Southern Cross College

At Southern Cross Catholic Vocational College (SCCVC) research, both the individual and the collective, has shaped and informed the emergence of a college focused on applied learning. SCCVC has been recognised as a National Centre of Excellence winning the 2013 and 2015 Australian Training Award in the 'School pathways to VET' category.

SCCVC is a senior secondary college that began operating in 2010. Students typically study three Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications/courses whilst meeting the requirements of the NSW Higher School Certificate (HSC). SCCVC offers 16 different VET qualifications/pathways, with approximately 40 per cent of the student population taking a School Based Apprenticeship or Traineeship (SBAT). In addition to the full time cohort, SCCVC has in excess of 100 students enrolled as external VET candidates, who access

eight different courses from 12 different partner schools.

In 2013/2014, when SCCVC was still in its relative infancy, staff set about revising their vision and mission statements. The initial statements were crafted in 2010, to underpin and frame the initial SCCVC Strategic Plan 2011-2013. What emerged from this process was a rethinking and reshaping of the college vision statement, with a new emphasis on outcomes broadly understood, that is, what the students and graduates would

be/demonstrate/become. This then became the benchmark, the metrics, the measure(s) of 'successes for the SCCVC community—staff, graduates and families, business and community partners. These forms of 'success', have required staff to research and reflect on and their 'measures', far beyond NAPLAN performance and ATARs.

At SCCVC training and teaching staff members are referred to as 'learning facilitators' rather than teachers, in part, to signify the role they play with young adults in a post-compulsory educational setting. Those engaged in VET delivery have a variety of titles for their function—trainers, assessors and teachers. Not all staff members have both an education degree and industry/VET qualifications and experience. To this end, the 'learning facilitator' title includes and embraces all staff, and does not create a caste system across staff based on qualification(s).

In the beginning: There was research

SCCVC was recognised and funded as a 'Centre for excellence' as set out in the National Partnership Agreement on Improving Teacher Quality (2010-2012). These partnerships were supported by funding from the State and Federal Governments, and school sectors. This agreement mandated a collaborative initiative with a university, and saw SCCVC partner with Charles Sturt University (CSU), chosen in recognition of staff expertise in research and practice in VET.

Prior to SCCVC commencing, the principal and CSU staff began meeting, to explore views and discuss possibilities. The principal was clear that SCCVC sought a relationship with CSU that included a dimension beyond what the National Partnership Agreement required—that of a 'critical friend'—but also to partner in and through action research. Given there were very few schools similar to the emergent SCCVC, this dimension was strategically and practically of great value. Both parties developed a number of shared principles on which the relationship was to be built. These principles addressed a number of factors foundational to the development of SCCVC.

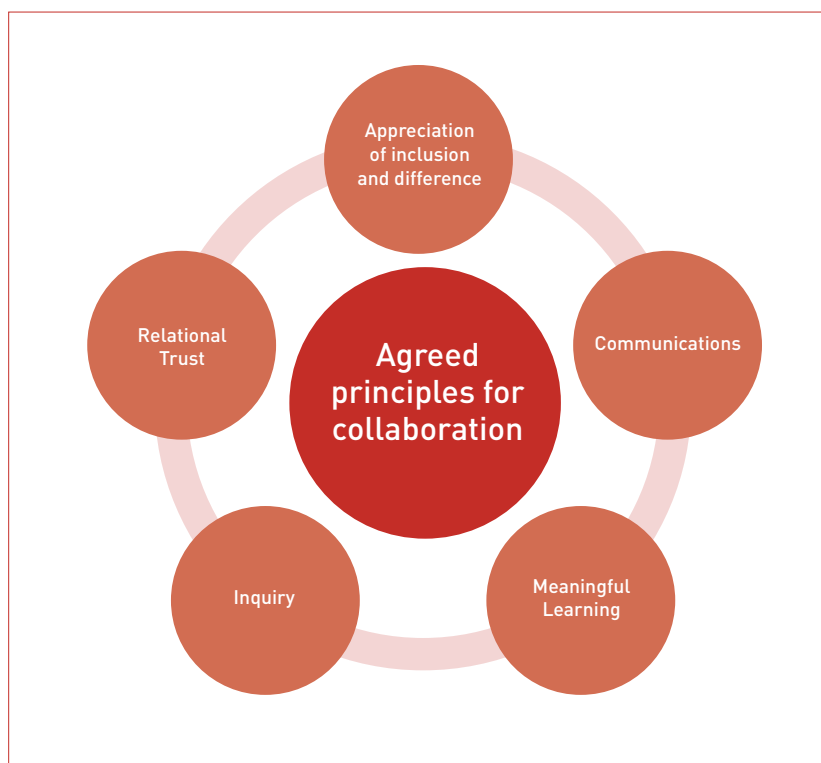


Figure 1: Agreed principles for collaboration between SCCVC and CSU [Brennan Kemmis, R and O'Reilly, P (2012), p. 50]

Across three years five learning facilitator-led action research projects occurred and in time the best of the research wisdom had been integrated into programs and the professional learning of staff. One project continues as legacy in 2016—Professional Learning Teams (PLTs).

All learning facilitators at SCCVC are part of a PLT. These teams engage in:

- reflecting on their practice in multidisciplinary groups
- supporting staff research in and of their practice
- developing and refining policy and process related to student learning and wellbeing
- offering feedback to/with each other that is focussed on the quality learning outcomes and wellbeing of their students.

The PLTs are designed to create an environment fostering mutual cooperation, emotional support,

personal growth, and synergy of efforts (Dufour and Eaker, 1998).

The PLTs are now in their third iteration. Hattie suggests that PLTs may work to improve student outcomes, but they are generally not sufficient by themselves. 'While these communities can work, they tend to need an additional factor (a person, or process) to challenge problematic beliefs, test the efficacy of competing ideas, and ground discussions in student outcomes' (Hattie, 2009). This is further evidenced by Timperley who observes that PLTs 'need to focus continually on improving student outcomes, and include experts who will work to ensure teaching practice is continually linked to student outcomes as well as challenge entrenched beliefs' (Timperley, H, 2008).

To this end, each of the 2016 PLTs have at least one trained Literacy 'leader' focussing each team on improved practices related to student reading and comprehension.

Research from a meta/macro perspective

Leading learning and training: A philosophical perspective

When working with young adults at SCCVC are the staff engaged in pedagogy (Greek: 'child-leading') or andragogy (Greek: 'adult-leading')? Debate and discussion regarding this distinction stems back centuries, with the latter term first used by the German educator Alexander Kapp in 1833, and popularised by the American adult educator Malcolm Knowles in the 1950s and 60s (Knowles, 1968).

Many researchers and theorists believe the andragogy-pedagogy classification is far from perfect; equally they cannot reach consensus on a viable alternative either. Knudson (1980) proposed replacing both with the term humanagogy because it is pedagogy and andragogy combined. Humanagogy attempts to capture the similarities and differences that exist between both adults and children as learning human beings. It approaches human learning as a question of degree, not kind. It is more a holistic approach. Knudson asserted that ignoring the principles of pedagogy from adult learning excludes

childhood experience. He argued that both approaches have something to offer. 'Like the Chinese symbols of yin and yang, they are at the same time opposites and complements and equally necessary' (Knudson, 1980, p. 8).

What is clear is that SCCVC operates as something of a 'halfway house' for students. Staff research and reflect on their practice from this perspective.

As the feasibility study undertaken prior the establishment of the college noted:

'This school will be a halfway house between normal school provisions, and structures and that available in the adult training environment of TAFE. Its establishment would:

- recognise that many students need greater guidance and structure than that available in the adult environment
- acknowledge that many parents see a vocationally oriented curriculum as ideal for their children
- ensure that the structures, safety and pastoral care provision of a school are available' (Laughlin, 2008, p. 40).

These important structures at SCCVC focus on both learning and wellbeing and this emerging adulthood requires that 'while most adults have well developed personal identities, many youth are still in the process of establishing self-concepts of self-responsibility while pursuing tertiary education' (Choy and Delahaye, 2005, p. 9).

