



independent education
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Healthy future
**Australia's most
sustainable schools**

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 aliened from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Endorsed by:





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Editorial

The dedication and excellence shown by our members is a constant source of inspiration.

Meet Cairns maths teacher Anja van Hooydonk whose achievements in and out of the classroom have been recognised with a prestigious award (page 6).

Discover Australia's most sustainable schools and why maintaining beehives and raising poultry for eggs is a crucial learning experience for students (page 8).

Australia attracted global attention when it banned children under 16 from using social media. We explore why politicians, parents and many researchers are worried about its impact on young people (page 10).

Sexual harassment of teachers by students, mostly teenage boys, is distressingly common. On page 12, we discuss why employers need to do more to fulfil their legal obligations to prevent harmful sexual behaviours and ensure schools are safe workplaces.

On page 18, Assistant Federal Secretary Veronica Yewdall explains how the new national Teacher Workload Impact Assessment Tool can address the impact of introducing initiatives on our workloads.

Should mental health first aid be provided in schools? We speak to an expert who argues that training to deal with mental ill-health is as important as knowing CPR (page 22).

School excursions are a powerful way to engage students, especially with Indigenous history and culture. We find out the benefits of place-based learning from the experts (page 26).

On page 28, member Josh Brady reflects on Life Education's 45th year, and how everyone's favourite giraffe, Healthy Harold, plays a vital role in preventative health and wellbeing education for children and young people.

We explore why employers should provide high-quality training on using artificial intelligence in schools to ensure it enhances student learning (page 30).

We hope you find this edition of IE thought-provoking and valuable for your professional practice.

Carol Matthews

Secretary
IEUA NSW/ACT Branch

Australian Capital Territory

Brindabella staff finally paid after union takes action

Staff at Brindabella Christian College can fully focus on teaching after the union took action when a majority of staff at the K-12 school in Canberra were not paid on 21 February.

On 26 February, the union took Brindabella to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) over the unpaid wages and superannuation after the school failed to provide assurances that staff would be paid immediately.

IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews said it was "unprecedented" for a school not to pay staff – leaving them feeling shocked and anxious about paying bills, including mortgages and rent.

At a hearing in the FWC on 3 March, Brindabella said it was seeking an "alternative funding source" that would enable it to pay staff overdue wages. Two days later, the school entered voluntary administration.

On 7 March, dozens of Brindabella staff finally received their overdue pay as well as regular wages due that day. The failure to pay staff follows court action against the school filed in February by the Australian Taxation Office over an \$8 million tax debt, including penalties for not paying super on time.

The school has previously been investigated over a spate of governance and financial breaches.

The union has stood with members at Brindabella throughout this protracted and difficult struggle. "We won't hesitate to hold employers to account in the media and the FWC," Matthews said.

New South Wales

Yes vote for independent school MEAs

Teachers and support staff in NSW and the ACT won strong pay rises and better conditions after the union reached agreement with the Association of Independent Schools (AIS) on new multi-enterprise agreements (MEAs). The MEAs will have a three-year term, expiring in January 2028.

Votes of employees to endorse the MEAs were held in about 240 schools in the last week of February. The 'yes' vote was carried across all employers.

Pay increases over the life of the MEA will vary for teachers, depending on current MEA and classification and translocation to the new scale. For new teachers, pay will rise by 4.5% in February 2026 and 4% in February 2027.

The union has achieved improvements in paid parental leave that will apply to periods of leave commencing after the start of the new MEAs.

Employers will also need to comply with the new workload transparency requirements: that is, advise teachers of their usual face-to-face teaching hours per week or cycle, general requirements for extracurricular duties and release provided for teachers in Leadership Level 1 and Level 2 positions.

Northern Territory

IEU condemns NT government decision to scrap Treaty process

Our union has condemned the NT government's decision to cancel negotiations for a Treaty with First Nations Peoples. It comes as the most recent Commonwealth Closing the Gap Annual Report (2024) indicates only five of 19 key Closing the Gap targets are on track to be met.

IEU-QNT Branch Secretary Terry Burke said the decision undid seven years of meaningful progress and undermined reconciliation efforts.

"The decision is shameful but unsurprising and characteristic of a government not fully committed to reconciliation," he said.

"Seven years of hard work and considerable funding were invested into this Treaty process, which has now been scrapped.

"Alarming disparities continue to exist in our country between First Nations Peoples and non-First Nations people," Burke said.

The decision is at odds with the recommendations in a report published last year by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), which called on governments to recognise the devastating impacts of systemic racism on First Nations Peoples and take urgent action to address it.

The AHRC report noted that truth-telling, education about historical impacts and a commitment to self-determination are critical to dismantling racism against First Nations Australians.

Queensland

'Acceptable other experience' policy updated for provisional teachers

The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) has updated its policy for 'acceptable other experience' that may be considered by teachers transitioning from provisional to full registration.

In some circumstances, the QCT permits provisional teachers to use experience other than teaching in an Australian school as a pathway to full registration.

Effective from 1 February 2025, the policy applies to provisionally registered teachers seeking a pathway to full registration using experience other than teaching in an Australian school.

The updated policy includes a list of programs acceptable for other experience, including frameworks relevant to early childhood education settings. It considers a person's education, demonstrated abilities, experience, knowledge, skills and lists any special requirements needed for such applications.

Other acceptable experience now includes reference to an ACECQA-approved program, broadening the context for early childhood teachers from jurisdictions outside of Queensland.

This is an important recognition of the professional standing of early childhood education teachers.

The policy update does not impact Permission to Teach (PTT) holders, as any experience pre-dating provisional registration cannot be included.

Provisionally registered teachers should refer to the QCT website for the updated policy and other resources to support their transition to full teacher registration.

South Australia

Action afoot in two sectors

The IEU(SA) has several unprecedented actions under way. With bargaining having stalled in independent schools, the union has applied for Protected Action Ballot Orders for the first time in this sector. Two IEU(SA) sub branches have separately determined that negotiations are not progressing, so the union has applied to the Fair Work Commission for members to have the right to take protected industrial action.

One school is a Christian school where membership has tripled as a result of member collective action. The threat of action at that school was enough to get the employer to see reason and increase their wage offer.

The second school is a high-fee school, where wages have not kept up with similar schools and, in some cases, have dipped below salaries in government schools. Members at that school are taking limited industrial action at first, as the employer has shown a greater willingness to negotiate key areas such as salary and workload.

Bargaining for members in the Catholic sector continues. The employer, Catholic Education South Australia (CESA), has gone after long-held rights around what a dispute can cover and notifying the union about significant change. These are fundamental rights that allow the union to represent members and we will oppose the employer's move.

The IEU(SA) appreciates the offer of support from other IEU state and territory branches if CESA persists with its claim.

Tasmania

Catholic deal approved: Now for implementation

IEU members in Tasmanian Catholic schools have secured a major victory, with 96.6 per cent of voting employees endorsing the new union-approved agreement. IEU Victoria Tasmania General Secretary David Brear praised the dedication of reps

and active members who went "above and beyond" to achieve this outcome. The agreement now awaits final endorsement by the Fair Work Commission before becoming legally binding in all Tasmanian Catholic schools.

This success follows a challenging campaign marked by employer resistance, including refusal to attend in-person meetings, and the introduction of controversial claims some 18 months into negotiations. When talks stalled, members took decisive action – securing a Protected Action Ballot Order and initiating work bans. Their efforts paid off, with an in-principle agreement reached just days after bans began.

Key wins include a \$1000 payment (pro-rata for part-time staff) for most low-income employees, pay parity with government schools, reduced face-to-face teaching hours, and improved parental leave.

This agreement reflects the strength and determination of IEU members, delivering fair pay, better conditions, and reduced workloads – benefiting staff, students and school communities alike.

Victoria

Campaign kicks off for better pay in Catholic schools

In the last round of negotiations, we tackled member concerns about crushing workloads, securing historic reductions in scheduled class time. While we are still refining these workload measures, the focus of this bargaining round is firmly on pay.

With the extraordinary rise in living costs during the course of the current agreement, securing substantial pay increases is essential. Education salaries have surged nationwide, and if Victoria wants to maintain its reputation as the "Education State", it must act decisively to catch up.

To strengthen our case, the IEU has engaged respected industrial expert Patrick Lee to develop a wages policy based on Australian and international research and salary benchmarks. This will provide the foundation for our push for much needed pay increases.

Beyond wages, we are surveying all IEU members in Victorian Catholic education to ensure our bargaining position aligns with the broader membership's priorities on salaries and conditions. Member input will be crucial in shaping the fight for fair pay and better conditions in the upcoming negotiations.

Western Australia

Making progress, training delegates

The beginning of 2025 has been busy for the IEU in WA, with numerous ongoing matters and disputes.

At the same time, many union delegates have taken paid leave for union training for the first time thanks to the federal Labor government's delegates' rights reforms.

Bargaining for members employed by the Anglican Schools Commission grinds on, with the employer reluctant to engage in further meetings despite several IEU claims going unanswered.

However, bargaining for Catholic support staff has progressed considerably. While the employer has rejected several IEU claims with the spurious excuse of financial constraint, many big improvements have been agreed, including provisions for long service leave and allowances.

Significantly, the proposed registration of an agreement for St John WA's first aid trainers has led to a dispute over whether the IEU has a right to cover certified trainers for this large registered training organisation. The matter progressed to a full hearing in the Fair Work Commission in early March, with a decision expected soon.

DOCEMUS AWARDS



Celebrating the achievements
& contribution of staff and volunteers
in Catholic Education Diocese of Cairns

Successful formula Maths teacher wins award



IEU chapter representative Anja van Hooydonk has been honoured for her exceptional contribution to teaching, writes Emily Campbell.

The Docemus Awards acknowledge and celebrate the unwavering commitment, achievements and outstanding contribution to Catholic education by staff, volunteers and supporters.

In 2024, Anja van Hooydonk was among those in the Cairns Diocese recognised for their commitment to going above and beyond as an educator.

Anja was commended for her dedication to providing extracurricular maths events for all students in the district and organising networking and professional development events for fellow teachers.

A maths and physics teacher at St Mary's Catholic College in Cairns, Anja says she was surprised to receive a Docemus Award.

Established by former Catholic Education Diocese of Cairns Director Tom Doolan and meaning 'to teach' in

Latin, the award also includes a bursary to undertake professional development.

"I was truly amazed and humbled, as I am still a bit of an old-fashioned maths teacher, preferring pen and paper to fancy online programs," Anja says.

"I intend to use the funding from the grant for professional development in mathematics, and I'm hoping to attend the 2025 annual teachers' conference hosted by the Mathematical Association of Victoria."

The conference will provide a platform for participants to engage in keynote presentations, workshops, panel discussions and networking opportunities. With the theme of "Thriving in mathematics", the event fosters a collaborative environment for sharing knowledge, exchanging ideas and developing strategies to support teachers and students.

Unconventional career path

Anja describes her path to a teaching career as unconventional but says it

provided a solid foundation for working in the profession.

"After finishing high school in the Netherlands, I began a degree in physics," she says.

"However, I did not end up finishing this degree, because I went to a kibbutz in Israel and from there, travelled the world, before ending up settling in Australia.

"From there, I studied environmental science before I became a mum and decided to switch to teaching as I thought it would provide stability for my family.

"I also realised after working for a year in a chemist that sitting in an office was not for me."

In 2000, Anja began teaching in the government sector and worked in a few different schools before moving to Cairns and eventually being employed at St Mary's, where she still works today as a senior maths and physics teacher.

"In between, I was head of the maths department for eight years and did a two-year stint as an assistant principal,



but decided I liked classroom teaching more than office work," she says.

Anja says she loves teaching and the ability to interact with students, which is the people-facing element she enjoyed while working in hospitality during her university years.

"My favourite moments are when you see a student achieve and grow in their mindset," she says.

"Sometimes it is not the academic achievements but just when they've grown in their mindset and believe in themselves.

"The interactions I have with my colleagues as we all work together to get the best outcomes for students doing maths is very rewarding."

Professional highlights and challenges

As president of the Cairns branch of the Queensland Association of Mathematics Teachers (QAMT), a role she has been in for over a decade, Anja helps arrange a variety of PD events and networking workshops for colleagues, including early career teachers.

Through QAMT, she also organises events and activities for students who excel at mathematics.

"We run maths days for high-potential learners in Years 7 and 9, which includes guest presenters doing maths activities which are not typically done in classrooms," Anja says.

"It is great to hear the comments of students who participate afterwards and have enjoyed themselves."

Over time, Anja has seen big changes in the teaching profession, including what is asked of teachers and the tools and resources used in their professional practice.

"In mathematics, the biggest change is the introduction of technology," she says.

"I love doing some of the problem-solving questions we can now pose to our students in senior mathematics because we have the technology."

Anja says traditional pen and paper – coupled with rote learning – still has its place in maths subjects.

