



independent education

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How learning endures in Ukraine

The professional voice of the Independent Education Union of Australia

Uluru Statement from the Heart

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Editorial

“Unthinkable things are made possible, not because you have benevolent or wise leaders, but because you have a social movement. It’s always social movements that create social change”.

So says inspirational unionist, sociologist, and educator John Falzon in our In Focus profile on p6 of this edition of *IE*.

John’s viewpoint is pertinent to many stories in this edition. On p23, we examine increasing industrial action and unionisation around the world, as workers seek remedies to unfair conditions.

On p26 we look at how children get educated about the role of unions; and on p15, we discuss how schools must play a leading role on climate literacy, resilience, and engagement.

Sometimes engaging students can feel challenging in the face of teaching shortages and heavy workloads, but imagining teaching in a warzone. We get an insight into this when we meet Suzanne O’Connor, who has been teaching students via Zoom for some time. The Ukrainian students are motivated to learn despite their trying circumstances (p28).

Education itself is a form of ‘social movement’ and the way we educate, and the subjects we teach help change our world. Education also creates social change by broadening the perspectives of students by discussing topics like First Nations scientific knowledge (p31); and weapons industry awareness (p30).

That’s why we need to recognise the importance of non-teaching assistants in the classroom and on school grounds (p9, 10); the nuances of personal development (p34) and the implications of AI for teachers (p20).

But, as John emphasises, change comes from the ground up, not the top down, which is why we are so pleased to report on the inspiring student-led campaign for menstrual equity at St Paul’s Catholic College in Booragul, NSW. It’s been so successful that it’s now being rolled out across an entire diocese.

We hope this mixture of articles brings you inspiration to think the unthinkable inside and outside the classroom.

David Brear Secretary
IEUA Victoria Tasmania Branch

Victoria

Careers at risk

The careers and mental health of far too many IEU members are being devastated by unfair allegations made under Victoria’s Reportable Conduct Scheme (RCS). Given the dangers the scheme presents to Victorian members, the union will continue to push for urgent reforms, and inform staff about how to protect themselves.

The IEU wholeheartedly supports robust child safety measures – but unfortunately the scheme in practice all too often punishes staff without good reason. The extended, humiliating, reputation-ruining processes that follow unfounded allegations leave far too many employees unable to return to work.

Trivial or vexatious allegations against education staff abound.

Staff have been cited for restraining a child to stop them running across a road, for accidentally stumbling against a student, for using a raised voice in a noisy classroom, and for not picking a particular student for a school production. There have also been vexatious reports against education staff made by aggrieved ex-partners.

The union outlined its concerns in a detailed submission to a review of the scheme in late 2022, but the report is now more than seven months late. The rights of educators must be recognised in a revamp of this well-intentioned but faulty scheme.

Tasmania

Campaign goes next level

Overworked, frustrated Catholic educators are upping the ante in their campaign for a reasonable deal, two years since the expiry of their last IEU-negotiated enterprise agreement.

In the first year the IEU had to take employers to the Fair Work Commission to force them to meet with us. The second year started more productively, but it was seriously derailed when the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office made new claims 18 months after bargaining started, including attempts to extend the school year and give employers the power to forcibly relocate staff between schools.

Dealing with these ridiculous new additions delayed discussion of the union’s progressive claims.

Late last year, the union held urgent meetings with reps from around the state, who decided to escalate the campaign unless there was rapid progress at the bargaining table. Sessions in both cities received enthusiastic support from members fed up with the interminable delays in getting their conditions updated to match colleagues in other sectors, with measures aimed to alleviate workload issues at the forefront.

A major campaign is under way and we are asking members to commit to various actions aimed at pressuring the employer. The deal needs to get done.

Australian Capital Territory

Abusive student behaviour must be addressed

When teachers are faced with provocative behaviours from students, the rules of acceptable practice require them to respond in a calm manner to defuse the situation.

But some students can verbally abuse or even physically assault teachers. Teachers need to be restrained in their response.

Should a teacher call for assistance from a member of the school executive, there will be a delay in response.

Following such an incident, a teacher could be stood down pending investigation. If it is alleged and sustained that unnecessary force was used, the teacher could be terminated and the matter reported to the teacher registration authority.

This student may have a long history of such behaviour and some schools fail to implement effective strategies to support either the student or the teachers.

The IEU is mindful of protecting the welfare, reputation and careers of members. If you find yourself in this situation, contact your union organiser.

In December 2020, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) developed the National Strategy to Address the Abuse of Teachers, School Leaders and Other School Staff (<https://bit.ly/3uDeiiw>). The AITSL survey found that 55.6% of teachers had experienced unacceptable behaviour from students. The strategy encompassed five actions with the evaluation due next year.

Together, the profession, jurisdictions, unions and national agencies must work to reduce the abuse school staff are facing and provide support for staff when incidents occur.

Queensland

Recognition of First Nations Peoples

Our union's campaign to Close the Industrial Gap has reached an important milestone, with the recent release of the first iteration of the First Nations Education Workers Project's Industrial Guidelines (the guidelines).

IEU-QNT Branch Secretary Terry Burke said the guidelines were an essential first step to providing long-overdue professional recognition of employees delivering First Nations Language and Culture programs in schools.

"First Nations Peoples undertaking this vital work must be recognised through professional pay rates, employment conditions and career pathways," Burke said.

"Years of hard work and research from a variety of stakeholders has occurred behind the scenes to create these guidelines, so I congratulate and thank everyone involved for their contribution," he said.

"I would like to acknowledge the enormous contribution of the IEU-QNT Yubba Action Group, the committee who oversee our branch's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), for spearheading the campaign."

"As part of the Closing the Industrial Gap campaign, our union will continue advocating to teacher registration authorities about the urgent need to ensure viable career pathways for First Nations Education Workers," Burke said.

Members can access the guidelines online: www.ieuqnt.org.au/reconciliation

South Australia

Building a strong negotiating position

The new year brings a renewed focus on the upcoming Catholic Enterprise Agreement (EA) negotiations.

Comprehensive reps (delegates) packs have been sent to all IEU (SA) Catholic reps for Week Zero that included campaign flyers, meeting agendas, join forms and information sheets.

By getting on the front foot early in the school year, we are looking to increase the activity of our reps and increase membership in Catholic schools, giving us a stronger position when we enter negotiations.

In the early childhood sector, IEU(SA) supports most of the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care's recommendations, but we are disappointed the South Australian government wants to create a three-year teacher qualification for early childhood teachers. We argue this three-year qualification has the potential to further undermine the community standing of the Early Childhood teaching profession in schools. Any teaching degree should

have the same rigour and standing as other teaching degrees and should be a university-level qualification.

Northern Territory

A voice and an ear for the profession

IEU-QNT Branch Executive member and teacher Erica Schultz is our union's new representative on the Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board (TRB) after stepping into the role in October 2023.

Erica said IEU representation on the NT TRB remains vital to ensuring teachers' voices are heard regarding the professional concerns they face.

"Representation is important for our union to hear about issues that are affecting members, so I can listen attentively and report back on those issues," Erica said.

"Since becoming a representative, the key priorities for the TRB include matters concerning teachers with allegations of misconduct, as well as the procedure of registration renewal for new teachers from other jurisdictions and ongoing teachers who are re-registering," she said.

In 2024, the NT TRB will continue to focus on matters regarding the registration of teachers in early childhood education settings.

We thank Erica for her ongoing contribution and will provide NT TRB updates to members throughout 2024.

New South Wales

Time for action in independent schools

Last year NSW saw unprecedented pay increases for teachers and support staff in government and Catholic schools that included:

- teacher salary increases in NSW of between 8% and 12% from October 2023
- teacher salary increases in the ACT from August 2023 of 11%-19% between 2023 and 2025
- general employee salary increases of at least 6.5% and up to 20% over 12 months
- improved parental leave for both mothers and their partners.

Now it's time for independent schools to step up. Despite a few well-publicised schools paying above government school pay rates, many still pay well below these rates.

Conditions in some independent schools are also lagging well behind those in NSW government schools and Catholic schools.

The IEU is consulting with our members in independent schools to discuss priorities for our claim.

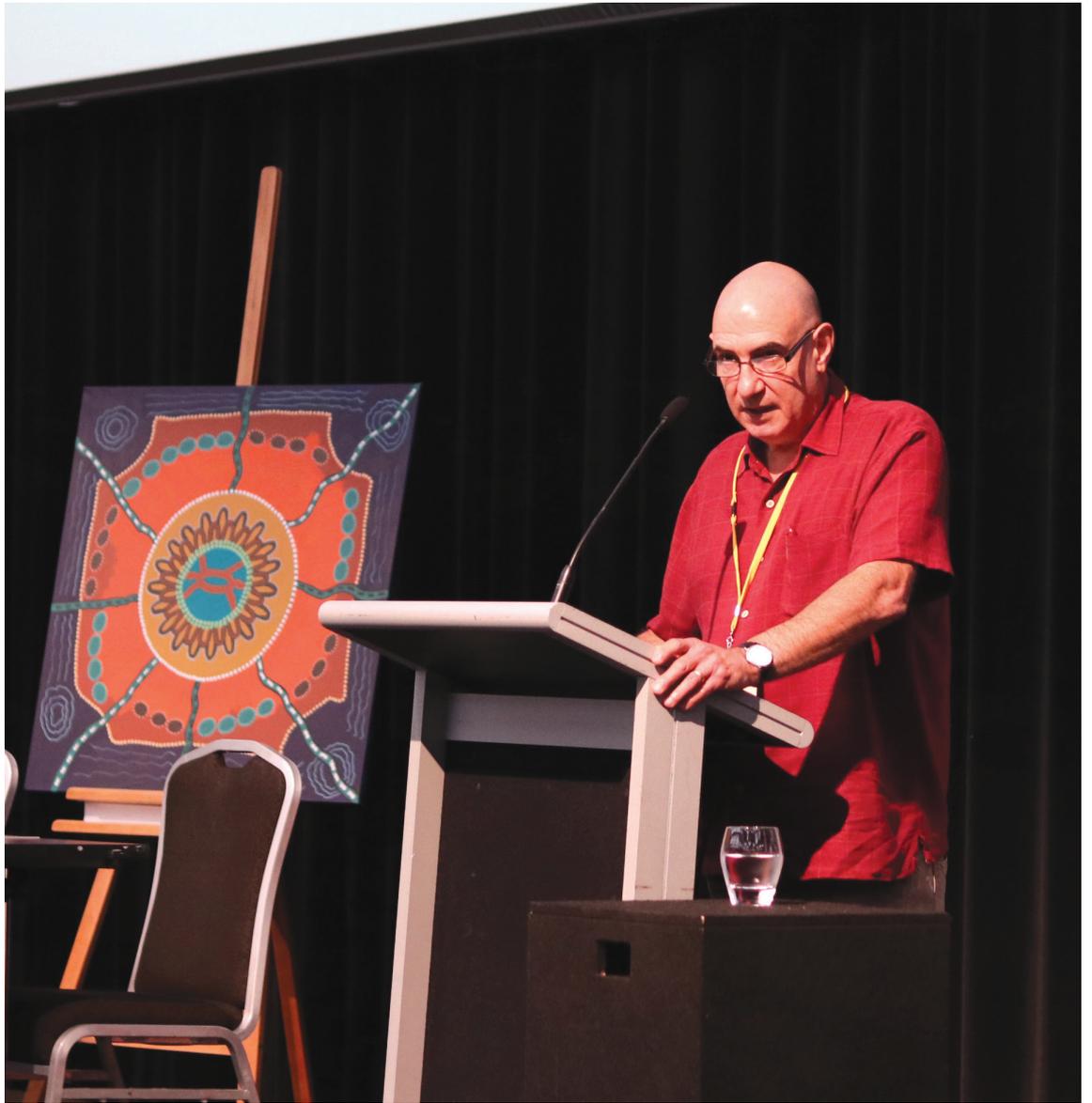
The key to a successful outcome is a high level of union membership in every school.

Unions also have new rights under the *Fair Work Act* that strengthen the IEU's ability to bargain effectively for multi-enterprise agreements.

A priority will be ensuring our IEU reps understand how we can wield these new rights effectively.

In Focus

John Falzon



John Falzon might have a busy professional life - he's a poet, teacher, sociologist, administrator and social justice campaigner, among other things - but he is driven by the simplest of motivations, writes Will Brodie.

"I just want to be socially useful to the movement," Falzon says.

He means the union movement, which he says is "at heart, a social movement that is able to create incredible social change."

"Unthinkable things are made possible, not because you have benevolent or wise leaders, but because you have a social movement. It's always social movements that create social change."

In pursuit of being useful, Falzon has published books, studied for degrees in literature, theology, philosophy, politics and social analysis. He also led St Vincent de Paul for 12 years. Now, he's a senior fellow in inequality and social justice at think tank Per Capita and a visiting fellow at the Australian National University's School of Regulation and Global Governance.

Due to his inspiring and fierce yet gentle and down-to-earth campaigning, he is in demand as a keynote speaker and teacher of liberation sociology to unionists all over Australia.

