



independent education

issue 1 | Vol 53 | 2023



InFocus:

# CHRISTINE COOPER

## Uluru Statement from the Heart

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

*This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.*

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. *This is the torment of our powerlessness.*

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a *rightful place* in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: *the coming together after a struggle*. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.



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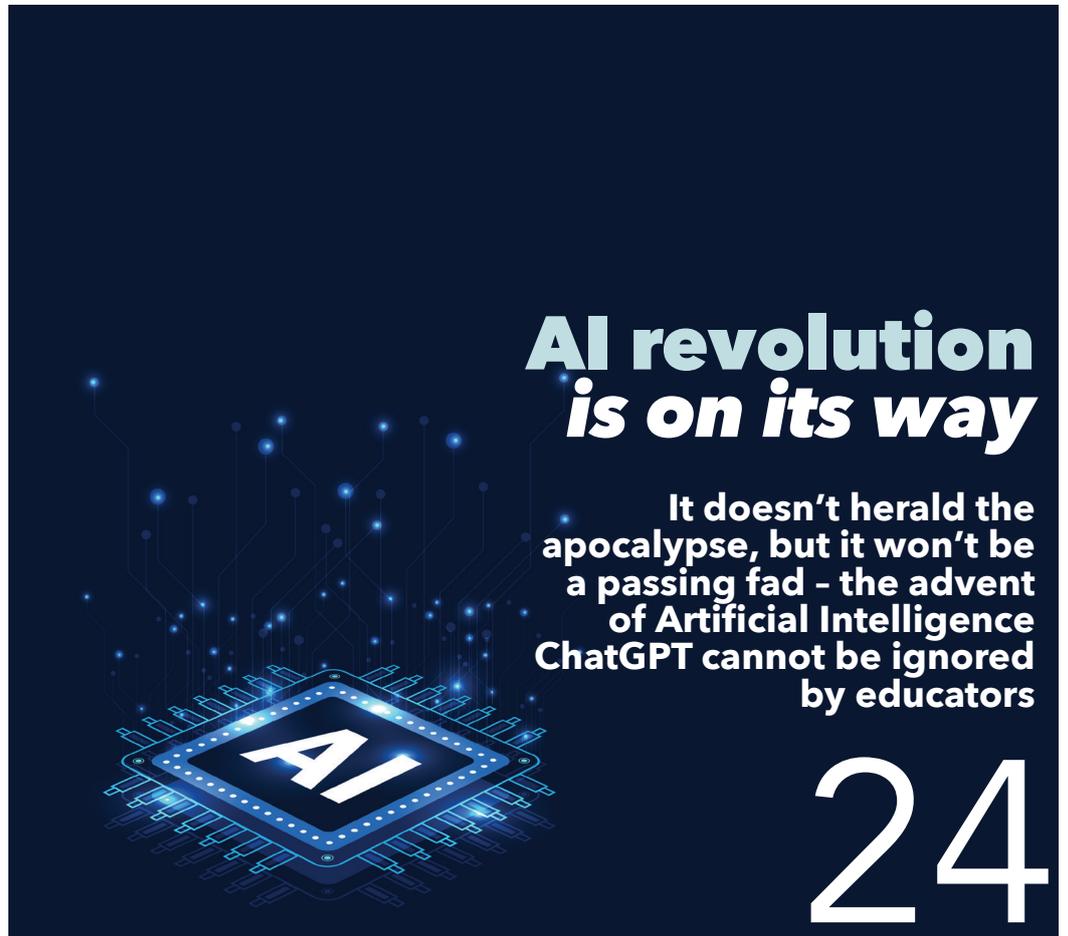
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Print Post Number 100007506

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## Editorial

**This edition of *IE* reflects a time of change for our union, this publication, and for education.**

With this edition, *IE* farewells Managing Editor Monica Crouch, who presided over a period of sustained excellence and topical news coverage. We wish Monica all the best, and welcome Sue Osborne who will fill in as Acting Editor until a permanent replacement is found.

It is apt then, that long-time IEU member and accredited professional supervisor Dr John Lee's article addresses leadership transition! (p28).

Our cover feature is an extensive interview with IEUA Federal Secretary, Christine Cooper, tracing her fascinating journey in education and unionism, and her hopes for the IEU and the union movement.

This edition also highlights welcome changes in education. After years of lobbying, consent education is now mandatory in Australian schools, and Emily Campbell examines whether teachers and employers are prepared (p14).

There's a ground-breaking program at Holy Family Parish School in Parkes, NSW, in which every class at the school receives fortnightly lessons in Wiradjuri (p18).

We also cover the establishment of awards celebrating young people's contributions to peace in Zillmere, Queensland (p32) and the heart-warming embrace of Ukrainian war refugees in Orange, NSW (p26).

The impact of technological change upon education is an inescapable topic, as you will see with pieces on the right to disconnect (p16), personalised learning (p22), and especially the advent of Artificial Intelligence ChatGPT (p24).

Our new regular feature *A Day In The Life*, (p12), kicks off with a look at the vital role played by support workers in schools.

That complements our member profile of Kerri-Anne Nolan, a Support Teacher: Inclusive Education (STIE) at St Benedict's College, north of Brisbane (p10).

The more things change, the more we need to stick together in our union and hold to the values which inform our commitment to education. We think this issue reflects that need and those values. We hope you enjoy reading it.

Contact us with your feedback via email: [ie@ieu.asn.au](mailto:ie@ieu.asn.au)

**Deb James**  
General Secretary

IEUA Victoria/Tasmania Branch



### NSW/ACT

#### Time to say 'yes'

The IEU continues to push for improvements in pay and conditions for teachers and support staff employed in Catholic systemic schools.

The union is negotiating with dioceses to seek improvements in key workload areas such as programming, scheduled release for early career teachers and their mentors, data collection, NCCD, reporting and requirements for teacher development. Some progress is being made. However,

in the central negotiations, and with some dioceses, bargaining has stalled.

To progress the claims, the IEU lodged a bargaining dispute with the Fair Work Commission on 20 February seeking the assistance of the Fair Work Commission in bargaining. Our concerns are that key documents (such as Catholic Employment Relations (CER) proposed support staff pay classifications, CER proposed support staff pay rates, and a draft enterprise agreement) still have not been provided to the union.

Employers have also failed to match the additional release that is being provided in government schools, despite promising in April 2022 to match any improvements implemented across the state in government schools. In many dioceses, there has been little progress on workload. We hope the Commission will be able to create a new, more effective framework to progress discussions on pay, workload and other outstanding issues.

Members are encouraged to continue to support the campaign by wearing yellow Hear Our Voice t-shirts one day a week or displaying union slogans or insignia.

Meanwhile, the NSW/ACT Branch has thrown itself wholeheartedly behind the Unions For Yes campaign for a Voice to Parliament. The union is encouraging its members to vote 'yes' in the forthcoming referendum on recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and embedding their right to have a voice on policies and laws made for them. IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Mark Northam and Assistant Secretary Carol Matthews show their support (above).

#UnionsForYes #Yes2023

### Victoria

#### No More Freebies

Late last year, the union announced that significant progress had been made towards reaching an in-principle deal for a new agreement in most of Victorian Catholic schools. This progress was in large part thanks to the extraordinary efforts of members across the state through the No More Freebies campaign, which highlighted the ridiculous workload excesses endured by educators.

The proposed deal focuses heavily on landmark workload improvements, achieving significant improvements to many important conditions for all staff, better classification structures for education support staff and - crucially - a fundamental change to the way teacher work is regulated.

It will support the professional autonomy of teachers and provide a strong foundation from which to limit workloads and help retain and develop teachers.

The year began with extensive work fine-tuning the details of the deal and drafting the final document. IEU Reps from all relevant schools were

introduced to the main features of the proposed deal in an online briefing. All members in the covered schools then received detailed rundowns of the proposed improvements and were offered extra training on specifics from organisers and reps.

After all the hard work fighting for much-needed improvements, the union must now ensure that members understand how the workload alleviation measures work and how they will benefit staff.

## Tasmania

### Two brave members win leave entitlements for many

Early in 2023, the IEU settled a case it had brought against Catholic Education Tasmania (CET) involving the rejection of Communicable Diseases Leave requests for two members who contracted COVID-19.

The IEU argued that the benchmark for demonstrating that COVID had been acquired in the workplace had been set unrealistically high, and that as a result many staff were being denied the paid leave to which they should be entitled.

Thanks to the determination of those two members, many others will benefit. After the settlement, CET agreed to review all previously rejected COVID-related Communicable Diseases Leave requests by 14 February.

Accordingly, the union urged members in CET schools to contact their organisers if they had similar issues, as the settlement offered hope that many formerly rejected leave applications could be approved.

The co-operative nature of the negotiations leading to the settlement was a significant change from the stubborn hostility the union has experienced when attempting discussions with the CET in recent years. We hope this improved communication with Tasmanian Catholic employers continues, particularly as we return to the negotiation table seeking a new and overdue agreement.

## Western Australia

### Back to the bargaining table

The IEUA WA team is powering through Term 1, thanks to an industrious 2022. In September, Catholic teachers voted 'no, loud and clear' to a sub-standard proposed enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA), bringing Catholic Education WA (CEWA) back to the bargaining table. It's too soon to celebrate with CEWA still ignoring unsustainable teacher workloads. Our next Catholic teacher bargaining meeting was due on 1 March.

IEU Members at St Stephen's School celebrated their first EBA registration with the Fair Work Commission in May, having fought long and hard since late 2017 - a massive win for IEU Members at St Stephen's. Their access to paid union delegate leave was a first for IEU members.

There was an impressive win for Methodist Ladies' College members who did an amazing job voting down an unsatisfactory EBA twice and negotiating a much improved deal.

## Northern Territory

### Catholic members set benchmark rate

Catholic school members have secured a wage offer that exceeds the public sector for the first time in the Northern

Territory. 84.7 per cent of staff voted 'yes' at the ballot in mid-December on the new collective agreement, which will provide wage increases of 10.1 per cent over three years.

The public wage increase is nine per cent for the same period.

NT Organiser Jengis Osman said members were relieved to have finalised the bargaining process and that their tenacity and collective strength had paid off.

"IEU members in NT Catholic schools had their voices heard and have now secured higher wage percentage increases than the public sector," Jengis said.

Securing this wage rise came after an overwhelming 86.2 per cent of NT Catholic school employees voted 'no' to the employer's initial proposed agreement in September, which offered wage increases of just 2.5 per cent per year over a three-year agreement.

"IEU members rejected the employer's initial offer because they found it unacceptable, given it was significantly less than current and anticipated inflation," Jengis said.

"Members refused to settle for an inferior wage offer from the employer, particularly in light of crippling cost-of-living pressures impacting workers across Australia," he said.

## Queensland

### Catholic bargaining underway

Fair pay to address cost-of-living pressures, greater professional recognition of school officers and meaningful interventions into workload and work intensification are the top priorities for Queensland Catholic members in this round of collective bargaining.

The new collective agreement must provide significant wage and income relief in response to cost-of-living pressures.

This means the superannuation 'premium' previously won by IEU-QNT members based on an employee co-contribution must be reviewed, given developments in the Superannuation Guarantee (SG) rates and foreshadowed changes in the Queensland public sector.

Meaningful interventions are also needed to ease workload pressures caused by new employer initiatives, government regulations and growing parental expectations.

The new collective agreement should confirm the final stage of the School Officer Classification Review.

Replacing the outdated school officer classification structure with a contemporary, appropriate, and considered classification structure is long overdue.

We need an updated contemporary classification structure recognising the complexities of diverse school officer roles.

IEU-QNT members in Queensland Catholic schools can access the latest campaign updates 24/7 via their MyIEU member portal at [www.myieueu.org.au](http://www.myieueu.org.au)

# InFocus: CHRISTINE COOPER



**The outgoing Federal Secretary of the Independent Education Union of Australia (IEUA), Christine Cooper, reflects on her experiences of building a strong union, writes Emily Campbell. Despite her career in the non-government education sector, Christine never intended to pursue a career as a teacher nor as a union leader but was hoping to become a scientist.**

## **Aspiring scientist to teacher**

"Teaching wasn't my first career choice; I actually wanted to go into science research at the CSIRO, something like animal health and nutrition," Christine said.

"However, McAuley College, now known as the Australian Catholic University (ACU), was offering a new course for secondary education, so having finished my degree in Rural Technology, I applied for that.

"I worked as a preservice teacher at St Laurence's College in South Brisbane, before gaining a position as a graduate teacher there."

At St Laurence's College, Christine developed a love for teaching and was also introduced to the union movement and its values.

"I found that I loved being a teacher, so while it wasn't my first career choice, I realised the value of being a teacher and the interactions with students," she said.

"At St Laurence's, I taught science and religion for five years from 1986 to 1990 and enjoyed the opportunities it provided to me as well as the strong support of the teaching community.

"The school had a very strong union presence, and it was here where I learnt the value of unionism and what it meant to be part of an active chapter culture.

"I am ever grateful for my years working with the St Laurence's Chapter as it set me on my path in developing strong union values.

"Eventually I moved to Bundaberg for a change and secured work at Shalom Catholic College, where I taught between 1991 and 1995.

