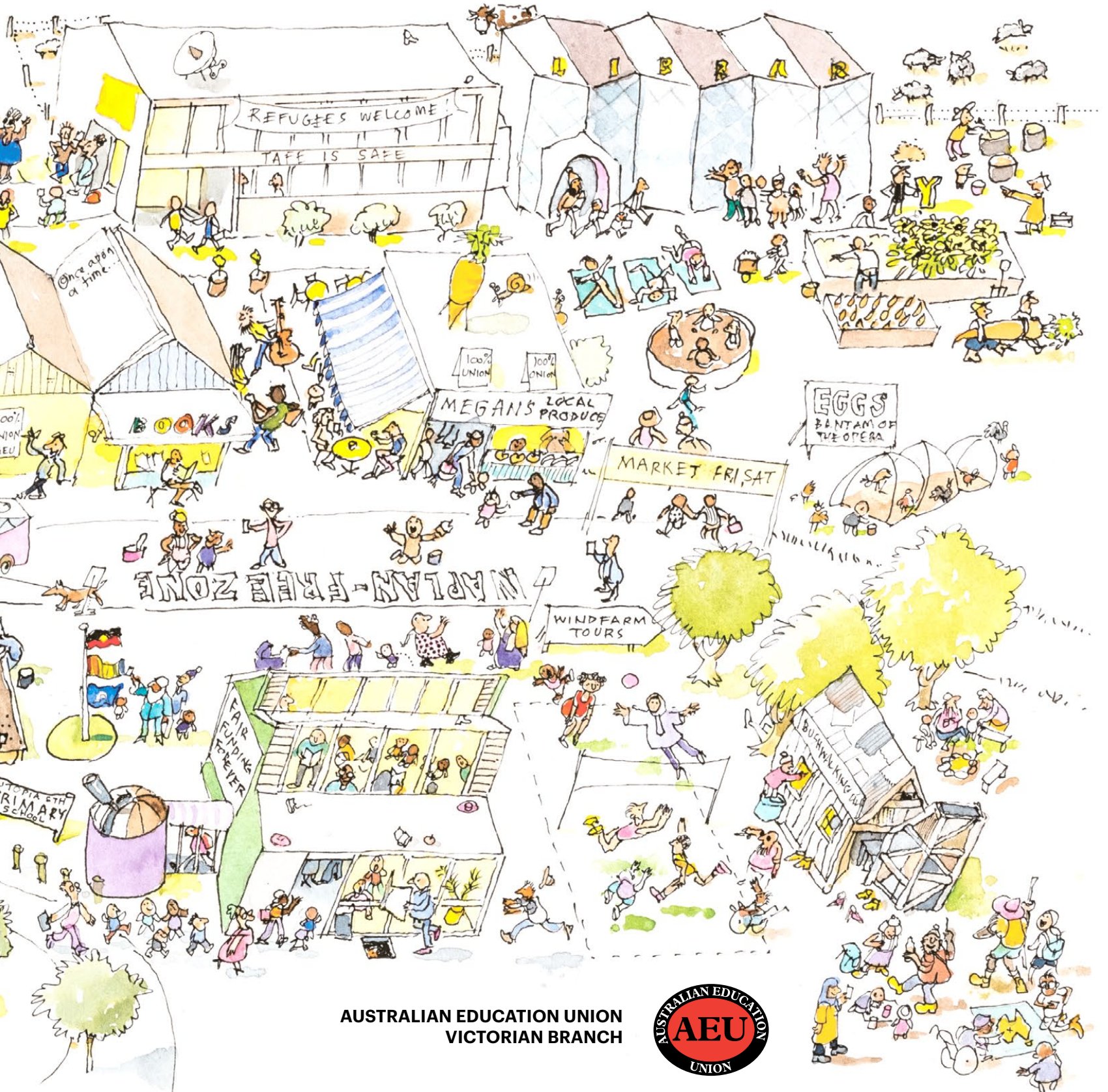


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AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION
VICTORIAN BRANCH





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In any election year, we talk a lot about the kind of Australia we want to be. So, in this issue of *AEU News*, we thought we'd paint a picture of the future we've been campaigning so hard for: fair, inclusive, sustainable, compassionate, diverse... not to mention fun. And we knew the perfect person to illustrate it for us.

If you've grown up here, chances are you've read a postcard from Crabby Spit or made a visit to Uncle Kev's farm, where the car runs on 'chook poo and peanut butter'. Author/illustrator Roland Harvey has created yet another of his distinctively affectionate, cheeky takes on life in Australia, just for us, with our cover celebrating public education.