Leading learning and training: The place and role of VET

In engaging young adults enrolled at SCCVC, staff are challenged to engage with and reflect on the tensions and conundrums that curriculum systems and frameworks create. Wheelahan paints a challenging picture:

'In Anglophone countries, such as Australia and England, which have particularly impoverished models of VET (Clarke and Winch, 2006), VET has been reduced to the skills needed to get a job and for work, knowledge, where it exists, has been subordinated to and tied to skills. Curriculum theory has abandoned

vocational education' and that VET is 'a key way in which social inequality is mediated and reproduced because it excludes students from accessing the theoretical knowledge they need to participate in debates and controversies in society and in their occupational field of practice.' (Wheelahan, 2015)

And further:

'If students are to have access to these debates, then they require *epistemic* access to the knowledge that is used to conduct them. Curricula that focus on experiential learning are often at the expense of providing students with:

- systematic access to disciplinary knowledge that informs practice in their field
- access to the knowledge they need to support educational and occupational progression...

'Arguably, this is one way in which the universal component of the system contributes to maintaining existing social inequalities, because it provides students with access to a different form of knowledge (Wheelahan, 2016).

If Wheelahan's contentions are correct, the staff at SCCVC, committed to the college vision of successful post-school pathways for all graduates, must bring a richer and deeper experience of learning, and not be limited to or by an 'instrumentalist' view of VET. One way this being addressed is via the 4-6-1 model.

A model for practical and vocational learning (PVL): 4-6-1

SCCVC is described as a 'workplace of learning'. This connotes two dimensions:

1. Bringing the best of high workplace and school expectations together
2. Operating a number of registered businesses under the umbrella of 'Southern Cross Vocational Enterprises', designed to engage students in the provision of goods and services with clients, intended to deepen and extending applied learning.

To these ends, SCCVC has sought a whole of school approach to learning, with a particular focus/emphasis on



practical/vocational learning. The model importantly must connect the SCCVC vision statement and the aforementioned measure(s) of 'success' with what happens daily in each course, class and learning space.

Having scanned the theoretical and research horizon, the college, in 2015, embraced the work of three academics from the Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester, and the model for Practical and Vocational Learning (PVL) they have developed (Claxton, G, Lucas, B, and Webster, R. 2010).

Drawing on a broad range of research from a predominantly constructivist theorists and perspectives, this PVL or model for 'real world learning' takes the '16 habits of mind' identified by Costa and Kallick (Costa and Kallick, 2000) and synthesises a combination of habits and frames of mind characteristic of successful applied or practical learners. The model stresses 'the importance of the context of learning both from the perspective of the learner in the moment of engagement (we call this 'presence of mind') and in terms of the cultures and contexts in which learners find themselves' (Claxton, G et al).

The four habits of mind the model identifies are:

- investigating
- experimenting
- reasoning
- imagining.

'By exploring these four habits of mind in more detail, we seek to show the ways in which the pedagogies and practices of PVL might be further developed' (Claxton, et al).

Further, the model details six specific frames of mind:

- curiosity
- determination
- resourcefulness
- sociability
- reflection
- wisdom.

'These six frames of mind suggest a number of fruitful questions which PVL practitioners may wish to consider' (Claxton, G et al).

The authors argue strongly that 'each of these qualities of mind can be either suppressed or developed by the context of learning, and raises the possibility that PVL could—and should—aim to strengthen these, as well as developing vocationally specific knowledge, skills and attitudes.' (Claxton et al).

It is early days with 4-6-1 but the hope is that this in time will improve learning facilitator practice, deepen student learning and enable graduates to realise the SCCVC vision, and be better equipped to address the aforementioned concerns that Wheelahan has presented.

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Learning Stories in early childhood settings

HELEN HAZARD

As an early childhood educator, I began working as an untrained carer in a childcare centre nearly forty years ago and then trained in a Diploma of Children's Services before moving to Higher Education studies to work in academia. Having seen many changes in the early childhood sector across this time, I will highlight one indicator of these changes, the use of 'Learning stories', as a method of documentation to make visible the learning of young children in early childhood settings. It is the sharing of stories that allows learning to emerge and reveals that children are not the only learners.

Changes in early childhood policy and practice

In the last decade there has been a noticeable shift in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) policies at the government level. For example, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (NQF) aims to set a new national benchmark for quality and to drive continuous improvement and consistency in education and care services. This includes a national agreement to deliver a year of preschool education to all children by 2013; a National Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF); and a requirement for four year early childhood trained teachers (DEEWR, 2009).

In addition, across this same period in the ECEC community, there have been significant changes in professional practice and pedagogy, influenced by moves toward sociocultural explanations for human development that emphasise 'how the child develops the skills and knowledge relative to her or his community, rather than on the basis of a universal description of development'

(Nuttall & Edwards, 2007, p.7). As a result, the way in which families and the wider community are recognised and involved in teaching and learning in early learning settings has also shifted.

The use of 'Learning stories' as a means to document observations of young children and make their learning visible typifies this move to a non-prescriptive approach. This is quite different from the objective style of observing that was so much a part of early childcare in the past. Observations such as running records, anecdotes, event sampling and checklists, that have, until recently, been more familiar to educators working with young children, require the observer to be objective in order to ensure accurate conclusions and to establish a baseline or milestones for whatever is being observed. The observer should be unobtrusive, sit apart from and not interact with the child. The reason for taking these observations is to build developmental records. In particular to be alert to any needs that might be perceived through the *external* manifestations the observations reveal, and to then 'communicate with families' ►

and specialists and give them a better understanding of what the child does in your program' (Child Care Plus, 1998, p.3). Objective approaches such as this employ a scientific model and construct the educator as expert.

Learning stories, on the other hand, are illustrative narratives that are more like campfire storytelling (Drummond, 2016). They are positive interpretations of a child's actions and involvement. Writing a learning story is based upon something that troubles, or excites, or inspires or disconcerts and it requires the educator to recognise a good story when they see one (Hazard, 2011). All participants are involved such that the educator is mostly not the assessor because, 'the artefacts, activities and the social community itself will provide for the learner their own indicators of achievement or success' (Carr, 2001, p.93).

The assessment is of dispositions for learning rather than a judgement of age-stage as developmental indicators. Here, the educator is 'no longer a transmitter of knowledge but, with children, a collaborator, researcher and knowledgeable 'other' in the educational endeavour' (Fleet, Patterson & Robertson, 2006, p.6).

Learning stories emerged in 1998 alongside the New Zealand Early

Childhood Curriculum, Te Whāriki, which reflected sociocultural theory and intent. Carr noted five behaviours to be attentive to when writing a story: initiative; engagement; intentionality; representation; benefaction and reflection (Drummond 2016). She also described a repertoire of dispositions such as courage and curiosity; trust and playfulness; perseverance; confidence and responsibility 'from which a learner recognises, selects, edits, responds to, resists, searches for and constructs learning opportunities (Carr, 2001 p.21). Later, in Australia the EYLF (2009) also took the perspective of sociocultural theories to describe children's belonging, being and becoming, and referred to Learning stories as one way to document the contribution of children and family ideas.

Images of childhood, shifting the goalposts

Offering personal views and conjecture in recording and sharing stories about and with young children fits comfortably within a sociocultural approach to assessment which makes possible a 'search for understanding' and shared meaning-making (Fleet et al, 2006, p.5). When children are participants and collaborators in their own meaning-making along with families and other educators, observations and assessment

encompass an image of children as powerful and knowledgeable. The theoretical shift to sociocultural imperatives in ECEC changed 'a deficit view of children to one of competency and complexity within a broader context of learning' (Nyland & Rockel, 2007, p.76). Because Learning stories unsettle preconceived ideas and categories that have previously been used to describe children and their development (Hazard 2011), they symbolise a change in the image of children and childhood.

The histories of childhood are inextricably linked to the prevailing and dominant images of childhood which reflect the dominant sociocultural norms, beliefs and values of a time and place. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate the complex and paradoxical nature of constructions of childhood, it is important to note that because they are 'often a reflection of the constructors rather than a reflection of children themselves' (Zhao, 2011, p.241) these constructs inevitably affect educators own practice. For example, an image of the child as innocent and pure, which Zhao describes as the 'first, or perhaps the most prominent construct of childhood since enlightenment' (2011 p.243), is normalising and limiting; positioning children as 'incompetent, vulnerable and dependent; a blank slate



ready to be moulded by adults'; the interests of the child being determined by the educators (Sorin 2005 p.14). For Zhao, the agentic child, who is active here and now in his or her own learning and living, is the 'only modern construct of childhood that does not relegate children into the other category' (2011, p.254). The adult and child collaborate; 'adults interacting with these children are co-learners who negotiate, challenge and guide while sharing power with them' [Sorin, 2005, p.18]. A key element to the EYLF (2009) is that children recognise their own agency and that adults support them in this endeavour.

