



2023 NEW VOICE PERSPECTIVES

**SUPPORTING EMERGING VOICES IN
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**



NEW VOICE PERSPECTIVES

Supporting emerging voices in educational leadership

The Australian Council for Educational Leaders is proud to present the 2023 New Voice Perspectives, celebrating leaders recognised in the fields of school leadership, educational leadership research, and early childhood and care.

Every year, recipients are welcomed into the ACEL network contributing to and supporting the dissemination of new learning and thought. New Voice Scholarships are awarded to educators recognised as forward-thinking, contextually relevant and responsive leaders by peers and the wider education community. Over 100 talented educators have been awarded these scholarships since the program was initiated in 2014.

The New Voice Perspectives provide an opportunity to explore and uncover new and diverse points of view. This year, recipients were asked to respond to one of four questions that considered how leaders inspire hope and create the future; the three main global challenges facing educational leaders; what it means to be an educational leader in 2023; and in an age of AI, how leaders can ensure that leadership remains human focused. As to be expected, the recipients recounted a variety of interesting and thoughtful responses to the questions and challenges. An important theme that emerged was the need to prioritise the “human” element within schooling by empowering young people to be confident, critical thinkers who are discerning users of AI and other technologies, as well as lifelong learners who can thrive in a volatile and uncertain future. Another key theme was the necessity for educators to work collectively to create systemic solutions to perennial issues facing schools. Through collaboration, innovative solutions are like to appear.

As the 2023 New Voice scholars share their voice and rich perspectives throughout these pages, we envisage it will stimulate further prompts for reflection, planning, and action as we consider an educational environment in which anything is possible. Indeed, we have seen in the past 12 months that anything is possible. Those pivotal moments in time have illuminated the opportunity and importance of thinking without constraint. We are very proud to showcase each of our New Voice Scholars who have inspired us with their clarity of purpose in the pursuit of universal access and engagement for all students to achieve in schooling and beyond.

Dr Barbara Watterston
Acting ACEL CEO



The New Voice in School Leadership



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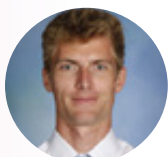


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By integrating physical exercise, artistic expression, and community service, these activities can significantly bolster students' emotional, social, and physical wellbeing.

Tom Cain

*Principal,
Port Melbourne Primary School, Victoria*

New Voice in School Leadership 2023 Recipient



Tom Cain is the Principal of Port Melbourne Primary School, leading a team of educators and support staff committed to delivering exceptional education in a connected and positive inner-city community. He values the role high-performing schools play in nurturing thriving communities and supporting young people on their journey to excellence. Before his current role, Tom served as an assistant principal in secondary schools, focusing on school improvement to address the challenges marginalised communities face. Notably, he contributed to the remarkable turnaround of Monterey Secondary College as part of the Frankston North Education Plan, serving one of Melbourne's most disadvantaged postcodes. Tom holds a Master of Teaching from the University of Melbourne where he conducted and published research under the supervision of Professor John Hattie.

As we ride the accelerating wave of the fourth industrial revolution, characterised by increasing digitisation and artificial intelligence (AI), the education sector faces three main global challenges. First, the rapid advancement of these technologies is transforming how we teach and learn, requiring educators to integrate these tools meaningfully into their practice. Second, the uncertainty of the future demands that we prepare students with the skills and mindset to adapt to an ever-changing world. Finally, the challenge of attracting, retaining, and developing the best and brightest people within our teaching workforce is becoming increasingly difficult.

The human element: The key to navigating technological advances

In the face of the aforementioned challenges, prioritising the human element in education is essential. Technological advancements provide opportunities for innovation but must enhance human connections and development. Their full potential is unlocked when educators are equipped to integrate them effectively. Moreover, the human element is vital in countering the potential negative impacts of AI and technology on young people. Teachers guide students through technology's ethical, social, and emotional aspects, ensuring they become not just proficient users but also responsible digital citizens. By promoting critical thinking, empathy, and ethical awareness, educators enable students to navigate the digital age's complexities and use technology to positively influence their lives and society.

The current value proposition for teaching: A barrier to progress

The underwhelming value proposition for teaching, marked by low salaries (Dennison, 2024) and limited flexible work options,

poses challenges in attracting and retaining top "talent" in our classrooms. Additionally, workload management remains a significant challenge, often driving teachers to consider leaving the profession (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2021).

The strain on the workforce could be easier to swallow if it led to significant improvements for young people, but the reality falls short. Australian students' academic performance has been declining since 2000 (De Bortoli et al., 2023), and mental health issues like anxiety and depression are on the rise, surpassing levels seen during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kohler & Reece, 2023). Additionally, loneliness, social isolation, extreme behaviour, and substance misuse among youth are also increasing (Karp, 2023; Wilkins et al., 2024). Teachers are stretched thin, tasked with enhancing academic outcomes while also addressing the broader societal expectations of "whole-child" education. This situation poses a significant challenge in attracting and retaining the innovative and dedicated educators needed to navigate technological advances and prepare students for an uncertain future.

A bold solution: A "less and more" overhaul

Compelling Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data, highlighted by Pasi Sahlberg at the 2023 ACEL National Conference and discussed in a recent *Australian Education Leader* article (Sahlberg, 2024), reveals a paradox: countries like Australia and the United States, with high compulsory instruction hours, underperform in international assessments, while nations like Finland, South Korea, and Estonia, with fewer hours, excel. For example, by age 15, Australian students have received about 11,000 hours of compulsory instruction, compared to just 6,300 hours for Finnish students.

This data suggests the need for a fundamental re-evaluation of our school day structure. A “less and more” overhaul could reduce compulsory instruction hours, giving teachers more time for professional development, collaboration, and refining teaching practices. It could also offer greater flexibility and hybridisation opportunities for teachers, improving the value proposition of a career in education.

Reduce instruction, support holistic development

Reducing instructional time could create space in the school day for holistic development programs focused on non-cognitive skills, play, exploration, and community engagement. These programs are vital for equipping students with resilience, creativity, and adaptability for an uncertain future. By integrating physical exercise, artistic expression, and community service, these activities can significantly bolster students’ emotional, social, and physical wellbeing.

These holistic development programs could serve as a gateway to comprehensive support, integrating community and allied health services to address the diverse needs of young people. This approach can include counselling, mental health support, and nutritional guidance, providing a more rounded support system for students.

Diversify the education workforce

Crucially, implementing these programs does not necessitate oversight by traditionally trained teachers, nor does it require “finding more time” in an already packed schedule. It is time to shift away from the expectation that teachers be the sole providers of everything young people need for adulthood. Instead, we should liberate the school day to offer students the opportunities they truly need.

This approach welcomes a diverse education workforce, including specialists in arts, sports, community engagement, and allied health. Such a multidisciplinary approach ensures a comprehensive and holistic educational experience, focusing on students’ overall development. Importantly, this strategy allows teachers to concentrate on their core business—delivering high-quality classroom teaching—while equipping young people with the skills and experiences they need to navigate a complex and uncertain future.

Redefining education: A leadership imperative for prioritising the human element

The call for educational leaders is to embrace change, addressing the interplay of technology, uncertainty, and talent. By innovating the structure of the school day and building a diverse education workforce, we can cultivate an environment that both supports educators and enriches the learning journey for students. Now is the moment to act, to equip our students for the complexities of tomorrow, and to maintain the human-centred essence of education.

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Conor Fennell

*Acting Principal,
Katherine High School, Northern Territory*

**New Voice in School Leadership
2023 Recipient**



Conor Fennell is a home economics teacher by trade and has been teaching for over a decade. Since arriving to Australia in 2012, he has worked across several states and territories, mainly in diverse and complex regional and remote locations. His passion for supporting teachers to build their own capacity has seen him complete further master's research and being awarded the Commonwealth Bank Schools Plus Teaching Fellowship and the Big Rivers Region Secondary Educator of the Year award. Over his career he has worked in a variety of roles including leading and senior teacher, curriculum development, and lecturing.

As we move forward, education will increasingly require students to be critical thinkers, creative, and adaptable to prepare them to thrive in an ever-changing world.

Hear me out: the bustling halls of schools are the new kind of gym. No, they are not filled with the traditional treadmills or dumbbells! Instead, it is where teachers and school leaders are sculpting their "professional physiques" to tackle the ever evolving, dynamic, and increasingly complex challenges of schools. From technological advancements, shifting societal norms, and the growing diversity of student populations, teachers and school leaders are being forced to navigate a multitude of factors that continuously shape the way students learn, teachers teach, and leaders lead. Just like hitting the weights, we need to be constantly working out our skills, building muscle, and flexing our enhanced conditions to inspire hope in our school communities and successfully reimagine the future of learning, teaching, and leading in our workplaces.

