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Leading Excellence through Equity

AEL Spotlight Interview with Janet Clinton

Leading Education Equity for All: Personalisation and Differentiation

by Jim Watterston & Yong Zhao

Leading excellence through equity: Social emotional learning for a Fair Go

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Australian Educational Leader

Vol 43, Term 3 2021

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Australian Educational Leader (AEL) is published quarterly in March, July, September and November. It is a practical journal for the exchange of current research, trends and innovations. It is a valuable resource for accessing leading educational techniques and thinking. *AEL* is a forum in which educational leaders can share their expertise and their stories of challenges and celebrations for the benefit of all readers.

Australian Educational Leader is included as part of membership of ACEL. Address subscription, advertising and membership inquiries to ACEL.

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Published 2020

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ISSN 1832-8245

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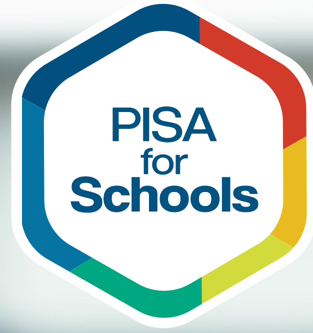

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From the President

Stephen Gniel, MBA, BEd
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Dear colleagues

As I write this, it is difficult to know what will be happening in our communities by the time this publication goes to print and is received by members. I cannot express adequately in words my sincere admiration for all educators who in many areas of Australia and across the world continue the education of our children and young people in challenging circumstances and show incredible dedication and commitment to the communities we serve. Thank you.

There is no doubt that passion is required to thrive as an educator, however, it doesn't mean that we don't get tired every now and again. It's R U OK today and, as I sit and write, never has it seemed more important to look after each other as educators, parents, grandparents, carers, partners, and colleagues. Part of supporting each other is gathering and sharing our passion as well as our challenges. This has always been something that I have looked forward to as part of our annual ACEL National Educational Leadership conferences. The ACEL board and team tried so hard to hold onto the in-person gathering that I, and many others, craved in delivering our National Conference in Melbourne in 2021. We left the difficult decision to move the conference online until we knew it just wasn't going to be possible to hold an in-person event. However, Dr Watterston and the team have again delivered on preparing a wonderful virtual conference to look forward to, where we can learn together and share.

One of the elements of ACEL providing a forum for discourse about education 'matters that matter' is giving voice to our homegrown talented Australians. This has always been a priority for ACEL and continues today. I was thrilled to open the latest ACEL Members Newsletter and be greeted with a video from a wonderful colleague of mine Kristen Douglas, Head of headspace in Schools who will also be speaking at the conference. Not only is it reassuring to know that our intent to showcase the talent of leaders like Kristen is being delivered, but her message is also so timely and needed for our school leaders who deserve our gratitude and understanding that they too need the opportunity to rest and recharge. Thank you, Kristen!

In 2020, our online Global Conference was a resounding success. More people tuned in than ever before and we heard from Australia's leading education voices as well as from our international experts and colleagues. The online mode delivered a different experience, but one that we well and truly made the most of. The 2021 conference again promises to be a fantastic event, with an unsurpassed line up of speakers and events that present a multitude of opportunities to listen, challenge ourselves and others, and learn. I encourage our members and all educators to join the event and the discussions.

As well as making adjustments to our conference, we are continuing to listen to our members to ensure we are delivering on our promise to inspire educational leaders and shape the practice and contribute to the growth of educational leadership. I commend our CEO, Dr Barbara Watterston, on her insistence that we actively listen to and act on the feedback we receive from our members through a range of means, including through regular membership surveys. The recent survey of our valued members has delivered areas for us to focus on, strengthen or begin to offer to meet the contemporary needs of educators. I would like to thank members who provided feedback and encourage all members to engage with these opportunities to help set the direction of our organisation and provide insight into how we can best support all educational leaders. It is the feedback and contributions of our ACEL members that drive our strategic planning as we look towards 2022 and beyond.

I look forward to joining you at our ACEL Online Conference.

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From the CEO

Dr Barbara Watterston
@BarbKW

As we enter a new chapter in ACEL's strategic direction, all of us at ACEL would like to thank you for your feedback and insights collected from both surveys and conversations via our Branches across the country. Your valuable feedback has led to the development of simplified membership tiers, ensuring less confusion in selecting what best suits your needs and current context. Our new categories of membership make it clear which tier is the right one for you and remind us all that we are in this together: as teachers, leaders, educators, researchers, experienced elders of the sector and those embarking on their first steps in education.

As you open the pages of this edition, ACEL's 2021 Online Conference, *Leading excellence through equity*, will be in full delivery mode. This AEL edition provides a provocative and informative companion to exploring the key themes of the conference. Due to the uncertainties surrounding lockdowns across the country, we made the executive decision to provide a fully online conference; a decision that came with a sense of collective relief.

Our flagship conference continues to remain an important forum for members and non-members alike to come together not only to reflect and learn but also to recognise and celebrate the achievements of teachers and school and system leaders who provide exemplary leadership to all students across this country. Importantly, registration to the ACEL 2021 Online Conference includes access to all sessions post-conference for a period of six months ensuring that you and your team can use the professional learning and the provocations from the conference as part of your wider team's ongoing reflection, dialogue, decision making and action.

An innovative element of this year's conference will be an emphasis on *leading with students* where students will be active participants in conference panels and video reflections. Their involvement is an important step in listening to their voice and recognising that they are our "change partners and creators of the future" (Yong Zhao), a message underscored also by Virginia Trioli in a recent ABC episode of Q&A. We cannot underestimate the capacity for children and young people to understand and contribute to the debates about education issues that affect them. As challenges of the pandemic continue to escalate, the voice of younger generations needs to be at the centre of our response.

The pandemic has emphasised just how vital schools are to communities. In our interview with Janet Clinton in this edition of AEL, she makes this very point when she says how the pandemic has put an important spotlight on the exemplary work of teachers and leaders and raised the profession's esteem in the eyes of the community. These sentiments were echoed in a recent Monash University study where lead researcher and author Dr. Fiona Longmuir emphasised the way in which COVID has amplified the importance of schools as community sites as the work of teachers became more visible to families. She reminds us that we need to be proud of what school communities have achieved over the past 18 months. There is no doubt that these recent disruptive and challenging times have provided all of us with an opportunity to reflect on the lessons learned and to take these positive learnings from this time with us into the future.

Our thoughts of support go to all educational leaders who are committed to continuity of learning and wellbeing for their staff, students, and school communities. Leading in complex times requires the creation of a culture where positive and proactive mental health and wellbeing strategies are a key feature of school communities. A priority for ACEL is strengthening wellbeing initiatives for leaders. ACEL is partnering with well-known thinkers and professionals in the field to deliver professional learning, support, and best practice resources to provide a better picture of wellbeing and its prominent place in organisational life.

ACEL recognises and appreciates the valuable contribution of middle level leaders to the overall leadership and functioning of schools and other organisations. For this reason, ACEL is focused on engaging more proactively with emerging and middle leaders from a variety of education sectors including early childhood and care, schools and systems, and higher education. Our goal is not only to strengthen and expand existing networks, but also develop new strategic partnerships to stimulate thinking, policy and practice around the importance of middle level leadership.

ACEL's evolving focus on professional learning opportunities for emerging and middle leaders has been emphasised through the introduction of the pre-conference Master Class: *Leading with the heart and mind: you and your leadership.* Experienced guides Tracey Ezard, Adam Voigt and Dr Kylie Lipscombe, will create an environment to reflect on, reframe and resolve some of the leadership challenges, taking a deep dive into the heart and head of leadership through *inspiration, exploration and provocation.*

Together with AEL spotlight articles, the masterclass launches ACEL provision of quality evidence informed professional learning and resources to support the development of educators and educational leaders at different career stages. Through ACEL Branches and nationally, our goal is to continue to provide opportunities for connection, recognition, professional sharing, and learning.
This involves strengthening our connections within and across branches and sectors and contributing to developing an innovative professional learning program for middle leaders that is engaging and intellectually stimulating focused on issues important to middle leaders.

Drawing from lessons of a moment in our lifetime like no other, our ongoing challenge is to provide professional learning opportunities through quality programs, resources and publications that address the needs and interests of our members who are located at different career stages. Some examples of exciting professional learning opportunities on the horizon are:

- The **Clarity Learning Suite** based on the highly acclaimed work of Dr Lyn Sharratt. The focus is on the comprehensive "whole-system" and "whole-school approach" participants can use to help them plan clear, self-determined pathways for their own improvement journeys. It models best teaching practices to improve knowledge, skills and results in all subject areas across all programs on behalf of ALL students – highlighting the priority of Equity and Excellence. Ongoing registrations for the Clarity Learning Suite are now over 1000 people in Australia.
- **ACEL Leader's Library**. As we work on reformatting resources for all members into our **Leader's Library**, we are delighted to launch the first series of webinars for the library which engage participants with authors including:
    - Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley: **Five Paths of Student Engagement: Blazing the Trail to Learning and Success**. The authors offer five webinars based on their new book of the same title that covers what engaging with learning means (and doesn't mean). In these practical sessions, Andy and Dennis cover each facet of engagement and include recommendations for classroom instruction, school leadership and educational policies
    - Steve Munby: **Imperfect Leadership.** Steve is offering three webinars focusing on the notion of imperfect leadership that argues it is unrealistic for leaders to be experts in every facet of their work. *Imperfect leadership* reveals what leaders can do to create a culture of development, and how leaders can work within their schools to achieve both academic excellence and equity.

Through the enormity and volatility of our current context, we need to continue to work closely together, learn and reflect on what we have learned. "Leaders are dealers in hope" (Napoleon Bonaparte) and, for this reason, we look to the future with some optimism that our lives and those of the children and young people in our care will be more optimistic and resilient. In the midst of chaos, there has never been more of a need for kindness: kindness to ourselves, our colleagues, our students, and our communities.

Our value proposition is our connectedness with members and non-members of the ACEL community who represent the breadth, depth and diversity of the profession. Importantly our work is relational; it's about people.

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Leading Education Equity for All: Personalisation and differentiation

Jim Watterston, University of Melbourne;
Yong Zhao, University of Melbourne, University of Kansas

The world post-COVID will be different. While we are still uncertain when the COVID-19 pandemic will truly end, or whether it will end at all, the disruptions caused across the planet could already be prescient indicators of a changed future. We know, for example, that there has been a significant increase in employees choosing to work from home or a hybrid of remote and in-person work (Lund et al., 2020). We have also seen that innovative and adaptive businesses will unlikely seek to return to the pre-pandemic "old normal".

Education across the globe has certainly experienced highly challenging disruptions. Schools have had to close and reopen on multiple occasions depending on their location and proximity to virus outbreaks. Remote learning has become a universal experience of most teachers and students (Zhao, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a). Although the quality of remote learning has been uneven for various groups of students, and while it seems that many students may have continued to prosper, it is apparent that it has not always served students from disadvantaged backgrounds well (Goldin & Muggah, 2020). What is abundantly clear, however, is that the universal experience of remote learning has had significant impact, for better and worse, on the delivery of education to students of all ages.

The experience with remote learning has taught us a number of things. Firstly, educators can make rapid and drastic changes when they collectively believe it is necessary. Although the changes were not in all instances necessarily well prepared, the vast majority of classroom educators did make quick and innovative responses to provide external and online teaching. It was evident that educators could make the necessary fundamental changes required to improve practice if they were collectively committed and felt a sense of agency and responsibility for proactive and relevant reforms.

Secondly, remote learning did not offer satisfying and inclusive experiences for all students, however, we must take into consideration the conditions under which it was offered. Initially, there was not the available time for detailed preparation or comprehensive design as many teachers and students were not nearly as familiar with remote learning as compared with face-to-face classes. For a significant number of teachers over recent decades, the incorporation of digital experiences and pedagogies has been peripheral or an adjunct to traditional learning so there has not been large-scale professional development or rethinking about learning with enhanced remote digitised learning as an essential element of education. Now is the time to reflect on what kind of flexible and adaptive education could we offer and what elements of our recent remote instructional experiences would we want to preserve and enhance?

Thirdly, the requirement for remote learning made it necessary and plausible for learning to take place away from the classroom, which has meant that students and teachers have experienced learning modes and experiences that, for the most part, they had never relied upon before. Learning generally took place at home and in many cases, with parent or caregiver support or oversight. Again, it may not have been an optimal learning experience for all students and teachers, but it was an almost universal solution which demonstrated that learning can take place without students and teachers being physically located together.

Fourthly, remote learning demonstrated the capacity to change the time, location, and how and where learning took place. Many students found themselves not having to learn synchronously with teachers or the whole class during a traditional school day. Other than the times dictated by parents and schools, many students were able to learn at any time they wanted. For proactive and motivated students, learning was expanded way beyond class time, often utilising alternative digital resources and applications to explore areas of interest and passion.

The learnings from these lessons could have a significant impact on educators as we move forward to reshape and rebuild our education systems and practices, especially for the purpose of equity, personalisation and the inclusion of all students regardless of socio-economic constraints and learning difficulties.

Educational Equality and Equity

The issues of equality and equity in education have persisted since formal schooling began. It could be argued that educational achievement in Australia has not really ever been equal or equitable for all young people for a variety of reasons. While we don't like to openly admit it, some children go to schools without necessarily having their interests best served by less experienced or capable leaders and teachers. Many attend schools with less resources than others. Some children live in much more isolated communities than others, while others have more challenging home environments which impact heavily on learning and opportunity.

Obviously, those with optimal home and community environments, and higher socio-economic status in general, do much better than those from disadvantaged backgrounds and, as a result, educational outcomes vary significantly (Hanushek et al., 2019b; Lee et al., 2019). In short, and for the most part, educational opportunity and performance are severely inequitable, and we argue strongly that they are the basis to declining educational outcomes in this country (and many others).

There have been numerous, and ongoing efforts to address the issue of inequality and inequity in education (Zhao, 2016a), in order to close the achievement gaps among identified groups of students (Hess, 2011). In Australia, every state and territory government, along with all educational systems, and the federal government have invested heavily in improving education outcomes over the past ten years (Gonski, 2012). High-stakes assessments have become the dominant source of accountability by which schools and teachers are judged as the nation searches for sustained improvement. Newspapers, politicians and quite often, bureaucrats and department officials use simplistic and severe summative judgements to gauge educational performance. Billions of dollars have mobilized an array of resources in an effort to make education supposedly better for all Australian students (Gonski, 2012). Alongside this considerable funding growth, there has been an outpouring of educational research, slick consultants offering ready-made self-assessed educational improvement strategies, and no end of professional development opportunities provided to teachers across the nation.

Excellence and equity are the primary identified justifications for these inputs; however, it seems that these efforts have not made much difference in either excellence or equity, judging from NAPLAN results. A recent NAPLAN review (McGaw et al., 2020) found that the Australian national testing results from 2008 to 2019 in addition to international assessments have not substantially improved. As noted in the report:

> National NAPLAN results have improved in the last decade in Years 3 and 5 but not in Years 7 and 9. Writing achievement has been static in Years 3 and 5 and has declined in Years 7 and 9.
>
> There have been improvements in NAPLAN reading and numeracy in Years 3 and 5, PIRLS Year 4 reading and TIMSS Year 4 mathematics. Although achievement in Years 7 and 9 NAPLAN reading and numeracy has not changed in a decade, PISA reading literacy and PISA mathematical literacy of 15-year-olds have declined.

Interestingly, in the United States, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data identified similar results (U. S. Department of Education, 2020). The 2019 data show some improvement for students in early grades from 1992 to 2019, but 12th graders scored lower in 2019 than in 1992. The achievement gaps fail to improve (Hanushek et al., 2019a) as socio-economic status and family background continue to be the dominant factor in student learning outcomes (Smith et al., 2019). Moreover, if students when in later grades don't see sustained improvement, then one hypothesis might be that the early grade achievement for some may be temporary or worse, just an illusion. Despite our lagging efforts to improve our national education performance, the aim has always been to ensure that all students are highly capable and optimally prepared for their future upon graduation.

What NAPLAN and PISA results do show us conclusively, is that a student's "postcode" absolutely matters. Simply summarized, the further a student lives from a capital city in each of Australia's states and territories, the less likely it is that they will achieve at a level compared to those students in metropolitan areas (Perry, 2017). There are some exceptions, but the data is unequivocal that socio-economic status is the strongest indicator of potential educational achievement in this country. Educational attainment is inequitable and for many students, their chances of success seem to be diminished and compromised before they even enter a school. We are no cleverer than anyone else who can digest the data, and we are certainly not the first people to point this out, but the "*Australian socio-geographical student achievement performance lottery*" continues without a coherent national plan in place to seriously address this gross variation in performance. Policy makers, government advisors, glib consultants and authors of the plethora of national and system-based educational reports and reviews that are commissioned ad-nauseum every year, come up with piece-meal solutions and ever-changing reforms but socio-geographical destiny reigns supreme.

It is important to note, however, that not all aspects of identified educational inequity can be addressed singularly by schools because students are only in schools for a relatively short period of time, and they come to school after they have already experienced home and community during their most formative years. While the suite of necessary interventions schools can make to address inequity is somewhat limited, formal education is the only universal and compulsory institution for our young people and therefore the critical opportunity for children to be nurtured, engaged and well supported to learn must be maximised. At a time of great change, how can we proactively shift the destiny of those students whose postcode will likely determine their life outcomes?

Rethinking Educational Equity

Today, in considering the incredible and previously unimagined COVID disruptions and innovations, schools have a unique opportunity to rethink educational equity and excellence. If all educators draw upon the same agility and capacity they determinedly demonstrated through heroic educational responses to pandemic-related lockdowns in order to address equity, we may have a better chance to improve educational outcomes for all students.

In pursuing equity in education, we seem to have inappropriately conflated the notions of equity and equality whereby, according to governments, achieving equitable outcomes will be achieved through being provided with similar base levels of resourcing. We seem to have accepted the fantasy that equal outcomes mean that all students master the same content in the same grade at the same time. Due to the over-simplified significance of NAPLAN outcomes, in the main, we have mistakenly focused on plans and new policy built upon a "level playing field" distribution of resources, programs and rigour to achieve equitable outcomes.

In order to provide authentic equity in education, teachers cannot simply be implored to strive harder to achieve the same educational outcomes for all students without some major structural changes and differential investments to focus on the impact and challenges of postcode based disadvantage. It is unlikely that students will achieve the same test scores or master the same content at the same age because of vast human individual differences, along with variable home and community environments (Gardner, 1983; John et al., 2008; Lewontin, 2001; Reiss, 2000; Ridley, 2003; Sternberg, 1985). Equity is, therefore, about personalisation and differentiation to ensure that all students are able to access a quality education.

Equity means ensuring the most vulnerable students in the most disadvantaged communities are taught by the very best teachers and the most experienced school leaders. It means those with disabilities receive necessary professional services and supports through timely referrals and immediate access to expert providers who then work in partnership with the school. It means access to evidenced-based wellbeing programs, juvenile justice enhancements, contemporary resources, the provision of regular nutritious food, and ongoing healthcare. For some it also requires integrated and nurturing family support, clinical service coordination and mentoring. It may also mean more secure housing and sustained protection from domestic disruptions.

So how do we provide all of the above to ensure that every student has their basic and essential health, safety, cultural, social and intellectual needs met before we start thinking about academic achievement?

While there is not enough space in this article to articulate the necessary policy and strategic directions required, we must stop resourcing schools with "Gonski type formula" which recognise a range of insubstantially funded differences (loadings) between schools but do not provide the necessary school equity funding envelope required to pay the best teachers and leaders significantly more and with better conditions to work for longer periods in our most challenging schools. We need additional money for school-based local and accessible health and wellbeing services and to provide breakfasts, lunches and afternoon teas for those who need it. Great teaching on its own is not enough, but for any progress to be made, it must be of the highest quality for those who need it most.

NAPLAN test results should, therefore, need only to be used to indicate which schools we should provide extraordinary and decidedly unequal funding to in order to ensure that every student has the fundamental supports to enable them to come to school feeling safe, well and ready to learn. It will only be through seriously addressing the underlying social and health constraints that prevent young people from accessing all that education has to offer them, that we can then effectively focus on the development and attainment of academic success for all. To that end, and in the spirit of differentiating the provision of basic supports, we can then focus on personalising the outcome achievement of every student as they develop a successful "jagged" educational profile of competencies and abilities (Rose, 2016).

To cultivate personalised jagged profiles requires schools and teachers to pay attention to students' strengths and interests. As mandated, schools have faithfully paid unabating attention to the very dense and expansive Australian Curriculum which many teachers find exceedingly difficult to implement within the course of a school year, and which is delivered, often at the expense of time, to foster students' unique talents and passions. While it is necessary and important to expect students to achieve the basic competencies, it is also important and engaging to know and celebrate each student's unique strengths and interests. Constructed with students, such an integrated learning profile identifies and records strengths and passions and charts each student's journey to pursue growth, expertise and future opportunities. Such a profile should be regularly reviewed to ensure learning and development pathways are intentional, differentiated and reliably assessed.

Rethinking Learning Resources

To ensure that students are provided with meaningful opportunities to have their strengths and passions developed requires abundant, distinctive and differential learning resources. Learning resources in schools have been traditionally limited to what the school can afford and source. From an equity perspective, we have become acutely aware when visiting schools in disadvantaged rural and regional communities that there is more likely, due to funding issues, to be a comparative scarcity of engaging resources that would enable and support opportunities to develop student passions and personal strengths. The remote learning experiences enacted during COVID-19 may, however, have highlighted a solution.

As a new and adaptive learning paradigm has been forged by necessity during the pandemic, remote learning has become more established within a global context (Zhao, 2021b). During periods of lockdown, many teachers were no longer able, or required to be, the sole source of learning for students. Innovative schools were able facilitate student participation through digital opportunities with external learning communities, often with students from other jurisdictions and countries. Once learning expands globally via digital pathways, students are likely to access and share an abundance of learning resources and experiences typically unavailable in a local school.