We had hoped the recent federal election would take us one step closer to this sunny, egalitarian vision. Sadly, it didn't pan out that way. But we've maintained our focus on the progressive society we can be.

Our 'regional focus' is Western Melbourne, where schools and TAFEs are finding new ways to be inclusive of a rapidly changing society. We profile an educator using his love of gardening to improve the lives of people with disability. And we talk to the director of *That Sugar Film* about his new doco inspiring collective action on climate change.

We hear how Australia can adopt the Finnish approach to education. One teacher shares her experience of working in remote Indigenous communities. And we discover how Philosophy is helping to build resilient, inquiring kids better equipped to take on a complex future.

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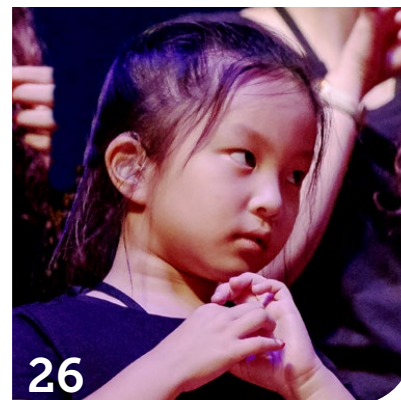
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Meaningful conversations can shift people's understanding – and their votes.

Focusing on the future

This election, we fought hard for what we saw as a fairer Australia for our students, our members and the broader community. While the result was not what we wanted, the core of what we fought for in

this election and over many years – and our resolve to keep striving for a just and equitable nation – has not changed.

School funding remains grossly unfair, with the bulk of federal funding going to private schools. TAFE has been and continues to be ignored by the federal government. While there is still no funding certainty for four-year-old early childhood education and no mention at all of support for three-year-old preschool. Beyond education, the climate emergency remains the biggest challenge our planet has ever faced. Tackling this crisis will require us to work together like never before. Just as we'll keep working to defeat insecure work and raise wages, especially for low-paid workers.

Despite the election setback, I am encouraged by a couple of experiences I had on election day. While handing out *Fair Funding Now!* how-to-vote cards, I met a Liberal Party volunteer who genuinely wanted to understand why the current schools funding policy is unfair. He then introduced me to his teenage daughter, who had previously joined him in handing out Liberal Party material. This year, she had decided to stand at the booth with her own message, asking people to consider the catastrophic consequences of climate change for young people like her, and to vote accordingly. Her passion was clear. Her father's instinct was to disagree, but his respect for her had led him to consider her point of view, though it clearly challenged his existing ideas and loyalties.

The second was with a young teacher who responded to an AEU request for members to help out on election day. Though she hadn't been involved in this kind of action before, she enthusiastically joined us in handing out our how-to-vote cards. As a practising teacher in the electorate, voters were interested in hearing what she had to say about education funding and its impact on her work.

It is these meaningful conversations that shift people's understanding – and their votes. People care deeply about issues like climate change and education. They understand how important they are, not only for their children, but for our society as a whole.

The students involved in the climate strikes have been criticised by many, including our prime minister, but they have relentlessly turned up in ever-increasing numbers across the country to keep the conversation going. As soon as the election was over, they again joined thousands in a snap rally in Melbourne's CBD to show the government that they will continue to take a stand and not let the election result stop the movement for change.

We will continue to do the same for public education. Rather than being deterred by the election result, we will return with renewed vigour to the fight for a better future. That means continuing our campaigns to achieve funding justice for public education from the Morrison government and to see greater investment at both state and federal levels.

In our schools, we will keep working on the implementation of professional practice days and the 30+8 clause for teachers. We will continue to support ES members as they participate in the review of work dimensions. And we will make sure our principals can do their jobs as educational leaders without threat to their wellbeing.

In TAFE, our focus remains on key elements of the new agreements, including qualifications assessments, workplans, and building the capacity and pressure at the local level to achieve the outcomes we want. This is imperative if we are to have a workforce that is supported and equipped to play a significant role in the further reforms needed in the sector. We've finally had success in achieving a new agreement at RMIT, despite management's efforts to push through a non-union deal, and are working to do the same at VU after it withdrew its own non-union agreement from Fair Work.

In early childhood, we will again take up the campaign for ongoing funding. The election result means federal funding for four-year-old preschool remains insecure and federal funding for three-year-olds remains non-existent. This is where our strong campaigning over many years, and particularly before last year's state election, paid off – the Andrews government has committed to funding 15 hours of preschool for all three-year-olds over the next 10 years alongside the continued funding of four-year-old preschool.