"I still value written work because students need to demonstrate their understanding and show their communication, and skills such as learning times tables help students show much of their understanding of many concepts in maths," she says.

"The fact we must practise repetition of work should not be undervalued because it is necessary to improve at the subject."

'I joined our union as I believe we need to protect our rights at work.'

Although she loves her job, Anja is acutely aware of the challenges teachers face, including workload and work intensification and declining respect for the profession.

"The constant changes in curriculum make for a lot of extra work on all teachers, and not enough release time is given for us to implement them within our working weeks," Anja says.

"Another major challenge is that the teaching profession is no longer as highly respected as it was in the past.

"This brings unique challenges, such as how parents can behave towards teachers if their children's behaviour is called into question."

A proud unionist

With her generosity of spirit towards students and colleagues, Anja is a natural fit for advocating for the interests of staff in her workplace as IEU-QNT chapter delegate (representative).

The lack of professional respect for teachers coupled with a lack of autonomy were motivating factors for Anja.

"After the previous union chapter rep

left our school, nobody else was willing to take on the role," she says.

"I joined our union as I believe we need to protect our rights at work.

"Union membership is necessary in every industry and, unfortunately, I saw what happened working in hospitality during university, where there was very little union representation."

Anja knows IEU membership is critical for protecting careers and advancing the working conditions of staff in the non-government education sector, as well as improving students' learning conditions.

In 2023, she joined thousands of IEU members in Queensland Catholic schools who took protected industrial action after negotiations with employers soured.

Employers refused to listen to staff regarding concerns about working conditions, including wages, high workloads and work intensification.

Along with her colleagues at St Mary's, Anja took part in a one-hour work stoppage, which resulted in some Queensland Catholic employers, under the provisions of the *Fair Work Act*, deducting a full day's pay from participating staff.

The protected action was necessary for employers to hear members' voices.

Anja is proud to have stood in solidarity with many other IEU members to achieve important wins in higher wages and improved working conditions during collective bargaining.

"The increase in pay due to the increase in cost of living was a significant result," she says.

"Recognition of teachers who have composite classes is another.

"The additional planning, preparation and correction time (PPCT) for primary school teachers, given the increase in students with special needs and the need to provide documentation on differentiation, is a good result, too.

"However, I would like to see further improvements to PPCT time due to the increase in administration work required in our profession."

The Educator awards

Australia's most sustainable schools



Non-government schools can play an important role in educating students and communities about sustainability, writes Andrew Taylor.

From waste-free lunch days to planting native trees, students at Hills Grammar are playing their part in ensuring they leave the world in a better place for future pupils.

Last year, Year 11 students participated in a tree-planting day with Landcare. Year 12 students will take part in this year's World's Greatest Shave, donating their hair clippings to be made into "hair booms" used to soak up oil or chemical waste in land or ocean spills.

A collaboration with the University of Technology Sydney, meanwhile, allows senior students to work on sustainability projects to help the school reach net zero by 2035.

The ideas taken up by the school in the north-western Sydney suburb of Kenthurst include installing motion-sensor lights and kinetic energy tiles, and utilising digital screens to reduce paper wastage.

"Our students are not only learning these amazing skills about collaboration, creativity and problem-solving, but they are looking at a real, authentic problem that will contribute to the future of this school and perhaps the future of the planet," says principal Karen Yager.

'Shining examples'

Hills Grammar is just one of the non-government schools named most sustainable by The Educator, a specialist news website covering the education sector.

In 2024, The Educator invited Australian schools to share their sustainability initiatives. Twenty-five schools were chosen as "shining examples of effective sustainability education in action".

Sunshine Coast Grammar School and Matthew Flinders Anglican College in Queensland, Canberra Grammar School in the ACT and Al-Taqwa College in Victoria were other non-government schools crowned most sustainable.

At Hills Grammar, solar panels installed across the campus have cut electricity usage by more than 64 per cent, while two electric buses in the school's fleet save an estimated 42 tonnes of carbon emissions each year.

Sustainability also underpins the day-to-day activities of students and staff such as IEU member and the school's Head of Year 12, Helen Laidler.

"In addition to embedding sustainability in all stages of my Geography teaching, I have also been mindful of ensuring student leadership and community service activities also include elements of sustainability," Laidler says.

The IEU applauds the efforts of these schools and members such as Laidler in delivering sustainability education.

The union has long advocated for a healthy and sustainable environment and economy for our members and school communities.

The union's climate policy recognises the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Why sustainability matters

Sustainability matters, as Australia's national curriculum makes clear, because it addresses the ongoing capacity of Earth to maintain all life.

A cross-curriculum priority, Sustainability is taught across a range of subjects and year levels and explores the knowledge, skills, values and world views necessary for people to act in ways that contribute to a viable future.

Sustainability is also part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2025 Science Framework.

Associate Professor of Science and Environmental Education at Deakin University, Peta White, says sustainable practices in schools are important because schools are places of leadership in communities.

"Principals and teachers are often and rightly held in high esteem in communities and so they can and should drive sustainability practices," she says.

But raising awareness of these issues is not enough to generate change.

"Sustainability education must involve action and, more importantly, the development of agency where we are motivated with knowledge and skills to be able to act with intentionality personally and collectively," White says.

Schools can adopt a wide range of sustainable practices, from water and electricity management to programs that attend to biodiversity, waste and climate action.

Hands-on experience

Building a sustainable future is one of the guiding principles of Matthew Flinders Anglican College in Buderim on Queensland's Sunshine Coast.

The school seeks to "embed sustainability principles and practices throughout learning and teaching, facilities development, community engagement and operational activities".

For students, this means hands-on experience in maintaining a citrus orchard, vegetable beds, beehives and raising poultry for eggs at the school's Flinders Farm.

Principal Michelle Carroll says the farm program is an example of how "we are developing our campus setting in ways that show respect for the environment and provide our students with authentic learning".

Year 9 students explore how to grow crops without chemical inputs and the natural systems to improve the farm's water cycle, solar energy cycle, mineral cycle and community dynamics.

A curriculum unit on First Nations People's agriculture practices explores how Indigenous people accepted themselves as part of the landscape, not separate from it.

Farm produce is sold to the school community at the fortnightly Flinders Farmers' Market, while the Flinders Environment Authority student club engages in activities such as picking up rubbish from local beaches. It also plays a part in the school's long-term sustainability goals such as introducing charge points for electric vehicles and the removal of single-use plastics in lunch boxes and tuckshops.

Sustainability is taught to younger students such as Year 4 pupils who used artificial intelligence and LEGO robots to improve farm practices, while Year 3s explored frog habitats around the school campus.

"We intend for all of the college's efforts to nurture a more inspired, informed and skilled community focused on living a more sustainable life," Carroll says.



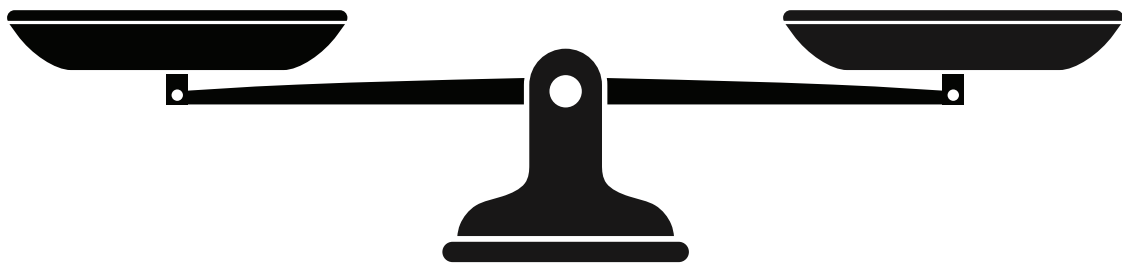
Above and right: Waste-free lunch days and creative repurposing of resources are some of the sustainability initiatives at Hills Grammar in Sydney's Kenthurst.

Opposite page and below: Students at Matthew Flinders Anglican College on Queensland's Sunshine Coast gain first-hand experience of maintaining a citrus orchard, vegetable beds, bee hives and raising poultry at the school's farm.



HELP OR HARM?

Pros and cons of the SOCIAL MEDIA ban



Australia has banned under-16s from accessing platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, in a bid to protect children from the “harms” of social media, writes Andrew Taylor.

The federal parliament attracted the world's attention last year when it passed legislation banning children under 16 from using social media.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the ban – supported by the Coalition but opposed by the Greens and some independents – was needed to protect young people from the “harms” of social media.

The federal government claims the ban will help combat the youth mental health crisis as well as assist parents to resist the “pester power” of children who want to use platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat and X (formerly Twitter).

“The fact is that young women see images of particular body shapes that have a real impact in the real world,” Albanese said in November 2024.

“And young men through some of the misogynistic material that they get sent to them, not because they asked for it.”

“If you're a 14-year-old kid getting this stuff at a time where you're going through life's changes and maturing, it can be a really difficult time.”

‘Unregulated experiment on children’

The Prime Minister echoes concerns raised by New York University professor Jonathan Haidt in his 2024 book *The Anxious Generation*. Haidt argues social media is harming young people who

are especially vulnerable to becoming addicted to their phones.

US social psychologist Jean Twenge has also raised the alarm about teenage mental health issues stemming from excessive use of social media and smartphones.

Polling indicates strong public support for the ban, driven by frustration at the failure of digital platforms to self-regulate, parents concerned about cyberbullying and inadequate age enforcement.

NSW Premier Chris Minns backs the ban, and last year described social media as “this giant global unregulated experiment on children”.

The Victorian and Queensland governments have also backed age restrictions on social media.

The ban is due to take effect in December 2025, but details about which platforms will be forced to ban children and how this will be enforced are yet to be provided.

How will the ban work?

The new law puts the onus on social media platforms to take reasonable steps to ensure children under 16 are not using their services.

Most platforms have a minimum age requirement of 13 for users, but Australia's eSafety Commissioner regards current measures to enforce the minimum age as “often absent or ineffective”.

Tech companies are critical of the new law that could see them face fines of up to \$50 million.

Federal Communications Minister

Michelle Rowland told parliament that exemptions would be given to services such as Google Classroom and YouTube as they often have “a significant purpose to enable young people to get the education and health support they need”.

However, Meta (owner of Facebook and Instagram), TikTok and Snapchat criticised the decision to exempt YouTube from the ban in separate submissions to the government's consultation process.

Serious harm

Parents increasingly worry about protecting children from unacceptable content such as pornography, nudity, bullying and harassment.

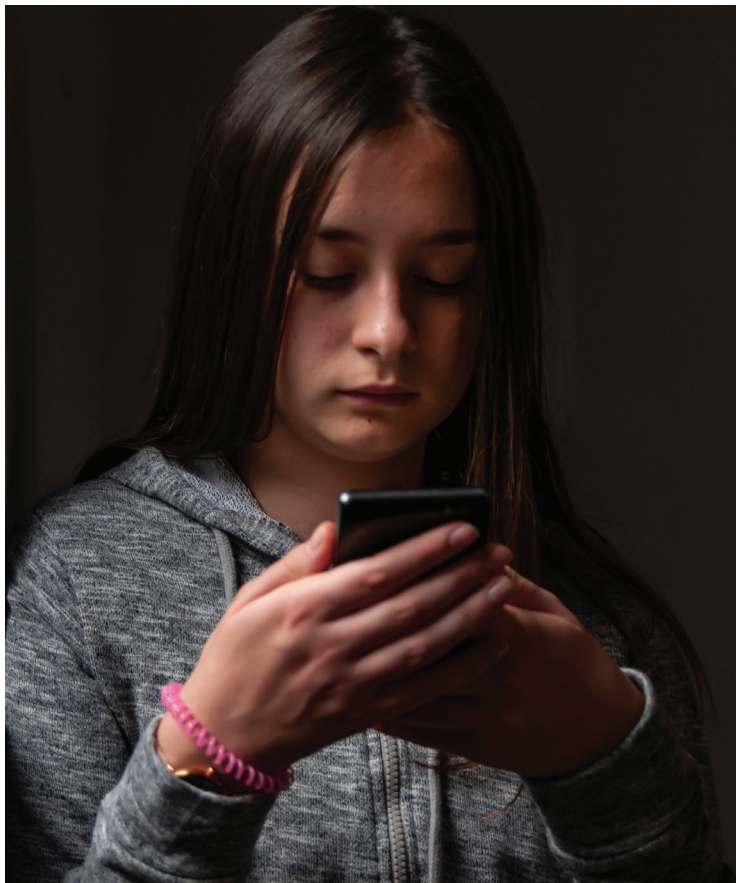
“I've met parents who've had to bury their children as a result of the impact that social media has had, as a result of bullying, and we need to do something about it,” Albanese told ABC's *Insiders* last December.

ASIO boss Mike Burgess has outlined how social media and digital technologies fuelled ideological radicalism among children.

