



independent education

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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 aliened 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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IE is the professional journal of the Independent Education Union of Australia. It is published for members and subscribers and has a circulation of approximately 70,000. The contents of this journal do not necessarily reflect the views of the IEUA or the editors nor imply endorsement by them.

IE online

www.ieu.asn.au/publications/

Contributions

Contributions from members are welcome. Printing does not reflect endorsement and contributions may be edited at the editor's discretion.

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IE is available free to members of IEU, or by subscription, contact Tania Yardley
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Print Post Number 100007506

NSW and ACT Teachers

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Editorial

Respect is crucial, both in our professional and personal lives.

As a union, a core part of our work is our advocacy to ensure professional respect for all members: teachers, school support staff, principals and our trainers in the VET and ELICOS sectors.

The theme of respect is very much at the centre of this edition of *IE*.

On pages 8 and 9 we examine the urgent need to show respect to First Nations Peoples by ensuring a right to Voice in Parliament is enshrined in the Australian Constitution.

This is critical if we are to continue to move towards reconciliation as a country.

At a sector level, we examine the need to reinforce professional respect for the teaching profession within the community.

That advocacy is essential both in terms of countering the rise of anti-worker forces seeking to set education policy (pages 28-29) and in regard to recognising the needs of our ELICOS members given the devastating impacts of the pandemic to their sector (pages 30-31).

When it comes to ensuring respect for members working in our schools, the case studies on pages 16-17 consider the gender issues in leadership of boys schools, while the impact of disrespectful behaviour is evident in the latest health and wellbeing study of principals (pages 34-35).

Ensuring our students and the next generation of Australians experience more respectful relationships at school, at home and at work is also given focus in this edition.

The work being undertaken in our schools to teach students about respectful relationships and consent is in focus on pages 10-13, while on pages 14-15 we examine how to recognise and respect the needs of gender diverse students.

These articles and more, make this a must-read edition which we hope will inspire conversation and action for you and your colleagues as we work to create the respectful society we all deserve.

Terry Burke

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Victoria

Protection from 'persons posing risk of harm'

At press time, a new Bill enabling schools to issue a School Community Safety Order was introduced into the Victorian Parliament. If passed, it would probably come into effect in August.

It would enable principals, or other authorised persons, to issue an immediate order and, if necessary, follow it with an ongoing order for up to 12 months. This can prohibit or regulate certain conduct on school premises to protect members of the school community from harmful, threatening or abusive behaviour, including via communications.

An order can also be made where the authorised person reasonably believes a person poses an unacceptable and imminent risk of causing significant disruption to the school or its activities or poses an unacceptable and imminent risk of interfering with the wellbeing, safety or educational opportunities of students.

The Act will provide for civil penalties for the enforcement of those orders. An order cannot be made in respect to a person under 18 years of age, a staff member at the relevant school nor a student at the relevant school. The person who receives the order is able to seek an internal review of the order and appeal the order at Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Tasmania

Secondary curriculum changes - extension

Following a review of Years 9 to 12 schooling, which examined barriers to student retention and attainment, the Tasmanian Government adopted several strategies, including a review of the Years 9 to 12 curriculum and developing a Years 9 to 12 Curriculum Framework. The Tasmanian Department of Education is undertaking the work.

The department consulted with the IEU VicTas and the Australian Education Union (Tasmanian Branch) over the past year and, following union feedback highlighting concerns over the implementation timeline and associated workload, the department extended the timeline for new courses accredited by the Office of Tasmanian Assessment Standards and Certification (TASC).

Most courses will now be implemented in 2023, providing time to work collaboratively with practitioners to ensure a more considered approach to the new courses. A smaller number of new courses may be available in 2022, subject to TASC accreditation.

Northern Territory

Girls' uniform equity campaign success

The IEU Chapter at the Essington School in Darwin is celebrating the success of a multi-year campaign to change the girls' uniforms.

Girls now have the option to wear dresses, skirts or the better fitted skorts that allow them to play freely.

Chapter Representative and IEU-QNT Branch Executive member Louise Lenzo said girls had only been able to wear dresses or loosely fitted skorts that did not provide adequate coverage when they were engaged in physical activities - they were uncomfortable and/or impractical.

Lenzo said the IEU Chapter believed it was reasonable to offer different uniforms, enabling students to play more comfortably, particularly in the Darwin climate.

To raise awareness of their campaign, staff wore pants/trousers for a full week. Establishment of the Girls' Uniform Agenda (girlsuniformagenda.org) helped the Chapter gain more support among staff, and found its resources a helpful way to approach their employers and their school community.

Louise said perceptions shifted within school leadership through feedback from students, parents and families that overwhelmingly supported a change.

Queensland

Women members: Be BOLD for Change

The IEU-QNT *Be BOLD for Change* 2021 conference will be held on 19 August. The aim is to connect women from throughout the non-government education sector in Queensland and the Northern Territory to talk, learn and reflect on the workplace issues that matter most to them.

The free, online conference will include an exciting line-up of guest speakers, including workplace wellness expert Thea O'Connor's session, *Women's health at work: What needs to change*.

The conference will include workshops on empowering women at work – including leadership development, contemporary reproductive and mental health support, building safe and respectful workplaces and achieving change through action.

The *Be BOLD for Change* conference will be hosted on an interactive platform. We encourage early RSVPs as spaces are limited: reserve your place and download the program at: ieuqnt.org.au/bold

IEU-QNT members in schools with union development leave can access this leave to attend the conference. If you are unsure whether you have this leave, please contact us for help via enquiries@ieuqnt.org.au or freecall 1800 177 938 (Qld) or 1800 351 996 (NT).

South Australia

Art Award winners announced

The IEU(SA) is proud to sponsor an art award encouraging Year 12 Visual Arts students in non-government schools to pursue their artistic skills and create an artwork reflecting their views and expressivity.

With so many strong entries, the judges chose joint winners. Congratulations go to Carmen Marino of Loreto College, Murrumbidgee, for her multimedia response to the recent bushfires. In "What was unprecedented is now our future" she incorporated dirt, sticks and wire from the affected landscape to convey the devastation and communicate the need to heed climate change warnings.

Sophie Arundell of Scotch College Adelaide produced "Solitudo" which reflects the pain, desperation and isolation felt when in a dark place. The hidden face reflects the hiding of problems while the shower setting symbolises everything crashing down when one is alone.

Carmen and Sophie received their \$250 cash prize, funded by the IEU(SA), from Assistant Secretary Louise Firrell and the CEO of the South Australian Certificate of Education Board, Professor Martin Westwell.

NSW

IEU opposes Parental Rights Bill

The IEU represents members' interests on many fronts but of key concern is One Nation's Education Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill.

Under the umbrella of "parental primacy", the Bill requires the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) to identify those parts of any syllabus developed or endorsed by NESA that relate to parental primacy. It also demands NESA prepare resources for parents, setting out areas of the syllabus that relate to parental primacy, and provide these

resources to schools, including non-government schools.

Given the broad definition of "parental primacy", any syllabus that touches on ethical and moral standards, political and social values and personal wellbeing, could be affected. This includes discussion of gender diversity, First Nations matters, and curriculum that looks at environment issues or climate change.

To express serious concerns about the Bill, the IEU made a written submission to, and appeared at, a NSW Legislative Council inquiry. We have also written to all Diocesan Directors (except the Diocese of Parramatta which originally opposed the Bill), to indicate that the proposed legislation would make schools the "plaything of politicians" and that amendments to the NSW Teacher Accreditation Act 2004 would expose teachers to investigations and possible loss of accreditation.

The union joins with many other organisations, including the NSW Parents Council, the Uniting Network, the NSW Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People and the Law Society of NSW, to oppose the Bill.

In the words of one member: "It is an attack on teachers' professional judgement and our capacity to support young people in schools as they seek to navigate the challenges of their own identity and the complexities of the world around them."

ACT

People at Work survey 2021

In February this year, IEU NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Mark Northam and organisers from the IEU's ACT office attended a briefing by Jacqueline Argus, ACT Work Health and Safety Commissioner. Argus sought the union's support in promoting Australia's only validated psychosocial risk assessment survey, People at Work.

Funded by Australia's work health and safety regulators, and developed in collaboration with leading researchers, People at Work helps identify key psychosocial hazards in businesses across Australia. It also provides guidance on practical ways to manage them.

The risk-assessment tool furnishes a five-year tenure and is free to every employer with more than 20 employees. It is a five-step process that businesses can use to identify, assess and control risks to psychosocial health at work. Approaches to psychosocial health so far have been narrow, focusing on harassment and bullying.

The tool encompasses assessment of risk factors such as fatigue, workload and stress. Engaging in the survey provides the employer with an opportunity to tailor questions to their particular industry. The ensuing report gives de-identified information and assessment, so employers can take action based on the results.

Participating workplaces will also receive a report comparing their results against a benchmark of similar companies.

InFocus **Brandon Jack**

From professional athlete to published author, Brandon Jack is kicking goals. But there's another game he's working very hard to change, he tells journalist Monica Crouch.

Brandon Jack, 27, went to primary school at West Pennant Hills Public and secondary school at Oakhill College, Castle Hill, where he was also school captain. He has since completed a Bachelor of Arts; written various columns for the *Sydney Morning Herald*; and in August this year his first book will be published.

And did we mention he has already crammed in a career as a professional athlete, playing for the Sydney Swans from 2013 to 2017. Brandon's older brother, Kieren Jack, also played for the Swans (2013-16); their father is renowned former rugby league player and coach Garry Jack, who played for the Western Suburbs Magpies and the Balmain Tigers, as well as in the NSW State of Origin side 17 times between 1984 and 1989.

Speaking of teachers

But back to Brandon, who undertook the HSC in 2012. He speaks highly both of his own teachers and the profession. He is also appreciative of how teachers, despite their ever-intensifying workloads, accommodate a wide range of students, many of whom may not excel in conventional ways.

"There are many kids who have forms of intelligence that we don't measure with exams and assessments," Jack says. "It's obviously very tough to give every student that intense level of attention because there is already enough pressure on teachers, there are only so many hours in the working day and people higher up often just want to see results. But sometimes all it takes is a small word of encouragement or recognition so

that a student feels seen – that's all it takes sometimes."

Several teachers had a big impact on him, Jack says, in particular his Year 9 history teacher who also taught him Studies of Religion in Years 11 and 12. "I'm very much where I am today because of the support and guidance she gave me," Jack says. "I'd never really viewed myself as a writer until she pointed it out to me."

Onwards and upwards

After high school Jack began a law degree at the University of NSW, but found it wasn't for him. "I changed to journalism, then psychology, before eventually finding my passion with sociology," he says. His BA includes majors in sociology and anthropology, with a minor in creative writing.

Jack's first book, *28: A memoir of football, addiction, art, masculinity and love*, will be published in August. "This is not the book I originally wrote, nor the book I ever thought I would end up writing," he wrote in an Instagram post in May. "It's actually the book I was avoiding writing."

Jack had initially wanted to exclude his football career from *28*, but while packing to move house he found the diaries he'd kept during his years with the Swans. "After reading through those pages I started again from scratch and *28* is what poured out of me," he wrote. "This book is a deep dive into many areas both on and off the field – masculinity, sexuality, addiction, identity and expectation, to name a few."

Turning the tables

Yet Jack's honest examination of masculinity didn't begin with this book. It began when one of his female friends "looked me in the eye and told me her story". It was a "shattering moment", he says. It was also a turning point.

"I started listening to the women in my life and their experiences, and I started to reflect on the really masculine environments I've come from," he says. Then he took action.

As school captain at Oakhill, Jack was accustomed to giving speeches, and as a professional footballer he'd given presentations in schools. So he developed a new talk, aimed mainly at boys. The themes echo those of the book: masculinity, equality, respect, sex and consent.

These are the issues at the very heart of the crisis revealed by some 6000 young women and girls in their responses to the online petition that hit the headlines in February this year.

Initiated by Chanel Contos, a former student at Kambala, an independent girls school in Sydney's eastern suburbs, the petition calls for better education for all students about respect and sexual consent – and at a younger age.

Talking to boys

In his talk, which he tailors to different groups from Years 7 to 12, Jack asks boys to rethink definitions of masculinity. He connects with them in the same way his female friend did with him: by sharing stories about himself, particularly from his high school years.