However, use of Learning stories has not proven to be a silver bullet linking sociocultural theory and images of an agentic child seamlessly into the assessment of, and planning for, young children in early childhood settings. Hatherly and Richardson (2007) describe their concern that the early childhood sector continues to be influenced by the more traditional approaches to assessment and that depth and breadth of information is potentially lost when educators rely on the use of printed templates for recording their Learning stories. Blaiklock (2008) expresses several concerns including the need for ongoing training and professional development for educators, difficulties with establishing the validity of Learning stories, and problems with defining the concept of disposition.

Going on together

The objectivity sought through the previous approaches to observations claim to be scientific, bias-free and rational. Educators/observers seem to find some comfort in this apparent rigor. Perhaps the physical distance from the child who is being observed, or being able to tick boxes, check against baselines or 'find' milestones feels satisfying and gives a sense of completion and duty. Telling stories is another thing entirely. When we tell stories we are prepared for differences of opinion, even when they are disconcerting. We can be surprised by someone else's ideas and responses but so long as we do not dismiss them out of hand, these differences are exactly what will tell us more about that person

than we might otherwise know and, importantly, more about ourselves.

A few years ago I offered training to educators in a childcare centre in a remote community. I was, as the observer-analyst, tasked with the job of ensuring quality control. I had expectations of a conventional set of conditions; I assumed that all children be, belong and become more or less identically. But this Indigenous-run childcare centre challenged all that. We used photos and stories to share and compare ideas of what 'quality' might look like in action. I told them stories gathered from my own experience and beliefs, and from various documents including EYLF (2009).

The stories the educators told me of what constituted 'good' behaviour and strong and healthy relationships were disconcerting. For example, teasing another child is a good sign of maturing and being self-aware. Sharing with your closest kin is better than sharing with every child because it shows your awareness of your relationships and responsibilities. Other ways to confirm and reconfirm relationships might be for the adults to 'hang out' with the children, herding them from one activity to another, or to complete an activity while a child sits alongside contentedly, or to help the youngest child to complete a painting or construction by taking her hand and leading her movements (Hazard 2011). It is in the sharing of stories, in doing things together, that new ideas and ways emerge. The power of Learning stories lies less in the 'learning' and more in the 'story', as we struggle on together.

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Teacher as researcher: The reflective processes



ELISA DI GREGORIO

It is difficult to imagine a day of teaching going by without some reflection or evaluation on the lessons that transpired. With ever-present time constraints and various extra-curricular commitments, these considerations can sometimes be fleeting. They can be as simple as going through a quick mental checklist, for example: 'did I take attendance accurately?' 'did I hand out the practice exam?' and 'was that at-risk student engaged or disengaged today?' The list goes on. Other days allow for a more thorough examination of each class, where the efficacy of a differentiated lesson plan or the capacity of a task to achieve its

learning intentions can be considered. Sometimes, this might occur in the setting of a formal learning area meeting or in team meetings where we evaluate the impact of a newly implemented behaviour management policy. These reflective processes, whether informal or formal, deep or fleeting are what makes every teacher a researcher of their own practice.

Understanding reflective teaching practice as 'research' may not be a particularly natural perspective for many teachers, where the teaching profession is widely seen as a 'practical' one. This is especially the case when so much of

time is spent lesson planning, managing behaviour, trying to get through content in class, and assessing student work. These factors all seem to contribute to the ongoing 'separation' of the roles of 'teacher' and 'researcher' within the context of education practice, and certainly contribute to the difficulty that teachers experience in trying to 'formalise' the reflective practices with which they naturally engage. In this way, practitioner research cannot be considered identical to formal academic research in the traditional sense. Here, the term 'practitioner research' is used with a particular intention, as it captures the notion of reflection on



everyday 'practice' in the classroom. This perspective enables consideration of aspects of my own teaching and research, such as evaluation of assessment data, the use of theory and literature to inform my teaching philosophy, and the influence of the research process itself. This is not to say that practitioner research and formal research do not share commonalities. Both pursuits have a mutual purpose in conducting meaningful evaluation of information or data gathered, and both subsequently consider the implications that this has for a specific context or question.

Evaluating assessment data to inform my 'research question' in the classroom

The classroom provides many instances where teacher 'reflection' or 'evaluation' represents a form of research. For instance, the school where I currently teach emphasises the importance of student data as a teaching and learning tool. A large component of this is numerical data—including but not limited to statistics on student performance on standardised tests, achievement on assessment tasks as they occur, and homework completion tendencies throughout the year. More informally, student questions or discussions demonstrate the formation of meaningful connections to new concepts—when knowledge isn't necessarily demonstrated on a test, but in candid conversation between fellow students, or teachers. This 'ongoing assessment' approach creates a robust profile of each student in a class, and a place for teachers to begin when determining a student's point of readiness to learn. It also informs the differentiation that should take place in a particular classroom and is often the first step in planning lessons and determining learning goals.

Reflecting on student data in this way simultaneously answers and establishes a 'research' question in the classroom. For example, student outcomes on a topic test demonstrate how well particular knowledge has been understood and applied by a student. This evidence provides a more tangible 'answer' to the question 'how much do they know?' However, at the same time, it is similarly (if not more) important to observe the 'gaps in knowledge' that are evident on a test. This is where more questions should be raised. Within my own classroom, if a large number of students are unable to effectively construct an appropriate hypothesis on a Psychology test, then reflection on the methods used must be undertaken. In my experience, a useful way to determine the focus of how my teaching should be evaluated is to analyse the assessment tool itself. This means analysing the pattern of student performance on each specific question. Particular reflective questions can

then be considered in determining an explanation of data trends observed in the test. In particular, poor performance might indicate an inappropriate teaching method, or a poorly worded question. It is also important not to overlook the classroom context, and consider when the test was taken, whether it coincided with a 'high assessment phase' of the term as well as the personal lives of the students who were completing it. This process constitutes a more formalised analysis of the outcomes in my classroom, and provides a clear instance of where the processes of practitioner research and more formal research can be seen to overlap.

Using theory and 'literature' to frame practitioner research

The conclusions drawn from analyses of assessment tasks in this way are indeed critical in better ensuring effective and targeted teaching practices. However, reflections on assessment data cannot and do not occur in isolation. They are inherently informed by each teacher's own 'disposition' or philosophy, the theories that they prescribe to and the influence of vast knowledge shared among teacher colleagues. Like formal research, then, practitioner research is often supported by related literature. Annual Psychology conferences, for instance, permit the exploration of the content and curriculum. More frequently, daily discussions with colleagues relating to lesson planning, curriculum design, assessment task construction and student-centred conversations play a similarly important role in informing my own decisions in the classroom. While informal, these sources perform as literature that support, inform and enhance the reflections or 'research' I conduct in the classroom.

More formally, educational theories and research also serve as useful literature. As mentioned, this literature combines to influence each teacher's particular 'disposition' or philosophy. In the case of my own teaching disposition, this has unfolded in two major ways. The first is through my pre-service teacher training and the second, through my own experience as an academic



researcher. In relation to the former, my experience at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE) emphasised the 'clinical practitioner' model of education. Through this perspective, it is the fundamental role of the teacher to 'diagnose' or determine the individual learning need of each student, the design and implement the appropriate learning intervention. It is fitting, then, that the evaluation of my own teaching and the learning of my students is often based around data that provides a formal 'picture' of these learning needs and the way that they are being met. As a result, a 'differentiated' philosophy in the classroom is somewhat implied. This disposition undeniably 'frames' the way I consider, investigate and implement my own teaching practices.