This last point is salutary in our march forward. At times we have setbacks and our battle can seem unwinnable. But each small achievement – of which there have been many – lays the foundations for future success. Thank you to everyone who participated in our campaigning, from doorknocking to leafletting, attending rallies, making calls or speaking out on social media.

Our deep commitment to public education and a fairer country has not changed. We will continue, together, to make our workplaces, our communities, our nation and our world a better place. Our students deserve nothing less!

MPeace

Meredith Peace
President, AEU Victorian Branch



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AEU MEMBER VOICES

There was no ignoring the outcome of the election on social media – much as we might wish we could close our eyes, tap our heels and wake up in an alternate universe. Many members shared their pain while noting that, on the upside, we still have a state government willing to support and invest in public education.

I'm lost, shocked and hurt. Is it too much to ask for fair funding. Where to from here?
– Dylan Zen

My school is not disappearing and my students still have needs. We will continue to support them and fight for their right to secure the education they deserve for their future.
– JASPer @humpete

I am so furious for so many reasons. But today, particularly, because I know teachers who are collecting flipping Woolworths Earn and Learn stickers to get books for their school libraries. It's not bloody good enough. #fairfundingnow
– Rosie Scroggie @rosieanice

Fortunately we have a state Labor government in Victoria who is committed to funding education, including 3-year-old kinder. Unfortunately, our kids and staff in schools will continue to suffer with a return of the Morrison Government.
– Kate Monica

Hey, do you have any ideas for fundraising? My kids' school P&C is meeting tonight to work out how to meet some of the massive shortfall in public school funding under a @ScottMorrisonMP Govt.
– Adam Curlis @TAFEeducation



The fight for fair funding continues

We celebrated ESP Week by profiling some of our wonderful ES members across Victoria. It was great to see the responses from colleagues and other members acknowledging the “unsung heroes of public education”, such as this comment about Northcote High School's Kylie Witt.

I've had the pleasure of working with Kylie. She is a vital part of the school and so important in the lives of the students, as are so many other ESs. Thanks for this important reminder.
– Alexander McLeod

We were flooded with emails and comments from members frustrated by the latest problems related to NAPLAN testing. Computer glitches had many of you fuming. Some students had to do their tests again after repeated system drop-outs – with many schools ditching the online option and returning to trusty pencil and paper. More than ever, we need a comprehensive review of NAPLAN!

Just end it so I never have to watch smart, capable children cry over something as pointless as a multiple choice test ever again.
– Anastasia Beaverhousen



Kylie Witt

Wasn't just NAPLAN. We couldn't get any admin work done because our entire network went down. Total waste of time!
– Kayte Heard

All minor issues, but lots of them, which adds to the stress load of both student and teacher. Apart from technical issues, some students simply cannot type fast enough – therefore were not able to complete the writing task. Also the inability to circle/underline/highlight text and instructions (critically read), puts students at a disadvantage over those completing hard copy versions of the test.
– Kerri Bee

We had a planned PD day and couldn't do it!
– Robyn Bernau

Stick to pen and paper. It's not worth the stress of this!
– Stephanie Janna



JUSTIN MULLALY, DEPUTY PRESIDENT

SCHOOLS

School funding Victorian style

Victorian public school students remain at the bottom of the league table when it comes to school funding, despite the efforts of the Andrews government to bridge the gap. The state budget handed down in late May shows that more needs to be done to ensure funding justice for our local schools.

Treasurer Tim Pallas' budget has projected a real increase in funding to public primary and secondary schools. This means there is some extra funding being provided to schools beyond that needed to keep up with enrolment growth in the system and annual inflation costs. It's a good first step.

The highlight of the budget was a significant increase in capital funding: \$1.4 billion for new public schools and for the rebuilding and refurbishment of existing ones. This compares to last year's budget, which allocated \$1.2 billion in capital works. There is further funding for portable classrooms and \$179 million for the removal of asbestos from school buildings or their replacement.

This capital investment delivers on one of the AEU's key policy objectives, which we campaigned for as part of our Put Education First campaign in the lead up to last November's state election.

Some of the program and recurrent funding commitments in the budget include \$7.5 million for community languages in schools; \$58 million to expand the school breakfast program to lunches in 1000 schools; \$5 million for the provision of school uniforms through State Schools Relief; \$5.8m for continuing anti-bullying programs, \$20.7 million for free tampons and pads, and \$24.1 million to fund the new child link register.