Professional physique is about more than just having knowledge to do the job you are required to do and love. It is about honing the art and science of teaching, refining your own skills in this regard, and being prepared to meet the diverse needs of every person you interact with in schools as every interaction matters. Think about it like this: just as a bodybuilder doesn't rely on one exercise to build muscle, teachers can't rely on just one teaching method to reach every student, and leaders can't rely on just one approach to meet the needs of every colleague. They need to have a whole kit bag of strategies at their disposal, ready to pull out whatever is needed to provide every person every opportunity, and support each of them on their own unique school journey.

But building a professional physique isn't just about what happens inside the classroom. It is also about how teachers and school leaders interact with their broader community. That means forging strong partnerships with parents, community organisations, and other stakeholders to create a supportive network that lifts everyone up. By working together

with all members of the school community, from teachers to parents, school leaders can create a culture of shared responsibility and collective action. And as teachers and school leaders continue to flex their professional muscles, they're not just preparing for the challenges of today; they're also shaping the future of education. With each lesson taught, each decision made, they're inspiring hope and reimagining what's possible for students everywhere.

The future of education needs this transformational approach to learning, teaching, and school leadership. With the rise of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and other tools, traditional classroom boundaries are disappearing, and more immersive and interactive learning experiences tailored to individual students' needs and preferences are being considered and delivered. Moreover, the global interconnectedness opens opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing among students worldwide. As we move forward, education will increasingly require students to be critical thinkers, creative, and adaptable to prepare them to thrive in an ever-changing world. Additionally, there will be a greater focus on developing socio-emotional skills such as empathy, resilience, and cultural competency. Furthermore, the future of education will need to leverage on these skills to ensure greater accessibility and inclusivity to bridge social divides and ensure that all individuals have equal access to quality learning opportunities.

In my own experience, I've found that the role of a teacher or school leader extends far beyond just expertise and experience. It's a blend of being versatile, adaptable, and a preparedness to tackle the unexpected challenges that constantly arise within schools. Every minute of every day presents its own set of curveballs, and curveballs they are, forcing us to fail hard, and demanding us to act swiftly and recover quickly. Even during supposedly relaxing school holidays, the demands persist.

While they do provide some time for us to rest and revive, they also require us to remain on our toes and be ready to respond to whatever the world throws our way in the term ahead. The ability to pivot, adjust, and thrive amidst uncertainty is paramount, and our resilience and flexibility are not just desirable traits but essential tools to ensure the success and wellbeing of our students and the broader school community.

So, the next time you see a teacher or a school leader in action, take a moment to appreciate the hard work they're putting in behind the scenes. They may not be lifting weights in the traditional sense, but they're building muscle—the kind that will carry us forward into a brighter, more inclusive future for education. The journey of building a “professional physique” in education is one of continuous growth and adaptation. Teachers and school leaders alike must constantly challenge themselves to expand their skills, refine their practice, and forge strong connections within their communities. By doing so, they not only inspire hope in the hearts of their students but also reimagine the future of education as a dynamic, inclusive, and transformative force for good. As we look ahead to the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow, let us draw inspiration from these dedicated professionals and commit ourselves to the ongoing pursuit of excellence in education.

Ian Finn

*Director of Professional Learning,
Arndell Anglican College, New South Wales*

New Voice in School Leadership 2023 Recipient



Ian began his career as a history teacher in Sydney's North-West, and learnt early on the value of professional learning and leadership. After a period of time, he was appointed as Head of History and Legal Studies at The King's School, before being appointed to his current role. As Director of Professional Learning, Ian has had the opportunity to explore the development of leadership within schools and its impact on student outcomes. Ian is currently completing his PhD with a focus on strategic leadership and its capacity to facilitate change within educational organisations.

Teachers are able to expose students to new ideas, global issues and innovations while also working to develop the skills and character students will need for their future.

The world we are preparing our young people for is a rapidly evolving and tumultuous one. The VUCA acronym (i.e., volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) accurately encapsulates the challenges students encounter beyond the school gates. The escalating threat of natural calamities, perpetual conflicts, escalating social disadvantage, and numerous other factors contribute to an environment that can easily be perceived as hostile to humanity. Our students are already bearing the brunt of these circumstances. A recent study revealed a 40% surge in feelings of hopelessness among young people (Abrams, 2023), underscoring the urgency of the situation.

Into this scene walks the teacher, an individual with the capacity to provide compassion and psychological safety to those they teach, an individual who can inspire and empower students to imagine a better future. The role of the teacher remains critical for the betterment of our future (Day et al., 2007). Teachers have the opportunity to create environments in which students are able to connect with one another, to explore, to experiment, to create, all in pursuit of a better world (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014). It is through this human connection that students are able to learn and grow, so they are able to prepare for life in the future (MacMahon, 2020). They can enjoy a level of stability and security that teachers can provide which supports their mental wellbeing and allows them to take risks in a supportive environment. In this environment, students have the opportunity for immediate feedback, deeper understanding and meaningful relationship building beyond the screen. A supportive environment also fosters social and emotional development as well as empathy and communication skills. All of these conditions enable students to engage with the complexity of the world, and yet not be overwhelmed by the uncertainty and ambiguity inherent within the chaos. The teacher, the focus of this process, proceeds with the goal of growing humans who are equipped and prepared not just to deal with volatility, but excel in it (Talanquer et al., 2020). However, it

takes more than just preparing students for the outside world to change it.

Not only do teachers provide environments for students to develop and grow, but they also have the opportunity to inspire young people and build hope for the future. Through passion, enthusiasm and rapport, the "classroom" (whatever this looks like) becomes a crucible of ideas, creativity, and development (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014). Teachers are able to expose students to new ideas, global issues and innovations while also working to develop the skills and character students will need for their future. It is the work of the educator to light a fire within the hearts of students to see a better world and provide hope that the problems we face are not insurmountable (Liesveld et al., 2005). Through carefully laid plans and impromptu opportunities, teachers can support students in pursuing their strengths and passions while building compassion and empathy. In inspiring our young people with hope, they are able to envision a better world on the horizon.

Yet, while inspiration is critical for sparking hope for the future, it is only through empowerment that students are able to make their vision a reality. Through empowerment, students are equipped with the mindsets, skills, and dispositions they need to make a difference (Lock et al., 2003). It is the work of teachers which builds these dispositions within students that enable them to work towards reimagining the future and plan a path for how this can be realised. It is the teacher who facilitates students' understanding of how to learn and adapt for themselves and build metacognition so they are able to thrive in the world into which they are going. However, the role of the teacher is more than just empowerment through the building of skills and learning. It is the teacher who lifts up the voices of students and shows them that their contributions are valued (Dobson & Dobson, 2021). It is the teacher who empowers students to take agency over their lives and assists them in understanding the impact they can have.

The work of the teacher is critical for the inspiration of hope and supporting students in reimagining the future. While critical work, this is a significant responsibility to place on the shoulders of teachers. With instances of burnout on the rise and growing administrative workloads, how are educators able to engage with students while also managing an ever-growing list of competing demands? Who inspires the inspirers? Who empowers the empowerers? Just as teachers' work is critical for students' development, educational leaders' work is critical for teachers' development. It is our leaders who create and provide the supportive environments that educators need in order to inspire and empower (Covey et al., 2022). It is our leaders who build hope in the purpose of vision of our profession to lift our teachers up, to show them that their voice and contributions matter so they are able, in turn, to lift up students.

In spite of the ever-increasing VUCA world in which we live, there are plenty of reasons for hope. The work of teachers and leaders within schools continues to be the bedrock on which the future is built. As those engaged in the work of education continue to inspire and empower students and educators alike, a new generation is being raised up with the skills and mindsets not just to survive but thrive in what lies ahead.

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Educational leaders inspire hope by providing visionary leadership, celebrating successes, empowering others, promoting equity and inclusion, and cultivating a sense of purpose.