A recent report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021) presents the current and future learning resources enabled by new technologies such as artificial intelligence, block chain, and robots. The report, based on detailed reviews, makes a very positive assessment of educational technology:

"Now is the time for schools to dive into digital. Many have liked the 'anytime-anywhere' capabilities of remote classes. More and more educators are getting ready, but is the technology?" (OECD, 2021, p. 3). The report claims that the answer is a definite yes. "As it turns out, education technology is ready too." The ever increasing number of YouTube videos, Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs), large-scale formal and informal learning environments such fan fiction sites (Aragon et al., 2019) and educational gaming platforms such as Scratch (Resnick, 2017), global learning institutions such as the Global Online Academy (Global Online Academy, 2021), and social media have truly created the possibility for learning anything, anywhere, and anytime. Remote learning during COVID-19 has, hopefully, given teachers and students a sense of this possibility. But should schools and systems seek to retreat to the "safety" of the past (Watterston & Zhao, 2020) should the current pandemic subside, the digital innovation and impetus for teaching students how to access an array of online opportunities and resources will diminish.

The key to personalising learning to improve engagement and performance for all, is to keep pushing forward and to continue to embrace what was forced upon us when lockdowns first look place. For many teachers the pivot to online learning was a giant and innovative leap of faith, while for a large number of students it was a side-step towards the digital world where they had long felt comfortable.

A potentially important outcome of the pivot that has been made by teachers to shift to differing modes of delivery in order to sustain learning during the pandemic, is the opportunity to reflect and reconsider the traditional conception of mainstream learning and teaching. The context of teaching has changed because of the availability of global and technology-driven learning resources (Zhao, 2018). When students have access to these resources and can learn more independently, whenever and where-ever they want and need

to, the question that must be considered is, what constitutes effective teaching in a post-pandemic world and how can we improve learning for all students?

Teaching for equity requires teachers to pay attention to all students as capable individuals with unique talents, passions and capabilities. Teaching individual students to identify and build on their strengths and address specific challenges rather than teaching universally to the group, has been reinforced to teachers through the advent of COVID-19. Instead, as one principal described to us, teachers in her school adopted a role akin to more of a coach as students were remotely challenged to take more responsibility for their own learning. In this mode, a teacher's primary responsibility is to work with individuals or small groups to co-develop relevant learning plans and identify appropriate resources. The shifting role of the teacher is, therefore, to provide meaningful instruction and learning within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) while providing more agency and responsibility to individual students to support and build confidence when required.

The post-pandemic teacher is also the learning community organiser. Learning is social and thus cannot be always optimised by working independently. Well-developed and effectively tasked learning communities are important to ensure socialisation, peer mentoring and collaboration when working virtually. Learning communities can have different forms and shapes but the purpose is to place students in social contexts for more effective learning.

A fundamental change is the acceptance that teachers do not need to be the only source of learning. Instead, combining challenging and relevant resources from various sources and assigning tasks for students has been a hallmark of innovative learning during recent lockdowns. Based on the lessons from COVID-19, not all learning needs to be in the classroom as we have seen that students can also learn from, and in, the community and with the careful and critical selection of online resources. There could also be a reconsideration of the need for senior students to be in school for the entire five days of the school week. Instead, depending on the tasks, students may be able to spend a portion of their valuable time in the community or at home to focus on their work.

Rethinking Schooling

With access to additional digital learning resources and blended modes of delivery, learning can be much more customised, and student driven. The process could start with the personalisation of time, place, and pace of learning. One of the challenges in striving for equity through personalisation is that students are diverse and master the same content at different speeds. Facilitating flexibility in learning based upon differential progress can be of significant benefit to students. A more elevated level of personalisation is to enable students to choose different courses or learning resources that match their strengths and interests. That is, besides the basic curriculum, students can achieve other learning outcomes from different sources. At this level, students personalise their learning outcomes in addition to learning processes (Zhao, 2016b).

Firstly, schools could enable greater personalisation through grouping students in interest groups rather than age appropriate grade levels for some activities, which is empowering for some students as it can build confidence rather than create competition. These communities can be local, global, or a combination of both.

Secondly, a school can offer a range of different and enticing opportunities by drawing from online and technology-supported resources as well as collaboration with other schools. Schools no longer need all course offerings to be developed and curated by their often over-stretched teachers. They can identify and encourage students to also seek external resources for learning. More courses enable students to have more choices that can extend their learning and further their passions.

Thirdly, schools could consider a co-construction approach with students as self-determining learners. Innovative schools, in recent times, have prioritised working with students to understand their responsibilities for seeking learning opportunities, to develop the skills to manage their own learning, and to create learning plans for themselves.

Summary

There is little doubt that our rapidly changing world will be different because of COVID-19 but whether schools will be different is uncertain. Although the possibilities exist for the adoption of new approaches to education in order to seriously address equity in education, it is up to schools and teachers to seize the moment as a catalyst for what we have not been able to achieve previously. Even though educators are tired and somewhat anxious as they face ongoing challenges, now is the time to reflect on lessons learned from COVID-19 in order to advance education provision and practice to ensure equity for all.

Schools and teachers are not independently able to fully address the issue of student equity without governments and systems ensuring that funding is effectively distributed to achieve justice in education. Better distribution of funding would improve the conditions of education for disadvantaged students and would ensure that the curriculum was resized to allow for the individual needs of all students. Australian educational outcomes, based upon national and international test scores, will not substantially improve until we all play our part in addressing the impact of low socio-economic status and disadvantage on educational performance and life-chances.

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Leading excellence through equity: Social emotional learning for a Fair Go

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Australia likes to call itself the land of the "Fair Go". But what does a Fair Go mean for students from backgrounds of deep disadvantage? The UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 aim to ensure "inclusive and equitable quality education and [to promote] lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2015). The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) notes that equity does not mean all students achieve the same outcome, but rather that the variation seen in student outcomes is not based on their social-economic background, or gender, or cultural-ethnic group status (OECD, 2019).

When students start their schooling, inequity in outcomes is already in place. Students enter the Foundation years of schooling with pre-existing disparities in the core academic and social-emotional skills. How many of those vulnerable students manage to achieve the top ATAR scores? Are school staff able to shift the life trajectory that students are on at the beginning of their school journey? Can school staff help vulnerable students achieve a meaningfully Fair Go? How can school leadership chart a course that reduces the gaps?

We believe that achieving excellence through equity requires a meaningful commitment to students' social and emotional learning in schools. Reducing inequities in student outcomes will require a much greater commitment to building non-cognitive skills than currently exists. Evidence suggests this initiative may also provide the tools to increase overall academic achievement and improved student behaviour as well. Social-emotional skills may be the bedrock for ensuring all students really do get a Fair Go.

Relative Disadvantage, Inequities in the Foundations of School Success and the Limits of Traditional School Responses

At the beginning of their schooling, students may show vulnerabilities in (a) language and cognitive skills, (b) communication skills, as well as in (c) social competence, (d) emotional maturity, and (e) physical health. Researchers at Telethon Kids Institute have been assessing these vulnerabilities at school entry using the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). Using teachers' understanding of their young students, the AEDC provides a snapshot of these five indicators of development. The AEDC provides a way to map developmental vulnerability across all these indicators at a community level, enabling school leadership to identify and plan for how to address these needs.

Linking AEDC reports to other data on the community context of the school, data linkage studies have found that all five indices of developmental vulnerability are already showing a social gradient by age five. This means that children from the most affluent backgrounds have the highest scores on these developmental markers, children from middle-class backgrounds tend to have middling scores, and children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds have the lowest scores, and thus the greatest vulnerability. This developmental vulnerability can be seen as an early red flag of the accumulation of disadvantage: a model of six perinatal risk factors predicts this vulnerability, including mother's and father's occupation, and a set of maternal risk factors (smoking during pregnancy, age, marital status, and the number of previous pre-term births). Public health has coalesced around a shared understanding of the importance of broad social and economic circumstances that together determine the quality of health of a population, known as the "social determinants of health", with economic disadvantage as a chief driver of those determinants (Braveman & Gottlieb, 2014). Social determinants of health are also understood to encompass determinants of health inequalities within a population over the lifespan, producing social gradients in health, where the further down the social ladder one is, the more likely they are to experience poor health (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003). Just like we see on the AEDC at the tender age of five for Australian children.

The large academic risk faced by children from disadvantaged backgrounds has been known for years, but has changed little since it was observed in the early 1980s (Sirin, 2005). This inequity is mapped in the recent *Educational opportunity in Australia 2020: Who succeeds and who misses out* report (Lamb et al., 2020), which has shown the gap in learning outcomes, such as the achievement of minimal literacy and numeracy standards and meeting the international benchmarks for maths, sciences and reading. These outcomes, based on NAPLAN and PISA findings, provide evidence that the gaps start early and persist. For example, 91% of primary years students from high SES backgrounds are developmentally on track in both numeracy and literacy, compared with only 74.3% from low SES backgrounds. By the middle years, 91% of students from high SES backgrounds achieve minimum standards on NAPLAN, but only 50.6% of students from low SES homes meet this mark. By the end of secondary school, 86% of students from high SES backgrounds meet the international PISA benchmark for maths, science and reading; under half (48.6%) from low SES backgrounds manage to do the same.

Schools are undoubtedly focused on providing the strongest start for all their students to make up these differences in academic outcomes going into and leaving the school system. In Australia, the standardised NAPLAN testing focuses attention on numeracy and literacy outcomes. In these domains, PISA results provide regular reminders that we can do better. But PISA has shown that Australian schools are not doing better, despite the focus that NAPLAN places on literacy and numeracy. The 2018 PISA report indicates that Australia was one of seven nations that saw declines in performance from 2003 across all three of reading, mathematics and science. Whilst Australia has shown success in the direction of Fair Go regarding reading outcomes: 13% of disadvantaged students (i.e., those in the bottom 25% for the PISA index of economic, social, and cultural status) are classified as academically resilient, based on reading performance scoring in the top 25% of Australian students (PISA, 2018). That's great. But there is reason to believe that focusing on the "hard skills" may not be the only, or even the best, route to equitable educational outcomes.

If past efforts to address this inequity are not working, then what could schools do differently? Paradoxically, gaps in achievement may be best addressed not by intensifying instruction on the cognitive bases of those outcomes, but by focusing instead on the social-emotional skills gap.

Social and Emotional Skills, School Life, and Inequity in Life Outcomes

James Heckman – the economist who won the Nobel Prize for his work showing that early investment in child development pays off in long-term economic productivity – has helped to popularise the case for "non-cognitive" skills, such as the capacity to negotiate interpersonal situations successfully or to regulate one's own emotions in the face of serious adversity. In Heckman's words, "non-cognitive ability is as important, if not more important, than cognitive ability" in accounting for later life outcomes such as secondary school completion, secondary school final marks, tertiary participation, as well as broader "life success": avoiding illegal activities, finding a life partner, and earning a good wage for one's labour (Heckman et al., 2006).

Not only do social-emotional skills seem at least as important as the cognitive skills that are the traditional purview of schools, but those non-cognitive skills appear to predict those cognitive skills in the first place. A 2020 meta-analysis (a study of the existing studies, aimed at understanding the big picture) found that emotional intelligence – the popular psychology construct that looks at emotion regulation skills, social skills and self-motivational capacity - was a robust significant predictor of academic achievement (MacCann et al., 2020). In fact, two non-cognitive skills – emotional IQ and conscientiousness, were the most important predictors of academic achievement after the student's intelligence.

Social skills measured in kindergarten have been shown to predict outcomes two decades later, including educational attainment, employment, crime, substance use and mental health (Jones et al., 2015). For students whose early life has not provided the capacities for emotional regulation and negotiating positive social relationships with peers, schools are perhaps the last bulwark against perpetuation of intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. In most affluent nations, school attendance is mandatory from 5 years of age, making it the second universal setting in a child's life, after the family. As the only universal setting for adults other than the parents/guardians to support children and their health development, schools have the potential to reduce inequities across academic and social-emotional domains. Unlike the family, schools have a mandated care structure with the possibility of government-directed intervention to redress inequities.

But there is a risk that schools will not effectively address pre-existing inequities in children's social-emotional skills without targeted effort. Under such a scenario, there is a risk of a "Matthew Effect", where schools ultimately amplify the small pre-existing differences and make them bigger. Deriving from the New Testament book of Matthew (25:29), the Matthew Effect describes how those who come "prepared" for the demands of schooling go on to succeed, and conversely, those who do not fit the expectations of this setting increasingly fall behind. These Matthew Effects may not only accrue in the academic domains in which they were made famous (e.g., reading), but also in social and emotional learning, the process in which social-emotional skills are acquired.

What does a Matthew Effect look like for social-emotional skills? A closer look at the questions asked of teachers when completing the AEDC provides a portrait of the vulnerable child that is familiar to anyone who has spent time in a classroom. Imagine a student who does not play and work cooperatively with other children, does not respect the property of others, or demonstrate respect for adults or for other children. A student who gets in fights, or bullies others, or is disobedient. Imagine a student who is nervous, or inattentive, or impulsive, or unhappy, or cries a lot. These are the children who start the Foundation years with vulnerabilities in social and emotional skills.

But the developmental vulnerability already present at school entry is just the start of the story. Things that happen to children at school may also work to increase inequity in outcomes. For example, children from low-income backgrounds are more likely to be targets of bullying (Tippett & Wolke, 2014). A systematic review found that being bullied was consistently related to cortisol reactivity (Kliewer et al., 2020). Experiences like being bullied can 'get under the skin' via epigenetic mechanisms (Aristizabal et al., 2020), endocrine functioning (Berens et al., 2017) and immune system functioning (Miller et al., 2011). Stressful experience beyond the children's coping capacity are particularly likely to be biologically embedded (Berens et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2011), which might account for why bullying during the school years predicts adult health outcomes (Copeland et al., 2014).

So how can schools be better equipped to reduce these problems, avoid Matthew Effects in pre-existing vulnerabilities, prevent exposure to development risks in schools and reduce the gap between these students and their peers?

Addressing Inequity in Social and Emotional Development in Schools

Fortunately, school-based interventions in social-emotional learning can be effective in providing the social and emotional skills (Durlak et al., 2011) that some students lack at school entry. As Heckman and his colleagues (2006) illustrate in their economic analyses, school social and emotional learning (SEL) opportunities may be particularly valuable in breaking the chain of disadvantage. The time spent ensuring adequate SEL need not be seen as taking away from the development of cognitive skills, but rather providing the foundation for those capabilities to be built. Research has shown that SEL interventions set the stage for improved academic achievement outcomes (Nix et al., 2013). Indeed, meta-analyses have found that SEL interventions are associated with an 11-percentile gain in achievement (Durlak et al., 2011) for those students who receive the intervention, compared to those who do not.

SEL not only builds student competencies but also proclivities to improve the overall climate of the school (Kolbe, 2019). A positive school climate has been found to mitigate the impacts of low socio-economic backgrounds and academic achievement (Berkowitz et al., 2017). Improving the social-emotional skills of students also mitigates against a range of school-based risk factors such as bullying that, left unchecked, can amplify inequities. Supporting SEL provides a way for schools to reduce these additional risks to the lives and wellbeing of children.

Many SEL interventions are available to schools and typically aim to build children's skills to "understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (SELspace, n.d.). In the Australian Curriculum, these skills are referred to as "personal and social capabilities" to "understand themselves and others, and manage their relationships, lives, work and learning more effectively" (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2016). Successful social and emotional learning interventions are typically classroom-based that developmentally build student competences over multiple years through explicit lessons and classroom environments that provide opportunities for practise and foster positive social and emotional competencies. They also provide quality training and other implementation supports for teachers. Analysis of the content of the range of effective SEL interventions has not been done, so for now it is recommended that schools focus on a range of both intrapersonal and interpersonal skills (Domitrovich et al., 2017).

As social-emotional vulnerability has also been shown to predict problem behaviours, SEL interventions are often a component of whole-school prevention approaches to promoting pro-social behaviours and reducing at-risk behaviours such as bullying, violence and drug and alcohol use (Gaffney et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2017). One such intervention in Australia, effective in improving the social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people in primary and secondary schools is Friendly Schools (e.g., Cross et al., 2011, 2018, 2019). In additional to explicit SEL in classrooms, Friendly Schools features components that reinforce student SEL outside the classroom and builds positive school climate. Strategies involving the whole-school community work to strengthen schools' policy and procedures; develop student, staff and parent competencies to build positive relationships; provide opportunities for student participation

and "voice"; support school social and physical environments; and encourage parent, family and community engagement (Barnes et al., 2019). Strategies that embed social and emotional learning into the fabric of everyday school life as part of a whole-school approach allow schools to build competencies and protective features, like positive connections between student and their teachers, that are relatively cost-effective and easy to implement.

No single action by schools will be a silver bullet, and no intervention is a panacea. But one thing that is clear about SEL interventions in schools is they must be implemented well and sustained to make a real difference for students (Meyers et al., 2019). As school teams and staff need ongoing training and coaching support, school leadership must make the commitment of resources and time needed to implement and sustain new practices. And it is worth considering that the schools with students who face the greatest vulnerabilities may also experience the most difficult challenges in implementing effective action to address social-emotional inequities. This is especially true for schools from low socio-economic neighbourhoods. Such schools are likely to be under pressure from State and Federal education departments to improve their literacy and numeracy outcomes, given the likelihood of socio-economic gaps and gradients in NAPLAN scores (e.g. Haeck & Lefebvre, 2021; OECD, 2017). This may leave even less time to dedicate to SEL, which may be perceived as an optional "luxury" that the school cannot afford. As we have argued here, however, SEL is not a luxury but a pre-requisite for academic achievement. This means that schools do not need to choose between SEL and academic achievement, because investing in SEL is likely to pay off in improved achievement outcomes.

Conclusion

Social-emotional skills are critical to positive school and life outcomes for all students, but especially for those who are economically disadvantaged or showing early emotional and behavioural problems. If schools do not positively and intentionally address vulnerabilities in social-emotional skills, they risk setting in train Matthew Effects of increasing gaps in the behaviour and wellbeing of their student population. As the work of Heckman et al. and other economists makes clear, improving social-emotional skills of the student body in general is a goal worth having. It is not only the personal wellbeing of the students that stands to benefit, but the morale of the workforce and the economic prosperity of the nation. Improving the overall outcomes of a school by increasing the gains of the most privileged might elevate average outcomes but at the risk of a growing gap between those who have and have not. School leadership is needed that prioritises both elevating and equalising outcomes for true equity to become a reality. Equalising outcomes means lifting the performance of those who come to school least ready for what schools ask of them. Enabling excellence means promoting the best in everyone, regardless of what family or suburb they were born in to. Embedding social-emotional learning in schools holds the promise of providing a truly Fair Go for Australia's children.

This research was supported partially by the Australian Government through the Australian Research Council's Centre of Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course (Project ID CE200100025). Donna Cross' contribution was also supported by NHMRC Research Fellowship GNT 1119339.

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We have had far too many external notions of accountability of teachers whereas it is more powerful to ask – what evaluation process should be used to support continual professional growth and application of new approaches across different contexts?

Janet Clinton

AEL INTERVIEW

Professor Janet Clinton is the Deputy Dean of the Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE) and Director of the Teacher and Teaching Effectiveness Research Hub, at MGSE. She has wide national and international experience as an evaluator and educator and has an extensive publication record. She teaches several post-graduate subjects in the discipline of Evaluation and also supervises a number of PhD students in the areas of Evaluation and Education. Janet has worked in Australia, New Zealand, and the USA, and has been a principal investigator on many large complex evaluations and research projects. Recently, she was the principal evaluator for the Australian Professional Standards for Teaching. She currently leads the Visible Classroom initiative as well as directs the Teacher Capability Assessment Tool project and is the lead investigator for the development of an Australian Teacher Performance Assessment.

Overall, she has led over 100 national and international evaluation projects across multiple disciplines, in particular health and education. Her major interest in program evaluation is the development of evaluation theory, mixed methodologies and data analytics. Her current evaluation work focuses on development of evaluation frameworks and implementation protocols, as well as using evaluation as a vehicle for change and building capacity through extensive stakeholder engagement.

The upcoming ACEL Online Conference is themed around Leading excellence through equity. What do you see as the main challenges facing school leaders in terms of equity within their schools and how can they approach this?

The essence of equity involves removing the predictability of success or failures that currently correlates with any social, cultural, or desired education factor (National Equity Project, 2018). Too often, however, equity is considered to apply to only certain groups of students, particularly with low achievement. Equity, however, is about ensuring everyone has access to a great learning experience, makes great growth in learning relative to their starting point, and feels welcomed and invited into the class. We want all of our students to progress educationally as a consequence of similar opportunities of quality teaching and learning.

There is evidence for example that Australia is declining in international assessment rankings. The evidence suggests that this is mainly because many students who are above average achievement are not making sufficient progress. Maybe we are not best serving these above average students, but rarely are they included when equity is discussed. While we know that, on average, students in rural and remote or vulnerable communities are not progressing at a steady pace it is misleading to classify these groups of students as “equity groups” as there are many schools in these areas where students are making great progress. Understanding the nuances of success and poor performance is essential. While we know that we must not stereotype groups of students, stereotyping happens (often unconsciously) and often this leads to lower expectations. Monitoring, analysing progress and seeing the patterns gives us a “real” picture of our students progress -there is no place for opinions. Too often, in the name of equity, we seek out failure and aim to find band aids, whereas we need to seek success and scale it up for all our students. Hence, to enhance equity we need to be smarter at finding those success cases that reduce the negative effects of background correlates. This is a critical role for school leaders, and while it requires some creativity and adaptation it also necessitates a recognition of what has been working overtime. Perhaps it’s about a new mindset for leadership that involves having the courage to focus on the rate of progression rather than an assessment score; to call the lack of progress for all students not as failure but as a challenge to learn from; identifying and celebrating what has worked as something to scale and finally using this evidence as a call to action for the whole school.