A further \$178 million has been allocated for the Program for Students with a Disability (PSD), which will only cover inflation and the increased number of students eligible for funding. This remains one of the key areas that the state government must address through the implementation of the new PSD model being currently trialled. Too many students who need additional help in the classroom are missing out – a significantly expanded PSD budget will be a necessity for future costings.

But the real assessment of the recurrent spending in the budget can only occur once a state-federal school funding deal has been completed, with the funding allocations to public and private schools transparently reported.

Disappointingly, the budget confirms the doubling of the funding allocated to private schools for building works to the tune of \$400 million over the next four years. This is money that should have gone to our public schools, given the current federal government's preferencing of non-government schools with both recurrent and capital works funding and the state government's primary obligation to fund public education.



ELAINE GILLESPIE, VICE PRESIDENT
TAFE AND ADULT PROVISION (TAP)

TAFE

Bright future for TAFE

We welcome the Andrews state government's pledge to make TAFE 'better than ever before' with its latest budget, which features \$69.7 million to continue and expand the rollout of the Free TAFE program, \$57m for building upgrades and new TAFE facilities, \$10.3m for apprenticeship initiatives and a further \$82.7m for new training places. Two early childhood qualifications will be added to the list of fee-free courses from 2020 to meet demand in the sector.

This is in stark contrast to the federal Morrison budget, released in April, which failed to mention TAFE once!

Victoria University has withdrawn its application to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to have its non-union agreement approved. It is a great outcome, reflecting the union's efforts to ensure members' conditions are maintained and improved. We have recommenced negotiations and welcome VU's commitment to honour the salary increase negotiated by the AEU through the standalone TAFE agreement (including back pay to 1 January 2019). We are focused on achieving an agreement for VU members as quickly as possible.

The new agreement at RMIT commenced on 6 June and we anticipate that the staff vote to approve the agreement at Federation University will be conducted very soon.

We know some members are struggling with the implementation of the new agreement in their workplaces – in particular, issues relating to workplans, qualifications and the definition of teaching.

We have been meeting with the Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) and DET to address these matters. We have continued to argue that teaching, which includes supervision, must be counted within the 800 hours, including practical assessment duties. It is clear to AEU members that competency-based training (not to mention duty of care) often involves teaching, supervising and assessing all at once.

We've also begun a detailed process of mapping qualifications, having obtained the evidence to show the procedure for VTA's non-agreed qualification assessment process is inadequate.

In other news, we are supporting members at one regional TAFE where staff have been asked to sign on-the-spot agreements amending significant aspects of their working arrangements.

We want to remind members that amendments to your regular roster, including the alteration of hours, work location or patterns of work, are considered 'major changes' under the agreement and as such require a minimum two weeks' notice.

If a manager requests a meeting, they must provide you with the agenda and purpose. If the purpose is to discuss changes to work arrangements or issues with your performance, you must be given at least 24 hours to prepare and you have the right to bring a support person to discussions. If you are presented with documents or contracts to sign, seek advice from our Member Support Centre (MSC) on 1800 013 379 and consider your options before signing.



CARA NIGHTINGALE, VICE PRESIDENT
EARLY CHILDHOOD

DISABILITY

Highs and lows for disability

Our campaign to gain access to portable long service leave (PLSL) for disability sector members has finally succeeded, with NDIS-funded entities now covered by the act from 1 January 2020. This means members can retain their LSL entitlements when changing jobs or working in the same centre under a new employer within the sector.

We also had a good win at Merrimu Disability, where some members were not receiving the correct pay. The service used a complicated system of 24-hour clocks, fractionalisation of hours, job codes and spelling requirements. Any mistakes resulted in staff not being paid, which forced them to make a claim for hardship to receive a late payment.

Despite initial meetings with management resulting in agreement that all staff should be paid their full entitlement on pay day, a lack of action forced the AEU to seek a conference with the Fair Work Commission. The day before this conference was due, we again sought to meet with management – this time succeeding in having timesheets simplified and agreement that staff would be notified of any errors so they could be fixed prior to the pay run. We also set up a review process so these issues don't recur in future.

On a less positive note, disability sector members have been neglected in both state and federal budgets.

We have been working to reach a multi-employer agreement (MEA) for members in the sector, but this can't be done without transitional funding from the Andrews government. We are continuing to put pressure on the government to achieve an MEA, which would maintain current wages and conditions under the NDIS. This requires a minimum \$45.6m in transitional support over three financial years from government.