Education is central to everything he does, but it was far from a foregone conclusion for

Falzon himself, given his upbringing.

Falzon's parents left Malta, then England, in search of greater economic opportunities. Though Falzon's father was a voracious reader who was keen to learn, he was also poor. He worked as a tailor, then a bus conductor in London, then in Australia, he was a quarry labourer testing road materials.

Falzon's mother was also keen to learn, but as a teenager she was pulled out of school to work as a waitress in her family's café, taking orders because she was her family's best English speaker.

When the Falzon family landed in Australia, they lived in a relative's garage in Sydney's west. Though Falzon says he was a "nerd" and "bookworm" from the outset, a precocious reader even at age two, a multi-degree future was far from a given growing up in Blacktown, in Sydney's west.

Importantly, Falzon's parents encouraged him to follow his passions. "And, you know, I've never forgotten that," he says. "That was a time when a lot of migrant working-class kids like me, sometimes pressure was placed on the kids, because the parents wanted them to get a well-paying job.

"And my dad always stuck by me. I just thought it was beautiful the way he used to say

to me, completely counter-culturally, 'If you decide you want to be a street sweeper because that would bring you joy and give you a sense of fulfilment, I will be proud of you, and I will be happy in exactly the same degree as if you get a law degree and earn good money.'

Falzon took the "incredible liberation" of this support to heart – he took books to family gatherings as a child, and his first PhD thesis was a cycle of poems.

The parental support he received taught him "a very radical vision of the value of people and the value of people's work", which dismisses the notion that how much someone earns indicates their social or personal value.

Libraries: Temples of learning

Libraries were Falzon's "temples of learning" and education staff his greatest benefactors.

"I've got some fond memories of school librarians who took pity on me," he says. "They saw I was interested in all sorts of things, and they would come and ask how I'm going, and tell me something about the book they saw I had."

Lacking the internet, Falzon spent hours "just hanging around the library".

"It wasn't a discipline, it was an out-of-control passion," he says.

Falzon says libraries were the "great repository of possibilities" that opened up his world. The books, writers, and thinkers he found in them were his greatest mentors.

As a young man, Falzon began to read philosophy, politics, and critical theory as much as literature, which broadened his mind enormously. His eyes were opened by a "tatty little cheap paperback" by jailed American social activist Angela Davis.

"And that had a huge impact on me, just knowing that there were people in the world who were struggling for justice; this was something that just totally enthralled me. The idea that there are people, that there are movements who wish to create the possibility of a different kind of society. This just captured my imagination in the same way as poetry. In fact, I would be very loath to separate those two strands in my education."

Falzon has never disentangled those strands, his sociology course containing epigrams from poets, and his poetry references to the struggle for equality.

"For me with poetry or for any writer, if their writing is true to their

life, then it has that resonance that speaks to the heart. For me it's never just an intellectual or an aesthetic exercise."

Unions: The simplest truth

Falzon was always familiar with trade unions because his father was always a member, and often a delegate. He also absorbed the powerlessness of his mother, who in Australia worked "extremely hard in both paid and unpaid jobs" in the informal economy, lacking union coverage.

"My dad really treasured his involvement in the union movement. He didn't bang on about it, he wasn't ideological about it, but to him it was like the simplest truth. He would say to me, 'the worker needs other workers. If you're alone you've got no protection. If you stand together, you're protected'; it was as simple as that.

"And so it was just so obvious to me from a very, very young age that being in a union is a simple and sensible and right thing to do.

"And again I saw that in my dad's working life that the union was there for him.

"When he got industrial cancer, when he was exposed to known carcinogens in the solvents that he was expected to use in testing those road materials, the union was there for him."

The illness was a devastation in Falzon's father's life because "he actually enjoyed being at work, particularly for social reasons".

"He worked very hard, he always took on overtime, all of that," Falzon says. "But he used to come home, kick off his steel-cap boots, and he'd be wearing his King Gees, and he'd sit at the dining room table, light up a cigarette, have a cup of instant coffee and we'd all sit together, and he'd tell us what happened at work that day. It was sort of a ritual, and he loved it.

"It was just a terrible devastation when he was physically unable to continue working because of the cancer; it took away a great deal of joy and meaning in his life, which

A May Day Poem

by Dr John Falzon (2020)

**Here is where we start from
where it hurts
where our hope is hidden
in the fresh wound
here where our story
is made of old scars
here
my comrade
in the struggle
where our home is
here
where we're free
to be tender
clench our courage
shout our soul
our social surge
our intimate democracy
our hunger for what
makes us human
our beautiful battalion
our simple solidarity
here.**



**John Falzon with IEUA Victoria
Tasmania Branch Deputy
Secretary Kylie Busk**

had a huge impact on my social justice awareness."

Such experiences formed connections for Falzon between what he was reading and his "immediate, concrete reality", a fruitful trait which continues - Falzon often synthesises personal experiences with big ideas.

At university, Falzon was exposed to middle-class and upper-class people for the first time; however, when he started teaching at Western Sydney University, he says it was "so beautiful and special" to connect with kids like himself, many of them from working class migrant backgrounds.

"Many of them were the first in their families to go to uni," he says. "For other [social] classes, there might be a tendency to take going to university for granted. But for me and for those kids who I was teaching, there was a freshness and an excitement and it was terrifying as well. Because wow! We're really here! How did this happen?"

Teachers, justice, and change

Falzon speaks with a lot of teachers through his work in the union movement, and he's deeply engaged with education issues.

"There is a real crisis both in terms of funding, but also in the sort of structure of work for teachers and teacher workloads, and the lack of value placed on teachers," he says.

He's appalled at the attitude to safety in professions like nursing and teaching where "the rules regarding exposure to injury don't apply, because you're doing this out of love. You're in a caring profession. The student comes first, or the patient comes first.

"And teachers are expected to just cop it on the chin and carry on, because that's the cultural expectation - it's considered part of the job."

He is horrified by the serious psychosocial and physical injuries teachers are exposed to daily. "Because we are systemically allowing that kind of exposure to injury to occur within what should be a really happy and creative space," he says.

"It was just so obvious to me from a very, very young age that being in a union is a simple and sensible and right thing to do."

"And it just beggars belief how you can create that inclusive, happy, respectful, liberating space for learning while you know that the worker who is facilitating that learning is suffering injury, not on an exceptional basis, but on a regular basis. And so to me, at every level, it's profoundly wrong.

"We need to think about teachers as workers. I think there are a number of dangerously and deeply held prejudices regarding the work of teaching that we need to completely reconfigure."

Falzon says defending the rights of education workers has fallen to the union movement. "I think it's part

of that individualism in society that capitalism fosters deep in our souls. And so sometimes there is a culture of 'as a parent I'm a client'," he says.

He thinks education has, to some degree, been commodified. "But I think it actually goes beyond that. If there's a sense of 'well, I'm the client and you're simply providing the service', your wellbeing is immaterial to me'.

"Education should matter so much that we would want to create that environment where there is mutual respect and enjoyment. As someone who has enjoyed learning all my life, I can't comprehend how people can learn to their real full capacity when it's a deeply unpleasant and injurious experience."

Hope in the face of crisis

Falzon isn't fazed by the myriad challenges modern progressives face.

"We need to imagine the unimaginable and we need to change the parameters of the possible," he says. "And you know the fall of apartheid is a great example of that, as is the fall of the Berlin Wall. It was also unthinkable not that long ago that we'd have marriage equality in Australia."

Falzon sees his liberation sociology as "a means, a set of tools to think critically about concrete reality and to understand that concrete reality is something in motion, and subject to change that doesn't come from above.

"People through history have brought about incredible change in every aspect of their lives, and we have the capacity to bring about further social change to create the kind of society where people can care for each other, for themselves and for our planet."

A day in the life

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



MATT DOWNEY Maintenance officer

There's much more to maintaining a school than meets the eye. Matthew Downey's work is crucial to keeping his regional primary school running.

When Matthew Downey had a serious accident while servicing heavy machinery in 2009, a job at St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Orange, in the NSW central tablelands, was a lifeline.

Under a back-to-work scheme, Matt started working one day a week at the school. His wife, Nicole Downey, is the Financial Manager at St Mary's and a member of the IEU Executive.

"One day a week turned into three days a week and, as the school grew, the role became full time," Matt says.

Early starts

Matt's day starts at 7am when he unlocks the school and walks around to check everything is in order. He makes sure there are no leaks in the toilet block, that the lights are all working and he fixes anything that needs attention.

This generally takes about 90 minutes, then it's time for a coffee before he jumps on the mower to maintain the ovals. As the day proceeds he might move furniture or boxes, or do some gardening, plumbing or electrical work.

Once a week he runs a gardening club for kindergarten students.

"The kids love watching what they've planted grow and taking it home to their families," he says. "People don't get their hands dirty so much these days so it's nice to see them having fun digging and growing their own veggies.

"It's a fun and satisfying part of my week."

No two days the same

Matt never knows what each day will bring and says he loves this about the job.

"I grew up on a farm, so looking after trees, plants and lawn is second nature to me," he says.

"I just don't know what I'm walking into every morning, but there's always something interesting going on.

"I do miss working with heavy machinery, but that was harsh on my body, and this is a safe alternative," he says.

Matt has some funny anecdotes from his job, such as the time a student asked him to retrieve a shoe from the school's roof, because it had "fallen off his foot". Then there was a pesky crow that kept stealing children's lunches.

"One day I was sitting on the oval and it dropped a golf ball quite close to me," Matt says. "I had to get that golf ball back from the crow."

Matt says he enjoys the relaxed atmosphere at the school, where everyone works together.

Support staff

Recognising their rising importance and expertise

It's time to recognise the changing roles and expanding professionalism of education support staff, writes Will Brodie.

The work of most categories of education support staff has changed dramatically over recent decades.

These days, support staff develop tailored learning plans, contribute to the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) for students with disability, liaise with specialists and much more. Many have specialised qualifications and extensive practical experience.

At Galen College, a secondary school in Victoria's north, a small team of

Learning Support Officers are crucial to the learning outcomes of students.

Asked what her role entails, Learning Mentor Linda O'Donohue lists:

- follow the teacher's direction and work collaboratively with them
- grow rapport with all students to gain their trust
- support teachers and students
- undertake behavioural management
- support students emotionally
- work with students with learning difficulties
- work with students in class who need extra support
- provide weekly mentor notes
- help students set goals.

IEU Victoria Tasmania Education Support Staff Organiser Tracey Spiel is not surprised by the length of Linda's list. For classroom-based support staff, "gone are the days when they were volunteers and helped students with, in the main, reading".

She says new technology and changes to curriculum and community expectations have had an effect, but support staff have also been "heavily impacted" by the extra loads besetting teaching staff.

"Work intensification across the school community has meant that tasks done by others have been redistributed to support staff more and more," Spiel says.



"This is not necessarily a bad thing. Support staff are capable, smart and, above all, adaptable. Many of the tasks allocated to teachers are not tied to their teaching practice and can be productively performed by support staff."

Spiel believes schools should audit the tasks allocated to teaching staff and administrative leaders and consider whether support staff could take on some of the non-teaching tasks.

"For example, a daily organiser role could be done by support staff. The same goes for the Victorian Assessment Software System (VASS) Coordinators, Learning Support Officer (LSO) coordination roles, and interpreters and translators," she says

Support staff can also be taking on some administrative work that has fallen to teaching staff.

Rethinking the roles

"Support staff need schools to think outside the box," Spiel says.

"Many support staff members are taking on more and more complex tasks. It's already happening with collecting data for the NCCD, but there are very few schools giving preparation time for this to occur within working hours, with many staff forced to take work home.

"Risk assessments for excursions and camps are another example. While some input from staff who know the students involved is essential, this doesn't need to be the teacher.

"If curriculum-based support staff assist with risk assessments for their classes and consult with teachers and leadership, this would lessen teachers' workloads."

At Galen College, O'Donohue plans her timetable around the classes of the students she is assisting rather than teachers, but she says it is vital to develop a rapport with teachers so they all work as a team in the classroom.

"I am a strong believer that if you have a good relationship with your teacher in the room, then working together with the students will come easier," O'Donohue says.

But the relationship building goes further than that, she says.

"Sometimes the student you are in the room for may not want you to help them, as they feel they are 'different' to everyone else. I always find getting along with the whole class is a huge benefit to help overcome that student feeling like you are there only for them.

"I often work with different students in the class or have a chat with the students. I don't just pick out the students I'm in there for, as students work off their peers a lot."

O'Donohue says schools can best utilise support staff by "giving them

the opportunity to grow and allowing them to be a part of meetings that are relevant to the students they support".

"I also think mentors need to be trained before they are thrown into a classroom for the first time," O'Donohue says. "Some mentors go to classes and are unsure what to do, or don't have the skills to allow them to be a part of the classroom."

Spiel agrees that education support staff require more training and "PD in areas of need within a school".

"This is not routinely readily available to staff unless it is online and outside of work hours," Spiel says.

Support staff need more ways of advancing their careers within a school or sector - there is too little flexibility written into awards and agreements.

And, Spiel says, "they deserve more respect and recognition for the important roles they perform".