"Shalom College was another great school to work in though very different from working at an all-boys' school as it was co-educational.

"Again, I was fortunate to work with a well-formed and strong union chapter."

It was at a time when staff were faced with potential restructuring and associated impact on staffing numbers that Christine learnt again the value of collective support.

"It was the Shalom College Chapter that provided the staff with the necessary voice in



discussions with the diocese and the school administration," she said.

"Without our chapter, staff would have been left to feel the worry of job insecurity alone."

Christine said at that stage she learned that good school leadership was not fearful of a union chapter's voice; they saw it as a constructive way of resolving issues.

"I commend the leadership back then, because our employer talked with us, consulted us about potential change," she said.

"Importantly they weren't scared of the chapter and didn't try to shut us down.

"Over the past decades, I have come to learn that when a school leader is secure in themselves, they are open to listening to a union chapter and are generally better at dispute resolution," she said.

"I have also come to learn that as union members we must teach others to respect us and treat us professionally.

"We do this by acting collectively and ensuring our voices are united."

### Transition from teaching to union official

In addition to her role as a teacher and Chapter Rep, Christine became more actively involved in our union.

Between 1990 and 1994, Christine served as the General Representative for the Wide Bay region to the Council of the Queensland branch of the IEUA, before being elected President of the Queensland branch in 1994.

"Then as things happened, I made a choice to step into our union as an official," Christine said.

"It wasn't a decision made because I wanted to leave teaching, but because I found that employers kept asking more and more of us as teachers, even back then, so it was time to fight for change at a different level.

"I thought I'll do this for a while and eventually return to teaching, but as you can see, the need to fight for our members' working conditions has never gone away.

"When I began working in the office, enterprise bargaining had only just started, and my first role was as an Enterprise Bargaining Project Officer.



**Christine (front centre) with a group of BOLD women members at the IEUA Federal Conference in 2022**

“Following that, I was employed as a Branch Organiser with responsibilities for Catholic and independent schools in the Bayside region of Brisbane.”

In 2004, Christine was elected as Assistant Secretary/Treasurer for the Queensland and Northern Territory Branch (IEU-QNT) and then in 2008, Christine was elected to the federal office, as IEUA Assistant Federal Secretary.

Christine held the position of IEUA Federal Secretary upon the retirement of her predecessor Chris Watt.

“In each of my different roles working in our union, the level of responsibility has increased, but the fundamentals remain the same: to work collectively with IEU members so that together we achieve our goals,” Christine said.

### **Difficult decade under Coalition**

Christine said one of the most challenging aspects during her time in the IEU federal office has been trying to enact positive change for members and the broader education sector during the tenure of the previous coalition federal government.

“It is a challenging thing when the doors are shut in your face,” Christine said.

“Trying to get the previous coalition government to listen to us and understand so we can make a difference was extremely difficult in this role.

“Their lack of respect for our professional voice was one of the significant reasons the education sector is in crisis with teacher shortages and workloads.

“The ever-increasing emphasis on teachers proving their worth and their quality’ has eroded the profession.

“While members struggled across the country with workload intensification, it was demanded they prove their quality, fill out this form, duplicate that data.

“None of this has made any tangible improvement to student outcomes, but it has eroded the trust in our profession and forced teachers to jump through hoops to prove that they have what it takes to do the job.

“The coalition government relied on advice from actors external to education and the realities faced by our members in schools.

“As a result of our union being sidelined and ignored by the coalition, education policies implemented over the past decade fail to support the professional practice of education professionals.

“Every new and shiny idea the federal coalition government came up with wasn’t in consultation with the profession, and then when it inevitably failed, they claimed it was the fault of teachers.

“Add to this, our industrial relations laws and bargaining system prevented us from having a voice and bargaining on an equal playing field.

“Despite these obstacles, our union fought hard and loud during the past decade to push back on the coalition policies and we are proud of the wins we made during that time,” she said.

### **New government a ‘breath of fresh air’**

However, Christine said the recent change in federal government has brought hope for opportunity and for change.

“It’s a breath of fresh air that the views of education unions are now being genuinely listened to and considered by the government and we are becoming more central in the conversations, and we hold very strong expectations on the federal government to deliver,” she said.

“We have been included in numerous federal government consultations: the Job and Skills Summit, the Teacher Workforce Strategy Action Plan round-table and the Early Years Learning Summit, to name just a few.

“It is a huge change, to work with a government that wants our input.

“This federal government wants to know what our members think and what they’re experiencing, so it’s a privilege to have been able to represent their voices at a peak level,” Christine said.



### Highlights and successes

The past decades have provided many challenges and opportunities for Christine, but she maintains every bit has been a privilege.

"Having the opportunity to represent our members, work alongside exceptionally professional union officers, collectively fight for and celebrate our wins for quality education is what it has all been about," Christine said.

"I was recently invited to speak at the NSW/ACT Catholic schools strike rally and when I climbed up onto the podium to speak, I was just in awe, the crowd was packed with more than 2000 IEU members wearing yellow t-shirts.

"When the members turn out together to fight for their issues; no matter how hard that fight is, it's a privilege to be a part of that fight."

Another highlight of Christine's work has been the work of the IEU Federal Women and Equity committee and the establishment of BOLD (Building Our Leadership Development) women's movement.

"BOLD is all about women stepping up to demonstrate active leadership in our union.

"Leadership is not simply a position as such; leading is a verb, so it is about taking action, supporting other women and making a change.

"The BOLD movement within and across our IEU branches has already delivered some great outcomes to our members and to our union structures.

"Our union's work on the international front, particularly in the Pacific for the Council of Pacific Education (COPE) has been inspiring," Christine said.

COPE, as part of Education International, is the organisation of teacher unions/organisations in the Pacific comprising of 19 affiliates from 11 countries in the region. Every three years, the IEU supports COPE in the development and delivery of the regional women's workshop. For the past 14 years, Christine has held the position of Assistant to the Women's Network Coordinator on the COPE executive.

"I've been very fortunate to support several women in that role and it's a delight to see them finding their feet as women leaders in their union or COPE.

"I have learnt a lot from my Pacific sisters about strength and resilience and will always be grateful for their solidarity and support."

### Looking ahead

Christine said she is optimistic about the future for our union, for the wider union movement and the education sector.

"Our union is well placed to secure a positive future for our members and for the profession.

"Our members are focused on delivering high-quality education, that's what they're about, and they demand the professional and industrial conditions that will support them," she said.

"It is with our members, our branches and our union staff where our hope lies for a stronger decade.

"I'd like to commend the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) on the recent Better Jobs, Secure Work campaign for pushing the new government to accept the urgent need to change Australia's IR laws," she said.

Christine said our successes are always incremental wins, layer upon layer, whether at the bargaining table with employers or lobbying politicians.

"There still needs to be more change, and that's always going to be the case, and we are ready as always to fight for better conditions.

"As one of our Chapters taught me back when I was an organiser years ago, whether we win or lose, we must always have a go".

"I think as a union, that's pretty much what we have always done, and what we will continue to do," she said.

# Every teacher needs a mentor

**IEU member Kerri-Anne Nolan, recently awarded the Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) Excellence Award for Learning and Teaching in a Secondary School, believes collaboration and collegiality are key to survival in the teaching profession, writes Emily Campbell.**

After working in the education sector for more than 26 years, Kerri-Anne, who is currently employed as a Specialist Teacher: Inclusive Education (STIE) at St Benedict's College, Mango Hill north of Brisbane, remains steadfast in her belief that teaching is from the heart and is a vocation.

"I have been afforded many amazing opportunities to teach in a range of contexts, engaging in different roles from teaching prep students to teaching and mentoring students undertaking education degrees at university," Kerri-Anne said.

"I fell into teaching rather than it being a conscious decision and I have been on a journey of discovery and learning ever since.

"My initial desire was to be a journalist, or to spend my days as a writer, but once I embarked on my first year of an education degree, I realised that my work as an English teacher could fulfil the creative outlet I was seeking and provided a sense of personal and professional fulfilment."

## **Inclusive education**

Kerri-Anne has over 25 years' experience working in inclusive education and for the past 18 months, she has been employed as a STIE at St Benedict's, working alongside families and external specialists in supporting and caring for students in the senior years.

STIEs are teachers who specialise in supporting inclusive education for students with diverse learning needs, and their role can be highly varied.

A key aspect of STIE's work is to educate their colleagues around contemporary practices in inclusion, build capacity in students and teachers,

to hold schools accountable and challenge inclusion practices.

"The role embraces the collaborative work with teachers in planning for student learning and ongoing consultation with a range of external specialists and agencies to ensure the students under my care are provided with the most appropriate adjustments and opportunities to access and engage with their learning, with a focus on progress as well as achievement," Kerri-Anne said.

"The STIE role includes a teaching role and at my current workplace I have taught English, the QCAA Short Course-Numeracy and QCAA Short Course-Literacy programs."

## **Collegial profession needs time**

Kerri-Anne said collegiality and being part of a collaborative team have reaped benefits for her students through more effective and quality teaching and learning.

"My own rewards were a greater satisfaction and confidence regarding the positive impact of my teaching," Kerri-Anne said.

"Equally, I value the ability to work autonomously and have trust placed in my capacity to carry through with a practical plan to enact the vision and deliver these ideas effectively with students," she said.

"Often the answers to the big questions have already presented themselves and for me, the investment of time provided for teams to work collaboratively remains the golden ticket to successful outcomes.

"It takes time to engage, share, create, challenge, refine, moderate, and enact a vision.

"While many of these conversations occur in the daily professional conversations with my peers, being intentional in providing the time and the space for teachers and teams to engage fully remains the key to success.

"Sharing the vision and taking people with you in pursuing and driving forward with ideas demands

that organisations are respectful of the need for teachers to have the time to do this."

## **Mentoring critical for teachers**

Kerri-Anne acknowledges that early career teachers need strong mentoring to thrive in the profession and counter significant attrition rates.

"Schools and the wider educational organisations have an inherent obligation to support new teachers over the first few years of their professional life, specifically in managing what is paramount for teachers, being the 'emotional labour' of teaching," she said.

"Mentorship provides the humour, insight, and wisdom to allow early years teachers to navigate the often-complex workplace interactions and provide the support needed to pick up and keep going after a difficult day or a confronting conversation.

"The support of my own mentors in these areas has been central to longevity in my career.

"Without the intentional and strategic support of early years teachers in enacting the vision they have for themselves, in striving for professional growth, and in developing the toolkit of self-care and personal boundaries, I do not consider that the pattern of early years teachers leaving the professional will alter.

"We have reached a crossroads for the profession and capturing and retaining quality teachers demands flexibility and responsiveness to individual needs and to provide teachers with attractive avenues for professional growth and rewards."

## **Challenging educational philosophy**

Kerri-Anne maintains mentoring is not just for early years teachers though, and advocates for all teachers at every career stage to have a mentor.

"I would propose that all teachers need a mentor," Kerri-Anne said.

"Mentoring is central to a teacher thriving and I continue to seek and



*“We have reached a crossroads for the profession and capturing and retaining quality teachers demands flexibility and responsiveness to individual needs and to provide teachers with attractive avenues for professional growth and rewards.”*

access the guidance and advice of trusted colleagues.

“Even as an experienced teacher, I don’t possess all the answers or expertise, and forethought is required to approach different situations, often requiring a team approach.

“Initially, I was placed with mentor teachers with experience in the specific subject areas or year levels I taught.

“As I have matured professionally, I have actively sought my own mentors who fit into two categories - those who share a common educational philosophy and viewpoint, and the other category are those who do not shy away from the conversations that challenge my thinking about quality teaching and learning, not purely to give me the answers I might initially hope for.

“Professionally, these people have included my current and past principals, Heads of Department, fellow support teachers, as well as the support staff and teacher aides who enact the plans and ideas that I initiate for the benefit of students.”

### Combating the teacher shortage

With Australia’s teacher shortage reaching critical points, Kerri-Ann

believes employers must be responsive to individual needs if they are to attract and retain quality teaching staff.

“Managing workloads is particularly important in the current climate,” she said.

“Conversations around teacher shortage need to adopt practices and processes used in other sectors, including responsive approaches and flexibility to the workforce’s structure.

“Reducing the focus on administrative work and addressing individual’s needs must be common practice if schools are to secure and maintain a highly effective teaching workforce.”

### IEU membership matters

As a long-term IEU member, Kerri-Anne said union membership is important as both an avenue to seek individual support and to serve as a collective voice.

“I am an honest and forthright communicator who seeks out individual conversations to voice my insights and feedback.

“However, I am also aware that job security and the conditions afforded to me are because of the collective work of union chapters, and those who have advocated for these.”

Kerri-Anne said her professional goals include a return to further post-graduate study, given her genuine love of learning and self-improvement.

“At the risk of appearing simplistic, I seek most to continue to improve what I do each day,” she said.

“This job remains a genuine challenge for me.

“It is more challenging than ever to juggle the multitude of demands that constitute the role effectively.”

Kerri-Anne appreciates the support of her St Benedict’s colleagues and feels fortunate to be working in an encouraging and vibrant community.

“I was overwhelmed and extremely humbled to be recognised with the BCE Excellence Award this way, particularly as I was nominated by people whom I hold in the highest regard.