Meanwhile, we'll continue to pressure the Morrison government to increase its investment in the NDIS. Without this state and federal support, the disability sector will struggle to attract and retain the skilled workforce that the NDIS and people with disability need.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

A hard-fought campaign

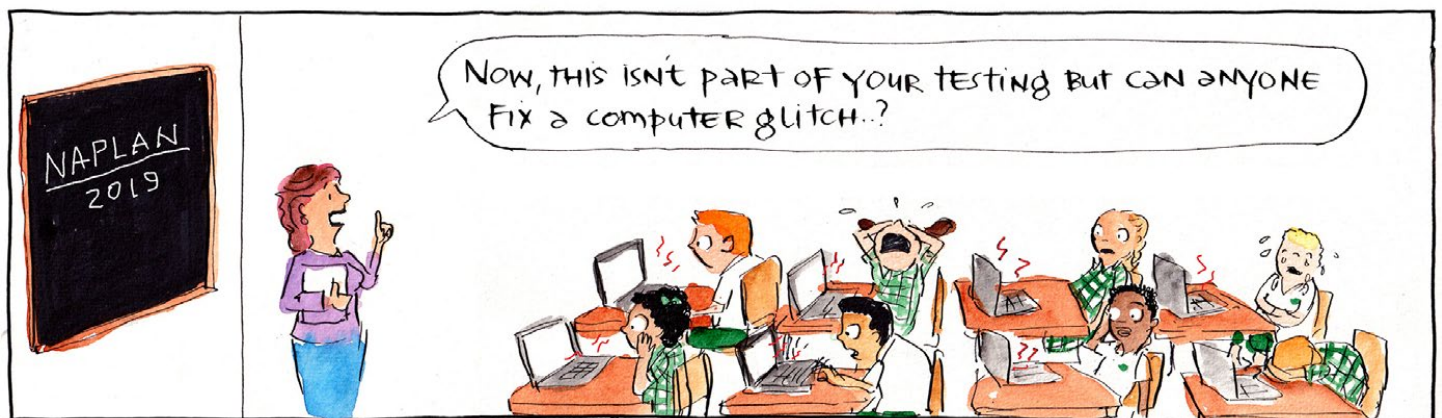
Early childhood members campaigned hard in the run up to the election in an attempt to secure permanent federal funding for two years of preschool education for every Australian child. Given that Labor was committed to funding preschool for all three and four-year-olds if voted in, the election result is a huge loss for our sector.