Drawing the parallels of formal research and practitioner research

My formal research experience has emerged as similarly influential. Having recently completed a Masters of Teaching, I conducted a year-long

research project based on examining what 'equity' or 'fairness' looks like in a contemporary Australian education policy. While the content of the thesis was certainly of personal significance to me, it was an awareness of the processes of research that I found to more acutely influence my everyday teaching practice. Specifically, while I was more immediately aware of what 'fairness' looked like in my own classroom and school, it was the challenges that I faced in the research process that have become particularly informative of my teaching practice. For instance, applying the most relevant and appropriate method for collecting and analysing data for the project required thorough consideration. At times, the approach changed to match the evolution of my research question. A similar process should be and can be seen in the classroom. Strategies devised by teachers are not always as effective as they were intended; that is, they do not or no longer address the identified learning need. As such, the 'strategy' or 'method' must be amended accordingly. In this way, a teaching approach must also be consistently renegotiated as the

year progresses in response to evidence gathered both formally and informally.

Of similar significance is the writing process itself. While writing my thesis, I was fortunate to have my work consistently evaluated and critically appraised; a process that is fundamental to scholarly research. While this was often challenging, it was also the place where I learned the most. Likewise, peer-to-peer feedback on teaching strategies and practice serves as an extremely valuable process which allows for different perspectives to be considered. Integrating this 'peer review' process in my classroom practice has been similarly effective, where I encourage students in my Year 12 Psychology class to create exam questions, generate a marking scheme and corresponding answers. Swapping work and having students complete each others' questions not only enforces an 'open' or 'mistake friendly' environment, it makes each student think critically in terms of specific criteria and allows them to practice providing (and receiving) relevant feedback. Conducting my own formal research has gone some way toward making these reflective processes clearer, and certainly emphasises their significance in enhancing teaching practice.

Despite their common separation in a practical sense, the worlds of 'formal' research and 'practitioner' research are perhaps not as disconnected as we might often imagine. While practitioner research does not (and often cannot) follow the prescriptive conventions or processes of traditional academic research, their fundamental purposes can be similar. Good research considers the context of the research population, examines the data, utilises supportive literature and analyses accordingly. The way in which 'teaching' and 'formal research' go about working through this process often differs. However, each step is critical in ensuring well-informed and effective practice for both pursuits.

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The need for readiness-based education



TIM MIRABELLA

This is an abridged version of a paper presented to the Education and Youth Affairs Policy Committee of the Victorian branch of the ALP, Ringwood, Victoria, 11 June 2016.

The Italian Renaissance, which saw the rebirth of many social and cultural ideas, is regarded by historians as a period of enlightenment.

Enlightenment comes with understanding and without this the fundamental nature of learning will always be misinformed, with public opinion relentlessly driving political leaders to acts of desperation. I'm sure most teachers will agree that misinformation and desperation remain in plentiful supply, most visibly in the media, and in a continuing, three-decade's-long sequence of failed education reform movements, because these are inevitably based on false beliefs about teaching, and false assumptions about the way children learn.

Recently ACER's CEO Professor Geoff Masters asked: 'What is the problem with Australian schools?' Perhaps this article will answer his question and provide the ingredients of a rapid and permanent solution to stagnating standards.

Given the pivotal role of primary school, primary teachers must be regarded as specialist teachers. They must be given learning-specific pre-service and in-service training, otherwise primary education will never take the lead in producing higher standards—which it must do—as a matter of great urgency. ►

▶ But that is not going to happen while primary teaching is viewed as an inferior or easier version of secondary teaching. When primary schools allow underachievement to fester thanks to institutionalised systemic ignorance, all educational sectors suffer, none more so than the secondary sector.

This leads to focusing on a verifiable way of facilitating successful learning for all intellectually capable students—which is about the vast majority of children in our schools, regardless of any educational advantage or disadvantage.

Twenty to 25 per cent of primary and secondary students are reportedly struggling to *achieve* and *maintain* minimum acceptable standards of Literacy and Numeracy. Given that a minimum acceptable standard is a weak and impermanent state of learning, it is fair to say that there is something terribly wrong with a system of education that somehow interprets that as a measure of successful teaching. If *that* many students are struggling, can the rest be achieving according to their individual capacity to learn? Of course not!

As it appears this *is* the current state of affairs, then it must be recognised as a catastrophe, and could be sheeted home to a misinformed and misleading philosophy of education.

Let's ponder these rhetorical questions:

1. What exactly is the focus of Educational Philosophy? Is the focus on teaching, or is it on learning?
2. Is there a philosophy that is properly defined, or, is philosophy a matter of *ad hoc* consensus, or of individual choice?
3. What is your personal Philosophy of Education? Do you have one that you can readily articulate, and most importantly, personally translate into successful teaching practice in the classroom?
4. Do you ever question your philosophy, your beliefs, your assumptions, your concepts of teaching and learning? Or are they set in concrete?

These questions are posed, because 40 years ago an extremely difficult set of



circumstances *forced* me to question 'conventional wisdom', and in order to develop a different philosophy, which, when applied to curriculum development, was responsible for the sort of learning outcomes that all teachers of underachieving children desire, but few achieve.

I trained as a primary teacher in 1954/55 at Melbourne Teachers College, and for the next 20 years, I strove to be the best teacher. I had set out, and had proceeded to teach *as I was trained and expected to teach*; but, whilst I was rewarded with a number of rapid and hard-earned promotions, this striving took a heavy toll. By 1974, I was seriously ill with a life-threatening condition, which, when ultimately diagnosed, required five months sick leave before I was strong enough to survive life-saving surgery. I received compensation because the illness was deemed to be stress induced.

The surgery was the next best thing to a miracle cure because, although I seriously considered leaving the profession, I took a risk and returned to duty in 1975 at one of the most disadvantaged schools in Melbourne—with

the knowledge that I was to be allocated a fourth grade of 40 underachieving and difficult pupils. It was a huge risk, but one that ultimately returned a massive dividend.

Having thought long and hard about what had happened, and what might lie ahead, and having already taught in a significant sequence of country, rural, and suburban schools, both advantaged, and disadvantaged, I drew upon my experience to plan ahead. Knowing I could not continue to push myself beyond endurance, I devised strategies that I hoped would help the children while ensuring my own survival for one more year, at which time, my appointment in that school would have run its course.

You can teach disadvantaged underachieving children until you become desperately ill, as I did, and not see the learning outcomes you strive for, because so many disadvantaged children simply do not learn by being taught in the ways that conventional wisdom, and government policy, would have them taught. They are the children who become the 'classic' examples of the illiterate and innumerate members of society, whose plight is inevitably and unfairly laid at the feet of



and physical exercises at the first and every sign of restlessness or disruptive behaviour.

Although I expected resentment, the opposite proved to be the case. The children quickly came to enjoy their movement sessions and these too became invaluable elements of the safe, secure routines such children crave. Childhood should be full of movement of all kinds. Children should not be required to spend long periods sitting still in classrooms, especially sitting, squatting or crouching 'on the mat'.

With misbehaviour becoming less of a problem, and with happy teacher/pupil relationships strengthened, my normal teaching style began to take effect, and learning began to flourish. Well before the end of that year, those children were reading, (much to the surprise of the principal) and they had been transformed from reluctant underachievers into happy, relatively successful and enthusiastic learners.

That success was so gratifying, it made me decide to stay on and repeat the success; also in the hope that I might help other beleaguered teachers see the benefits of my strategies.

But then staff changes for 1976 meant that I unexpectedly became acting deputy principal with responsibility for the Infant School. That was an important year of gaining experience in school administration, and although I didn't know it, it meant my classroom teaching days were over.

But it was especially important for at least two other reasons.

Firstly, I was now 'officially' a teacher of teachers, a teacher educator, for it was my responsibility to offer assistance and guidance to more than a dozen young teachers and ancillary staff.

Secondly, I introduced the established concept of 'prep screening', a process utilising the *Vermont South Crossroads Program*, which allowed prep teachers to closely assess each child's physical, emotional, social, perceptual and language development and to plan accordingly. Here was coincidental and invaluable preparation for what

their teachers. But they *are* intellectually capable—so they do not deserve to fail.

Strategy number one was based on my realisation that these children would most likely never learn to read *well*, because their speech was *so* poor, it did not bear resemblance to the printed language in books. So daily speech training became important. Logically, I decided that it was one thing to provide speech training, and another thing to provide a variety of opportunities for the children to *use* their voices—so, among other things, the singing of songs and the recitation of rhymes and poems were presented to the children visually and aurally. Words of songs were written on the chalkboard and rhymes and poems were presented on duplicated sheets. My voice provided the model and vocal support.