“I am extremely grateful to have supportive colleagues and leadership who cultivate an environment where I am motivated to be better each day, where I am personally valued and where I can be human.”

**Note:** Kerri-Anne is now employed at another school and remains an active union member.

# ANYONE AFTER

In this series we talk to IEU members about their diverse roles in education.

## Margaret Smith

Curriculum Support Officer – Secondary

**Every morning Margaret hits the ground running with the phones ringing hot as soon as she starts at 8am, plus a constant stream of parents, students and staff turning up at the front office, all needing help with something.**

She assists in running the front office at Holy Spirit College, Bellambi which is on the NSW South Coast in the Wollongong Diocese. Parents arrive for meetings with teachers, to drop off laptops, lunches, sports clothes, sports equipment or any other items their child has forgotten which they need for the day, or to pick up their child from sick bay or for appointments. It is a continual stream of parents all day.

Margaret covers the front office but also assists Student Services. The school's new office has been designed to be a one-stop shop, with both the front office and Student Services in the one area.

In between breaks from phone calls, front counter or Student Services, Margaret turns to emails and checks the daily bulletin seeing which staff are in or out, or what activity they are doing for the day. This allows office staff to know what is happening in the school when answering the phones and dealing with parent enquiries.

Once the morning rush of phone calls and walk-ins settles down, Margaret can focus on her other role as Curriculum



## Jodie Howard

Support Staff Officer – Primary

**Jodie works at Nazareth Catholic Primary School, Shellharbour City, which is on the NSW South Coast in the Wollongong Diocese.**

Her day kicks off when the children come in from their lines and she checks in with teachers to see what needs to be done and to see if any students need extra support.

"I make sure they are all prepared for the day," Jodie said.

For children who will access the learning centre in the morning, she makes sure they have completed Geography or History tasks set in the classroom the day before.

Then she starts independent learning plans with groups of children, or she might go to sport in the morning.

"It depends on the teachers and what they need."

In between working with students, Jodie might do some data entry for individual plans, some printing or photocopying or other administrative tasks.

"I do a bit of everything."



Officer, wrangling data for Semester One and Semester Two reports for all year groups from Years 7-12.

She also manages student requests to change course or subject, ensuring Compass, Edval and NESA databases are all up to date and that all relevant staff are aware of these changes.

*"We are all in this for the kids, so I don't like any mistakes to go out in their reports. It's not fair on them."*

subject, grades and data for each student. We have almost 1300 students at the college, each needing a half yearly and yearly report with a minimum of 10 subjects per student," Margaret said.

"We are all in this for the kids, so I don't like any mistakes to go out in their reports. It's not fair on them."

Margaret administers 'N' warning letters. These are sent to students who have not completed assessments. She said it is important to make sure these are sent out correctly.

"Can you imagine a student or parent getting a notification advising they are failing a subject when it is not actually correct?"

At lunchtime, the team has a split shift system to make sure there is always someone to cover the front office, phones and Student Services. This ensures the smooth running and

She manages excel spreadsheets with up to 15 different subjects depending on the year group. There are columns for Content, Assessment Strategies and Outcomes: these are all transferred to the Compass Markbook, which makes it easier for teachers to put their data entries into the reporting system.

"It must be approached methodically. It's important to get it right. We must make sure we have the correct

At recess and lunch times, Jodie is on the playground, supervising students, addressing any problems that may arise and checking in with students when there is a need.

*"I love seeing the children succeed and be happy. If I can make a difference to their lives, I feel I've achieved something."*

catch up with assessments, spelling and maths tests."

Jodie also does one-on-one reading and handwriting practice, or works on an iPad with a student, creating presentations or movies.

She has qualifications in special education, mental health awareness, literacy and numeracy support.

Although she performs many tasks, working with students is Jodie's passion.

"I love seeing the children succeed and be happy. If I can make a difference to their lives, I feel I've achieved something."

The afternoons are a bit quieter than the mornings, and Jodie spends most of her time in the classroom supporting students, catching up on any admin duties requested by teachers in the last 15 minutes of her day, after the children have gone home.

Jodie said the key to her role is agility - she can be requested to do a variety of tasks at any time.

"I could be helping with a science experiment, supporting another teacher while a teacher steps out, assisting students in the classroom, helping students

ready availability of a support officer at all times of the day. The office operates from 8am to 4pm.

The students often show their high regard for support staff by bringing in small gifts to the office.

Unfortunately, not all parents are respectful when they interact with the front office staff. Margaret said it is a common occurrence for a parent to become rude or abusive towards support staff, particularly if they've been informed their child has been placed on an in-school or out-of-school suspension or the student has phoned the parent themselves about some issue at school.

"It's water off a duck's back to me, but for some of the newer staff, it can be quite upsetting. We do get training on how to manage these types of situations. But nothing prepares you for a face-to-face confrontation. It does create a stressful environment and puts the office staff on edge when we are waiting for some parents that are repeat offenders."

Margaret said all support staff officers stick together and help each other out, no matter what is happening.

At the close of the day, Margaret ensures all shutters and doors are secured and the office is tidy and ready for the next day's onslaught.

"You never know what's going to happen when you turn up in the morning, the best laid plans can go awry very quickly. It's unpredictable and keeps you on your toes."

Jodie said support staff in Catholic schools are undervalued and should be paid more for what they do.

"If teachers didn't have support staff in the classroom, there would be many things that would not be achieved. We are the backbone supporting teachers who do a wonderful job. Without us who would do the things we do?"

"While pay is a big issue, for me, permanency is a real problem. Even though I've worked here for 19 years, I cannot get every day as a permanent, which quite frankly, stinks."

"I know of other staff members in Catholic schools, and they have had their days reduced.

"If young people cannot get permanent jobs in schools they are just going to move on. When the older, more experienced staff like me retire, there's going to be a gap, unless the system can change so people can get permanent work. At the moment it's unfair.

"But I love my job, and I wouldn't trade it for the world, because every day I know I make a difference in the life of a child."

# Compulsory consent education

## Teacher support crucial

**Mandating consent education in the new national curriculum is a positive development and a victory for those who have campaigned for compulsory sex education and respectful relationships education in all Australian schools.**

But what should delivering high-quality and nationally consistent consent education look like, particularly in faith-based and non-government schools?

Emily Campbell spoke to IEU principal member Silvana Rossetti about the importance of compulsory consent education in contemporary schooling.

### **The background context**

After years of increasing public pressure, education ministers across Australia unanimously decided in early 2022 that consent education would be mandatory in the national curriculum from 2023.

It comes at a time when a broader societal shift towards greater awareness of and disdain for gendered violence, gender inequity and discrimination is occurring.

Although experts agree it is difficult to pinpoint the exact date consent education began in Australia, given that it varied across states and territories, the beginning of sex education arrived in the 1980s.

However, consent education was never mandatory for all schools to teach because the curriculum was open to interpretation, meaning non-government schools were given the discretion and flexibility to avoid broaching the subject.

Version 9.0 of the Australian curriculum includes a key change to “strengthen the explicit teaching of consent and respectful relationships in age-appropriate ways”.

As a woman principal at an all-boys’ Catholic secondary school, Rossetti acknowledges that schools have a role and responsibility in educating students, particularly boys, to become young men who treat women and other men with respect.

“Whilst the academic component of schools is essential and initially the main reason for the introduction of schools, the world we find ourselves living in today is very different from 200 years ago,” Rossetti said.

“To best prepare our young people to successfully navigate themselves in the world they live in, we need to teach them the social and critical thinking skills they will require.

“Teaching consent is about permission, kindness, empathy, reciprocity, generosity, and how to show respect for ourselves and others.

“Consent and respectful relationship education encourages children to be critical thinkers about disrespectful attitudes and behaviours.

“It also gives children and young people fundamental, internal decision-making skills and knowledge of the nuances of consent communication, so that they can take them into all relationships, when they are older, hopefully enabling them to be valuable members of society.”

### **Equipping students academically and socially**

Last year Rossetti attended a panel discussion on consent education at the IEU NSW/ACT June Council, that she said was an important conversation in which to be involved.

“The panel discussion highlighted the importance of raising awareness of current and potential issues for our young people so that they can be

well informed and equipped with the knowledge and skills to make decisions that are right for them and their context as well as being made aware of their rights,” she said.

“With our young people being exposed to so much information via technology, it is important more than ever that we are all educated in this area not only to know our legal obligations but also to ensure we have the skills to assess the reliability and validity of the information we are engaging with.

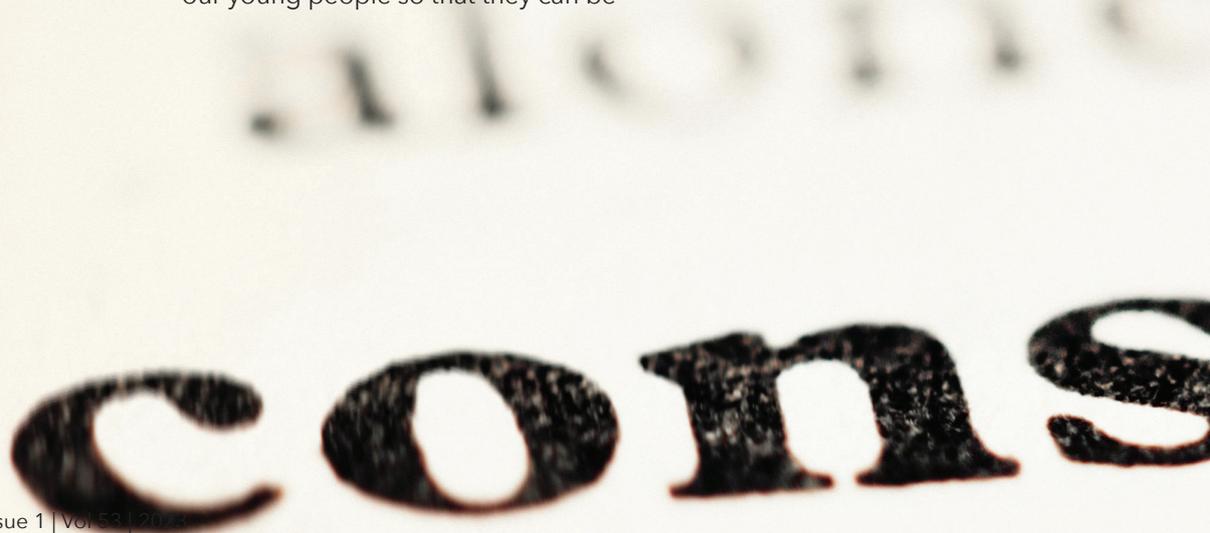
“As an educator, you always aim to work with your families to develop the students in your care both academically and socially, equipping them with the knowledge and skills they will require to be successful in life.

“It would be the hope that education in this area would educate thoughtful, compassionate, caring humans while improving general wellbeing and reducing widespread discrimination.”

Rossetti said Australians were fortunate to be afforded the freedom to send their children to a school that aligns with their values and beliefs.

“With this in mind, being respectful to all, high-quality consent and respectful education in schools should involve developing students’ skills, attitudes and understanding of gender inequality, respectful, equal and non-violent relationships in line with the ethos and values on which the school is founded.

“Learning about respectful relationships has been linked to students showing improved academic outcomes, more positive social behaviour, lower rates of mental health problems and less likely to engage in violent, risky and disruptive behaviour.”



### Recognising teaching opportunities

Rossetti said when trying to develop a culture of respectful relationships, it is best to deliver the learning contextually and authentically through the existing curriculum whilst using opportunities that present themselves through events like assemblies and year meetings.

"This provides an opportunity to reinforce concepts and messaging about respect, equality and kindness using examples from the school community to highlight this," Rossetti said.

"Through programs such as the Pastoral Care or Enrichment program, you can deliver Social and Emotional Learning programs to reinforce your message and provide clear examples of respectful behaviour and relationships.

"This time can also be used to explicitly teach positive behaviour and respect for others.

"During interactions with students, teachers can model restorative approaches and strategies that facilitate students to develop skills such as problem solving and empathy.

"Certain curriculums, such as the Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) curriculum, provide authentic opportunities to teach and reinforce consent education," she said.

### Professional development necessary

Employer support of teachers and support staff will be essential to successfully embedding consent education in classrooms.

"Employers should be supporting their teaching staff by providing them with the relevant professional learning and resources to be used in delivering this curriculum," Rossetti said.

"Consent education needs a collaborative approach both in the home and in the classroom.

"It also needs to align with the values and beliefs of the school - this is the school that the parents have chosen to send their children to with the understanding that home and school values are aligned.

"With technology making it so easy to create your own websites, become an influencer, post the information (not always providing true information) it is more important than ever to work with our families to ensure young people are grounded in their faith and values, and equipped with the skills required to make good choices in life.

"We should never bury our heads in the sand but rather address issues as they arise so students can learn and ask questions in a safe and supportive environment," she said.

IEUA Assistant Federal Secretary Brad Hayes said our union wholeheartedly supported the introduction of mandatory consent education in Australian schools and said teachers would need to be supported as the new program is delivered.

"The quality and consistency of consent education in the non-government sector and across states and territories has been difficult to fully assess in the past," Hayes said.

"The government's commitment to mandate national consent education this year in all Australian schools is an important part of a community-wide strategy to prevent sexual harassment and violence.