Violent misogynist material was among the extremist content available to children on social media platforms, he told last year's Social Media Summit, jointly held by the NSW and South Australian governments.

A 2024 study from Dublin City University found teenage boys were “bombarded” with misogynist content on platforms such as TikTok and YouTube.

The issue of rising sexism among young boys is also explored in the Netflix



Research links
social media use
to poor sleep,
online harassment,
poor body image,
disordered eating,
low self-esteem,
self-harm and
depression.

drama *Adolescence*, which explores how online bullying and misogynist influencers can have a serious impact.

Warning labels

US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, in a 2023 Social Media and Youth Mental Health Advisory, warned of “ample indicators” that social media can have a profound risk of harm to the mental health and wellbeing of children.

Murthy has also called for “warning labels” on social media apps to dissuade young people from using them so much.

Research linked social media use to poor sleep, online harassment, poor body image, disordered eating, low self-esteem, self harm and depression.

Social media platforms are often designed to maximise user engagement through features such as push notifications, autoplay, quantifying and displaying popularity (that is, “likes”) and opaque algorithms that serve content recommendations.

These features can lead to excessive social media use by children who may experience changes in brain structure similar to changes seen in people with substance abuse issues or gambling addiction.

Studies in Australia and overseas have suggested a correlation between greater social media use among children since 2012 and worsening mental health outcomes, including self-harm.

Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows the rate that 12-to-17-year-olds are hospitalised for

psychiatric care has almost doubled since 2011 – a trend mostly attributed to increases among girls.

Opposing the ban

However, some social media experts claimed, in an open letter to politicians in October 2024, that the ban could be a disincentive to social media platforms offering child safety features.

The Australian Human Rights Commission also expressed “serious reservations” about the ban because of privacy risks and its impact on children’s right to freedom of expression and access to information.

Youth advocates such as the eSafety Youth Council, which advises the regulator, claimed politicians did not understand the role of social media in their lives.

“We question if restricting young people’s access will truly address the root cause of the negative influences and impacts of social media,” the Council said in a submission to the Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society.

A paper published in the *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* in March 2025 also cast doubt on whether social media was to blame for the rise in youth mental health problems.

“It is plausible that social media use is harming youth mental health through other pathways, such as through parental social media use, which would not be addressed through a ban for young people,” it said.

A teacher’s voice

IEUA NSW/ACT Branch member Sarah Gardiner, who is also on the branch’s 22-member Executive, says teachers are aware of social media’s negative impact on students’ mental health, body image and self-esteem.

Gardiner, who teaches at Catherine McAuley Catholic College in Medowie, says teachers often deal with issues such as online bullying and student distraction because of social media use, which is “super difficult to manage and in my view not really the job of the teacher – but it’s often made their job”.

Gardiner says the social media ban for under-16s might help reduce harm “but is only part of the solution”.

Social media can be an important source of news, education, and social connection for students, she says, so “banning access could harm young people who rely on online spaces for support and identity exploration”.

Gardiner also says enforcing the ban may prove challenging and fears it will lead to extra responsibilities for teachers.

“We already have workload issues that are falling on deaf ears, and this sounds like it could become another thing we have on our plate without anything being removed,” she says.

Tackling harassment in schools

Employers need to fulfil their legal obligations to prevent the sexual harassment of teachers by students, writes Andrew Taylor.

Women teachers, principals and school staff across Australia face increasing rates of violence and harassment from students, mostly teenage boys, but also from primary school children.

Highly publicised incidents include the expulsion of a male student from Melbourne's Salesian College in 2024 after he created fake explicit images of a female teacher that were circulated around the school.

A national survey found teachers – overwhelmingly female – were subjected to routine sexual harassment.

The shocking findings prompted IEU Federal Secretary Brad Hayes to call for immediate intervention from governments and school employers to address the issue.

"Our members tell us they are experiencing increased incidences and types of verbal and physical attacks and intimidation, which experts confirm is fuelled by online anti-feminist activists operating in the 'manosphere,'" Hayes says.

Safety compromised

The Sexual Harassment of Teachers report, published last year by Collective Shout, found teachers are propositioned, threatened with rape, subjected to sexist slurs, mimicking of sex acts, sexually moaned at, asked for nude photos and intimidated.

Collective Shout director Melinda Tankard Reist said the sexual harassment of female teachers by students was a "crisis".

"Schools have become sites of abuse," she said. "The safety of teachers and female students is significantly compromised."

The Sydney Morning Herald last year reported a spike in sexual offences, including at NSW schools amid a surge in reports of school violence in the past two years.

The National Research Organisation for Women's Safety found women teachers across all sectors are seeking greater support and professional development to counter sexual misbehaviours by male students.

Hayes says urgent action is required to address the increase in harmful sexual behaviours in Australian schools and end the sexual harassment of teachers.

"Schools will play their part, but we need parents and the wider community, including sporting organisations, to call out bad behaviour and mentor positive role models for boys and young men," Hayes says.

Bystander inaction

The national curriculum, along with state education programs such as Respectful Relationships in Victoria, includes specific focus on consent and respectful relationships, making social media safer for students and making women's lives safer.

Hayes says teaching resources and education programs are an important part of the solution, but school employers must also show clear leadership on these issues.

"Employers must take immediate and decisive action in response to any cases of harassment of school staff," he says. "There must be a policy of zero tolerance of harassing or worse behaviour in every workplace, and in every school."

However, research led by Adelaide University Associate Professor in education Samantha Schulz highlighted the issue of bystander inaction when it came to complaints about sexual harassment.

"This is when school leaders, other teachers, or parents downplay what is happening or do nothing or little in response," she wrote in *The Conversation*.

Monash University's School of Education, Society and Culture lecturer Stephanie Wescott says research shows women in schools are "far less respected" than men, and the authority of men is more understood and respected.

"Boys were learning how to openly display sexism and misogyny towards women and then trying this stuff out in schools," she told ABC Radio National in November 2024.

Dr Wescott says schools could do more to stamp out this behaviour including calling it gender-based violence and believing women rather than dismissing or undermining them.

"There also needs to be proper consequences and procedures," she says. "We don't have, really, in Australia, schools that are recording this behaviour accurately."

Teachers worried

Teachers are increasingly worried about the rise of harmful sexual behaviours by students, which they attribute to early exposure to pornography, the malign impact of social media influencers and sexist attitudes still prevalent in the community.

IEU members last year described how an alarming number of schoolboys had been radicalised by online content pushed by misogynist influencers, causing some women teachers to give up the profession.

IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Deputy Secretary David Towson says members are reporting increasing incidents of violence and sexual harassment by students directed towards teachers and other staff in non-government schools.

"This problem is escalating in all school sectors, and it is unacceptable," he says.

"Violence and sexual harassment is never acceptable. Everyone has the right to a safe workplace, and it is the union's job to ensure employers fulfil their legal responsibilities to ensure a safe workplace."

The problem is not new. A 2021 Monash University study, *The erasure of sexual harassment in elite private boys' schools*, found female teachers in elite private boys' schools were vulnerable to sexual harassment due to the school's status.

"If elite private schools are run like 'businesses' and 'bad news' can spread, then it stands to reason that market pressures might lead administrators to play down or 'disappear' sexual harassment before these incidents come to parents' attention," said the study's authors, George Variyan and Jane Wilkinson.

The Age in 2016 reported Melbourne's Brighton Grammar had expelled two senior students who set up a social media account featuring photos of young girls and invited people to vote for "slut of the year".

Concerns about violence and sexual harassment by students, particularly towards female teachers and support staff, last year prompted members of the NSW/ACT Branch's Mid North Coast Sub Branch to forward a resolution to the branch's governing Council.

Consequently, a four-part motion was passed at a NSW/ACT Branch Council meeting in August 2024 demanding action from employers and the government to address the issue.

"The members called on employers to provide confidential reporting mechanisms, prompt and thorough investigations and appropriate action against perpetrators," Towson says.

"We're also asking for training programs for all staff and students to raise awareness about harassment and its impact, as well as strategies for prevention and intervention."

Employers must act

After the Council meeting, IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews wrote to employers to request meetings to discuss what steps they have taken to stamp out violence

and harassment and what more is needed to ensure a safe workplace, including clear data derived from robust reporting mechanisms.

There has been a range of responses so far. The Diocese of Bathurst was open to sharing data and working with the IEU so that all employees are aware of the support and processes available to ensure matters are addressed.

The Association of Independent Schools encouraged the union to discuss any specific cases in which the school has not responded appropriately with it, so it can offer advice and assistance to the school to implement strategies to deal with and prevent sexual harassment of teachers by students.

Matthews says schools need to implement measures to ensure employees are safe and free from harassment.

The Respect@Work reforms, passed by the federal Labor government in 2022, impose a positive duty on employers to eliminate unlawful behaviour in workplaces, including:

- discrimination on the grounds of sex
- sexual harassment
- sex-based harassment
- conduct creating a workplace environment that is hostile on the grounds of sex, and
- related acts of victimisation.

"This positive duty imposes a legal obligation on employers to take proactive and meaningful action to prevent unlawful conduct from occurring in the workplace including behaviour by students towards employees," she says.

'The safety of teachers and female students is significantly compromised.'





Positive masculinity

Helping boys make better choices

The Common Ground Project is helping boys 'unlearn' gender norms through the Foundation for Positive Masculinity's program, writes Sue Osborne.

IEU members, especially female teachers, have reported an increase in disrespectful and offensive behaviour towards them in the classroom in recent years.

And throughout Australia during 2024, 78 women were killed in incidents of gender-based violence, up from 64 in 2023.

This prompted the federal government to call the problem a "national crisis" and provide funding of \$3.5 million for several initiatives to encourage healthy masculinity and respectful relationships in school-aged boys.

Three projects will trial activities focused on influencing and changing attitudes and behaviours that may lead to gender-based violence. The projects include:

- Empowering boys to become great men – The Man Cave
- The Common Ground Project: Future Fit Masculinities – a consortium led by the Foundation for Positive Masculinity
- Active Respect – The Men's Project (Jesuit Social Services), focusing on soccer players and coaches.

How one program works

The Common Ground Project has its roots in Melbourne's Brighton Grammar School. Deputy Headmaster and Executive Director of the Foundation for Positive Masculinity, Dr Ray Swann (pictured above, far left, with members of the Positive Masculinity Foundation Advisory group), says the program was tested at Brighton Grammar School and expanded to more schools through the foundation.

The three-year trial will run in several schools, both government and non-government, in South Australia, NSW, Victoria and Canberra. The schools were invited to participate based on several criteria, including their location.

Unlearning and relearning

For students in Years 7-9, teachers will use a five-week lesson sequence with three phases.

The "learning phase" will identify what students understand.

The "unlearning phase" gives students the counterfactuals to help stimulate their thinking around the impact of what they're seeing and the influence of gender norms.

During the "relearning phase", students are given tools for making healthy choices.

For students in Years 11 and 12, facilitators run four workshops, where factors such as the "bro code" and other "manosphere" tropes are debunked.

"We are teaching them how they might liberate themselves from rigid, stereotypical views that we know lead to poor health outcomes not only for kids now, but adults across the course of life," Dr Swann says.

"Some research came out last year that 25 per cent of young men aged 18 to 24 report having no close friends."

By teachers for teachers

While teachers are already feeling the strain of a packed curriculum, Dr Swann is confident that this program could be integrated into existing lessons.

"It's a series of PowerPoints and lesson outlines, designed by teachers for teachers, but it still demands time and effort from already busy teachers," Dr Swann says.

"However, we have designed the program so it can be rolled out in any subject – English, humanities, health, or in pastoral time, to alleviate some of these pressures.

"The upside of it is about building engagement and awareness and taking a stand on an important issue which is moving towards ending gender-based violence and improving healthy masculinity and engagement of boys."

One of the aims is to provide students with some critical thinking strategies around the technology they're using and the content it serves up to them.

"Through the algorithms that tech relies on, students are just being shown more and more content to create polarity," Dr Swann says. "But schools and teachers have the power to help students question and interrogate sources of information."

"I think people underestimate the incredible power teachers have in helping shape lives not only of the children in their care, but in the country as a whole."

More information

To find out more: positivemasculinity.org.au



TUNED IN

How to have challenging conversations

A six-part training series helps adults discuss difficult topics with young people, writes Ella Doyle.

Tuned In is a partnership between the Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS) at the Australian Catholic University (ACU), the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) and Run Against Violence offering practical techniques for ensuring safe and effective facilitation of difficult conversations in the classroom.

Associate Professor Tim Moore, Deputy Director of the ICPS and a co-designer of the modules, highlights the importance of feeling safe to reach one's full potential, especially in educational and interactive environments.

"Children and young people have told researchers they value opportunities to talk to adults about their worries, concerns and things that might seem a little sensitive," Moore says.