"Support staff deserve more respect and recognition for the important roles they perform."

"In some schools this is part of the culture and it engenders a great feeling among all staff," Spiel says. "Sadly, it is lacking in many more."

And the changing roles of support staff also need to be reflected in their salaries, which haven't always "kept up with the changing complexity of roles and higher education requirements".

Career structures

To this end, the IEU VicTas Branch has negotiated improved classification structures and role descriptors to ensure support staff have career paths and salaries that better match their work, duties, expectations, experience and qualifications.

In the IEU NSW/ACT Branch, support staff in Catholic systemic schools gained significant improvements in the most recent enterprise agreement.

Almost all classroom and learning support and administrative staff received pay rises of between 6.5%

and 19%. These pay rises brought them in line with their colleagues in the NSW public sector.

"Over the past decade in the Victorian Catholic sector, we negotiated overhauls of the middle and upper levels of the support staff scale, opening up new salary bands for experienced staff and ensuring the descriptors they rely on when seeking reclassification were clear and reflected the actual work they did in schools," says Deputy Secretary Kylie Busk.

In a recent major Catholic agreement, all education support staff were lifted off Level 1 salary rates (that will now only apply to staff undertaking a formal traineeship) to the higher pay rates and a greater number of experience-based classification steps in Level 2.

"We also negotiated a new classification stream called Health and Wellbeing Services, which applies to first aid officers, nurses, speech pathologists, and psychologists employed within schools," Busk says.

"This will ensure that these employees are correctly and consistently classified and paid according to their qualifications, experience and responsibilities."

The Victorian Catholic agreement recognises the growing professionalism of staff further up the salary scale by granting them the same annual position allowance payments as teachers. It also provides a significant salary restructure for school services officers.

And for the first time, the new agreement dictates that support staff workload issues are to be discussed in the same way as teacher workloads through school Consultative Committees.

Strength in numbers

Spiel says there is still plenty of work for the IEU to do.

"The union needs more education support staff members in order to grow power in this cohort. Many are not aware of their rights under agreements or awards," she says.

"We need to recognise the speed of growth and change within the sector and do our best to reflect that in bargaining with employers for the right wages, conditions and classifications."

Such efforts help education support staff but, considering their vital work, also benefit schools, teachers, and students.

No more shame

Period positivity

makes a difference

One school's progressive move could be a model for many more around the country, writes Lucy Meyer.

What started as a classroom discussion led to school-wide changes before spreading throughout a diocese.

It began in early 2022, when a news item sparked passionate responses from a Community and Family Studies (CAFS) class at St Paul's Catholic College Booragui in regional NSW.

The state government had just announced it would provide free pads and tampons for students at all government schools. "Getting your period should not be a barrier to education," said the state's then-Education Minister, Sarah Mitchell.

The Year 12 class at St Paul's, a co-ed school, couldn't understand why they wouldn't also have access to free period products. Weren't pads and tampons a necessity?

Their teacher, IEU member Nicole Burns, encouraged them to find out more. The students left the class fired up and determined to make a change.

Charlotte Ferry was in that class. Her sister Maddie remembers how excited Charlotte was when she came home from school that day. "We really think we can make it go somewhere," Charlotte told her sister.

Kicking off the campaign

The students wrote to their local members, the Minister for Women, and the Minister for Education. "The advice was resounding: 'you're not going to get them for free,'" Burns remembers.

Assumptions were made that students at non-government schools were privileged enough not to need free period products, Burns says. "And that's certainly not the case at this school."

Undeterred and armed with research, the students met with the director of the Catholic Schools Office to advocate for period products to be freely available in school bathrooms. The director was supportive. A steering committee was formed "and it all went from there", Burns says.

The project involved countless meetings, research and consultation, financing, logistics, surveying students and incorporating findings.

Students were involved at every step. They faced some hurdles, says one of the students who kickstarted the idea, Alex Holliday. "It took a while to get a few people on board, but you just hassle them down," Holliday says. The students were assisted by Dr Michelle O'Shea, an academic from the University of Western Sydney.

Strong launch spurs wider change

Together with the rest of the steering committee, the students created Period Positivity, an initiative focused on access, equity, and dignity. Free pads and tampons would be provided in dispensers in school bathrooms, but the program would extend beyond products, with an education campaign plus policies to promote reproductive health and gender equity.

They launched a pilot program at St Paul's in Term 4, 2022. It was so successful that Period Positivity was rolled out to the entire Maitland-Newcastle diocese in Term 3, 2023.

By the time Period Positivity was unveiled at St Paul's, the class who started it all was sitting their HSC exams. They passed the baton to an incoming class, who matched their passion for the project.

Shame, stigma and skipping school

Maddie Ferry was in the new cohort. The day the dispensers were installed, she took a photo and sent it to her sister Charlotte, who had helped make it happen.

"I shed a tear," Charlotte says. "Because it's so much bigger than just having tampons." There are so many more girls, women, non-binary and trans students "who can come to school now and feel safe", she says. "Honestly, if I talk about it too much, I get emotional."

According to research from the University of Western Sydney, a lack of support around menstruation means many Australian girls are disadvantaged in educational and extracurricular activities. A 2020 national survey revealed that close to half of all menstruating students regularly stay home from school due to their period.

"The thing that makes me feel upset about students not coming to school because they don't have access to those products is because it's such a simple solution," says Sarah Gardiner, a teacher at St Paul's and a member of the IEU Executive.

A St Paul's survey revealed a correlation between absenteeism and a lack of access to products, Holliday says. Some experience "period poverty" - the struggle to afford sanitary goods. But accessibility is about more than cost.

St Paul's found that many students felt uncomfortable going to the office to request a sanitary item. "You'd whisper it", says Maddie, "you wouldn't want anyone to hear you asking for it". When she was a student, Burns says, "there was a lot of secrecy". She remembers her peers hiding pads up their sleeves.

"I really do hope that other schools will see us and think, 'oh, we can do that too!'"



Top left, from left: St Paul's teacher Nicole Burns with former students Alex Holliday, Jess Robinson, Charlotte Ferry, Maddie Ferry.

Top right: St Paul's teachers Nicole Burns and Sarah Gardiner.

Left: A dispenser with free period products in a bathroom at St Paul's.

Right: Nicole Burns receives the 2023 Emmaus Award for Excellence in Secondary Teaching from Steve Lemos of the Catholic Schools Office, Maitland-Newcastle.



Periods have long been a source of shame, but Period Positivity is attempting to destigmatise menstruation. Access to pads and tampons should be as basic as toilet paper and hand soap, Burns says.

The importance of education

Period Positivity "did teach people that it's not something to be ashamed of", says Jess Robinson, a member of the 2023 class that led the initiative.

A key focus of Period Positivity is removing the taboo of menstruating. To do that, students need to be taught about the realities of periods, says Robinson, who believes the curriculum isn't filling the gap.

"We don't get educated, we get taught," she says. Girls are told the basics: their uterine wall will shed once a month. But what is really needed is in-depth education about the whole experience, "symptoms, pain, cramps" she says, banging her fist on the table to emphasise each point.

A model of change

Period Positivity is part of a broader societal shift towards menstrual equity: the right to fair and equal access to sanitary goods, education on reproductive health, and quality care.

In 2019, Australia repealed the "tampon tax" that taxed products as luxury items. In the last few years, every state and territory has announced free pads and tampons in public

schools, but not many independent and Catholic schools have followed suit.

Could St Paul's be a model for other non-government schools around the country? "Absolutely, I don't see why not," says Burns. The Period Positivity team has shown "that it works and that it's a need".

Gardiner also believes her school's success can be copied. "I really do hope that other schools will see us and think, 'oh, we can do that too'."

Burns believes the key to replicating the success of St Paul's is ensuring students steer the process. You need a team, she says. "I used to call them my 'period patrol.'" If she were doing it again, Burns would also include more boys.

Another key factor is the level of preparedness. The Period Positivity team knew a student or two might make jokes or pull pranks, but they were ready. They included an awareness campaign, and had students talk to their peers. As a result, they experienced very little antisocial behaviour.

Having a teacher like Nicole Burns driving the process was critical. Her students say that while she'll never take credit for the project, it wouldn't exist without her. In May 2023, Burns won the Emmaus Award for Excellence in Secondary Teaching for her work on Period Positivity.

She sees her students as "changemakers" who made a difference on an issue of dignity and equity. "Why wouldn't I support something like this?" she asks.

Artificial intelligence

Resisting and reimagining

In light of the recent hysteria around Chat-GPT, education professionals may well groan at having to read yet another piece about AI and education, writes Monash University Professor Neil Selwyn.

However, AI is not a topic educators can afford to completely tune out from. Indeed, there are a lot of people wanting us to surrender to the hype and accept that we have all now entered the 'AI age' and that teachers and students simply need to accept it and make the best of the AI being handed down to us.

As such, one of the main reasons that ongoing debates around AI have become so boring and repetitive is the seemingly inescapable nature of the situation. Regardless of how optimistic or pessimistic the conversations around AI are, the underlying presumption is that 'there is no alternative'.

In contrast, organisations affiliated with Education International (the global federation of teachers' unions) remain suspicious of being told to put up and shut up. Indeed, there are many powerful voices working hard to keep us passively resigned to the changes currently being ushered in under the aegis of 'AI' - not least the likes of Google, Open AI, the OECD and others who stand to gain most from this technology.

Rather than give in to these vested interests, the education community needs to step up and work out ways

of pushing back against the current received wisdoms around AI and education.

So where to start with thinking against the current forms of AI currently being so relentlessly sold to us? This article presents a range of persuasive critiques of AI that are beginning to emerge from those who stand to lose most (and gain least) from this technology - Black, disabled and queer populations, those in the global south, Indigenous communities, eco-activists, anti-fascists, and other marginalised, disadvantaged and 'subaltern' groups.

Any educator concerned about the future of AI and education can therefore take heart at this growing counter-commentary. Here, then, are a few alternate perspectives on what AI is, and what AI might be.

Ways of thinking differently about AI

Some of the most powerful critiques of AI are coming from traditionally minoritised groups - not least Black critics calling out racially related misuses of the technology across the US and beyond. These range from well-publicised cases of facial recognition driving racist policing practices, through to systematic racial discrimination perpetuated by algorithms deployed to allocate welfare payments, college admissions, and mortgage loans.

Condemnation is growing around the double-edged nature of such AI-driven discriminations. Not only are these AI technologies being initially trained on datasets that reflect historical biases and discriminations against Black populations, but they are then being deployed in institutions and settings that are structurally racist.

All of this results in what Ruha Benjamin (2019) terms 'engineered inequality' - ie the tendency for AI technologies to result in inevitably oppressive and disadvantaging outcomes "given their design in a society structured by interlocking forms of domination" (Benjamin 2019, p47).

Similar concerns are raised by critiques of AI within disabled and queer communities. As scholar-activists such as Ashley Shew argue, there is a distinct air of 'techno-abilism' to the ways in which AI is currently being developed. Features such as eye-tracking, voice recognition and gait analysis all work against people who do not conform to expected physical features and/or ways of thinking and acting.

Shew points to a distinct lack of interest amongst AI developers in designing their products around disabled people's experiences with technology and disability. At best, AI is developed to somehow 'assist' disabled people to fit better into able-bodied and neuro-typical contexts

“Rather than give in to these vested interests, the education community needs to step up and work out ways of pushing back against the current received wisdoms around AI and education.”



Professor Neil Selwyn, Monash University School of Education, Culture and Society

– framing disability as an individual problem that AI can somehow help overcome.

Such perspectives on AI should certainly make educators think twice about any claims for AI as a force for making education fairer. Indeed, it is highly unlikely that AI systems implemented in already unequal education contexts will somehow lead to radically different empowering or emancipatory outcomes for minoritised students and staff. Instead, it is most likely that even the most well-intentioned AI leads to amplifications and intensifications of existing discriminatory tendencies and outcomes.

Feminist approaches to AI

Such concerns are echoed in feminist critiques of AI. These stretch back decades to writers such as Alison Adam in the 1990s highlighting how AI is founded on deeply problematic understandings of intelligence, and profound insensitivities toward social and cultural aspects of thinking, acting, and living. Since then, feminists have continued to call out AI developers and the technologies they produce as lacking any genuine concern for core human attributes such as empathy, ethics, solidarity, and care for others and the environment.

In raising these issues, feminist critics highlight how many of the

problems associated with current uses of AI relate back to how power and privilege operate in modern capitalist conditions. For example, feminist activists were quick to protest the reliance of AI development on low-paid and unpaid ‘invisible labour’ performed by women, people of colour, and often outsourced to non-Western workers. Feminist thinking reminds us that these injustices cannot be simply avoided, neutralised, or fixed. Instead, these are issues that need to be resisted, challenged and worked around in ways that rebalance the outcomes of AI tools along more equitable lines.

All of this leads to calls for the development of new forms of AI that are informed by feminist principles and can be used for feminist ends. Examples include projects where local communities take time to create their own datasets to then train AI models on. This means that the functioning, intentions and parameters of the eventual AI tool are visible to everyone involved in its development and use – in contrast to the deliberate ‘black box’ opaqueness of most commercial AI.