Nina Jones

*Assistant Principal,
Connected Curriculum,
Katherine High School, Northern Territory*



New Voice in School Leadership 2023 Recipient

Nina Jones is an Assistant Principal at Katherine High School, Northern Territory. The school has been on an improvement journey since 2021 with Nina playing a pivotal role in the foundation of the school's positive behavior strategy as well as a focus on Year 12 completion rates. In 2024, the school is set to have its highest number of Year 12 Graduates since 2016, with 70% of those students identifying as Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander. Nina found her "why" in teaching in the Territory. She has now dedicated her career to working in the space of Indigenous education not only to "close the gap" but to create generational change in her community. At her core she believes every student can achieve success and that education has the power to change lives.

In the vast expanse of Australia's educational landscape, Indigenous education stands as a poignant testament to the enduring struggle for equitable access and cultural recognition. Of the 19 "closing the gap" targets only five are on track, with seven targets related to education and training showing little to no improvement; in some instances, some are worsening (Australian Government, 2020a). Amidst the challenges faced by Indigenous communities in Australia, the global arena of education grapples with its own set of obstacles, from technological disparities, student behaviour, a decreasing workforce and increasing workload demands. Within these challenges lies an opportunity to cultivate hope and envision a transformative future for education worldwide. When looking to reimagine education for the future we can look to Indigenous perspectives to help foster innovative approaches to decrease disparities and forge an inclusive and equitable educational landscape that inspires hope and reimagines the very essence of learning.

Global challenges facing educational leaders

Access to education is a fundamental human right. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states: "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available, and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit" (United Nations, 1948). One of the most pressing challenges globally is ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students, regardless of socio-economic background, geographical location, or gender. Nationally, Year 12 retention and completion rates are at their lowest levels in a decade (Cassidy, 2024). The Australian Government Productivity Commission's report (2024) found that fewer

students are entering Year 12, while the gap in school attendance between remote and city students is widening. The number of Indigenous students who completed Year 12 or equivalent in 2023 decreased proportionately to increasing remoteness of usual residence: 76% in major cities, 68% in inner regional areas, 66% in outer regional areas, 53% in remote areas, and 42% in very remote areas (Australian Government, 2020b). As educational leaders we must work to address barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of resources, cultural biases, and discriminatory practices that stop students accessing education.

This inequitable access to resources plays out in a growing digital divide in schools. In an age of artificial intelligence (AI) teachers are challenged not only with our own vocation, but also our mortality as teachers. Will teaching always remain human centred? Does it need to? Rather than undermining the teaching profession, this technology is an opportunity for teachers. Education needs to adapt, or we will be left behind. AI in education is generally viewed as positive, but as is the slow-paced adoption of new technology in education there are reservations over its social and emotional impacts in the classroom, the suppression of intuitive knowledge and data security (Gocen & Aydemir, 2020). Leveraging AI for practical purposes can offer tangible solutions to alleviate teacher workload and mitigate burnout. As a profession we are facing a crisis. In 2022, 5% of the teacher workforce reported an intention to leave the profession within the next year citing workload, student behaviour, and poor salaries as the main reasons (Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2023). Despite all this, teaching remains an important job, just as it has done for hundreds of years, but fundamentally, teaching has not changed. This is an issue.

The system demands placed on teachers and educational leaders are often not aligned with the core business of schools which is teaching and learning. The Australian Education Union surveyed thousands of public school teachers with a trend emerging in their responses. People enter teaching to change lives. People leave teaching because they are undervalued, underfunded, and overworked (Beardsell, 2023). The role of the teacher has changed. Teachers must possess a contextual comprehension of the social and emotional hurdles that students encounter daily. With students coming to us from diverse backgrounds and possessing unique experiences, these factors significantly influence their learning capabilities. Consequently, teachers must adapt to challenges and be adequately equipped to offer the necessary support and guidance to ensure student success. Other challenges include trauma informed practice, research-based pedagogy, having aspirational staff and students, and building a community of parents, staff, and students who want to learn. In a culture of staff burnout, a lack of community understanding and the reality of the slow pace of change in education, it can feel overwhelming to address all these components simultaneously while trying to carry out the core business of teaching and learning. Tackling these hurdles calls for leaders with vision, teamwork among everyone involved, fresh ideas in teaching methods, updates to policies, and ongoing commitment to funding education. By putting fairness first and using technology wisely, leaders in education can aim to create welcoming, adaptable systems that prepare students for whatever lies ahead, helping them succeed in a world that's always changing.

Inspiring hope and reimagining the future of education

There are silver linings amidst the challenges. There is an analogy I came across when I first began teaching in the territory seven years' ago called, "swimming the river" (Trust, 2013). This analogy talks about schools being places where students learn to swim the river. All the opportunities for our students lie on the other side of the river. In the Territory only about 40% of families walk with their students to the side of the river, before entrusting teachers to help foster their students' potential and teach them the skills to swim the river (Australian Government, 2020a). Learning to swim is important because the river current can be strong, it can lead to cycles of poverty and disadvantage.

In the context of reimagining education, the "swimming the river" analogy can serve as a powerful way of addressing the educational

disparities and challenges faced by Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in this ever-changing educational landscape. Who taught you to swim? How do you teach your students to swim? Do we need to change the way we teach swimming? How can we get more families to walk their students to the riverbank and work alongside schools to create communities that empower young people and build inclusive, culturally responsive pathways for success for all learners?

Educational leaders inspire hope by providing visionary leadership, celebrating successes, empowering others, promoting equity and inclusion, and cultivating a sense of purpose. Through their actions and words, leaders can create a culture of hope and optimism that fuels positive change and transformation in education.

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More broadly 21st century education requires students not only demonstrate academic capacities, but also to possess a broad range of skills and attributes that are critical in a globalized world.

Dr Luke Mandouit

*Vice-Principal / Learning,
Teaching, and Academic Innovation (ELC – 12),
Geelong Grammar School*



New Voice in School Leadership 2023 Recipient

Luke Mandouit has been a teacher and school leader for over 20 years across government and independent sectors from ELC - 12. Whilst working in school settings, he completed graduate research in how student voice can be used to inform teacher professional learning. Following this, Luke completed his doctoral research investigating how students receive, interpret, and action teacher feedback. After four years working at Melbourne Graduate School of Education in educational research and teacher education, Luke returned to school leadership. Luke is currently Vice-Principal | Learning, Teaching, and Academic Innovation (ELC – 12) at Geelong Grammar School and is an Honorary Research Fellow in the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne.

This *New Voice Perspective* explores several pressing challenges in the evolving landscape of global education. These include the critical need to attract, develop, and retain teachers and school leaders, catering to the emerging academic and wellbeing needs of 21st century learners, and the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in educational settings.

Teacher workforce

The persistent shortage of teachers in the workforce is an ongoing concern, and attracting, retaining and developing staff remains critical. The effects of this shortage are evident with some schools needing to collapse classes or to cover staffing gaps with those in leadership roles. Of significant concern is that one in ten qualified teachers is currently not working in schools, with the shortage not only driven by supply and demand, but by heavy workload, the want for work-life balance, and the impact teaching has on wellbeing and mental health (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2021).

Considering these factors, school leaders must aim to manage teacher wellbeing through improved support systems, along with professional learning opportunities which may mitigate these risks and enhance teacher retention (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). School leaders also need to leverage off principles of authentic leadership (Walumbwa et al., 2008) to cultivate psychological safety in the workplace. Authentic leaders who prioritise and display moral purpose can inspire and motivate teachers which is essential in a profession fraught with challenge and high turnover (Fullan, 2001). By focusing on the broader impacts of education and the personal growth of students, leaders can foster a more committed and satisfied workforce.

Critical to the retention and ongoing development of teachers is the provision of engaging, relevant, collaborative, and

transformative professional learning and development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). This extends to the development of emerging leaders which is crucial for the sustainability of school leadership and improvement. Effective leadership programs should include mentorship, hands-on leadership experiences, and opportunities for reflection and growth (Bush & Glover, 2016).

Academic and wellbeing needs of 21st century learners

The needs of 21st century learners present numerous challenges to educators, with the effects of COVID-19 and interruptions to schooling further shaping the academic and wellbeing interventions required in schools. The academic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is evident in the performance dips seen in NAPLAN literacy and numeracy data across various year levels, particularly among younger students who missed critical periods of face-to-face learning (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021). Whilst the last lockdowns were experienced in 2022, a grade 1 child who experienced disruption to that school year won't graduate year 12 until 2033, with these gaps remaining a challenge for the next decade should appropriate interventions not be actioned. To achieve this, teachers need to be provided the appropriate guidance, professional learning, and tools to monitor student achievement at individual, small group, and cohort level, and with a deep understanding of the instructional interventions that will support their students to bridge learning gaps.