Since the advent of COVID-19, what do you think are the key areas school and system leaders need to consider when ensuring that vulnerable students still have access to the best support for their education and development?

We need to be careful to examine what actually happened for each student, we need to dig in and investigate and not get caught up in the opinion and hysteria or classifying students into groups that may or may not be affected by COVID-19 teaching and experiences. Do not presume. There will be many students who had negative effects in learning during COVID-19, but we are also hearing stories of students and teachers who flourished during COVID-19. What's important is that those students who were already seen as vulnerable and often already known to schools were at the greatest risk, then it is likely that their vulnerability was amplified. What is important to understand is that the lockdowns can be disruptive to learning and engagement and our sense of stability: what matters is our ability to cope and embrace this new form of learning. It's not COVID-19 teaching, it is the development and presence of coping strategies to deal with potential stressors and developing the skills to enhance each student's (and teacher's) rate of recovery.

For some of our teachers the pivot into distance, hybrid, in-class and back again was too hard, entailed very high levels of workload, and there is a desire to "return to normal" asap. One of the greatest tragedies, however, would be learning nothing from the teaching and learning from these different forms of schooling. COVID-19 has, for example, accelerated the digital learning skills of students and teachers (and leaders) and brought our community of families into our schools. Exposing our community to the world of teaching and learning is such a golden opportunity for esteeming the expertise of those engaged in education and yes, it has been created by a disaster.

As a consequence, our leaders have an important role to play in this evolving environment, particularly in ensuring that what we've learned during the disruption is not lost. Leaders need to create opportunities to evaluate what we want to keep, what we want to let go, and what have we discovered that we shouldn't do again.

One strategy is to have more discussion about what worked for vulnerable students and bring these ideas back to the regular school, evaluate the effects on each student, and where appropriate use case management approaches to attend to these students. One thing COVID-19 has shown, for example, is that social and emotional learning is not (and never was) a separate issue to achievement, and the new resources in this area could augment teachers in schools to better work with all students.

In considering the attributes of a high-quality teacher, do you think we may see these attributes differently in 2021 than we did a couple of years ago? What are the key attributes, in your mind, of a highly effective teacher in 2021?

Effective teachers possess a range of characteristics and importantly the capability to enact a range of teaching strategies while extending their educational knowledge and building positive relationships within the school and education community (Clinton et al., 2018). High quality is still going to be determined by the impact of the teacher on the lives of all their students, the school community, their fellow teachers, and the profession. The way they impact will have varying dimensions depending often on the individual context. The attributes needed in different contexts for each student are necessarily going to change the way we enact quality teaching and learning. For example, being engaged in digital education, requires the teacher to develop the right mind set, start building skills, and want to engage in new practices. As we take on new learning metrics our teachers will need to be inventive, evaluative and open to change. Importantly they will trial and evaluate how their teaching is going and reset goals and activities. As an evaluator I am wedded to the idea of teachers not only being evaluators in their place but thinking evaluatively. Always take time to view from the balcony how things are going and asking what, how, why and for whom.

We need to not look to the correlates of student achievement and learning to define high quality but look to defining high quality teachers in terms of what teachers do and what works – e.g., using a particular teaching method may not translate to effective learning. Moreover, we need to invite teachers to put the case that they are having a marked positive impact on the learning lives of all their students and ensure this is shared so others can learn from this success. It is these interpretations of their evidence of impact that are core to the notion of high-quality teachers and its multiple methods and approaches to achieve quality.

What are the key factors that schools and education systems should be considering when evaluating the effectiveness of teachers? How can the quality of teaching and teacher quality characteristics be incorporated into an effective development pathway for teachers in their practice but also as a means of building capable future leaders?

While I will never shy away from accountability, it is important to always appreciate that we are working with our world's greatest asset - our young people; and therefore, a minimum standard is just not acceptable. We demand high quality but even within high quality there are differences, successes and failures. Take for example, when competing at the Olympics, you are one of the best in the world, but you can still fail or make mistakes - it's all relative. We need to turn the question upside down. We have had far too many external notions of accountability of teachers whereas it is more powerful to ask – what evaluation process should be used to support continual professional growth and application of new approaches across different contexts? How can we change the narrative about evaluation of teachers such that teachers (and leaders) are hungry for evaluation activities?

In light of these ever-increasing accountability pressures there has been greater emphasis on new methods of understanding teacher quality (Flores & Derrington, 2018). Consequently, over the past four years we have completed a number of reviews and built a process for turning the tables on the evaluation of teachers (Clinton et. al., 2016, 2018, 2019). We have suggested a system that teachers welcome as part of their career-long desire for continuous improvement and can also be shown to improve their impact. Any program that aims to change a person, will not be welcomed by that person and is unlikely to have an impact – so let's stop inventing new systems to "evaluate" teachers and focus more on systems that teachers welcome as a part of a program of professional growth. Our teachers, as professionals, also need to consider their role and responsibility in this process and seek out what they need to excel and grow in the context that they are teaching as well as in the profession overall. Let's provide our teachers and leaders with some evaluation agency. The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) results provide a good deal of information about what teachers want: they want a co-designed process that is useful, on target, respectful, and embedded in everyday school life. The task for the leader is to establish engagement in teacher evaluation processes with an appropriate school climate, high levels of collective efficacy, and by creating time and infrastructures that facilitate information flow. At the same time, creating activities that allow for the celebration and scale of the successes while simultaneously allowing teachers to work on and learn from any lack of sufficient impact and challenge.

Do you think there's a place for school leaders in selecting pre-service teaching candidates or in influencing what that pre-service education looks like for the next generation of teachers?

School leaders must be engaged in and contribute to the dialogue, in some form, with anything that affects schools. A greater level of partnership between schools and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers is needed to ensure ongoing quality education for the future. Specifically, it's about working together to ensure new teachers build a foundation for professional growth throughout their career. A continual question for schools and ITE providers is whether we are equipping our teachers with the resources they need to teach our future (and current) generations. The idea of working with the next generation of teachers is a complex and interesting one, particularly given the demands of introducing new skills and competencies that our students need for the second half of the 21st century. It is noted that the OECD is working on new metrics relating to resilience, social and emotional learning, and critical thinking skills and adaptability.

There are many examples of school leaders already working with ITE providers in a range of areas. In fact, school leaders for example, engage by selecting graduate pre-service teachers when they employ them in their schools. Also, many ITE providers involve school leaders in selection of potential candidates into their programs, particularly in the residency programs or high stakes pathways. Like school leaders when selecting teachers for their schools, ITE providers need to use comprehensive measures of selection that include cognitive and disposition dimensions that encourage self-reflection by pre-service teachers and provide clarity about requirements necessary to reach classroom ready and beyond status. In 2013, after reviewing the evidence on the methods of selection into professions, Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE) chose to build a valid and reliable measure to support decisions about selection into the MGSE Master of Teaching and other ITE programs. The Teacher Capability Assessment Tool (TCAT see https://tcat.edu.au/) provides the evidence-based approach leading to the selection and development of pre-service teachers.

Ultimately, it is about the quality of the ITE students at graduation rather than at entry that matters most, and we all have a role to play in this. It would also be really powerful to consider how school leaders could be involved in shaping the program for ITE candidates, and how ITE could be more involved following their graduates into schools during their induction into the profession. This would also inform ITEs of the success or otherwise of their program, allow schools to be closer partners in developing new teachers, and send a strong message that preparation is not over at graduation. At the same time, we can work with more experienced teachers within a school in relation to the mentoring and evaluation of pre-service teachers.

How do you think the discussion of student voice can and will change in light of the schooling experience of current students and school leaders over the past 18 months?

As school leaders and teachers, we must use every opportunity to ensure our students develop their voices and participate meaningfully in discussions about what they need to grow as learners in our schools. The increased engagement of families in the learning process over the past 18mths has brought a greater awareness of individual needs and I would assume this will bring to light the significance of student voice.

Student voice is much more than students and school leaders talking at meetings; it entails students learning how to regulate their own learning which requires them to have a voice about their learning. Student voice relates to this notion of self-regulation which is among the many current demands on students to understand their learner disposition. This can and should be taught.

What it means for school leaders and teachers is that we need to focus student voice so it relates to their learning. It is about teaching our students to voice how they are thinking, and how they are solving problems. We need to develop their skills and confidence to voice their ideas in groups; about what they do not know, how to explore their errors, and talk through the consequences of their actions and thoughts. These skills are often the core of self-regulation, and during COVID-19 distance teaching it becomes more clear which students have these skills and which did not.

Our students need the chance to talk and be listened to. From our work with the Visible Classroom (https://visibleclassroom.com, an App to analyse lesson transcripts in real time), we know that a typical lesson has teacher talking about 89% of the time. Also it demonstrates that teachers ask most of the questions, and in any one lesson students are only asking at most 10 questions and these questions are generally about procedure or process while very few are about their understanding (Clinton & Dawson, 2018). Getting the balance of actual student voice in the classroom right is important, and maybe we need more teachers listening and students talking about their learning.

Kyle Hattie (in Clinton & Hattie, 2018) makes the point that teachers need not only to be listening but also, and importantly, they need to know what to ask and when, about what the student needs, and how they are learning particularly as they develop their learner profiles. He argues that we as teachers need to shift our students to seeing themselves as a student to a learner, and that teachers need to be learners alongside their students. This new voice of students as learners has the potential to shift our thinking about teaching and learning at every level.

Finally, you will be speaking at this year's Online Conference about evaluation and giving schools "permission" to measure what matters from within their own context. Could you share a little bit about what this could mean for school leaders?

My message is that a quality education system or school as a learning organisation is not just about collecting information about what we do, but more how we use this information and interpret evaluatively, i.e., to make a judgement. I view evaluation as the vehicle of change and improvement, it allows us to understand our environment or context and role in it, whether you are a leader, teacher or student. It promotes monitoring of the "what we do", "the when", and importantly the "so what and what next". My mission as an evaluator and my talk at the conference relates to how we can create a new narrative about evaluation. I want to focus on evaluation agency for leaders. Agency in this case implies the ability and capacity to perceive, evaluate and change the environment. We must recognise that there are a number of challenges for leaders' perception of evaluation agency in education and particularly in the context of schools. A perception of evaluation agency requires a motivation for change or continuous quality improvement. There are three significant characteristics that must be present in order to foster this self-motivation (or in this case motivation to evaluate), i.e., the capacity to evaluate, a sense of autonomy over what can or should be evaluated, and a sense of relatedness to the school and system.

Essentially evaluation is now seen as an "add on" assessment for accountability rather than as a desired embedded process for quality improvement and assurance. It has become the stick (an extrinsic motivator) rather than the carrot (an intrinsic motivator) and we need to flip the metaphor. We are challenged by current mindsets in relation to measurement and assessment, let alone the somewhat jaded and overbearing notions of accountability. Consider the polarities that have arisen for many- to assess or not, that is the question. We have a growing anti-assessment movement in Australia. I must confess I can't understand education without assessment that provides a focus on interpretations and evaluation of results. But perhaps – realistically it's about teacher and school leader autonomy over their context and the workforce capacity to engage in the evaluative process.

I would argue we need a new narrative to change the mindset about evaluation and in fact suggest we as leaders need to own it and champion it at the point of implementation, embedded in the work we do. We also need to recognise that it is important to know how things are working in education at many different levels across our system - for individuals, classrooms, schools, diverse communities, regions, states and territories, nationally and internationally - and we have an important role to play in building this profile. We need a new process that encourages a scaffolded use of information where judgements are made formatively.

In this new educational evaluation revolution school leaders must take control, own it and become the architects of the system.

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Leadership for anti-racism: The industry, thought, and educative leadership of the Council of International Schools

Stephen Chatelier, Assistant Professor in the Department of International Education at the Education University of Hong Kong

The death of George Floyd in May 2020 brought issues of structural racism into stark focus (Gannaway et al., 2021). Schools, universities and other educational institutions have been prompted to question if and how they are promoting and practising anti-racist education. Contemporary Australia has been shaped by a colonial history in which racism is embedded. Yet, the 2016 Australian Census reveals that "nearly half (49%) of all Australians were either born overseas" or had at least one parent who was born overseas. The same data show that there has been a distinct shift towards migrants arriving from the Asian region (ABS, 2017). Subsequently, school classrooms in Australia are increasingly constituted by cultural and linguistic diversity. While Australia has adopted multicultural strategies since the 1970s, the "political shift from a white Australia to a multicultural Australia has not coincided with shedding a dominant cultural imaginary of Australia's so-called 'core' foundation as white and Anglo" (Walton et al., 2018, p.133). Indeed, previous research suggests that 80% of students from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds in Australian schools reported that they had experienced racism (Mansouri & Jenkins, 2010).

The authors of the recent report commissioned by the Australian government, *Through growth to achievement* (Gonski et al., 2018), acknowledge that there is a link between equity and excellence, though they view this largely through the lens of academic outcomes. In identifying markers of inequity, they prioritise socio-economic indicators over cultural and ethnic indicators. There is no mention of racism in the report. While Aveling (2007) reports findings from her research suggesting that school principals believed that "racism was not a problem" in their schools (p.82), this is unlikely to still be the case some 15 years later. This is especially so in the light of social movements such as Black Lives Matters. The current moment, then, represents an opportunity for school leadership to focus on the area of anti-racism. This will require leadership for change at a cultural level, in an area that often involves competing perspectives. How, then, do school leaders work for such change?

Leadership beyond individuals, leadership beyond schools

Various studies have suggested that school leadership is imperative to school improvement (Walker & Qian, 2020) with Gurr and Drysdale (2020) expressing that it is leadership that acts as the driver for school and student success. As such, it is not surprising that there is a wealth of scholarly work focused on the theory and practice of school-based leadership. Literature on school leadership has explored approaches such as transformational, transactional and instructional leadership (Shatzer et al., 2014). A number of studies have sought to explore leadership practice more specifically, focusing on different components of the enactment of the models of leadership listed above, such as resource management, communication structures, and quality assurance measures (Walker et al., 2014). Notwithstanding an increasing emphasis on, for example, distributed models of leadership (Holloway et al., 2018) and middle leaders (Bryant & Walker, 2021), research tends to focus on the individual leader and organisational leadership.

However, while it is true that "school leaders have an important role to play in the battle against racism" (Ryan, 2003, p.158), this task becomes easier within the context of a wider movement for change. Thus, while school improvement and change are often understood as being achieved at the school level, and by individuals,

in this article I focus on leadership for change that is enacted by educational institutions external to the school. I argue that school change involving matters of moral importance and complexity requires more than instrumental forms of leadership. I seek to do this with reference to an ongoing process being undertaken by the Council of International Schools (CIS) (an organisation based in the Netherlands but serving schools and universities across the world), to address its own systemic racism, and to lead change for the schools and universities which it represents. I suggest that the CIS case demonstrates three forms of leadership - industry, thought, and educative - that, together, have the potential to assist individual schools to implement change for anti-racism.

'Industry', 'thought', and 'educative' leadership: CIS as a case study

The Council of International Schools is a membership community comprising over 1300 schools and universities across the world, with a vision to "inspire the development of global citizens through high quality international education: connecting ideas, cultures, and educators from every corner of the world" (Council of International Schools, Mission and Vision section, 2021, para. 1). CIS functions as an accrediting body for international schools, with re-accreditation taking place every five years. The protocol used by CIS to accredit schools has at its core four drivers: purpose and direction; learning; well-being; and the development of global citizenship. These drivers are used as a lens through which to evaluate each school as part of the process of school improvement. Accreditation as a process of school improvement is the primary mechanism through which CIS seeks to "inspire the development of global citizens through high quality education" (Council of International Schools, Mission and Vision section, 2021, para. 1). Implicit in its mission and practice, then, is the aspiration for equity and excellence in education. Through the standards CIS has devised for its accreditation protocol, international schools are challenged to consider how their learning programme and school policies contribute to the development of global citizenship, well-being for the whole community, as well as quality learning experiences for students. Moreover, CIS's commitment to global citizenship is connected to its organisational values of being principled, valuing diversity, challenging itself and others and providing leadership to those whom it serves (Council of International Schools, Mission and Vision section, 2021).

It is in the context of the organisation's purpose, values and activity that CIS came to understand that its commitment to anti-racism, diversity and equity may not have been as well-embedded into the organisation's DNA as it may have assumed. Its Executive Director, Jane Larsson, writes that her "wake-up call" was talking with her colleague Nunana Nyomi not long after the death of George Floyd (Larsson, 2021). This conversation helped her to realise the disconnect between those whose lives have been affected by racism and those whose lives have not. Even though the values and mission listed above have been at the heart of CIS's professed mandate, whether or not the organisation had properly reckoned with various forms of inequity and exclusion was now in question. In light of this, the CIS Board of Trustees saw the need, in June 2020, to establish "a Board Committee on Anti-racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion" (Larsson, 2020, para. 3). I joined this committee a few months later, working with other members of the CIS community from across the world to "audit" the organisation and recommend changes that would aim to better position CIS to embody inclusion through diversity, equity and anti-racism (I-DEA).

Through my relatively small involvement, I have come to the view that CIS's initiative is an act of *industry leadership*. Industry leadership may be defined through measures of market share, profit/earnings ratio (in the business sector) or sphere of influence, but here I use the term in an active sense of "doing leadership" within and for an industry. Corbo (2018) writes, "industry leaders do not only know a lot about their chosen industry, but they also live and breathe it … they know about the ins and outs of the product or service itself, but they also understand and embody the *goals of the industry*" (para. 1, emphasis added). Given international schools' commitment to intercultural understanding and global citizenship, this work being done by CIS may be seen as an attempt to understand and embody the goals of the international school sector. The ongoing process of CIS's exploration of its own commitment to I-DEA, models to its member schools and universities the hard work required to "speak up and speak out" in a space typically dominated by measuring success through numbers and dollars.

It is difficult to know what will be the impact of CIS's industry leadership on international schools across the globe. In part, it is this that leads me to suggest that CIS is practising *thought leadership* within the space of international schooling. Harvey et al. (2021) note that, "organisations face the challenge of spending significant time and financial resources on thought leadership that may have little measurable outcome or impact" (p.2). I would argue that the time and resources CIS is spending on attending to I-DEA within its own organisation is evidence of its position as a thought leader. Given the prevalence of "evidence", "impact", "accountability" and "measurement" in contemporary educational discourses, taking time and resources to properly address issues of inequity goes against the grain and offers another way of being. For this reason, thought leadership may also be understood as the central aspect that feeds into both the industry and educative forms of leadership.

One point that Jane Larsson (2021) has made is that tackling racism and inequity through compliance via the accreditation mechanism is not going to be the solution. Harvey et al. (2021) also state that thought leadership "touches on topics that are inherently messy, tension-fuelled and evade resolution" (p.5). While compliance might aim to "manage" the problem of inequity within schools, this becomes very difficult when dealing with matters that are contentious and impossible to solve. As Harvey et al. proceed to say, "this is the reason why leadership of thought, as opposed to management, is so important" (p.5).

While compliance through accreditation may not be the solution, CIS has nevertheless made changes to standards in its accreditation protocol to better address I-DEA. But it is the long journey of becoming a more equitable, diverse and anti-racist organisation that will function as a form of *educative leadership*. Commissioned in 1986 by the governments of Victoria, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, the Educative Leadership Project (ELP) described educative leadership as "leadership that is both educative in intent and outcome" (Gwynne et al., 1991, p.34). While not commonly used anymore, I would argue that it resonates with CIS's practice and approach to its work on I-DEA. Duignan and Macpherson (1992) explain that they see organisations as cultures which manifest from "the concerted imaginations of organised people who share assumptions, values, interpretations of their situation and meanings that they give to their actions" (p.3). Given this definition, organisations are involved in the task of clarifying contested values and seeking some kind of partial resolution of the inevitable conflict that emerges from this task. Duignan and Macpherson (1992) argue that educative leadership is, therefore, "concerned about right and wrong, justice and injustice, truth, aesthetics and the negotiation of practical ideals in education" (p.4). This understanding of leadership

is contrasted to the management techniques prevalent in the literature which, according to Duignan and Macpherson, are not particularly helpful when "the problems faced daily by practitioners always seem far more complex" (p.2) and "are often of little help when a leader has to choose between competing values" (p.3). CIS is demonstrating that compliance is not enough to tackle difficult problems. Instead, what is required is educative leadership and, of course, this is especially so for organisations whose core purpose is education.

Conclusion

When social movements occur at a national or global scale, there can be pressure for schools to not only take a stand on the issue, but to demonstrate what is being done as an organisation to address the matter. In this paper I have suggested that recent events in the world have raised the urgent need to address racism in education as a matter of equity. While literature regarding school leadership and change often focuses on the role of the individual as an organisational leader, I have made the argument that difficult and complex matters of moral concern may be better addressed as part of a broader mandate for change. Such leadership for change can be enacted by institutions connected to, but outside of, individual schools. As such, leadership responsibility becomes shared across schools, not only within schools. Moreover, I have used CIS as a case study to show how external and representative education bodies are in a position to provide both industry and thought leadership. Finally, I have made the argument that complex and contested issues are best served by forms of leadership that are educative, rather than compliance-driven. While the first two forms of leadership may fit most naturally with organisations such as CIS that are positioned to more easily influence schools within the field, educative leadership may be adopted just as easily within individual schools.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Associate Professor Darren Bryant for comments provided on an earlier draft of the manuscript.

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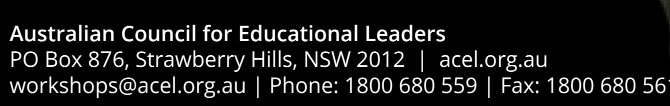

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Excellence through equity - but is it enough?