"Age-appropriate consent education is vital in providing safer classrooms, and ultimately safer workplaces and homes for women and girls.

"Contemporary curriculum materials, professional development and planning time for teachers will be essential to ensure teachers are well-supported and have adequate resources to deliver the new requirement successfully," he said.

Various states and territories have published a comprehensive suite of consent education resources for students of all age groups to support the implementation of consent education in classrooms.

IEU members can learn more about consent education in the Australian curriculum and access the resources from states and territories listed below online at <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/curriculum-connections/portfolios/respect-matters/>

[australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/curriculum-connections/portfolios/respect-matters/](https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/curriculum-connections/portfolios/respect-matters/)

### Resources from states and territories

**PDHPE Teacher Toolkit: Prevention of Domestic Violence** - New South Wales [http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus\\_sc/domestic-violence-prevention.html](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_sc/domestic-violence-prevention.html)

**Respectful relationships education program - Queensland** <https://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/stages-of-schooling/respectful-relationships>

**Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum - South Australia** <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/schools-and-educators/curriculum-and-teaching/curriculum-programs/keeping-safe-child-protection-curriculum-information-educators>

**Respectful Relationships Teaching and Learning package - Tasmania** <https://respectfulrelationships.education.tas.gov.au/>

**Resilience, rights and respectful relationships - Victoria** <https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/ResourcePackage/LandingPage?ObjectId=0249f9d6-e536-4122-9298-dbd3d6b29808&Check=1>

**Building Respectful Relationships - Victoria** <http://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/Resource/LandingPage?ObjectId=03bdca34-62ec-4f30-aca0-8262db67c2db>

**Growing and developing healthy relationships - Western Australia** <https://gdhr.wa.gov.au/learning-activities-by-topic/respectful-relationships>



# The right to disconnect

**The right to disconnect from work communications has emerged as a significant workplace industrial issue. Workers in schools are overworked, stressed, and exhausted. Many are leaving the profession and a teacher shortage is biting. The expectation that they are always “on call” for their employer and students and their parents, exacerbates workload intensification, Will Brodie writes.**

ACTU secretary Sally McManus says its essential that working people can disconnect from work tasks; if we don't have clear boundaries separating work and the rest of our lives, we end up performing even more unpaid work and damaging our mental health.

Members of the European Parliament have called for the right to disconnect to be a fundamental right, saying the 'always on' culture increases the risk of burnout, anxiety, and depression. Under their model, staff members would not be contacted outside their working hours, except in an emergency.

Already, six European nations have right to disconnect laws.

## **One size doesn't fit all**

Australian unions are now arguing for a 'right to disconnect' as part of their workplace agreements.

The IEU Queensland/Northern Territory Branch (IEU-QNT) has tabled a 'right to disconnect' claim in its current bargaining in Queensland Catholic schools. Its position recognises that such provisions need to suit the staff in each school: "Each school will establish through consultation with staff an agreed span of hours for the purposes of this clause."

In schools with a School Consultative Committee (SCC), that body would manage the consideration of when staff are not able to be contacted. In schools without a SCC, the principal would be required to undertake the consultation with all employees.

This position recognises that one size doesn't fit all when it comes to expectations about being 'connected'. Some research warns against being too restrictive, at the risk of creating distress for some.

Researchers at the University of Sussex in the UK who examined 'right to disconnect' rules found workers who were 'banned' from checking emails after work felt more stressed than when they were allowed to do so.

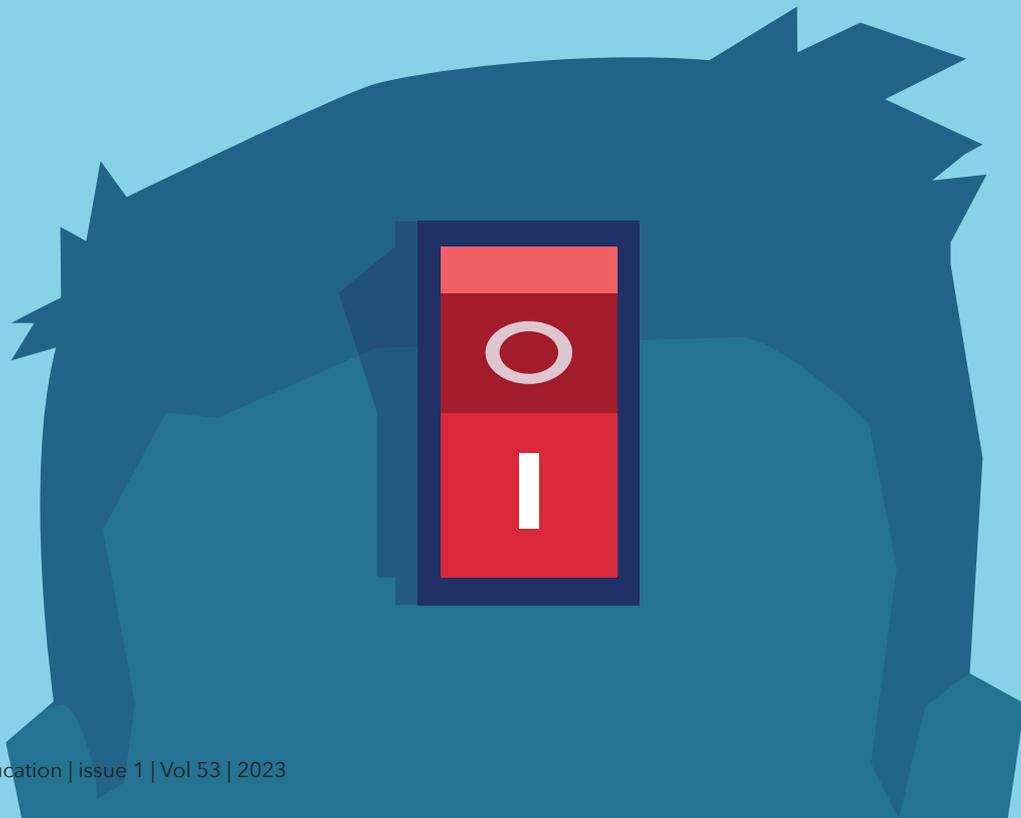
Emma Russell, lead researcher of the study said, "people need to deal with email in the way that suits their personality and their goal priorities in order to feel like they are adequately managing their workload".

Marcus Butts, a management professor at Southern Methodist University, says after-hours connectivity can be beneficial.

"Being able to attend to after-work emails after the kids go to bed allows you to set up for the next day," he says, likening it to "parking downhill".

## **Hard to enforce**

A *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial suggested, "While it might help to write the broad principles into workplace agreements, this is such a complicated area that employers and employees will still have to show flexibility in working out the details".



Expectations in one workplace may not suit another. Workplace lawyer Samantha Maddern says, "... any 'right to disconnect' would still need to be sufficiently flexible to meet operational needs and accommodate employees' reasonable needs."

Legal and employment blog *On Labor* identified shortcomings of existing right to disconnect laws, including a lack of clarity and enforceability.

Many such laws don't create an obligation to disconnect. "This often shifts the burden of disconnecting to the worker. While proponents of laws framed without such an obligation to disconnect might suggest this allows the workers to take control and choose whether to disconnect or not, the reality is more complicated.

"Workers may feel pressure from their employers or managers, or desire to get ahead by being more available, and thus may still opt to connect and respond to online communications after hours. In turn, this may disadvantage those who choose to exercise their right to disconnect and deter those that otherwise would."

The IEU-QNT clause is therefore adamant that it is the responsibility of schools to make it clear what is expected of staff: "Each school has a positive duty to advise students, parents and the school community of the employees' right to disconnect and the agreed operational protocols".

Those protocols would include an agreed span of hours when employees may be contacted and an agreed response time which includes consideration of weekends, vacation periods and holidays.

*On Labor* suggests technology might assist in protecting the boundary between work and home. Automatic prompts could remind senders that their message is out-of-hours. Servers could delay delivery of any email sent at night or over the weekend.

Luc Pansu, evaluating right to disconnect legislation for the *International Journal of Management and Applied Research*, offered other suggestions:

- Choose face-to-face contact over electronic communication where possible
- Add additional messages in emails reminding that the sender does not expect an immediate answer (except when there is a genuine emergency)
- Exclude emailing recipients who are on holidays. (For important matters, the sender will have to send another message when the recipient comes back from holiday)
- Deactivate email functionalities like "reply to all".

Pansu says the large majority of participating workers, even managers, welcome the laws.

However, in most organisations, "short-term results and financial performance seems to prevail over concerns of wellbeing, better working conditions and long-lasting productivity".

Good intentions don't reduce workloads. No employer or school leader says they want their teachers to be overloaded, but they are, and workload demands continue to increase.

Unions are setting the pace on the right to disconnect provisions in the face of increasing demands on staff for 24/7 connectedness.

Australian Unions reported on teachers in the ACT being expected to respond to late night emails from students and parents and were "bombarded" with calls when on sick leave. Supervisors sent text messages to staff asking them to pick up textbooks at sales on the weekend.

Stories such as these would be familiar to teachers all over the country.

Collective action makes a difference and unionists are leveraging their presence in the workplace.

At some schools there are "walk-arounds at 5:30pm" to ensure that staff have left for the day. Another school issued an all-staff direction not to communicate out of hours about work matters, except in the case of an emergency.

"If a school has a strong and active union presence, the right (to disconnect) is well-enforced."

Victoria Police employees negotiated right to disconnect provisions in 2021. Managers now have to "respect leave and rest days and avoid contacting officers outside work hours, unless in an emergency or to check on their welfare".

Victoria Police Association of Victoria Secretary Wayne Gatt told ABC News, "it's really important that as much as possible... we introduce some barriers so our members can wind down, so they can return to normal".

"That's so important for their mental health and wellbeing."

"We need to put the brakes on some of the things our members do outside of their working hours, so that we can keep them at their best and we can keep them helping the community for a long and productive career," he said.

Gatt could just as readily be describing burnt out teachers.

'Right to Disconnect' provisions are not a silver bullet, but they can help address the workload and work intensification scourge if they are developed with the input of employees and drawing on the insights and expertise of the union movement.

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*"Even within a single workplace, any right would need to be flexible to meet operational needs and accommodate employees' reasonable needs. A one-size-fits-all approach absolutely will not work."*



**Above:** Students from Holy Family Parish School and St Patrick's Primary School Trundle form the Wiradjuri word for 'sorry' on the school oval. **Below:** Students wearing masks they made while learning how the kangaroo got its tail.



*"Now I'm proud to say 'I'm Indigenous'. Learning for the children has meant learning for myself and regaining my culture and my connection."*

# Lessons in Wiradjuri

**Wiradjuri language and culture lessons are a regular part of the timetable for all year groups at Holy Family Parish School Parkes, NSW, Sue Osborne writes.**

Principal Denise Gersbach said the school's journey to including Wiradjuri language and culture in every aspect of school life was a long one.

"Some years ago, the bare bones were being done. More was needed," Gersbach said.

The school was able to access some funding from the Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes Education Office to employ a Wiradjuri tutor for one year.

The Wiradjuri nation is the biggest in NSW, and the language is the most widely spoken Aboriginal tongue in Australia. Stan Grant Senior (the father of journalist Stan Grant) has been instrumental in a language revival movement around Parkes, Dubbo, Young and Forbes.

Grant Senior's grandfather was arrested in the 1940s for speaking Wiradjuri to his son in the street. He spent a night in the cell and never spoke his language in public again.

In 2010 Grant Senior and Dr John Rudder published the 600-page *A New Wiradjuri Dictionary*. Grant Senior also initiated a two-year Wiradjuri course at Charles Sturt University.

The introduction of language and culture to Holy Family has been a challenging journey for Aboriginal Education Worker (AEW) Donna Payne, who has worked at Holy Family for 10 years.

Every Wednesday afternoon she attends Parkes Wiradjuri Language Group with elder Geoff Anderson, and other Aboriginal Education Officers from Parkes. Holy Family is the only Catholic school in Parkes.

They learn the Wiradjuri language and make videos and recordings

to share their languages with the wider community. Before she started attending these classes, Payne said she was not well informed about her own language and culture.

"My grandmother never spoke about it. She was brought up being told not to. So there was only so much information I could get. But Geoff [Anderson] has taught me a lot more.

"Now I'm proud to say 'I'm Indigenous'. Learning for the children has meant learning for myself and regaining my culture and my connection."

Payne went to Holy Family herself as a child and said there was no language and culture teaching at that time.

"If we'd have had the kind of education that the children are getting now, I think there'd have been less discrimination back in the day.

"Nowadays it just comes naturally to me to be proud of who I am, but it wasn't always like that."

### Raising cultural awareness

She said everyone has pulled together, the principal, the diocese and the community, and that's why the introduction of Wiradjuri had been such a success.

"We've had our ups and downs, but Denise [Gersbach] has always believed in it and backed me up."

Payne teaches fortnightly 30-minute language and culture lessons for Years K-6.

Gersbach said, "Every student and staff members' cultural awareness has been raised."

"The fortnightly lessons support other KLAs [key learning areas]. It's an integral part of school life, with lots of sacred spaces around the school, language everywhere you look.