Other feminist forms of AI are being developed to deliberately combat the discriminatory and misogynist forms of AI that currently predominate – such as alternate forms of predictive AI that alert law enforcement to crimes such as gender-based violence and femicide. As Sophie Toupin concludes,

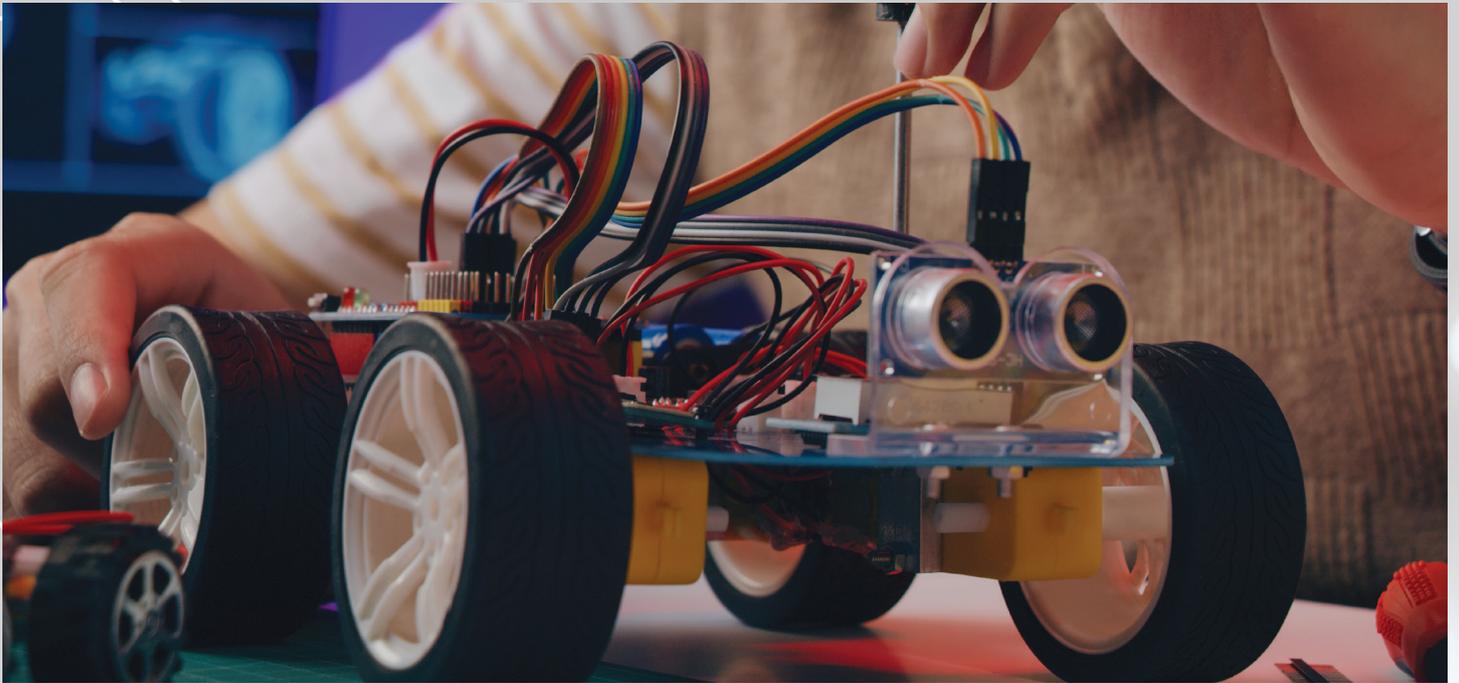
“The promise associated with feminist AI is that a fairer, slower, consensual, collaborative AI is possible”.

Indigenous perspectives on AI

Allied to this is growing interest in reconceptualising AI through the lens of Indigenous epistemologies, cosmologies, and ways of being and doing. One initial attempt to do so is offered by Luke Munn’s recent article ‘Designing and evaluating AI according to Indigenous Māori principles’, which applies the work of anthropologist, historian, and noted Māori leader Sir Hirini Moko Mead to current Western framings of AI technologies as they are starting to be applied across various societal domains.

As Munn explains, these Māori principles, values and understandings offer a distinct break with the current dominant assumptions around AI as promoted by Western IT industry and policy interests. For example, Indigenous framings of AI raise concerns around human dignity, collective interests and communal integrity, as well as contextualising impacts according to local norms.

Crucially, these approaches also foreground the ways in which AI is entwined materially with natural environments – from the imposition of water-hungry data centres in drought-ridden regions through to problems of e-waste and the exploitative depletion



of rare metals and minerals to construct computer hardware.

From an Indigenous standpoint, therefore, the current Western push for AI appears dangerously unbalanced and removed from the needs of people and land. When set against the Indigenous framings outlined in Munn's paper, current dominant IT industry rhetoric such as the complete AI-led 'transformation' of society, and extreme visions of an omnipotent 'general artificial intelligence' appears decidedly arrogant, hubristic, disrespectful, and destructive.

Recurring issues and concerns

These are just a few aspects of a fast-growing counter-commentary on what AI is, and what AI can be. Indeed, a variety of alternate standpoints and perspectives are now being brought to bear on AI. Alongside growing calls to rethink AI along decolonialist and eco-justice lines, another emerging set of arguments against the politics of current AI draw attention to the clear "resonances between fascistic politics and AI's base operations" (McQuillan 2022, p97).

While all these ideas and agendas offer very different - and sometimes contradictory - takes on AI, they do contain some common sensibilities and ambitions. For example, these critiques are usually not afraid to make radical demands. One central conclusion from many of these viewpoints is that specific forms of AI should simply not be developed and/or should be immediately discontinued and outlawed. For example, there are persistent arguments for the complete banning of facial recognition technology - or, at the very least, tight control and

regulation over its use like controlled substances such as plutonium. As noted legal-activist Albert Fox Cahn has reasoned: "Facial recognition is biased, broken, and antithetical to democracy. ... Banning facial recognition won't just protect civil rights: it's a matter of life and death".

Elsewhere, are common concerns over placing marginalised and alternative perspectives at the front and centre of future AI design. In the short term, it is argued that future design of AI technologies and tools should be built around the needs of those least likely to benefit from the technology (what designers sometimes refer to as 'edge cases'). Instead of being an afterthought, the experiences of Black, disabled and/or Indigenous communities should guide the decisions of AI designers and developers. This is reflected in calls for disability-led design, feminist AI design, Indigenous AI design guidelines, and design justice approaches to conceptualising AI.

In the long-term are calls for these principles (and others like them) to be mandated as a basis from which to advance the sustained fundamental reform of AI along anti-discriminatory, genuinely inclusive and decolonised lines - forcing IT industry, policymakers and other drivers of AI to ground their actions and ambitions around larger questions of justice, inequality, and coloniality.

This would require the AI industry to give up their current preoccupations with technological speed, scale, novelty, and wilful disruption. Instead, this promotes an approach to AI that is "slower, more considered, and more considerate of life in its various forms" (Munn 2023, p70).

So where now?

Rather than being set in stone, there are plenty of reasons to believe that the ongoing 'AI-ification' of education is something that can be resisted, and perhaps even reimagined in radically different ways.

All the different perspectives just outlined should inspire us to slow down and recalibrate current discussions around AI and education - reflecting on what these technologies cannot do, and calling out what is lost and what harms occur when these technologies are used.

These are certainly not unreasonable requests. Indeed, it is telling how we have quickly descended to the point where calls to consider issues relating to social inequality, humanity and the environment somehow appear to be so radical and totally unachievable.

We are still at a moment when there is time to speak out against the harmful forms of AI currently being pushed so relentlessly. Seen in this light, then, it seems crucial that the education community makes concerted efforts to push such values, ideals and principles into debates and decision-making around what forms of AI we collectively want to see in education.

The critiques outlined in this post from Black, feminist and Indigenous perspectives suggest that the future of AI and education does not have to be a foregone conclusion that we simply need to adapt to. Instead, the incursion of AI into education is something that can be resisted and reimagined.

This article was written by Professor Neil Selwyn of Monash University's School of Education, Culture and Society, and is republished with his permission.

Artificial intelligence

Implications for assessment practices

The implications of artificial intelligence (AI) on assessment practices have, in many respects, been more thoroughly considered than other, broader issues. However, if AI use is to be policed in schools, resourcing and personnel come with it, IEU-QNT Research Officer Dr Adele Schmidt writes.

Both universities and schools have been aware of opportunities for students to use AI and other digital tools to 'cheat' for some time. Universities often have sophisticated detection systems in place.

The detection of cheating is taken so seriously in universities that several institutions have resourced their faculties with personnel who work with students on the use of AI in assessment pieces.

Schools do not have the capacity to do this without additional funding.

If AI use is to be policed in schools, this level of resourcing/personnel must be delivered rather than expecting schools to 'value add' using current resourcing and staffing models.

Schools deal with younger students and often take a more pastoral approach when cheating is detected, with the goal of educating the student on why cheating is unethical, rather than simply punishing them for having cheated.

Options for educators

Lodge et al [2] note that there are six options for educators trying to find ways of dealing with AI and its impact on assessment:

- ignore
- ban
- invigilate
- embrace
- design around, and
- rethink.

Given that ignoring and banning are unlikely to produce solutions, and invigilating requires investment of considerable resources, educators have no option but to embrace, design around and rethink.

One rethink option open to teachers in schools is to shift to more process-based assessment models, such as oral examinations [3], where there is less emphasis on the artefact and more on the learning underlying it.

Such changes are resource-intensive and have the potential to overwhelm teachers with even more assessment and moderation work (that is, individual assessment interviews with a class of 25 senior students).

Alleviating assessment workload

It is possible that AI could help ameliorate assessment-related workload.

Some authors have suggested that AI integration into

learning environments can develop complex, multi-dimensional models that summarise the learning status of individuals across subject areas to facilitate more precise instructional diagnosis [1].

The solution for designing and implementing effective 21st century assessment paradigms is likely to lie somewhere between process-focused and AI-mediated assessment.

Either way, any sustainable integration of AI into the teaching, learning and assessment process requires recognition that traditional assessment paradigms are:

1. Onerous for educators to design and implement.
2. Provide only discrete snapshots of performance rather than nuanced views of learning.
3. May be uniform and not adapt to the knowledge skills and backgrounds of participants.
4. Inauthentic in that they adhere to the culture of schooling rather than the cultures schooling is designed to prepare students to enter.
5. May be antiquated in that they assess skills that humans use machines to perform [4].

In proposing options for assessment tasks that incorporate AI use, Swiecki et al [4] suggest that automated assessment construction, AI-assisted peer assessment and deployment of writing analytics have potential, but rolling these out at the scale demanded by the entire schooling system is problematic.

Not only is it inadvisable for schools to undermine human relationship-oriented learning, but concerns about data sovereignty exist when AI platforms are owned by commercial entities.

This creates tensions in relation to matters such as health, safety and wellbeing (including data sovereignty) of schools, teachers and students.

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Generative AI

What next for teachers?

Since the launch of ChatGPT and the rapid adoption of generative artificial intelligence (AI) worldwide, there has been extensive debate about how this new technology will fit into education, Katie Fotheringham writes.

Dr Tiffani Apps is a senior lecturer at the School of Education at the University of Wollongong and the Associate Academic Program Director Digital Technologies for Learning and Co-Head Postgraduate Studies.

Dr Apps's work engages the impact of educational technologies on schools and how children, parents and teachers engage with digital systems, platforms and tools.

The Australian Framework for Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Schools (the framework) was introduced this year.

Dr Apps says the framework painted AI in an unrealistically positive light and overlooks many issues that will arise in schools.

"The potential of [the framework] to guide the responsible and ethical use of AI in schools is not to be understated," Dr Apps says.

Dr Apps says a 'one size fits all' approach was not ideal when implementing this new technology in a school setting.

"The support required for teachers will look different in every school," she says.

"It's a tricky situation because it's so complex - we need to be able to think about how we support both students and teachers to understand the nature of AI and then be able to use the tools effectively.

"Because of this, there are sort of two layers to the situation, and often we can see very clearly in the history of educational technology that there's always lots of hype around new tools, but teachers are often not very well supported to understand them and integrate them into their practice.

"I welcome a framework to support teachers to be able to understand and implement the tools - my concern is when we have vague, generalised statements around what we might expect AI to be doing, we are not able to best support teachers to understand and use the tools," she says.

Understanding AI imperative

Dr Apps says a priority should be educating teachers and students on what generative AI is and how it works, as there may be misconceptions about the technology.

"Much of the research that we've been doing ahead of the advent of generative AI is exploring how teachers understand AI," Dr Apps says.

"Until the advent of generative AI, AI was already embedded in many of the tools that we use, and it's largely designed to be invisible in our practice.

"Because of this, there many who are confused about what AI is, and all of the kind of media hype around generative AI tools such as ChatGPT adds to this confusion.

"Teachers need to be supported to understand what generative AI is, what it's capable of, and then also to understand the impacts it will have on students now and in the future.