Dr Ken Avenell, Director of Formation and Identity for Toowoomba Catholic Education

In 2012 Google was in its relative infancy in a greater sense. Craig Froehle at that time released the graphic above to illustrate his point that equal opportunity wasn't a defensible goal when considering outcomes. From when he originally published his meme, he has continued to track the variations and embellishments that occurred in the years since then (Froehle, 2016). His blogsite is an interesting journey of evolution of the meme.

Froehle's initial premise has been greatly elaborated upon and it is now common parlance that equity is not about treating all children the same. Equity is what each student should receive individually to develop and experience success (Blankstein et al., 2016).

But is that enough? If all lives matter, should we do more than just resource differently to overcome the barriers impeding individual success and achievement? We could make accommodations that make transparent the barriers that have traditionally been circumvented through equitable approaches.

But again, is that enough? Shouldn't we in the spirit of justice and liberation, remove the barriers altogether?

Equality means that the curriculum should not disadvantage any student or group of students because of their background or characteristics. Equity implies affirmative action to overcome structural imbalances in methodology or resourcing. Liberation means working to challenge and reverse the effects of unintentional limitations, which manifest themselves in schools in numerous ways. A liberated curriculum will benefit students and wider society, as well as tackling the age-old problem of discrimination, as we begin to learn and understand the experience of other students we are better placed to see the world from a pluralistic viewpoint.

In schools that are liberating, there is the explicit belief that every child can learn and the needs of every child are important. The values of human dignity, unlimited potential and fullness of life are achieved through the following means:

- Put students first – know our students; deliver what matters; making decisions with empathy.
- Turn ideas into action – challenge the norm and suggest solutions; encourage and embrace new ideas; work across boundaries.
- Unleash potential - expect greatness; lead and set clear directions; provide, seek and act on feedback.
- Be courageous – own your own actions, successes and mistakes; take calculated risks; act with transparency.
- Empower people – lead, empower and trust; play to everyone's strengths; develop yourself and those around you.

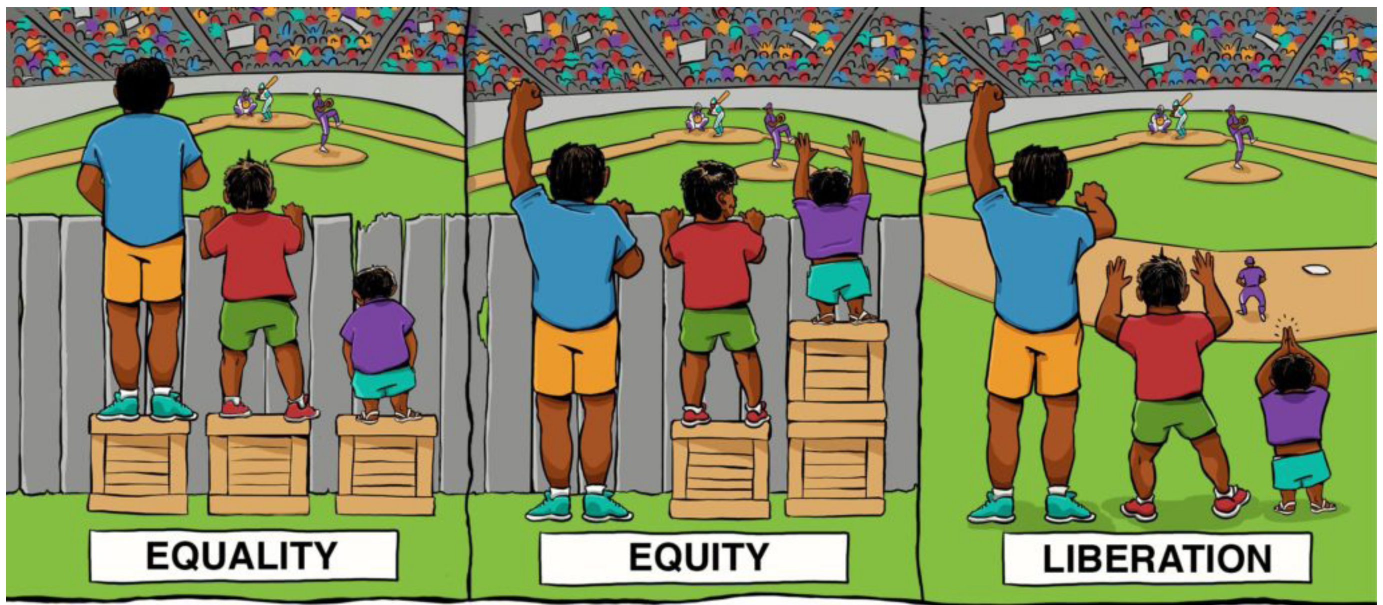
(Toowoomba Catholic Schools, 2020)

To help educators with what can at times be a difficult and challenging journey, Blankstein, Noguera and Kelly (2016) emphasise three important areas of research: (1) child development, (2) neuroscience, and (3) environmental influences on child development and learning.

Child development has been part of teacher preparation programs for years, however Blankstein et al. (2016) contend that our expectations of adequate yearly progress has trumped our understanding of the variations in child developmental milestones. Instead of generalised expectations for all, Blankstein et al champion personalised learning and other programming that is responsive to the developmental need of each student.

Current neuroscience provides a message of hope. Knowing our brains are able to change and grow throughout our lifetime ensures that the experiences in school will and do have an impact in our brain capability. Delays are retrievable and learning gaps can be closed. As such, having learning that is relevant and related to life experiences is more than just engaging; it is learning that taps into already-existing pathways in the brain. Teachers can cultivate talent and ability in their students by understanding how best to increase brain development.

Environmental influences such as hunger, housing instability, home safety, etc are often out of a school's scope of influence, and yet still have a significant influence on children's learning, outcomes and life expectancies. However, when leaders acknowledge the impact of these environmental factors, many schools partner with community agencies to ameliorate circumstances and meet the needs of their unique student context.



Original illustration by Angus Maguire madewithangus.com

Liberation challenges teachers to examine their normal teaching practice to produce curriculum programs that meet the needs of the student, maintain the integrity of each of the Learning Areas, and also allow for opportunities to generalise skills across a variety of settings.

Too often the level of conformity required for school "success" gives advantage to mainstream students, minorities are sometimes lost or overlooked and assimilation is assumed (Loflin, 2017).

Paulo Freire informs us that education is never neutral; it either colonises or liberates. It either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration and bring about conformity, or it becomes the means by which learners deal critically with reality and discover how to participate fully in their world (cited in Finn, 2017).

Teaching isn't liberating when the same task is set for every student, or provides little variation, or assesses all students against a general criterion, and consistently utilises inflexible pedagogical approaches.

A liberated curriculum is differentiated when there are adjustments to content or the process used to learn or the outcomes expected from students. A good differentiated classroom means that both the curriculum and the pedagogy meets students' needs within their zone of proximal learning development.

And in all of this, nothing is really new to experienced school leaders and educators, yet we continue to see prevalent evidence of non-differentiated classrooms. We have more evidence than ever of what works best in the classroom and we know categorically what does not. What we need to do now is to act as leaders of learning to help all of our teachers put this in place. That is the educational leadership challenge of 2021.

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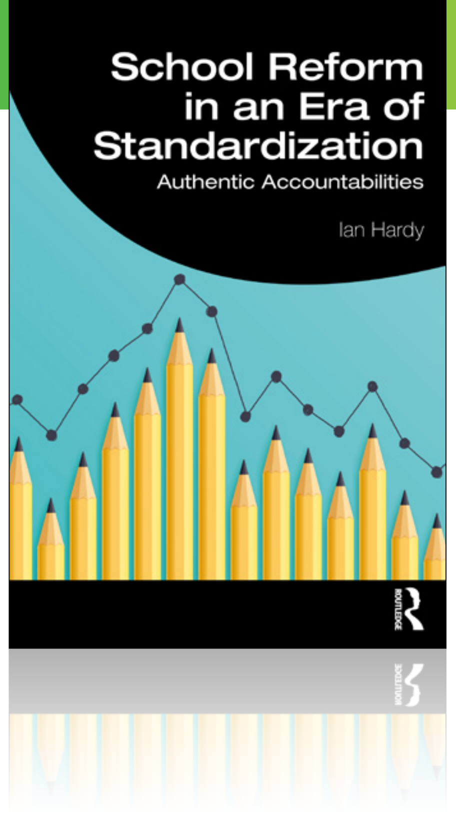
BOOK REVIEW

School Reform in an Era of Standardization: Authentic Accountabilities

Professor Ian Hardy



Reviewed by Kerrie Blain
Educational Consultant and former Principal
Telopea Park School / Lycée Franco-Australien

The recently released book, *School Reform in an Era of Standardization*, written by Dr Ian Hardy, the Associate Professor of Education at the School of Education, University of Queensland, seeks to explain how teachers, school and system leaders navigate the processes of accountability and standardization in schools today. It reveals in detail the nature and effects of standardization processes on schools and schooling systems. In doing so it shows how teachers and school leaders have responded proactively.

Dr Hardy shows us how curriculum development, teaching and assessment practices have been recalibrated under conditions of increased external scrutiny of teacher and student work and learning. This is a detailed, logically constructed book aimed at giving meaning to the reasons for school reform and who will benefit. The research quoted demonstrates many aspects of accepting change. School leaders have responded by interpreting, interrogating, and challenging these new requirements. This is a book of hope for educators who aim to understand and enhance practices in schools and school systems. It not only shows it is time to rebuild trust in the public school system but demonstrates that if Australia is to be internationally competitive then continual school reform is inevitable and necessary. This book would be equally valuable for those in non-government leadership positions.

The book is divided into two parts: the philosophy, policy and politics as drivers of accountability which set the scene for current understanding; and secondly, the politics of practice of contemporary curriculum reform, testing and why we need authentic accountabilities. Dr Hardy tells us that his book "seeks to make sense of how educators in schools have responded to policy and political pressure for increased accountability, and the more standardized educational practices that have subsequently ensued". Educational leaders will no doubt relate this to the introduction of a national curriculum as well as national literacy and numeracy testing (NAPLAN) among other important drivers of change.

The author tells us "in the push for ever increasing control of educational practice, the codification of schooling can be seen in advocacy for more standardized and prescriptive approaches to curriculum development, teaching and assessment". Curriculum reform has always been fraught with difficulties in curriculum content and how this relates to pedagogy and assessment.

Throughout the book there are links to curriculum reform in Queensland and although this provides interesting reading, some educators will not relate to the specific programs introduced to support curriculum understanding and delivery in that state. There are, however, many anecdotes from educators in schools, including classroom teachers. This lends an authentic value to the narrative in describing real-life experiences.

Teaching in and beyond an age of accountability attempts to move beyond the significant influence this has had on teaching practices in schools. Dr Hardy tells us that such standardization has placed a greater focus on the role of the teacher as an individual with concomitant attention to teacher quality as an individual responsibility. We know that this is also a state and territory responsibility. He quotes the OECD's (2005) report: *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* and refers to its advocacy for increased attention and focus on the nature of teachers' work and its impact. The OECD is emphatic that in spite of all the influences on student learning, teacher quality is the single most important school variable influencing student achievement.

Finally, the author says that while his book is "a critique of performance policy, curriculum, teaching and testing practices that characterize so much of schooling, it also seeks to advance a normative agenda around more authentic accountabilities, and the interrogative logics on the part of teachers that will help to facilitate such accountabilities". This also is overtly referring to the skills of teachers. Is it time for Australia to choose the best and brightest to enter into the teaching profession?

This is a book for educational leaders and aspiring leaders at all levels. It will clarify their understanding of school reform in a rapidly changing world, to understand who is responsible and ultimately to stay on task for continual improvement. The research cited is impressive, valid and pertinent. This book will be a valuable resource for those leading systems and schools as Australia strives towards equity of educational opportunity for all children.

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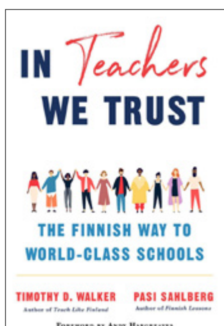


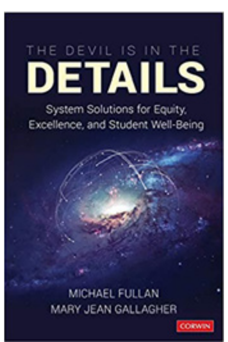
In Teachers We Trust: The Finnish Way to World-Class Schools

Pasi Sahlberg, Timothy D. Walker, Andy Hargreaves (Foreword by)

Seven key principles from Finland for building a culture of trust in schools around the world.

In the spring of 2018, thousands of teachers across the United States—in states like Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Arizona—walked off their jobs while calling for higher wages and better working conditions. Ultimately, these American educators trumpeted a simple request: treat us like professionals. Teachers in many other countries feel the same way as their US counterparts.

In Teachers We Trust presents a compelling vision, offering practical ideas for educators and school leaders wishing to develop teacher-powered education systems. It reveals why teachers in Finland hold high status, and shows what the country's trust- based school system looks like in action.



The Devil Is in the Details:
System Solutions for Equity, Excellence, and Student Wellbeing

Michael Fullan, Mary Jean Gallagher

Develop equity, excellence, and wellbeing across the whole system!

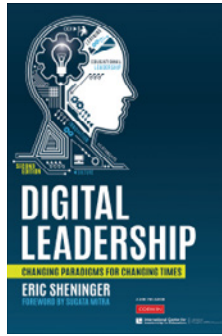
Our world needs a transformation to survive. We need a moral imperative and a system transformation to survive for the better. The Devil is in the Details shows how we can re-think the education system and its three levels of leadership?local, middle, and top?so that each level can contribute to dramatic transformation whether individually or collectively. The focus is on examining details to ensure correct actions are taken, rather than assuming large pronouncements will drive change.

Ferocious Warmth - School Leaders Who Inspire and Transform

Tracey Ezard

At the best of times leadership is messy. It's about a way of being, not doing. It's nebulous, nuanced and elusive, as much to do with feeling and energy as thinking and planning. It's contextual and responsive and can never be one size fits all. When great leaders are in balance, they are both ferocious about the moral purpose and courageously making a stand, while warmly building strong and enduring relationships. This seeming paradox comes together in what Tracey Ezard calls Ferocious Warmth. Leading within the tension of both epitomises the daily dance of leadership.

When you meet a Ferocious Warmth leader, you know it. It is art and science in partnership, a constant flow between the head and the heart and an essential skill for leaders who seek to inspire and transform education.



Digital Leadership: Changing Paradigms for Changing Times

Eric C. Sheninger

Just as the digital landscape is constantly evolving, the second edition of Digital Leadership moves past trends and fads to focus on the essence of leading innovative change in education now and in the future. As society and technology evolve at what seems a dizzying pace, the demands on leaders are changing as well. With a greater emphasis on leadership dispositions, this revamped edition also features:

New structure and organization emphasizing the interconnectivity of the Pillars of Digital Leadership to drive sustainable change.

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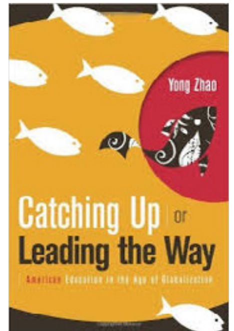
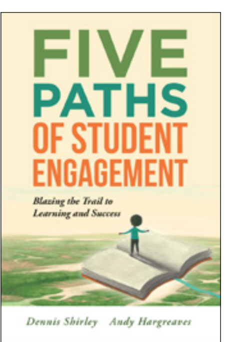


Catching Up or Leading the Way: American Education in the Age of Globalization

Yong Zhao

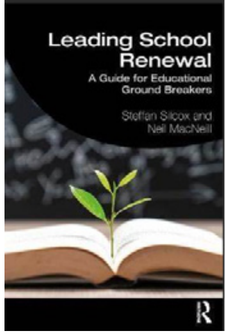
With this book, educators, policymakers, parents and others interested in preparing students to be productive global citizens will gain a clear understanding of what kinds of knowledge and skills constitute "digital competence" and "global competence", and what schools can -and must - do to meet the challenges and opportunities brought about by globalisation and technology.This book will forever change the debate about what's wrong and what's right with education and where it should be going. With an extraordinary command of facts and thought leadership, Zhao describes how schools have to keep pace with a world that is being dramatically transformed by globalisation, the "death of distance", and digital technology.



Five Paths of Student Engagement
Blazing the Trail to Learning and Success

Dennis Shirley, Andy Hargreaves

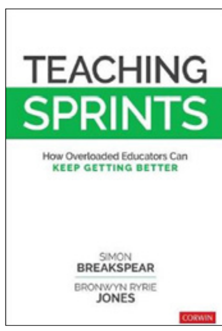
As education turns from rigid, standardised and over-tested schooling to holistic, personalised and human learning, engagement is the way forward. But to reach the goal of serving students' wellbeing and identity as well as their achievement, F-12 educators must prepare for the journey of engagement, avoid detours and battle enemies to stay on course. Grounded in psychological and sociological theory, as well as authors Dennis Shirley and Andy Hargreaves's own research, Five paths of student engagement: Blazing the trail to learning and success covers each facet of engagement and recommends practical approaches for classroom instruction, school leadership and educational policies.



Leading School Renewal: A Guide for Educational Ground Breakers

Steffan Silcox, Neil MacNeill

Leading School Renewal explores how school principal leadership behaviour impacts on school change endeavours, and in particular pedagogic renewal, which is a form of educational improvement that is primarily concerned with the growing of the knowledge, skills and beliefs of education in a manner that optimises students' life options. The authors identify attributes of principals who have engaged in school renewal and examine the influences on their leadership behaviours and disposition towards renewing their schools while also acknowledging the influence of site-specific contextual variables. The authors propose that certain leadership behaviours exhibited by school principals are integral with renewing a school's pedagogic focus. They argue renewal is a preferred form of sustainable educational change because it relates to deep-seated cultural changes in approaches to pedagogy, curriculum and school structures.



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Collaborative professional learning for the common good

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Learning partnerships are formed through a virtuous circle of embedded questioning, thinking and reflecting in an environment that values shared knowledge and a sense of community. Such partnerships are integral to the professional interactions of the e-Learning Working Group (eLWG), a core network established under the auspices of the Catholic Education Network (CEnet). CEnet is a not-for-profit company that enables access to educational services, and supports members to improve learning outcomes for students and teachers by providing an environment underpinned by collaboration and sharing. Members of CEnet include 17 dioceses across the Northern Territory, Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Canberra and Tasmania.

The eLWG was initially established in 2012, as part of CEnet's formalisation of its committee and working group structure, to provide input into the requirements for new educationally focussed services that are provided by CEnet. A number of members were involved in previous groups in CEnet, going back some seven or eight years prior to this formalised establishment. The group comprises nominated representatives from each of the member dioceses with executive officer support provided by the CEnet Manager: Communications and Member Engagement.

As outlined in the Terms of Reference, the purpose of the group is to:

- review available e-Learning opportunities for member dioceses;
- explore and evaluate leading practice of e-Learning initiatives that support learning and teaching in today's world;
- share resources and professional learning opportunities;
- schedule and coordinate e-Learning forums for CEnet members as required;
- evaluate the effectiveness of e-Learning forum initiatives;
- bridge with the nominated working party members of Catholic Network Australia (CNA) Digital Learning Network; and
- promote CEnet e-Learning initiatives within their dioceses.

Diocesan eLWG representatives are educators who have responsibility for increasing the digital capabilities of teachers and promoting effective pedagogical practices using technology in teaching and learning. The eLWG represents a collaborative community of practice, a group of people who genuinely care about the same real-life problems or hot topics, and who on that basis, interact regularly to learn together and from each other (Wenger et al., 2002).

The capacity of the eLWG to be innovative and responsive within the digital learning space is built on the foundation of shared values and trust. When the COVID-19 crisis resulted in rapid transition to remote and online learning, the eLWG coordinated the sharing of materials to support schools to plan for teaching and learning. The collation of resources initiated a series of questioning, thinking and reflection by the eLWG resulting in evidence that the uncertain and ambiguous environment teachers were required to work in, had resulted in an opportunity to create online, just-in-time professional learning for teachers. Rather than distribute materials across schools within the CEnet Dioceses, bringing schools together to partner in their learning was identified as a way to provide access to experts in digital education for rapid upskilling, irrespective of location. Due to these reasons and the common goal of providing all of our students with the best possible remote learning experiences, traditional boundaries were ready to be broken in an attempt to support all teachers within CEnet Dioceses to prepare for remote learning.

The collective wisdom, agility and flexibility of the eLWG was harnessed to develop the concept of a Catholic Learning Online Summit (CLOS), a series of workshops for teachers from all member dioceses to develop new skills for the design and delivery of digital learning in preparation for remote teaching. The eLWG's prior learning partnerships, resource sharing and activities provided a foundation for creating high quality learning. The benefits of working collaboratively in this new strategy included the positive impact on student outcomes, distribution of time and financial savings, and the ability to overcome the limitations that may have been experienced due to location, size of school, or capacity of staff to facilitate learning. Experience and expertise in digital learning along with contextual knowledge of teacher needs in each diocese came from working in the field. This enabled clear and accurate fidelity between teacher needs and design of the professional learning opportunity.

The resulting Catholic Learning Online Summit was a week of online professional learning workshops and presentations delivered via Zoom, and coordinated through a bespoke CEnet website hosted on Google Sites. A legacy has been created with recordings of workshops available to CEnet members and their teachers through the website.

Environment

In late March 2020, Australian states and territories were moving towards restrictions in the community in an effort to limit the impact of COVID-19. By the end of April 2020, schools were at various stages of rapid implementation of remote learning and every state and territory was expected to start Term 2, 2020 with all schools delivering learning remotely. In preparation for new ways of working, the members of the eLWG were involved in supporting their diocesan schools to assist teachers create 'Learning from Home' teaching programs. There was a sudden demand for increased skills in using synchronous and asynchronous digital tools to design and deliver effective learning for students. This need was common across members during March and April. Initially members shared resources that were created for specific dioceses, which were duplicated then modified for their own contexts. The core tenets of pedagogy, teaching materials and tools were a common thread that connected the experiences of eLWG members in this initial phase.