The mental health of children and teenagers has also been impacted by the pandemic. Data indicates a surge in anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders among young people, exacerbated by isolation and the stress of uncertainty (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021). Schools play a critical

role in addressing these wellbeing needs by providing comprehensive support systems that include counselling, peer-support programs, and mental health education. It is essential for educational institutions to integrate wellbeing into the curriculum to foster a supportive environment that can address students' emotional and psychological needs. Data again plays a significant role in supporting schools to respond to these challenges, with tiered levels of both proactive interventions and support offered to students across year levels, smaller groups, and to individual students as required.

More broadly 21st century education requires students not only demonstrate academic capacities, but also to possess a broad range of skills and attributes that are critical in a globalized world. Fullan's framework of the 6C's—collaboration, creativity, communication, critical thinking, citizenship, and character—provides guidance in the importance of these competencies (Fullan, 2013). To effectively foster these skills, schools must adopt pedagogies that encourage active learning, critical inquiry, and real-world problem-solving in dynamic and interactive learning experiences.

AI in education

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into educational systems presents several opportunities and challenges. AI's potential to assist teachers in tasks such as lesson planning, data analysis, and providing feedback can significantly alleviate their workload. AI systems also have capacity to analyse large sets of data to identify trends and patterns in student learning, aiding teachers in making informed decisions quickly and efficiently (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Additionally, AI-driven feedback tools can provide students with immediate responses on their work, enabling timely and personalised feedback.

Despite these benefits, school leaders need to take a range of ethical considerations into account in the introduction of AI based initiatives. These include taking a proactive approach to policy in the ethical use of AI, informed decision making when adopting AI tools, stakeholder engagement to ensure alignment with community expectations and values, and ensuring that there is equitable access to AI so as not to further accelerate existing inequalities (Schiff, 2022).

AI is also having a significant impact on shaping the workforce and the skills and capabilities students need to be successful. This includes the capacity to be adaptable in performing non-routine-based tasks and developing social and emotional awareness (Fadel & Bialik, 2018), along with the capacity to think

ethically and creatively. Drawing on the needs of 21st century learners discussed earlier to achieve this, teachers and leaders must design learning experiences to build critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and ethical thinking. It is important to note that whilst this can be achieved by having students effectively engage with AI tools to solve problems and complete tasks, these capabilities can also be developed through experiential learning experiences, adventure education, and community-service learning.

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Jennifer Sze is a Lecturer in Learning Intervention at the Faculty of Education at The University of Melbourne. She has taught in primary, secondary and tertiary settings. She has a deep passion for special education, especially helping students with learning diversities in dyslexia and dyscalculia. She is an active member of the Australian Dyslexia Association and Dyscalculia Association United Kingdom. In her PhD, Jen's research focused on boys' writing. In the future, she intends to explore two key areas: how girls learn to read and write, and how to empower girls to engage in STEM subjects. Jen has been part of the Teaching Excellence Program with the Victorian Academy of Teaching specialising in Maths. She was the 2023 recipient of the ACEL New Voice and NextGen Scholarships.

There are many critical issues in education today and among them are the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), a shortage of teachers, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) emerging from COVID-19 impacting students' learning, particularly those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. The question many stakeholders ask is, how do those engaged in teaching and leading inspire hope and reimagine the future? For me there are three themes that are important to consider. The first theme is the empowerment and inclusion of marginalised students from disadvantaged socio-economic groups. One way to achieve this is by creating inclusive policies and practices that support a whole-school approach (Berman et al., 2024) where the school and its community agree on the cultural and procedural aspects of implementing inclusive practices in schools (Carrington et al., 2023).

The second theme is to put students at the centre of teaching and learning. This is sometimes referred to as a "student-centred approach" (Bayram-Jacobs & Hayirserver, 2016). An advantage of this approach is that it ensures students' needs are met thus enabling them to learn. This can be achieved by nurturing an inclusive culture by promoting positive values of acceptance and a sense of belonging for all students (Baeten et al., 2016) regardless of their ability, gender, ethnicity, or other differences. Teachers who value students and promote student agency provide opportunities for students to develop confidence in themselves and their own potential.

The third theme is for educators to prepare students for 21st century skills. Among these skills are the ability to be creative and innovative, adaptability to change, good communication skills, and social skills of empathy (Amir & Guskey, 2024). The skills of innovation and adaptability are essential for students not only to live in today's complex world, but also to thrive in it (Kennedy & Sundberg, 2020).

In addition to the aforementioned three themes, is another set of themes that are relevant for education and educational leadership globally. These are issues of equity and access, quality of education and learning outcomes, education for students living in conflict zones (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Manojlovic, 2018), and the emergence of artificial intelligence. In Australia and elsewhere, not all students have access to a quality education. Among the factors impacting upon their access are socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, geography, and disability (Cole, 2022). The recent COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the digital divide where some students were able to access and use technology and internet connectivity for remote learning and others were not (Aissaoui, 2022). Yet it is incumbent on policy makers at every level to ensure that all students can access equal opportunities and resources (Cheddali & Bouache, 2021; Óskarsdóttir et al., 2020).

Central to a quality education for students is ensuring that all students are engaged in learning and achieve meaningful learning outcomes. For this to happen, other issues such as teacher quality, curriculum relevance, assessment practices, and the integration of 21st century skills (Kim et al., 2019) need to be a key part of the education discourse. To address these issues and the ongoing demands of the changing education landscape of education will require educational leaders to be innovative and future focused (Kezar, 2023).

A global issue that impacts millions of people including school-aged children is ongoing war and conflict. Educating students in these conflict zones is extremely challenging due to regular disruptions to schooling, destruction of schools, and the displacement of students and teachers (Badrasawi et al., 2018). Educators and educational leaders face the task of trying to provide safe spaces for learning while at the same time providing an education and supporting students' wellbeing (Østby et al., 2020).

The final global issue discussed here is the pervasiveness of artificial intelligence. AI is transforming the way we study, live, and work. There are many different schools of thought regarding the value and impact of AI in education. There is no doubt that AI offers opportunities to improve teaching and learning, but teaching is a human endeavour. As educators we need to understand and utilise AI to support teaching and learning but always with the consideration of meeting the needs of students. At the heart of education are relationships and relationships involving human connections. One way of using AI is to investigate how it can assist education to remain a human-centred enterprise. For example, AI could be used to develop students' social and emotional skills by providing them with personalised feedback (Jones & Doolittle, 2017) and customising their learning preferences to foster greater engagement (Pratama et al., 2023). Another example is moving away from standardised testing for all to using AI to create individualised targeted tests thereby providing more meaningful and equitable assessment for students (Howard et al., 2023). Schools need to prepare students with 21st century skills including the skills of how to use AI to support their learning now and in the future.

In this essay, I have endeavoured to underscore a range of critical issues that impact education, and teaching and learning both in Australia and globally. Each of these issues provides both opportunities and challenges for educators. I see that educators are professionals who are engaged in teaching and leading and who inspire hope and reimagine the future for students on a daily basis and in a myriad of ways. Their commitment to inclusive practices and providing a quality education for students regardless of their backgrounds, their promotion of a robust curriculum to develop 21st century skills so they can thrive in an uncertain world, and their willingness to embrace AI so that it is used to enhance student learning are among some of the important practices in which they are involved. At the heart of what they do is developing relationships and building human connections.

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Dr Hugh Gundlach is a researcher and lecturer in the Faculty of Education at The University of Melbourne, and a registered secondary teacher. Hugh's scholarly outputs span journal and trade publications, and interviews via television, radio, print, and new media. He is a regular presenter at state and national conferences for educational associations.

Collaboration among universities, school systems, and governments is essential to recruit, develop, and retain teachers and school leaders.

While reviewing materials for my commerce teaching, I came across a career structure booklet from McDonald's (2014) detailing pathways for new crew members. I was struck by its clear pathways and progression, in stark contrast to the career structure of teaching. I rather admire the restaurant chain's transparent framework and commitment to developing their workforce's knowledge, skills, and ambition. Especially in a crisis of teacher and principal burnout and shortage, shouldn't our professional framework for educators aim to be better trained, supervised, planned, and resourced than an organisation focused on cheap, fast food?