Jack tells the boys he ticks many of the "typically male" boxes: he plays football; he has plenty of mates; he goes out to bars. "But I also write poetry and I cry in movies – things that guys might hear as 'sissy stuff' or 'feminine stuff' – but I do these things, so does that mean the definition is wrong or I'm wrong? Or does it mean we can pick and choose, and we don't have to be a certain kind of male?"

With the news cycle dominated by domestic violence and sexual assault allegations, it's time to shift the focus from victims to perpetrators,

"Sometimes all it takes is a small word of encouragement or recognition so that a student feels seen – that's all it takes sometimes."



Image: Maya Cook

Jack believes. "The entire notion of a victim-blaming culture, putting the onus on the person who's been really hurt, and expecting them to be the one to speak up when it should never have happened in the first place, is really flawed," he says.

He wants boys to think critically about their attitudes to girls and women, to question stereotypical "male bonding territory", and to think about how disrespect can devolve into dangerous attitudes.

During his talks, Jack invariably notices boys nodding in identification. They ask him questions. He's got them thinking, which is what he set out to do.

Altering attitudes

Tracing twisted thinking back to its roots is one of Jack's objectives. "Boys don't come into this world thinking women are less than men, so it has to be taught somewhere or absorbed from somewhere," he says.

"The lack of respect and commodifying of women is a really unfortunate thing about masculinity and young men wanting to fit in and thinking that's the way to do it. I think it might start like that - then over time, if boys continually talk about women in a certain way, their view of women becomes distorted. There's this possessiveness and sense of entitlement and all these things come out in sexual assault."

In his talk in schools, Jack introduces the notion of affirmative consent: "It's about being able to continually ask another person 'is this OK?' and if there's any doubt, then it's a 'no,'" he says.

His talk also covers harassment on social media and the distorting impacts of pornography. "It's so easy for boys to consume porn in these days of the smartphone and the internet, but that industry is very damaging to ideas of consent and a normal, healthy sexual relationship."

How things change

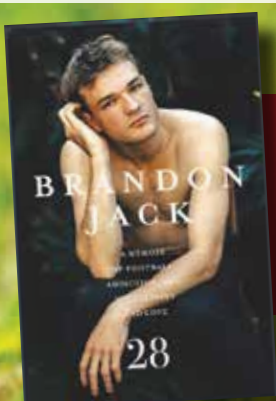
Jack believes there is one crucial resource schools need for this issue: time. "Set aside an assembly to introduce the problem or start a conversation and where possible keep that conversation going. It can be done in conjunction with the curriculum," he says.

Jack is nothing if not hopeful that the needle on this wicked problem is steadily shifting. "I study this stuff, and when I catch up with friends for coffee, I find more and more of them are asking me about it," he says. "That gives me hope. I think kids in schools are becoming far more aware of these things than ever before."

References

To invite Brandon Jack to speak at your school, email: brandonlukejacks1994@gmail.com

Read the petition: teachusconsent.com



Giveaway

Win a copy of *28: A memoir of football, addiction, art, masculinity and love* by Brandon Jack, published in August 2021 by Allen & Unwin. We have one copy to give away.

To enter, simply email giveaways@ieu.asn.au with Brandon Jack in the subject line by Thursday 12 August.

Raise the Voice

One of the largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegations to Parliament House convened in mid-March 2021. The IEU's delegates tell journalists Sue Osborne and Monica Crouch why.

Voice. Treaty. Truth. These are the three vital elements of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which invites all Australians to walk with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people "in a movement of the Australian people for a better future".

The delegation to Canberra, comprising union members from all over Australia, met with the Minister for Indigenous Australians, Ken Wyatt, to advance the referendum for an Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

The Voice provides a formal structure for Indigenous people to have a stronger say in their own affairs. "It is simply a representative body with democratic processes – it is the structure required to practise unity across a large number of people," said author, activist and unionist Thomas Mayor, who convened the delegation.

"It is an enhancement of a people's position through collectivism and structure. As unionists, we understand there is power in structure, in a strong, united voice."

To protect this Voice, it needs to be enshrined in the Constitution via a referendum. If it is simply legislated by one government, it can be repealed by the next.

The delegation met with Labor Senator Malarndirri McCarthy from the Northern Territory and Senator Pat Dodson from Western Australia, along with Labor MPs Linda Burney, Tanya Plibersek and Bill Shorten. They met ACTU President Michele O'Neil. They heard from academic and lawyer Noel Pearson and the director of the From the Heart campaign, Dean Parkin. Importantly, they all met each other.

The IEU was proud to send three delegates and here we listen to their voices.

Kylie Booth-Martinez

"We were there to remind politicians that the Uluru Statement has not died down and that we're looking for constitutional change," said Wiradjuri woman Kylie Booth-Martinez, an Aboriginal Education Worker at St Stanislaus College and the Assumption Catholic Primary School, both in Bathurst. "Aboriginal people need to have more of a voice to say what works and what doesn't – put power back in our people's hands."

Booth-Martinez sees unions, and particularly the IEU, as having a central role in educating and advocating for Voice Treaty Truth and constitutional change. "As teachers and educators, we have this great platform," she said. "We have such access to educating our youth and our communities. And not just Aboriginal communities – all communities."

Meeting peers from throughout Australia was important to Booth-Martinez. "It was a lovely time of solidarity, for being an Aboriginal person in a group of like-minded people," she said. "It was a moment of feeling, 'wow, I'm not the only one who feels the injustices or that this needs changing'."

Hearing from Vicki Morta, the first female Indigenous bosun and member of the Maritime Union of Australia, was a standout for Booth-Martinez.

"Vicki works in a man's world, and she was the first person in her family to have this sort of career," she said.

"I met her in the day and she seemed quiet, but when she got up in front of this whole room of different powerful

people, she was breathtaking. I was super proud of her for standing up there."

Booth-Martinez also loved meeting Vincent Lingiari's granddaughters, Lisa and Rosie Smiler, who came from the Northern Territory. "It doesn't matter where we come from, what part of the country, it doesn't matter, we're the same culture and we have a goal for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people."

(Vincent Lingiari led the nine-year Wave-Hill walk-off in 1966 as the Aboriginal workers were paid in rations alone. He is famously pictured with Gough Whitlam in 1975, with Whitlam pouring a handful of red soil into his hands, symbolising the return of Wave Hill station to the Gurundji people.)

It was also an inspiring time of union solidarity. "Unions all have their place, from the wharfies through to the education unions, and I felt that," Booth-Martinez said. "We all bring our power to this arena. And out of all the unions, our union is one of the best placed. I would love to see more Aboriginal people teaching the teachers."

Vincent Cooper

Vincent Cooper, Ministry Coordinator at St Joseph's High School in Aberdeen near Newcastle, said the Voice to Parliament is a practical reform that would "give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a say over the policies that directly impact us".

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people understand the issues on the ground in our community, so we know the best ways to address them. Instead of listening to the bureaucracy, parliament and the government need to listen to us to address the problems," Cooper said.

"The best way for MPs to understand the need for a Voice is by listening to stories. Stories create emotional connection to a policy, showing MPs why there is a real need for change in local communities. Our delegation allowed us to tell the politicians our stories."

Cooper said the Voice would be a fair and unifying reform allowing all Australians to come together to deliver real change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In the 1967 referendum, Australians voted overwhelmingly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to be counted in the census. "Fifty years since that referendum, it's time our voices were heard – only when our voices are heard can we start to close the gap that exists in Australia," he said.

"Treaty is important to us, but we know that we need a strong voice enshrined in the Constitution first. We have seen what happens in negotiations when we don't have real power at the table. We need to make sure there is focus on achieving a Voice before we turn our minds to treaty."

"A constitutionally recognised – not legislated – Voice gives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people recognition as the first peoples of Australia and overrules the notion of Terra Nullius."

Cooper said meeting supportive Labor MPs was encouraging. He enjoyed Bill Shorten's address, in which he paraphrased a quote from Martin Luther King Jr. "How can Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people pull themselves up from their bootstraps when they don't own a pair of boots?" Shorten said. "A constitutionally recognised voice would allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to own those boots."



1: IEU delegate Kylie Booth-Martinez, centre, with WA Senator Patrick Dodson and another delegate **2:** Kylie Booth-Martinez with NT Senator Malarndirri McCarthy, centre **3:** ACTU President Michele O'Neil with Kylie Booth-Martinez **4:** From left, Organiser Jackie Groom, delegates Vincent Cooper, Kylie Booth-Martinez, Luke Wighton, Organiser Lyn Caton **5:** Labor MP Bill Shorten speaks to the group (author and activist Thomas Mayor standing, far left, and Labor Vice-President Mich-Elle Myers at right) **6:** Labor MP Tanya Plibersek with IEU delegates Vincent Cooper and Luke Wighton.

Luke Wighton

A Wiradjuri man and Aboriginal Education Worker with the Catholic Diocese of Wagga Wagga, Luke Wighton works in several schools, sharing Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum.

Wighton felt empowered standing with politicians and unionists in a public show of support for the Voice to Parliament.

This inspiring experience would inform his discussions with students in the future, he said.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people haven't had a Voice in this country for so long," he said. "It's important to have that enshrined in our Constitution so that no matter who is in government, the Voice is protected."

Meeting Pat Dodson, Linda Burney, Thomas Mayor, Bill Shorten, the descendants of Vincent Lingiari and representatives from other unions was "absolutely inspirational", Wighton said.

"It was a real buzz to be there, and ever since I've returned home, I feel empowered by the experience," he said. "It has given me hope for the future. I feel like things are on the rise for all Australians, and definitely for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people."

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. It was a chance to be part of history in the making. I'm proud to say unions are playing an important role in this campaign."

Measure of RESPECT

This year kicked off with a spotlight on teaching respectful relationships and consent education in school, writes IEU VicTas Assistant Secretary Cathy Hickey. Here's how two Victorian schools approach it.

Australia got a wake-up call about sexual assault through an online petition, launched in March 2021, calling for consent education to be taught at a younger age. Organised by former Sydney school student Chanel Contos, 22, the petition has so far garnered more than 40,000 signatures and 6200 testimonies.

While schools and systems across Australia use a number of programs and resources, the Victorian Education Minister, James Merlino, has recently called for a nationwide rollout of the respectful relationships program run in many Victorian schools. He has also mandated consent education in Victorian government schools.

Several reviews of current programs are also underway. The review of the Australian Curriculum being undertaken by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is examining whether consent needs greater emphasis. The Queensland Government has also committed to

review its Prep to Year 12 Respectful Relationships Education Program.

Here we take a look at the work taking place in this area in two non-government schools: Kingswood College in Box Hill, Victoria; and Sacred Heart Primary School, Diamond Creek. They share their approaches to embedding respectful relationships in their school's learning programs.

Consent and the national debate

Our Kingswood College authors sum up the nation's challenge succinctly.

"Unfortunately, a glance at any media source in Australia will confirm that there is an ongoing national crisis in gender relations and family violence, despite what positive relationships we might enjoy in our own workplaces and families," they said.

"A royal commission into family violence and another into institutional responses to child sexual abuse demonstrate the depth of the issues which face students, their families and educators alike.

"While women continue to die at the hands of intimate partners or ex-partners - and the statistics for women who have suffered abuse, sexual assault or sexual harassment remain as high as they currently are - we must assume

that educators and students are living with the current or historical impacts of these crimes. That makes the teaching of this kind of content extremely sensitive. It also makes development of the skills in the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships [RRRR] curriculum an imperative.

"Often, as a wellbeing educator, one might reflect on the challenge of engaging in this kind of teaching. It only takes a look at the 'milkshake video', now removed from the Australian Government's The Good Society website, to see the myriad ways the conversation can be derailed."

The national conversation about consent is the latest reminder that students' access to a robust, clear, appropriate, inclusive and safe curriculum - one that equips them for mutually respectful interactions and purposeful participation in school and wider communities - is paramount.

Staffing, planning, programming and pedagogy may present all manner of problems for school leaders, teachers and support staff, but it is useful to be reminded that what we are doing when we work with students to develop their respectful relationships competencies is an incredible privilege."



Kingswood College Box Hill, Victoria

Kingswood College is a co-educational Prep-to-Year 12 independent school in Melbourne's east. The school's vision statement highlights its aspiration "to be a world-class school known for our innovation, engagement and collaboration, where students' potential soars because we nurture and challenge them to know themselves and achieve their personal best as global citizens".