The identification of these core needs was the basis of eLWG members recognising the opportunity to shift from diocesan support, to inter-diocesan collaborative professional learning. The design of the Catholic Learning Online Summit was focussed on addressing a high demand need for each member diocese to quickly upskill teachers in common areas of digital learning, and assisting teachers to access professional learning after lockdown measures had come into effect across each state and territory. The success of the Catholic Learning Online Summit will be determined by the agility and innovativeness of the eLWG to work effectively in making decisions, organising people and technology, and use of common technology platforms to enable the facilitation of synchronous connection, aligned for seamless and ubiquitous participation across CEnet members.

Catholic Learning Online Summit

Bobby Moore (2018) from Epic Impact Education states that "the key to improving our schools is focusing on social capital and creating high performing teams" (para 7). The Catholic Learning Online Summit captured how a high performing team and effective collaboration can lead to a successful delivery of professional learning. In less than two weeks, members of the eLWG worked together to coordinate a significant professional learning event for diocesan members. Over 500 teachers from 15 dioceses in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania accessed the equivalent of 2,175 hours of professional learning.

A selection of workshops was presented by diocesan staff with specific experience and expertise in common technology platforms and tools used throughout CEnet Dioceses. Additional presenters from outside the eLWG were sourced by organising committee members, made possible through their knowledge, reputation and professional connections. These external presenters are well known in their field, possessing high level knowledge and reputation. The collective approach taken in establishing a shared vision for the Summit assisted in securing these presenters at very short notice, all of whom expressed a willingness to be involved in similar activities in the future.

The Catholic Learning Online Summit provided access to teaching and non-teaching staff, thereby increasing advocacy for technology use in schools and building capacity for all staff who do not always have access to professional learning with technology. Data shows participants were from various service areas within the diocese, represented by teachers, casual teachers, school support officers, librarians and diocesan office staff.

Feedback from session evaluations highlights the ability to collectively pool resources and bring a greater offering to CEnet Dioceses. Many participants commented on the access to experts being extremely beneficial.

"Wouldn't it be good if ... talent like [Presenter] is available at everyone's fingertips".

Participants voiced their willingness and enthusiasm surrounding this type of event.

"If all PD was designed like this, great instruction, clear focus, useful in the classroom, only takes 1 hour to inspire you to take up the resource and run with it, you are in the comfort of home, you choose to make the effort and therefore the focus is 100%."

Teachers reported their capacity to deliver high quality online learning was significantly enhanced. The majority of teachers intended to implement their new skills and knowledge in the following week. While the online nature of this event was successful

in reaching across dioceses, participants also commented on the need for more time and guidance within the sessions so they could seek specific assistance and apply the skills within the workshop. This highlights the need for hybrid learning for teachers involving personalised face-to-face learning experiences and in-school opportunities, as well as access to online modules, workshops and webinars.

Advancing the learning partnerships for the benefit of all teachers

Following the success of Catholic Learning Online Summit, the eLWG's vision of advancing digital learning outcomes across members has involved addressing needs at school and diocesan levels, while continuing to collaborate on an expanded suite for Catholic Learning Online (CLO). A second Catholic Learning Online Summit was delivered in April 2021, and an ongoing series of short online workshops called Catholic Learning Online Events (CLOE) are regularly delivered to CEnet Diocesan members. The Catholic Learning Online Events are designed to provide access to learning directly from digital education providers to increase the efficacy of teachers in the design and delivery of digital learning. Teachers self-select their professional learning pathways with Catholic Learning Online Events, which cater for teachers beginning to explore new tools, and those who are looking to apply existing digital skills in new ways. Addressing the use of the digital tools and pedagogical impact when using the tools, every teacher can benefit from Catholic Learning Online Events. Since April 2020, seven Catholic Learning Online Events, three Event Series and two Summits have been facilitated, resulting in a bank of 57+ hours of just-in-time professional learning. Each Catholic Learning Online event is hosted on the CEnet Catholic Learning Online (CLO) website and is accessible to all CEnet Dioceses teachers and beyond for personalised learning.

Grounded in foundations of collaborative practice, the eLWG is a self-organising network of professional educators who demonstrate agile leadership competencies including self-reflection and self-management, personal integrity and reliability (Bushuyeva, Bushuiev & Bushuieva, 2019). The formal and informal interactions of members strengthen the efforts of the eLWG to deliver high impact outcomes in education. The robust discourse focussed on initiatives which drive pedagogical change in teaching and learning are due to the professional relationships that are built on trust and reciprocity and are integral to ongoing eLWG success. With these conditions in place the eLWG collaborates in learning partnerships to respond to the needs of members to advance digital education and enhance student learning across Catholic schools, providing an extended network of professional learning that is inclusive of all teachers.

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Middle Leaders are not just Principals-in-waiting

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In recent years it has been acknowledged that leadership in schools rests more broadly than just on the principal and senior leadership team (Harris, 2004). There has been a growing appreciation for the crucial work that *middle leaders* do in driving and sustaining educational change, and their capacity to influence pedagogical practice more directly because of their expertise and engagement in classrooms. Indeed, ACEL programs like *Pivotal People* led by Liz Benson (in Queensland) are evidence of tailored professional development and the need for middle leaders to be supported. Previously we have provided a broad overview of some of our work with middle leaders (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2020) and, in this article, we outline more specifically some of the particular challenges that middle leaders face.

It is important to note that middle leaders have been identified as the critical agents in leading teachers' professional development and in-school improvement agendas (e.g., Grootenboer et al., 2020; Harris, 2004). However, little is known, in Australia or internationally, about middle leaders' specific leading practices, or about how these practices impact on student learning and outcomes (Harris & Jones, 2017; Lipscombe et al., 2019). There is, moreover, only limited understanding of notions of site-based leadership and development. Studies thus far have established that more focused research is required to investigate not only the distinctiveness of middle leaders' practices, and the influence of these practices on teaching and learning (Harris et al., 2019), but also on the particular professional support that middle leaders need so as they are able to work and lead effectively.

A recent synthesis of literature on middle leaders and their role in school-based teaching and learning development identified specific inadequacies in relation to senior leadership and models of distributed leadership (Harris et al., 2019). These inadequacies become particularly apparent when school leadership structures, and a lack of broader systemic support, hinder the capacity for building and refining middle-leading practices (Lipscombe et al., 2019). In a recent Grattan Institute study (*Top teachers: sharing expertise to improve teaching*, Peter Goss & Julie Sonnemann, 2020), it was noted that middle leaders' work is constrained by limited up-front training and ongoing support, with little oversight by experts in the field. The report concluded that teachers in middle or instructional leader roles are not set up for success.

While it is commonly understood that effective professional and curriculum development occurs in school sites and in response to local needs and conditions (Higgins & Parsons, 2011), how this translates to the development and support of middle leaders so they can effectively lead school-based teaching and learning development, is somewhat neglected in reality. The *Through Growth to Achievement Report* (Australian Government, 2018, known as Gonski 2.0) states: "High-quality teacher professional learning includes opportunities for active learning and interaction with colleagues; takes place over an extended period of time; and comprises collective learning activities (for example, communities of practice) or joint research with other teachers" (p. 67). This is significant because the leaders of this "professional learning" will, in the main, be middle leaders. However, to undertake these important leading practices, middle leaders face a number of challenges, including but not limited to, focused support and targeted professional development. Here we focus on three particular challenges related to:

1. teaching *and* leading;
2. time *and* resources; and,
3. bridging *and* brokering.

Below we briefly outline each "challenge" and provide some ideas about how principals and middle leaders can manage and ameliorate them.

Teaching and Leading

Middle leaders have a unique position to influence and drive pedagogy in their particular part of the school, as they have access to some of the power and resources of formal leadership, but also have the currency of practice as they still have a substantial classroom teaching role (Grootenboer, 2018). Thus, they are privy to some of the higher-level discussions and decision-making in the school, but at the same time they have to enact these decisions "on the ground" with their teaching colleagues in classrooms. The teaching *and* leading duality is critical to successful and sustainable site-based development, yet its practices are both complimentary and contested. However, while this dual position provides unique opportunities that are necessary for leading curriculum and pedagogical development, they also provide some particular challenges and tensions for middle leaders.

First, middle leaders are often appointed because they have been acknowledged as good teachers, teachers who can ensure successful student outcomes, and a positive learning environment within their classroom (Irvine & Brundrett, 2016). However, as middle leaders they work with classes beyond their own immediate classroom. Leading effective pedagogy in several classes requires different skills and practices beyond just "teaching well". Indeed, to a large degree the activities and events of a singular classroom can be directly influenced and directed by a teacher, but work across several classes means that the effectiveness of the middle leader's impact is always mediated by others (Grootenboer et al., 2017). Second, middle leaders can find that the lack of singular attention to their class (that they had as a successful classroom teacher) can result in them feeling less prepared and satisfied with their own teaching, the very thing that gave them confidence and assurance for their middle leading position. This can see their sense of self-efficacy as a leader being challenged, not because they are not necessarily "leading well", but because their own teaching practice feels compromised (Grootenboer et al., 2020).

While the sites of middle leading practice vary, some possible ways ahead relate to middle leaders embracing their dual role and seeing that they can lead by teaching students and colleagues. By this we mean not always viewing the teaching and leading dimensions of their practices as mutually exclusive or independent of one another. For example, when considering a new teaching initiative, the middle leader could invite a junior colleague to observe them in the classroom as they implement the new practices, they could then discuss the initiative and how it can be implemented in other classrooms. This could then lead to a reciprocal visit where the middle leader provides their junior colleague with support and feedback on the teaching initiative in their classroom. Collaboration between middle leaders with their teacher colleagues can lead to the development of a stronger relational trust where both parties (practices, professional knowledge and perspectives) are equally valued.

Time and Resources

The second key category of challenge for middle leaders is the availability and access to resources, and most commonly the resource of time. Almost without exception, a significant confounding factor for any educational innovation or change will be a lack of quality and useful time (Hargreaves, 1994). This can take a range of forms related to aspects including insufficient time to meet and plan, a lack of shared time to collaborate, and piecemeal or poor-quality time when teachers are not refreshed and able to reflect and seriously consider their pedagogical practices. It is an understatement to say that schools are busy places with many activities occurring simultaneously yet carving out time in an authentic way for organising, managing and coordinating teaching and learning school initiatives, is often neglected.

It seems to us that the adequacy of time is always going to be considered to be a challenge, and so perhaps the first issue for middle leaders to address in their work with their teaching teams is "the pressing need for time". And to this end, given that time is generally a fixed commodity, the question that needs to be considered is "how will we use our time?" – in other words, what are our priorities? Of course, all school sites are different, but it would be important to start with the core business of schools, learning and teaching and what happens in classrooms, and ensuring that priority and quality time is given first to continually developing educational practices in classrooms.

Principals and senior leaders also have an important role to play as they are usually the ones who, to a large degree, create the conditions and arrangements for middle leaders to undertake their leading. Of course, it is important that middle leaders have an adequate time allocation to fulfil the requirements of their position, but they also need a timetable that facilitates, rather than hinders, times for middle leaders and teachers to meet, collaborate, and work collegially in each other's classrooms. While principals and school leaders seem to face an ever-increasing burden of administration and bureaucracy, the temptation for them to pass some of this load down the line to middle leaders should be resisted. Allocating administration tasks is counterproductive as it draws the middle leaders away from their crucial role in leading teaching and learning and collaborating with teachers and can even change the nature of their work and relationships with their teaching colleagues.

Bridging and Brokering

Finally, middle leaders face challenges related to their unique structural position *in the middle* – relating "up" to the school senior leaders and "across" to their teaching colleagues. This can see them being simultaneously part of the school leadership and the teaching community, but they can also feel somewhat isolated from both (Bennett et al., 2007). Senior leadership may have agendas that they want the middle leaders to implement and action with their teachers, but at the same time teachers need their middle leaders to advocate and represent their perspectives to the principal. In this way, middle leaders can face challenges as they act as a bridge and broker between the senior leaders and teachers, requiring them to "lead up" and to "lead down and across". Of course, the dichotomy between these communities is not clear cut or necessarily mutually exclusive, but in our studies many middle leaders have reported feeling isolated and lonely in an awkward "relational sandwich" as they navigate their roles.

As we noted above, middle leaders are often appointed to their positions because they have been seen as good teachers, and so their sense of self-efficacy and identity can be closely aligned with their teaching rather than their leading, and they can be more comfortable with being led by the senior leaders. However, middle leaders need to advocate for their teacher colleagues with senior leaders to ensure that they understand the pressures and conditions of classroom practice, particularly as teachers' work continues to be pressured by the many external demands and requirements. Middle leaders can also broker arrangements with senior leaders to ensure that there are adequate resources (including time) for continuous sustainable educational development to occur. At the same time, middle leaders can also be a bridge in taking requirements from systemic and school leaders (e.g., for a new initiative) and leading their teaching colleagues as they work out how they might enact it in their particular context or setting.

For principals and senior leaders, it is important that they do not co-opt middle leaders to be extended operatives of the senior leadership; rather, middle leaders need to be acknowledged for their important unique leading position. For example, should senior leaders have a concern about a particular staff member and their teaching performance, it would not be appropriate for the middle leader to be the evaluator of the teacher's performance or the one to give them the appraisal of their performance. This should be undertaken by the senior leader. This would then allow the middle leader to work alongside the teacher to help them develop their pedagogical practices. The middle leader's capacity to act as a mentor and coach to their teacher colleagues will be significantly diminished if they are not trusted and viewed as the person assessing teacher performance.

Concluding Comments

We have collectively and independently worked with middle leaders for over 10 years and have been educational middle leaders ourselves. The "challenges" that we have presented here come from this extended engagement with middle leaders in primary and secondary contexts, and in state, Catholic, and independent schools. Through all of this work we are convinced that middle leaders are uniquely and critically positioned to lead curriculum and pedagogical development in schools (and other educational settings), but to do this we need to have a better understanding of their work and practices, a clearer idea about what focussed professional development and support they need, and a firm commitment to allowing these leaders to focus on the core business of education – teaching and learning.

Middle leaders are not just "aspiring leaders" or "principals in waiting" – they are crucial leaders who are central to on-going sustainable school-based educational development. Over the next four years we will be undertaking an in-depth study into middle leadership in schools, funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC, DP210102247: *Improving middle leading practices in schools to enhance student learning*), and the findings will inform future policy and practice, and professional development and support for middle leaders.

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Strategies to support and boost the resilience of vulnerable students in a time of crisis

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School leaders experience firsthand how the local community and community events impact on the school (Harris & Jones, 2020). As far back as the 1970's (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), theories of the interaction between systems, school, family and the wider community have been identified but have failed to capture the complexity of the dynamics between these factors to fully explain the extent and nature of the interdependence. Establishing the nature of these relationships has only taken on an enhanced relevance in light of the global pandemic sweeping the world.

Worldwide, the COVID-19 outbreak has precipitated widespread school closures. These enforced shutdowns have served to further compromise the learning and development of the most vulnerable students and those with special educational needs (OECD, 2020). For many, school attendance signifies much more than education - it provides a routine, a structure, a place of refuge and a social setting as well as a center for learning (Larsen et al., 2021). Children have suffered not only losses of learning, but also significant setbacks socially and emotionally (Idoiaga et al., 2020). Celebrations, developmental milestones, transitions and vacations have all been postponed or delayed (Masten, 2021). Furthermore, some children are coping with an additional layer of serious problems arising from the vulnerability of sick or elderly family members and sadly, in some cases, the death of family member from COVID-19 (Walsh, 2020). At the same time, we have witnessed firsthand how individuals can respond, adapt, and grow as circumstances change. In the past year, children and young people have demonstrated a remarkable capacity for resilience (Masten, 2021).

What is this amazing ability we have to bounce back from adversity? There has been a surge of research over the past 20 years, examining children's and adolescents' reactions and responses to a multitude of difficult circumstances (Yule et al., 2019). Typically referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), these events are categorized as early life challenges, experiences of victimization or instances of helplessness, which may in many cases be traumatic in nature and may put an individual at risk of negative outcomes (physical, psychological, social and academic) across the life course (Karatekin & Hill, 2019). Given the prevalence of ACEs within the lives of young children within modern society, a growing body of research surrounds the emergence of Trauma Sensitive Schools, wherein the staff are aware of the impact of ACEs and can provide a supportive environment for the most vulnerable students (Thomas et al., 2019).

Research unpacking the core tenets of resilience and highlighting the impact of trauma and, in turn, the potentially ameliorative influence of trauma sensitive schools in the lives of young learners is of undeniable value to improving the effectiveness of the educational system. However, a significant issue emerges when we attempt to translate the primary recommendations and findings from these

eminent fields of research into the day-to-day educational practice implemented in our schools which are pressurised and overburdened educational workforce. School Leaders and teachers are wary of yet another layer of learning and consideration to be embedded into their practice and their sense of teaching efficacy has the potential to be eroded by another programme to implement in what is already perceived to be an overloaded curriculum (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2010; OECD, 2019). Therefore, as researchers, the onus rests with us to determine how we can go about facilitating the implementation of trauma-sensitive approaches in a manner which is manageable and easy for educators. How can we incorporate research-based strategies to enhance resilience and create inclusive school for all students without further overburdening those who will have to implement the practices at the coalface?

The most vulnerable students are those who may lack the social, emotional, or language skills to effectively communicate their distress and who struggle to adapt when faced with challenges that emerge in their lives. Sadly, this creates something of a catch 22 scenario as these students may repeatedly attempt to cope using more deleterious strategies which bring negative attention upon them, creating a vicious cycle of perceived problem behaviours accompanied by subsequent reprimands and punishment. These learners struggle significantly more than their peers in terms of exhibiting help-seeking behaviours and ultimately may be more susceptible to absenteeism, disciplining and expulsion (Murphy et al., 2019).

The two groups of students that we will focus on within this article require more intensive support in school. The first group we will examine comprises those learners who are regularly acting out and coming to the attention of all school staff very quickly for the perceived wrong reasons, namely engagement in disruptive, angry and aggressive behaviours. The second group to consider are those who may go under the radar in the day-to-day hustle and bustle of the school environment until a major crisis is seen to emerge. These learners present as withdrawn and quiet, but when attended to more closely, can show physical signs of distress such as self-harming behaviours, disordered eating patterns, weight loss, and isolation from their peers. Oftentimes, these represent the students who may be struggling to cope with a traumatic experience(s) that have occurred or may be ongoing in their lives.

The literature on resilience (Yule et al., 2019) has identified risk factors and protective factors for children. Studies have shown that children can be affected by significant trauma in their youth in very different ways, with some being seen to cope, adapt and recover in a rather healthy fashion, while others may experience more significant struggles (Cohen & Mannarino, 2011). Furthermore, research with adult populations indicates that some individuals who experience trauma also respond in a more adaptive manner than comparable peers (Bonano, 2021). So, one question naturally arises from these findings – namely, why is this the case? What differentiates those who are more resilient? And what can we learn from this research about how we can support those who may be more vulnerable than their peers or siblings? Can we identify simple and reliable strategies that may be of benefit in enhancing the resilience of the two groups of students who we have identified earlier as being at a higher risk of being marginalized or excluded within the educational system?

Change the Question

By changing how we look at vulnerable students and asking the right questions, we can provide support and gain a greater insight into why these learners may be behaving as they are. We can shift the focus by asking the question "what happened to you?", as opposed to "what is wrong with you?" This simple shift is the first step in changing how we look at a student, by ensuring that a student does not come to be defined by perceived challenging behaviours they may exhibit. Instead, educators come to recognise that the learner has been adversely affected by the challenges and trauma they have faced in their lives (Wolpow et al., 2009). Such a perspective shift subsequently alters how an educator might choose to interact with this student moving forward.

See Behaviour as Communication

Behaviour is communication. When we begin to understand what students are trying to communicate through their behavioural patterns, we can start to help to meet their priority needs in a more learner-centred manner. Recently, our team coordinated a European funded research project aimed at supporting early school leavers (THRIVE, 2020). Within the programme for trauma-sensitive practice produced as part of the project, the THRIVE research team recommends that educators observe and interpret behaviour using trauma sensitive glasses. This involves looking beyond the surface level behaviours to gain a sharper insight into what the student may be hoping to achieve by exhibiting such behaviours. For example, a resistant child who has experienced trauma may find it difficult to trust adults, a student who is attention-seeking may actually be feeling alone and disconnected. Educators often get caught in a negative cycle implementing the same sanctions even when they are not working. Standing back and examining behaviour as communication can provide different outlook on a student and can help to break the cycle by highlighting more progressive ways in which we can respond to the learner in question to bring about more meaningful and progressive interactions for educator and learner alike.

Build relationships and establish connections

Relationships matter and are the beating heart of effective and caring schools. Establishing connections with the most vulnerable students is important. One good adult can make a difference in the life of a child and that adult is often a teacher. The evidence for this comes from a longitudinal study on resilience where over 678 babies were followed for 40 years into adulthood (Werner, 1993). Referred to as the Hawaii study, a number of protective factors emerged amongst the most resilient individuals followed within the research, one of which was a stable relationship with one good adult and connection to community and school.