"The students used to go to the high school or Red Bend Catholic College to access dance. Now they have started their own Aboriginal dance group using what they've learnt about culture.

"The CEO has provided cultural resources and Donna has created scope and sequencing.

"Students love it and are very engaged. The infants love dancing and movement in class or hearing a Dreamtime story."

The number of students identifying as First Nations at the school has almost doubled from less than 20 to almost 40.

"The Aboriginal students find it a fantastic recognition of their culture. It unites all students."

Gersbach said parents have also responded positively.

"This is not an extra, this is who we are. It's just what's expected."

### A voice for all

Payne said children love her classes, as everyone has equal opportunity.

"Doesn't matter if they're really quiet, or have trouble settling, if they're doing really well at maths or not, in Wiradjuri everyone get to have their voice. It encourages respect for everyone."

Payne said Parkes has become a centre for Indigenous language. "Before, you had to go overseas to see examples of good Indigenous language and learning. Now people are coming to Parkes."

She is on the executive committee of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group in Parkes, which invites First Nations students from each school in the area to participate in community roles such as ANZAC Day, NAIDOC Week and Sorry Day ceremonies. The Junior AECG also hold regular meetings to discuss the happenings in each school and this gives the children a voice and active role in the community.



**Above: Stairs showing the numbers 1-10 in Wiradjuri. Below: AEW Donna Payne teaches Dreamtime stories with an infants class.**



Gersbach said she has observed students participating in these formal activities growing in confidence and responsibility.

Gersbach and Payne recently travelled to Leura in the Blue Mountains to present 'Birrang, Our Wiradjuri Journey' at the Catholic Schools NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander State Education Conference 2022.

IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Organiser Jackie Groom attended the conference and described their presentation as "inspiring".

Other principals and even some Wilcannia-Forbes Catholic Education Office staff, who were not aware of the extent of the school's achievements, were keen to learn more after seeing their presentation.

"The journey's not over, we want to keep moving forward," Gersbach said.

# What is education for?

**Funding. NAPLAN. Phonics. Equity. Teacher training. AI. Insane teacher workloads. How to teach. How to assess students. How to improve results and standards. Education faces huge challenges and the debates about its fundamentals are more bitter than ever, Will Brodie writes.**

About the only thing that unites entrenched foes in those debates is the conviction that education is very important, because it shapes the next batch of citizens. Who vote.

These intractable ideological positions determine the policy decisions of senior bureaucrats and politicians.

So, what is education is for, according to these people?

Researcher Luke Zaphir, Researcher at the University of Queensland says the “philosophical framework” of pragmatism underpins the dominant view of education.

“It (education) is a tool to be used to bring about a specific outcome (or set of outcomes). For the most part, this purpose is economic.

“Why go to school? So you can get a job.

“Education benefits you personally because you get to have a job, and it benefits society because you contribute to the overall productivity of the country, as well as paying taxes.”

It’s a strain of thinking he traces back to the “incredibly focused system” of the Ancient Greeks, under which rich males received a complete education that fostered their thinking skills and knowledge of the arts and sciences.

Most of the populace – women, manual workers, and the poor, went without.

Early in the 20th century, John Dewey exemplified new thinking which held that society, not the individual, was responsible for the “fostering the mental attitudes it wished to see in its citizens”, and education should be for “building mentally healthy human beings and fully developed citizens”.

This sentiment found full expression in 1948’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the historic document hammered out by nations of the world in response to the horrors of the Second World War. It held that “education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”.

## **Economic or social?**

This view is central to the second goal of the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young

Australians: “All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens”.

(The first goal is “Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence”.)

By contrast, Zaphir quotes the Australian Department of Education mission statement: “By lifting outcomes, the government helps to secure Australia’s economic and social prosperity”.

On the one hand, education, like any other venture, should be held accountable and measured strictly, in search of constant improvements.

Conversely, education should nurture the person and their inherent capabilities and anything else is secondary.

Former principal and Save Our Schools commentator John Frew says making economic competitiveness the priority is a “major impediment” to effective education.

He accepts the necessity of training children for occupations but says the real goals of education are



developing a sense of self; social skills; autonomy; and a sense of purpose.

He believes the qualities of the child should be the foundation of education.

By contrast, Kevin Donnelly, writing for *The Australian* demands a “more market-driven system where schools are pressured to improve”.

Acclaimed educator Sir Ken Robinson, the most watched speaker in TED Conference history, identified education as a “contested concept” like “democracy” and “justice”. That means a definition of it cannot be agreed upon because people hold such contrasting views of it: the word ‘education’ means different things to different people.

Robinson believes education should “enlarge our worldview” and “expand our consciousness, capabilities, sensitivities, and cultural understanding”.

His core purpose of education breaks down into four basic purposes.

**PERSONAL** Education should enable young people to engage with the world within them as well as the world around them.

**CULTURAL** Schools should enable students to understand their own cultures and to respect the diversity of others.

**ECONOMIC** Education should enable students to become economically responsible and independent.

**SOCIAL** Education should enable young people to become active and compassionate citizens.

Robinson says the “new and urgent challenge” is to “provide forms of education that engage young people with the global-economic issues of environmental wellbeing”.

One of the most eloquent statements of that perspective came way back in 1990, when environmental educator David Orr told the graduating class of Arkansas College that “all education is environmental education”. To teach economics, for example, ecology and physics must be considered.

Orr believed the goal of education is not mastery of subject matter, but of one’s person, and knowledge carries with it the responsibility “to see that it is well used in the world”.

He also said, “we cannot say that we know something until we understand the effects of this knowledge on real people and their communities”.

As an example of this, he discussed how the town near where he grew up was “largely destroyed by corporate decisions to ‘disinvest’ in the economy of the region”.

“In this case MBAs, educated in the tools of leveraged buyouts, tax breaks, and capital mobility have done what no invading army could do: they destroyed an American city with total impunity on behalf of something called the ‘bottom line’.

“But the bottom line for society includes other costs, those of unemployment, crime, higher divorce rates, alcoholism, child abuse, lost savings, and wrecked lives.”

Sarah Hopp, the Student Disability and Neurodiversity Manager at the University of London, says teachers are often caught up in “fulfilling the requirements of the curriculum, in meeting targets and ensuring value for money.”

She believes it’s crucial that teachers frequently ask themselves what the purpose of education is “in order to properly understand our ethos and values as educators and determine whether we are living out those values in our daily educational practice”.

“There needs to be a move away from an education system that is based on accountability, surveillance, and perfectionism...”

“We tell our students that failure is part of life’s learning journey and to see mistakes as learning experiences, yet we also tell them to strive, through meritocratic contests, for a perfect knowledge that does not exist.

“Similarly, we tell teachers to constantly reflect and not be afraid to experiment with new and dynamic techniques. Yet often education policy holds professionals to account, creating a profession that is fraught with pressure, stress, and anxiety.”

Hopp says we should maintain high expectations of ourselves and our students but if we prioritise human relationships, we’re more likely to “fulfil our potential, to flourish and to become truly ‘educated’ rather than merely ‘trained’”.

In 2015, the Governor of Wisconsin Scott Walker tried to remove words in the state code that command the University of Wisconsin to “search for truth” and “improve the human condition”, replacing them with “meet the state’s workforce needs.”

Walker backed off after intense criticism, but his attempt focused national debate in the US about the purpose of education.

Educator Arthur H. Camins simplified things by saying education “doesn’t have to be either-or”.

“Education should prepare young people for life, work and citizenship.”

Such a balanced viewpoint can seem transgressive in such a polarised policy debate. The sensible middle made radical!

Maybe it offers an example of wisdom emerging from either side of the great divide.

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*“We cannot say that we know something until we understand the effects of this knowledge on real people and their communities.”*



# THE PERSONAL IT TOUCH

**“The aim of personalised learning is to tailor the education system to meet the individual needs, interests, and abilities of each student.”**

**Sounds great. Something all teachers would support. How does it work? Will Brodie finds out.**

“Technology and data analysis identify strengths and weaknesses, adapt teaching methods, and provide customised resources and feedback to students. The aim is to enhance student engagement, motivation, and achievement by offering a unique learning experience to each student.”

Okay.

But does personalised learning (PL) work?

Maya Gunawardena, Assistant Professor, University of Canberra, says PL “makes sense”.

But it is not a “magic wand” and “we need to think carefully about how it is rolled out”.

She described PL as a “paradigm shift” for many schools, teachers, parents, and communities accustomed to “mass education”.

For it to succeed, overtaxed teachers would need to be assured it wouldn’t lead to more work and wary parents would have to be convinced about the potential benefits for their children.

Others believe unless PL is examined more closely, it will create perverse outcomes.

Alan Reid, Professor Emeritus of Education, University of South Australia, told *The Conversation* that PL can mean a flexible approach which starts with each student’s individual strengths and capabilities, and encourages a wide range of learning activities.

Or it can be used to justify a “program of rigid and scripted individual learning progressions”.

Reid fears the “direct instruction” model developed in the US in the 1960s,

a “tightly scripted, step-by-step approach that follows a predetermined sequence through packaged resource materials”.

Tests align to behavioural goals, leading to an “inevitable reliance on the use of online resources”, and a “hyper-rational approach to curriculum and pedagogy that limits students’ agency, narrows what they can learn in school, and limits schools’ ability to respond effectively to a diverse student body”.

In Reid’s worst-case scenario the only winners are private technology companies which track students and devise their learning programs. Individual students become “automatons” moving through standardised progression levels.

“Creativity and critical thinking are stifled as students are steered down an already determined path. And teachers are increasingly excluded from the process, as planning and decision-making is done by algorithms.

"The result is a narrow and highly individualised learning experience that is unlikely to prepare students adequately for the challenges of the 21st century."

### Investing in high-tech education

*Forbes* journalist Natalie Wexler points out that the data on PL was "inconclusive at best".

"The most encouraging study to date found that PL had a modest positive effect on math test scores and no significant impact on scores in reading. But other studies have found that some personalised learning programs can reduce students' enjoyment of learning or make them less likely to feel there's an adult at their school who knows them well."

Wexler pointed out that kids don't necessarily want to do what algorithms want them to; teachers feared PL was a ploy to reduce their numbers in schools; children would choose the path of least resistance if not pushed; and parents were worried about misuse of their children's data.

And if everyone learns something different, students lose much of the essence of the school experience, "the opportunity for group discussion, the excitement of bouncing ideas off of fellow students, and the guidance that a teacher ideally provides".

Wexler concedes personalisation can play a "valuable role in some aspects of education". She says PL could work for math "where a defined set of skills need to be practiced".

"But it's only a delivery system. The real question is what is being delivered."

Instructional designer Caroline Focke, writing for ADInstruments, a company which creates tools for life science research and education, says it's understandable that schools look for alternatives to the "one size fits all" approach.

"For example, one student might excel at math but has difficulty learning new languages as they prefer to learn visually. While another student might be the opposite. Different approaches are required to best support both students' learning. This is what PL aims to do; provide the best possible educational journey for each student."

She says technology can provide each student with individual learning material based on their "knowledge gaps, learning pace and preferences". Educators can better track students' progress.

She believes PL can potentially lead to higher student retention "because every student is supported on his/her level and therefore won't feel overwhelmed".

"Learning will be more inclusive for students with language barriers and disabilities. A more flexible teaching environment makes it easier to adapt to students' busy lives and other commitments."

However, Focke is also wary about PL, saying it "might lead to less social interaction and subsequent behavioural issues".

It could also widen inequality if its technology is not available to all students.

"Currently, there is little evidence that personalised learning actually increases students' success rates. There is a lot of potential for AI to be an aide for teachers to enable them to focus more on supporting students, however, we are not at a stage of completely self-guided learning yet."

*"Currently, there is little evidence that personalised learning actually increases students' success rates."*

### Pros and cons

A review of PL literature by Caitlin Swan from the University of Canterbury, New Zealand also found good and bad news stories about PL.

Benefits included improved academic performance, fewer behavioural problems, increased motivation, and better teacher-student relationships. But several studies indicated implementing PL without increasing student agency can increase student disengagement.

One study found that implementing PL can "perpetuate existing inequalities" and "marginalising low achieving, lower class, or minority culture students".

Swan concluded that further research was needed to understand how to implement PL successfully.

Cognitive scientist Rishabh Khanna told the *Times of India* that modern education technology resembles India's ancient guru-shishya tutoring relationship, based on "a mentor or teacher (guru) imparting knowledge and guidance to a student, who is considered to be the guru's 'shishya' or disciple..."

"The teacher or mentor provided individual instruction and guidance to each student, taking into account their unique strengths, abilities, and learning needs."

"This was done to help students feel more engaged and motivated in their studies and to allow them to progress at their own pace."

Khanna says edtech companies are similarly using "adaptive learning algorithms, and personalised learning plans to provide each student with a customised learning experience that is tailored to their individual needs, interests, and learning style".

Historically, in the guru-shishya model, the teacher was not just a source of knowledge but also a mentor and guide who made students feel supported and encouraged as they learned.

"Edtechs today are also using AI-powered learning assistants and chatbots to provide students with instant feedback and answers to their questions and to help them stay on track with their studies."

However, Khanna says PL's modern-day guru-shishya models "are yet to find their balance in the constant renegotiation between tradition and modernity".