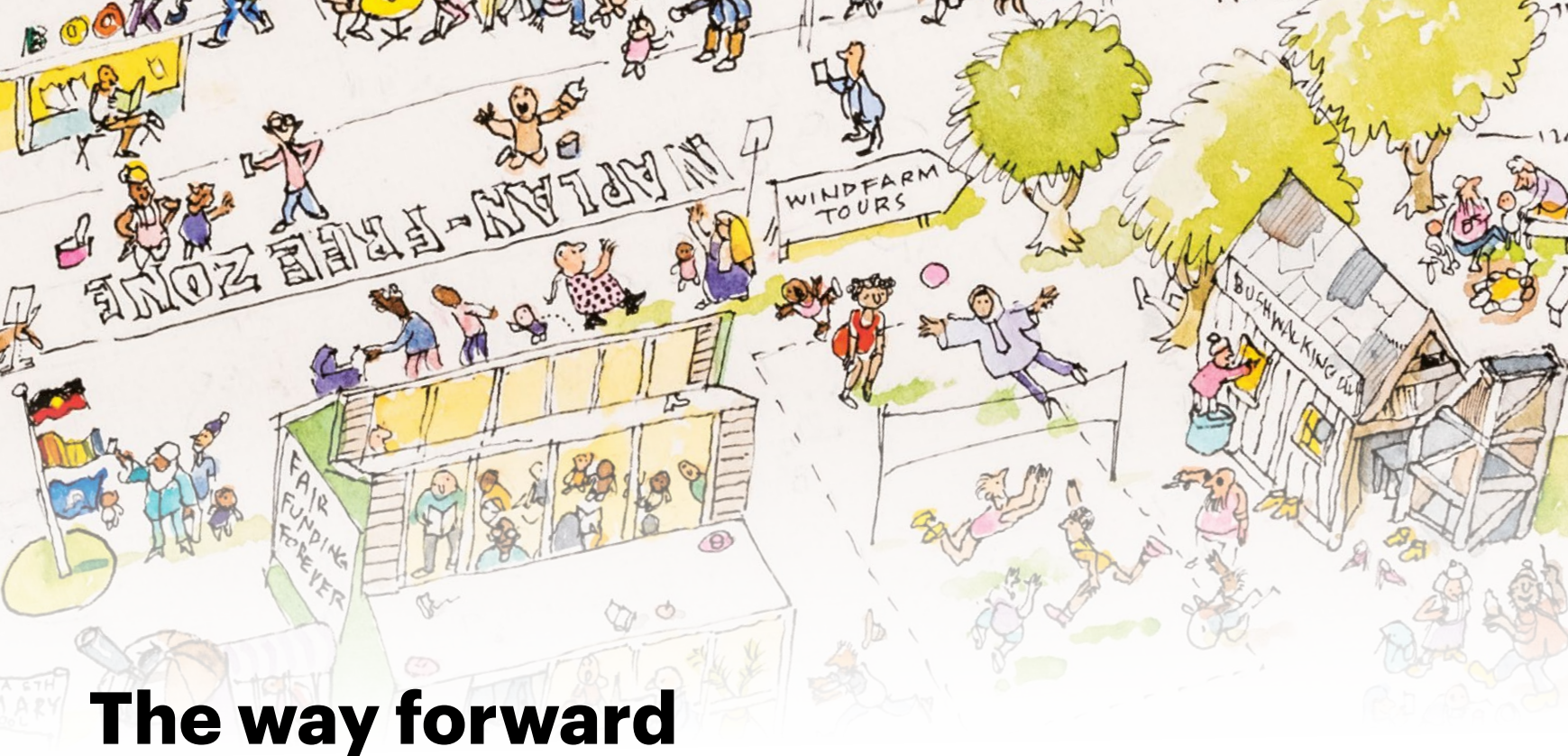
Early childhood members engaged in countless conversations with families, politicians and their local community, sharing personal stories about the benefits of two years of preschool education. These conversations help to shape attitudes and keep the importance of early childhood funding on the political agenda.

It's this sort of advocacy that allowed us to win the game-changing pledge from the Andrews government to fund 15 hours of three-year-old preschool for all Victorian children. We're delighted to see that pledge locked in with the latest state budget. This is the result of collective action and members should feel justifiably proud.

Federally, the picture is less rosy. A Morrison government means Commonwealth funding for four-year-old preschool is only guaranteed until the end of 2020. It also means three-year-old preschool will not be introduced nationally. Under Morrison, \$20 million has been cut from the National Quality Agenda. And, in contrast to Labor's plans, there will be no world-class early years education reform agenda and no investment in the workforce.

I urge all members to keep talking to their local federal MPs. Write letters, invite them into your services and lead the professional conversation about investment in early years education. Tell them why the federal government has a responsibility to permanently invest in four-year-old preschool and to extend that to three-year-olds; why it must properly fund the National Quality Agenda to ensure a rigorous assessment and rating system; and why it must develop a workforce plan to attract and retain teachers and educators into the sector. As advocates for children and our profession, we must keep fighting for every child's right to a high-quality preschool education.





The way forward

A disappointing election result will make life harder across all areas of public education. But there is much to be positive about.

There's no getting around it. The election result will have profound and negative impacts on our schools, TAFEs and early childhood centres. Bill Shorten's Labor had pledged to restore the \$14 billion cut from schools funding, make early childhood funding permanent for three and four-year-olds and guarantee two-thirds of federal government funding to TAFE.

We now find ourselves faced with a hostile Coalition government that has made no such commitments. There will be no fair funding for public schools, no secure federal funding for preschools and no support for TAFE. As our budget report shows, the Morrison government, re-elected with a narrow majority, has very different priorities.

For those of us who care about public education, this result comes as a blow. But there is much to be positive about. The AEU proved itself a political force to be reckoned with, mobilising thousands of our members to rally through the streets of Melbourne, to visit MPs or doorknock and phone voters, and to advocate for fairer funding across Victoria. Collectively, union members made over 38,000 phone calls, held over 350 campaigns actions and collected over 4,000 pledges in marginal seats. As part of the union-wide "mega phone bank", the AEU had more conversations with its members than any other union.

The key result of these efforts is that we managed to contribute to the downfall of two Liberal party MPs in the seats of Corangamite and Dunkley and helped ensure that the Liberals didn't pick up any new seats in Victoria. This means we now have two more electorates ready to support fair funding.