Flexibility of thinking

Recently the research on resilience explains that while many protective factors can boost resilience, it is in fact flexibility of thinking that is central to cultivating resilience (Bonanno, 2021). Teaching students how to think in a flexible manner as situations and problems occur during the school day should therefore be a central aim for those attempting to develop the social and emotional capabilities of young learners. Asking questions, modelling problem-solving and guessing potential outcomes can support students in evaluating situations in a more adaptable and open-minded fashion. Intuitively, this approach makes sense. Consider how we think when we are feeling good and experiencing positive emotions. We are capable of thinking in a flexible way, generating various possibilities and developing creative and innovative ideas and solutions. This mindset empowers us thereby promoting our problem-solving capacities and enabling us to trouble shoot situations in real time, and bounce back from adversity. Educators should encourage more flexible and adaptable approaches to challenges and model these ways of thinking to their learners regularly throughout the school day wherever possible.

Covid-19 reminds us that adversity is a fact of life. Being mentally tough and resilient will enable students to survive and thrive in life - achieving where others struggle. School leaders can encourage all staff to use these identified strategies throughout the school day to boost thinking and enhance resilience in the school and classroom. In this way the most vulnerable students, the ones who need these skills of resilience can learn them and the ones that are often excluded can be included and achieve better outcomes in life.

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Living our moral purpose: Inclusive practices at Baringa State Primary School

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Sheldon Boland, Deputy Principal, Baringa State Primary School
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Noel Baggs, Principal, Baringa State Primary School

An introduction to Baringa State Primary School

Baringa State Primary School (SPS) was established in 2018 on the southern end of the Sunshine Coast as Queensland's first purpose-built STEM school. Catering to students in Prep to Year 6, Baringa has experienced rapid growth with current enrolment numbers sitting at 1,035. These enrolments include students with various support needs, culturally and linguistically diverse students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with a disability, students in out-of-home care, students with mental health support needs, and gifted and talented students. Baringa's moral purpose of "each and every member of our school community believes that each and every student can and will achieve" (Baringa SPS, 2021, p.4), reflects the school's commitment to inclusion and every student achieving their full potential.

Creating sustainable, flexible support structures and building teacher capability to uphold the school's moral purpose and meet the changing needs of the school community have guided every decision made by the Baringa SPS inclusion team. Baringa's inclusion team is committed to supporting teachers to provide reasonable adjustments so that all students can access - and experience success in - the Australian Curriculum. This pursuit of building staff capability to implement evidence-based practices and resources to support students with diverse needs led the inclusion team to engage with the inclusionED (http://inclusionED.edu.au) teacher professional learning platform. inclusionED is an initiative of the Autism CRC (Cooperative Research Centre) which receives funding from the Australian Government.

Underpinning successful inclusion: Values and beliefs

Aspects of this new school's infrastructure undeniably contribute to an inclusive approach through the design of learning spaces. Additionally, the planned flexibility inherent within the developed systems of inclusion support enables the school to respond to the ebb and flow of student need. While these systems reflect the stated moral purpose of Baringa SPS, they are not *the* reason for the school's authentic inclusion. As opposed to professional obligations to meet legislative requirements, it is the values and beliefs expressed by school leaders that drive their commitment to an inclusive approach, "… stakeholders within the school are valued and different approaches aren't just tolerated or accepted but celebrated in an authentic way … we continue to acknowledge the value of learning." (Deputy Principal)

While such sentiments of commitment may be heard in the school, genuine inclusion also places the primary responsibility for student belonging, participation, and learning firmly within the school community as expressed by the Deputy Principal, "… knowing that the next child who walks through our gates will have unique needs and the system will need to bend to that child not the other way round."

Baringa SPS's leaders believe that inclusion is not a destination but a journey as there is no single point in time when their efforts towards inclusion will be complete:

> So, what's the next stage of our development? For those new students who are walking through the gate … I'm facing challenges I haven't faced before or something in the landscape has changed, an existing student where, you know, a life event or something, some element has changed recently which requires a different lens so I think we've always got to be on our toes with inclusive practice. (Deputy Principal)

Transforming inclusive values into inclusive practice requires dedicated effort and knowledge (Cologon, 2019) and consistent with Article 24, General Comment 4 on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), *action* is required to ensure sustainable inclusive practice within school settings:

> Placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without accompanying structural changes to, for example, organisation, curriculum and teaching and learning strategies, does not constitute inclusion. (United Nations, 2016, p.4)

The Head of Inclusion, the Deputy Principal, and the school leadership team champion inclusion across the school and enact inclusive values in the whole school community. While specialists and inclusion teachers support classroom teachers to implement inclusive teaching practices, it is clearly understood that the replication of special education practices into a local school setting is *not* inclusion (Saggers & Carrington, 2021). The objective is to enable individual classroom teachers to gain the knowledge and skills they require to directly champion all students. Sustaining a transformative approach requires a commitment to a program of professional learning (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).

Setting up for successful inclusion: A culture of performance and development

A whole-of-school professional learning process has been planned and implementation has begun, initially involving all Year 1 classroom teachers in a single community of practice. As explained by the Head of Inclusion below, this cohort has been enabled through dedicated efforts to release teachers:

> teachers are very time poor so I don't want it [their professional learning] to be in addition, I want to give them the time as we do this important work … it has to be part of the whole school improvement agenda, a part of the culture of the school otherwise you get that mentality of "no they're your kids, your [inclusion] team looks after that".

This respect afforded to both the teachers and their professional learning encourages a culture of performance and development which aligns with the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership's (AITSL) *Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework* (2012). The framework identifies a series of factors necessary for the growth of a performance and development culture, all of which are present at Baringa SPS:

- A focus on student outcomes including learning, engagement and wellbeing;
- A clear understanding of effective teaching according to the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (AITSL, 2011), and informed by the school's context and priorities;
- A flexibility of approaches and systems to be responsive to the school's individual context; and
- Coherence between the various activities that teachers undertake, rather than performance and development being enacted as an additional process without the adoption of a school-wide approach.

A series of four, fortnightly sessions was planned and situated within Stages 1 and 2 of the *High Quality Professional Learning Cycle* proposed by AITSL (n.d.). These are "identify professional learning needs" and "select and undertaken learning". All eight Year 1 teachers opted to be involved in the sessions and were released from the school's weekly assembly in order to engage with inclusionED. Members of the inclusion team and the Deputy Principal also attended these sessions.

Adopting and applying inclusionED practices

inclusionED (2020) was created as a professional learning platform to enable Australian teachers to mobilise the findings from more than 25 research and development projects within the School Years Program of the Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC). Over a period of four years, more than 200 Australian teachers have participated as co-designers, consultants, and advisors so that inclusionED could support teachers to implement specific teaching practices and successfully teach to the diversity within inclusive classrooms.

The online community learning platform provides the 2,500 registered users with the resources to access underpinning research while responding to teachers' call for the supported implementation of teaching practices that have been informed by this research. Informed by the principles of Universal Design for Learning, inclusionED supports flexible approaches that can be customised for individualised learning. Teachers are assisted through a high quality cycle of professional learning built into the inclusionED design, and the platform incorporates some familiar social media conventions enabling teachers to engage with like-minded colleagues within a growing national community of practice.

Procedure

Session 1. With the caveat that there is never a single answer, the first session began with the Year 1 teachers' descriptions of ideal inclusive school settings (see Table 1).

Table 1: An ideal inclusive school setting described by Year 1 teachers

- ✓ *Strong levels of student wellbeing and engagement*
- ✓ *Students who are more engaged and on-task with their learning*
- ✓ *Students who have greater confidence and are prepared to take calculated risks and persevere with their learning. This would be facilitated by safe learning environments; supportive peer and all adult relationships*
- ✓ *Look like they are working*
- ✓ *Students with focus and perseverance – when it doesn't work out, they would try again*
- ✓ *Students would have trust that they can access the learning tasks and activities*
- ✓ *Improved student self-regulation*
- ✓ *Students who would be able to connect with themselves*
- ✓ *Students would know and understand themselves as a learner*
- ✓ *Removal of barriers to learning, for example through the use of assistive technology for writing*
- ✓ *Students who have an age-appropriate understanding of inclusion - where everyone is valued*
- ✓ *A supportive environment.*
- ✓ *Everyone (students and teachers) have what they need to be successful and that this can look different for different students*
- ✓ *There would be celebration ...*

Teachers considered the gap analysis in practice to benefit student outcomes, whilst also developing their teaching practice. Teachers chose to address the following student challenges:

- Task completion;
- Remaining on task;
- Remaining calm; and
- Sensory needs.

With these considerations in mind, the teachers explored practices on inclusionED and identified those that resonated with their context.

Session 2. Teachers further explored those inclusionED practices that had resonated and considered how they could be adopted. The desire to meet students' needs drove teacher decision-making. Teachers chose one of the following three practices:

- Structure tasks using work systems;
- Meet students' sensory needs; and
- Assess your classrooms acoustics.

Sessions 3-4. The third session focused on writing *SMART* goals: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-phased. Goal writing and reflection on outcomes are key to the supported implementation within inclusionED. Setting goals was described as "the bump in the road" by the Head of Inclusion, and two sessions were necessary to workshop how teachers could measure student success.

Teachers described exactly what the student and the teacher would be *seen* to do. Descriptions included details as to the type and frequency of scaffolds and prompts to be provided. Frequently, the experiences for diverse learners and their families have focused on what the learner cannot do or has not yet achieved. The ability to describe incremental changes such as a reduction in required scaffolds empowers teachers to frame change as progress and strengthens school-family relationships.

Teachers' knowledge about how students currently engaged and participated was critical for clearly articulating goals. For example, setting a goal to extend a student's engagement required knowing how that particular student might be engaged (i.e., with support from a fidget toy, a particular type of seat, or perhaps a countdown). In addition to advice from the inclusion team and external specialists, several of the Year 1 teachers opted to work directly with the children to establish which strategies would be tried.

Setting a goal that is achievable over a given period relies upon teacher knowledge of the student. When data are not available, recording baselines is necessary. Setting achievable goals requires realistic judgment about likely student progress over the implementation period. It was important to guide teachers to consider and accept student factors such as their rate of learning, and that the relevance of goals is determined by student need. The Head of Inclusion described how this guidance was particularly important when teachers are committed to promoting increased student outcomes:

> we have quality high performing teachers at Baringa who are so invested in the outcomes for kids, and sometimes it's about refocusing that actually the goal for this child isn't about academics at this point in time… so it's about reframing that for them to see it from the perspective of what my student needs at this time. (Head of Inclusion)

Where to next?

Responses by this cohort of Year 1 teachers on the Intention to Teach in Inclusive Classrooms Scale (ITICS) (Sharma & Jacobs, 2016) clearly demonstrated a commitment to proactively seek and lead evidence-informed inclusive practice. The teachers incorporated collaborative teamwork to create goals for inclusive practices in order to build knowledge about their learners and to enable them to reflect on and refine their ongoing efforts towards inclusion. In doing so, they have created an environment conducive to a continual cycle of capacity and capability building that aligns with the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (AITSL, 2011). Reviewing the process undertaken by teachers at Baringa SPS will be critical to building on this with future cohorts within the school.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the following teachers who have participated in the professional learning process: Lindsay Botten, Roberta Brown, Nicole Browning, Diana Goodwin, Sam Hall, Belinda Hudson, Nicola Jardine, Kirsten Noe, and Tarsha Roberts.

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Kelly Gorham, Baringa State School's Head of Inclusion, is committed to improving inclusive practices to ensure students are provided with effective support and adjustments to engage with the Australian Curriculum, and achieve success. Kelly draws from a range of experiences across urban and rural settings to inform her professional practices.

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Noel Baggs is the foundation Principal at Baringa State Primary School, Education Queensland's first purpose-built STEM school. Noel is chair of the Caloundra Coalition of Principals influencing more than 11,800 students (P-12). He has held significant roles internationally in Ontario and British Columbia, Canada, and New York SUNY campuses.

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Understanding development in students' oral story-telling ability

Dr Sandy Heldsinger, Managing Director, Brightpath Assessments;
Dr Stephen Humphry, Senior Lecturer, University of Western Australia;
Kerry Miller, Classroom teacher (previously of Lesmurdie PS, WA);
Rosemary Simpson, Founder & Director, Language Express

Captains of industry speak often of their enormous respect for story-telling and its power to inspire and motivate change. Story-telling is seen as a tool to teach important lessons, define culture and values and set a vision. More broadly story-telling is valued as a means of sharing ideas and explaining abstract concepts.

Successful story tellers amuse and entertain their audience. They craft an introduction that engages their listener; they create a complication which their character or characters have to face and resolve; they imbue their characters with personalities; and they create a fitting setting for their story.

Successful story-tellers use descriptive and precise language to enhance their story-telling. They use more complex language structures such as casual and temporal connectors and elaborated noun phrases and their use of noun/pronoun referencing successfully communicates the relationship of their ideas.

In an early childhood context, oral narratives provide the means for the educator to observe children's ability to use language at the discourse level within a developmentally appropriate and naturalistic context. The literate language features used in narration such as adverbs, adjectives, casual and temporal markers and subordinate and relative clauses, are consistent with the written language children need to master. Because oral language is closely related to written language, narrative proficiency is highly predictive of reading comprehension. Current research evidence demonstrates that explicit narrative instruction for typically developing and linguistically complex populations in the early years can lead to significant gains in oral language skills needed for proficient reading and writing (Peterson & Spencer, 2016).

Researchers from the University of Western Australia, the WA Primary Principals' Association and early childhood teachers collaborated to develop an approach for assessing oral language that allows teachers to better understand development of students' oral story-telling ability. The collaboration was motivated by a desire to develop an assessment that was relatively easy for teachers to use and would inform their teaching practice.

In this paper, we share our research as we have found that sometimes even the most experienced teachers lose sight of the value of explicitly teaching students to tell stories orally. We begin by providing an overview of the assessment process. We then explain the features of development in student oral story-telling ability. Finally, we present a case study to illustrate the value in teaching students to be oral story-tellers.

Overview of the assessment

Eliciting the student's story

The assessment uses books from *The Frog Where Are You?* series of books by Mercer Mayer as the stimulus for students' story-telling. These books were selected because of their clear and simple illustrations and because they have a strong story line. Teachers can opt to use other books but care needs to be taken when selecting a book as a stimulus. There are many beautifully illustrated wordless books to choose from but such texts do not always include a simple storyline.

A student is first given time to look through all the pictures in the book. When the student is ready, they use the pictures to tell their story. It is recommended that the teacher makes an audio recording of the student's performance.

Assessing the performance

To score the student, the teacher compares their performance to a series of calibrated exemplars. They are required to decide which exemplar the student's performance is closest to or which two it falls between.

When making this judgement, the teacher needs to consider the macrostructure of the performance such as whether there is a beginning, a complication, a resolution and the extent to which characters and setting are portrayed. They also need to consider the microstructure of the performance such as the sequencing and cohesiveness of ideas; the length or complexity of sentences and the variety of sentence beginnings; the grammar, including tense; the vocabulary and descriptive language used; and the articulation of words.

The calibrated scale includes performance descriptors that characterise the developmental continuum of oral story-telling. The assessment and resulting scale are appropriate for students aged to 4 to 7 and the scale range is from 120 to 300 score points. Exemplars are provided at increments of 20 on the scale. Further information about the research we undertook to develop the oral narrative scale is reported in Humphry, Heldsinger and Dawkins (2017).

Following the successful completion of the research, the assessment was incorporated into the Brightpath reporting and assessment software. Brightpath was adopted as the WA state testing program for primary schools in 2015 and is now used in schools across Australia.

Broad features of development in oral story-telling

Figure 1 provides a summary of the key features of development in students' oral narratives. The score ranges refer to the Brightpath oral narrative scale scores. It can be seen that students start by simply describing the actions depicted in the pictures and naming objects. As students progress, they start to craft a story and include an orientation and a complication and they describe their characters beyond simply naming their character. Students working at the top of scale demonstrate a strong sense of story-telling. Not only do they utilise the macrostructures of story-telling, they also begin to select words and phrases and manipulate sentences to enhance their story-telling.

Sample exemplars are shown in Figure 2. The exemplars provide substance to and help illustrate the performance descriptors. The exemplars in particular highlight what experienced early childhood teachers tell us. "If a student can't tell you a story, they won't be able to write it."

Brightpath score range **250 – 300**	Students working at this level orientate the listener to their story. They use a complication to drive their story and resolve this complication at the end of their story. There is a stronger sense of story-telling and often a stronger sense of a narrator. These students start to incorporate details that enhance their stories which leads to a stronger portrayal of character and possibly also of setting. They may include some reflection about their characters' intentions and responses. These students use a wider vocabulary, including adverbs. Their stories are more cohesive because they use a variety of connectives and they use correct noun-pronoun referencing. Student working in this ability range demonstrate increased control of sentences and they use subordinate and embedded clauses to create complex sentences.
Brightpath score range **230 – 250**	Students in this ability range start to incorporate many of the features of story-telling and there is a stronger sense of story and of a complication driving the story. These students, typically, provide more detail about the events in their story and the events are more likely to be relevant to the story and are likely to lead to a resolution. They may describe characters' reactions to events and to other characters. At this stage of development, students are still only likely to name the setting of their story. Students working at this level start to use co-ordinating conjunctions and are less likely to rely on ***and***, ***and then***, to order events. They also start to use some descriptive and precise vocabulary.
Brightpath score range **180 – 230**	As students' story-telling abilities develop, it becomes easier for the listener to follow the sequence of events. These students start to demonstrate some understanding of the requirements of story-telling such as naming characters, explaining characters' actions and emotions, be it in very simple ways. They also attempt to orientate the listener and include a complication in their story. Students in this ability range more successfully use the past tense to tell their stories, but they drift into the present tense when they revert to describing the pictures. These students mostly use simple and compound sentences. They also use additive connectives to link events.
Brightpath score range **100 – 180**	Students lowest on the scale typically state the actions in the pictures rather than tell a story. They use a limited range of common nouns (dog, frog, window, bees) to name objects and verbs (doing, getting, singing) to describe actions. Actions are described through short, simple and incomplete sentences. These students sometimes use the simple past tense but they are likely to swap to the present continuous tense because they describe what they see in the pictures rather than tell a story.

Figure 1: Summary of the key features of development in students' oral narratives

Figure 1 is taken from Humphry, S.M., & Heldsinger, S.A. (n.d.). *Brightpath Assessment and Reporting Software.* http://www.brightpath.com.au and reproduced with the permission of Brightpath Assessment and Reporting Software.

Exemplar representing a scale score of 300

STUDENT: A Boy, A Dog And A Frog.

One day a boy wanted a pet so he and his dog, Rover, went out to get a frog. The boy tried to look for a frog as high as he could, while Rover scratched himself all over. Then, the boy suddenly saw a frog. He was a big green one. He was running down the hill when, trip, he tripped over a big branch and landed straight in a river, into the river with the frog. But, the frog stayed stationary on his lilypad with the boy looking at him eye to eye.

The boy tried to make a grab but the frog jumped over. The boy looked at the frog very crossly and the frog looked back with a huge smile. The frog looked at Rover rather sadly when the boy shouted at him to go away. But, as he caught up with the boy on one side and Rover on the other and the frog sitting in the middle, the frog was in for a big surprise. As Rover tried to distract him the boy was trying to put him in the net. The boy thought that he got the frog but Rover got too much in the way. The frog went plop head first into the river. The boy looked at Rover very crossly eye and eye. The frog was pretty angry and jumped back onto a rock.

The boy shouted trying to get the frog's attention but the frog didn't, he just sat there on the rock just looking very glum. As the boy walked away and the further they went the more sadder the frog got. He didn't mean to make the boy so sad. The boy stomped away with Rover crawling by his side. The frog still stayed stationary. There the frog sat all alone, he had no attention, he just wanted someone to play with. So, the frog followed his footprints, followed their footprints, into the house. He searched to where they were. As the boy and Rover were in the bath together, the frog decided that he was very hot and was very thirsty. So, he hopped into the bathroom, the boy was very happy to see him, and the frog jumped straight into the bath. They were all having great fun, especially the not so glum frog.

Exemplar representing a scale score of 200

STUDENT: Once upon a time there was a boy who wanted to catch a frog, but when he catched the frog he falled. There was a frog and he wanted to catch him but when he catched him he falled.

He falled and when he was in the water he standed on his head in the water. And he was in the water and he stand on his head. He really wanted to catch the frog, yes, and he's grumpy for not getting him. When he was in the water he swam and he tried to catch him very carefully. Tip-toe, tip, tip, tip. When he was in the water he told him to go on the log. And when he was on the log he catched the dog. He catched the dog.

The frog standed on his head, yes, and he wouldn't let him catch him. He was grumpy and then he goed, splashing into the water. And he said, "Come back here froggy", but then he went away. The froggy was sad. He was sad and sad. Then he goed. And then the little boy goed. The little boy was grumpy because he couldn't get him. He was all alone. He goed – now the froggy was all alone and very sad. So he saw the footprints. He could see footprints inside, he could see footprints in there, he could see him there in the bath. He was so happy to see him and the froggy jumped in. They played in the bath together, yes.

Exemplar representing a scale score of 120

STUDENT: The dog doing that. The frog getting in. Gone. Opening the window. The dog's putting his head in that. The dog's licking him. He's singing. The dog's trying to get it. All the bees came out of it. Climbed up the tree. He fall down.

He climbed up the rock. He found a reindeer. The reindeer runs. He fell off, in the water. He climbed up. He saw a frog. He throwed the frog.

Figure 2: Sample exemplars

Figure 2 is taken from Humphry, S.M., & Heldsinger, S.A. (n.d.). *Brightpath Assessment and Reporting Software.* http://www.brightpath.com.au and reproduced with the permission of Brightpath Assessment and Reporting Software.

Case study

In the next part of the paper, we present a case study which illustrates the value in explicitly teaching oral narratives in early childhood. The teacher in this case study teaches in a small government school on the outskirts of Perth. She spent five weeks teaching her Year 1 students how to tell stories.

Teaching intervention

Each week the teacher focused on a different aspect of narratives and she continually helped students see the relationship between these different aspects of story-telling. She also gave her students plenty of time to have a go at telling stories.