Positive, mutually respectful relationships between students, between students and staff, and between the college and parents are central to Kingswood. The school has a long history of focusing on respectful relationships as part of a wellbeing curriculum that aims to equip students to know and be themselves in order to live purposefully in the world.

Once referred to as 'pastoral care', the program has always had a place in the school curriculum and several years ago became known as 'wellbeing matters'. Sequential across the whole school, it is dedicated to resilience building, positive psychology, study skills and relational interactions between students and their wellbeing mentors.

The school continually improves its formal program. Some years ago, updating material on family violence resulted in a robust focus on respectful relationships and child safety. The Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships (RRRR) curriculum's eight topics are an effective synthesis of many of the key focus areas for our wellbeing curriculum and allow us to employ a whole-of-school approach to this area of social and emotional learning.

Whole-of-school approach

Kingswood is taking a whole-of-school approach to teaching respectful relationships and it is embedded in the wellbeing curriculum from early learning to senior school. Staff have frequent access to professional learning in the area of respectful relationships, and we have undertaken a gender-equality assessment in relation to college policies, curriculum and practises.

In junior school, respectful relationships are also addressed in the context of the Primary Years Program and also on a daily basis in circle time, during which students may discuss issues that impact them on the playground. Some elements are also covered in subjects such as Religious Education, where values are explored.

We firmly believe that learning about wellbeing and respectful relationships does not just occur in weekly wellbeing sessions. Rather, it should be modelled by staff relationships with each other, with students, and with the broader community.

Kingswood is also part of a cluster of schools that work together on respectful relationships education. While this was challenging in 2020 given COVID-19 constraints, we hope this initiative will resume in the near future. This approach allows for schools to work more collaboratively with each other with the same content and program. It allows us to learn from each other, leading to enhanced student outcomes.

Taking a whole-of-school approach means we continually develop students' skills, knowledge and

understanding of how to relate purposefully in the world. Teachers also benefit from this because students bring their competencies and language into every interaction at school and this improves our learning culture.

We have also audited our curriculum, particularly in relation to our English texts, to ensure they are representative of the world our students live in and the world we want to help them create. This has meant checking the dominant voices, expressions of identity and cultures in the texts we set for students, and adjusting our curriculum as necessary.

Benefits for students and staff

Staff can often feel less confident in dealing with the more challenging aspects of the RRRR curriculum and the pedagogical approach can be challenging for some teachers. One of the strengths of a whole-of-school, iterative approach is the way students and teachers develop, early on in the program, the competencies and language that enables them to discuss the more challenging topics later in the program. This means teachers can tackle the later topics from a strengths-based approach because the students will have the emotional intelligence and vocabulary to build on their understanding in a safe classroom environment.

With thanks to Grant Exon, VCE Wellbeing Coordinator and Lucinda Malgas, College Chaplain and Head of Journey's Precinct, Kingswood College



Sacred Heart Primary School

Diamond Creek, Victoria

Our school was established in 1962 to serve a widespread parish including the greater Melbourne areas of Diamond Creek, Wattle Glen, Hurstbridge, St Andrews and other nearby areas. Currently there are 146 students at Sacred Heart and 22 staff including full-time, part-time/job share, support and administration staff.

Students at Sacred Heart enjoy the benefits of studying in a small school. All students know each other across the year levels and develop strong and supportive relationships with each other. The school has a firm focus on student wellbeing and has developed a number of programs to support a culture of acceptance, caring and inclusiveness.

Since 2017, Sacred Heart has been involved in the Respectful Relationships initiative and has been a Lead School for the past two years.

Sacred Heart became involved in this initiative when Wellbeing Leader Gina Murphy, in analysing the school's behaviour management data, recognised a need for building the social skills essential for positive relationships.

At Wellbeing Leaders Networks, Gina became aware of the Respectful Relationships initiative and recommended it to the school leadership team. She said it was an evidence-based approach and was well-resourced through the Department of Education and Training. It also included professional learning opportunities on the initiative's guiding principles; as well as training in how to access and implement the tools to support staff in delivering general and sometimes sensitive information.

Staff felt this initiative was part of a society-wide movement for change in response to the Royal

Commission into Family Violence. We were fortunate that staff member Norah Jacombs agreed to lead our Respectful Relationships program. With her passion and drive, she has been fundamental to ensuring this initiative is kept among the school's priorities at all times.

Planning and action

At Sacred Heart we implemented the Respectful Relationships Initiative using a school-wide approach encompassing not only explicit teaching of materials but also integrating this into the culture of Sacred Heart.

We have developed an annual action plan working with all staff to have a shared language and methodology. This allows us to stay on track with implementing the Respectful Relationships initiative and to reflect regularly on our progress as a group.

Our pedagogical goal is ultimately to provide tools to enable students to navigate everyday relationships and challenging situations they may face both now and in the future. Using the RRRR program enables our staff to deliver a targeted Social Emotional Learning program to all students that is underpinned by a clear scope, sequence and age-appropriate materials.

Enhancing voice, expanding vision

During our journey with the Respectful Relationships initiative, we have had many 'a-ha moments' – and some challenges – but through teamwork and ongoing dialogue we have had many, many more successes.

As a school we recognise that Social and Emotional Learning underpins the wellbeing and safety of all of our students and that

Respectful Relationships is a strong cornerstone of our SEL curriculum. We know that Respectful Relationships enhances student voice and provides opportunities for students to show shared vision and leadership at our school. This improves student learning across all areas of the curriculum.

From implementing Respectful Relationships over several years, our staff have developed greater confidence and knowledge of the importance of Social and Emotional Learning through various professional learning opportunities and in dialogue with other members of both school and partner communities. Being involved in Respectful Relationships has provided us with the ability to network with local schools and share resources to strengthen the program.

So our parent/guardian community can join us on this journey, we have ensured Wellbeing is a consistent component of our weekly newsletters. In this way we can keep parents/guardians informed of the processes we use to implement Respectful Relationships and what it means to students.

This also means we can support and enhance our students' knowledge of themselves and others both at school and, equally as important, outside of school.

Overcoming challenges

In implementing the Respectful Relationships initiative, staff experienced several challenges in planning, implementing and teaching the program.

One of our first challenges was to address the reality that students present at different stages of their emotional maturity and development in any given year level. This meant staff needed to really know their



students and modify their delivery to different cohorts of students.

The Wellbeing/Respectful Relationships Team took this on board and facilitated staff meetings to ensure all staff understood the principles behind the curriculum materials and were therefore comfortable with selecting the activities supporting these principles, using the language and approach suitable to their particular cohort. We also timetabled a common Social and Emotional Learning timeslot across the entire school.

Another challenge was ensuring parents understood the content and importance of the program and supported delivery of sensitive material, particularly around topics 7 and 8 (gender diversity and gender-based violence).

We addressed this by providing our parish priest with the relevant material and inviting him to attend staff meetings to discuss staff concerns and provide the church's position on these topics. This dialogue provided our staff with increased knowledge and confidence.

Getting started

We advise schools starting out on this journey to, first of all, gain familiarity with the resources and curriculum through professional learning and trying out various materials at staff meetings. Obtain the staff's approval and commitment based on their authentic understanding of the program's principles and processes.

To implement the program, create a team of leaders to drive it, network with other local schools and liaise with the Department team.

It is vital for schools implementing this initiative to acknowledge the many great things you already do in wellbeing at your school and find ways to build on these with a Respectful Relationship lens.

Also always remember to celebrate and communicate to your community all of your successes, small and large.

With thanks to Sacred Heart Principal Jim O'Sullivan and teachers Gina Murphy and Norah Jacombs

"The national conversation about consent is the latest reminder that students' access to a robust, clear, appropriate, inclusive and safe curriculum is paramount."

This report was compiled by Cathy Hickey, Assistant Secretary, IEU VicTas

Resources

Respectful Relationships: A Resource Kit for Victorian Schools
www.education.vic.au/about/programs/pages/respectfulrelationships.aspx

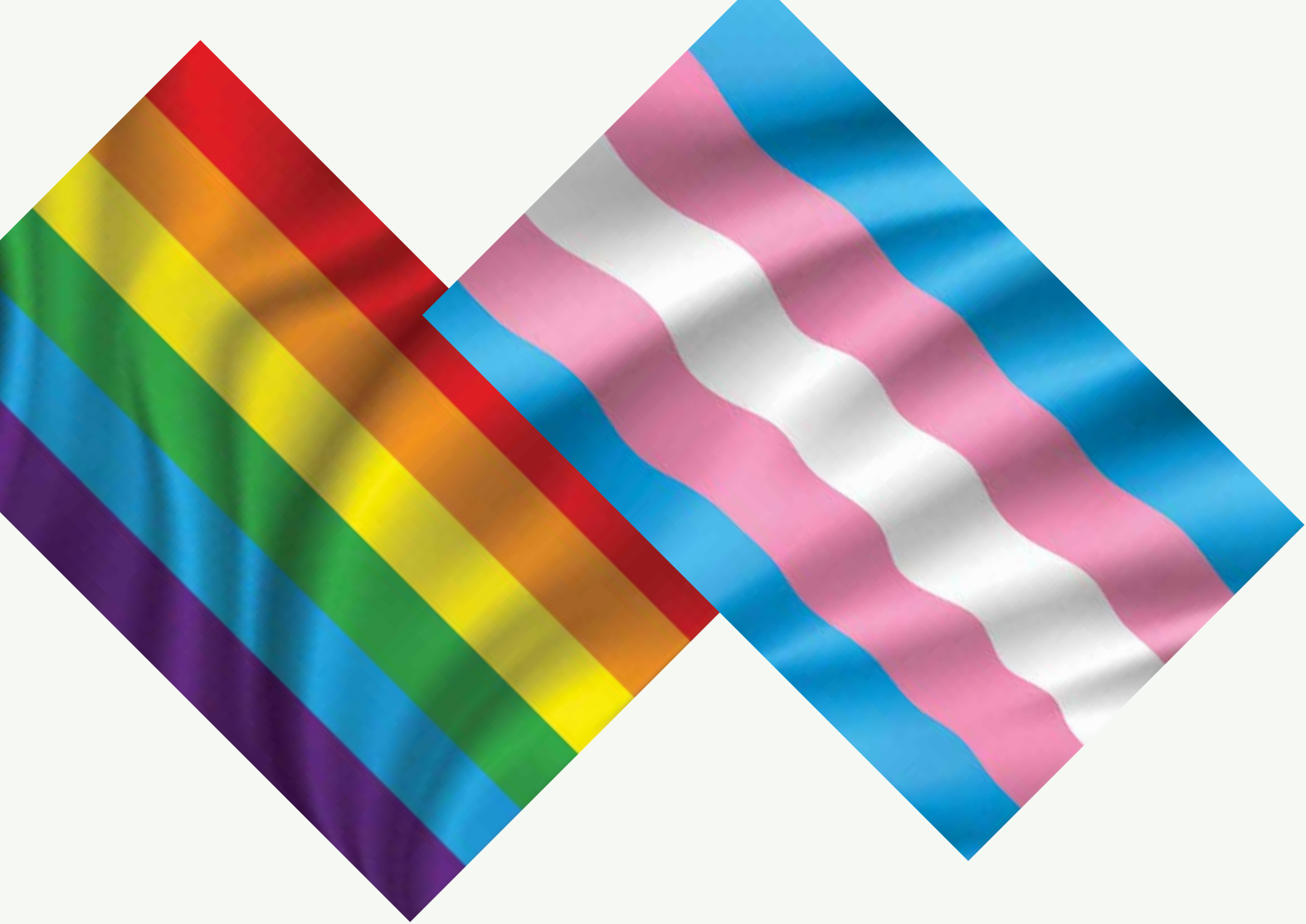
Respectful Relationships Education to Prevent Gender-based Violence: Lessons from a multi-year pilot in primary schools (May 2021) www.ourwatch.org.au

The Queensland Respectful Relationships Education Program (RREP) www.education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/stages-of-schooling/respectful-relationships

Peer Support Program: <https://peersupport.edu.au>

The Good Society: A resource for teaching respectful relationships (Australian Government) <https://thegoodsociety.gov.au/about/what-is-the-good-society>





Creating safer schools for gender diverse students

Australian Catholic University (ACU) research has revealed gender diverse students feel significantly less safe at school than their cisgender peers, writes IEU journalist Emily Campbell.