Nearly every educational expert who appraises PL expresses enthusiasm about its potential, then reservations about its current iterations.

Some PL liberates learners, some entraps them. Reis's warning is most stark.

"The version of personalised learning Australia promotes should be one that nurtures a love and a passion for learning, not one that reduces it to a checklist."

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# AI revolution *is on its way*

**It doesn't herald the apocalypse, but it won't be a passing fad - the advent of Artificial Intelligence ChatGPT cannot be ignored by educators, Will Brodie writes.**

Former Google Vice President Hugh Williams told Education HQ ChatGPT "could herald a revolution in education comparable to the invention of the internet".

When ChatGPT launched in December 2022, it was immediately obvious that it threatened any education system based on written assessments. An epidemic of cheating was predicted. "Goodbye homework," Elon Musk said.

ChatGPT is a software program that writes like a human. Type a question into the free ChatGPT chat window and you instantly receive a competent, grammatically sound, correctly punctuated, perfectly spelled written response based on the AI's reading of millions of articles and books. The words can come in any style requested: rap battle, iambic pentameter...

## **Or a Year 10 essay**

And you can have a 'conversation' with GPT, asking more questions to further explore your topic.

The user can then copy and paste the responses to form a credible 'answer' for an assignment.

The Queensland, NSW, Victorian and Tasmanian departments of education announced they would block students from accessing the chatbot, following the lead of New York City education officials who moved to prevent its use on school networks and devices.

"I wouldn't presume to be an Education Department executive and have to make those kinds of decisions, but what I would say is that this technology is here and it's here to stay - it's going to get better," Williams said.

"I think students are going to find a way to use it, even if you try and block them on the school network. And I think as a profession, teachers and education departments are going to ultimately need to embrace this and figure out how to get students to use it in the right way, understand it, and adapt the way they teach and the way they run their schools to incorporate this kind of technology."

Williams compared the onset of AI to the emergence of the world wide web in the 1990s, when students stopped reading as many books and conducting "deep research" at the library.

Jeremy Weinstein, a professor at Stanford University, told The Age the AI revolution will make the world "completely different". He said "overwhelmed" schools, teachers and regulators aren't ready for the technology and don't have the



*"We must embrace the chaos that ChatGPT will bring, let go of the ways of working and thinking that it makes redundant, and look for the ways in which, like writing and print, it can free our minds to do more and to reach further."*

infrastructure to “allow the benefits of this technology and mitigate its potential harms”.

In January an anonymous survey of 4500 Stanford students found that 17 per cent had used ChatGPT in their final exams and assignments.

However, there are educational experts who say the AI shake-up is required.

### **AI will change education because education needs to change**

Those who welcome ChatGPT say it will banish the outmoded reliance on written responses to questions, which they consider a major shortcoming of modern education.

Age commentator Adam Voigt, a former principal, insisted that despite the “panicked reaction among the teaching fraternity” to ChatGPT, the advent of AI technology was not an “existential threat to the role of teachers” though it will “fundamentally change the way we educate”.

“Any assessment that a student completes independently at home is now going to be compromised.

“Finally, unable to justify trudging the tired path of delivering a lecture at school, setting a task, collecting the task, marking the task and returning a grade that has so slowed our educational progress.”

He says the integrity of a student’s learning will be impossible to determine unless they are under direct supervision, so “the very formula for educating them will finally be forced to change”.

Writing for *The Atlantic*, Ian Bogost said he’s glad “dumb” ChatGPT will hasten the demise of take-home essay exams, “a stupid format that everyone hates but nobody has the courage to kill”.

Academic Dan Dixon says, “AI is to prose what a calculator is to maths”, and assessment processes are currently given priority over learning.

“Students are reduced to an essay, and an essay to a grade.”

Digital education expert Matt Miller says AI will “eventually start to push some of those terrible assignments out and force us to come up with something new”.

“It’ll probably be painful, and many of us will probably hate parts of the process. But in the end, we will evolve to something better.”

*Forbes* senior contributor Peter Greene says the teaching of writing too often requires students to follow a set format. A common example is the ‘five paragraph essay’, consisting of main ideas, supporting ideas, and conclusion.

“Teachers end up grading students not on the quality of their end product, but on how well they followed the teacher-required algorithm.”

Experimenting with ChatGPT, Greene found that “to get a better result from the program, the user has to put the kind of detail and thought into their instructions that should be used for writing the essay themselves”.

This irony offers a hint to the possible uses of the technology.

Media analyst Ben Thompson suggest the real skill in future homework assignments will be in verifying the (often faulty) answers an AI system churns out, so students learn how to be “a verifier and an editor, instead of a regurgitator”.

In a University of NSW round-panel discussion academics from four disciplines agreed that AI will be a “fantastic personal tutor”, its infinite patience and consistency would be a boon for people with autism and it could “level the playing field” for people with disabilities.

Arts, Design and Architecture Professor Cath Ellis said because AI can’t feel, and doesn’t have emotion, its use will force us to value “the things that are truly human”.

Law and Justice Professor Lyria Bennett Moses said ChatGPT would be useful for simple tasks in minor matters where the information was repeated. But AI has no creativity.

“No AI would have written the Mabo decision... it took creativity to say no, given history, we need to fundamentally rethink this matter”. Artificial Intelligence like ChatGPT, based on previous information, has no ability to “go beyond what came previously”.

### **Knowledge is no longer power**

Writer and academic John Weldon points out that in the fifth century, writing itself was feared as the great disruptor by philosopher Socrates, who worried it would “bring about mass forgetfulness and ignorance”.

Weldon says the onset of writing and then the printed word were feared because they “questioned accepted modes of knowledge creation, husbandry and control”.

But he believes these days, “power and worth now lie in the ability to synthesise information to form new and innovative ideas.”

Als like ChatGPT are threatening because they have the potential to do that synthesis for us.

However, he believes that tools that do the grunt work of synthesis can offer us more time to innovate and create.

“We must embrace the chaos that ChatGPT will bring, let go of the ways of working and thinking that it makes redundant, and look for the ways in which, like writing and print, it can free our minds to do more and to reach further.”

### **ChatGPT’s top three ways to help teachers (according to ChatGPT)**

- 1 Automating Grading: ChatGPT can grade student writing assignments by providing automated feedback on grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors.
- 2 Lesson Planning: ChatGPT can provide ideas, resources, and suggestions for activities.
- 3 Content Creation: ChatGPT can help teachers generate writing prompts, discussion questions, and quizzes.

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# A warm welcome

**Collective action and community spirit shone through as the small town of Molong in central-west NSW made a new home for a group of Ukrainian refugees, writes Monica Crouch.**

In early 2022, Pip Waters, a music teacher at James Sheahan Catholic High School in Orange, NSW, made inquiries about supporting refugees from the war in Ukraine.

After hearing nothing for months, Waters received a call asking if she could pick up a family that week. This family turned out to be Vika and Alex Volodin and their two small sons, who had not yet started school. Waters welcomed the family to her home.

She then spoke to IEU member Matthew French, a teacher at St Joseph's Primary School in Molong, about 30 kilometres away, and asked if he'd like to be involved. He said he would.

They knocked on the local Parish Priest's door. "They said they were passionate about doing something to address the need of Ukrainian refugees. Could the church help?" Father Bellamy said to ABC 7.30, on 9 November 2022. "Could I assist them in any way? After having some discussions, we realised that we have an empty building in Molong."

That empty building was an old convent that had fallen into disrepair. What followed was a remarkable example of unity and purpose as Molong residents and other keen helpers came from far and wide to renovate the convent and make it a home for the displaced Ukrainians.

The Molong community has since welcomed a group of nine refugees, including two families, two children, a grandmother and a niece from Zaporizhzhia in south-eastern Ukraine, who has courageously come to Australia without her parents.

"We really hope this will be a home for them," Father Bellamy said.

Ukrainian refugee Alex Volodin said: "I'm very happy to live here and very, very happy [for] my family, and it's good for my children."

## Rapid renovation

Converting the convent became a 12-week community project. Along with St Joseph's and

James Sheahan, several other schools from nearby Orange were involved, including Kinross Wolaroi, Catherine McAuley Catholic Primary School and St Mary's Catholic Primary.

Each school took on a room to renovate, with St Joseph's taking the kitchen.

But it wasn't all smooth sailing. "I got an estimate on how much it would cost to fix the convent overall - well over \$200,000 - and that was going to be a problem," French says.

"So I got in touch with a lady called Mary Mulhall - she's, like, the matriarch of Molong. She's a wonderful lady who can just drum up support at the click of her fingers. You know, people come running to help Mary, she's a beautiful person and she's strong."

So Mary clicked her fingers and people did come running, some from considerable distances. "We had carpenters come from Dubbo [about 120 kilometres away], they were here from 6am to 11pm, for nothing," Waters said. Painters came from Trundle, about 150kms away.

"There had to be a lot of tradesmen come in, but we'd make a phone call, and they'd come," French says. "Electrics had to be changed because that stuff just wouldn't have met today's standards. Power points and lights and things like that."

The school community proved incredibly generous. "The parents from our school supplied virtually everything for the kitchen - all the pots and pans and cutlery and glasses, and a coffee machine and mugs, and all the cookers and all that type of stuff," French says.

"We put a letter out to the parents and said, 'look, this is what's happening - this is a list of stuff we need. And right from the word go, I was getting emails or phone calls and we were ticking things off. There was literally thousands of dollars worth of donations coming in, in the form of new appliances and things that were needed for the kitchen."

The dilapidated convent now hums with a happy energy and has a whole new lease on life. "The transformation is incredible, it's like a new home now," French says. "It's gone from being a run-down old convent to virtually like a brand-new home."

## Finding their feet

The Molong community held an opening celebration and barbecue to welcome the Ukrainian families to their new home, complete with a Welcome to Country from the local Aboriginal group.

The Ukrainians are busy making Molong their home. Among the donations was an upright piano that the fathers from the school loaded onto a trolley and pushed up the hill to the convent. One of the group, Anna Kovalenko, not only plays the piano, she plays the organ in the small rural church.

"We haven't had musicians here for a long time," Father Bellamy says.

Anna is enjoying life. "I have new friends and I feel very happy," Anna said on 7.30. "I feel I have a new life. I have much work because I need to learn English. I'm very good right now."

With community help, one of the group has established her own clothing repairs and alterations business, so she has some income. "We've created this logo for her and little business cards, and she's already taking orders," Waters says.

The men too have found work, and all are attending classes to learn and improve their English.

St Joseph's, which has about 90 students, has welcomed one of the Ukrainian children into kindergarten, with a second to start next year.

## Giving back

When the main street of Molong was devastated by a sudden, huge flood in November 2022, the Ukrainians were among the first on the scene to help with the clean-up.

"They wanted to give something back," French says.

Molong is determined to help the Ukrainians make a new life. "There's a sense of community, and a sense of compassion," French says.

*"The parents from our school supplied virtually everything for the kitchen."*



Top left: Pip Waters and Ukrainian refugee Yulia. Above: Father Greg Bellamy helps prepare the house for the refugees with community members. Below: The community work together to refurbish an old convent into a home for refugees.

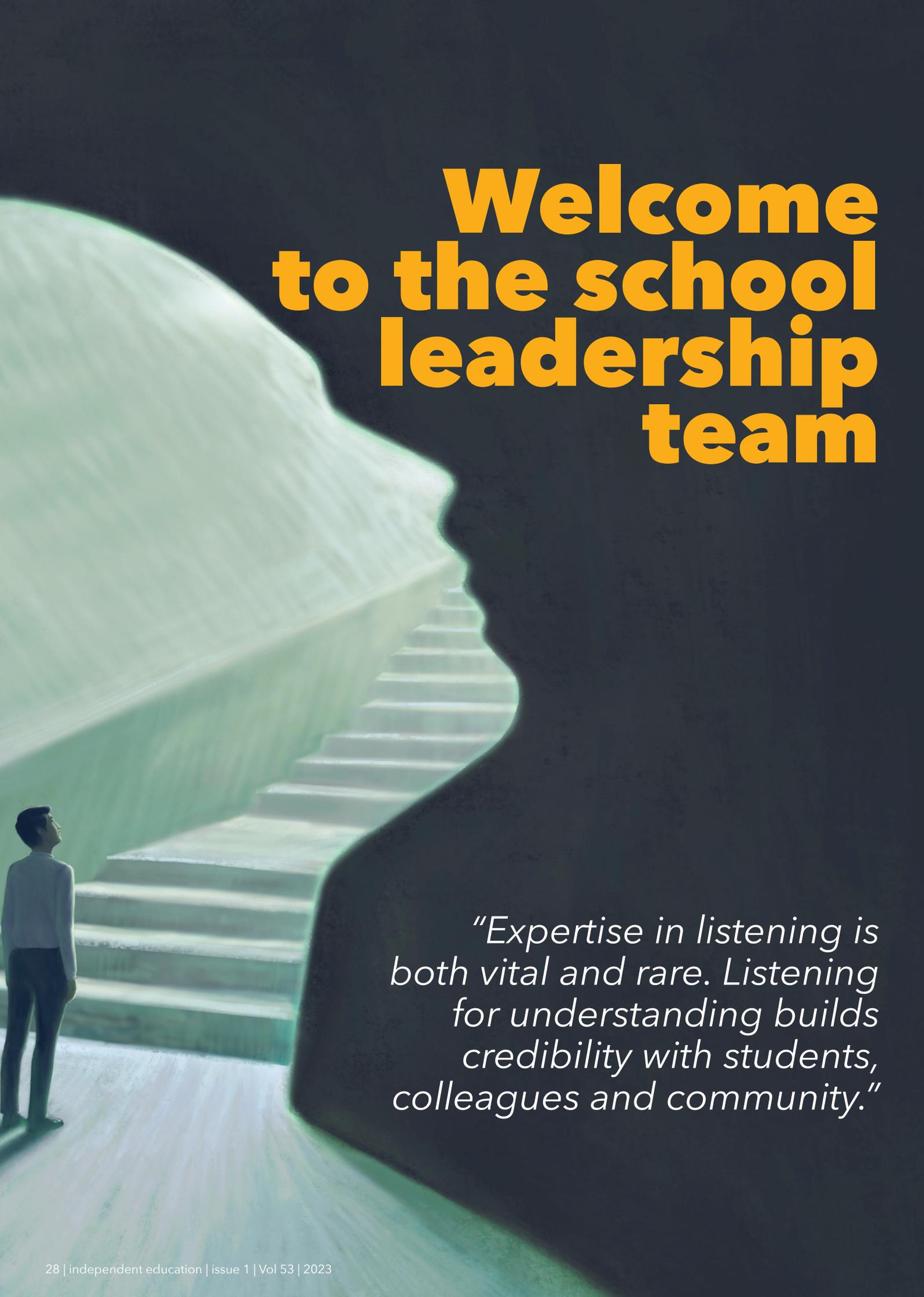


“Molong is a strong, community-minded place. It’s a close community, a farming community. People are very strong about their thoughts about Molong. Molong’s our town, and this is what we want.”