- In week 1, she focused on setting and taught her students about time and place and they explored adjectives they could use to describe setting;
- In week 2, she taught her students about characters (main characters and supporting characters, naming and describing characters);
- In week 3, the class explored the concept of a complication in a story and they considered cause and effect. They also discussed characters' feelings and thoughts in relation to the conflict and their desire or need to solve the problem;
- Week 4 built on the learning of the previous weeks. The students were taught how to resolve the complication and end their story. They were also taught to explore the thoughts and feelings of characters once the problem was solved and what might be the atmosphere at the end; and
- Week 5 was dedicated to the students practising their story-telling. They were given the opportunity to retell familiar stories in pairs, in groups, to the whole class, to other adults and anyone who would listen.

Evaluating the intervention

The teacher observed a marked improvement in her students' oral narratives. Figure 3 shows the distribution of students' scores on the Brightpath scale. The lower histogram shows the distribution of scores on the pre-test and the upper histogram shows the distribution on the post-test. Table 1 sets out the pre and post-test means and standard deviations.

It can be seen that all students improved as a result of the intervention and that the progress was marked. Extracts of one student's pre- and post-test oral narratives are shown in Figure 4. It is delightful to see how much this student learnt in five weeks.

Table 1: Pre- and post-test means and standard deviations

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number of students
Pre-test	144.2	9.1	13
Post-test	236.5	26.7	13

Table 1 is taken from Humphry, S.M., & Heldsinger, S.A. (n.d.). *Brightpath Assessment and Reporting Software*. http://www.brightpath.com.au and reproduced with the permission of Brightpath

Assessment and Reporting Software.

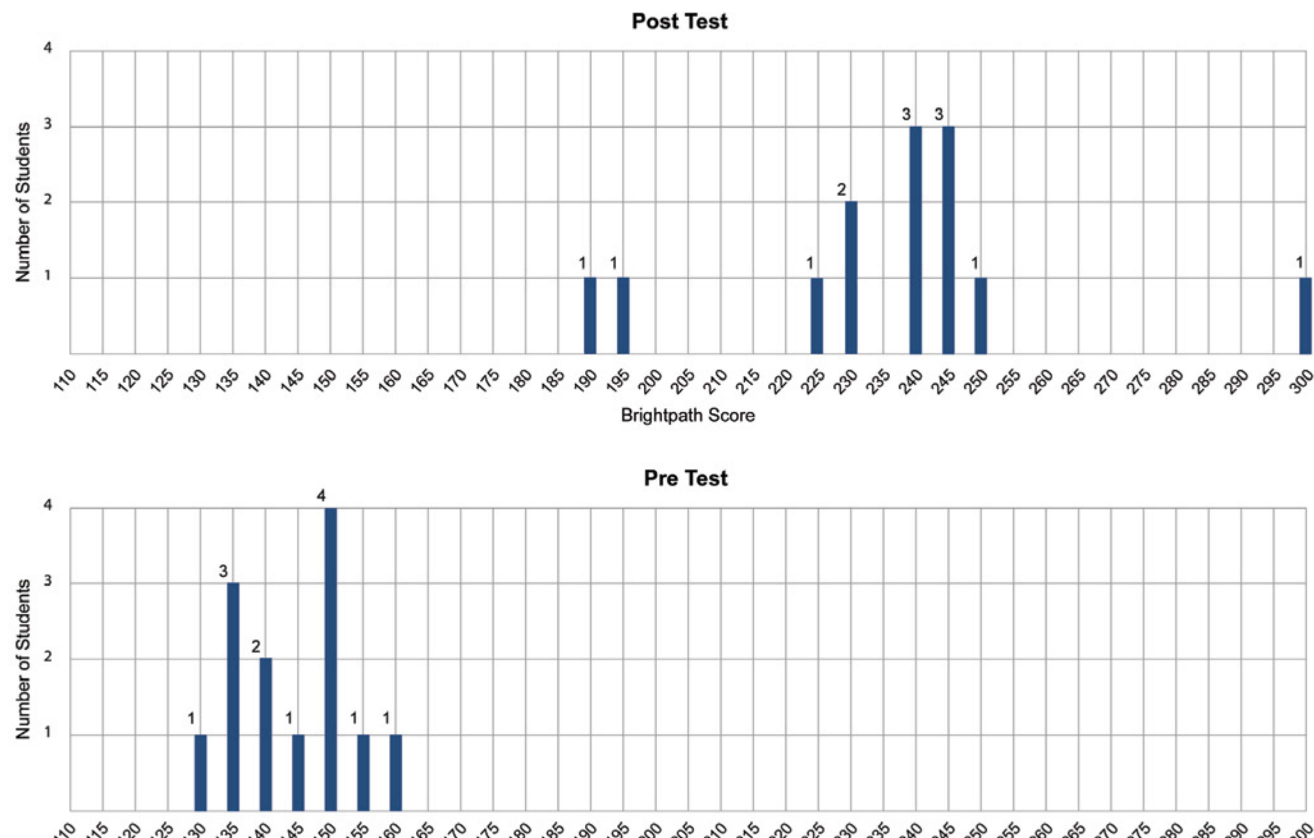

Figure 3: Distribution of student scores from the pre-test and post-test assessments

Figure 3 is taken from Humphry, S.M., & Heldsinger, S.A. (n.d.). Brightpath Assessment and Reporting Software. http://www.brightpath.com.au and reproduced with the permission of Brightpath Assessment and Reporting Software.

Pre-test performance	Post-test performance
A boy ummm went walking with a dog. The boy climbed a tree. The boy was trying to/ he was wanting to catch a fish…....... The frog was on a log.	One night there was a boy and a dog. They were looking at their pet frog, until their mum told them to go to sleep. The boy looked a little bit scared. He thought the dog would hurt himself. They kept looking. They never gave up. They walked and called and called “Frog, where are you? Where are you?” As it echoed through the mountains.
Teacher’s observation	**Teacher’s observation**
The student provided a page-by-page description of the events illustrated in the book.	Even without the book, the listener could follow the story.

Figure 4: Extracts of one student's pre and post-test performances

Figure 4 is taken from Humphry, S.M., & Heldsinger, S.A. (n.d.). *Brightpath Assessment and Reporting Software.* http://www.brightpath.com.au and reproduced with the permission of Brightpath Assessment and Reporting Software.

Concluding comments

In this paper, we discussed a collaboration between researchers and teachers that led to an approach for assessing oral language designed to help teachers better understand the development of students' oral story-telling ability. We hope that this discussion has not only provided some insights into how students' oral story-telling can be developed but also enabled teachers an opportunity to reflect on ways they might incorporate the explicit teaching of oral narratives into their curriculum.

The case study presented in this paper arose from a small-scale research project undertaken by four schools. Many of the teachers commented on the fact that their students transferred what they had learnt about oral narratives to their written narratives. They also commented that although they spent less time teaching writing, their students' writing improved more quickly. In other words, there was support for the idea that before students can be taught to write a story they need to be able to tell a story. What these promising findings suggest is that there is a place and need for further research. For example, a valuable school-based action research project could be instigated to examine the impact of explicitly teaching oral narratives on students' writing development.

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Dr Sandy Heldsinger's research interests focus on developing assessments that support effective formative assessment practices. Sandy leads the development of the Brightpath Assessment and Reporting software.

Dr Stephen Humphry has extensive experience in the NAPLAN and large-scale testing programs. His research has focused increasingly on developing novel approaches that allow classroom teachers to reliably assess students in areas not amenable to large-scale testing such as Visual Art and Science Investigations.

Kerry Miller is an early childhood teacher with over 35 years teaching experience in Western Australia, Victoria and internationally. Kerry holds a Masters degree in Education (Reflection and Metacognition).

Rosemary Simpson was the Principal of the North East Language Development Centre, a public school in Western Australia that caters for students with Developmental Language Disorders for over 25 years. Rosemary is a Co-founder and Director of Tracks to Literacy that supports many government and non-government schools in the implementation of an evidence-based approach to teaching oral language.

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Moving from good to great

Angela Martlew,
Assistant Principal,
Mater Dei Primary School, Toowoomba, Queensland

Going from good to great isn't necessarily easy. When something is going well, often there is no impetus to do it even better. "Why bother, the results speak for themselves? Our students perform well above norms." In these circumstances, it can take a conscious effort to entertain possibility, shift practice and do things differently. Despite this, Mater Dei Primary School in Toowoomba, Queensland, made the deliberate decision to move from good to great.

A co-educational Catholic primary school, Mater Dei's 420 students typically come from families with high educational expectations and community involvement. In 2017, the school committed to a three-year "visible learning lighthouse project." Informed by John Hattie's seminal meta-analysis of what works best in education (Hattie, 2009), the project formed the basis of a re-evaluation of practice. Enabled and supported by the Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office (TCSO) and facilitated through Corwin Australia, the three-year project has now embedded practices that *illuminate possibilities for all.*

How it happened

Essentially, we:

- prioritised strategically for time, people and money
- facilitated staff selection of impact coaches
- established broader teams of key influencers
- established localised baseline data on effective teaching and learning via
  - student voice
  - teacher perception
  - collective teacher analysis of lessons and classroom practices
- identified student and staff behavioural dispositions essential to productive learning
- integrated the dispositions into
  - school behaviour support processes
  - staff individualised reflection and goal setting
- refined teacher practices through
  - consistent integration of high yield strategies
  - development of "Hub" spaces for collaborative data analysis and formative teacher planning
- developed an *Illuminating Possibilities Learning Framework* which reflects the interrelationship between teachers, students and the curriculum premised on
  - Learning dispositions
  - Learning process
  - Action/impact cycles
  - School culture.
- celebrated our collective efficacy.

Strategic prioritising

Committing to the three-year project involved strategic allocation of time, money and people. Visible learning priorities were written into our Annual Action Plans to ensure the maintenance of a strong, singular focus. This entailed the allocation of pupil free days to whole staff professional development, further release days for leadership and school impact coaches and budget considerations to enable this. Operationally, the restructuring of timetables and duty rosters allowed for an increase in collaborative time available for cohort level professional learning teams to meet.

Impact coaches and key influencers

One key element in the success of the project at Mater Dei was the fact that change was driven by the teachers themselves. From the beginning, the leadership team recognised that a top-down approach would not be as effective as teacher-led initiatives. Staff nominated two classroom teachers to be School Impact Coaches. Well regarded by their colleagues, these teachers had cultivated positive and productive relationships with their peers and the leadership team.

These key teachers rapidly established a broader team of teachers, and it was this team that became influencers and early adopters in change of practice. This "Visible Learning Team" met regularly in their own time to discuss and share the successes and failures they experienced. As change started to become evident in pockets across the school, diffusion of ideas occurred. Nurtured by our team of early adopters, a critical mass was reached and within twelve months saturation levels were evident (Rogers, 2003).

Establishing a baseline

The first step in any journey is identifying where you're starting from. Baseline data were collected in early 2018 regarding perceptions of what learning is, what makes an effective learner and an effective teacher, and feedback. Our baseline data provided us with the following information:

- Students voiced that learning and being a good learner was based on behaviour. They stated that listening to the teacher and trying hard makes a good learner. Twenty-four percent could not describe the characteristics of a good learner.
- Teachers felt learning was presently teacher directed. Their understanding of their impact on student progress was highly variable, 50% indicated they used student data to inform practice and 50% were unsure how they measured their impact.
- Students saw teachers as keepers of knowledge, with 42% indicating they did not know what they were learning about and 24% indicating they learnt whatever the teacher told them to. They described effective teachers as helpful and nice.
- Students had a shallow understanding of feedback, with 25% not knowing what feedback was and 34% not knowing how to give feedback.
- Teachers felt they had little opportunity to give or receive feedback from their peers however they felt it often improved their practice.

Developing our Dispositions

The first area we decided to address was gaining a consistent understanding and common language around learning. This came as a consequence of visiting other schools in both Australia and New Zealand. We noticed commonalities in schools where learners were able to talk with confidence about their learning. Digging deeper into what made some schools more successful than others, we found that a shared understanding and language about learning was key.

Revisiting our "why" was, and continues to be, a key element of our journey. Thinking from the inside out or knowing and following your purpose or belief is at the core of inspiring others (Sinek, 2009). Our "why" is our school vision, *Illuminating Possibilities*. Our professional learning with Corwin facilitated an analysis of the dispositions we, as staff, saw as integral to achieving this vision, examining the qualities of an effective learner and the traits we wanted in our learners. We also extended this opportunity to parents and gathered a significant proportion of responses from them.

The dispositions of effective learners that our community identified as paramount were housed under our values. They are deeply contextualised to our school, integrating a Catholic perspective and acknowledging our cultural background. Significantly, a firm belief has been cultivated that our dispositions apply not only to students but to staff too. Just as students are expected to reflect and set goals, move beyond their comfort zone and value the perspectives of others, so too are staff.

Identifying our dispositions gave us the starting point for a common language. Using this language in our classrooms, class awards and communications with parents soon built common understanding and an easy means to foster the development of these learner characteristics.

Refining practice

Running concurrently with the implementation of our dispositions was an evolving understanding of the need for clarity; both for teachers to know exactly what their intended learning objectives were, and for students to know what constituted success. Developing quality Learning Intentions and Success Criteria (LISC) has been an ongoing journey. Initially, teachers felt they had achieved this goal quite easily. However, as we have progressed down this path, we have developed a much more sophisticated understanding of the power of quality LISC.

This evolved into the development of our school Learning Process. Reflecting surface, deep and transfer learning, we attached year level specific cognitive verbs drawn from the curriculum to our phases of "build it, deepen it and transfer it." This has again provided a common language of learning. Students now collaboratively develop Success Criteria using verbs from each phase of our Learning Process and can articulate in which phase of learning they are.

Another major change has been the visibility and transparency which has been deliberately established across all aspects of our school. We initially developed "The Hub" in a spare classroom. The school impact coaches worked with the leadership team to transform the room into a space where data and teacher planning were visible. While it was a great start and set the scene for a change in mindset about being more open, its geographical location meant it was not utilised as extensively as we envisioned.

To overcome this, again reflecting the prioritisation of our focus, some renovation work was done in our office and staff room, knocking down walls and opening a large central space. The new hub has become pivotal to all that we stand for. In it, thinking is made

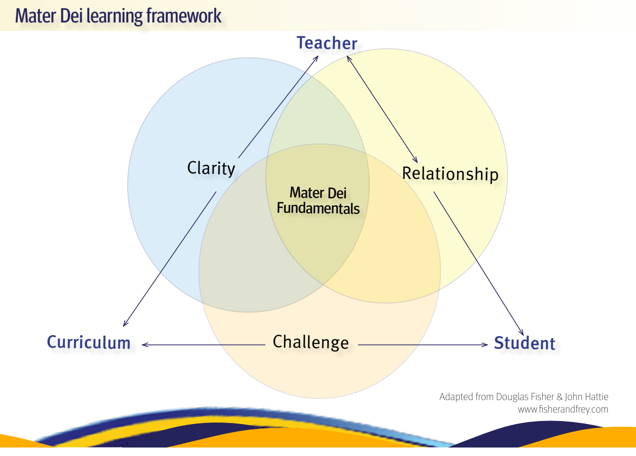
visible, walls are adorned with notes from collective teacher voice, whole school and year level progress and achievement data, as well as evidence of formative teacher planning. Prominently displayed in The Hub are photos of each staff member displaying something they have learnt over the holidays. Staff share their learning with peers, reflecting on how they learn. This affirms the belief that we are all learners, continually moving through the learning process.

To further refine practice, we have embedded impact cycles. Based on a very simple model of identifying where we are, where we aspire to be and how we are going to get there, our Taking Action Cycle (TAC) is used in response to short, medium and long cycle data. Based on its simplistic success, our TAC is now used by staff at strategic planning levels, for operational considerations, student review and respond meetings and personal goal setting. It is used with students to identify next steps in learning, address behavioural concerns and whole class or cohort goal setting.

Learning Framework

Over time we have developed an *Illuminating Possibilities Learning Framework*. Based on the work of Douglas Fisher, our Learning Framework reflects the interrelationship between teachers, students and the curriculum (Fisher at al., 2017). It categorises these dimensions as Relationship, Clarity and Challenge. Where these three dimensions overlap is where we aim our teaching and learning. This sweet spot is where our *fundamentals* lie. When a positive and productive relationship exists between student and teacher, when both teacher and student have clarity over what is being learnt and when an appropriate level of challenge is provided for each individual, optimal learning occurs.

Our Learning Dispositions, our Learning Process, Taking Action Cycles and school culture form the four key elements of these fundamentals. Representing both technical and human domains, we have invested in these elements as essential to effective teaching and learning.



Collective efficacy

Through an unrelenting focus on these key areas we have, as a school community, changed the way of being at Mater Dei. The belief that through a clear vision and true collaboration we can achieve success has resulted in a sense of collective efficacy (Donohoo et al., 2018), which is palpable across the school. Change is evident in the responses students now give when asked what constitutes an effective learner, with responses typically including descriptions such as learners who seek feedback, set goals, know where they're at with their learning and can identify their next steps in learning.

Where to next?

As a school community dedicated to moving from good to great, we are not content to remain where we are in this journey. While we recognise we have come such a long way in the last three years, as with any effective learner we continue to set goals and articulate our next steps. With changes coming in the Australian Curriculum, we will be renewing the cognitive verbs each year level uses in their LISC and ensuring teacher clarity with changes. We are also further developing our Taking Action Cycle template to include greater rigour, and using it in new contexts, such as with our school board. Finally, as with anything, the rate of change is not uniform. It's important that we ensure our whole school community is walking this journey together and that no individual or group is being left behind. Building our accountability to ourselves and each other in this way will continue to ensure our school genuinely illuminates possibilities for all.

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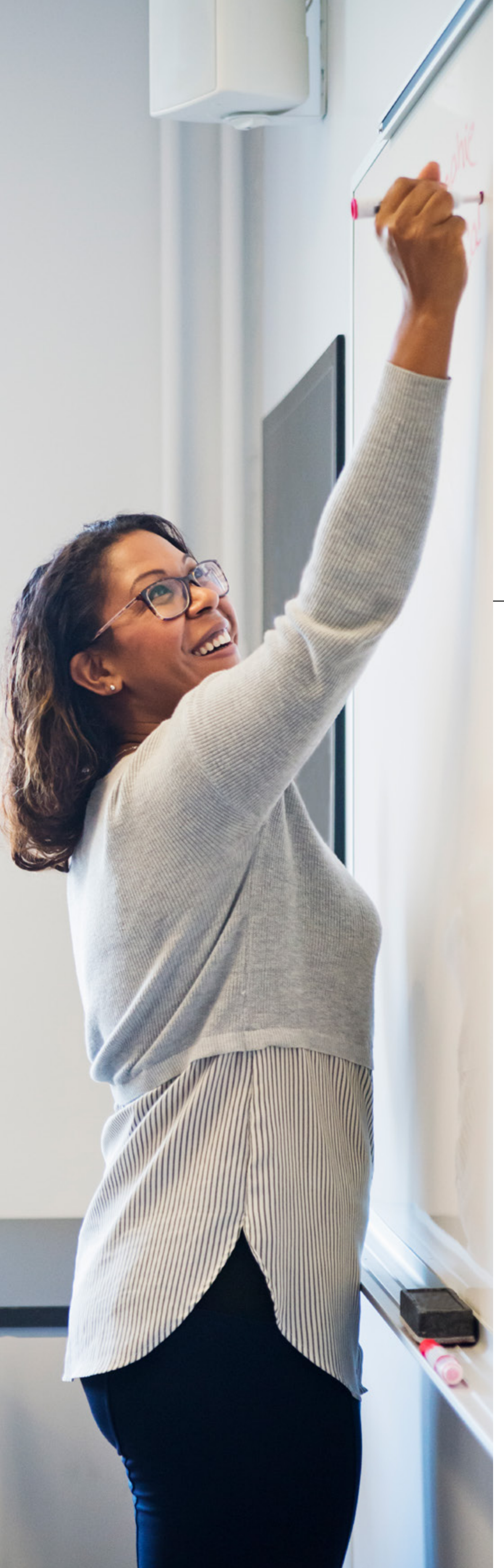

The use of NAPLAN data and support for it: Perceptions of practising teachers

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This article explores the use of data, and school leadership support for it, identified in the findings of a Masters Research project, which investigated teacher attitudes and perceived competence in using data to inform classroom practices. The case study research was conducted in an Independent Catholic Girls' College in Queensland. Teachers identified that external assessment data, in particular the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) measure were of low usefulness in informing their classroom practice. Additionally, there was a significant number of teachers who believed they were not confident or competent in using these data effectively. A key finding of the study was that leadership within the College needs to provide greater opportunities and support for teachers to help them improve their data literacy skills.

Background

The use of data is recognised as a fundamental component of effective teaching and learning (e.g., Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2014; Gonski et al., 2018). Teachers are being asked to demonstrate a level of expertise and to use more and diverse data to support practices that can improve student learning outcomes (Mandanich et al., 2006; Wayman et al., 2017).

In Australia, and increasingly internationally, standardised test data are seen as a key form of data to guide instructional practices. With literacy and numeracy a high priority in many Australian schools, and standardised test rankings such as NAPLAN being open to public scrutiny, many schools and sectors have an explicit focus on teachers using standardised test data, such as NAPLAN, to identify areas for student improvement or to enhance the performance of cohorts in general (Goss et al., 2015; Goss et al., 2017; Renshaw et al., 2013).

Consequently, in this policy and practical context, it is important to know if and how teachers are using standardised test data, their levels of competency and confidence in the use of these data, and whether (or not) teachers are being supported to become more data literate.

The Study

This study was undertaken by the first author in a Year 7 - 12, Independent Catholic Girls' College (referred to as the "College") in metropolitan Queensland, during Semester 2 of 2019. As a case study, it utilised both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to gain perspectives from teachers and middle leaders and employed a descriptive and interpretive approach to analysing and triangulating the study data (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995).