However, the study found gender diverse students trusted adults working in schools and other youth-serving spaces to help combat sexual harassment and provide support when students faced unsafe or risky situations.

Context of study

The study *Gender diversity and safety climate perceptions in schools and other youth-serving organisations*, published in *Children and Youth Services Review*, compared the safety perceptions of three cohorts: males, females and gender diverse youth, all aged between 10 and 18 years old.

Lead author Douglas Russell from ACU's Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS) said the study emerged as a side project resulting from work the ICPS undertook between

2013 and 2015 for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

"Early on during the Royal Commission it was realised there was quite a huge gap within the research literature in that nobody had really asked children and young people about their perceptions of safety, specifically related to grooming and sexual abuse," Russell said.

"The ICPS was given funding to create and deploy a survey tool that would allow the collection of that data.

"More than 1400 children and young people aged between 10 and 18 responded to that broader Australian survey and we decided to use the data collected as a basis for this preliminary study," he said.

ACU researchers, including leading child protection expert Professor Daryl Higgins and social psychologist Dr Joel Anderson, worked with Professor Damien Riggs of Flinders University and Associate Professor Jacqueline Ullman of Western Sydney University on the study.

"We had collected information nationally, across multiple states, pulling together a multi-state team with backgrounds in relation to child abuse and maltreatment but also specific to gender and sexuality," Russell said.

"We decided to look at the data in regard to what differences might exist between those three groups, the male, the female and the gender diverse respondents," he said.

The group compared survey responses from the 27 male, 27 female, and 27 gender diverse youth, selected from the larger convenience sample of 1400 young people.

Faith in adults but not organisations

The results showed that despite facing greater safety concerns, gender diverse students were optimistic adults working in youth spaces would support them during times of concern.

"When we talk about safety in the context of the study, we are not talking about falling off play equipment or getting injured during sport, but specifically about interpersonal safety," Russell said.

"While gender diverse youth had less faith in organisations to help keep them safe, they were more likely to show confidence that adults within these organisations would properly deal with instances of sexual harassment and be supportive if they felt unsafe because of sexually questionable behaviour," he said.

Russell said an explanation for the contrasting result may be partly explained by the setting and demographics of a school that took part.

"The school attended by 44 per cent of the gender diverse participants was likely to have gender and sexuality diversity-affirming educational content, including advice on how to seek help when faced with gender-based harassment and support of gender and sexuality diverse students.

"This may have provided more confidence to this group that adults would try to help," Russell said.

Gender diverse students vulnerable

Unfortunately, the findings highlighted several barriers to help-seeking for young people experiencing sexual harassment, detailed by the respondents.

"These barriers are there as a result of the relationships these students have with their teachers and other staff at the school," Russell said.

"Things like not being comfortable talking to an adult, if something like this was to happen, thinking adults do not care or are too busy to deal with issues like this, were barriers identified by respondents," he said.

"We know that LGBTQIA+ young people are at risk of poorer outcomes regarding mental health and can face a lot of social stigma and marginalisation which can lead to poor school attendance, so it's very important for schools to foster safe and supportive environments for them.

"There is definitely a need for more professional development for school staff in this space, so staff can work out small ways they can try to make school a safer place for gender diverse students, ensuring they feel welcome and involved in the school community," he said.

Supporting students

Professor Damien Riggs said schools that create safe spaces are likely to benefit from the inclusion of affirming student clubs or societies focused on the needs of this diverse population of young people.

"Research has shown that the existence of such clubs or societies helps to reduce discrimination in schools, and hence foster a greater sense of school safety," he said.

"One of the ways school staff can help gender diverse students feel safe and respected is by using their preferred names and pronouns," Russell said.

"One of the key areas some of my colleagues would definitely agree with is seeing more transgender and non-binary people within their schoolwork and having more books in the library featuring stories about gender diverse individuals."

School staff speaking positively about gender diversity also has a positive impact on the wellbeing of gender diverse students and their sense of safety, as identified in previous research by co-author Ullman (2017).

"School leadership, teachers and other staff should make an effort to ensure gender diverse students are specifically and uniquely aware of an adult they can approach when they have a problem," Russell said.

"Someone who is a champion for gender diverse students, who can be a go-to person and is comfortable dealing with situations and can direct them the appropriate mental health resources or external support if necessary," he said.

GSAs and safe spaces

Establishing a gender and sexuality alliance (GSA) or similar group is a powerful way to ensure LGBTQIA+ and gender diverse students feel safe and included at school.

More nuanced findings

Russell said his research into this field is ongoing and the research team are continuing to collect data using a revised survey, which should yield more nuanced findings.

"It may be a couple of years yet before we get the number of participants, we would like to have a well powered study," he said.

"Essentially, with this new way we are collecting gender data, we hope that we will be able to do comparisons between non-binary individuals and individuals potentially who are trans masculine versus trans feminine and again versus male and female."

Resources

Readers wanting more information on these issues are encouraged to read the full study, which can be accessed at <https://bit.ly/2SkO0hn>

IEU QNT members should keep an eye out for an upcoming inclusive education professional development session, in conjunction with *True*, being held in the June/July school holidays. This session will assist members in providing support to students who may identify as or be questioning whether they are LGBTQIA+.

Additionally, the Queensland Human Rights Commission has excellent resources including the *Trans @ School* guide for trans and gender diverse students and a companion resource for school staff, found at: <https://bit.ly/3aZ4KB9>

IEU VicTas members can access a webinar on 31 August - designed to help teachers build a culture of acceptance and support LGBTQIA+ students. Register for the Safe Schools' program and the support it offers teachers through the Learning Hub at www.ieuvictas.org.au/webinars

The NSW/ACT Branch of the IEU recently partnered with several organisations including Wear it Purple and the NSW Teachers Federation to establish a committee who are creating resources to educate school staff about gender diversity and support them to build, shape and activate a GSA in their school. IEU members can sign up to receive a copy of *The GSA Guide* at <https://www.gsaconnect.org.au/>

Same but different **When women lead boys schools**

Two women principals were recently appointed to boys schools. They talk to journalist Sue Osborne about breaking new ground and what they bring to the table.

Since 2021 dawned, a series of media reports have raised serious and disturbing questions around gender roles and respectful relationships, particularly in the non-government school sector. As schools strive to understand and change this, we talk to two principals who are already making a big difference.



Silvana Rossetti

Silvana Rossetti is making history as the first female principal at 84-year-old boys' school Marist College Eastwood, in Sydney's north-west.

A couple of times a student has greeted her in the corridor with: "Good morning, Sir - I mean Miss. Sorry Miss, force of habit!"



Vicki Lavorato

Dr Vittoria Lavorato (known as Vicki) has recently taken the reins at St Patrick's College Strathfield, a Catholic primary and secondary school in the inner-western Sydney suburb of Strathfield. She is also the first female principal of this boys' school.

It's not Lavorato's first experience in leadership at a boys' school: she spent some years as a deputy at Waverley College in Sydney's eastern suburbs. She has also been a principal in two girls' schools: Domremy College at Five Dock; and Bethany College, Hurstville.

Lavorato said leadership appointments should be gender blind, based on merit, talent and ability. "It's never been an issue when men have been

Only five weeks into her role when she spoke to *IE*, Rossetti said surprise has been the predominant reaction from the school community, but also pleasure, particularly from female teachers.

School leadership is nothing new for Rossetti: she was assistant principal and acting principal for 10 years at Catherine McAuley, Westmead, an all-girls school also in Sydney's north-west. She spent the first 14 years of her career teaching in a co-ed government school.

Transitioning to a boys' school has not fazed Rossetti; her view is "education is education".

"I'm really passionate about education and excited to be a role model for the boys, as I have hopefully been a role model for girls in the past," she said.

Role modelling is a crucial part of Rossetti's philosophy. Having taught physics and biology before moving into leadership, Rossetti wants girls to see female role models both in leadership and the sciences.

But she also wants boys to see female leadership in action. "Being in a 'boys' club' is not good preparation for life - boys need to understand that respect for everyone, regardless of who they are, is important in today's world," she said.

"The more boys see women in leadership roles, the more society can evolve, and we can tackle some of the problems we've been reading and hearing about lately."

Thanks to encouragement from one of her own female mentors, Rossetti gained a Master's Degree in Educational

Leadership in the mid-2000s while guiding her son through high school and holding down a full-time teaching job.

"I think I've been confident enough to step forward into leadership roles because someone has said to me, 'hey, have you thought about this? I think you've got some good qualities that could make you a leader,'" Rossetti said.

Rossetti hopes to support the staff at Marist Eastwood similarly, and her door is open for them to talk to her about their aspirations.

"I'm not in the classroom with the students, they are, so my job is to support them as much as I can so they can do the best by the students," Rossetti said.

"There are more males on staff than at my previous school, but so far that has not been an issue. Some of the females have said they are happy to welcome a female principal, but so have some of the men. They are keen to see what kind of leadership I will offer."

Having met with the P&F several times, she said the parents seem excited and supportive.

"It's quite a lovely community and they want their boys to grow up with respect for everybody," she said.

A member of the union's Principals Sub Branch, Rossetti said being able to touch base with other principals, male and female, share ideas and find out how other schools are approaching problems has been a big help.

appointed principal at an all-girls school, so it shouldn't raise concern when it's the other way around," she said.

Lavorato began her career as a mathematics and science teacher, and she also had a stint as a regional director with Sydney Catholic Schools. "I was a very interesting looking deputy headmaster back in the 1990s, as there was no attempt to make that job title gender neutral," she said.

Lavorato comes from post-war migrant parents who didn't get to complete primary school, so she is justly proud of her doctorate. "I believe in the liberating power of education," she said. "Coming from quite an impoverished background, I believe teachers can help bridge the gap for their students."

A love of education spurred Lavorato to undertake a master's degree in pure mathematics at the University of Sydney. She also has a graduate diploma in theology and has completed doctoral research in secondary school improvement.

"I love being in the chaos of schools," she said. "What inspired me to become a teacher from the beginning was the students, and that passion hasn't changed. They give me life and energy and I love being able to make a difference in their world."

Lavorato sees a difference in how boys learn, particularly in their activity levels, self-confidence and willingness to take risks. But she says there are more similarities than differences between boys and girls schools.

But this lack of confidence and self-belief she sees in female students manifests in women not taking full advantage of their career opportunities, Lavorato says.

"Women often talk themselves out of opportunities, especially if they're mothers," she said. "At St Pat's, I've been meeting every person individually. I think as a female leader you learn quickly to put a lot of energy into building

positive relationships. It is the first step in building authentic collaboration within a school culture.

"Meeting and encouraging the women in my workplace will be an ongoing thing, because you find women can be reluctant to consider leadership positions. Reminding them of their skills and capabilities and letting them know they are ready can often give reluctant women the impetus to 'put their hand up' and lead.

"When my appointment at St Pat's was announced, there was fabulous support from the community, from teachers, parents, boys and old boys. Parents have commented on how pleased they are that the school is being progressive and in tune with other workplaces.

"I remind staff that you can have a work/life balance because people like me have done it. I was the primary caregiver to my two children in the past. They're grown now, but with two children and a husband, and being married for 35 years, you learn the efficacy of multitasking, delegation and prioritisation."

Lavorato hopes her appointment will challenge assumptions and stop people making sweeping generalisations about women in leadership. Disappointingly, Lavorato still experienced some trolling on social media, with comments to the effect that her appointment was a sad day for boys' education.

"Some people perceive education to be a 'highly feminised' profession and these prized positions in boys' schools were the last male domain," she said. "But in reality, while there may be a lot of female teachers, principals' positions still tend to be dominated by males.

"I never got around to responding to the negative comments, but I didn't need to. The education community saw those remarks and answered them on my behalf."



A person's ability to recognise reputable, accurate health information is part of their health literacy.

Health literacy is essential to making critical decisions in health-related situations. There is a positive relationship between health literacy, health behaviours and health outcomes, and low health literacy is associated with poorer health (Möttus et al., 2014).

Teach health literacy to all

HealthLit4Kids (HL4K) is an education package designed at the University of Tasmania for use in schools to raise awareness of health and promote discussions about health

among teachers, students, families and communities.