As a researcher of employee attraction and retention, I am interested in understanding the factors influencing teachers' career decisions. From my survey of 1,000 Australian teachers and former teachers, one of the most intriguing findings that emerged was that teachers who had longer careers had often sought growth through diverse opportunities within their schools, or by moving schools (Gundlach, 2022). Many participants in the sample cited a lack of opportunities, or being overlooked for advancement, as a reason to leave a school or the profession altogether. Although some participants acknowledged support from their principals in pursuing career aspirations, most moves were driven by individual agency. Another significant finding, particularly among those who had exited the profession, was the perception that their careers and salaries stagnated by about seven to ten years, especially when compared to their similarly qualified peers in other industries (Gundlach, 2022).

In teaching's flat hierarchy, a seasoned classroom teacher with decades of experience can hold a similar "rank" to a graduate, and few if any duties are ever relinquished, where other professions delegate tasks to assistants and subordinates as one progresses. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2024) offers only four career stages: *Graduate*, *Proficient*, *Highly Accomplished*, and *Lead*. While these stages have detailed descriptions, they are not explicitly linked to any qualifications, specific pay levels or ranks in a consistent way across systems. It's concerning that a fast-

food chain, albeit the world's most successful one, boasts twice as many stages for recruits entering with no qualifications, and offers a clearer delineation of the training at each level and its associated career prospects.

At McDonald's, the career structure comprises four realms with approximately eight distinct levels overall. Notably, each level features a designated training program, and five levels offer a transferable, externally recognised qualification, funded by the employer. Beginning with the *Crew* realm, it includes positions such as *Crew Member* and *Crew Trainer*. What's particularly appealing is that from the third level upwards, all employees assume responsibility for training and developing individuals at lower levels (McDonald's, 2014). In contrast, in the teaching profession, universities struggle to secure volunteer mentors for pre-service teachers in placement schools. Simultaneously, many teachers assert that real learning occurs on the job, rendering the theory learned at university irrelevant.

In the *Manage* realm, McDonald's positions include *Shift Supervisor*, *Assistant Department Manager*, *Department Manager*, and *Restaurant Manager*, each culminating in a Certificate, Diploma, and Advanced Diploma of Management. Notably, these positions gradually broaden the perspective and scope of the duties and responsibilities (McDonald's, 2014). Once upon a time, "Getting a job at Maccas" was the punchline for saying one had no education or employment prospects, "yet I contrast McDonald's structure" and investment in its people with the current situation in education. Due to severe teacher shortages, schools are granting "Permission to Teach" status to individuals lacking completed qualifications. Fast-tracked interns are deployed as solo classroom teachers, learning as they teach. This means interns lack substantial supervised practice before leading their own classes, or the opportunity to reflect with mentors. While I teach in such a program without holding concerns of candidate quality or the instruction and support provided, it raises concerns about the teaching profession's advocacy for a robust career structure. Unlike professions like medicine

or law, where solo practice without complete qualifications is unheard of, the nature of teaching, in its solitary context, presents unique challenges.

Restaurant managers, akin to principals, oversee all facets of operations, including quality, service, standards, sales, HR practices, and profitability. They receive explicit training in talent management and succession planning. Does education provide such targeted development for principals and aspiring leaders? Beyond managerial roles, McDonald's also enables individuals to specialise in various corporate functions such as operations, human resources, workplace safety, training, marketing, accounting, IT, property development, purchasing, equipment, communications, and quality assurance. Conversely, participants in my teacher survey expressed frustration with the dearth of pathways to transition into other industries, even education-related roles like policy or consulting, citing a lack of contacts, know-how, or necessary skills (Gundlach, 2022). I commend McDonald's model, where employees ascending the corporate hierarchy can pursue their passions and expertise, contributing to the global success of the restaurant chain.

While I draw comparisons between teaching and the fast-food industry here, I am steadfastly opposed to seeing teaching degrade into a profession akin to that of fast-food workers, with low entry requirements, low salary and salary progression, low status, and poor public perception. Rather, my intention is to stimulate discussions on how we can elevate teaching and school leadership into fulfilling, sustainable careers, devoid of the need to sacrifice salary, career advancement, and prestige. Collaboration among universities, school systems, and governments is essential to recruit, develop, and retain teachers and school leaders. I urge ACEL and its members to take the lead in these discussions and advocate for a national, well-structured career progression to prevent dilution of the professional standards and structures by other stakeholders.

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The only way for us to change and to stop the impending freefall from the cliff edge is for there to be political will to do things differently.

Education systems around the world have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and many school communities continue to operate under immense stress. In a recent issues paper on teacher workforce shortages in Australia, it was claimed that we will have a projected deficit of approximately 4,100 secondary school teachers in the country by the end of 2025 (Department of Education, Skills and Employment Modelling [DESEM], 2022). The most recent Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey (Dicke et al., 2024) reported on the immense stress that principals are currently experiencing, notably because of workload issues and an increase in offensive behaviours directed towards them. When these claims are considered alongside concurrent concerns related to students' mental health and disengagement in the classroom, a worrying picture emerges about the state of education in Australia. Simply, we are at, or we are fast marching towards, a cliff edge whereby the only logical move is to change direction.

Sahlberg (2024) explained that in Australia, and across the 11 years of primary and lower secondary education, a student will have 11,000 hours of mandatory instruction. Remarkably, mandatory instruction is, on average, about 2,200 hours less in other OECD countries. This is equivalent to approximately two full school years less, with this deficit increasing to four full school years less in Estonia, Korea, and Finland. Sahlberg (2024) went on to explain that there is no proven correlation between more instruction time and better student outcomes, and, in fact, there is a slight negative correlation. Why, then, is there such an incessant push to do more and more in schools given that we know it doesn't yield beneficial outcomes for both teachers and students? In a similar vein, others have shown that it is not uncommon for principals to work more than 50 hours per week, with these hours rising and with more work being

done outside of already expanded working hours because of the increase in devolution from the state (Reid & Creed, 2021). It seems bizarre that at the policymaker level, and in a time where some schools are experiencing significant tensions, we deflect the burden back onto teachers and school leaders to, simply, do more. It is institutionally violent to do this. Packing every school day with more instruction and more work is not the answer and it is detrimental to student outcomes, school connectedness, and the wellbeing of our teachers and school leaders.

This focus on more instruction time in Australian schools goes hand-in-hand with the growth of a rigid, high-stakes testing culture that has come to dominate much of the educational landscape in the country. As I have argued elsewhere (Hudson, 2024), we ask our school leaders, teachers and students to operate in a pressure cooker where the dominant focus is on what we can most easily measure – academic results (e.g., NAPLAN and ATAR). This test-based accountability system sees students pushed along a pipeline of education until the sum of their efforts culminates in a single numerical score at the end of 13 years of schooling. While some may argue that this method of regulation and standardisation has its merits, its centralisation has seen a culture of compliance and competition reign supreme in the Australian education system. This relentless pursuit of improving students' academic results has pushed aside a focus on encouraging students to enjoy the creative process of learning and, concurrently, the experience of being a learner. Moreover, it has diminished the focus on creating meaningful relationships that are based on more than just the transaction of knowledge. Teachers and school leaders are also hamstrung by the high levels of professional accountability that are married to a system that has such a perpetual affinity for comparisons and rankings.

When reflecting on the prompt, *think about how those engaged in leading schools inspire hope and reimagine the future*, I firmly believe that principals in Australia do this every day by inspiring others around them to focus on enhancing school and student outcomes beyond academic results. We are blessed to have such passionate and dedicated principals in this country and yet we continue to laden them with laborious educational policy demands that hinder their leadership, not least of which is operating in a system that continually asks them to do more than they already are. The only way for us to change and to stop the impending freefall from the cliff edge is for there to be political will to do things differently. It is a case of changing the game, not churning through the players. My call to action is therefore directed towards those policymakers tasked with the responsibility of deciding the rules of the game: we must escape this obsessive focus on academic results and consider broader ways to gauge school success in Australia. There is a plethora of other contextually sensitive ways that our schools are positively impacting the lives of young people but they often go unnoticed at the expense of what those in power value – numerical outputs that can be standardised and normalised. If we do not change direction away from these “normalising regimes of power” (Foucault, 1977), and soon, then there will be no one left to teach in and lead our schools.

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Tania Leach, an educational leadership expert at the University of Southern Queensland, focuses her research on modern challenges faced by system leaders and how to better support schools for overall system growth. With 18 years of leadership experience in both schooling and university settings, including roles as Associate Dean, Principal Education Advisor, and Head of School, Tania's expertise has been recognised with the 2017 ACEL Queensland Excellence in Leadership Award. Her work delves into the interconnection between system and school leadership, emphasising the skills necessary for successful leadership in both domains. Through collaborations with current leaders, policymakers, and international researchers, she aims to underscore the complexities of educational leadership today. Tania's system leadership research and current work with education systems in multiple Australian states and systems earned her the 2022 Research in Educational Leadership and Management Award, and 2023 International Contribution to Education Leadership which explores these challenges and pathways for supporting school leaders to achieve holistic system growth.