Constant repetition, practice, rote learning of songs, rhymes and poems provided many benefits in growth in language and vocabulary. It also provided endless opportunities for assisted whole class reading, for absorbing language forms and sentence structure, and for an introduction to grammar.

Besides, singing and poetry brought genuine feelings of joy and pleasure to children whose lives were sadly lacking such emotions. These practices became safe, secure daily routines, as did the integrated handwriting and spelling activities, as did my determination to hear every child read something aloud every day. And so my simple-integrated language development and multi-faceted Literacy program began and evolved. Most importantly, this wasn't just about focusing on the teaching of reading.

Strategy number two was based on my knowledge of the volatility and disruptive behaviour of children in that school; behaviour I had figured out was due in large part to frustration. The lives of so many children were filled with endless frustration and anxiety, by deprivation, even by child abuse, all exacerbated by their failure and underachievement, and even their disciplining at school. There were so many little volcanoes ready to erupt, any opportunity to vent that frustration was accepted with gusto.

Knowing that, a good way to relieve any frustration I might have been feeling, was to take deep breaths and undertake physical activity, helped me use breathing





was to come in my days as a principal. *Crossroads* has long-since disappeared, but has been replaced by the less informative *Australian Early Development Census*—the AEDC

The following year, I was expecting to return to the classroom, but instead was given a new role in that large school, that of English coordinator and mentor to a large number of teachers.

It was in that role that I was amazed to find that my former fourth graders, now in sixth grade, were, in terms of Literacy, far more advanced than their peers. There were four classes at Year 6 level, each class containing approximately 1/4 of my former fourth graders, and the extraordinary contrast in literacy acquisition was uniform from class-to-class.

Whilst endeavouring to understand what all this implied, I had the good fortune to attend a seminar at Swinburne Institute (now University). The seminar's theme closely reflected the design of the *Crossroads* program and was presented by a child development consultant, Margaret Sasse, who later founded Toddler Kindy Gymparoo. It featured Margaret's practice of designing therapy programs for underachieving secondary students.

Her programs were designed according to the theories of Sensory Motor Theorists and therapists such as Temple Fay, Newel Kephart, Marianne Frostig, Carl Delacato and Glen Doman.

Margaret's sensory motor programs were intensely therapeutic and designed for a few weeks duration. They also required a huge commitment from parents because they were conducted out of school hours, with considerable fees.

It didn't take me long to realise that Margaret was inadvertently explaining why my simple, year-long, cost-free strategies had brought about the remarkable transformation I had witnessed among those 40 disadvantaged children. Best of all, the sensory motor theory explained that my physical exercise strategy, acting in tandem with my Literacy program, had played a major role in the children's mass transformation from reluctant underachievers to successful learners.

In the coming months I realised:

1. That my pre-service and in-service training had almost cost me my life; that the Educational Philosophy with which I had been imbued was seriously deficient because it was totally reliant upon the Psychology Theory of Learning, and left no room for other theories.
2. That by the beginning of their year with me, most of my fourth graders had not yet achieved readiness for learning, which explained why they had been perpetually underachieving before they came to me. I now understood that my survival strategies had inadvertently brought them to viable states of readiness for learning, and that's why my teaching had succeeded. It wasn't just because I had suddenly become a better teacher.
3. That misbehaviour, learning failure and underachievement are primarily due to neurological and overall immaturity, to lagging or delayed development in vitally important aspects of early and later childhood. These delays are clearly evident in children who exhibit poor behaviour, poor movement coordination, poor speech and limited spoken language. Teaching of Literacy and Numeracy and just about everything else is rendered difficult by such immaturity in children.
4. I now knew that the primary school curriculum must become readiness-based if all intellectually capable children are to become successful learners ASAP, for example fully and functionally literate and numerate, and thus capable of independent learning.
5. I knew that thanks to the richness of my teaching experience, supplemented by the inspiration gained from my disadvantaged students, and informed by Margaret Sasse, I was now armed with the most potent knowledge any primary teacher or principal could possess.

The opportunity to apply this knowledge to whole-school curriculum development arose immediately, when in 1978, I took promotion as principal of another disadvantaged school. The resultant

learning outcomes in that school became an acclaimed success story, and earned me the 1981 Victorian Teacher of the Year Award—for what was described as my inspired leadership, and for developing a highly successful program in Literacy and Numeracy.

So back to Professor Masters—what is wrong with Australian schools? The most fundamental rule of teaching is: *do not teach children if they are not ready to learn because they cannot learn successfully*. Thanks to a misinformed and misleading Educational Philosophy, teacher education and training is bereft of understanding in the one area of knowledge that matters most—children's developmental readiness for learning.

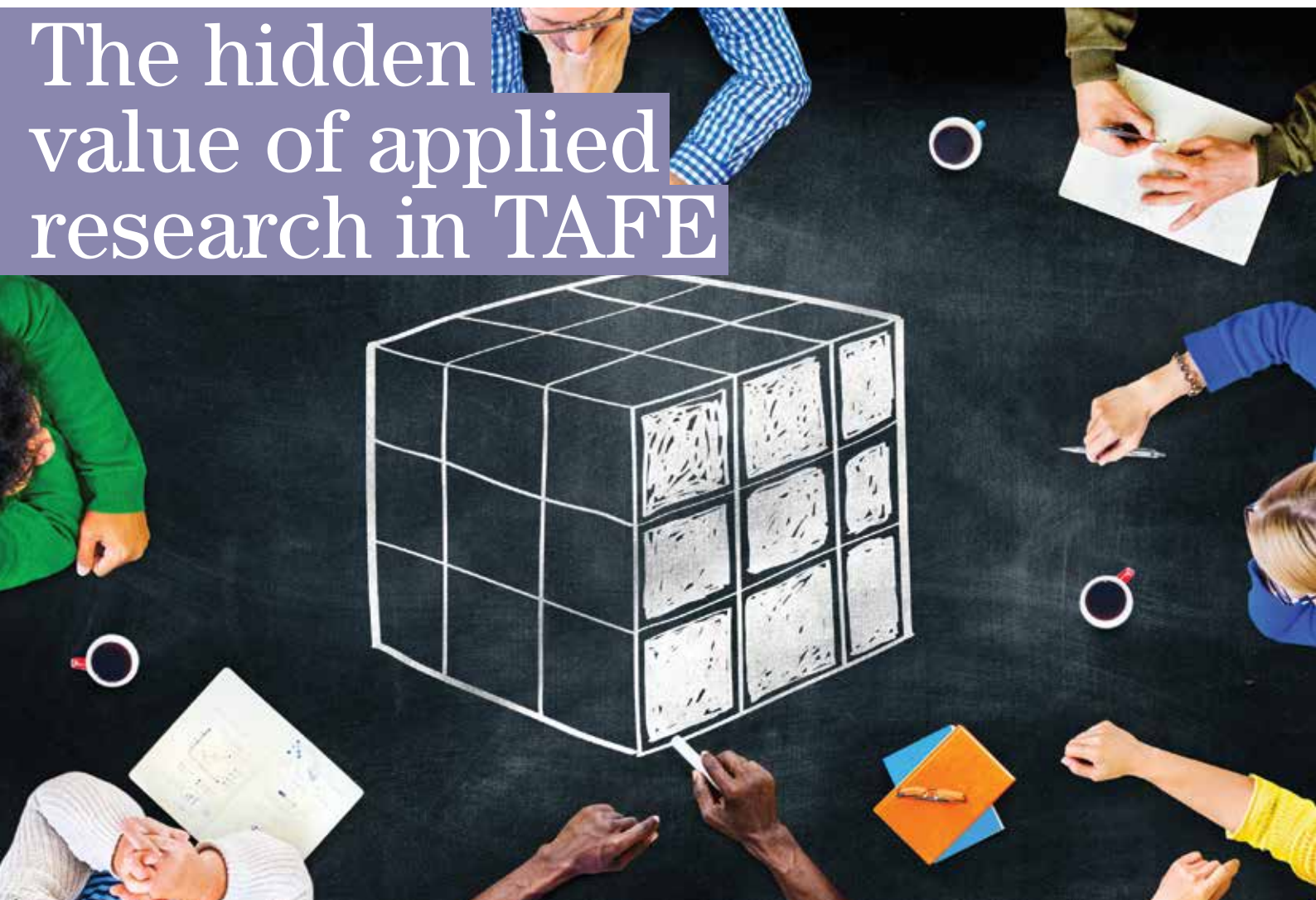
To the detriment of all the children in our schools, and their teachers, our entire education system, the National Curriculum included, is founded, designed and implemented in defiance of that maxim, and therefore, teachers are educated and trained in ignorance of the precept. By relying solely upon teachers, teaching methods and testing for standards, *and* reinforced by NAPLAN, our system of education *ensures* that seriously large numbers of children are destined to fail, or at best, underachieve relative to their individual potential.