The program has been piloted in five Tasmanian primary schools to support classroom teachers to develop health literacy in their students and encourage schools to embrace it across their curriculum. These five schools are located in areas of socio-economic advantage and disadvantage within Tasmania (from deciles 2-8 on the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas scale, where one is the lowest).

As these schools capture some of the socio-economic variation among the community, they may be representative of other schools in similar contexts nationally and internationally.

The HL4K program is designed to encourage children to create health messages and experience health-orientated activities in ways that make sense to them. Students demonstrate their health literacy by creating health 'artefacts', such as mental health (egg) cartons of calm, food plates and posters that they exhibit in whole-of-school Health Expo at the end of the program. It becomes an age-appropriate catalyst for students to start health-related conversations with their teachers, parents and friends.

At the end of the first year of the program in each school, program creators interviewed parents and analysed the teachers' written reflections. Despite the variation in the socio-economic status between different schools, there was a lot of overlap in the challenges and benefits identified in implementing the program.

Parents' impressions

Parent comments about HL4K focused on the engagement and behaviour changes of themselves and their children. Parents positively reported their children's engagement and motivation to participate in practical activities, artefact creation and events such as the school expo. Children talked with their parents about the artefacts they were creating, and parents viewed this as supporting learning as well as reinforcing pressure points such as reduced screen time that were being emphasised at home.

Parent engagement reflected time pressures as well as their own values and priorities in relation to health. Parents perceived an increase in their children's ability to understand, communicate and act on health-related knowledge at home.

Parents also observed behavioural changes related to food and nutrition, mental health and physical activity. They also reported their children had corrected some of their health-related misunderstandings and informed them of new or updated health information. This new knowledge and resulting changes positively influenced the whole family (Nash et al., 2020).

Teachers' reflections

Teachers' written reflections pointed to the importance of a whole-of-school approach using shared, health-related language, developing their own health literacy and knowledge about teaching it, and student engagement.

Teachers confirmed a whole-of-school approach was important to developing greater awareness and knowledge of health and wellbeing within the school community, enhancing learning opportunities within and between classes and using common health-literacy language (for example, 'sometimes' and 'always' foods) in lessons and conversations.

Teachers also developed a greater awareness of gaps in their own health literacy and how to work on these, as well as how to integrate health literacy across the curriculum. Similar to parents, teacher reflections revealed that students appreciated the importance of improving their health literacy, and how their engagement and excitement had a positive influence on the program (Nash et al., 2021).

Lifelong benefits

Insights from teachers and parents contribute to strategies to positively influence the health literacy of students and the wider community.

Parental engagement can be challenging for schools; however, parents in this study reported they were more likely to engage in programs that interested their children.

Along with regular informative communication (school newsletter, principal/teacher emails etc) and invitations to contribute to school plans and events, these strategies provide opportunities for the impact of a health literacy program to be sustained outside of the classroom. And it can positively influence the lifelong health of the wider population.

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Dr Rosie Nash, Chief Investigator and Co-Founder of HealthLit4Kids and Lecturer in Public Health, School of Medicine, University of Tasmania.

"There is a positive relationship between health literacy, health behaviours and health outcomes, and low health literacy is associated with poorer health."

Education suffers from period pain

A new study has revealed the impact menstrual disorders and period pain is having on the education of young women, as journalist Jessica Willis writes.

Menstrual disorders are highly prevalent in adolescents and young women.

Period pain affects about 75 percent of women under 25 worldwide, a figure that increases to 90 percent for young women in Australia.

Researchers from Western Sydney University, the University of South Australia and Middlebury College in the United States surveyed 4,202 young Australian women aged between 13-25 years old on their menstrual pain and academic achievement.

90% suffered period pain

Over 90 percent of participants reported period pain, with more than half reporting pain with every menstrual cycle in the past three months before the survey.

While over a third said they had recently missed at least one class of school or university in the past three menstrual cycles due to period pain, similar numbers missed a whole day of school or university.

This is concerning given the established link between absenteeism and academic achievement – when absenteeism increases, academic achievement decreases – as well as other adverse consequences such

as increased social isolation and disengagement from peers and community.

Presenteeism was also found to be a major issue with participants reporting issues with concentration during classes, poorer performance during classes as well as assessments or tests due to period pain.

Dr Mike Armour at Western Sydney University's NICM Health Research Institute led the study, calling it a wake up call for the need to remove stigma around periods and for more flexibility and support to be provided to students and those teaching them.

"Education takes a hit when students miss school, so it's concerning that over a third of young women reported missing a whole day of school or university in the previous three months," Armour said.

Period pain can be severe

Dr Jane Chalmers, co-author of the study and senior lecturer at the University of South Australia, said the impact of menstrual pain can be severe.

"Period pain can significantly affect young women's mood, energy level and consequently their work or school performance," Dr Chalmers said.

"This significant level of impact is higher than previous studies have shown and it suggests that younger women are not getting sufficient relief from their period pain."

An overwhelming majority of the women surveyed were also worried about how to hide their period, and the risk of bleeding through their clothes.

Over half also reported pelvic pain when not having their period, a concern as this can be a sign of persistent pelvic pain caused by conditions such as endometriosis which is not uncommon in adolescents and young women (it can range from early to advanced stage even at a young age).

Open communication between students and teachers would help

Professor Kathryn Holmes, another co-author from the University of Western Sydney, said the study shows open communication between students and teaching staff would help, but many young women are unwilling to raise issues with their teachers.

Only 11 percent of young women at school said they would talk to a teacher about their period-related problems.

About a third said they would speak to a teacher but only if the teacher was a woman.

"This reluctance stems from feelings of embarrassment or perceptions that teachers would not respond in a caring manner if symptoms were reported," Professor Holmes said.

According to the study, reasons teachers may be reluctant or avoid teaching on sexual health and relationships in schools varies from an overcrowded curriculum and little

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time to lacking confidence or a fear of overstepping the boundaries of 'parental content'.

Dr Armour said these misgivings are also partly due to a wider cultural stigma around periods.

However, he also pointed to previous studies showing that more teacher education is needed in this area.

"There is an urgent need for more effective teacher education on menstrual health," he said.

"This should be for all staff involved in teaching young women, not just those teaching health and physical education."

Health literacy critical regarding period pain

The combination of low health literacy and the normalisation of menstrual pain may result in a serious risk of chronic health conditions being underdiagnosed and/or undertreated.

Although it is taught in the Australian curriculum, most young women frame period pain as part-and-parcel of "becoming a woman".

It is time to recognise this as a potential health problem and something that women do not need to 'put up with'.

Worryingly, most young women manage their period pain primarily with over-the-counter pain medications rather than seeking medical advice, according to findings from the same survey.

This means they are often under-dosing or choosing less effective medications such as paracetamol and not getting optimal pain relief.

A variety of factors could explain this, including cultural/ societal shame or stigma around discussing periods, a lack of health literacy and education on periods, feeling or experiences of being dismissed by medical professionals or the pain occurring so long it becomes 'normal'.

"Improved menstrual education is a priority for young people and their parents, who often feel they do not have access to suitable information on

menstruation," Dr Armour said.

"For meaningful sexual health education for all, it is critical that menstruation and period pain stops being a 'female-only' issue and includes all genders, as well as parents, caregivers and our school communities."

Workers' rights and reproductive health

Period pain and other menstrual symptoms do not just affect young women in schools.

Women in workplaces can also suffer similarly.

Our union has created a model clause regarding paid reproductive leave for use in collective bargaining to help alleviate workplace pressures on all workers, particularly those who suffer from chronic or severe reproductive health conditions.

The model clause would provide 10 days of paid leave per year (non-cumulative) for employees suffering from menstruation, pregnancy, perimenopause, menopause, poly-cystic ovarian syndrome and endometriosis, male or female infertility, In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) and other forms of assisted reproductive health services, vasectomy and hysterectomy.

To find out more about the model clause please contact our union.

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Key findings:

- 90% of participants reported period pain.
- Over 50% reported period pain during every period.
- Over 30% reported missing a class due to pain.
- Over 30% reported missing a full day of school due to pain.
- Majority reported issues with concentration, negatively impacted quality of schoolwork and poorer performance in tests/assessments.
- Over 50% reported experiencing pelvic pain when not on their period.

DPAIN



When **personal devices** come with pitfalls

Technology can blur the lines between leisure and work. IEU VicTas Industrial Officers Gretta Nicholls and Jessica Mekhael examine the issues - including the potential for surveillance.

The pandemic has given rise to a proliferation of working from home, and with this comes both the use of workplace devices for personal use and using personal devices on a work platform. And both come with potential problems.

Employers are increasingly relying on surveillance through electronic devices to keep an eye on employees. This includes the personal use of employer-provided devices such as laptops and phones for purposes that are not work related; for example, an employee shopping online on a work laptop during work time.

Employers are also monitoring employees' use of their own personal devices that use work-provided platforms, such as a personal mobile phone connected to the workplace internet.

In both examples - and subject to the applicable legislation - the employer may be able to rely on the information obtained from monitoring a personal or work-provided device to take disciplinary action against employees.

What the law says

In Australia, there are no blanket laws regarding workplace surveillance. Instead, there is a complex web of state and federal laws that have not adapted to the reality of technological advances and ever-increasing flexible work arrangements arising in our workplaces.

Laws governing surveillance in the workplace differ between the states. Only NSW and the ACT have specific legislation dedicated to dealing with workplace surveillance (*Workplace Surveillance Act 2005 (NSW)*, and *Workplace Privacy Act 2011 (ACT)*). In these jurisdictions, an employer must give 14 days' notice prior to workplace surveillance

being undertaken, and there is a requirement that the surveillance accord with workplace policies.

The use of electronic devices for workplace surveillance in other states is covered by general privacy and surveillance laws. For example, in Victoria, the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999 (Vic)* regulates the use of surveillance devices in general; however, the only specific regulation it provides in relation to workplaces is the prohibition on certain devices being used in bathrooms.

This leaves the use of surveillance devices on employees largely to general laws governing surveillance and relevant employment law. For example, the use of surveillance devices and the storage of that data may also be incorporated into employment contracts, enterprise agreements and workplace policies.

Emerging issues

Broadly speaking, there are two main categories of issues that arise in the use of technology connected to the workplace that may create contention between employers and employees: use of a work-provided device for personal use; and use of a personal device on a workplace platform.

If an employee engages in activity on a work device or workplace internet, and that activity is either prohibited by a workplace instrument or is illegal, it is most likely the employee will face disciplinary action or other consequences if the employer becomes aware of that activity.

Most employees will understand that where the online activity engaged in is illegal - for example, accessing material that is clearly prohibited under Australian law - this will result in a decisive course of action, most likely termination of employment.

Employees may be less discerning about putting their employment at risk where they use a workplace device or workplace internet to look at material that is not illegal. However, this may conflict with the employer's views or beliefs.



For instance, if an employer had a strict policy or term of employment in respect of adherence to religious beliefs prohibiting divorce or parenthood planning – and an employee were to search for such materials or purchase products online using the work internet or work device – then despite the conduct not being illegal, it may still be open to the employer to discipline an employee in these circumstances.

If this does occur, the course of action and outcome will be closely linked to the terms of any workplace policy, industrial instrument or employment contract.

Case in point

In a case before the NSW Industrial Relations Commission, an employee was dismissed by her employer for breaches of the code of conduct and communications policy.

In the case of *Bellenger v Mid North Coast Local Health District* [2017] NSWIRComm 1019, Bellenger was dismissed after an investigation found she had used the employer's email system inappropriately. A review of her work email directory found she had received, stored and sent significant quantities of emails that were considered pornographic, graphic (violence), and generally inappropriate in nature.

A personal journal unrelated to work was also found on the work device and this was found to be in breach of the employer's policy on personal use. It was also found to have "encroached on work time" despite the employee contending that she had worked regularly beyond the standard hours of work, took work home and worked at home on weekends.

The employer had a Code of Conduct which, among other things, stipulated that work resources and equipment must be used lawfully, efficiently and only as authorised. It was found that the emails and storing of pornographic and graphic (violence) material, and material that was generally inappropriate in nature, as well as the personal journal,

were in breach of the relevant policy and constituted a valid reason for her dismissal.

Minimising the risks

To mitigate risks for employees while using a workplace device or workplace internet, Lachlan Jarvis from Lyonswood Investigations and Forensics suggests:

- that the employer provide electronic devices to employees for work-related use and provide clear instructions on any limitations or restrictions in their use
- that the employment contract stipulates the terms of any workplace surveillance
- that a clear workplace device surveillance policy is developed in consultation with employees.