NAPCAN chief executive Leesa Waters says adults can play an important part in preventing abuse and violence and that adult allies can be, as one young person put it, 'our lifesavers'.

Trauma-informed practice

Tuned In introduces concepts such as trauma-informed practice to help adults, including teachers and school officers, to have conversations that demonstrate warmth and understanding.

It also explains how adults can deal with adjacent issues, including young people who:

- overshare
- provoke conflict
- find it hard to contribute, or
- disclose that they are being harmed.

The course consists of six self-contained modules:

1. Facilitating child-safe group work with young people
2. What makes a child-safe facilitator
3. Understanding trauma and facilitating trauma-informed groups
4. Creating child-safe spaces: Building connections, trust and respect

5. Keeping it together: Dealing with challenging behaviours and when things go wrong

6. Identifying and responding to young people's concerns

Each module takes about 60 minutes to complete.

Embedding a culture of conversation

IEU-QNT member and teacher Alex Patten works at a flexi school engaging students who are not supported by mainstream schooling. She says the principles behind Tuned In form the basis of the whole model at flexi schools.

"Our model is based on a concept called 'common ground' – that all young people and adults are the same," Alex says.

"If we want young people to learn, grow, prosper and experience success, especially our most vulnerable young people, the only way forward is relationships.

"The only way you have relationships, especially with students who have had tough lives, is to make time to have those conversations.

"Children and young people value opportunities to talk to adults about their worries and concerns."

"And the conversations have to be about some low-level nothing stuff too, and it has to be their concerns, not just ours."



IEU member and teacher Alex Patten engages students in flexi schools.

Alex says these conversations should adhere to a school's code of conduct.

"A lot of us [teachers] were trained in the era of 'you don't have personal conversations with young people,'" Alex says.

"If staff are not feeling confident to have conversations with young people about difficult things they should 100 per cent consider training or upskilling in that area."

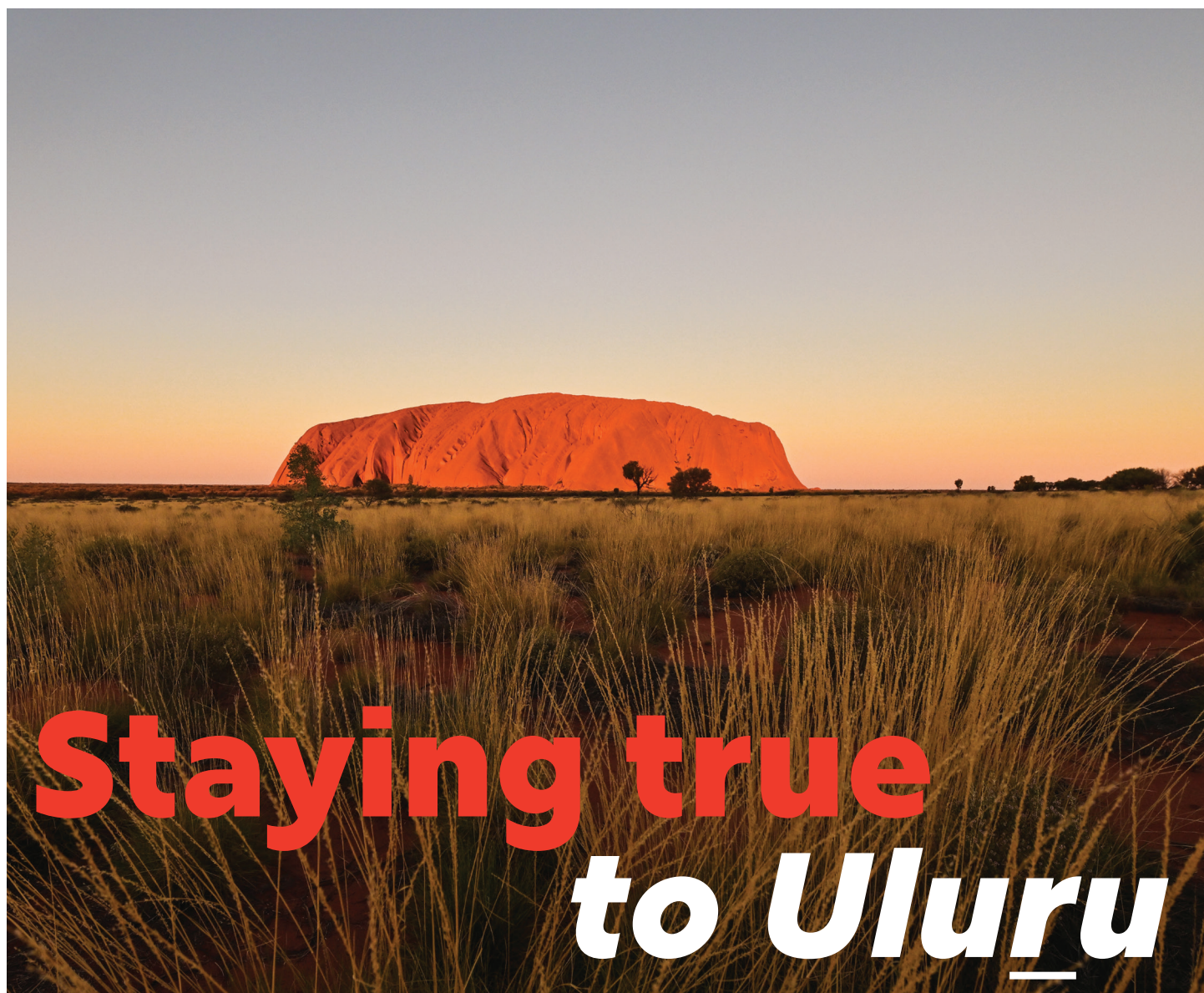
Alex says for staff to get the most out of training such as Tuned In, it needs to be a school-wide approach.

"Make sure you're not doing it on your own, it needs to be open and transparent," she says.

"There also needs to be psychosocial support provided by the school employer in terms of the next steps for young people and staff if a difficult conversation were to happen."

More information

To access the Tuned In modules, visit: bit.ly/4iaLAIH



Staying true to *Uluru*

Uluru Youth Dialogue (UYD) Co-Chairs Allira Davis and Bridget Cama remain optimistic about achieving a better future, writes Emily Campbell.

Allira Davis, a Cobble Cobble woman from the Barrungum and Birrigubba Nations, and Bridget Cama, a Wiradjuri and Indigenous Fijian woman, first met in early 2019 at a meeting of First Nations Peoples in Cairns as part of the Uluru Dialogues.

The event was one of many gatherings held after the Uluru Statement from the Heart was issued in 2017 and focused on how to improve the lives of First Nations Peoples through Voice, Treaty and Truth.

Youth voices

Looking around the room, Allira and Bridget noticed a lack of young people.

"We felt as though there could have been more young people involved," Bridget says.

The pair approached the Uluru Dialogue senior leadership, among them Pat Anderson AO and Professor Megan Davis AC, proposing a youth-specific meeting to platform young voices and

involve young First Nations Peoples in the discussion.

Senior leadership gave their blessing, so Allira and Bridget collaborated to host a summit.

"It took us six months to organise and facilitate the project, and our first big event, the Uluru Youth Summit, was held in December 2019," Allira says.

"We brought over 50 young First Nations Peoples from all over Australia to Cairns so we could bring them up to speed on the Uluru Statement and the movement towards constitutional recognition, as well as to discuss First Nations affairs more broadly."

To reflect the diversity of First Nations Peoples and communities, Allira and Bridget wanted broad representation among the participants in the Uluru Youth Summit.

"We had a good diverse representation and wanted to ensure the group was balanced in terms of gender, geographical location and life experience," Bridget says.

"The goal was that young people would always be a key part of the movement so they could take what they

learned about different aspects of the campaign for a Voice to Parliament back to their local communities.

Bridget says the success of the summit "bringing together all those amazing young people" prompted the creation of the Uluru Youth Dialogue to continue their work.

Yes campaign efforts

Members of the UYD, of which Allira and Bridget are co-chairs, were instrumental to the work of the Yes campaign in the lead-up to the referendum.

Both women spent considerable time on the ground campaigning at a grassroots level.

They said enormous efforts were put towards equipping other UYD participants and allies with the skills and knowledge to have meaningful conversations about the topic.

Allies included those who do not identify as First Nations Peoples but are committed to supporting reconciliation by upholding the Uluru Statement's call to action.

"A key part of our work was educating participants so they could bring



Uluru Youth Dialogue co-chairs Bridget Cama, left, and Allira Davis.

“Don’t stop talking about the Uluru Statement from the Heart.”

the knowledge back to their local communities and educate others,” Bridget says.

“We continued to hold meetings with UYD participants but also spent time getting out on the ground into communities and educating people.

“As the government called the referendum, our yarns became more specific about the Voice and the importance of constitutional recognition.”

Loss and hope

Despite the devastating referendum loss, Allira and Bridget know their work was not in vain and the movement for reconciliation in Australia must continue.

“The loss was very disheartening, but I remain optimistic,” Allira says.

“I am hopeful and do see a change in my lifetime that will be beneficial for the First Nations community to ensure we feel self-determined and empowered.”

Bridget says the need for a voice, structural reform and constitutional recognition has not gone away.

“It took some time to recover because as young people it was our first big no, and referendums don’t come around every day, so it really was a once-in-a-generation opportunity,” she says.

“We can’t forget that 6.2 million Australians did vote yes. Prior to the referendum, we couldn’t really put a number on it, so it feels humbling and means we went through a process that didn’t mean nothing.”

Unpacking the referendum result

Allira and Bridget say the reasons the no vote prevailed are varied and perhaps more complex than simply racism.

They have been working hard to conduct ongoing post-referendum research and analysis into why 60 per cent of Australians voted no.

Allira says misinformation and disinformation perpetuated by bad-faith actors and some media outlets was rife throughout the campaign.

“The no campaign contained a lot of fear mongering and lies, and I also think many people struggled to understand the concept of constitutional recognition,” she says.

“Civics education is so important for us as a democracy, especially in this contemporary age of social media.”

Bridget says some people reported voting no because they did not want race in the Constitution, even though references to race already exist in Australia’s Constitution.

As the analysis continues, the UYD co-chairs are committed to standing by the mandate of the Uluru Statement.

“In terms of how we move forward, we want to put that messaging out there and the media analysis to tell our truth, our story,” Allira says.

“Allyship has grown over recent decades but there is still a lot of work to do.”

Supporting reconciliation

Bridget and Allira say there are plenty of ways IEU members can support the movement towards meaningful reconciliation, noting school staff are in a powerful position to influence upcoming generations.

“Don’t stop talking about the Uluru Statement from the Heart,” Bridget says. “It was a gift to the Australian people to walk with us for a better future.

“Yarning is important, creating space for safe, respectful conversations and forging strong connections with local community.”

Allira says acknowledging Australia’s true history and being open to learning about First Nations histories and cultures is vital. “Reconciling is not just about talking to First Nations Peoples, it’s about going on your own journey,” she says.

“It’s about making sure you know the name and history of the country you’re on and understanding why First Nations Peoples might feel a certain way on 26 January, or why we celebrate NAIDOC Week and mark National Reconciliation Week.

“Not just doing it on special occasions, but doing it every day throughout the year, and always being open-minded to learning,” Allira says.

More information

Learn more about the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Uluru Youth Dialogue: ulurustatement.org

Listen in Hi Society podcast

Curious about the big issues shaping Australian society? Listen to ‘Hi Society’, the new podcast by Uluru Youth Dialogue co-chairs Allira Davis and Bridget Cama. Hi Society dives into today’s pressing challenges, including justice and reconciliation, equality, the environment, and the impact of technology. Hi Society is proudly produced for the Pro Vice Chancellor Society at UNSW.

Listen now: bit.ly/4i2MV47

Change without

The national Teacher Workload Impact Assessment and AERO's *Insights into Implementation*

Teachers are, and always have been, incredible change agents in their schools, writes Assistant Federal Secretary Veronica Yewdall.



The Covid pandemic provided a stunning demonstration of the capacity of teachers to pivot and adapt to meet the needs of their students. However, widespread and relentless churning of initiatives, and ill-considered or unhelpful implementation processes significantly intensify teacher workloads and often produce results that fall short of the intended outcomes.

The IEU has consistently asserted that initiative implementation processes that fail to consult meaningfully with teachers, consider existing or potential implementation workloads, or monitor impacts throughout the process, are driving the excessive and unsustainable expectations that lead to burnout and exacerbate the teacher shortage.

Rushed implementation, followed by hasty jettisoning of an unsuccessful program, and the rapid adoption of another initiative, form an unsustainable cycle that adversely affects student outcomes and saps teachers' energy.

The national Teacher Workload Impact Assessment tool

In July 2023, the IEU and other members of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (NTWAP) Working Group were approached by the Australian Government Department of Education to provide feedback on the draft Teacher Workload Impact Assessment tool. Several IEU recommendations were incorporated into the tool.