They are neurologically, emotionally, socially and/or intellectually unprepared for academic learning; they are not yet ready to be taught. This means that direct and remedial teaching may only magnify their learning and behaviour problems.

Education's greatest philosophical error is to imagine that the quality of the teaching determines the quality of the learning outcomes. Also, that the quality of the learning cannot exceed the quality of the teaching. Developmental readiness for learning is the primary determinant of learning success. Therefore it is the major determinant of teaching success. Teaching, no matter how it is delivered, is a secondary determinant of learning success.

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The hidden value of applied research in TAFE



MELINDA WATERS

An Innovation and Applied Research Roundtable, hosted by TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) and LH Martin Institute at the University of Melbourne in March 2016, facilitated a debate about the role of the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector in Australia's national innovation and productivity agenda. The aim of the roundtable was to highlight the research activity currently underway in TAFE and to explore ways to expand these opportunities into the future. The roundtable concluded that the TAFE sector can significantly contribute to the National Innovation and Science Agenda (NISA) through applied research, however this activity is currently undervalued and absent from the policy discourse.

Drawing on outcomes from the roundtable and further related research, now is the time to investigate the value of applied research in TAFE to the innovation and productivity agenda and what is lost when Australia's research effort remains focused only on research undertaken by universities and research agencies.¹ This is not to challenge the importance of this research, but to also highlight the value 'grassroots' applied research brings to innovation and, more importantly, to improved outcomes for students in TAFE. It is well known that incremental innovation depends on the critical thinking and problem solving capability of workers (OECD, 2010) and that innovation is critically related to research (Goedegebuure & Meek, 2015). ▶

What is not so well known is that the pattern of innovation in Australia makes enterprises more reliant on VET than in other OECD countries and that, in many of these countries, tradespersons and non-university trained technicians constitute a large part of the research and development (R&D) workforce (Toner and Dalitz, 2012).²

Speakers at the roundtable from Canada, New Zealand and the UK demonstrated the link between applied research in public VET institutions and innovation; and its value to industry and the wider community. Community Colleges in Canada, for example, engage in systemic applied research activities with local enterprises and contribute significantly to local economic and social development. Funded for over a decade by the Canadian Government, and now attracting equal or greater investment from private industry,

the applied research model has over 100 dedicated applied research offices operating within community colleges nationally, over 5,500 private sector applied research partnerships in Canada and over 31,000 students engaging in technological or social innovation projects annually (CICAN: 2016).

In New Zealand, the Education Act³ clearly defines 'applied and technological research' as a key function of the public Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITP). This legislation has led to a strong culture of applied research in ITPs, which is supported and funded by the New Zealand Government. Applied research is not funded in Further Education (FE) colleges in England, however the UK Government has committed £2.7 million over three years to the development of a scholarship framework for FE colleges, focused on those delivering higher

education. The aim is to distinguish the applied nature of higher vocational curriculum, pedagogies and research in FE contexts and ultimately, to improve outcomes for students.⁴

The trend for applied research in non-university settings is not limited to the countries featured at the roundtable. Germany, for example, has Fraunhofer Institutes designed to undertake applied research with local industries. A number of other European countries have created applied research functions in non-university institutions to support 'innovating professions and service industries' (Goedegebuure & Meek, 2015). By comparison, applied research in Australia's VET system is clearly underdeveloped, evident in its low status (OECD, 2009); in the absence of funding and policy frameworks to support research capability; and in the exclusion of references to research in VET and other policy discourses. The links between applied research, innovation and quality outcomes for students have yet to be made by policy makers, despite calls for some time for greater recognition of VET in addressing 'persistent deficiencies' in the capacity of enterprises to innovate (Toner and Dalitz, 2012); for 'more widely dispersed' institutions than universities to 'fill a serious gap in Australia's national innovation system' (Moodie, 2006: 235); and for practice-based pedagogies and scholarly activity to be embedded in VET teaching practice (Waters et al, 2015).

Questions have also been raised about how well universities nurture innovators and entrepreneurs and build dynamic higher education-industry research interfaces;⁵ especially now Australia lags behind other OECD countries in innovation output and industry-research collaboration (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). Indeed, most advanced countries are struggling to reform their post-compulsory education systems to keep pace with the social and economic disruption caused by exponential digital innovation and globalisation (OECD, 2016). These uncertain environments are driving tertiary institutions to continuously adapt to increasingly diverse student communities while upholding quality teaching to ensure graduates can work successfully in complex and changing work environments.



What is applied research in TAFE?

What defines applied research in TAFE is a surprisingly contentious issue. The limited data available suggests research activity ranges from the provision of R&D facilities for industry (such as the Textile and Fashion Hub at Bendigo Kangan TAFE) to applied research projects with enterprises (the partnership between Canberra Institute of Technology and the Australian Federal Police), to solving problems for industry in the field (such as the Santos and SkillsTech partnership in Queensland), to public/private training and research partnerships (the Holmesglen Private Hospital partnership between Holmesglen Institute and Healthscope), to scholarly activities focused on teaching and learning and/or specific industry practices. What characterises this research are close relationships with enterprises, a focus on real industry problems and the highly applied nature of the inquiry. This is clearly not the same as most university-based research, or the commercialisation of research.

We know that applied research in TAFE has a strong practical focus on problem solving, is action-based, is rarely pure research and is not systematically published, or shared across the sector (Jonas, 2012). As a result, it does not fit what is commonly understood as 'properly constituted research' (Reid, 2004), but it is capable of creating new knowledge and using existing knowledge in new and creative ways; albeit at a 'grassroots' level. Challenging perceptions of the VET sector as the diffusor of knowledge and innovation, it can be original work that generates new ideas, products, practices or services with a specific practical application and can advance the quality of teaching to ensure TAFE graduates have the capabilities they need to succeed in the twenty-first century, including the skills to be innovative.

Applied research as pedagogy

While the case for applied research in TAFE to stimulate innovation in local businesses and economies was well argued at the roundtable, the case for the value of applied research to TAFE educators and students was not so

visible. To be innovative, workers need more than the practice-based or informal knowledge acquired through experience and, arguably, through the competency-based system of VET. Workers also need to engage simultaneously in the concepts, theories, models and frameworks of research-based knowledge and to reflect on what they learn during the process (Nilsen & Ellstrom, 2012). The use of applied research as pedagogies in Canada, where students engage with their teachers in applied research projects with industry partners, demonstrate how these different forms of knowledge can work well together. Both are fundamental to innovation and serve different purposes. Research-based knowledge for example, also provide the basis for 'educational and occupational progression' (Wheelahan and Moodie, 2011: 16).

Applied research as a 'practice-based' pedagogy engages students and educators in problem based activities as part of the students' coursework. All parties are learning together as they explore a problem within the context of changing industry practices and grapple with answers which may be new or improved ideas, products, designs, processes or techniques. Teaching is no longer understood as delivering 'packages' of learning transactions but is transformed into emergent, co-constitutive, experimental, knowledge-creating practices (Waters, 2014). These practices bring theory and practice together and foster critical, creative and innovative thinking by students and educators alike. Far from research being something that someone else does, 'theoretical knowledge becomes part of the lens through which they view the world' (Wheelahan and Moodie, 2011: 16).