In addition, employees should be mindful about connecting to the workplace internet on a personal device, such as their mobile phone. In certain circumstances, the employer can monitor an employee's internet use through the employer's internet router.

Employees should keep in mind that any device supplied by the employer is the employer's property, and the employer can forensically examine this device.

Industrial Officers Gretta Nicholls and Jessica Mekhael are based in the IEU's Victoria Tasmania Branch

If you are an IEU member, and you would like advice or assistance on any issues raised in this article, please contact your state or territory branch.



Playing chess reduces risk aversion in children

Journalist Emily Campbell explores the findings of a new study into the impact of playing chess on children's levels of risk aversion.

Chess is a complex game which has stood the test of time and has experienced a resurgence thanks to the popularity and success of Netflix television series *The Queen's Gambit*.

The game is considered highly beneficial to brain development and academic achievement, and is thought to improve memory and concentration, enhance problem solving abilities and promote creativity.

Although previous research indicates chess can improve these cognitive skills, a recent study by Australian researchers has led to a significant new finding that playing chess can reduce risk aversion in children.

Intensive chess program field study

A team of economic and business researchers from Monash University and Deakin University, including Professor Asadul Islam, Dr Aaron Nicholas and Dr Wang-Sheng Lee, conducted a randomised field experiment examining the effects of an intensive chess program on a group of

year five students who had no previous exposure to chess.

The research, which was recently published in the *Journal of Development Economics*, concluded learning chess rules, basic strategies and repeatedly playing chess over time had a significant positive effect on reducing levels of risk aversion in children.

A group of students from Bangladesh undertook a 30 hour chess training program over three weeks, taught by qualified chess coaches and following a curriculum approved by the World Chess Federation.

For a year after the chess instruction program concluded, the researchers assessed participants on a range of cognitive and non-cognitive behavioural changes, such as time management, mathematic ability, concentration and risk taking.

Dr Lee said although the researchers looked at a range of benefits and outcomes on children who participated in the program, the strongest findings related to risk aversion.

"We were not sure exactly what would arise, but the majority of students involved in the program demonstrated lowered risk aversion,

which was an interesting finding," Dr Lee said.

"Although there has been speculation, and some previous research into the potential benefits of chess, our rigorous study design means there is now scientific evidence chess can teach children about healthy risk-taking."

Importance of calculated risks

Learning to take calculated risks and make informed decisions is an essential life skill that children must develop in order to thrive and live successful, fulfilling lives.

Part of this involves developing caution and foresight, performing cost-benefit analyses when considering options and exposure to win/lose situations through competition.

Professor Islam said the findings showed chess could help model and nurture positive risk-taking behaviour which would prepare them for life's challenges.

"Risk and reward is a concept that is articulated well in the game of chess," Professor Islam said.

"Players often sacrifice pawns, knights and bishops if it helps checkmate the opponent's king and win the game.

"Our rigorous study design means there is now scientific evidence chess can teach children about healthy risk-taking."



"Such sacrifices are inherently risky because if one's calculations are faulty, the sacrifice could prove to be critical, eventually leading to a quick loss.

"Children need to know how to take calculated risks.

"If children are too risk averse it might prevent them from swimming at the beach, going to a public park or participating in contact sports for risk of injury.

"In many life situations, it is also the case that with great risk often comes great reward.

"However, the line between necessary calculated risk-taking and reckless behaviour is sometimes difficult to determine.

"Learning chess can help bridge that gap," he said.

Essential life skills

Dr Lee agreed risk aversion is an important life skill for young people to develop in their formative years.

"We are not necessarily saying it is always good to be more risk averse or less risk averse," Dr Lee said.

"The point I take from this research is it is good to think about what a calculated risk is and when it is a good time to take a calculated risk.

"Some risks are definitely not worth taking but in some other life situations, you might want to take the risk because the benefits outweigh the costs, so this is what chess helped the students realise.

"When playing chess, the students started thinking deeply about whether in a particular position it is worth pursuing a certain strategy, asking

themselves will it work or will I end up losing, considering different scenarios."

Dr Lee said learning to take calculated risks would set children up with essential life skills that would equip them for future jobs and be transferable to other areas of life.

"It is hard to know what jobs will be available in the future for today's children and many jobs existing today will no longer exist by the time this cohort have grown up and graduated from school and university," he said.

"To prepare for this uncertainty, the education system really should seek to teach children how to think critically and how to develop non-cognitive skills like taking calculated risks, which will be valuable in adulthood."

Chess in the curriculum

The children involved in the study seemed to thoroughly enjoy the chess program.

In a survey conducted with students 10 months after the chess program, 99% said they wanted more chess lessons, 94.5% had played chess with a classmate in the previous week, and 87.5% said they played chess regularly with friends or family.

"As introducing chess as a subject in school will not be very costly, the educational intervention we examine in this paper most certainly has the potential to be scaled up if smaller proof-of-concept studies such as this paper show positive results," the researchers wrote in their discussion.

Dr Lee said Australia should consider following the lead of countries

including Poland, Armenia and India, who have integrated chess instruction into their primary school curricula.

"Compulsory chess instruction is something worth thinking about, although as we know the school curriculum is already so crowded and I'm sure there are many other ideas worthy of inclusion.

"How much time should be spent in the curriculum playing chess is obviously debatable, because the objective is not to make the school a school for chess champions, but perhaps having some regular lessons and spurring an interest in the game could be positive.

"Starting a chess club for students who are interested so they can play at lunch or after school as an extracurricular activity is an alternative option to taking up lesson time.

"Students do not need to be chess champions competing at an elite level in order to benefit from the game, but chess coaching will take them up a notch and playing frequently enough, understanding strategy and tactics has benefits," Dr Lee said.

References

Readers with an interest in chess can access the full study by Professor Islam, Dr Lee and Dr Nicholas at http://users.monash.edu/~asaduli/pub/Chess_paper.pdf

Royalty-free chess instruction materials approved by the World Chess Federation's Chess in Schools Commission can be accessed at <https://edu.fide.com/materials/>

Building connections with LEGO Braille bricks

Braille is a vital communication tool for people with impaired vision. Now students can learn it in a fun way alongside their sighted peers, writes journalist Jessica Willis.

Vision Australia, a not-for-profit provider of services for people with blindness or low vision, has partnered with the LEGO® Foundation to help students develop their Braille skills and offer inclusive learning with their sighted classmates.

"Most little kids start out playing with blocks with letters on them, but a child who is blind or has low vision can't see those – so these LEGO Braille bricks allow them access to early literacy learning," says Melissa Fanshawe, senior lecturer at University of Southern Queensland. Fanshawe is a LEGO Braille education ambassador and mum to Ollie, 14, who has low vision.

The raised bumps on each LEGO Braille brick have been modified to correspond to a letter or character of the Braille alphabet.

Each brick also has a printed letter or character to allow children who are blind or have low vision to learn and play alongside sighted classmates, family members and teachers.

"This new toy normalises Braille and allows sighted kids and those who are blind or have low vision to play together and it allows kids with vision impairment to learn while they play, and that is something that sighted kids take for granted," Fanshawe added.

Revolutionary educational tool

The CEO of Vision Australia, Ron Hooton, said the organisation was proud to partner with LEGO and

become the only distributor of the Braille bricks in Australia.

"Inclusive education is something Vision Australia advocates for and the LEGO Foundation has provided us with a great example of how that can be achieved," Hooton said.

"Braille is vital in supporting children who are blind or have low vision to develop literacy skills, and LEGO Braille bricks are a great way to expose children to Braille at an early age.

"Not only will LEGO Braille bricks be a revolutionary educational tool for them, it's also a great way for families and other children to learn more about Braille and its importance."

"It's a great way for families and other children to learn more about Braille and its importance."

Seeing differently

Fanshawe has worked with children who are blind or have low vision for the past 20 years and is trained as a teacher of the vision impaired.

Her son, Ollie, was born with low vision and while he knows how important Braille can be, like any child learning to read and write, he can find it a bit boring and challenging.

"Why would you want to learn Braille on paper when you can learn it with LEGO?" Fanshawe said.

She points out that children who are sighted start developing pre-literacy skills by looking at letters and words all around them – from signs and menus to toys and building blocks – but children who are blind or have low vision are denied that opportunity.

"If you don't have sight and you are just listening to words via technology you can't hear how things are spelled," Fanshawe said.

"But it is important to be able to spell things properly because sighted people expect things in a well-written, well-punctuated format, so these are key things.

"Particularly homophones: things that sound the same but are spelled differently." By this she means words such as new/knew and rain/reign/rein.

High rates of Braille literacy also tend to translate into better work outcomes for people who are blind or have low vision.

Creating the concept

The concept behind the Braille bricks is simple: play-based methodology that teaches Braille to children who are blind or vision impaired.

Each brick retains its iconic form, but the studs are arranged to correspond to numbers and letters of the Braille alphabet as well as a printed version of the symbol or letter.

By combining these features, a whole new world of playful learning opens up that is enjoyable and tactile.

According to the LEGO Foundation, fewer young people are learning Braille





Image: LEGO® Foundation

due to the growing volume of audio books and computer programs on the market.

However, around the world, people with blindness or impaired vision still rely on Braille to work, study and enjoy their lives to the fullest.

The foundation hopes that this simple but highly practical tool will teach and encourage more young people to take up learning Braille.

The Danish Association of the Blind first proposed the bricks to the LEGO Foundation in 2011, followed by the Brazilian-based Dorina Nowill

Foundation for the Blind in 2017.

The concept underwent two rounds of extensive testing over two years in collaboration with Blind communities in Denmark, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Norway, Germany, France and the United States.

How to come by the bricks

Vision Australia is the LEGO Foundation's official partner for distribution of the Braille bricks in Australia.

They will be provided to schools or other education institutions that have

one or more students who are blind or have low vision and are learning Braille.

They are not available for sale to the general public.

Schools, other institutions and teachers will need to register with Vision Australia and complete a one-hour webinar training workshop developed under guidance from the LEGO Foundation.

After completing this they will be provided access to kits.

For more information, see the Vision Australia website www.visionaustralia.org



Anti-worker forces in education policy

As anti-worker forces seek to set education policy, IEU Research Officer Dr Adele Schmidt asks why - and what is to be done.

Any practising teacher would be acutely aware of the frequency with which both traditional and digital media outlets publish stories that seem designed to do nothing more than amplify negative perceptions of teachers, schools and schooling.

More often than not, these articles diagnose ‘problems’ with various elements of the education system and propose sensational solutions that are obviously (to any practising teacher) overly simplistic and inadequately resourced, and therefore destined to have limited impact, or fail completely, if they were ever implemented.

“Independent” agencies

The origins of such stories can be hard to pinpoint at times, but increasingly can be traced back to the release of some form of report generated by an independent agency which has set itself up as a source of solutions to various policy problems.

Examination of the work history and political affiliation of the authors often reveals that these agencies are not at all independent but exist to promulgate the views of specific sectors of society, garner public support and ultimately votes for the policies of a particular party.

It is also telling that very few - if indeed any - of these self-nominated education experts have worked as classroom teachers.

Examples of such agencies are abundant in the education sector and examples of both left and right-leaning ‘thinktanks’ abound.

A recent study by education researchers from Cambridge University and Queensland University of Technology, shows just how influential the work of these thinktanks can be in terms of their influence on public perceptions and, through that, education policy.

In this context, it is vital that teachers and other education workers are able to critically evaluate policy options and the platforms through which they are promulgated.

Rising populism

To the potential negative impacts on education from such agencies with an anti-worker agenda, it is necessary to understand populism as a political strategy that seeks to

divide society into two camps (creating an ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality).

The aim is to position one of those camps as the ‘underdog’ and then argue the underdog’s case as a just and right cause in stark contrast to the alternative “elite” regime.

The rise of populism as a political and social phenomenon is well-documented and has been clearly linked to the emergence of social media as a mechanism that allows ordinary people to “express themselves without the mediation of traditional media” [1].

The significance of the social media environment in particular is that it tends to boost affective and emotional responses, which means rational debate is often obscured, and downright prevented, by more polarising - and quintessentially more popular - “chains of aggregated grievance” [1].