The finalised Teacher Workload Impact Assessment (TWIA) was agreed by Education Ministers in December 2023. Consistent with Action 20 of the NTWAP, the TWIA will be used on National Policy Initiatives in the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement and considered by Education Ministers during negotiations.

However, the IEU has always strongly supported the need for far broader application of the TWIA and asserted its value as a logical and consultative framework that is likely to reduce workload intensification for teachers and improve the continuity and maturity of initiatives, thereby supporting more consistent student outcomes.

The TWIA is an interactive tool, providing the capacity for agencies to fill in responses to a series of questions and requiring further exploration of any identified workload implication. While the TWIA was developed for the assessment of national initiatives, the IEU believes it is a sequential framework that genuinely seeks to address the teacher workload impact of initiatives and could be usefully implemented at school and system level.

Definitions

Core teaching duties: Includes but is not limited to classroom instruction, preparing whole class instruction, assessing work, providing feedback, providing individual assistance or support to students, tailoring lessons, meetings, assemblies, yard/bus duty, administration, parent engagement and counselling students.

Teachers: References to teachers also refer to associated administrative and support staff due to the potential downstream impact on teacher workload.

the churn

Impact Assessment Tool

on research

The TWIA framework as it might be used in a school or system context

There are nine steps in the TWIA process. The IEU has removed references to national policy initiatives in the tool to show how it could have broader application for schools and systems.

See Definitions, page 18, opposite.

1. Initial assessment

Will the proposed initiative require, or could it require, changes to the systems of work in schools, teacher roles and responsibilities or compliance obligations which would influence the existing duties of teachers and school leaders?

2. A description of the problem

Is the issue supported by evidence and data?

3. The rationale for policy change

An explanation is required to justify why intervention is necessary to address the problem.

4. The objectives for the proposed policy change

What are the objectives for the policy change?

5. A summary of the proposed initiative and other options considered

A detailed summary of the proposed initiative, who is responsible for implementing the initiative and timeframes for delivery is required:

- How will the proposed initiative achieve the stated objectives?
- How will success be measured?
- What is the expected interaction with schooling systems and the teacher workforce?
- Outline alternative options and why these alternatives are not preferred.
- Why existing initiatives or policies could not be leveraged, repurposed or altered to achieve the same outcome?

Have these initiatives reached the stage of independent implementation by teachers?

Are teachers still engaged with professional development and feedback on implementation?

Has the timing of the introduction of the initiative been sufficiently considered, in consultation with teachers?

6. An assessment of the potential workload impact on teachers and school leaders

- How does the initiative impact jurisdictions differently?
- How does the initiative impact individual sectors differently?
- Does the initiative impact disadvantaged schools, complex settings including regional, rural and remote?

What is the impact on teachers in these settings?

Identify how the proposed initiative will impact teachers, school leaders, students and resources in diverse school settings.

- Does it have a disproportionate impact on different teachers (First Nations, subject specialists, early career, Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers)?

Assess the impact on these teachers where the impact is not uniform.

- Identify potential unintended impacts on teachers, school leaders, students and resources in diverse school settings.

Do additional teachers, support staff or resources need to be obtained? Are there additional costs associated with recruitment, onboarding, release time and training?

Does the initiative require teachers and students to pivot to different content or pedagogy? Is such change likely to disrupt the continuity of learning?

7. An assessment of the potential impact (positive or negative) on core duties

- How will the initiative impact teachers in performing their role? This section should focus on the impact on core teaching duties. Identify the core teaching duties this initiative will impact including adjustments to existing work practices and workload. This assessment should not just reflect a simple time-cost but should also take account of any workload intensification such as increased emotional labour or cultural load.
- Is the impact different on school leaders? This section should identify the core leadership and administration duties this initiative will impact, including adjustments to existing work practices and workload.

8. Assessment of the potential time impacts

Assess the time and resources needed to undertake or provide any additional support and/or training requirements for teachers and school leaders and if time is required for ongoing maintenance of these skills. If significant impacts are identified at Question 7, the response to this question should identify commensurate levels of support.

9. Any additional regulatory or reporting requirements related to the initiative

Undertake due diligence to ensure there are no existing initiatives in place that can be leveraged, repurposed or altered to achieve the same outcome. Ensure that the initiative does not lead to the duplication of existing tasks or administrative duties. Identify the reporting requirements (both one-off and ongoing) and provide an assessment of the time needed to complete them and if they can be undertaken by support staff.

More support for appropriate implementation processes

AERO's *Insights into implementation* research

During 2024, the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) produced a series of explainers to support strong and manageable change processes in schools.

The government agency charged with providing evidence-based research to the education sector, AERO, also produced a discussion paper, *Insights into Implementation*, to support sustainable initiative implementation.

AERO's Explainers provide important support for school leaders and teachers who would like to start a conversation at their school about proposed initiatives, and how to manage them without workload intensification. Some of the key findings relate to issues the IEU has consistently raised, including:

- the proposed initiatives should be a response to a specific school-based challenge
- the readiness for use of the proposed initiative should be evaluated
- barriers (such as competing new programs) must be addressed (not just acknowledged)
- competing initiatives should be pruned
- there is great value in discussion with all staff involved and regular debriefing of experience/progress
- avoidance of burdensome documentation is recommended

All excerpts from AERO's Explorer documents are used with permission.

From AERO's Explorer: Monitoring implementation outcomes

- Schools should focus on monitoring those outcomes that are most relevant and realistic for their context.
- Collecting data to assist with monitoring implementation outcomes should leverage what a school is already doing. It doesn't need to be time-consuming or burdensome.
- Feasibility (Considerations)

To what degree does our school have the time and resources to dedicate to implementing this evidence-based practice?

What might need to change to ensure teachers are supported by systems and structures during this period of change (ie timetabling, release time, resource availability, access to coaching, etc)?

How will we check what staff think may need to change?

AERO CEO Dr Jenny Donovan: "One of the things that we recommend is to do a diagnosis of the area of need. You can examine the learning and teaching model to find what the solution is, but that diagnosis of where you begin, needs to come first.

"Implementation is absolutely context specific, because where every school is up to, the background of the teachers, the specific areas of learning achievement that the students might be demonstrating – all of those things will be different from one school to the next."

Excerpts from AERO's Explorer: Taking an evidence-informed approach to implementation

- When selecting an evidence-based practice, schools need to consider how implementable it may be. In other words, schools need to consider how ready for use the practice is, or the effort required to operationalise it into implementation strategies, such as professional learning materials, so it can be consistently applied by teachers.

- Address enablers and barriers: Every implementation effort will experience enablers and barriers that can help or hinder the process. Understanding exactly what's acting as an enabler or barrier within a school context is useful, but being prepared to respond to this information is key to effective implementation.

AERO CEO Dr Jenny Donovan: "School leaders need to know in the first instance, what is it that teachers are doing, what's informing their practice, what experience and expertise do they have that will ready them for adopting a new or different or changed practice? What needs to be provided to them?"

"Care needs to be taken with how an initiative is presented, so that it isn't just 'Well, here's the thing that you should be doing, because the evidence says so.' You need to consider the story, 'We know that this works, but let's explain why it works. Let's drill into this new idea and understand what sits behind it, in terms of cognitive science or the empirical data', for example, to help people feel reassured about the change of direction."

From AERO's Explorer: Addressing enablers and barriers to implementation

- There's great value in all teachers and staff who are involved in implementation discussing and suggesting actions to address current barriers and strengthen enablers.
- When enablers and barriers have been identified and prioritised, and staff have had the opportunity to suggest how they might be addressed, leaders can consider the strategy (eg coaching and modelling) they might use to reduce or remove a barrier.

AERO CEO Dr Jenny Donovan: "It's absolutely more about the putting it (the initiative) into practice than it is about the endless meetings to talk about it or requiring unnecessary documentation or other busy work.

"Instead, at each of the stages, you've got a tollgate where you stop and reflect, 'How's this going? Are we taking everyone with us? Who still needs some convincing? Where do we need to cycle back into a bit more explanation?' The idea of staging is to help chunk out the task of implementation and give you the opportunity to reflect on where you're up to and where you want to be and what might need some more attention along the way. It needs to be a conscious and deliberate approach that you take, otherwise you're really just crossing your fingers and hoping for the best."

Conclusion

The IEU proactively engages with federal and state agencies to find meaningful solutions to address unsustainable workloads, including through collaboration on official guidelines such as the NCCD Evidence Fact Sheet, the Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework Fact Sheet and NESA's Curriculum Programming and Record-Keeping Fact Sheets, or through highlighting helpful frameworks provided by federal agencies.

Invite non-members at your school to join the IEU and help support this critical work.



WORKLOADS

Why teachers need a new tool

Adding new programs and initiatives without a clear purpose only intensifies teachers' workloads, but the new national Teacher Workload Impact Assessment tool aims to change this, writes Will Brodie.

Teachers constantly find themselves taking on many new tasks that employers and governments assign to schools, leading to heavy workload burdens and burnout.

"Teachers will always be open to adapting and refining what they do to achieve better outcomes for students, but the mounting pressure of doing this without workload recognition is one of the biggest drivers of teachers abandoning the profession," IEU VicTas General Secretary David Brear says.

Teachers have been taking on more and more compliance requirements in recent years, as well as out-of-hours professional development. Then there's planning and preparing quality learning experiences, recording data and maintaining documentation that reflects student learning and progress. On top of that, teachers are required to attend meetings and briefings, support diverse learning needs for students and interact with parents.

"For too long, governments have added more administrative and compliance burdens without involving teachers in decision-making about the merit of these initiatives or how the work will get done," Brear says.

War on workloads

This is why the IEU, together with other education unions, the federal Department of Education and other stakeholders, helped develop the new National Teacher Workload Impact Assessment tool (TWIA) as part of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan.

It is an essential part of the overall strategy to alleviate workloads, and it will apply to any national enabling initiatives arising from the new Better and Fairer Schools Agreement.

Throughout the process of developing the new workload tool, the IEU argued it should apply to *all* initiatives proposed for schools. "This tool sets an important precedent for the adoption of similar teacher workload protections across all areas of education policy," IEUA Federal Secretary Brad Hayes says.

First things first

The long overdue tool aims to ensure any new national initiative is practical and viable by addressing specifically what it intends to achieve, how it will be implemented, how it will fit with existing programs, and how it will affect teacher workload.

When a new program is proposed, members will welcome consideration of these crucial factors:

- What initiatives are already in place? This involves genuine consideration of timeframes, essential professional development and the reality of implementation.
- Is additional release time, administrative support, training or more staff needed to support new policy initiatives?
- Are any proposed changes likely to disrupt the continuity of student learning?
- Do new policy initiatives add to the duplication of existing administrative tasks?

"The government's engagement with teachers and their unions in the development of the assessment tool is an essential step in not only limiting the creep of more administrative tasks, but also in beginning to rebuild respect for the profession," Hayes says.

References

IEUA submission to the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System: bit.ly/4kOlxln

Teacher Workload Impact Assessment tool: bit.ly/43JelCV

See also: Change without the churn, pages 18-20.

Mind matters

The need for mental health first aid

Is it time for mental health first aid to be provided in schools, asks Emily Campbell.

According to Safe Work Australia, the national workplace health and safety regulator, first aid can mean the difference between life and death.

Teachers and support staff undergo regular refresher courses on how to manage a range of situations that may arise in their workplaces – everything from minor wound care and allergic reactions to administering CPR and defibrillators.

Yet specific mental health first aid remains an optional extra despite increasing rates of mental ill-health in young people.

What is it?

Dr Amy Morgan, Principal Research Fellow at the University of Melbourne, is a mental health first aid researcher.

“The formal definition of mental health first aid is the assistance offered to someone developing a mental health problem, experiencing a worsening of an existing mental health problem or in a mental health crisis,” she says.

“This definition parallels that of physical first aid, being the initial help offered, rather than ongoing care or support provided by a professional.”

Dr Morgan says mental health first aid encompasses approaching the person to have a supportive and non-judgmental conversation about their mental health.

It also involves providing practical support if needed and encouraging a person to seek professional help and engage in other forms of support, such as self-care activities or spending time with loved ones.

“Mental health first aid training is relatively young, developed in the year 2000, compared to physical first aid training courses,” Dr Morgan says.

“The concept of mental health literacy was first defined in the 1990s by Professor Tony Jorm and colleagues, which they defined as knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders that aid their recognition, management or prevention.

“It includes knowledge that helps to support mental health, such as recognising when a problem is developing, knowing where to seek help and what treatments and self-care strategies are supported by evidence.”

Mental health literacy also includes knowing how to provide mental health first aid to others.

Dr Morgan argues workplaces should be ready to protect employees’ mental and physical health – but knowing how to support someone in mental distress without the appropriate training can be confronting.

“Historically, there has been stigma associated with mental health problems, so mental health first aid hasn’t been seen as a priority,” she says.