"There is also a need to be able to think thoughtfully about how it fits with

the existing curriculum and the kinds of needs that students have because students' needs are very diverse.

"Something that teachers excel at is taking a standard curriculum or tool and then catering for the needs of the students in front of them," she says.

What's missing from the framework

Dr Apps says several key issues were overlooked in the current framework. "The document overlooks the complicated nature of generative AI and many of the issues that will arise with mainstream use in schools - including exacerbation of existing digital inequalities, trespasses on the privacy and data rights of teachers and students, intellectual property rights, teacher competencies and contribution to negative environment impacts."

Dr Apps says years of research revealed a plethora of privacy and data issues in relation to AI.

"There are huge risks around our privacy and the diversification of our work, as well as intellectual property risks for students and teachers.

"It's important to understand that the ChatGPT API is open and is sharing data as part of the machine learning, so by its very nature there are privacy risks associated with that.

"The most important thing teachers can do to protect themselves is understand those risks by engaging in some professional learning surrounding that.

"We also see many educational jurisdictions, such as South Australia, now looking to build their own versions of generative AI to provide a safer platform for students and teachers."

Dr Apps says the social implications are equally as important to understand as the technical side of AI.

"Schools should be making a real commitment to exploring what AI is through the digital literacy capability, with a focus on the ethical nature of it and the social impacts of those tools – these tools are not neutral," she says.

"Having those conversations that are more social rather than technical in focus with students is part of building their digital capability, part of building their understanding of the impacts of these tools on our lives is a great entry point to understanding AI through a social lens."

Relevant PD critical

Dr Apps says it is important that specialised professional development (PD) be made available to teachers.

"In my experience of delivering PD over the last 15 years, anything that's kind of situated in a particular context is always more valuable to teachers because they can relate it to their specific practice," she says.

"However, broader online courses, lectures and webinars can be useful as a starting point.

"Many schools run their own school-based professional learning regularly.

"I think that those spaces can be good because they provide an opportunity for teachers to feel safe – new technology is always risky, and it is important for teachers to feel supported and be honest about how they are feeling," she says.

Dr Apps says the University of Wollongong runs a free yearly webinar around emerging technologies.

"The learning team aims to provide an overview and then to give some example strategies of what it might look like in the classroom with connections to existing curriculum as a first point for discovery around those emerging technologies," she says.

"There is also a range of different providers who do face-to-face or broader online PD opportunities connected to the Australian curriculum – the Digital Technologies Hub tends

to have some good case studies and examples of practice as well."

IEU position

Terry Burke, IEU-QNT Branch Secretary, says our union made submissions throughout the development stage of the framework and remains conscious of the risks that could arise for members following mainstream adoption.

"It is important that we do have national guidelines and, given the complexity of the issues, it is important to identify principles that should underpin the decisions of schools and teachers regarding how and when AI is deployed," Burke says.

"The principles themselves are sound, but they are insufficient in that there is a need for teachers and schools to have time to engage in the deep analysis of the risks that emerge when working with AI for education purposes – the responsibility for managing risk should not reside solely with teachers and school leaders," he says.

Burke says the guidelines should acknowledge the risks associated with mainstream generative AI use in schools.

"It is important that the framework is developed in consultation with the profession and updated regularly to ensure that it recognises and addresses new and emerging risks and does not inappropriately shift the responsibility for anticipating, preventing and responding to negative events to teachers and other school staff," he says.



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The University of Wollongong has online university-supported PD sessions, resources and information related to the impact of AI on learning and teaching.

Access the information hub at lrc.uow.edu.au/hub/collection/ai-in-education

Examples and case studies from the Digital Technologies Hub can be accessed at digitaltechnologieshub.edu.au

Climate crisis

How schools can form a hub

Last year, the Australian Government released its Intergenerational Report 2023, which projects an outlook on the economy and its budget to 2062-63, writes Katie Fotheringham.

A significant emphasis was placed on climate change, with the transformation to net zero expected to be a driver in shaping Australia's economy over the next half-century.

Perhaps most at risk are youngest Australians, who will no doubt bear the consequences of climate change, as will their schools and communities.

High risk infrastructure

Monash University Education Environment and Sustainability Faculty Research Group Professor Alan Reid says important school infrastructure would be at risk in the event of extreme weather events.

"The climate crisis visibly disrupts school communities when associated phenomena such as bushfires, flooding and severe weather events damage infrastructure," Professor Reid says.

He says that school infrastructure often plays a significant part in local communities.

"In parts of regional and rural Australia where the infrastructure is thinnest, we have to recognise that school buildings often take on particular significance to the community.

"They are holders of memory and identity and contribute to the fabric of communities in many ways, including being a rallying point in times of disaster and recovery.

"Losing such a physical hub can be devastating to a community, whether for generations of learners and their families or the many others participating in community activities on school grounds," he says.

Leading the way

Many experts believe the potential for schools to lead on climate literacy, resilience, and engagement is not being fully utilised - even as schools feel the impact of extreme weather.

Professor Reid says it was vital schools emphasise the importance of climate action for students.

"If schooling and the climate crisis can't be shown to matter to children, communities and politicians, then the opportunities for schools to express 'constructive hope' in the curriculum as well as in school buildings and school leadership will be sorely missing," Professor Reid says.

"Unless schools adopt a coherent whole-school approach to climate neutrality, we risk further entrenching climate illiteracy rather than climate literacy," he says.

Monash University Faculty of Education Lecturer George Variyan says young people were eager to take action when it came to climate change.

"The climate crisis is not a crisis; at least, that's how governments across the globe seem to be responding," Dr Variyan says.

"Government inaction on climate change has precipitated worldwide protests, with young people taking centre stage.

Dr Variyan says school leaders would be crucial in supporting students to respond to the crisis.

"If school leaders want to stay relevant to their students' futures, they have a role to play that demands more than simply playing their traditional role.

"Educators have never seen a greater challenge."

Resources for educators

The Australia Institute has compiled resources in conjunction with high school teachers and university academics in the field of climate change.

The series aims to provide teachers and students with accurate information about climate change rather than providing detailed classroom activities.

The modules will be best suited to teachers in the humanities, namely in the studies of society and environment, geography and economics.

The resources can be found at: bit.ly/3OEwE9J

"Schools are holders of memory and identity and contribute to the fabric of communities in many ways, including being a rallying point in times of disaster and recovery."



Greater investment needed to tackle disruptive student behaviour



Our union has welcomed the Federal Government's new investment in a range of free, evidence-based resources designed to help tackle disruptive behaviour in school classrooms, Emily Campbell writes.

The investment follows the release of the Senate Education and Employment References Committee's Report on increasing levels of classroom disruption in Australia.

A Foundational Classroom Management resources handbook is now available from the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO).

Greater funding necessary

IEUA Federal Secretary Brad Hayes says our union was pleased with the investment but emphasised more action was needed to meaningfully address the issue.

"Our union's position is that governments and school employers must prioritise the resources and specialist support necessary to address complex factors contributing to students' disruptive behaviours," Hayes says.

"While resources are always welcome, the emphasis on teacher professional development (PD) and training as a remedy for the problem of disorderly classrooms may obscure the external factors responsible for such behaviours," he says.

Hayes says teacher training is only one element of a suite of actions needed to address problematic student disruption.

"Teachers are not solely responsible for addressing student behaviour problems, and a sustainable, long-term solution will require significant action by school employers and governments.

"A reassessment of classroom environments, better access to allied health services and better preparation of and support for initial

teacher education students and early career teachers were necessary, as recommended by the report," he says.

Report recommendations

The Senate Committee's final reports detailed recommendations to combat classroom disruption, including the introduction of a behavioural curriculum and a further inquiry into declining academic standards in Australian schools.

The report noted the committee considered the release of the OECD's latest Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey results continued to show a decline in the disciplinary climate in Australian classrooms.

According to the committee, Australia should examine how high-performing countries are achieving better results than Australia, including what we can learn from their experiences and how funding for students in Australia and other countries correlates with performance and academic standards.

Ongoing consultation must continue

The inquiry's focus on consultation with practising teachers is a priority that should continue to find meaningful solutions.

"The Senate Committee terms of reference identified the necessity of inquiry into the impacts and experience of disorderly classrooms on teacher safety, work satisfaction and staff retention," Hayes says.

"It's important to note that teachers have repeatedly raised concerns over many years through their union and through their workplaces of the escalating disruption to learning, both through persistent low-level behaviours and more dangerous incidents," he says.

Final report falls short

Following the report's release, Associate Professor and University Research Theme Champion (RTC) for Education and Work at Western Sydney University Dr Katrina Barker says teachers need additional support, achieved through collaboration with their colleagues, school leaders, the students themselves and parents, as well as allied healthcare professionals.

"This collaborative effort is essential for identifying the underlying reasons and motivations behind challenging behaviour and working together to both prevent and address it," Dr Barker says.

"Initiating the provision of extra resources to schools for implementing this wraparound support will benefit teachers, school leaders, students and families and address the issue of increasing disruption in Australian classrooms."

Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Monash University and Certified Behaviour Analyst Dr Erin Leif says the report fell short in recommending strategies for ways to establish supportive school systems.

"Looking ahead, it will be important to ensure schools can allocate time and funding for teachers to engage in planning, professional development, collaboration and reflective practice related to student behaviour," she says.

Read the Senate Committee's Final Report on school disruption and recommendations online at <https://bit.ly/4butezR>

Access the AERO's new suite of classroom management resources and handbook online at <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/>



Members of the the Writers Guild of America picket outside the Netflix building in Los Angeles on 5 May 2023

BOOM TIME

The rise of unions in the US

The US labour movement is stronger than it's been in decades. What's driving this revival and what can Australian unions learn? Lucy Meyer spoke with experts to find out.

On an autumn afternoon in 2023, US President Joe Biden made history by joining striking autoworkers on a picket line. He was the first sitting president to do so.

Speaking through a bullhorn at a General Motors plant outside Detroit, he told a crowd of striking workers that they deserved the raises they were fighting for.

"Wall Street didn't build the country," said President Biden to cheers and hollers. "The middle class built the country. And unions built the middle class."

What might seem like a publicity stunt in the lead-up to an election is a snapshot of a larger phenomenon. The US is experiencing a union revival – a substantial rise in industrial action and high-profile organising campaigns across the country hailed by the media as "the union boom".

There have also been similar surges in union activity in the UK and Canada in the past few years. While the US has no shortage of political and social challenges, the union boom offers some insights for Australia.

From Hollywood to Houston

The Hollywood strikes are the most well-publicised example of US union action. Last year, you may have noticed your streaming choices grew thinner as writers and actors walked off set, and TV and film productions went on indefinite hiatus.

From May to September 2023, the 11,500 members of the Writers Guild of America took part in the second longest labour stoppage in Hollywood history.

The actors' strike was even bigger, with 160,000 members of the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists striking from July to November. In both cases, workers won huge gains.

From writers and actors, to autoworkers, baristas, teachers and support staff, Amazon warehouse workers, journalists and many more, US workers across industries, states, and even political divides, are organising, and taking industrial action to demand better pay and conditions. According to analysis by CNN, close to 1 million unionised workers secured double-digit wage increases last year.

Union popularity is also growing. The latest survey results from Gallup show 67 per cent of the US public support unions.



Actors' strike, Rock the City rally, Times Square, 25 July 2023

In a 2023 article for *The New Daily*, journalist and economist Alan Kohler declared “it’s virtually impossible” to strike in Australia “and has been for more than a decade”.

Since the Howard years, conservative governments at a state and federal level have passed laws that have inhibited union action. However, the current federal Labor Government has passed three tranches of industrial relations reforms over the past 18 months aiming to redress the balance (read more on p25).

But it’s important to remember, Tattersall says, that strikes do still happen in Australia.

The IEU’s highly successful “Hear Our Voice” campaign of 2022-23 saw teachers and support staff at Catholic systemic schools in NSW and the ACT take two full days of strike action, including a joint rally with the NSW Teachers Federation, winning historic pay rises in the process.

The IEU had to jump through many hoops to strike, including applying to the Fair Work Commission for protected action ballot orders and engaging a third-party balloting agent to conduct voting.

While the industrial landscape varies in the US and Australia, in both countries, workers do take illegal strike action on occasion, sometimes as a form of civil disobedience, IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Industrial Officer Michael Aird says. The NSW Teachers Federation was fined \$60,000 for striking during their 2022 “More Than Thanks” campaign.

Despite the restrictions on strikes in Australia, Tattersall argues that striking is only one weapon in the Australian labour movement’s arsenal. Unions can still achieve transformative change, she says, with limitations presenting an invitation to think creatively, experiment, and reimagine how they can exercise power.

What can be learned

“Borrowing successful techniques and strategies from campaigns in one country and translating them to another is nothing new,” says Tattersall, who has devoted a lot of time to adapting labour movement work across borders.

To her, one of the biggest lessons of the US union boom is the power of localised union activity. She argues that the decentralised nature of the fight has propelled the union revival in the US.

For Kallas, the union boom demonstrates the power of strong leaders who can see “when the conditions are ripe” for action and can capitalise on that opportunity.