Watson and Barnes [1] have examined how thinktanks aligned with anti-worker political interests in England have “taken full advantage of changing dynamics of global ideological, political and communicative environments” [1] to create the appearance of widespread popular support for specific policies, which have little grounding in evidence from the education sector in question.


In the specific example considered by Watson and Barnes [1], anti-worker forces have created a dichotomy that sets the “unheeded and disregarded teacher who is looking to regain authority in the classroom against a progressive elite which has used its status in government, in the academy and trade unions supposedly to foist progressive unscientific child-centred practices of the teacher” [1].

Our union, our voice

It is important here to challenge the assumption that unions are in a position to ‘impose’ any specific classroom practice on teachers.

In the case of our union, our activities are governed by input from members and any support for, or resistance to, particular policy initiatives is, therefore, a result of members organising around an issue rather than some external third-party directing activities.

Our representation as key stakeholders on various education committees, boards and government initiatives that in turn influence education policy is also a critical element in our capacity to organise around issues impacting our members.



We encourage all members to maintain an active interest in the activities of our union to ensure that their voice is heard early in the process of education reform, rather than later, when it is harder to counter the implementation of new policy initiatives.

Manipulation of new media

Returning to the subject of the manipulation of social media debate by anti-union forces; however, although the overall proportion of teachers who have bought into the staged debate in England is relatively small, the debate itself is nonetheless influencing policy and practice [2].

Anti-worker thinktanks have achieved this aim largely through exploitation of those features in social media posts that tend to give rise to virality and then use the virality of a post as evidence of the popularity of a particular policy position.

To follow the process to completion, a policy that has established its popularity would then more readily be picked up by politicians and, depending on the outcomes of various elections, find its way to enactment.

Ultimately, the power of such forces to manipulate traditional and new media to generate evidence of support for the policies proposed in their self-published reports hinges on a degree of naivete on the part of the general public that sees them suspend their engagement in rational debate in favour of more immediate, and emotionally satisfying, populist exchanges.

Policies should be based in classroom realities, not political agendas

In their paper [1], Watson and Barnes recommend teachers and support staff develop digital citizenship skills that will allow them to understand the forces at work in the digital environment and how to safely and ethically engage in meaningful debate, rather than feeding into the populist agenda.

As professional educators, teachers understand that the distraction created by uncritical sharing of polarising views does nothing to improve the quality of teaching and learning in our schools.

A clear example of the capacity of teachers to develop more sophisticated responses to complex professional issues is evident in ongoing debate about the role of phonics in the teaching of reading.

Although anti-worker thinktanks have grounded their arguments for adoption of phonics testing in an assumption teachers do not currently deploy phonics in the teaching of reading [3], in reality teachers have never abandoned it.

In Queensland, for example, teachers are formally advised to teach reading through a combination of

phonics, whole-word and other approaches that allows them to change and differentiate their practice to suit specific students and cohorts [4]. This has been the case for decades.

As this example illustrates, members of the education profession are highly trained practitioners who are more than capable of subjecting policy initiatives to reality testing and then making their own, contextualised judgements about what practices will bring about positive learning outcomes for their students.

IEU members united Australia-wide

As the influence of anti-worker thinktanks expands to incorporate both traditional and new media, it is more important than ever that the profession unites to challenge the fundamental problem of those with little to no experience of classroom teaching dominating the debate over what policies and practices might bring us closer to the goal of quality education for all students.

As a union of over 75,000 teachers, principals and support staff in non-government education institutions across Australia, our members are consistently engaging in the debate about the industrial and professional issues which faced by the sector.

Members will continue to resist the imposition of policies that do little to improve the quality of education offered to students and to advocate for those in positions of power and influence to consider the views of practitioners over the views of self-

appointed experts with a limited understanding of the operational reality of teachers and schools.

"Political interests create the appearance of widespread popular support for specific policies that have little grounding in evidence."

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Strong language

Rebuilding the ELICOS sector

International border closures have significantly impacted the international education sector in Australia. Organiser Orlando Forbes looks at what is happening in a sector where the IEU represents many members.

Private education providers for overseas students in Australia have gone through several tumultuous journeys over the years, most recently due to the COVID-related closure of international borders.

For more than 25 years, the Independent Education Union has represented employees in private business colleges, English language intensive courses for overseas students (ELICOS), and private vocational education providers throughout Australia.

In March 2021, English Australia, the peak body for the ELICOS sector, reported its “worst ELICOS commencement number in 14 years”, demonstrating a 43.3 percent drop in students beginning new courses. Recent media reports describe the outlook for ELICOS as “dire”, saying the sector has been “crippled” by COVID-19.

That ELICOS has suffered a huge blow is beyond question. An industry that relies completely on international students to operate is indeed in trouble when those international students are unable to enter the country. It is in even greater trouble when the wage subsidy keeping colleges afloat is ended, as JobKeeper was at the end of March 2021.

State of play

At the time of writing, large employers such as Kaplan International, Ability

English and EC English have either closed their doors or put the ELICOS arm of their operation into hibernation, as have a substantial number of smaller players. And although there has been some limited assistance from the Federal Government in the form of a \$53.6 million rescue package for the sector, there is an expectation that other employers will also close their doors in the weeks and months to come.

The Federal Government has signaled its intention to rethink the international education sector, having already begun moving towards a new approach with the release of a paper entitled *Connected, Creative, Caring: Australian Strategy for International Education*.

The paper notes: “Our institutions are facing a drop in onshore student numbers that will continue for some years to come and a new strategy is needed to adapt to the changes brought on by the pandemic.”

In much the same way, we need to consider what lessons we can take from the pandemic and what we want the sector to look like when the world stabilises. As stakeholders in the sector, how does the union want to ‘build back better’?

COVID-exacerbated casualisation

Although they are known in the sector as ‘permanent casuals’ or ‘long-term casuals’, the average casual ELICOS teacher can be categorised as what David Peetz (2020) has called an ‘unsubstantiated casual’.

That is, a worker who has been with their employer for more than one year, with reasonable expectations that they will continue to be with their employer

in 12 months’ time, and who has regular pay and hours. At a great many ELICOS colleges, this describes most teachers. Some 64 percent of ELICOS IEU members were listed as casual before the pandemic.

It is common for a teacher to teach the same hours Monday to Friday, sometimes for as long as 15 or 20 years. ELICOS teachers in this situation occupy an unusual space: they are employed in a ‘worst of both worlds’ arrangement, somewhere between casual and permanent, with no job security or protection, yet a level of commitment not typical of casual employment is expected of them.

“In practice, the flexibility isn’t really there,” said one long-term casual ELICOS teacher. “At my college we have a teaching schedule based on four-week blocks. As a general rule, if we request [unpaid] leave for some of that time our employer forces us to take the entire block off, meaning that we are penalised one month’s wages.”

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics from December 2020 tells us casuals were hardest hit by job losses during the pandemic. The ELICOS sector was no different, as colleges shed large numbers of these employees.

This was particularly distressing for those casuals among our membership who had been employed on a long-term, regular basis. These teachers found themselves suddenly cut loose to look for a new career in the middle of an economic downturn without warning or support, after having given many years to their job.

Some ongoing members were among the last to lose work during the pandemic – and those who did were

entitled to redundancy pay, notice or payment in lieu of notice, and the paying out of accrued annual leave. This put them in a much better position to transition to something new.

Wage theft and COVID pay cuts

Early in the pandemic, colleges tried to push losses onto teachers. One college, International House, attempted to impose a 15 percent below-award wage cut on staff across the country, until union members forced this multinational employer to rescind.

IEU branches have recovered large amounts of underpayments in the sector. For example, in Melbourne, IEU Victoria-Tasmania recovered just under \$200,000 of unpaid member entitlements from the Australian National College of English, due in part to its below-award slashing of pay to \$35 per hour after moving from face-to-face to online teaching.

The IEU also recovered tens of thousands of dollars in unpaid superannuation and entitlements from another Melbourne-based college, Languages Across Borders.

These two issues are broadly related, in that research shows that not only are casuals more precarious than their ongoing counterparts, but that this precarity places them at a higher risk of wage theft.

From the ground up

As the sector reboots, we need to focus on building a better industry. Rather than wage theft, precarious employment and substandard working conditions, we hope the sector builds in assurances of education quality, where teachers are treated in a way that is reflective of the quality work they are tasked with performing. We will not get there if things continue the way they were.

A 2019 risk assessment report from the Tertiary Skills and Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) reveals that education providers that were high-risk to students demonstrated persistently higher levels of casual academic staffing. "High proportions of casual academic staff [are] considered to pose risks to the continuity of support for students and adequate support

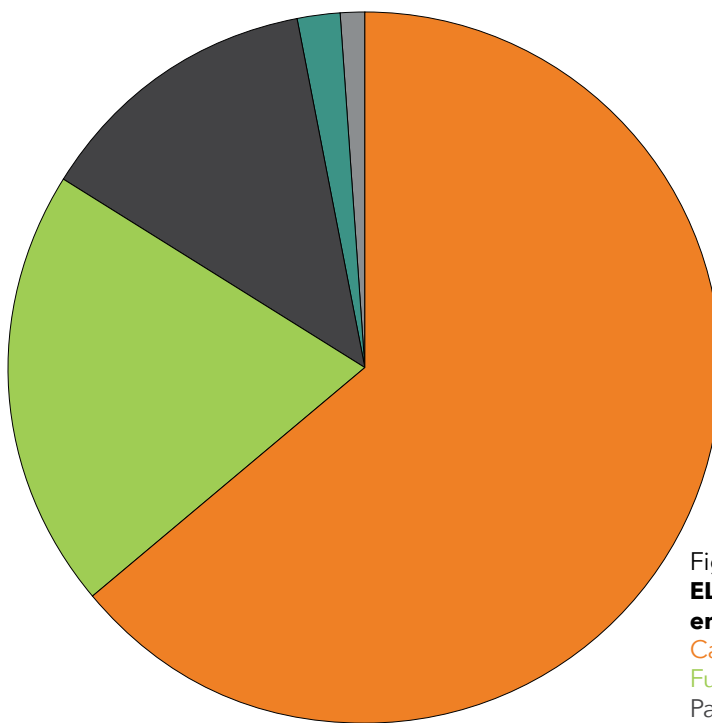


Fig 1
ELICOS members by employment type
Casual 64%
Full-time 20%
Part-time 13%
Sessional 2%
N/A 1%

systems for casual staff," the report said.

Casualisation presents the same obstacle to quality education in the ELICOS sector. The National ELT Accreditation Scheme (NEAS) conducted interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders in 2020, revealing a shared concern that casualisation in the industry is a barrier to teachers' professional development.

If employers want to get serious about quality, they cannot continue employing teachers as 'permanent casuals'. Further to that, however, ELICOS teaching needs to be perceived in a whole new light. It's not an 'easy', stop-gap job - it's a potential career.

"We need to start valuing the serious, professional contribution that some teachers make to our industry," wrote Phiona Stanley in 2017. "Yes, great careers can be had in school management, sales, marketing, and even academia. But if ELICOS is to grow and develop as a high-quality sector, we also need to recognise, and stop disparaging, the career-minded teachers in our midst."

It's worth considering how the sector should move towards recognising

and treating these teachers as the education professionals that they are. Some consideration should be given to how we might more formally professionalise the sector.