“Today there is increasing recognition of the role of workplaces in supporting their employees’ mental health, so it is gaining traction.”

Benefiting staff and students

Schools are complex environments that can impact the mental health of staff and students.

Burdensome workloads, occupational violence, vicarious trauma and increasing demands from employers, parents and students jeopardise the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and support staff.

For students, academic anxiety, bullying, friendship challenges, issues at home and a range of other pressures can be detrimental to mental health.

A recent study from the Lancet Psychiatry Commission, a global authority on mental health research, found young people especially are experiencing concerning high rates of mental ill-health.

The report found three-quarters of all mental ill-health disorders occur before the age of 25 years, with 15 the peak onset age.

Morgan says there is now recognition that schools have a role to play in supporting students’ mental health and wellbeing as well as academic learning.

“Helping young people early means avoiding a lot of suffering and supporting them to achieve their potential during their formative years,” Morgan says.

A costly problem

Half of all Australians will face mental ill-health at some stage during their life, according to a 2020 Productivity Commission report.

It estimated the cost of mental ill-health on Australia’s economy is up to \$220 billion per year, including direct and indirect costs.

Given the economic cost, the return on investment in mental health first aid training for school staff seems clear.

Dr Morgan says mental health problems are increasingly common, with one-in-five people experiencing issues over a year.

“We are all likely to know someone developing a mental health problem or crisis in the workplace at some point,” she says.

“Therefore, it’s important to have the knowledge to understand what might be happening and the skills and confidence to intervene in a helpful way to get that person support.

“Ideally, everyone should be trained in mental health first aid, so the responsibility does not fall to just one or a handful of people.”

Learning mental health first aid provides useful skills not just for the workplace, but for an employee’s social network too.

Evidence-based courses work

Although some organisations offer free training, Dr Morgan emphasises the importance of evidence-based mental health first aid programs informed by research.

“We do see a lot of workplace training that purports to be helpful but never undergoes any rigorous evaluation,” she says.

“Mental health first aid courses are not usually provided for free unless government subsidies apply.

“They are intensive courses, typically 12 hours long for the standard course, but they have extensive high-quality research behind them to indicate they are effective in improving mental health literacy.

“There is an opportunity cost from spending time on something that is not high-quality and likely to lead to sustained changes.”



**‘Ideally,
everyone should
be trained in
mental health
first aid.’**

In the context of chronic teacher shortages, school employers in the non-government sector should consider the return on investment and prioritise upskilling school staff by providing evidence-based mental health first aid programs.

Dr Morgan is collaborating with Mental Health First Aid Australia to develop and evaluate a basic mental health first aid course for educators and education leaders.

She recognises the need for a bespoke, shortened course in the education sector.

“The course will provide e-learning training and will be supplemented with optional modules and face-to-face sessions for those who want to undergo in-depth training,” Morgan says.

Contact our union for support

IEU members should ensure employers are meeting their work health and safety (WHS) responsibilities to protect workers from psychosocial risks and hazards.

Your IEU branch can help your IEU Chapter establish a WHS Committee, elect a health and safety representative (HSR) and provide information and advice about psychosocial hazards.

Members should contact their IEU branch immediately for support and advice around potential psychosocial hazards in the workplace or psychological injury.



We can support members through the best process of dealing with an injury or making a workers’ compensation claim.

If you or someone else is in immediate risk of harm to themselves or others, contact emergency services on 000.

For 24/7 telephone mental health support, call:

- Lifeline: 12 11 14
- Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

References

McGorry, P. D., Mei, C., Dalal, N., Alvarez-Jimenez, M., Blakemore, S.-J., & Browne, V., et al. (2023). The Lancet Psychiatry Commission on youth mental health. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 11(9), 731-774.

Australian Government Productivity Commission. (2020). Mental health: Volume 1 (Inquiry Report No. 95).

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Working towards wellbeing

My Mind Check

With mental health issues among students on the rise, a new program has been developed through extensive consultation with those who deliver it – teachers and school support staff, writes Will Brodie.

The increase in mental health complexities among students is having an obvious effect on teachers and support staff.

“Addressing student wellbeing issues has become a direct source of teacher workload,” IEUA Assistant Federal Secretary Veronica Yewdall says.

A new federally funded program, My Mind Check, seeks to address mental health issues without overburdening staff.

Whereas commercial versions of similar services paid lip service to staff needs, this one was developed with comprehensive input from teachers and support staff.

Macquarie University psychology professor Ron Rapee says his team considered 18 months of feedback “all the way down to individual teachers, principals, students, and caregivers”.

Researchers ran “hundreds of individual people through the process, getting feedback in individual interviews and focus groups to discuss pros and cons”, he says.

The research also involved more than 14,000 students across 70 NSW schools from all sectors.

My Mind Check proceeded because of “overwhelmingly positive” feedback from staff and students in all types of schools, Professor Rapee says.

How the program works

My Mind Check is an evidence-based digital mental health and wellbeing check-in.

Designed for students from Prep to Year 12, it helps identify those who need support through non-diagnostic check-ins that help guide educative decisions.

The program is voluntary, free of charge and supported by the federal government.

Students complete a short, evidence-based online questionnaire in class that takes no more than 15 minutes. Professor Rapee suggests conducting them once per term.

A designated “school champion”, ideally someone with mental health training, then receives a real-time, user-friendly report. This report can be filtered to identify students who are struggling in particular areas.

There is also “a whole set of curated feedback processes and materials” that the school champion can access. This could include “simply having further discussion with the student to check in with them in more detail, to make sure that it wasn't just a bad day”.

What it requires

Professor Rapee says implementing My Mind Check is akin to “overseeing a test” and does not require specific mental health expertise.

He admits it adds work for the school champion but sees it as a worthwhile trade-off for better classroom management and reduced stress.

“We see the value in hopefully reducing the workload in every single classroom from kids who are struggling with their mental health,” he says.

No silver bullets

From its inception, the My Mind Check program considered the needs of not just the students it assesses, but also teachers and school staff.

Nonetheless, student mental health is a complex phenomenon that cannot be addressed solely by schools. It is a community-wide concern requiring qualified experts and services – and schools need access to them.

A 2023 study by researchers at the University of Melbourne stated: “Educators report significant concerns about the complexities of their role and their capacity to support children's mental health due to a lack of resources, overwhelming demands, and inadequate training.”

The study, *Supporting children's mental health in primary schools: a qualitative exploration of educator perspectives*, recommended:

- pre-service and ongoing training for teachers in early identification of children's mental health difficulties to initiate appropriate care pathways
- professional mental health assessments for students within a reasonable timeframe
- schools need access to regular, ongoing support staff for both students and teachers
- better mental health literacy in the community, leading to shared understanding between schools and families.

Teachers need proper support to promote student wellbeing. The IEU will continue advocating for our members' welfare when implementing new programs to ensure they can run them effectively and achieve their stated purpose.

Reference

Supporting children's mental health in primary schools: a qualitative exploration of educator perspectives, A Giles-Kaye, J Quach, F Oberklaid, M O'Connor, S Darling, G Dawson, A S Connolly, *Australian Educational Researcher*, 2023



**Professor Ron Rapee,
Macquarie University**



Shaping the future

Award-winning teacher on why history is vital

‘Increased student engagement has led to higher results.’



IEU member Dr Natalie Fong has been recognised for excellence and dedication to history teaching, writes Emily Campbell.

Dr Fong received the Outstanding History Teacher Award in 2024. It was unexpected but welcome.

“I was surprised to learn I was nominated, but honoured to be recognised by my peers,” she says.

She is Head of Secondary Humanities at Citipointe Christian College in Carindale, south of Brisbane.

Every year, the Queensland History Teachers' Association (QHTA) invites nominations for teachers who have made exceptional contributions. Nominated teachers show:

- deep knowledge, passion and pedagogical skill that inspires student interest and learning in history
- innovation in designing and presenting units of work, courses, assessments or history texts
- outstanding contributions to the professional learning of others within QHTA, its student programs or publications.

Dr Fong wanted to be a journalist until she discovered her passion for working with children.

Working in outside school hours care (OSHC), children's ministry, and as a teacher aide helped Dr Fong realise her love for designing engaging and educational activities for children.

She has now taught for more than 16 years, primarily in independent Christian schools, and has worked in government schools in Australia and the UK.

Passionate about the humanities, she has taught English, Essential English, Literature, Modern and Ancient History, Geography, and Drama.

“I also work as a historian and have published articles and book chapters on the history of Chinese people in Australia, sharing my research on television, radio and podcasts,” Dr Fong says.

In addition to overseeing the school's humanities and honours program, Dr Fong organised the international Humanities Research Symposium for Youth, held in South Korea during 2024.

Importance of history

Dr Fong believes the study of history is vital for young people.

“History provides context for understanding the world today and shaping future predictions,” she says.

“It also teaches skills like research, critical thinking, problem-solving, and presenting well-supported arguments.”

While Dr Fong loves her job, she acknowledges the challenges the teaching profession faces.

“Teaching has always been busy, and it is particularly busy at the moment with curriculum rewrites in preparation for implementation of the Australian Curriculum Version 9.0 and the new Queensland Senior Syllabuses, although it's an exciting time to refresh programs,” she says.

“Balancing work and life, particularly during term time, is always a challenge.”

Dr Fong has been an IEU member for the past two years.

“I joined for the support and advice about teaching issues like employment

conditions and workload,” Dr Fong says.

“Having our IEU organiser visit regularly to offer support and answer questions in person has been great.”

Challenges facing the profession

Throughout her career, Dr Fong has observed many changes in education and to the profession.

“Teaching has become much more learner-centred, which is great, and it's about students engaging with and reflecting on their learning,” she says. “Increased student engagement has led to higher results.

“Learning now is more about skills – teachers teaching students how to find the knowledge, rather than just giving them knowledge,” Dr Fong says.

The rise of digital technologies such as AI is also changing learning, creating both opportunities and challenges.

“Students can sometimes be too trusting of AI and need to be encouraged to verify its accuracy,” Dr Fong says.

“They also need to learn to use it ethically, which teachers are still figuring out as we use AI for lesson ideas and resources.”

Dr Fong's favourite aspect of teaching is watching students grow intellectually, personally, and spiritually.

“High school is a defining time where students mature and discover more about the plans for their lives,” she says.

“I'm most proud of past students who became teachers, some of whom I've mentored as pre-service teachers.”

Putting history in its place



Place-based learning gives educators a powerful way to engage students, especially with Indigenous culture and history, writes Will Brodie.

IEU member Vince Wall believes school excursions are more important than ever. They “shake things up”, he says, because “getting out into the world makes history real”.

“They break the routine and remind students that learning isn’t just something that happens inside four walls.

“It’s one thing to read about the past; it’s another to stand in the place where it happened, to walk in the footsteps of those who came before, to feel that emotional, gut-level connection.”

Vince is a history teacher and Artificial Intelligence for Teaching and Learning Project Leader at All Hallows’ School, Brisbane. He holds highly accomplished status with the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL).

All that expertise informs the excursions he designs, in which students experience mapping, 3D scanning and GPS tracking.

Vince says site visits bring hands-on experiences the classroom cannot replicate and change the way students and teachers interact.

“Excursions bring unpredictability – new experiences, new challenges, even those left-field, unexpected moments on the journey there and back,” he says. “The planning, the safety and cultural protocols, the public interactions (sometimes awkward, sometimes eye-opening) – it’s all part of the learning.”

Vince’s students visit sites that “bring Australian history to life”, such as Brisbane’s Anzac Square and Shrine of Remembrance. They explore Australia’s involvement in both World Wars and post-WWII conflicts, especially during commemorations such as Anzac Day and Remembrance Day.

“Students use mobile technology for interactive scavenger hunts, Lidar scanning for 3D modelling of monuments, and Thinglink for digital annotations,” he says. “These tools turn the site into a dynamic, collaborative learning experience.”

Vince’s students also visit Brisbane Heritage Walks and First Nations Pathways, where they walk traditional Indigenous routes and visit heritage sites, sparking “critical conversations about reparative history and the role of history education in social justice”.

The personal touch

Victorian history teacher and IEU member Christine Thompson has taken students to Melbourne landmarks including the Chinese Museum, Jewish Holocaust Centre, Old Melbourne Gaol and Immigration Museum.

She says such sites now have resources and interactive activities that “heighten the experience” for students.

“Many of these places also have guides who can provide personal experiences which adds to a student’s understanding of the topic,” Christine says.

“The fact that questions can be asked and answered makes the experience

more realistic – this is of greater value than reading a comment in a text or on a website.”

Red dirt teaching

John Guenther, a Research Leader in Education and Training at the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in the Northern Territory, has worked primarily in remote schools with First Nations students. He helped pioneer ‘red dirt thinking’, an approach that values Indigenous knowledge, local context and community-driven learning.