Waters echoes this sentiment. “The group has just continually impressed us with how hard they’ve worked and how much they’ve done and, and how far they’ve come. We’re proud of them.”

Says Anna: “I hope very soon, the war will end and many Ukrainian families will be safe too. At this moment I say thank you.”

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# Welcome to the school leadership team

*"Expertise in listening is both vital and rare. Listening for understanding builds credibility with students, colleagues and community."*

**Early days and weeks are important, first impressions do count. New members of the school leadership team arrive from different places. Some from inside the school, others outside. Some are experienced in similar roles elsewhere, others new arrivals from middle management or industry or direct from the classroom down the corridor. All need to lead and deliver. Leaders can recover from a fall at the outset but it is better to get off to a positive start, writes Dr John Lee.**

Here are five interconnected insights that can support a new school leader as they find their direction in a new environment.

### **Know yourself**

Knowing self and knowing others are important facets of leadership. Effective leaders have a clear understanding of their own strengths, weaknesses and how to connect with their people. The human dimension of leadership needs attention if a school leader is going to be an agent of improvement. Socially and emotionally intelligent leaders are thoughtful and respond rather than react. Consider:

- What strengths and experiences do I bring to this role?
- What are my 'growing edges' that I will need to develop to be successful in this position?
- What aspects of the role excite and interest me?
- Are there responsibilities of the role that I will be tempted to ignore or avoid and may come back to bite me?

### **Know your role and lead in this context**

Schools are both similar and very different. Every school community has its own unique story and character. Get a sense of where the school is on its learning improvement journey. Find out the expectations about your role in the context of this place. Learn something of how the role was done before your arrival as useful background information.

Get to know and understand the principal and other members of the school leadership team. Be aware of the limits and agency that define the scope of your leadership. It is imperative to realise that your relationship with your principal can be a key factor in your leadership. Some principals are into centralised command and control, while others give school leaders a broad mandate to act with a degree of autonomy. Consider:

- What makes this school different?
- What is the history, culture and context of the school?
- How much scope do I have as a leader?
- What are the expectations of the principal?

### **Be astute**

New school leaders need to listen, observe and learn fast.

Expertise in listening is both vital and rare. Listening for understanding builds credibility with students, colleagues and community. Everyone has a point of view and a perspective on the educational matter under consideration. A leader who is a habitual listener before acting in a thoughtful manner will frequently gain respect.

Astute leaders are observant. On many occasions, a new leader needs to watch how the school operates before initiating a change in direction. Consult, test out ideas and take the people with you. Be a collaborative leader. No one has a monopoly on insight.

Make ethical behaviour a hallmark of leadership. Have and use a moral compass. Never underestimate the power of example and avoid being an unwitting ally in a power play or gossip. Consider:

- What am I learning as I listen and observe?
- Is there something I can do now that will have an immediate positive impact for the students and staff in my area of responsibility?

### **Be effective**

Schools are hectic places and teachers depend on leaders who are competent. Doing the job, being organised, well prepared and delivering on the key accountabilities of the role are central to success.

Get some early wins with your team. Run purposeful meetings and with action on agreed outcomes to build confidence, collective capacity and efficacy.

Cultivate a culture where evaluation occurs, feedback is welcomed and improvement is implemented. Consider:

- Are the people depending on me getting the support and communication that they need?
- When I am teaching is my practice exemplary or do I view my teaching as an inconvenience?

### **Be discerning**

New school leadership team members need to discern priorities. Everything

can't be done at once. Adopt a strategic approach to leadership.

Develop your own priorities in the light of the priorities of the Annual Improvement Plan and the leadership required in your role. Be patient and realise that significant change doesn't happen quickly. Know your people and bring them with you.

Often new school leaders have a picture in their mind of how an ideal person might look in this leadership role. This can be problematic. It is highly likely that a new leader will need to grow into the role over time. It is extremely rare for a person new to a role to be outstanding from the beginning of their tenure.

Seek support from a mentor, coach or professional supervision. Professional supervision is a great way to deepen reflective practice, boost role effectiveness and enhance wellbeing. See Dr John Lee *If it's not Super then it's not Supervision: supporting principals and educational leaders IE #3 2022*

In all things, be a leader for the common good and education of students while exercising self-care.

Demands on school leaders are increasing and senior leadership roles have their own stressors.

Lead in a way that you can sustain into the future. Thriving school communities have school leaders who are grounded and human. Setbacks will occur. New leaders learn on the go and need to be patient with self and others. Consider:

- What are my key priorities as a new leader?
- How will I work sustainably within healthy boundaries?

### **About the Author Dr John Lee**

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# BEYOND NUMBERS

## Assessment data in the classroom



**The quest for using data to inform educational decision making and practice is not new (Mandinach, 2012), write Professor James Tognolini and Rayanne Shakra of the Centre for Educational Measurement and Assessment, University of Sydney**

This quest for data was heightened during COVID-19 when there was a real probability that there would not be Year 12 external examinations in several states; the question that was being considered was what can we do to produce scores for secondary certification if it is not possible to run the Year 12 HSC examination (or equivalent)?

The solution, in every case, was that we can use the judgement of teachers because they know their students and the content of the courses better than anyone else and would give a more valid estimate than any algorithm can generate.

The focus for this article is on how teachers interact with data on a day-to-day basis to produce the evidence that is integral to the process of teaching and learning.

"Assessment involves professional judgement about student performance with respect to a continuum of development and is based upon the image formed of the student by the collection of evidence" (Tognolini & Shakra, 2021, p17).

The key part to this definition is that teachers build images of what their students know and can do based upon data or evidence they collect from various assessments. This image is then used to track student progress through syllabi that have been designed to describe growth through an area of learning.

Teachers constantly assess and process data in their day-to-day interactions with students. Data are "any information that helps educators know more about their students" (Wayman, 2013, p29) and which can be codified in some manner to facilitate systematic analysis (Schildkamp & Kuiper, 2010).

We can see that data are prevalent in every classroom situation. Data are more than test scores (Lai & Schildkamp, 2012). They help teachers make connections that lead to insights and improved student learning.

### Typical classroom

Figure 1 (above) shows a snapshot which is replicated in most classrooms around the world at any one time resonating with every teacher of every subject.

Any teacher in the situation presented in Figure 1 would notice that the class seem very engaged; that one student in the left-hand corner seems to be distracted, that some of the students have their hands up, but are looking down at their books (which probably means they do not want to be asked) etc.

We would argue that teachers process these data constantly by focusing on an aspect, taking the resulting data back to the 'image', processing these in terms of their expectation based on the image and then making an informed judgment about what they are going to do.

For example, the teacher might focus on the student in the left-hand corner of the photograph. This piece of data we would call information. It is processed something like 'he is a good student (based on all the evidence you have about this student. I will not draw attention to him on this occasion because I know he knows the answer and he is'.

This is an instance where teachers assess their students' engagement levels. Teachers might have already formed an image of who will be excited to tell her the answer to a particular question and who might not.

Data that are in Figure 1 might or might not be new information to the teacher. The image unfolds in the classroom through the interactions and ongoing informal data that teachers choose to interact with. It is this contextual aspect of assessment that makes it highly influential in the teaching and learning process. We would argue that this is

# Data

Data can be words, numbers or observations that are collected systematically, usually for a specific purpose.

# Information

Information is the communication or reception of knowledge or data eg interaction with data.

# Evidence

Evidence evolves from data. It is data. It is data presented in support of an option or assertion. It is probabilistic by its very nature as the support may be strong or weak.

# Professional judgement

Evidence-based decision making requires a systematic and rational approach to researching and analysing available evidence to inform decision-making.

formative assessment; that teachers are formatively assessing and processing such information all the time. Therefore, formative assessment is closely integrated with teaching.

Teachers in every classroom are at the centre of the assessment process. They use their professional judgement when they interpret data, as well as to decide when and what data to collect and analyse. An important point here is that the data need to provide evidence to inform the image from a wide range of data sources.

## Professional judgement

Figure 2 (above) is a representation of how teachers use their own professional judgement of what their students know and can do by collecting assessment data, then turning these data into information about the students. The compilation of this information is what forms the evidence base that informs a teacher's professional judgement.

The teacher is responsible for using professional judgement constantly to reconcile data from sources. At certain times more formal assessments (NAPLAN, HSC, check-in assessments, etc) will also contribute to the image. In most cases, they will confirm what it is the teacher already knows. However, where they do not, the question is what has caused the difference? It is this search for understanding the difference between 'expected' and 'most recent information' that drives teaching.

It also shows how we answer one of the most common questions that we are asked "How do you bring summative and formative data together to produce a single image that is supported by evidence that gives teachers confidence in as being a faithful summary of the students' location (progress) within the curriculum?"

Through data teachers bring together a student's summative and formative assessments to build an accurate image of this student's performance. As an example, the teacher can take data from summative assessments (eg NAPLAN) and process them through a comparison of what the teacher believed each child should have obtained on the

assessment based upon the image of that child.

To do this, the teacher makes a judgement at the time of a summative test of what level grade the student should get based on the image. If the student performs as expected, then it means that the summative assessment provides some further confirmatory evidence of the image that the teacher has of the student. If it varies, then the teacher should want

to know why. This means that summative assessments are being used in the same way that formative assessments are in the teaching and learning process. It is the way that teachers bring summative and formative together.

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*"We can use the judgement of teachers because they know their students and the content of the courses better than anyone else and would give a more valid estimate than any algorithm can generate."*

# PEACEFUL PATHWAYS

## celebrating young peoples' contributions to peace

**Students at Jabiru Community College (JCC) were recently recognised for their commitment to peace and non-violence through the Special Assistance School's Peaceful Pathways Awards and "Peace is ..." Art Prizes, writes Emily Campbell.**

IEU member and JCC Maker Space Coordinator Robin Taubenfeld said the inaugural awards were launched last year in a bid to celebrate students' peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding in the local community.

"JCC is a Special Assistance School (SAS) in Zillmere, north of Brisbane, which caters for students who are disengaged from mainstream schooling and often come from difficult or traumatic backgrounds," Robin said.

"Prior to working at JCC, I was already involved in exploring peace education and interested in the military's incursion or presence in education.

"In 2021, we established the series of awards as a way of recognising the contributions of young people at JCC towards creating and maintaining peace in the community.

"As a migrant to Australia, I feel it's a necessary commitment to do what I can do to address the colonisation, militarisation and nuclearisation of Australia and this region.

"I raised with colleagues the possibility of offering a peace award to our young people and staff were onboard with the idea.

"I canvassed various Brisbane peace groups who were keen to be involved, so it was easy to raise the funds to offer a peace prize to students at our school.