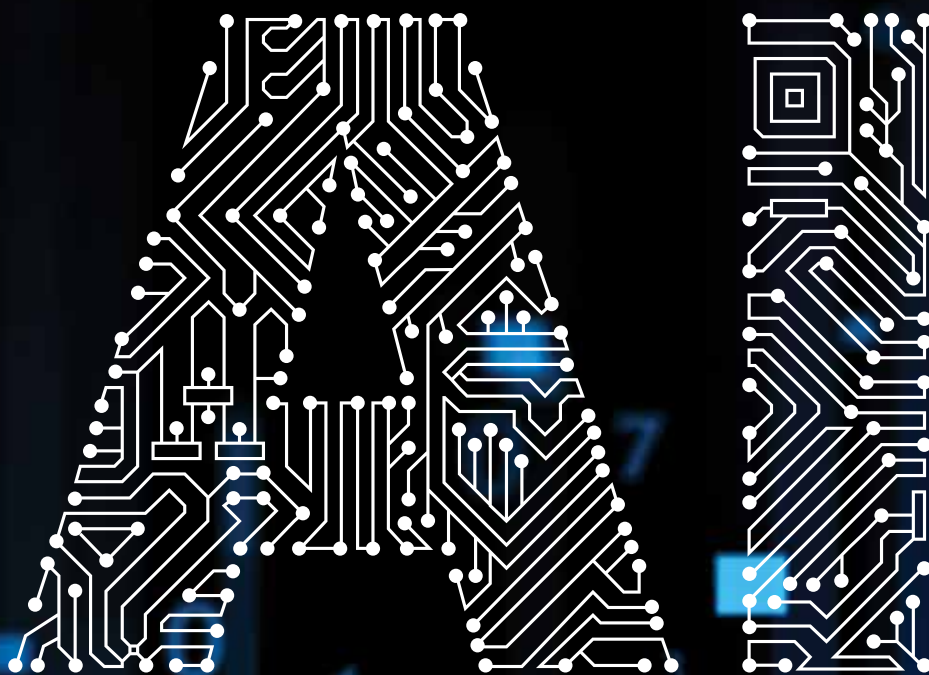
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A revolution in the writing process is quietly underway on the internet, writes Dr Lucinda McKnight, Senior Lecturer in Education (Pedagogy and Curriculum), Deakin University.

Much of what we read on the internet now is written by machines, not humans. Artificial intelligence (AI), through natural language processing (NLP) and generation (NLG) can now write like humans.

This is a hurdle that even recently humans imagined computers could never leap and it has major implications for education. If the writing of the future is to be done by machines, what should children be taught?

AI can now be trained on vast datasets. Imagine a writer who has read and processed everything on the internet. That's an AI writer. It has read a huge amount of text and is therefore able to make reliable predictions about sequences of words that make 'sense' to humans, even if the machines do not really 'understand' what they have written.

Here is an example of an AI authored text, for a website homepage, created in seconds when I told the AI I need a blurb for a personal trainer:

I am experienced with personal training, athletic performance, and nutrition. This includes working with children, pregnant women, older adults, people with disabilities, athletes, and anyone looking to achieve a competitive edge, improve their overall health, and overall performance. I also have an interest in alternative health, including wellness coaching and nutrition counselling. In my spare time, I enjoy spending time with my family, the outdoors, and writing.

Relying on AI is nothing new. For decades humans have been writing with AI, in the form of spelling and grammar checkers built into word processors. Early on, teachers tried to ban or discount these services, but over time they have become accepted and routine and have expanded into widely used apps such as Grammarly. This is likely to be the case with AI writers too, as what seems extraordinary now becomes mundane.

Robot writers

Already AI is writing reports, newsletters, articles, slogans, scripts, poetry and novels. Its capabilities are increasing

dramatically. In 2019 the *New Yorker* published a famous article assessing GPT-2, an NLG created by OpenAI, funded by well-known businessman Elon Musk. It found it rather lacking.

In 2020, new version GPT-3 wrote a whole article for *The Guardian* newspaper entitled "A robot wrote this whole article: Are you scared yet human?". I encourage you to search for and read these articles online to assess how quickly things are changing.

Humans are on the brink of a major rethink about what writing actually is and what needs to be taught in schools so that students have useful skills for the future.

Computers are good at doing what they are told. They follow rules and formulas. Alas, in a dead-end move, writing education for children in Australia has become more formulaic, as a result of NAPLAN.

We are teaching students to write in ways that have been superseded by machines. An education in the basics, while essential, is not enough to make humans valuable in the writing scenarios of the future.

Need to break rules

Humans can innovate, they have real purposes and needs. They feel emotion, including compassion, and can empathise. They perceive unkindness and cruelty. They can be funny – they understand humour, nuance, subtlety and irony.

Humans understand multiple complex contexts and motivations. They make informed, evaluative judgements: they can edit and refine. They can think and act in ethical ways, in line with their consciences and human psychology.

Fundamentally, humans can break rules. The challenge for curriculum designers and teachers is to come up with a writing education that makes the most of these features, rather than crushing them through rote learning and rote writing.

Teachers need to grasp how writing is changing and find ways for their students to fulfil their potential as writing partners with AI. Drilling in basic grammar and spelling, formulas for writing such as TEEL (Topic, Evidence, Elaboration, Link) or the five-paragraph essay, which only permits three ideas in three body paragraphs, are limited distortions of the writing of which humans are capable.

A focus on expository writing or analysis of texts rather than more creative forms of writing will not serve writers

and the writing revolution: What should we teach?

of the future well. Writing in exam conditions does not replicate the process of initiating, collating, evaluating and refining machine-generated text, which is the basis of much 'writing' already.

Instead, students need to be drafting and revising their own and others' (including machines') work, learning editing skills, acknowledging sources, understanding algorithmic thinking so they can perceive the shortcomings of robot writers, breaking rules for aesthetic or other purposes and critically evaluating the conscience-free, internet-trained outputs of AI that reproduce existing biases.

Let's get creative

What would an English curriculum that prioritised emotion, enjoyment, ethics, integrity, lived human experience, cultural insights, high-level writing skills (not just the basics) and AI analysis be like?

What would an English curriculum that focuses on the precious human capacity for creative experimentation be like, or a curriculum that embraces opportunities to participate in writing assemblages, with machines?

For anyone who wants to insist that humans will always be superior writers, and this whole scenario is unlikely, consider the capabilities of AI writers.

They can write in an unlimited number of languages, source images, create metadata, design headlines, format landing pages, put together a digital promotion campaign via Instagram or other social media ads, offer content ideas, expand bullet points and optimise text for search engines.

They can offer hundreds of different versions of an original text. They can do all this in the time it takes me to click my fingers. There is no competition here. Machines are outstanding at creating the kind of writing that is required for effective communication today. Students need to exploit these machine capabilities, as co-writers for digital platforms and audiences.

Wrong emphasis

The tragedy is that our schooling system seems geared, through pressure from government for systems data that show improvement, to educate students in a kind of writing that is not needed today.

As a university lecturer, I have students in my English method classes who have not the least idea of how to write for the screen, let alone write with AI. Their 13 years of literacy education has not even touched on how to arrange, structure and compose text that works for a blog post, or a website.

They generally do not know: what colours and contrasts work on screens; what width a row of text should be for readability; how to chunk information; what length sentences and paragraphs can be onscreen or what size and style fonts to use.

The inadequacy of our current English education for contemporary writing purposes, forms, audiences and contexts is clear. These students' education has not prepared them for the tertiary environment, where digital tasks, and authentic, real-world assessment are common, let alone for a workplace in which they will write with AI. How will they be able to judge and refine the digital products that machine writers present them with?

Australian teachers need time, money and professional learning to get to grips with the changing world of communication and the revolution in writing taking place around us. Writing in schools needs to be real writing.

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A matter of principals

The health and wellbeing of school principals throughout Australia has been the subject of research for a decade. Journalist Sue Osborne looks at results and recommendations.

The annual Australian Principal Occupational, Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey has produced some shocking results about abuse and violence principals experience at the hands of parents and students.

However, the findings of this annual survey, conducted by researchers at Deakin University and the Australian Catholic University (ACU), are being used as a catalyst for positive change in the workplace, such as a recommendation to make online meetings between parents and principals the norm to reduce the risk of abuse and threats.

Tough times in 2020

The 2020 survey garnered responses from 2248 principals. Not surprisingly, considering the COVID-19 pandemic, bushfires and floods, its results show principals faced increasing stress and heavy workloads.

"The extremely long work hours and constant exposure to stress during 2020 left school principals exhausted," said Professor Herb Marsh, Co-chief investigator for the survey and educational psychologist at the ACU Institute for Positive Psychology and Education (IPPE).

"During 2020, almost all principals (97 percent) worked overtime and close to 70 percent worked more than 56 hours a week during school term, and 25 hours a week during the holidays.

"The main sources of stress were the sheer quantity of work, the lack of time to focus on teaching and learning, the mental health issues of students and the expectations of the employer.

"During the survey period, three out of 10 school leaders (almost 30 percent) received a red flag email alerting them to contact employee support services. These alert emails are triggered when school leaders are at risk of self-harm, occupational health problems or serious impacts to their quality of life."

ACU investigator and IPPE Professor Phil Parker said, "Over the past decade, principals have reported a steady increase in job demands with no

real increase in support services. The surveys have shown us that school leaders need support to maintain a healthy work-life balance."

But on a positive note, the survey found better results for short-term measures of influence, commitment to the workplace, role conflict, social support from internal/external colleagues, social support from supervisors, and work-family conflict.

COVID amps up issues

Deakin University's Professor Phil Riley and co-chief investigator said the survey shone a light on "a year like no other" for school leaders.

"Last year was one of unimaginable horrors for Australians and the global pandemic had a life-altering effect on us all," Professor Riley said.

"But 2020 showed us that the more things changed, the more they stayed the same.

"As well as needing to quickly develop online learning practices, school principals were faced with managing COVID-safe processes to protect their employees, students, and parents from a global pandemic.

"Although schools were classed as essential services, and told to stay open to protect the economy, they were not privy to vital information. Particularly at the start of COVID-19, school leaders had to listen to the news to find out what to do with their schools' operations."

However, Professor Riley said there was a bright spot, "The survey has shown us the pandemic's lockdowns and restrictions reminded communities about the vital role school leaders play. Ironically, COVID-19 could herald a positive shift in community attitudes towards school principals."

Key recommendations

There were 16 key recommendations in the report including an urgent need to establish an independent taskforce to fully investigate the offensive behaviours occurring in schools.

Other recommendations included a call for standardisation and risk management of online meetings with parents to ensure quality control and reduce offensive behaviours. Online meetings are likely to be more convenient for parents and principals.

Employers need to take the moral choice of reducing job demands or increase job resources to allow school leaders to cope with the increased workload.

Professional associations and unions should collaborate and speak with one voice. A united voice would be stronger for achieving change. In Finland, for example, there is one union that advocates for all educators.

Federal, state and territory governments should come together to maintain a single education budget in a managerial way.

All school funding should be transparent so that anyone, at any level of the system, can confidently know how much money schools have.

There is a need to systematically research potential strategies and new policies before they are rolled out on a large scale. In medicine, for example, it would be unheard of to put in place large new programs without adequate efficacy and safety tests. The same should be true in education.

What can principals do?

- Increase personal capital (social, human and decisional). At the individual level this means increasing possibilities for development and exerting influence over work, based on sound values and moral judgements.
- Respectfully speak up when faced with 'moral harassment', which can lead to moral stress, an occupational threat. Moral stress stems from not



being able to perform the role that one feels morally obliged to do. This is quite demotivating. Moral stress is generated when interference or even blocking of professional behaviours guided by moral purpose occurs.

- Ensure your passions are harmonious, not obsessive. Love your work but do not let it dominate your life. A way to determine if passion is harmonious rather than obsessive is to monitor energy levels. Harmonious passion energises, individuals feel better after engaging in their passion than when they began. For example, principals should monitor and maintain friendships and relationships with family and loved ones, be sure to flag unrealistic work burdens and take the time they need in order to rest.
- Take responsibility for your personal work-life balance. Only you can know what is reasonable for your long-term health and wellbeing. It is therefore incumbent on the individual to find and maintain a healthy work-life balance.
- A work-life balance should not be imposed by others. The negative impact of poor work-life balance highlights that establishing one's own balance is far too important to be left in someone else's control. Principals must seek professional help where necessary, such as employer provided professional employee assistance programs.

Making progress

Over the 10 years of the report, important progress has been made in key areas. There is increased government recognition of the issue of violence in schools with several inquiries underway at the state, territory, and federal level.

The report has shone a light on the burden of stress and overwork among principals and significant policy changes have been made to benefit principals, particularly in Victoria, Queensland and the Northern Territory. For example, the establishment of the Victorian Policy Bank has helped ease the workload of principals in that state.

The survey report is available here: www.healthandwellbeing.org/reports/AU/2020_AU_Final_Report.pdf

Offensive behaviours

More than 40 percent of principals reported being exposed to threats of violence or being a victim of physical violence in 2020. This is up to nine times greater than the general population. However, several categories of offensive behaviours decreased, which is attributed to the reduced face-to-face contact with parents.

Over the 10-year lifespan of the survey, there was a steady increase in bullying, physical violence, slander, sexual harassment, threats of violence and verbal harassment towards principals.

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