In educational leadership, where the pressure to achieve reform goals often competes with the need to balance managerial responsibilities, the emotional labour of leadership becomes particularly pronounced.

In the ever-evolving landscape of global education, educational leaders find themselves at the nexus of profound challenges, influenced by rapidly changing societal demographics and the evolving expectations placed on education and educators (Bush, 2020; Hallinger, 2018; Leach, 2021). Recognising education as a deeply human endeavour with the power to shape societies, educational leaders play a pivotal role in uplifting the foundational principles and social contract of education. They are instrumental in "providing [an] inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2017, p. 18). When considering the current educational context, three overarching notions emerge as pivotal in discussing the current role of educational leaders. First, there is the critical task of contributing to educational reform efforts within a complex policy environment, where educational leaders must navigate complex policy frameworks, ensuring alignment between overarching goals and on-the-ground practices (Leach, 2021). Second, educational leaders must adeptly navigate local contexts amidst narrow accountability pressures, balancing the demands of various stakeholders while fostering environments conducive to meaningful teaching and learning experiences. Third, educational leaders are often marginalised within educational leadership capability discussions rather than being recognised for their expertise and insights (Riddle & Heffernan, 2018). Educational leaders, therefore, have a vital role amplifying educational leaders' voices in policy discourse, advocating for the needs and perspectives of educators, students, and communities at local, national, and international levels.

At the core of educational leadership lies the intricate dance of balancing diverse expectations while maintaining an unrelenting focus on continuous system and school improvement efforts, where the translation

of policies and educational focus areas into coherent school-based strategies becomes paramount. Moreover, within the context of national and state education policies, educational leaders must confront the tension between global competitiveness and local relevance, where pressures for conformity threaten to overshadow the unique needs and aspirations of educational school communities (Hallinger, 2018). Resisting the temptation to adopt one-size-fits-all solutions, leaders must advocate for policies and strategies that allow for contextual flexibility and adaptation, while achieving coherence. By doing so, they create environments where educational excellence flourishes organically, rooted in the unique strengths and aspirations of each community.

Recent research (Leach, 2021) underscores the pivotal role of educational leaders in system and school reform process, emphasising their role in interpreting, translating and implementing national and state policies within their school contexts. However, this research also identified that achieving policy and subsequent school strategy coherence and reform goals is hindered by a lack of role clarity among system and school leaders and staff, stemming from the lack of formal interpretation and translation practices of educational reform messages into system and school strategy documentation. As a result, individuals often base their actions on informal policy interpretations, leading to role tensions, accountability ambiguity, and partial strategy implementation.

Amid these reform efforts and the day-to-day management of schools, leadership roles may increasingly prioritise administrative duties over broader leadership functions, such as thoughtful leadership enactment. This shift is often linked to discussions on the emotional labour of leadership which encompasses the effort required to manage and regulate one's emotions in accordance with organisational or societal expectations. Emotional labour

not only influences how leaders interact with their teams but also significantly impacts their own wellbeing (Skaalvik, 2020). Leaders must navigate complex interpersonal dynamics, manage conflicts, and maintain a positive work environment, all while projecting confidence and empathy. However, the continual management of emotions, particularly in high-stress environments, can take a toll on leaders' mental and emotional health.

French philosopher Simone Weil (2023) highlighted the detrimental effects of repetitive managerial tasks and strict hierarchies on individual autonomy and creativity, emphasising the importance of meaningful work that fosters intellectual engagement and creative problem-solving. Weil's philosophy underscores the interconnectedness of emotional labour and leadership wellbeing, suggesting that environments devoid of autonomy and creativity can contribute to feelings of disconnection and burnout among leaders.

In educational leadership, where the pressure to achieve reform goals often competes with the need to balance managerial responsibilities, the emotional labour of leadership becomes particularly pronounced. Leaders may find themselves overwhelmed by bureaucratic tasks (Riddle & Heffernan, 2018), leading to feelings of frustration and exhaustion. This imbalance not only hampers their ability to fulfill broader leadership responsibilities but also jeopardises their wellbeing.

Therefore, addressing the emotional labour of leadership and prioritising leaders' wellbeing are essential for fostering effective leadership practices and sustaining healthy organisational environments. This involves creating supportive structures, providing resources for self-care and leadership development, and promoting a culture of open communication and psychological safety (McKay et al., 2024). By recognising the inherent link between emotional labour and leadership wellbeing, leaders can reconsider how to structure their time and environment to thrive amidst the complexities of their roles and make meaningful contributions to their teams and school communities. In addition to this, exploring the implementation of formal practices that promote the development of role clarity and role accountabilities in relation to specific improvement strategies (Leach, 2021) has been positioned as a way forward in optimising reform efforts within and across school contexts.

Furthermore, in grappling with policy and strategy coherence, educational leaders must navigate a landscape where their voices risk being drowned out by external policy pressures

and competing interests. Elevating their voices in educational policy discourse becomes crucial to ensure that policies resonate with the lived realities of classrooms and schools. By championing approaches that honour local contexts and celebrate diversity, educational leaders serve as custodians of context, bridging national policies with local realities. Embracing diverse, contextually relevant approaches becomes essential to fostering environments where every learner thrives, irrespective of background or circumstance. Leveraging professional organisations such as ACEL is crucial for this advocacy as these groups provide a unified platform for leaders to share experiences, exchange ideas, and collectively advocate for policies that support their goals.

In essence, educational leaders stand at the forefront of a global movement for change where the challenges they face are as diverse as the communities they serve. By addressing intricacies of policy and strategy coherence with a focus on role clarity and wellbeing, amplifying their voices in policy and leadership discourse, and navigating local contexts amidst accountability pressures, leaders can chart a course towards transformative education. In doing so, they shape futures and nurture potential in an increasingly interconnected world, where the pursuit of excellence intersects with the imperatives of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

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Dr Judi Newman

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New Voice In Educational Leadership Research 2023 Recipient

Judi Newman is the Director of The Academy of Organisational Neuroscience Australia (AONA) and is an expert in applied neuroscience, a field of study that takes the latest in social cognitive neuroscience research and applies it to leadership, motivation, learning, and influence. There is a gap between what schools sometimes do and what the science shows. Her mission is to boost influence through strengthening leadership and learning impact, through a neuroscience lens by sharing evidence-based practice. Judi works with school leadership teams across Australia, trains teachers in how the brain learns best, writes university curriculum, and leads the "Leadership and Learning Hub" for the International Institute of Organisational Neuroscience (ION). Judi's PhD research won the Paul Andersen Research Prize for the most outstanding thesis in the university's academic year in 2022 and she presents her research at conference keynotes across the world.

Our brain is geared to take in the visual and audio cues as we interact.

In my work I encourage people within the educational sector to view leadership in schools as defined by the nature of inspirational leadership as a process of social influence that occurs through biological processes manifesting in the brain (Lieberman, 2007). Having experienced and observed some exceptional leadership across school systems and states, I am curious about what transforms in the space between leader and individual as the leader inspires an uplifting influence of the intellect, emotion, and energy through their behaviours, words, and tone (Feser, 2016).

My PhD research took me into schools where I followed high-performing secondary school principals in their normal day to day activities and recorded everything they did and said. Interviews were conducted with the principals and their teaching teams to identify ways that principals inspire the best performance from their team. The data was coded and categorised into twelve leadership attributes which were grouped into three areas, aligning to neural networks of the emotional, social and thinking brain. Specifically, five attributes (integrity, humility, strength, clarity, positivity) were found to help calm the brain stem and build trust, three attributes (connectedness, appreciation, collaboration) align with the limbic system and assist in establishing rapport, and four attributes (purpose, communication, autonomy, challenge) stimulate the prefrontal cortex in order for rational thought and growth to take place. Put simply, I found that school leaders are judged by their trustworthiness, warmth and credibility.

A busy leader's behaviour will often default to what is instinctive and easy

A leader's behaviour will often default to what is easy, habitual and quick rather than what is effective. Our brain takes over 60,000 years to evolve, hence, our DNA programs us to think like a hunter and gatherer and was designed to move, connect, and be challenged. You

could say that our brain operates on primitive software (Sharot, 2018), having significant implications for our instinctive habitual behaviours. Therefore, there is a risk that our brain defaults to autopilot to save fuel, allowing feelings to drive behaviour if we are not fully present.