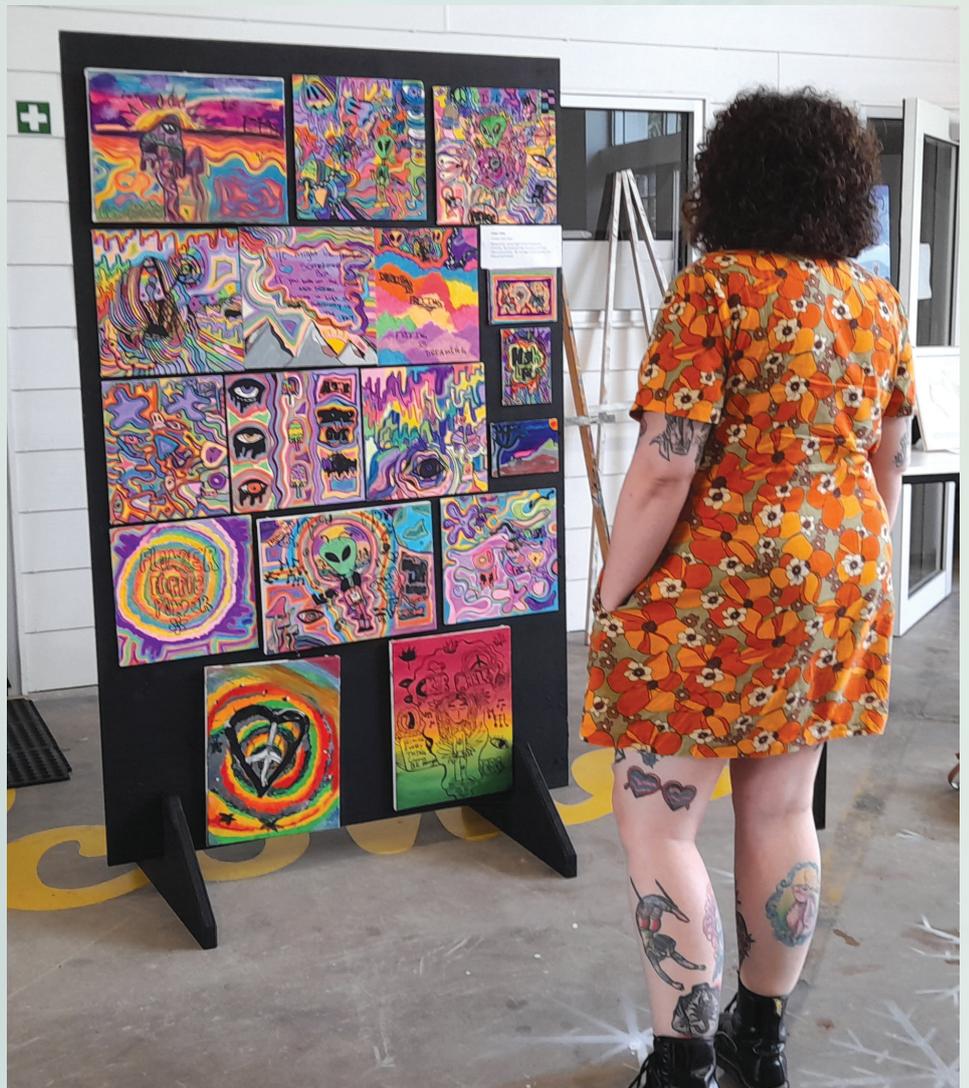
"Many peace movement elders were interested to see how we could develop an award to celebrate peace and eventually expand it to other high schools," she said.

### **Joan Shears Peaceful Pathways Award**

Robin said the inaugural Peace Prize Award was named after the late Joan Shears OAM, a Brisbane local who dedicated her life to working for peace and social justice.

"The Joan Shears Peaceful Pathways Award offers two major prizes of \$400 each for young people who have been actively involved in peacemaking, peacebuilding or peacekeeping in the community," Robin said.

"Joan was an amazing connector and stalwart of the Brisbane peace and anti-nuclear movement since the 1970s, so



it was proposed we honour her as a local peace hero," she said.

"We've called it the Joan Shears Peaceful Pathways Award to recognise there are so many pathways to peace.

"We wanted to acknowledge what Joan always said, that is "Peace is more than just the absence of war".

"We see that sometimes violence is glorified in our society and there's a lot of fanfare around military activity, but in our communities, we have amazing people like Joan and hundreds of others who are doing peace grounding, community building 'peace work' and that we want to young people to be able to connect with them.

"In the spirit of democratising the Awards, we opened nominations up to the whole community inviting young people to nominate themselves or their peers.

"We also opened nominations up to all young people across the school,

which allowed nominees of any age to be rewarded based on their merit.

"All nominees received a certificate, a small native plant, peace poppy and acknowledgement of what had been noticed about them by the staff or their peers to who nominated them for a Peace Award," Robin said.

### **Peace Is... Art prize**

In 2021, JCC also introduced the "Peace is..." Arts prize, where students are invited to reflect upon peace through a creative submission.

Robin said students could create a text or art piece responding to the theme "Peace is..." and entries may be in any art form, such as written or spoken word, poetry, theatre, music, dance, photography, craft etc.

"I think the students who participated got a lot out of it and it was really moving to see on display the different kinds of reflections young people had



on peace or what it meant to them," she said.

"Some students created really touching art about their family or relatives who had passed away, whereas others were political and digital, so the diversity of entries was amazing.

"Last year we ended up awarding each of them a prize because we identified that each student had addressed a different aspect of peace, whether it be the environment or a family connection theme.

"This year, we had seven young people and two staff enter the Peace Is... Arts Prize Exhibition and all young people were awarded prizes between \$50 and \$100 for their contributions.

### Building positive relationships

Robin said it was a privilege to work in an organisation that is committed to embedding and facilitating learning around non-violence.

"Another special thing about JCC is that we practise an Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP), which is a social justice movement I've been involved

with as a volunteer for a very long time," Robin said.

As detailed in a previous edition of *IE*, AVP is a training program which originated during the Civil Rights era in the United States and equips participants to deal with potentially violent situations in new and creative ways.

AVP gives participants a framework for responding to conflict and difficulty in all types of relationships and human interactions.

Robin said a central tenet of both AVP and JCC ethos is the importance of relationships.

"What I really love about working at JCC is the commitment to justice that embodies our work and our team which translates to respect and support for the young people we work with," Robin said.

"Building relationships is key, it's fundamental to working with our young people and each other," she said.

### Power of the collective

As union Chapter Rep at JCC, Robin is a big believer in the power of the

collective and collaborative action.

"I think it's important to be part of our union and social justice movements because those of us who have the capacity to stand up and fight, to challenge dominant structures should do that when we can, because there are others, less fortunate, who can't.

"Previously I was in a workplace that wasn't a school where we were doing frontline community support work and it wasn't very unionised, which was frustrating because I could see how much energy the staff put into helping others, but their jobs were at risk or their conditions weren't great.

"I've been excited to see our union campaigning around working conditions and aspects like the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD).

"It's reassuring to know other teachers and schools are having the same concerns as our school and that somebody is advocating on our behalf around these issues.

"Union presence helps us refocus and reflect on our roles and how we want to contribute to our community or workplace," Robin said.

### Commitment to expansion

Robin said many of the peace groups involved in helping fund and establish the Peace Prizes at JCC were interested in helping other schools around Australia establish their own Peace Awards.

"At the Peace Awards night last year, we had several different peace and environmental group representatives attend to present the awards, and some of them have since visited our school or have volunteered to help with our activities," she said.

"It's important that young people not only hear about great humans like Joan Shears, but they get the opportunity to meet and build connections with local peace heroes and can become involved with peace organisations in their local community.

"We are committed to expanding peace celebrations, so any fellow IEU members or schools who are interested in establishing their own Peace Awards can contact me for assistance with fundraising, organising and connecting with peace groups.

"International Day of Peace falls on 21 September, but every day is a good day to celebrate peace and non-violence in the community," Robin said.

IEU members who are interested in establishing their own peace awards and would like further information or advice are encouraged to contact Robin at [r.taubenfeld@jcc.qld.edu.au](mailto:r.taubenfeld@jcc.qld.edu.au)



## Exotic extra or educational essential?

**The idea that education should be about more than just grades never goes away, and the advent of mental health awareness might see that idea gain more traction, Will Brodie writes.**

In his 2010 campaign launch for the Victorian state election, then Premier John Brumby proposed that every Year 9 student in a Victorian state school “spend at least two weeks away from home to ready them for adult life”.

City children would experience life in the country; country children would spend time in the city. The program would equip students with “real world knowledge” and teach them essential skills including bushfire awareness, advanced water safety, first aid, self-discipline, self-defence, and drug and alcohol awareness.

Such capabilities are usually labelled ‘life skills’, practical assets that help you live a healthy and fulfilling life. They also help make students productive, efficient, and successful and enable them to operate independently of their parents after leaving school.

The 2010 life skills proposal, central to a \$288 million education plan, was soon dubbed ‘Brumby’s Boot Camps’ and criticised as a populist election stunt wasting money better spent on more urgent needs, including funding for educational psychologists, student welfare co-ordinators, integration aides and remedial teachers.

Brumby’s Labor Party lost that election. No boot camps. But the idea of incorporating more life skills into education is never far away, because people continue to ask: ‘What skills do we want our kids to possess by the time they leave high school?’

### **Boot camp time**

In July this year, journalist Julie Szego, addressing the anxieties of “listless and withdrawn” children following pandemic lockdowns, said “if ever the (boot camp) plan’s time has come it is now”.

Szego envisaged every kid undertaking “landscape painting, skiing, taking science classes by a river, and going cold turkey on digital communication”. They would write letters home – on paper.

“I imagine such a program would be transformative for some, for others a bucolic hell. Either way it would amount to

life, vividly experienced, and that’s usually fertile ground for personal growth.

“Beyond emergency relief, our children are crying out for opportunities to foster resilience and emotional strength.”

Szego anticipated the “eye-rolling” of overburdened teachers at the suggestion and acknowledged that staff shortages meant schools were barely coping with normal programming let alone “exotic extras”.

“But staffing in a range of sectors is a problem policymakers will be forced to seriously tackle, regardless. Meanwhile, the ‘exotic extra’ must be redefined as essential.”

Szego’s proposal is primarily meant as a boost for kids traumatised by being isolated for too long. And she acknowledges that many independent schools already offer enriching experiences outside the classroom.

However, life skills advocates feel there is a huge shift in emphasis necessary in all schools to properly prepare students for life beyond the school gates.

### **Life skills evolve**

Traditional expectations of life skills advocates have been that school leavers should be able to cook, change a tyre, apply first aid, do their taxes, and pay bills on time, run a household, and grasp fundamental physical survival skills.

Some life skills advocates demand computer science and video game design are modern must-have skills.

However, these days, life skills are more sophisticated.

Everyone from academics to bloggers highlights the importance of mental health and/or mindfulness tuition.

“Mindfulness can develop skills for concentration and impulse control,” writes international think tank Big Think. “It can help young people to better manage their worrying thoughts and discover how the brain and mind really works.”

“Simple meditation, breathing skills and finding how to ‘be in the moment’ will stay with you for life.”

According to Big Think, mental health classes should foster “practical mental wellbeing skills”. “Students would be introduced to methods of self-reflection and emotional assessment. They would practice techniques for effectively dealing with intense emotions such as stress, anger, and sadness.”



*“Moreover, young people grow more aware of their own struggles and those of the people around them. By becoming aware of this, young people are better equipped to handle what they’re going through.”*

The World Health Organisation now defines life skills as: “A group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathise with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and responsible manner.”

That’s a long way from rubbing sticks together on a bushland camp.

### **Stressed-out students**

We understand much more about the stresses on students than we did 12 years ago.

National Youth Mental Health Foundation Headspace reports that in 2020, one third of Australian young people (34 per cent) reported high or very high levels of psychological distress.

US-based education coaches Positive Action say, “learning life skills helps young people understand who they are and what they want out of life”.

“Moreover, young people grow more aware of their own struggles and those of the people around them. By becoming aware of this, young people are better equipped to handle what they’re going through and recognise when they need help. This helps reduce incidences of bullying and violence.

“The average high school student has oodles of real-life responsibilities to deal with. Between juggling homework, extracurriculars, and trying to maintain a social life – it can feel like too much sometimes.”

Social media exacerbates this, bombarding teenagers with images of unachievable ideals and messages about things they are missing out on. Low self-esteem, alienation and isolation are major concerns.

### **The reasons why not**

So why don’t life skills get applied in every school?

A common objection is that many of these skills are, or should be, the responsibility of parents.

However, in most families it takes two parents working to pay the bills. Few have time for extra tuition.

And we all know teachers are suffering a workload crisis.

Lack of funding, already full curricula, lack of teacher training, lack of resources and lack of integration with other subjects are other valid reasons why there’s not more support for life skills being taught.

Then there’s stressed students cramming to get marks in ‘core’ subjects they need to gain admission to their preferred Tertiary courses. They can, understandably, be dismissive of subjects that seem like a less immediate priority.

However, many of these valid objections come down to a matter of will. If we believe that mental health, getting along with others, being financially self-reliant, and able to help in an emergency are worthy outcomes for everyone in society, we must make them an accepted part of everyday school life.

To be successfully implemented, such things must be embedded right from the start of primary school, so they become expected aspects of learning. A two-week camp merely maintains the status of life skills as “outside” the mainstream of education.

In 2010, opposing Brumby’s Boot Camps, *The Age* senior education journalist Denise Ryan quoted a visiting academic Drew Gitomer, who was “puzzled” by Australia’s “rigid, top-down approach to education, whereby politicians and bureaucrats impose programs and spending priorities on schools”.

“It flies in the face of best international practice, where countries such as Norway give principals and teachers respect and the power to determine priorities.”

Respect and power for teachers? It’s an idea, like life skills education, that just won’t go away. Perhaps 2010 should be revisited.

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