The Innovation and Applied Research Roundtable indicated that applied research activity is already occurring in partnerships between TAFE and industry. Some TAFE Institutes are also establishing applied research centres. The presentations from Australian and international speakers outlined the many benefits from applied research in TAFE; innovation and social and economic development for enterprises and local regions, closer relationships with industry and enhanced reputation

for TAFE institutes, industry currency and ongoing inquiry by TAFE educators and, most importantly, improved learning and employment outcomes for graduates. Expanding this activity to become an integral part of TAFE's role and identity will require substantial and systematic change in thinking for TAFE institutes and VET policy makers. Lessons learned from other countries indicate that the right policy settings for public VET providers are essential to creating productive spaces to conduct outcome oriented, business driven applied research with students and industry partners. However, as learned at the Roundtable, these settings require a strategic, forward-looking 10-year national strategy and a commitment by all stakeholders to its implementation.

Melinda Waters is the Director of Technical and Tertiary, TAFE Directors Australia, NSW.

References

¹ The NISA makes the case for more applied, industry-driven research that is more likely to contribute directly to Australia's productivity performance and the commercialisation of research discoveries.

² Putting this in context, the Australian Government is investing \$9.7 billion in R&D over the 2014-15 period, including \$3.2 billion for business sector R&D with much of the balance allocated to research in universities (\$2.8 billion) and research agencies www.innovation.gov.au/page/national-innovation-and-science-agenda-report

³ 'Boosting High-impact Entrepreneurship in Australia: A Role for Universities' produced by the former Chief Scientist, Ian Chubb www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1989/0080/latest/DLM175959.html

⁴ www.aoc.co.uk/teaching-and-learning/college-higher-education-scholarship-project/enhancing-scholarship-in-college

⁵ www.chiefscientist.gov.au/2015/10/new-report-boosting-high-impact-entrepreneurship-in-australia/

Please email Melinda at mwaters@tda.edu.au for a list of full references.

Introducing your conference Keynotes



Changes & challenges

ACE 2016 NATIONAL CONFERENCE

This year, the Australian College of Educators' (ACE) National Conference will be held in Sydney 26 and 27 September at Dockside, Cockle Bay Wharf located in Darling Harbour.

The conference theme is 'Changes and challenges: The power of education to build the world to which we aspire'. The world is changing and increasingly facing significant challenges. Education has the power and the potential to change our lives to meet these challenges. Educators play an influential and vital role in shaping our future: a future world we want for our students.

The 2016 two-day program will be one of the most comprehensive and exciting events to date. A fantastic opportunity for all educators from the Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary, TAFE/VET and Higher Education and research sectors to gather and discuss the issues of the day facing education and all educators.

On the second day of the conference there will be an Early Career Teacher Program full of sessions encouraging participants to engage in roundtable discussions on key aspects that new teachers will face in their careers. Participants also will be able to critically analyse and evaluate possible impacts/influence on professional practice, as well as identify similarities and differences in their approaches to teaching in a friendly environment; plus so much more.

Professional educator spoke to some of the Keynotes presenters about their work, paper presentations and the current education climate in Australia.



Ms Rachel Hunter

Deputy Chancellor, Griffith University and former Chair for the board of the Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), NSW

PE: What aspect of your education work are you presenting at this year's conference?

RH: Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).

PE: How does your paper relate to this year's theme?

RH: Providing children with the best possible start in life is the foundation for building a better world.

PE: What are your thoughts on education during the Australian election period?

RH: Education continues to be an issue which people want prioritised. Investment in education unleashes imagination, empowers individuals, and defines a nation.

PE: What would you like to change in Australian education within the next five years?

RH: It would be good to see improved and personalised transitions for children and young people as they progress their education from the early years through schooling and post-school.



Ms Megan Mitchel

Gala Dinner speaker
National Children's Commissioner,
The Australian Human Rights
Commission, NSW

PE: What aspect of your education work are you presenting at this year's conference?

MM: I will be highlighting the important intersection between the work of educators and the rights of children. As National Children's Commissioner, one of my primary duties is to raise awareness of and respect for children's rights throughout Australia. I will also be discussing the ways in which my organisation, the Australian Human Rights Commission, seeks to collaborate with professionals in the education sphere to achieve this.

PE: How does your paper relate to this year's theme?

MM: I will be examining the idea of 'teaching for the future' by exploring the power and positive impacts of aligning human rights-based approaches with pedagogical practices to create social change. Teachers are natural leaders of positive social change. Through creating inclusive learning environments that redress social inequalities, and by empowering students to become active and ethically aware citizens, teachers are at the forefront of creating the kind of world to which we aspire.

PE: What are your thoughts on education during the Australian election period?

MM: A recent report released by the Australian Child Rights Taskforce, the national peak child rights body, outlined Australia's progress towards meeting the requirements of the United Nation's Convention on the rights of the child. Despite the commitment made by the Australian Government to uphold the convention over 25 years ago, there are still areas where Australian children fall through the cracks. In particular, the report highlighted where greater political action is required in relation to Australia's education system. To ensure we fully protect and respect the rights of all children, more commitment by the Australian Government is needed to implement, monitor and evaluate our progress towards fulfilling the convention.

PE: What would you like to change in Australian education within the next five years?

MM: I would like to see greater efforts to empower children and young people to become active and engaged citizens, capable of standing up for their rights and for the rights of others. As the future change-makers of our society, it is vital we encourage children and young people to have a voice and a say in matters that will affect them. This is particularly important in relation to groups of children who are typically marginalised and excluded, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disability and children from low socioeconomic backgrounds.



Ms Ann Vitale, MACE speaking at the ACE 2015 National Gala Dinner



Professor Peter Noonan

Tertiary Education Policy and Professorial Fellow at Mitchell Institute at Victoria University, VIC

PE: What aspect of your education work are you presenting at this year's conference?

PN: Future challenges for tertiary education in Australia.

PE: How does your paper relate to this year's theme?

PN: I will highlight the need for fresh thinking about the structure of tertiary education in Australia across the higher education and VET sectors in terms of the future social, economic and demographic challenges facing the country.

PE: What are your thoughts on education during the Australian election period?

PN: I am concerned about the absence of long term thinking about the capacity to tertiary education in Australia to meet these long term challenges particularly in relation to VET.

PE: What would you like to change in Australian education within the next five years?

PN: A more coherent and better integrated tertiary education system in Australia supported by a new financing framework.



Ms Jan Owen, AM

CEO, Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), VIC

PE: What aspect of your education work are you presenting at this year's conference?

JO: I will be drawing on reports from FYA's *New Work Order* series that explores what the future of work will look like, what employers want from their young employees and the skills young people will need to thrive now and in the future.

PE: How does your paper relate to this year's theme?

JO: Exploring three forces; globalisation, automation and collaboration, and the disruption that they are having. This presents both challenges and opportunities for young Australians. We must draw on education to give young people the skills, opportunities and support they need to take advantage of the opportunities and avoid the risks.

PE: What are your thoughts on education during the Australian election period?

JO: There needs to be thought around the education system and how it is not built to prepare young people for the challenges of the future. Despite staying in education longer, young people are not developing the skills increasingly demanded for work.

PE: What would you like to change in Australian education within the next five years?

JO: FYA is calling for a National Enterprise Skills Strategy to embed enterprise skills in Australian schools and build young people's skills for the new work order.

A National Enterprise Strategy would:

- Begin early in primary school and build consistently, year on year, throughout high school
- Be provided in ways that young people want to learn: through experience, immersion and with peers
- Provide accurate information and exposure about where future jobs will exist and the skills needed to craft and navigate multiple careers
- Engage students, schools, industry and parents in codesigning opportunities in and outside the classroom.



Emeritus Professor Colin Power AM, FACE

University of Queensland and former Head of the Education Sector of UNESCO

PE: What aspect of your education work are you presenting on at this year's conference?

CP: An international perspective on the conditions under which education empowers individuals, nations and humanity as a whole with the knowledge, skills, values and qualities needed to build a better world. This builds on my recent book *The Power of Education: Education For All, Development, Globalisation and UNESCO* to highlight challenges facing education in Australia.

PE: How does your paper relate to this year's theme?

CP: It is the conference theme!

PE: What are your thoughts on education during the Australian election period?