Emotions are a game changer but are often dismissed

It is the way we feel about someone that will determine our willingness to engage at our best. These collective feelings will create the workplace culture that will speed up or slow down the changes we want to achieve. Feelings cannot be dismissed from decision making as it is almost impossible to think without feeling due to the deeply interrelated neural circuits associated with cognition and emotion (Immordino-Yang et al., 2016; Perry, 2012).

Additionally, our brain non-consciously detects threat four to five times a second and there are four to five times more negative emotions dedicated to neural networks than positive emotions (Gordon, 2020). This means that it is very easy for a school principal to trigger someone into threat mode in which they may feel defensive and resistant. As Table 1 shows, the conditions are very different for agitate state (threat mode) compared to contribute state (reward mode).

Principals need ways to prime conversational chemistry and set up contextual cues to bring about a collective contribute state to maximise success. Moving others from fear and emotion to feeling calm and confident, then, relies on changing their brain state and can involve movement, a dopamine hit, joy, humour, tone, posturing, and a brain break. For example, personalising a conversation by building trust and rapport, showing warmth, making eye contact and calling a person by their name, will increase the brain chemical of oxytocin.

Table 1: Contribute and agitate states

CONTRIBUTE STATE Approach (reward)	AGITATE STATE Avoid (threat)
Release of oxytocin, serotonin, dopamine, noradrenaline (Gordon, 2020)	Release of cortisol and adrenaline (Gordon, 2020)
Attachment feelings: hope, love, trust, joy, inspiration, gratefulness, and curiosity (Wang, 2019)	Survival emotions: anger, fear, disgust, distrust, shame, embarrassment, and sadness (Wang, 2019)
Emotions build neural architecture (Hansen, 2014))	Emotions inhibit synaptic growth (Sapolsky, 2004)
Rest and digest	Flight or fight
14 regions in the brain activated (Boyatzis, 2012)	6 regions in the brain activated and 11 deactivated (Boyatzis, 2012)
Prefrontal cortex accessible for rational thought, learning, empathy and growth (Willis, 2016).	Limbic system inhibits executive brain function to PFC (Willis, 2016).
Pupils constrict, gut active, slower breathing, muscles relax, feeling of satisfaction (Gordon, 2022).	Heart rate increases, blood pressure rises, inflammation, muscle tightness, rapid breathing, sweating, pupils dilate, gut inactive (Gordon, 2022).
More insights (Jung-Beeman et al. (2008)	Thinking narrows (Frederickson, 2011)

Table 2: The Twice Model

Think TWICE about how you turn up		
T	Tone	Do you use pass the salt tone? (or use teacher or parent tone?)
W	Warmth	Do you smile, inquire, and encourage? (or talk at people?)
I	Interpersonal	Does your body language match your intent and strengths? (or does it project your fears and edges?)
C	Credibility	Are you calm, clear, concise, relevant, and true in your communication? (or are you wordy and a waffler?)
E	Energy	Do you use an active contribute response? (or do you use a passive agitate response?)

Others notice what we look like and sound like but we often think that intent and what we say is enough.

Our brain is geared to take in the visual and audio cues as we interact. So, what does it mean to show up in a way that maximises your influence? Not surprisingly, the tone you use is about fifty percent of your impact (Gordon, 2022). The TWICE Model (Newman, 2022), shown in Table 2, summaries other practical ways leaders can shape their influence.

Conclusion

New advances in the field of applied neuroscience and behavioural studies combined, may assist to unravel the physiology of leadership behaviours that inspire teams to engage because motivating people comes down to keying into neurological and psychological triggers in all of us (Feser, 2016). Using this knowledge allows school leaders to better understand the brain to align their behaviours with the physiology, not against it.

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Shanice Enoch

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New Indigenous Voice in School Leadership 2023 Recipient

Shanice is a First Nations woman belonging to the Mitakoodi, Kaantju, and Quandamooka Peoples of Queensland. Born and raised in the regional town of Mount Isa (Kalkadoon land) before relocating to Meanjin/Brisbane, Shanice has used her myriad experiences to inform a strengths-based approach to high-school education that values student agency and self-determination. She currently works at Calamvale Community College teaching language and literature through the International Baccalaureate, as well as coordinating the school's gifted and talented program for years 7-9. She has greatly enjoyed embedding First Nations perspectives through these positions by blending the deep philosophical ideations of world literature and established notions of excellence, with the holistic epistemologies of First Nations Peoples. Her current acting position as Head of Department for English 7-12 has provided great insight into the overarching issues facing educational institutions globally.

As educators, instead of focusing so hard on our data targets and what we want to see from students, we should be focusing on what the students want to achieve and use our knowledge to help them get there.

Recently I dealt with a non-submission assessment from an academically gifted senior student. Unfortunately, this student was experiencing mental health issues and cited the current socio-political global landscape as causing considerable psychological distress (among other things). From their perspective, what was the point in writing seemingly arbitrary school assignments when people are suffering from climate inaction, war, persecution, and global poverty, right now? This is a sentiment shared by young people all over the world, with a 2021 study on climate anxiety alone finding that 75% of youth respondents from a multitude of countries say the future is “frightening” to them (Hickman et al., 2021). My heart twinged at this question. As educators, many (if not all) of us see education as a direct route to addressing these issues by equipping our future leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to think critically, solve problems, and employ their ingenuity to benefit humanity. Indeed, humanitarians around the world, such as Malala, put their life on the line to afford their community basic rights to education. Why then, if the significance of education is a universal truth to so many, is there a seeming disconnect for students between education and the global context in which it exists?

This piece will contend that there are three main contributors to the prevalence of the “why should I care when ...” sentiment among students globally, which are:

1. Standardised educational systems that struggle to keep up with changing global priorities.
2. Information overload overwhelming young people.
3. Instant gratification – failure to appreciate the small steps leading to big actions.

The education monolith

It is no secret that the model for education delivery has largely remained the same around the world for over a century. Steven Wolk (2017) makes the point that his son's grandparents could walk right into his 8th grade classes and know exactly what to do: sit behind a desk, be quiet, and listen to the teacher. While I feel this is a little reductionist – the proliferation of inquiry-based pedagogies and student-centred learning have diversified student experiences in the classroom – he makes a valid point. The system as a whole is large, sweeping, standardised, and while efforts are made to consistently update the curricula to align with the modern world, the reality for many classrooms is that we teach the same things that have been taught for decades (along with new things, creating an overcrowded curriculum) in a manner that still fundamentally functions on a large number of children in a classroom with one teacher. Such a mammoth system understandably lacks the agility to remain reflexive to the changing global landscape and awakening conscience of young people. Without a coordinated, sustained, and well-resourced effort from the system itself to make meaningful connections to real-world experiences, problems, and communities, students will continue to feel overlooked in their full-to-the-brim classes that seem so far removed from the headlines that flood their social media feeds around the clock.

Doomscrolling

Social media is well and truly embedded in the lives of 21st century students. The beauty and terror of this is young people are keenly tuned into the complexities of issues around the world “at all times.” My approval of their awareness quickly turns to horror when I realise their knowledge derives from graphic content on the Instagram stories of a political activist they follow, or a TikTok account

giving daily updates on the situation. Not only does the question of source reliability and perspective-taking come into play when considering information sensationalised for mass online consumption, but even when the information is correct, the sobering reality is this content is being viewed and reinforced by young people every single day. Countless studies in recent years have proven a link between “doomscrolling” defined as “the activity of spending a lot of time looking at your phone or computer and reading bad or negative news stories” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024) and increased anxiety and depression, to which young people are disproportionately vulnerable as digital natives who are still developing socially, emotionally, and cognitively (Johnston, 2016). This is why our role as educators is so important and must keep up with the demands of the information age. Social media isn't going anywhere and that is not a bad thing; after all, we encourage our young people to be active global citizens and these platforms allow them to do so. But teaching media literacy and making young people aware of the psychological tactics and impacts of new age media is vital to their health and wellbeing. Instilling a critical understanding of the dangers of the digital landscape we inhabit is the key to reinforcing the importance and power of education.