John highlights three key benefits of place-based learning:

- It is relevant and meaningful to students.
- It helps students build strength through a sense of belonging and historical connection.
- It draws from the knowledge inherent in the place itself.

“It serves as a springboard to more meaningful learning beyond the place, providing a point of comparison and difference for students to expand their knowledge, and then critically reflect on new information,” he says.

John says place-based learning is about more than geographical locations or history. It can also include culture, social relationships, kinship, language, politics and ecological environment.

“The concept of ‘Country as teacher’ is increasingly used by First Nations scholars and educators to express the more/other than human sources of

knowledge that help define identity, reality, values, kinship, spirituality and cosmological understandings for students,” he says.

“It aligns with the aspirations of many people who live on Country. It allows the stories and the language of place to be learnt in a socio-cultural context, without being constrained by colonial interpretations of truth and knowledge.

“Place-based learning therefore adds meaning to what might, from a non-Indigenous perspective, be considered as ‘science’ or ‘historical truth’ or discrete curriculum areas of English literacy and numeracy.”

John says educators need to learn as much as possible about the place where they are teaching – “its history, its culture, the languages spoken, the values, stories and the kinship structures of place”.

“The teacher becomes a learner, withholding judgements about what they observe and listening before they speak,” he says.

“The teacher critically reflects on their own understanding of reality, values and knowledge, recognising the differences, but accepting that their position in ‘place’ is not as the expert.

“Those who belong in place should be seen as their teachers. Educators who do belong to the place where they are teaching students are well placed to draw on their knowledge to provide learning opportunities that are meaningful and enjoyable for their students.”

Sites in the city

Curriculum changes require Victorian schools to enhance their focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories by early 2026.

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) (NTAV) – traditionally focused on preserving historic buildings and monuments – now promotes a “unique, place-based learning approach”, offering “meaningful, tactile learning experiences, allowing students to connect abstract curriculum points to real-world locations and events”.

“Objects and places can convey powerful stories that words alone cannot express,” says Nicola Dziadkiewicz, NTAV’s Education and Public Programs Manager.

NTAV facilitators tailor each excursion to ensure it is “relevant to where students are up to in their classroom”.

The NTAV collaborates with First Nations groups to ensure programs are “accurate and culturally sensitive” and students get the chance to “understand the depth and breadth of the history of our sites”, she says.

At the *Polly Woodside*, a 19th-century tall ship moored in Melbourne’s South Wharf, Wurundjeri facilitators share the cultural significance of the Birrarung (Yarra River).



Teacher and IEU member Vince Wall



Research Leader John Guenther

At McCrae Homestead, students learn about the intersecting experiences of the McCrae family and the Bunurong community during the 1840s.

“These encounters illuminate wider historical contexts and deepen students’ understanding of the relationships between people and place,” she says.

Beyond learning

Vince Wall agrees with Guenther that it is essential to “recognise the cultural and spiritual significance of place”.

“For non-Indigenous students (and teachers), engaging with the idea that Country is alive, storied, and deeply connected to identity is a vital part of learning,” he says.

“Places don’t just tell stories overtly or in words, they speak through positioning, silences and what is left out. It can open conversations about enduring connections to Country, the way we

privilege some narratives over others, and the unfinished challenges of justice, recognition, and truth-telling.”

Vince says well-constructed excursions “go beyond just learning about history – they help students do history.

“They’re a reminder that history isn’t just something we study – it’s something we experience,” he says.

References and resources

Vince Wall’s pedagogical and tech blog is at disruptedhistory.com

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HEALTHY HAROLD

A movement that mobilised health education

You may be familiar with Healthy Harold but how did Life Education start? Sue Osborne talks to IEU rep Josh Brady, a Specialist Health Educator with Life Education.

Last year marked the 45th anniversary of Life Education – the largest not-for-profit Australian provider of preventative health and wellbeing education for children and young people.

The organisation was founded in 1979 by Reverend Ted Noffs of the Wayside Chapel, which provides care and support for people on the streets of Sydney.

Noffs's vision was built on a powerful concept: "Each and every child is unique, a true marvel in body, mind and spirit."

While the community struggled with trying to rehabilitate a new generation of drug users, and shock factors were the focus of most education campaigns, Reverend Noffs challenged these approaches and became an advocate for early prevention.

Instead of scare tactics, he saw value in empowering young people with knowledge, so he created a room above his chapel which would be known as the "classroom of the 21st century" – inspired by the Robert Crown Health Education Centre in Chicago, which adopted a giraffe mascot.

With a life-sized transparent anatomical mannequin, rotating floor, sparkling lights and a robotic giraffe, the Life Education program was born in Australia and students from across Sydney travelled by bus to experience it.

IEU member Josh Brady, who teaches for Life Education, says the giraffe embodies the organisation's ideals.

"Each spot on a giraffe is unique, so too are the children who come to visit him, and others see Harold as a role model to look up to," Brady says.

Trailblazing times

Demand for the newly founded program soon outgrew the Kings Cross classroom, and the first mobile classroom, or van, was built in 1982.

"It was during this time that it became obvious that Life Education was more than just a program," Brady says.

"It was a movement that mobilised education, as well as passionate individuals and groups impacted by the drug crisis."

These advocates began to raise funds and awareness, and with this came the expansion of the program.

"While the program was created to address the rising drug problem, it was always designed to look at the child as a whole," Brady says.

"It included opportunities for students to learn about physical health and wellbeing and explored topics like individual strengths,

self-respect, assertive communication, stress management, and seeking help to build overall confidence and resilience."

By delivering drug and safety education, Life Education was a "trailblazer" in the 1980s, Brady says. Key focus areas such as social and emotional learning came later.

Enthusiastic expansion

By the 1990s, Life Education was operating in every Australian state and 13 countries. By 2000, most states and territories had moved away from the local, committee-based model of management and program delivery in favour of a more centralised structure.

Under this model, each state and territory supported delivery of the program by employing educators, conducting fundraising, working with their state or territory government's health and education departments, and maintaining the mobile learning classrooms.

"Programs are based on sound research into best practice in safety, health and drug education," Brady says.

"Educators are trained with methodologies that include building rapport with students, active questions to involve and assess students, responding to create safe and inclusive environments, child-centred and strengths-based approaches."

As soon as he started teaching for Life Ed, Brady volunteered to become the IEU rep and has also been involved in enterprise agreement negotiations.

Life Ed educators don't have to be teachers, although many are. Brady was formerly a teacher in a Catholic primary school in Dubbo where he was also an IEU rep, and he was involved in the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch's highly successful 'Hear Our Voice' campaign in 2022-23, which ultimately won big pay rises for Catholic systemic teachers and support staff.

Consent enters the classroom

In the face of increasing gender-based violence in the early 2000s, consent education became crucial and the focus shifted to discussion of respectful relationships through Life Education's Respect, Relate, Connect module in 2015.

With the advent of new technology, Life Education developed an e-safety module in 2016 called Cyberwise. It explores cyber safety, cybersecurity and cyber ethics and helps children navigate issues like online bullying, fake news and unwanted contact.

"This is a close look at relationships through the lens of empathy, communication, body clues and help-seeking behaviours," Brady says.



Rev Ted Noffs in 1982 with students outside one of the first mobile learning classrooms.



Healthy Harold at a mobile learning centre.



Students at a pop-up outdoor classroom.



Students at a mobile van classroom.

Life Education facts and figures

- Educates more than 594,000 students a year.
- Visits more than 4900 schools and preschools a year.
- Reaches more than 100,000 teachers through social media and online campaigns
- Has created more than 100 resources to support delivery of modules in and beyond the classroom.
- Provides specialist educators who deliver health and safety education to preschoolers; health, cyber-safety and drug education to primary school students; and sexual health and drug education to secondary students.

"To effectively embed learning about such a complex issue across ages and streams, it explores how we value, accept and treat each other."

Facing up to vaping

Most recently, with the rise in vaping concerning schools and communities nationwide, Life Education created an experience for primary school students to equip them with the facts early on.

Co-designed by secondary students for Years 5 and 6 students, it brings peer-to-peer learning to life to deliver evidence-based messages on an evolving basis.

"Our new 'Take a breath' module on vaping asks students to stop, take a breath, and critically evaluate the information, history, and body knowledge," a spokesperson for Life Ed says.

"By encouraging critical thinking, students are empowered to make an informed decision in the best interests of their health."

"We must be flexible and modify some of our programs to suit the needs of the schools and students during our visits. We also provide comprehensive resources to support pre-learning and post-learning and even learning at home with parents."

Looking at 2025 and beyond, Life Education is focusing on tackling the rise in vaping, teaching nutrition through immersive and interactive experiences on the inner workings of the human body and exploring social and emotional learning.

Effectiveness study

The University of Newcastle released an *Evaluation of the NSW Life Education Program and its impact on Year 5 students*, commissioned by the NSW Department of Health and published in 2018.

The report found the program offered a unique learning experience, alignment with the curriculum and multi-strategy components, including for parents.

But there was one key challenge. "The effectiveness of the Life Education Program was considered by administrators and educators to be hindered by students receiving less than its designated 'dose', due to supplementary activities not being implemented," the report said. The take-home message is to run the program in its entirety so students can receive the full benefit.

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Classroom revolution How Generative AI can (and can't) improve teaching

Researchers echo the IEU's call for employers to provide high-quality training on using artificial intelligence (AI) in schools, writes Emily Campbell.

New research from Monash University's Centre for Learning Analytics (CoLAM) outlines key considerations for using generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools in learning environments.

Several aspects detailed in the paper reflect our union's position regarding GenAI in schools, including the urgent need to:

- invest in ongoing professional development (PD) to cultivate AI literacy in both staff and students
- develop GenAI education-specific tools and resources
- promote GenAI safeguards, and
- manage workload implications for teachers.

Published in the *Nature Human Behaviour* journal, the paper discusses essential factors for researchers, policymakers and technology companies to consider while adapting GenAI to support human learning in education settings and workplaces.

Underpinning those key considerations is a central tenet that GenAI educational tools should be carefully developed to support, rather than replace, human learning.

Integral to society's future

AI technologies are already widely utilised in everyday life. Internet banking, social media, navigation systems, digital assistants and chatbots, search engines and smart devices all rely on AI to operate effectively.

However, the proliferation and accessibility of new GenAI technologies such as ChatGPT has prompted debate about their effectiveness as an educational tool and ethical implications of their use in schools.

'Powerful AI tools are set to become integral to society'

CoLAM Director and senior author of the research paper Professor Dragan Gasevic says GenAI technologies could potentially permeate every aspect of human learning.

"Powerful AI tools are set to become integral to society, transforming how we learn, work and live," Gasevic says.

"Imagine students engaging in debates with digital twins of Socrates to explore ancient philosophy, learning impressionist painting techniques from a humanoid robotic mentor modelled after Claude Monet, or visualising Einstein's special theory of relativity in virtual realities.

"This kind of integration needs a dual approach to learning: educating ourselves both about and with GenAI.

"It requires careful development of education tools informed by rigorous research and supported by unified efforts from education institutions, technologists and government policies."

Throughout the paper, the researchers explore the promises of GenAI to enhance learning experiences by scaling personalised support, diversifying learning

materials, providing timely feedback and innovating assessment methods.

Despite its potential, they argue GenAI presents critical issues including model imperfections, ethical dilemmas and disruption of traditional assessments.

Ensuring AI literacy

The researchers say GenAI should enhance and supplement, but not replace, human learning. Using GenAI as a blunt tool without upskilling teachers and training them to understand its limitations is problematic.

"Most of the key considerations that go into developing educational AI tools for use in schools revolve around the idea of cultivating GenAI literacy in both students and educators," says the study's co-author Lixiang Yan.

"Not only do staff and students need to know how to use GenAI, but how to critically evaluate their outputs.

"Educational institutions must invest in ongoing professional development and support systems to help teachers manage techno-stress and workload burdens from adopting these new technologies."

A research fellow at Monash University's Centre for Learning Analytics, Yan says well-designed education-specific tools require learning scientists and teachers to collaborate with developers, so students receive a beneficial experience.

"Educational chatbots need those pedagogical scaffolding structures embedded in their design to support students' learning instead of diminishing it," he says.



Teachers' voice must be heard

Gasevic says the use of GenAI tools without appropriate scaffolding has detrimental consequences for students' learning.

"There's more emerging evidence that when students in schools or higher education use large language models (LLM) like ChatGPT directly in this way, it negatively impacts their learning," he says.

For this reason, the authors argue for the input of education professionals in the development of educational GenAI tools to ensure they are grounded in strong pedagogies.

"Teachers need to provide the scaffolding before AI provides the technological scaffolding," Gasevic says.

Human-centred values critical

Gasevic and Yan believe technological advancement must be balanced with what they refer to as human-centred values in learning.

They found fostering skills for critical thinking and self-reflection in humans is paramount for humans to effectively partner with GenAI.