CP: Not enough attention is given to education as a key policy issue. When it is put on the table, no serious debate, just a political football for scoring points, rather than what serves the common good of all Australians. There is a growing divide between the opportunities in education assessable to those able to pay for high quality early childhood, schooling and tertiary education on the one hand, and that which is being provided to those being left behind on the other. We need political and community consensus on a mid-to-long term policy and funding framework for the development of education and the nation. A policy that is built on the values and principles underlying the world and nation to which we aspire.

PE: What would you like to change in Australian education within the next five years?

CP: A shift from a preoccupation with self-interest (status, league tables, money, funding) to serving the common good by providing an education that is inclusive, of high quality and empowering.



Professor Shirley Randell AO, FACE

Managing Director,
Shirley Randell International, NSW

PE: What aspect of your education work are you presenting at this year's conference?

SR: I have been an international development consultant in the Pacific, Asia and Africa regions for the past 20 years. In each of these continents, I have worked on education and gender equality among other assignments. The country where I have seen education making the most powerful difference and that has had the most profound effect on me has been Rwanda, partly because of the empowerment of women there.

PE: How does your paper relate to this year's theme?

SR: Rwanda has witnessed the influence and power to overcome challenges and achieve changes brought about by education. I will discuss the degree to which the education of women and girls has empowered them in particular to contribute to the evident social and economic dividends that has created a world that is very different from the genocide era 20 years ago.

PE: What are your thoughts on education during the Australian election period?

SR: As the first Director of the Disadvantaged Schools and Country Areas programs for the Commonwealth Schools Program in the 1970s, I am disturbed that there is still such inequality in education outcomes for children from poor socioeconomic and rural areas in Australia. Education is clearly a key issue for both major parties and the Greens. It is imperative that the Gonski Reforms for schools are fully funded.

PE: What would you like to change in Australian education within the next five years?

SR: I would like schools to be safe and inclusive for all students. I am impressed with the efforts of the Safer Schools Coalition Australia that has assisted hundreds of schools across the country. It has actively promoted safety and inclusion for the benefit of the whole school community. This includes working in partnership with government and independent schools, schools in diverse geographic locations, and faith-based schools. All students, whether Indigenous, female, from a non-English speaking background, with a disability, or of different sexual orientation, have the right to feel safe and belong to the school community. This is vital for student learning and enables all young people to have a fair go in their education. Bullying of any kind is harmful and should not be accepted.



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Leading Learning and Teaching by Stephen Dinham

Book review by Gerald White, FACE

I approached this book with great anticipation based on my experience of previous work by the same author who seems to have an extraordinary capacity to blend theory, research and practice with an authentic and expert voice. As a former school principal and then education researcher for many years, I was not disappointed and became instantly engaged.

Leading Learning and Teaching by Stephen Dinham (2016, ACER Press) is a landmark work about how to lead learning and teaching, professional learning for quality teaching and educational leadership preparation and practice.

Leading Learning and Teaching is an original book on educational leadership that begins with an understanding of teaching for learning and then moves on to discuss educational leadership and its impact on teaching and learning including student focussed professional learning. The book moves seamlessly through an examination of school improvement and change and then concludes by looking at effective leadership preparation and the benefits of professional standards for school leaders.

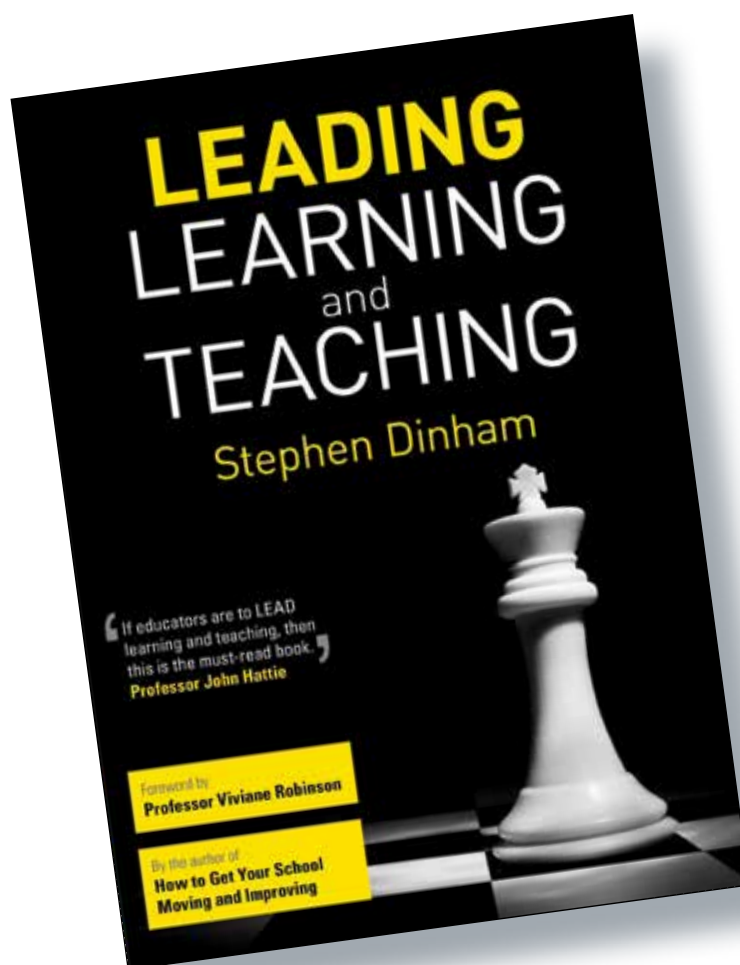
If there is a theme throughout this book, it is the emphasis on sound educational practice integrated with research evidence. However, that does not mean that Dinham has shied away from 'the manufactured crisis in education' (p. 72). He exposes the quick

fix myths, for example school governance improving learning outcomes, and cost cutting 'improvements', for example equity funding, often touted by public figures, self-appointed experts and the mainstream media.

Dinham's emphasis is on authoritative leadership, that is, leaders who have 'high-level interpersonal skills and personal qualities' (p. 253) and who are educationally credible because of their sound educational knowledge and

judgements. These are leaders whose interrelationships are marked by mutual trust (p. 163) and respect. The role of educational leaders is woven around the professional standards for school leaders and teachers, and so *Leading Learning and Teaching* can be used to align leadership in schools with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST).

Successful leadership practice in schools is characterised by Dinham



as distributed leadership (p.181) where the skills of principals, seniors and teachers are harnessed to develop and improve teaching practices, learning programs and their evaluation. The role of professional learning focussed on student learning is central to learning improvement in this book.

A dilemma that is highlighted in this book is the responsibility of the principal to professionally nurture and support teachers 'to make things happen within individual classrooms' (p. 144). Although this dilemma is real, it is not insurmountable. The challenge for schools is to devise collaborative methods for sharing and evaluating teaching practices so that innovative and improved practices that respond to students' learning needs can emerge.

Educational research is quite clear, asserts Dinham, that successful teaching

and learning is dependent on quality teaching, leadership with and through people, and professional learning with a 'central focus on students as learners and people' (p. 336). I particularly liked the fact that Dinham recognised the importance of school leadership over and above the minimalist impact that has been reported about this in much of the research to date. This reflects Dinham's extensive experience and research in schools over many years and also confirms my own view that after visits to hundreds of schools over many years, that an indicator of a successful school is the ambience of the school reflected through the leadership of the principal, although measuring that can be problematic and is an area for further research. As Dinham suggests, 'Educational leadership ... is a more contentious, complex, situated and dynamic phenomenon than previously thought' (p. 148).

This enlightened and insightful book *Leading Learning and Teaching* has masterfully blended an overview of educational research, extensive experience and sound teaching practice. I responded warmly to the voice of the author reflecting and commenting through case studies and his own observations throughout the book.

Leading Learning and Teaching is a breakthrough in school leadership because it brings research, teaching practice and leadership experience together in one place through an evidenced informed, expert voice. This book is essential reading for educational leaders.

Gerald White is an Associate of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and an Adjunct of Flinders University.



Changes & challenges

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KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Ms Megan Mitchell
National Children's Commissioner,
The Australian Humans Rights Commission



Ms Jan Owen, AO
CEO Foundation for
Young Australians (FYA)



Emeritus Professor Colin Power AM, FACE
University of Queensland and former
Head of the Education Sector of UNESCO

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