While Morrison's Liberals ran an almost exclusively negative campaign, the union movement and Labor were able to advance a positive, progressive agenda that clearly appealed to vast swathes of the electorate – in the face of an extraordinary spend by right-wing parties and relentless fear stories from the Newscorp press


on negative gearing and franking credits. The fact that Labor's campaign echoed the majority of our asks on public education bodes well for the future. They know ordinary Australians care about public education and we expect that to be reflected in Labor's upcoming plans for our sectors.

Campaigning across all sectors

Moving forward, the AEU will maintain its focus on sector-based campaigns.

In **EARLY CHILDHOOD**, we will keep campaigning for the Morrison government to commit to permanent funding for four-year-old preschool. Here in Victoria, the state Labor government will deliver 15 hours of three-year-old preschool over the next 10 years, as pledged by Andrews during last year's state election. If Labor had won the federal election, the Commonwealth would have funded a portion of those 15 hours. As it is, the Victorian government has been forced to cover the cost in its entirety.

For **SCHOOLS**, we expect the Andrews government to deliver its promised investment, despite tough negotiations with a hostile federal government that is not budging from its unfair funding deal. We will continue to fight for improved workloads through proper implementation of the agreement. And, of course, we will keep campaigning for a full review of NAPLAN and the halt of its disastrous online incarnation.

We will continue to apply pressure as the Andrews government rebuilds the public TAFE system. Last year's announcement of free TAFE courses has seen a huge influx of students into the sector and we want to ensure our members and their institutes have the resources they need to provide the highest quality education. We will also be working hard to implement the new agreements we've negotiated with standalone and dual sector TAFEs – Federation University, RMIT and Victoria University. 

Fighting force

Members came out in force in the lead-up to the election to fight for a better deal for our public schools, TAFE, early childhood and adult education sectors. Across Victoria, we door-knocked, phoned undecided voters, handed out leaflets at polling booths and championed our causes on social media.

We must never lose sight of what we want for our students – lower class sizes, more one-on-one support, first-class facilities and better access to resources. No matter the outcome on voting day – or the attitude of the current government – we can be proud of the many ways we continue to campaign for the values of public education, a more equitable society and a better deal for workers and their families. **AELU**



Another F for NAPLAN

The disastrous rollout of NAPLAN online offers further proof that the flawed test simply isn't fit for purpose, causing stress for teachers and students alike.

Frustrated teachers and stressed-out students were once more plagued by a catalogue of technical failures during online NAPLAN testing in May, amplifying calls for a national review of the process. We asked members

to let us know if they ran into trouble – and the reports came flooding in.

One of our members said it took 30 minutes to get all students logged onto the NAPLAN system for their writing assessment.

“This added to their angst as they were preparing to start, and they became more and more anxious as they waited,” she said, noting that even once logged on, they were often timed out and had to reconnect, with about a 90-second lag each time.

“During this time, the students lost their train of thought, and the flow of their writing was impacted,” she added. “Some students were locked out numerous times during the session and this time wasn’t added to the end.”

Of 98 students taking the Year 5 online writing test at a western Melbourne primary school, 88 encountered problems reconnecting to the server, with a lag of anywhere between 30 seconds and five minutes. “The test administrator couldn’t keep up with so many students experiencing disruptions,” said one teacher.

A teacher at another primary school noted similar problems with server connections, adding that, “On logging in, one student’s iPad reported that she was already logged on to another iPad, but she wasn’t.”

One Year 5/6 teacher said that a pupil had to change computers after repeatedly

receiving the “Time Finished” message before she even began. “That happened three or four times and then we had a long wait time for help desk support, meanwhile we had lots of stressed students and teachers too.”

She remained unconvinced that computer-based testing was appropriate for younger students, pointing out that most Year 5 students were, “key peckers, not touch typists,” and suggesting the NAPLAN test was inherently unfair on this basis.

“This situation would be highly challenging and extremely stressful for most adults. It’s totally unacceptable for an eight-year-old.”

A colleague said one anxious Year 3 student was reduced to tears twice during the reading session when their headphones stopped working. “They had been checked the day before. This situation would be highly challenging and extremely stressful for most adults. It’s totally unacceptable for an eight-year-old.”

It wasn’t just technical difficulties that made online NAPLAN testing problematic. According to a Year 9/10 music teacher, assessments for a composition and research assignment had been “significantly disrupted” by the sequestering of music classroom computers during the two weeks of NAPLAN testing.