Perhaps the biggest takeaway from the union boom is what Kallas calls “the contagion effect”. He points to a series of earlier teacher strikes in the US. The Red for Ed movement kicked off in West Virginia in 2018 when teachers and support staff walked out.

They soon inspired staff in other schools in state after state. “It was like a wildfire,” Tattersall says.

Kallas has seen this contagion effect across industries all over the country through the union boom and he believes it can continue across borders. He hopes the Labour Action Tracker might play a small role in that.

A global strike map

Scholars and activists from several countries are trying to “create at least the beginnings of sort of a global strike map report”, Kallas says.

Inspired by the work of Kallas and his team, researchers in countries including Brazil, Türkiye, and the UK are working on their own labour action trackers, with an effort underway to start a global database. “That would be exciting,” Kallas says.

The ultimate goal is to create a tool that would not only provide accessible data for policymakers and academics, but also help unite workers internationally.

Back in Australia, there is great potential for such a tool. Aird believes there’s power in hearing about what’s happening in other countries because we live in a globalised economy. “When workers are brave enough to stand up, it encourages other workers to do the same thing,” he says.

Looking ahead

With the US now in a pivotal election year, the impact on the union boom remains to be seen, but Kallas expects the revival to continue through 2024.

Tattersall is confident about the outlook for Australian unions. “We’re in a position to turn a fairly good context and a lot of interesting insights into action,” she says. “The hope is that this can be mixed together into something really exciting.”



Historic change

Big wins in new IR laws

IEU members across Australia welcome three tranches of improved workplace laws, including the right to disconnect and stronger rights for reps/delegates in schools.

The Federal Government has passed three tranches of industrial relations laws in the past 18 months that aim to get wages moving and provide better protections for working people.

But all of these improvements didn't just materialise in parliament. They follow years of campaigning by union members dedicated to ensuring fair wages, secure jobs and better working conditions.

IEU members have been front and centre during debates on all these new laws - sharing their powerful stories with politicians, in Senate hearings and to the media about the changes needed in our schools, preschools and kindergartens.

Closing Loopholes #2 Right to disconnect

Passed in February 2024, the latest round of reforms delivers important gains for workers across many industries, a new 'right to disconnect' is especially relevant to school staff who are drowning under unrelenting workloads.

The right to refuse unreasonable work-related contact outside normal hours builds on similar protections won by IEU members in Western Australia and Queensland through collective bargaining in 2023.

Employer requests, parental queries and student contact often encroach on the personal time of staff. The growth of mobile technology and assumed 24/7 connectivity have only made this worse. But teachers aren't permanently 'on call'. They need valuable downtime.

While there is still much to be done to address workload pressures in schools, a 'right to disconnect' will help overworked school staff by providing a right to refuse to monitor, read or respond to employer or work-related contact after hours or on weekends.

School communities - including employers, parents and students - will need to come together to ensure a clear understanding and compliance with these important new parameters.

"The 'right to disconnect' is especially relevant to school staff who are drowning under unrelenting workloads."

Closing Loopholes #1 Stronger rights for union reps

The *Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Closing Loopholes) Bill 2023*, passed in December 2023, includes changes that grant stronger rights for union representatives in the workplace (called delegates under the legislation).

These changes include access to paid training during normal working hours as well as reasonable access to communications with members and potential members. This can mean sending emails about union matters to staff lists that include non-members, and inviting non-members to attend union meetings.

The new laws prevent employers from unreasonably refusing to deal

with union reps, from misleading them and from hindering, obstructing or preventing the exercise of their rights under the *Fair Work Act*.

From July 2024 new enterprise agreements and all modern awards will be required to have specific clauses on delegates' rights.

Along with delegates rights, this new legislation also includes criminalisation of intentional wage theft and increased civil penalties for inadvertent wage theft and superannuation theft.

Tranche 1 Secure jobs, better pay

The first round of changes was an early Christmas gift in December 2022. The *Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Secure Jobs, Better Pay) Act 2022* means:

- more options for multi-employer bargaining to get wages moving (this is important for IEU members in the early childhood education and care sector)
- limits on the use of fixed-term contracts and the promotion of secure jobs
- long-overdue action on pay equity and measures to reduce the gender pay gap and prohibiting pay secrecy
- a stronger independent umpire to help resolve long-running disputes and enforce genuine, good faith bargaining.

Taken together, these three rounds of reforms represent the biggest changes to workplace laws in the past 25 years, and go a long way to restoring fairness and a level playing field. They deliver better rights for workers, which in turn deliver better wages.

Unionism in the classroom

Building unions takes education; kids can't join what they don't know about, Will Brodie writes.

The good news is that when young people know about unions, they respond with enthusiasm and want to be involved.

"When young people learn that the weekend, public education, public healthcare, good wages and a 38-hour work week were all won by union members, they are definitely surprised," says James Lea, Acting Director of the Young Workers' Centre (YWC), an initiative of the Victorian Trades Hall Council.

"But I would add that many young people also respond with pride and hope," Lea says. "Young people feel proud that the workers that came before them fought hard and won good things for working people, and they start to see themselves as an important part of the union movement and capable of winning great change."

YWC outreach organisers visit schools, TAFEs and community groups around Victoria to educate their peers about workplace rights. Since the centre was established in 2016, it's reached more than 50,000 young people, delivering free sessions on topics including Your Rights at Work, Bullying and Discrimination, OH&S, Apprentice Readiness and Social Movements and Campaigns.

Lea says he constantly hears from young people who want to know more about their workplace rights and conditions.

"Young people receive a lot of conflicting information from many different sources when they start their working life," he says. It's his organisation's job to provide young people with "the confidence to ensure they are being respected and treated fairly at work".

Accordingly, the YWC provides training for students undertaking the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Vocational Major, an applied learning program designed to be completed over a minimum of two years which prepares students to move into apprenticeships, traineeships, further education and training, university (via non-ATAR pathways) or directly into the workforce.

The Vocational Major subject called Work Related Skills includes topics such as workplace wellbeing and personal accountability and workplace rights and responsibilities.

However, Lea says that all young people could benefit from YWC training.

"Whether a young person is leaving for a trade, working part-time to put themselves through university or getting their first job it's essential they know about their rights, unions and how to stand up for themselves," he says.

Rights taken for granted

The YWC is busy because most young Australians don't get exposed to fundamental details about workers' rights and take their entitlements for granted until they are entering the workforce.

In Queensland, the Young Workers' Hub offers free World of Work sessions for schools, TAFEs and Registered Training

Organisations, and they are often assisted by the IEU's Qld/ Northern Territory Branch to get into independent schools.

Such sessions are vital because the information is only available in specific pockets of the Australian curriculum. There are modern history units that discuss unionism, but there is no universal introduction to workers' rights or unions, their role, and their history.

That's why other approaches are necessary to reach young people.

The children's book *Sticking Together*, written by James Raynes and illustrated by Mitzi McKenzie-King, who both work in Victorian Trades Hall communications, aims to help build awareness of collective values.

"It's not easy to talk about these concepts with our kids, so I wanted to produce something that explained the essence of unionism in simple terms," Raynes says.

"For me, that means working together for the benefit of the collective, by demonstrating kindness and compassion to those around us. I think that's an idea any child can embrace.

"We know that, for a variety of reasons, young people are less likely to join unions. There's a whole body of work involved in reversing that trend over time - some of it political, some of it industrial. But culturally, all unionists have a role to play in educating young people about the importance of union membership and normalising it as something you do when first entering the workforce.

"I guess *Sticking Together* is one small contribution toward that end."

Sticking together

Raynes says the Young Workers Centre does an extraordinary job in educating school students about their workplace rights, but "there's definitely a place in the curriculum" for more information about unionism and work.

"A young person's first experience of the workforce should be a positive one, but all the research suggests that's not happening. Young workers are more likely to be bullied, exploited and made to feel unsafe - we all have a responsibility as unionists to turn that around, and a curriculum that informs and empowers young people in the workplace would be a great step in the right direction."

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) offers 'incursions' of its Worksite program into secondary schools via its state affiliates.

The ACTU's Worksite for Schools is designed for Years 9 and 10 students across Australia. Its four key components are:

- work experience
- first job
- rights at work, and
- the role of unions.

Many individual unionists have addressed classes at the invitation of member teachers. Here's what they say:

"I used to go to careers lectures as a rep and give a union talk within a fairly comprehensive curriculum."



“All unionists have a role to play in educating young people about the importance of membership and normalising it as something you do when first entering the workforce.”

“I remember being asked a couple of years ago to talk to a Unit One or Unit Two Business Management class about the role of the unions and EBAs [enterprise bargaining agreements].”

Others raised unions in civics and history classes when teachers asked.

IEUA Secretary Brad Hayes is a former member of the Qld IR Education Group that would send “one union person and one employer rep to schools to talk about working rights”.

The internet is a useful resource – a quick search reveals many union-positive books and a plenty of witty YouTube and TikTok video explainers. There are even lesson plans.

In one, from American public broadcaster NPR, a breezy 90-second video introduces unionism by discussing society’s haves and have-nots. Then an exercise splits the class into labour and management teams which negotiate 12 ‘demands’.

The movement has created union education before. In 2011, the Australian Institute of Employment Rights (AIER) and the Teacher Learning Network (TLN) produced the curriculum resource *WorkRight* for teachers working with Year 10 students.

This resource informed students about issues such as discrimination, occupational health and safety and dispute resolution.

In 2021, looking back on the importance of *WorkRight*, then AIER Executive Director Lisa Heap said: “Where do you start when those you are working with have no understanding of unions, laws, or the IR system? You start with what they believe is right and wrong and how they would like to be treated at work. You start with them as people – and they very quickly move to the rights-based framework”.

WorkRight featured 10 themes that young people themselves had identified:

- everyone should have a fair go at work
- everyone has a right to be treated with dignity
- discrimination and harassment are against the law
- everyone has a right to a safe and healthy workplace
- everyone should get a say about the things that affect them
- you should always be able to ask someone to speak on your behalf
- no one should be asked to leave without a fair reason
- everyone is entitled to fair basic conditions
- you or your representative should be allowed to bargain for a fairer deal, and
- disputes should be resolved quickly and fairly.

That’s a good basis not just for educating children, but for establishing an industrial relations system.

Unions act on student wage theft

In 2018, a student from the University of Wollongong, Ashleigh Mounser, uncovered widespread wage theft from students working in local businesses.

At the time, the average worker in Wollongong (95 km south of Sydney), aged 21, was being paid \$10 an hour, when the correct rate was \$22.86 an hour. It was covered in the *Sydney Morning Herald* as “The great student swindle”: [bit.ly/SMHStudentSwindle](https://www.smh.com.au/news/the-great-student-swindle-2018-06-14)

This led to concerns about school students in Years 10, 11 and 12 with casual jobs in the area. “School students go into jobs with no idea of their basic rights, yet we act surprised when they get exploited,” said South Coast Labour Council (SCLC) Secretary Arthur Rorris at the time.

To counteract this, the SCLC approached P&C groups in local schools, and a number of Catholic schools in the area welcomed Rorris as a guest speaker, as parents didn’t want to see their children being exploited at work.

More information: bit.ly/NMWageTheft2018

The IEU provides free membership for education students.

Sue Osborne, journalist

Resources

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How learning endures in Ukraine



Retired school teacher Suzanne O'Connor

A 50-year career in teaching has taken Suzanne O'Connor around the world. Now, as we pass the second anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, she's teaching Ukrainian students, writes Sue Osborne.

English and Religious Studies teacher Suzanne O'Connor has worked in Canada, India, Timor-Leste and Africa, the central west of NSW and at St Francis Xavier's College in Newcastle, 160 kilometres north of Sydney, where she taught with former IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Mark Northam.

O'Connor spent the 20 years before she retired at St Vincent's College Potts Point in central Sydney.

International classroom

Retirement is not really an accurate description of O'Connor's status, as she taught in Timor-Leste for the two years preceding the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I volunteered with the Loreto nuns in Calcutta in 2013 and I wanted to go back," she says. "I was teaching the street children there which was an extraordinary experience. But [Prime Minister] Narendra Modi said people could no longer go to teach in India, so I went to Timor-Leste instead.

"I was teaching 'baby' nuns – as Timor-Leste is very much pre-Vatican 2, the only way intelligent young women can

avoid becoming mothers early in life is to train to become nuns. They are smart women and one in particular I hope becomes prime minister of Timor-Leste.

"When COVID started, the Australian Government sent two planes to fly us all back. I had two weeks in isolation, which was quite traumatic. The nuns sent me a bottle of gin though, so that cheered me up."

Education under fire

Feeling somewhat at a loss after having to leave Timor-Leste in such dramatic circumstances, Suzanne read an article on ABC Online about teaching in Ukraine. She decided to make enquiries.

A program administered by Melbourne's Monash University was looking for volunteers to teach Ukrainian students via Zoom.

Suzanne teaches for an hour a week on Saturdays. She doesn't know the exact location of her students, nor their last names, for security reasons.

She says all the students are hungry for as much education as they can get.

The war in Ukraine has led to substantial damage in the education sector, putting the right to education of the country's 5.7 million school-aged children at stake, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) says.