The teaching staff in the College were invited to complete an anonymous online survey on the value and use of data. A total of 49 teacher responded to the survey, which represented 76.5% of the teaching staff. The teachers recorded their responses on a mixture of a four- and five-point Likert scale. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with four teachers and six middle leaders to explore specific details around their competence and confidence to use data and the actual data use within the College.

In addition, unstructured observations were made during four workshops facilitated by the researcher and three middle leaders during the final term of 2019. These were structured to address some of the data use issues identified through the case study, and more specifically to upskill teaching staff in the use of the newly introduced online Learning Analytics Suite (LAS) which provides a broad view of student progress. The LAS enables teachers to access individual student profiles, class, subject, and cohort assessment data, as well as individual and cohort NAPLAN data.

While the case study explored much broader teacher perceptions of data use, this article presents findings around their perceptions of the use of NAPLAN data, its usefulness and frequency, and support for the use of data (see Table 1) and where relevant, interview responses and unstructured observations from workshops investigating the participants' perceptions of NAPLAN data.

Table 1: Research Questions

Focus	Question
Use of data	Q1. How often do you use the following assessments?
Attitudes towards usefulness of data	Q2. How useful are the following forms of student data?
Frequency of using standardised tests	Q3. What is the frequency of, and for what purpose do you use NAPLAN, PAT, and other assessments?
Support for the use of data	Q4. What supports are in place for data use?

Results

The participants' responses to the relevant survey questions (see Table 1) presented in Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 provide insight into teachers' use of, attitudes to, and frequency of use of data, including NAPLAN data, for informing classroom practice.

Table 2: Participants' Responses to Q1: How often do you use the following assessment data? (n=49)

	Do not use	Less than once a month	Once or twice a month	Weekly or Almost	Few times a week	No response
NAPLAN	13(27%)	30(61%)	5(10%)	1(2%)	-	-
PAT, QCS	14(29%)	29(60%)	5(11%)	-	-	1(2%)
Teacher-designed (formative)	6(12%)	11(22.5%)	16(32%)	11(22.5%)	5(10%)	-
Teacher-designed (summative)	9(19%)	17(35%)	11(23%)	9(18%)	2(4%)	1(2%)
Other	2(4%)	3(6%)	7(14%)	4(8%)	2(4%)	31(63%)

Table 3: Participants' Responses to Q2: How useful are the following forms of student assessment data? (n=49)

	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Useful	Very useful	No response
NAPLAN	8(16%)	24(49%)	8(16%)	1(2%)	8(16%)
PAT, QCS	6(12%)	21(43%)	8(16%)	4(8%)	10(2%)
Teacher-designed (formative)	1(2%)	5(12%)	16(32.5%)	20(48%)	6(12%)
Teacher-designed (summative)	-	6(12%)	16(32.5%)	19(39%)	1(2%)
Other	1(2%)	3(6%)	4(8%)	6(12%)	28(57%)

Table 2 outlines the regularity of use of various data sources by teachers available within the College. A total of 13 teachers (27%) reported that they do not use NAPLAN at all, and an additional 30 teachers (61%) stated they use these data less than once per month. These numbers are reinforced through Table 3, where a significant percentage of teachers reported that NAPLAN data was of little value for informing their classroom practice, with 24 teachers (49%) believing that it is only somewhat useful and eight teachers (16%) saying it is not useful at all. It is noteworthy that eight teachers (16%) did not respond to the NAPLAN option, and in combination with those who believed it was not useful at all, represents 32% of respondents.

A typical comment made by teachers in the survey further reinforced the perceived value (and use) of NAPLAN:

> It is confusing to access NAPLAN data ... Our Learning enhancement department caters for most of this data ... it is only a snapshot of students on a day - not a true reflection of their abilities.

Further comments such as: “it could be useful, but is outdated”, and “it is not often used in planning” reinforced that many teachers believe these data are of little use in informing their classroom practices.

Table 4 summarises responses to the question asking teachers to report their frequency of use of NAPLAN and other assessment data to inform practices, or to engage in conversations with various stakeholders. These findings reinforce the high percentage of teachers who report that they use NAPLAN, PAT (Progressive Achievement Test) or other standardised tests *only* once or twice per year, or a few times per year, to inform aspects of their pedagogy or for discussions with students. In the whole sample, only a few teachers reported that they use NAPLAN or other forms of data frequently (i.e. monthly or weekly) to inform their professional activities.

Teacher responses to the question of support types in place for effective use of data are shown in Table 5, highlighting the significant disparities across the College. Thirty-six (74%) agreed or strongly agreed that there is someone who answers their questions about using data, and 30 (61%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the College provides enough professional learning about using data. Furthermore, Item g highlights that 14 teachers (44%) reported that their middle leader/s did not model the effective use of data. Comments provided within the surveys corroborated these findings.

An important issue raised with respect to leadership and supports was around collaboration. When asked how often teachers met in teams to use data, 40-50% of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that they met to do the variety of activities as outlined, indicating that data are not being discussed on a regular basis in team meetings. Interviewees reiterated this in a variety of ways, with one teacher stating:

> It would be beneficial to discuss student data like NAPLAN and PAT at meetings more regularly so that we can work together to improve our student results, for example: have we all got 1/5 of the class not doing well in this particular area, so could we do some targeted remediation of gaps, and/or extension to support our classes? rather than only discuss the content of what we are teaching.

Table 4: Participants Responses to Q3: For what purpose do you use NAPLAN, PAT and other standardised tests data and in what frequency? (n=49)

Use of NAPLAN, PAT, OTHER to:	1 or 2 times per year	A few times per year	Monthly	Weekly	No Response
Identify instructional content	30(64%)	12(26%)	5(10.5%)	-	2(4%)
Tailor instruction to student needs	23(47%)	16(33%)	6(12%)	-	4(8%)
Develop recommendations for additional support	22(44%)	14(29%)	8(16%)	2(4%)	3(6%)
Form groups of targeted instruction	23(47%)	15(31%)	4(8%)	2(4%)	5(10.5%)
Discuss with parent or guardian	29(59%)	13(27%)	2(4%)	-	5(10.5%)
Discuss with student	30(64%)	12(24%)	-	-	7(14%)
Meet with a colleague - in or outside college	22(45%)	13(27%)	2(4%)	1(2%)	10(20.5%)
Meet with another teacher	28(57%)	13(27%)	2(4%)	-	6(12%)

Table 5: Participants Responses to Q4 What supports are in place for data use? (n=49)

Support in place for data use	SD	D	A	SA	No Response
a. You are adequately supported in the effective use of data.	8(16%)	17(35%)	21(43%)	2(4%)	1(2%)
b. You are adequately prepared to use data	7(14%)	17(35%)	21(43%)	3(6%)	1(2%)
c. There is someone who answers your questions about using data.	3(6%)	10(20%)	32(66%)	4(8%)	-
d. There is someone who helps you change your practice (e.g. your teaching) based on data.	3(6%)	18(37%)	22(45%)	3(6%)	3(6%)
e. The College provides you enough professional development about data use.	6(12%)	24(49%)	14(29%)	3(6%)	-
f. The College's professional development for teachers is useful for learning about data use.	8(16%)	20(42%)	18(37%)	1(2%)	2(4%)
g. Your middle leader/s model the use of data to inform practices, effectively. Teacher responses only (n=32)	2(6%)	12(37.5%)	12(37.5%)	2(6%)	4(12%)

NB Item g was a question for teachers only (not middle leaders), which accounts for n=32.

Discussion

Limited value and use of NAPLAN

A key finding of this study was that teachers reported external testing data such as NAPLAN were of low value in supporting their classroom teaching practice, with 13 teachers or 27% indicating that NAPLAN data were not used at all by them. Eight teachers (16%) reported it was not useful while a total of 24 teachers (49%) responded that it was somewhat useful, with "somewhat" being the second least favourable response. In summary, most teachers indicated that NAPLAN data were of minimal use in informing their practice. Comments by some teachers such as "it is confusing to access NAPLAN data" and "it is not a true reflection of students' abilities" reinforced this belief and are consistent with the other research (Dulfer et al., 2012; Matters, 2006). The findings may be explained by a lack of trust as to the value of NAPLAN, or from a lack of access and understanding of the data available for classroom instruction. While it is argued by Goss and Sonnemann (2019) that NAPLAN is an important component of the data ecosystem for schools and teachers, the findings in this study challenge this notion.

Renshaw et al. (2013) pointed to the evolving professional skills of teachers when they stated: "considering competency levels with the use of standardised test data, a benefit of the NAPLAN movement is possibly that the capacity of teachers to interpret quantitative data has increased following its introduction" (p. 41). Although the participant teachers reported engaging with NAPLAN data in some capacity, the dissemination of these test data and accountability measures have not led to improved capacity to understand and interpret the data or, more importantly, to changes in teacher classroom practices. Statements made by teachers in surveys, such as "because these tests are yearly, we only look at them once, and with no allocated time to go back and analyse the data, we don't", and "NAPLAN is not as important as what we do in class" tend to support this latter view.

The lack of value that many of the teachers assigned to NAPLAN data was further noted as a key topic of conversation during the LAS workshops. Several teachers stated that "NAPLAN was not relevant to their subject area" but they did express some interest in learning how to use it more effectively in their context. Some expressed surprise and interest with respect to how NAPLAN data could be accessed through the LAS, then used to inform practice for class and cohort support, but many commented that they were not convinced that the data provided were reliable.

Perceived supports for using data

Statements from teachers and middle leaders in the survey and interviews indicated that they lacked the ability to analyse the data and were unsure how to connect that analysis to improving classroom practice. Interviewees reported that they saw data analysis and interpretation as two separate skill sets and their confidence levels in both were low. This finding is consistent with international studies (Dunn et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2018), where it has been reported that teachers perceive the ability to connect data to classroom instructional decision-making as a separate activity from the ability to analyse and interpret data.

The overall findings of this case study suggest that if teachers are going to develop greater capacity to collect, analyse and use data effectively, then the school leadership team must provide opportunities for collaboration, training, and ongoing support. Yet, the literature (see Datnow et al., 2013; Mandinach & Jimerson, 2016) and this study suggest that teachers are not often provided with the training and support to effectively use the data available to them

to inform their practice. In this regard, the implementation of the workshops by the school leadership team during the duration of this study was significant in providing teachers and middle leaders some opportunity for collaboration and professional learning in the use of data in general. It was evident, however, that while some teachers may have already accessed the data through the LAS, many staff were not utilising the system to its full potential, with most navigating basic actions, thereby demonstrating minimal understanding as to how NAPLAN data could inform classroom practices.

This study supports the literature in arguing that school leaders should model and lead a culture of data use to facilitate professional learning opportunities (Jimerson & Wayman 2011; Timperley et al., 2007). It is essential that school leaders are skilled and willing to "lead" initiatives for professional learning that support teachers to develop their confidence and competence in data use for instructional purposes. They should also make available school time for teachers to collaborate and focus on the use of data to improve practice.

Conclusion

Overall, teachers at the College had a strong view that external assessment data, such as NAPLAN, was of low value for instructional purposes, and in their daily classroom practice these standardised tests were rarely utilised to inform their pedagogy. This under-utilisation of standardised test data, specifically NAPLAN, to inform practice is an area that warrants further attention, particularly as improved student outcomes continue to be a strategic focus of both external agencies such as AITSL and internal school leaders.

If teachers and leaders are to utilise NAPLAN data for instructional purposes, they need to be provided with opportunities for professional learning, collaboration, and to be guided effectively in its use. It cannot be assumed that teachers have the skills to analyse, interpret and then utilise the data effectively to impact student learning.

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Middle Leadership Challenge: Leading to influence

Liz Benson, Director Pedagogy, Coombabah State High School on the Queensland Gold Coast

Middle leaders are key influential leaders in a school. They translate the goals of systemic and senior school leaders into actions in the classroom through influencing the decisions and practices of classroom teachers. Middle leaders influence up, sideways and down to enact their goals and impact on student learning. They "actively work to contribute to, and shape, the professional agency of those they work with by influencing teachers [and other leaders]… to make positive choices that impact… on teaching and learning" (Lipscombe & Tindall-Ford, 2021, p. 14).

At the core middle leadership is influence

Over the last 20 years the complexity of middle leadership has changed. No longer is middle leadership just about the administration of a subject area or managing a cohort. Middle leaders now contribute to the strategic development of their organisations as well as develop staff capability, manage students, implement school improvement programs, report to external bodies, and support teachers in managing their workload (De Nobile 2018). To be effective, middle leaders must be skilled at influencing others in their organisations.

Three practical ideas that middle leaders can use to reflect on their skills to influence positively are:

1. Know your why
2. Build trust
3. Be strategic: Lippett-Knosters Model of Complex Change

Practical Leadership Tools to Build Trust

1. Know your why.

The Centre for Creative Leadership (2021) declares that "leaders need to understand why they are doing something and be clear about their own values and goals when applying their influence skills. That way, influence comes from a place of authenticity and has the greatest impact."

Time is precious and the hectic pace of education means finding opportunities for middle leaders to reflect and develop a deep understanding of who they are as leaders is a challenge. It's a challenge to resist the urge to act without answering the question: Do I know my why and can I clearly communicate that why in a way that will encourage others to come on board?

Table 1: Reflective Trust Leadership Questions

Trust Dimension	Reflective Questions	My Reflection . . . Use this space to reflect on your trust building leadership practices
Integrity	1. Do I display mutual recognition – that we are all learners together? 2. Do I demonstrate ways of relating to others that are open, inclusive and respectful of where each teacher/leader is at (what's going on in their context)? 3. Do I model vulnerability? That I am a learner also.	
Capability	4. Do I plan for transformational work that is targeted and purposeful? 5. Do I challenge myself and others intellectually to extend our collective thinking and action? 6. Do I approach the work with others with energy and determination to contribute?	
Intent	7. Do I plan carefully the physical and social spaces for collaboration? 8. Do I know my why and can I clearly communicate that why in a way that will encourage others to come on board? 9. Do I know my strategies for establishing shared responsibility for making meaning and decisions?	
Results Orientation	10. Do I establish a learning agenda that is sensible, practical and realistic to provide the positive results that teachers need to believe in the work? 11. Do I know how I will track progress? 12. Do I know what success looks like and do I celebrate success with my team?	

Table 1 is adapted from Grootenboer et al. (2020) and FranklinCovey (n.d.) Speed of Trust Action Cards.

Patrick Duignan (personal communication, July 18, 2021) says that leaders need a deep understanding of themselves and who they are as leaders to lead authentically. Tapping into who you are as a leader is a powerful means of influence. Duignan provides four guiding questions that we can use to discover our authenticity and our why.

- What values and qualities define my relationships and my leadership?
- How can I make a greater difference in the lives of others?
- What gives me strength to deal with difficult situations involving "people challenges" and difficult ethical tensions?
- How well do I reconcile (balance) my sense of "self" with the demands of my current work "role"?

It's not enough to know your why, you need to let your team in on who you are and your why. Middle leaders communicate their "why" through their "sayings, doings and relatings" (Grootenboer et al, 2020). Others look for congruence in how we talk, what we do and how we relate to others. When there is congruence, leaders communicate that they are trustworthy and worth following. A few simple strategies for communicating your why include:

- Developing a vision for your leadership e.g. When coaching I once asked a newly appointed Head of Department what kind of leader she wanted to be. She responded with "supportive and informed". In times when this HOD was questioning her ability we reflected on how her leadership practices were congruent with her personal leadership vision and how others could perceive her leadership actions.
- Develop a shared vision for your team e.g. as Humanities HOD our co-created vision was "empowering teachers to make decisions through curriculum alignment in unit plans, assessment and criteria sheets".
- Using the language of the vision in all communication. Alignment and empowerment were words I used every day in my conversations, presentations and written communication.
- Ensure all decision making reflects the vision. Curriculum planning was the vehicle for empowerment, so my task was to provide the physical spaces and structures for collaboration so teachers were empowered to make decisions related to curriculum alignment.

Finally, sometimes clearly knowing who you are and why you are becomes clearer as time passes and experience is gained. However, middle leaders can dig deep to discover and clarify their "why" by putting aside time to read, ponder and cultivate. Middle leaders must avoid the trap of putting their own development last.

2. Build Trust

If all leadership is about influence, then influence is about trust. Middle leaders must communicate their integrity, intent, capability and results orientation to build the trust between themselves and their colleagues. The degree to which others trust the middle leader determines whether they are able to influence beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.

Table 2: A practical example of using the Lippett Knoster Model of Change (in Caredda, 2020) – Have we covered everything we need for success?

Collegial Engagement Framework				
Vision	**Skills**	**Incentives**	**Resources**	**Action Plan**
Have we given a very clear and compelling reason for improvement? Coombabah SHS is a dynamic professional learning community. Every student succeeding Every student deserves a great teacher Every teacher deserves the opportunity to be the best teacher they can be	What skills and knowledge are needed to lead the implementation of our collegial engagement framework and pedagogy? HODs? Executive? Regular reflection on 'what does this mean for my leadership?" Teachers? Support? TAs? Change leadership skills Teacher's Knowledge and skill in using ASOT framework PLT Inquiry skills - including data literacy, conversation protocols, evidence of learning Do all the teachers and leaders have the skills to reflect on their own practice e.g. peer observation and PLT Teachers respond to questions (design OS) to provide opportunities for students to develop appropriate mindsets needed to take responsibility for their own learning	Why would teachers engage in a pedagogy framework? What does ASOT offer teachers? What does the CEF offer teachers? What does the Teaching for Thinking Schema offer teachers? What would influence teachers to implement the CTAs? Good stuff depository - could we have ASOT merch to give to people who deposit into the Good stuff? How can we use Guskey and the behaviour change model to develop teacher's beliefs and attitudes (which are the reasons why they adopt new practices) to influence?	What physical, financial and human resources are needed to implement the CEF? Time to develop staff • PLTs • Staff meeting– regular sharing of practice by • leaders and HODs • Peer observations • Learning walks • Faculty time • Knowledgeable others • Pedagogy nudge group • ASOT book and compendium • TLAPs Guiding coalition – nudge group Good stuff depository	Roll out 3-year timeline See above

Abbreviations			
Abbreviations	HODs: Heads of Department TAs: teacher aides ASOT: Art and Science of Teaching	PLT: Professional Learning Team (design) CEF: Collegial Engagement Framework	CTAs: Consistent Teacher Actions TLAPs: Teaching and Learning Plans

Integrity, *Credibility*, *Intent* and a *Results Orientation* are needed to influence others (FranklinCovey, n.d.). Communicating trustworthiness requires reflective leadership. Middle leaders can ask themselves reflective questions that provoke insight into their own trustworthy behaviours and qualities. Table 1 provides some examples and space for you to make some reflective notes as you read.

Regular focused reflection on trust building practices will ensure a middle leader is building the relationships needed to encourage others to come on board. FranklinCovey's Speed of Trust Cards identify "trust building" behaviours such as talk straight, right wrongs and clarify expectations, that middle leaders can practice in every interaction with their team members, students and senior leadership.

3. Be Strategic – Lippett- Knoster's Model of Implementing Complex Change

Middle leaders drive school improvement. Having the tools to establish a learning agenda that is sensible, practical and realistic requires a deep understanding of models of change management, inquiry, curriculum planning and action planning. The Lippett-Knoster Model of Managing Complex Change (Caredda, 2020) is a great tool used in education and business to clarify what is needed to influence beliefs, attitude and behaviour. A middle leader can use this to plan or reflect on their strategy. They can use it to prepare to "pitch" an idea to their Principal or teachers or to collaboratively plan the implementation of a new initiative.

In a nutshell, Lippett-Knoster (in Caredda, 2020) identifies five aspects of leading change that if not addressed, can lead to a range of reactions from those involved. For example, if teachers do not have the skills or knowledge to implement moderation cycles, then they are likely to feel anxiety when asked to engage in pre-moderation of an assessment task. Similarly, a literacy middle leader who wishes to convince their Deputy Principal to take on board a new literacy intervention strategy will have greater success if they have an action plan that details how exactly the intervention will be trialled.

Middle leaders can work their way through the model – either identifying clearly what is present or posing questions that might help address that element. For example, as Director of Pedagogy I lead the implementation of the school's Collegial Engagement

Table 3: Reflection Tool - Have we covered everything we need for success?

Project: ______________________________						
Which of these statements accurately reflect the current reality in my project?	Success	False Start	Frustration	Resistance	Anxiety	Confusion
What evidence do I have to support my belief?						
How do I check my assumptions?						
What might be my next action?						

Framework. In creating our implementation strategy, I brainstormed whether we had everything needed for success: See Table Two. This is an evolving document and you'll see that in some columns there are statements of fact and in others questions we still need to answer. My next step is to share this with the pedagogy leadership team and collaboratively deepen our understanding of each element, adding or answering questions. Each time we then sense frustration, confusion or resistance from teachers we can go back to this model and reassess whether we are providing what our staff need to keep them engaged in the Collegial Engagement Framework.

To get started using the Lippett-Knoster Model of Implementing Change, use Table Three to consider all aspects of your improvement agenda using this reflection table. Write your desired area of influence in the project line. In the second row identify which state (eg frustration etc) reflects the current reality of the colleagues you wish to influence. Finally, brainstorm the evidence you have to support your beliefs, how you will check your assumptions and the action you might take to get clarity or shift the current reality to success. You can use this model to understand individual or team behaviour.

Conclusion

Influencing others is a leadership challenge that many middle leaders face in their day-to-day and strategic work. Middle leaders can transform their ability to bring others on board by cultivating high trust relationships between themselves and their colleagues; digging deep to know their why and not being shy about communicating their why to their team and being strategic in planning their actions using models such as the Lippett-Knoster model (in Caredda, 2020). As the role of middle leaders becomes more significant in providing high quality learning environments, then middle leaders must become more skilled in leadership practices to influence.

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