Instant gratification

Finally, the instantaneous nature of social media itself has an undeniable effect on the young minds in our classrooms. Social media content is made to be brief and eye-catching, which is partly what makes scrolling for hours so addictive (Holmgren & Coyne, 2017). In addition, social media users are usually presented with the final product neatly packaged in a short clip or post, without appreciating the steps taken to get there. The consequences of these are three-fold: a) the attention spans of young people are trained by the habits encouraged by social media, b) the instant rewards provided for their very-divided attention make it harder to break free of those habits, and c) unrealistic expectations regarding input versus output are solidified (Fillmore, 2015; Holmgren & Coyne, 2017). The result is a cognitive dissonance between the sustained and time-consuming effort required to meet educational expectations and the desired goals of making lasting impact and change. While there is no steadfast easy solution to this rising issue, making students aware of these long-lasting impacts on their

attention is the first crucial step. In addition, “de-mystifying” the educational processes that define their lives is important if we are to lessen that cognitive dissonance. As much as the education system has not changed since its institutional formation, the priorities and consciousness of young people have. Young people want to know why. Why do we demand assignments from them and why must they participate in educational processes? While these processes are far from perfect and can do with re-framing, there is a worthwhile “why” in there, and it is our responsibility to ensure our schools have a clear focus on that why, and that we impart that information to our students. As educators, instead of focusing so hard on *our* data targets and what *we* want to see from students, we should be focusing on what the *students want to achieve* and use our knowledge to help them get there.

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A reimagined education future must be one that is human-centred and prioritises people over performance.

Dr Amie Fabry

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New Voice in Early Childhood Education Leadership 2023 Recipient

Amie Fabry is a passionate early childhood educator, researcher, and facilitator who is committed to empowering early childhood leaders to transform pedagogical practice. Her PhD research revealed the critical role early childhood leaders play in school settings generating cultures of collaboration and connection that enhance children's transition into and through the early years of school. Empowering others to believe in and use their own unique capabilities to lead meaningful work is Amie's strength and passion. At the Learning Future, Amie draws on her multi-faceted experience working as an early childhood teacher, academic, policy consultant and researcher, to design and facilitate professional learning programs and projects that inspire and ignite transformation in the education of our youngest citizens. She uses a strengths-based approach to build the confidence, knowledge and skills of early childhood leaders to create responsive and trusting cultures in which educators and children can thrive.

Reimagining a future for education has never been more vital or urgent. This volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world requires us to rethink current paradigms of schooling and to reconsider education and learning as human-centred and multidimensional. We are currently facing some of the greatest challenges to date, including the decline of mental health, wellbeing and academic performance of our children and young people, increases in disengagement, and workforce shortages stemming from educator, teacher and leader frustration and burnout (Hannon & Mackay, 2021). These challenges are symptoms of an ineffective education model that needs to be reimagined if we are to nurture the development and wellbeing of our youngest citizens, our educators, and leaders (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2022).

A reimagined education future must be one that is human-centred and prioritises people over performance. As leaders we need to advocate for the rights of children and young people as equal citizens with the right to make decisions about their own learning and lives (United Nations, 1989). We must be courageous in redefining the purpose of education and working in creative collaboration with others to inspire hope for a brighter future where children, educators, and leaders might thrive.

Courage

Reimagining the future of education takes courage; the courage to accept that our current models and practices are not working and the courage to lead others to innovative and unknown ways of working. Leadership is a practice, not only a role (Fabry, 2023). With courage, both educators and leaders can act as change agents to drive critical conversations and thinking as well as creative approaches toward reimagining education (McDowall Clark & Murray, 2012). As Kate Robinson reminds us,

we have come to a point in our history in which continuing to do what we have always done is no longer an option. We must do better. It begins, as it always does, with each of us taking a stand. (in Robinson & Robinson, 2022, p. xviii)

Doing better requires clarity.

Clarity

When you ask educators how they define the purpose of education, they do not say it is "to enable children to perform well on tests," yet our current school practices would tell us that this is what we value (Jefferson & Anderson, 2021). We need clarity therefore on what truly matters so we can be intentionally responsive to the evolving lives of our children and young people and ensure they are thriving alongside our educators and leaders (Hannon & Mackay, 2021; Hannon & Peterson, 2021). Pelo and Carter (2018) prompt us to reconnect with the purpose of education by asking two simple, yet integral questions: "What kind of people do we want to be? What kind of world do we want to live in?" (p. 32). These human-centred questions call us to think deeply, shifting our focus from outcomes and metrics to the children and young people we walk alongside. With clarity and focus on the true purpose of education, educators and leaders can inspire hope and find ways to actualise these values in our day-to-day practices, in collaboration with others (Jefferson & Anderson, 2021).

Collaboration

Reimagining the future of education is complex. It requires new ways of thinking about learning, teaching, wellbeing and thriving that cannot be tackled by educators and leaders alone (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019). Determining the kind of people we want to be and the kind of world we want

to live in is not just the responsibility of educators; it is the responsibility of us all. Through collaboration, leaders can draw on the collective wisdom of families, communities and those beyond the education sector to build the professional capital of our educators and ensure the responsibility for nurturing the growth of our youngest citizens is not left solely to those working in schools (Hannon & Mackay, 2021; Waniganayake et al., 2024). Stronger partnerships and shared learning between early childhood education and care (ECEC) and schools is one example of how new possibilities can be imagined. The ECEC sector, underpinned by The Early Years Learning Framework (Australian Government Department of Education [ADGE], 2023), provides a rich foundation for reimagining education through human-centred outcomes and responsive and relational practices. We can't possibly reimagine a transformative future without listening to and learning from the perspectives and experiences of others including the children and young people who are directly impacted by the education systems we have in place (Goleman, 2019). Through collaboration, the possibilities for innovation are expanded and we can engage in more creativity and critical thinking (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2022).

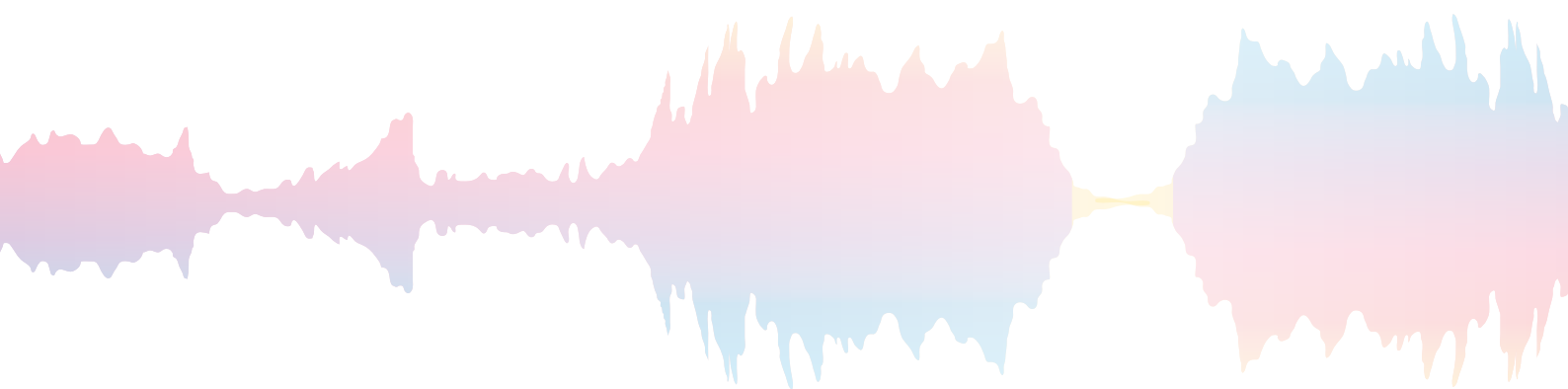
Creativity and critical thinking

We cannot reimagine a different future by solely relying on existing evidence or old ways of working. Leaders play a pivotal role in cultivating environments in which educators feel safe to question existing practices, challenge assumptions, and trial new ideas. This requires leaders to shift from having answers, to sitting in the unknown and we need to encourage and support educators to do the same (Fabry, 2023; Pelo & Carter, 2018). Instead of telling educators what to do, we need to promote critical thinking, reflection, and discernment. Building their self-efficacy will enable educators to confidently draw on their professional expertise to collaboratively solve the complex problems of engaging our youngest citizens in ways that foster their individual talents and nurture their wellbeing (Hannon & Peterson, 2021; Robinson & Robinson, 2022).

It is up to all of us to collectively speak up and stand up to create change. With courage, clarity, collaboration, and creativity and critical thinking, we can reimagine a better future and inspire hope. The future of our young people, our educators, and leaders depends on us all.

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