Attending school has become voluntary, O'Connor says. "A third of schools in Ukraine have been destroyed. Destroy education and you destroy culture."

Human Rights Watch has also reported on the destruction of education and educational infrastructure in Ukraine, stating in November 2023: "Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has devastated schools and kindergartens throughout the country. Since February 2022, over 3790 educational facilities have been damaged or destroyed."

O'Connor notes that while damaged communication systems are getting repaired almost at once, the same isn't happening for schools.

Language lessons

"The students are keen on Western culture and developing their English, as they want to be part of NATO and the West – it's part of their fight against the Russians," O'Connor says.

"In the past, if schools were found to have Ukrainian language books, they were shut down. You could be sent to the gulag for having Ukrainian literature at home. So language is precious to them.

"When you think about it, it's the same situation in Australia. Indigenous

people were banned from speaking their own languages after colonisation.

"My students say they want their English to be sophisticated, not just good, so we've been practising speeches. I'm introducing them to ideas of democracy, letting them choose their own topics to speak on. We've done free will.

"Their English is astounding. Mind you, I might have all the nerdiest Ukrainian students - they read Shakespeare," she says.

O'Connor says her students are accustomed to a highly prescriptive style of teaching and learning, so she's encouraging them to express their opinions. "They are very shy of this, because they think there must be a 'right' answer when it comes to literature," she says.

"I've been working on their critical thinking. It's been a challenge, but very interesting. I get them to watch various speeches, like [former Prime Minister] Kevin Rudd's Apology [to the Stolen Generations] address."

"A third of schools in Ukraine have been destroyed. Destroy education and you destroy culture."

Facing fears, finding support

O'Connor has also asked her students about their fears. "We're not supposed to talk about the war, so I was a bit apprehensive," she says. So she checked with her moderator, who said that for 17-to-18-years-olds, it was OK to raise it.

"They're adolescents, they talked about making mistakes, things like that. In their culture, students are punished for making a mistake," O'Connor says.

"They're all listening to each other on Zoom of course, and some are intimidated by the fluent speakers and feel humiliated if they make a small mistake.

"I've only got girls at the moment, some of the boys drop out because of this fear of mistakes, I think. I'm telling them their English is almost perfect, there are no mistakes.

"They're picking up on the idea that we're all in this together. They support each other and praise each other."



Top: At the start of the war, this school was damaged in the battle for the city of Kharkiv. Above: A school basketball court destroyed in the same battle.

Although the war isn't a topic, it inevitably intrudes on their lessons, such as when air-raid sirens force the students to go offline.

"They're funny, they're sad, they get angry sometimes," O'Connor says. "You know, some of the boys love playing sport and sometimes it's too dangerous due to the bombing. With the drones, you can't say when they're coming. This weekend some children were killed."

High price of war

The Director of the Europe and Central Asia division of Human Rights Watch, Hugh Williamson, has said: "Ukrainian children have paid a high price in this war because attacks on education are attacks on their future. The international community should condemn the damage and destruction of schools in Ukraine and looting by Russian forces."

O'Connor says the students are stoic. "For a lot of them, their fathers and older brothers are off fighting," she says.

The moderator has told O'Connor that some students are living in places where half the village has been bombed and roads destroyed, while many of the students have fled to Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Italy.

Standing together

On 24 February this year, thousands of people all over Europe marched to protest the second anniversary of

the war in Ukraine. "You know when I first became involved, I used to ask the moderators, can I send money?" O'Connor says. "But there's no banking system. There's nothing you can do.

"I've learnt so much from this experience. We laugh a lot, it's such a pleasure for me to do this.

"You realise how lucky we are and how we don't know how the rest of the world lives," O'Connor says.

David Edwards, General Secretary of Education International, the global federation of 380 teachers' unions, has said: "Schools are never legitimate targets of war yet in Ukraine they have been attacked over and over again.

"Our colleagues and their students persevere despite the violence unleashed on them, but we cannot underestimate the devastating effects of the invasion.

"Education unions around the world stand with Ukraine and will continue to support Ukrainian teachers in all their efforts."

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Teachers for Peace

How would you feel about Ronald McDonald teaching a science class? What about Joe Camel? The thought of these iconic yet morally dubious brands having the keys to the classroom would make the hairs on the backs of most people's necks stand up, Teachers for Peace writes.

So, what about a company with a share price linked to the proliferation of armed conflict? What might such a company be incentivised to include in a science lesson, and what might it leave out?

When a company is in the business of selling weapons, it has a fiduciary duty to shareholders to maximise returns, so it can quickly find itself gleefully reporting on outbreaks of conflict and the sales it is expected to drive. Of the war in Ukraine, Raytheon Technologies CEO Greg Hayes said: "We fully expect to see benefits from it."

Defence stocks jumped almost 20 per cent in the first month of the conflict.

Eradicating undue influence

Lockheed Martin is the largest weapons manufacturer in the world, with revenues in the tens of billions every year. It was also the major partner for the 2024 National Youth

Science Forum held in Brisbane and Canberra in January, even though state Education Department policies prohibit schools from having commercial relationships with weapons manufacturers.

In spite of this, the Medical Association for the Prevention of War has identified more than 20 programs with ties to weapons companies.

This rapid growth has prompted the formation of a growing professional non-profit group called Teachers for Peace. The group campaigns to eject weapons industry influence from STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) classrooms and promote education approaches that foster peace and safety.

Teachers for Peace believe that allowing the military industrial complex any influence on education creates opportunities for the industry to normalise war and engender militarism in the next generation.

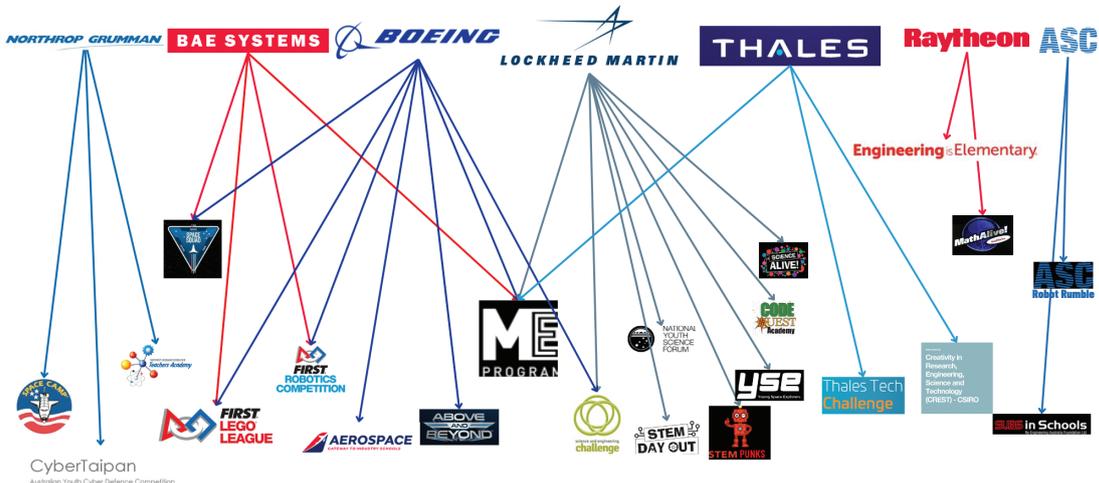
Keeping influence out of classrooms

In the 2016 Defence White Paper, the Federal Government articulated Australia's ability to manufacture weapons domestically as a national security issue.



Weapons Industry Influence in STEM Education

a guide for teachers and parents



Due to recent changes to Department policy, the programs listed above may no longer be compliant in QLD, NSW, ACT, and VIC.

By reframing the industry as a “key input to capacity” they seamlessly conflated private profitability with public safety. This was a boon to the weapons industry, as it made space for the state to openly use public money to assist the industry to grow, and talk about it like a public service.

Then came the release of the defence export strategy in 2018, which includes the strategic objective of Australia becoming one of the world’s top 10 exporters of weapons by 2028. The state seems willing to give industry all the money it needs to make this happen, but industry can’t find the people.

By 2019, the Department of Defence released the “Defence and Industry Skilling STEM Strategy” - reinforcing the conflation of the actual defence forces with the private companies that supply them. The report identified that the number of jobs “generally held by STEM qualified people” was growing 1.5 times faster than other types of jobs. Therefore, the challenge of attracting qualified people to the weapons industry in a climate where their skills are in high demand was acute.

The theme of this document is encapsulated in the first sentence: “In a time of increasing technological advancement and rapid change, Australia’s defence industry will be competing with other sectors for the workforce needed to deliver and support critical Australian Defence Force capability.”

In other words, the aim is to recruit people with STEM skills away from the fields of medical science, health sciences, climate sciences, regenerative agriculture, food security, and many other socially necessary applications of their skills. Finding workforces for those industries is apparently not the remit of government.

“Despite recent policy changes that clearly aim to ban these mechanisms of influence, we are not seeing the programs being pulled from schools, even in jurisdictions where they may be in breach of policy,” Teachers for Peace member Miriam Torzillo says.

“We believe this is because the companies tend to hide their associations with the programs, so teachers don’t know that there is a global weapons giant hiding behind a robotics competition. That’s not on teachers, the companies design it that way.”

Students shaped by educational environment

Teachers for Peace have paused to celebrate and welcome every jurisdiction’s policy change which has ruled out weapons companies as suitable candidates for “industry partnerships”, but our work is far from finished.

We will continue to advocate for policy change in the jurisdictions where it is still needed, but we are also putting effort into providing information and resources to teachers so they know which programs to be suspicious of.

There was a lot of outrage about the Nuclear Propulsion Challenge, given the controversial nature of the AUKUS submarine deal. We are building from that momentum to show school communities that the problem runs much deeper than just one program. We encourage everyone reading this to get in touch, so we can put the education system back in service of students and their communities, rather than private corporations.

“Education is more than just the transfer of knowledge,” says Miriam Torzillo. “It is also the environment in which young people spend most of their time. That environment shapes them, and if we allow multinational weapons companies to decide what it is and isn’t important for them to know - what will it shape them into? What do we not teach them, simply because industry doesn’t demand that they know about it?”

For a list of programs with ties to the weapons industry, see the MAPW Report, *Minors and Missiles*, and the resources available at teachersforpeace.org

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Connecting students with 'two-way science'



Australia's national science agency has launched an innovative new education program celebrating First Nations Peoples as the country's first scientists, mathematicians and engineers, Emily Campbell reports.

The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation's (CSIRO) Living STEM program supports remote Australian primary and secondary schools to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scientific knowledge in communities and classrooms.

Living STEM aims to increase students' engagement with science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and allows schools and local communities to collaborate to develop hands-on lessons linking local First Nations knowledge with the Australian science curriculum.

Community engagement

CSIRO Program Lead David Broun says Living STEM draws on community engagement principles of Two-way Science, developed with Aboriginal desert schools, which connects the cultural knowledge of the local community with Western science and the Australian curriculum.

"The Two-way Science model allows students to explore STEM subjects that value and connect with their cultural identity, leading to increased engagement and enthusiasm for learning," Mr Broun says.

Broun described Two-Way Science as a pedagogy that connects the traditional ecological knowledge of First Nations Peoples - including the cultural understanding of people, animals and the environment - with Western science inquiry and links that to the Australian Curriculum in a learning program.

"This approach also promotes First Nations leadership in education and fosters positive partnerships between

schools, communities, First Nations ranger programs and scientists," he says.

Previous evaluation of the Two-way Science approach demonstrates the benefit of culturally relevant and tailored lessons, not only for students but also their families and communities, who may otherwise experience barriers to engaging with their children's education.

Broun says Living STEM benefits First Nations students' wellbeing, engagement and achievement because they see local culture reflected in the school learning program.

"Living STEM builds on CSIRO's strengths in working with communities to design and deliver STEM education programs that embed First Nations knowledge," he says.

In August 2023, the Living STEM program was offered to the first intake of schools in the Karratha network in the Pilbara region of Western Australia.

The plan is to expand Living STEM. The initial intake program was delivered in July to the first cohort of schools, and included online and face-to-face learning activities.

Broun says the name Living STEM was chosen to reflect that First Nations knowledge is shaping the future of STEM education as a living network intertwined with the Australian STEM curriculum and knowledge systems.

Sharing First Nations knowledge

In July 2023, CSIRO held the first Living STEM knowledge-sharing and curriculum planning workshop with West Pilbara primary and secondary school educators and rangers from Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation (MAC).

Jade Churnside, a local First Nations ranger from Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation (MAC), says rangers co-designed and delivered a workshop for teachers as part of the Living STEM program.

"We had all the teachers and principals coming out, and we brought them down to Ngajarli and gave them the rock art tour, told them about the different meanings and interpretations behind the rock art," Jade says.

"We gave them a good, in-depth talk about the local medicinal plants, food plants and general-use plants.

"It's good to bring the teachers out because we get to show them hands-on and one-on-one what goes on and how it relates to what they do in the classroom," she says.

Another MAC ranger, Sarah Hicks, says she enjoyed developing classroom activities in the workshop, such as showing local school educators how to use a grindstone to make flour from native seeds.