"We anticipate a shift in educators' roles, with GenAI reducing the burden of knowledge dissemination, allowing teachers to focus on deeper connections with students as mentors and facilitators," Yan says.

"In terms of human-centred values, a vital skill is the ability to critically evaluate knowledge and information instead of offloading everything to AI.

"Having the ability to interact with the tech is important but being able to evaluate what we see and encounter during our lives is also vital."

Schools and education systems must prioritise teaching students to be adaptive learners equipped with the skills and knowledge to succeed in the 21st century.

Critical thinking, problem-solving and making sound judgements are all key skills.

Another human-centred value raised in the research is considering which jobs and tasks should be automated or outsourced to AI rather than performed by humans.

"Tech companies want to automate everything, but we need to think about the broader consequences of trying to offload our entire cognition onto some of these tools," Gasevic says.

"Human learning is one of the biggest tools, not only for getting jobs but also for staying mentally healthy.

"What tasks should stay with people and what the identity of humans is – these are big questions we must grapple with, and teachers and education communities need to have strong voices as part of this process."

Cautious optimism

The researchers hope GenAI eventually makes the lives of teachers easier, allowing them to focus on their core business of creating engaging learning opportunities for students.

If harnessed properly, education-specific GenAI tools could potentially reduce teachers' workload and work intensification by assisting with automation of certain administrative tasks and communication.

"Teachers are spending more and more time on compliance, paperwork and reporting for different quality assurance

schemes, which is taking away from their precious time and limiting what they can do," Gasevic says.

"I am hopeful GenAI will enable teachers to spend more time designing creative lessons and learning experiences, better assessments and promoting critical thinking, metacognition and students' strong agency over these technologies.

"Rigorous research across learning contexts is essential to evaluate GenAI's effect on human cognition, metacognition and creativity."

Resources

IEU-QNT Branch and the Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) have jointly published materials to advise and assist members in using artificial intelligence (AI) in schools.

The complementary AI Decision-making Framework and Discussion Points are crucial documents that encourage members to think deeply about the various opportunities and ramifications of using AI in an educational context.

Framework: bit.ly/4llwTF4

Discussion points: bit.ly/4cmZvKg

Read the full Monash CoLam study: go.nature.com/3ELIVII



Research explained

How students' lives can inform your teaching

Teachers can enhance learning by setting tasks about familiar things in students' lives, write University of Sydney researchers Graham Hendry, Kelly Padayachee and Jay Lim.

Teachers are asked to do more to enhance their teaching. Some of the latest practices they are urged to adopt include explicit teaching and formative assessment.

On top of this, teachers have long been expected to differentiate their instruction to cater to all students' learning needs (Gibbs & McKay, 2021). But is any of this really possible?

Real world tasks

In this article we show how these practices can be combined into one simple practice we call situated assessment.

Teachers have always known the value of setting a learning task that is about familiar things in young people's lives. A situated learning or assessment task is one that is situated or positioned in a circumstance in the real world.

Based on evidence from studies about teaching primary mathematics, we argue that 'situated' tasks intrinsically motivate students to make a genuine effort in their learning and so enable teachers to accurately judge how students are progressing.

How this works for teachers

As a teacher watches and listens to students working on a situated task, they can build on their images of what each student knows and can do (Tognolini, 2020) and, in the process, make judgements and differentiate their instruction.

For example, they can distinctly share with students the reason(s) for learning something (learning intentions), and what they should be able to do if they are successful (success criteria) (Sharratt, 2019).

A teacher can then decide to intervene and explicitly teach students who may need guidance, by showing them how to do part of the task, and/or they can extend part of the task for other students who have more advanced knowledge and/or skills, by showing them what to do next.

Assessing students

We believe this way of individualising or differentiating teaching is also equivalent to practising formative assessment.

The defining feature of formative assessment is gathering evidence of students' learning progress and using this information to adjust or rearrange instruction in real time to enhance students' learning outcomes (William & Thomson, 2007). Setting a situated task, particularly one of longer duration, can allow teachers to gather evidence and tailor their teaching.

Drawing a choice of objects

For example, in a study of teaching perspective and proportion in primary mathematics, Begg and Cavagna (2009) asked Years 5 and 6 students to use isometric paper "to draw their own choice of objects from their home or classroom environment" (p. 17).

That is, the authors situated the task in the circumstance of the immediate classroom or students' own homes.

They found that students were more motivated by this task, and it allowed the teacher to “identify the variance in skills within the classroom” and provide “meaningful immediate extension work” (p. 17).

Designing a sprinkler system

In another study in primary mathematics about teaching the concepts of perimeter and area, Lowrie and Smith (2002) gave Year 6 students a project task of designing an underground sprinkler system for new turf to be laid in their school grounds.

Students worked in small groups or individually and were allowed three weeks to complete the project. Lowrie and Smith found students used “a variety of methods ... to solve the task” and their “motivation remained high throughout the activity” (p. 17).

The task also accommodated the “differing ability levels of students” and the amount of ‘scaffolding’ or guidance provided by the teacher to each group or individual “varied considerably” (p. 21).

In other words, during this longer task there were many opportunities for the teacher to practise formative assessment, differentiate their instruction and potentially explicitly teach a concept or skill.

Motivated students

Students are intrinsically motivated to work on a situated task because they perceive it as being related to them personally and/or “connected” or “relevant” to their lives (Taylor & Parsons, 2011).

They may also be motivated by the realistic challenge and experiential, ‘hands on’ aspects of a task, and the collaborative experience of working with their peers (Kokotsaki et al, 2016).

The engagement and genuine effort of students enables teachers to make accurate decisions about how to instruct them as they complete the task.

Although initially designing a situated task can take time, we hope that well-designed tasks can be shared within the teaching community to ultimately improve the learning experiences of all the students we teach.

Dr Graham Hendry, Kelly Padayachee and Dr Jay Lim are from the University of Sydney’s Centre for Educational Measurement and Assessment.

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‘A situated task can allow teachers to gather evidence and tailor their teaching.’

Learning fractions with fruit salad

Here is an example of a situated task with suggestions for how to differentiate instruction during the task.

The task

This task is for early primary students to learn about the concept and size of fractions. Students use fractions of ingredients to make a fruit salad. This could begin with discussion of various types of fruit salads eaten in cultures around the world.

The aim

The main learning intention written in student-friendly language is, “We are doing this task to be able to fairly divide up and share food.” A success criterion is, “We can divide fruit into parts of equal size”. Of course, double-check whether any students have food allergies.

Instructions

Students work in pairs and will need a bowl, wooden knives, forks and spoons, and something to cut fruit on. Teachers will supervise hand hygiene.

Students practise cutting up fruit (eg, bananas) into halves and quarters. They also follow a recipe sheet and practise making a fruit salad using two measuring cups: one with four graduated markings and one with five graduated markings to measure quantities of fruit (eg, grapes).

Students needing help

For students who need help, show them how to trim then cut a banana into two equal size pieces. Explain that the ‘2’ (the denominator) in the fraction for half refers to the two equal size pieces into which the whole piece is divided, and the ‘1’ (the numerator) refers to one of the equal size pieces.

Extra skills

For students with advanced skills, ask them to work out the total quantities of fruit needed for bowls of fruit salad for a party of 6, 8, and 12 people. Show them how to work out the quantity for 4 people.

Making recipes

All students could also create their own salad recipes with different fractions of ingredients and/or different ingredients.



Learning from the experts

Meet the teachers educating their colleagues

Recent teachers turned teacher-educators have a unique perspective on the challenges their colleagues face, writes Will Brodie.

The Teacher Learning Network (TLN) was established in 1994 by what is now the IEU Victoria Tasmania Branch and the Australian Education Union (AEU) under the motto “For teachers, by teachers”.

It provides professional development for educators, guided by the belief that teachers are learning experts who should help advance the skills of school staff.

In 2024, three new course coordinators joined TLN, bringing fresh classroom experience.

As they completed their first year educating teachers rather than students, they tell us how their recent teaching experience has shaped the professional development they coordinate.

Jacqui Tarquinio
Becoming an ‘othersider’

When Jacqui first started at TLN, she struggled to get used to the fact that “sometimes work could wait until tomorrow”.

“Many teachers will vouch for the long evenings after work, creating resources, marking or drafting reports as this work can simply not wait until the next day,” she says.

That firsthand understanding of teachers’ realities and deep respect for their work shaped Jacqui’s first year as the Casual Relief Teacher (CRT) PD Coordinator.



She expected CRTs would be focused on getting updates on the science of reading, but after meeting them realised they want to be “understood, heard and praised for the excellent work they do”.

“While attendees come to CRTPD to learn they often leave feeling reinforced through professional development and networking that they are doing an excellent job in the classroom,” she says.

“This [feedback] is something busy schools and society in general do not understand nor hold in great esteem.”

Jacqui stresses she is “still constantly learning” as a teacher at TLN.

“As an ‘othersider’, I do not want to lose touch with the realities of teaching – like the feeling one gets when a class is about to start and there is no paper in the photocopier or there is no paper in the school at all.”

In her first year at TLN, Jacqui maintained weekly contact with CRTs and

'I did not truly appreciate how demanding working in a school was until I left the bubble.'

provisionally registered teachers. Along with in-person CRT courses, professional forums and meetings with educators, this kept her connected to current trends, ensuring her teaching knowledge and experience remained up to date.

"I do miss the classroom," she says. "I still have dreams at night of teaching, which tells me that, while I am here on the other side for a while, I will return to the classroom in the future."

Richard Linton **School staff need our support**

Richard's experience as an award-winning IEU rep and Health and Safety rep has proved invaluable in his new role.

"Our connections with the IEU and AEU are vital in keeping a pulse on emerging issues in educational settings," he says.

"Incidental and formal conversations with officers and officials at both unions provide important insight into the direction they are heading and how we can support education and the union movement."

After 17 years in the "education bubble" as a full-time teacher, Richard was curious to see how the non-teaching world functioned.

"I did not truly appreciate how demanding working in a school was until I left the bubble," he says.

"After a year of being outside and looking in, I can see school staff are some of the most committed, passionate people I have had the pleasure of meeting and working with. They also need our support more than ever."

In his first year at TLN, Richard stayed connected to the profession through his presenters, who were active in teaching or educational leadership.

"Professional learning courses are conducted outside business hours, and hosting offers a great opportunity to engage with attendees and discuss the profession, its challenges and needs," he says.

The new job meant Richard could

attend the annual two-day EduTECH conference, where he discussed the future of education with colleagues and observed the evolution of curriculum resource providers.

Richard says staff wellbeing is too often neglected.

"The education profession places the highest priority on the education and wellbeing of students, but promoting staff wellbeing is vital to ensuring staff can continue their great work," he says.

"Gender equity is better than most other sectors, but women are still significantly under-represented at leadership and executive leadership levels. This suggests that the glass ceiling and walls are still present in our profession."

Richard says many schools and staff still struggle to implement First Nations pedagogy, despite quality professional development being available.

Another major challenge for schools is "learning to use AI in a critical and ethical way to support both learning and school operations", he says.

Such considerations shape the courses Richard recommends for TLN.

"It is my hope that providing learning opportunities that support progress on these challenges will support school staff to continue their great work in educating young people and to assist with staff development and retention," he says.

Louisa Callanan **Helping prepare teachers**

"Delivering professional development to educators is a natural progression from my teaching and union rep work," Louisa says.

"As I have found my feet at TLN and enjoyed regular hearty and frank discussions with members across sectors, CRTs, presenters and colleagues, it has become clear that now more than ever, what educators need is explicit, targeted support of their practice and wellbeing, and dedicated time to complete the overwhelming workload."

Louisa admits she felt "completely ill-prepared" as a first-year graduate teacher when faced with managing the extreme and unsafe behaviours of three students in her Year 2 class.

Her studies and placements had covered "theoretical scenarios" but had not prepared her for the "practical reality" of these challenges.

Louisa survived thanks to an advisory teacher for behaviour support, who worked one-on-one with her for several weeks, "modelling strategies with the class and building my skills and confidence".

"It was a steep and challenging learning curve, but it set me up for a sustainable career in teaching across diverse school settings, and in a variety of roles," she says.

"I soon came to learn that this practical support for behaviour and classroom management is not a common experience, especially among early career teachers, who constitute a large proportion of those who are exiting the profession."

Louisa is not surprised that behaviour management was one of the highest attended TLN course topics in 2024: educators need to drive the organisation's offerings.

Louisa says those discussions have identified neurodiversity as an important PD topic for education staff.

"With growing awareness and diagnoses of ADHD and autism in particular, neuro-affirming strategies, simple practical strategies and action plans are vital for teachers to establish and maintain a learning environment that benefits all students, and themselves," she says.

More information

These topics are explored further in the *TLN Journal*, a free, practitioner-focused publication, visit: tln.org.au





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