She also appreciated the close attention paid by the attendees to the information the rangers shared about Murujuga's seasonal plants, ancient rock art depicting extinct megafauna and other things.

"The two-way learning is good," Hicks says.

"When I was at school, two-way learning mostly just happened during NAIDOC Week.

"Some of my old teachers were at the workshop, and it felt strange because when I was at school, I was very quiet, and I didn't like presenting at all, but in the workshop, I was presenting to them," she says.

Inaugural Living STEM showcase

More recently, the CSIRO hosted a unique gathering of over 80 Pilbara educators, elders, scientists and students for the inaugural Living STEM program showcase in November 2023.

Attendees described the inaugural event as a vibrant and culturally rich showcase of hands-on Two-Way Science.

Irene Hayes, a Yindijibarndi educator at Onslow Primary School, demonstrated her dedication to bridging the gap between Western science and First Nations knowledge.

She worked closely with teacher Rebecca Mackin, and together, they created a learning program around water filtration techniques taught to Irene as a child.

Scientists from Curtin University and Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation also shared their work, combining engineering and technology with traditional owners knowledge.

This approach allows them to monitor the Murujuga petroglyphs as part of the current application for Murujuga worked heritage listing.

Students from local schools in the Pilbara region are also engaged in this project, supported by the Living STEM program.

Broun says the hands-on demonstrations allowed attendees to visualise and see first hand how integration of traditional knowledge is applicable to today's STEM curriculum.

"The event celebrated the collaborative efforts of local educators and First Nations Leaders, demonstrating how First Nations knowledge can be respectfully integrated into STEM education, no matter where classrooms are," he says.

The CSIRO reported that feedback on the program so far has been positive.

"The schools involved have made good progress in developing STEM education partnerships with their communities," Broun says.

"For example, Dampier Primary School has partnered with a local Elder who is sharing Ngarluma knowledge around Spinifex resin glue.

"Karratha Senior High School has established a partnership with MAC, where they will be learning about the ancient cultural encyclopaedia represented in petroglyphs in the cultural landscape of Murujuga, Western Australia.

"As part of this, students will engage with Elders alongside scientists using cutting-edge STEM technologies for monitoring the impact of industrial emissions on the world heritage pending rock art sites in the region," he says.

Fostering reconciliation

The CSIRO hopes the program will benefit students, teachers and families, and will include:

- professional development for teachers
- events and seminars
- workshops and community engagement, and
- classroom resources.

Outputs of the program will eventually be made available for other jurisdictions outside the Pilbara region.

Broun says the Living STEM program helps support reconciliation.

"When teachers are learning about where they are and connecting with community, there are real benefits for everyone," he says.

"It benefits students, that's the idea of the program, but there's also benefits for teachers, for community ... there's this kind of learning ecosystem where everyone's learning together, which I think is a critical process and benefit of the project," he says.

Learn more about the Living STEM program:
csiro.au/en/education/programs/living-stem



Dave Broun, CSIRO Program Manager and Onslow Primary Educator Irene Hayes take in the ancient rock art depicting local Indigenous knowledges at Murujuga National Park, Karratha, WA. Photo credit: CSIRO

System, school, self

Layers of professional development

As teachers and educators, we often shorten professional development to 'PD', but this can diminish its significance, writes IEU member and Executive Officer of the Teacher Learning Network, Michael Victory.

Professional development is how we become better at what we do - how we gain knowledge, learn new skills, build our career, and grow as a professional.

I argue that we should be expanding our understanding of professional development. There are three layers to think about:

- systemic requirements for professional development
- school-identified professional development, and
- self-identified professional development.

Systemic requirements

Employers have a responsibility to ensure that employees understand relevant legislation, industry standards and codes of practice. This includes health and safety legislation, equal

opportunity laws and prevention of violence and harassment. In education, we also have curriculum 'legislation', assessment and reporting requirements, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) teacher standards, child safety standards and more.

It may be that systems (for example, Catholic system, Lutheran system, Islamic schools) have additional requirements around understanding the teaching and culture of the religious tradition or the philosophy of that systemic group of schools.

These authorities have a responsibility to ensure appropriate professional development is provided for teachers and support staff to allow them to meet their obligations. The most obvious example is where there is an update to the national or statewide curriculum requirements.

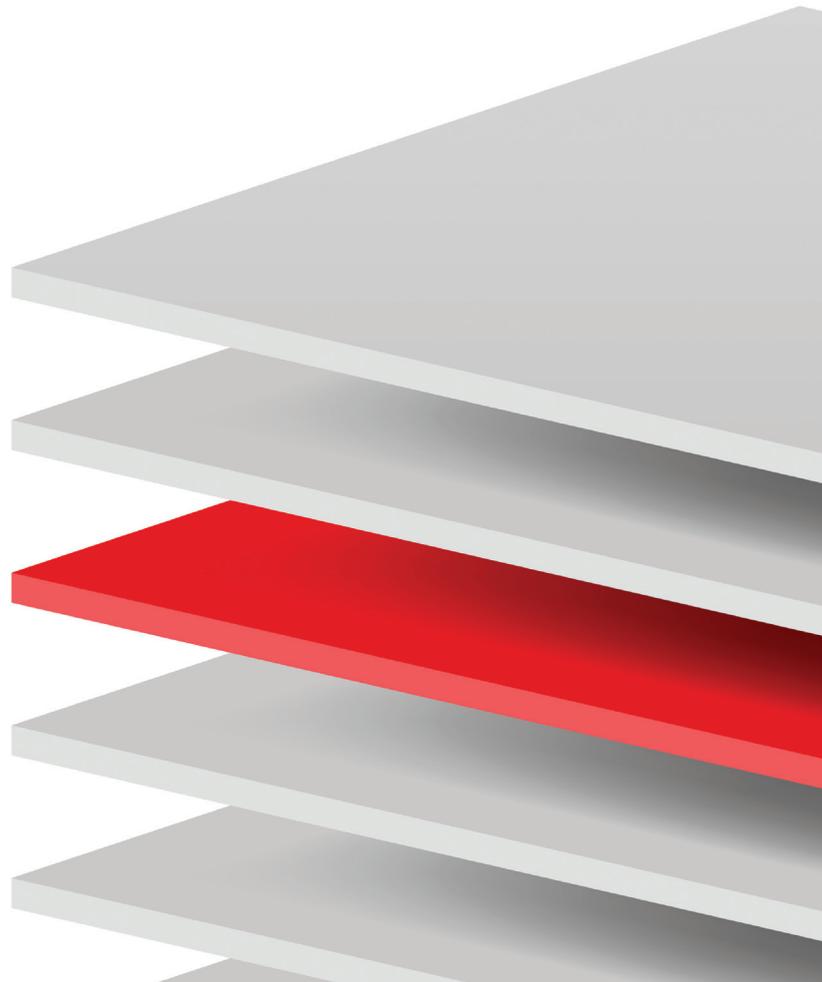
This is where the IEU plays a critical role for you. At a national and state level, the IEU lobbies the systemic authorities on your behalf for the time,

money and support to ensure you can meet your professional development needs around curriculum, assessment, and the relevant standards and codes of conduct. The system has the responsibility to ensure all employees are up to date.

School-identified

Each school has unique needs. It could have a high proportion of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) students, or students with a learning disability, a strong gender disparity (single-sex school), issues related to its location (small rural schools), or belong to a community that has been through a trauma like a fire or a drought.

Most schools now have a cyclical improvement plan which identifies key objectives, seeking performance improvements through research and data analysis to implement goals important to their community. This might include literacy and numeracy improvement or the introduction of a specialist curriculum such as project



based learning or the International Baccalaureate.

In these instances, the school must provide the professional development opportunities required by the staff to operate effectively in the desired environment. We know that a teaching degree or certificate qualifications are not enough to enable teachers or support staff to maximise their performance in every school environment. All staff need school-based professional development to support their work in each specific school context.

This is where your local IEU sub branch or chapter needs to be active in pressuring the school to allocate the resources that are needed to support all staff to increase their knowledge and skills. The IEU sub branch can and should have a significant influence on school-based professional development programs.

Self-identified

Schools expect that teaching and education support staff come to them with requisite skills and knowledge. For teachers, these attributes are now defined by teaching standards (see aitsl.edu.au).

A teacher is expected to have a sound knowledge of the relevant subject area (Standards 1-3), teaching pedagogies for different students and environments (Standards 4-6) and a commitment to the profession (Standards 7-8).

All teachers, even those who have reached 'expert' status, require ongoing learning to maintain their standards of professional practice. They must keep informed about new developments like artificial intelligence (AI); increase their understanding of student learning (for example, neuroscience); and keep abreast of new workplace technologies such as learning management systems.

Staff also need to develop expertise in specialist areas. For example, they may wish to improve skills in instructional or curriculum design, classroom management, literacy, and numeracy development, working with students with special learning needs, or leadership and management.

Schools should support self-identified professional development, as the whole educational community benefits.

The professional development needs of each teacher are unlikely to be met effectively through whole school 'in-house' professional development. How many IEU members have been herded into the staff room or assembly hall for a consultant-led day of whole staff professional development on 'effective differentiation'?

Each staff member has unique learning needs and goals, just as our students do. Each staff member is entitled to pursue professional goals to enhance their expertise.

All branches of the IEU have committed resources to supporting

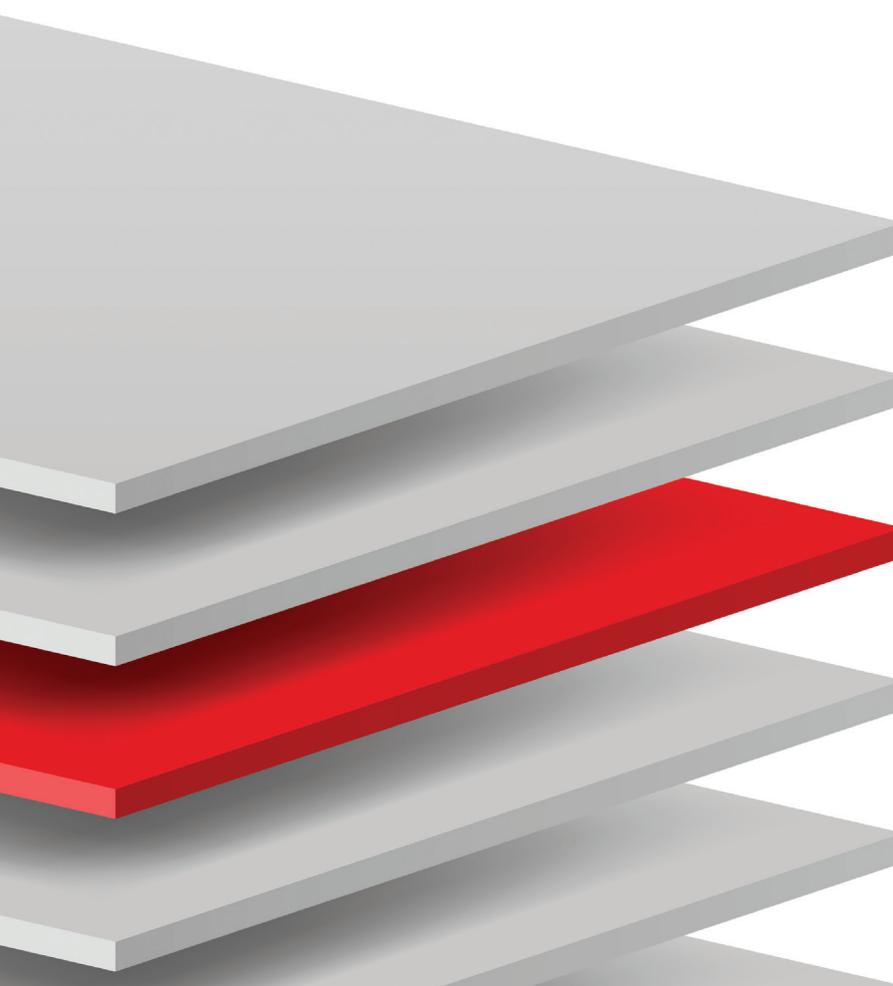
their members' professional development. Every member in Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, and Western Australia has access to free courses through the IEU Learning Hub and TLN.

IEUA NSW/ACT and IEU-QNT members also have access to a full training and events program. These initiatives are valued by members and the IEU continues to campaign strongly for teachers and support staff to get more time to engage in self-identified professional learning.

IEU chapters and sub branches must also continue to lobby for an increase in, and equitable distribution of the schools' resources for all staff to engage in self-identified professional development. Yes, there is a teacher shortage, but we cannot allow that to become a shortage in teacher skills, knowledge, or capacity.

You and your students will benefit when the system and the school invest in you and your professional development at all three levels, systemic, school and self.

Michael Victory is the Executive Officer of the Teacher Learning Network and an IEU member. He has a Master's degree in Education Leadership and recently completed his Doctor of Philosophy in Education. He can be contacted at mvictory@tln.org.au



“Each staff member has unique learning needs and goals, just as our students do. Each staff member is entitled to pursue professional goals to enhance their expertise.”



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