Similarly, a primary teacher said that equipment shortages put pressure on her small school. Providing access to a reliable laptop for each student was almost impossible, with one teacher having to lend out their personal computer.


The so-called convenience factor of administering the test online proved to be a furphy, she said. Testing took, “about an hour and a half longer than paper-based testing in the past. Laptops kept freezing and students became very frustrated with the constant stoppages, which ended in tears and an incomplete test from an extremely capable student. Others appeared to be just answering questions without reading and flicking through the test just to get it over with.”

One teacher at a P-12 college said that its reliance on older, slower computers meant their school was at a significant disadvantage. “Our students have experienced a multitude of issues

such as delays from typing from keyboard to screen, to drop outs, and we found the system clunky,” he said.

“Some tests pop up immediately, while other students had to wait for several minutes. It’s not a level playing field.”

Reports from another school told us one Year 7 student lost an entire paragraph of their writing test during a particularly traumatic computer freeze.

The AEU remains opposed to whole-of-cohort standardised testing more broadly. The stress and pressure that the test – particularly its ill-conceived online incarnation – puts on teachers and students is unacceptable. In fact, the online test has simply amplified many of the underlying concerns we have with this high-stakes test. We will continue to push for a full national review, to which the federal Coalition government has so far refused to commit, and seek an immediate halt to the rollout of NAPLAN online. 

A tale of two budgets

The differences between the Liberal federal budget and the state Labor budget couldn't be more stark.



It's worth noting that federal Minister for Education Dan Tehan, who has kept his portfolio after the re-election of the Morrison government, didn't put out a single statement about public education throughout the entire campaign. This silence shouldn't be surprising, reflecting the total lack of interest by the Morrison government in addressing the key issues in public education.

The April budget, released at the start of the campaign, had similarly little to say about public education. TAFE didn't merit a single mention. There was also no attempt to address the Liberal government's devastating cuts to public school funding, while the early childhood sector was once more treated with disdain.

The global trend towards two years of preschool for every child was again ignored, while a last-minute agreement to fund four-year-old preschool for another year did nothing to alleviate funding uncertainty for parents, teachers and educators.

By contrast, the Andrews government's Victorian state budget, released at the end of May, offered a once-in-a-generation increase to three and four-year-old preschool programs, a funding increase to public schools and extra funding to continue the rebuild of TAFEs.

Schools

While Victorian public school students continue to be the lowest funded in the country after six years of federal cuts, recurring investment by the Andrews government has closed this funding gap by approximately \$1000 per student. Its latest budget continues its significant investment in new schools and refurbishments, including \$648 million for new schools and \$363 million

to upgrade existing school buildings, with an additional \$281 million for new relocatable classrooms and asbestos removal. Of course, the Andrews government cannot be expected to do the heavy lifting by itself. Recurrent funding for public schools must be prioritised in any new bilateral funding agreement with the federal government.

The Morrison government is currently attempting to coerce the Andrews government into signing a school funding deal that will leave public schools funded to 95% in the best-case scenario, while private schools are funded to 100% or more through the federal funding model.

Public school students will continue to be funded by the Commonwealth at a lower level than private school students and the gap will continue to widen over the next 10 years. That is not fair and not in the interests of our students or the community. The AEU has called for greater transparency around funding deals, which will highlight the failure of the Morrison government to fund public schools properly. Parents deserve to know both the state and federal government's overall contributions to all schools across all sectors. At present, there is insufficient accountability for the expenditure of public funds allocated to non-government schools.

As a result of federal cuts, students in Victorian classrooms are currently missing out on extra one-on-one learning, additional literacy and numeracy programs, specialist support for those students with disability or with mental health issues, and smaller class sizes.

Early childhood

The budget reinforces the state government's commitment to deliver

on Victoria's contribution to 15 hours of preschool for all three and four-year-old children. This is an important and valuable investment in our children's future and in the future of this state – particularly in the face of continued funding uncertainty from the Morrison government.


In line with last year's election promise, the Andrews Labor government has unveiled a record \$1 billion investment in early childhood education, including \$880 million for its new three-year-old preschool program.

The Andrews government is to be commended for committing to investment in workforce and infrastructure in a comprehensive package of funding for early childhood education.

TAFE funding

More than 19,000 students across the state have enrolled in the free TAFE courses Andrews announced in last year's state budget, driving a doubling of commencements for those courses compared to the same time last year.

This year's budget includes \$69.7 million to expand the free TAFE list (with \$28.5 million to add two early childhood courses), \$82.7 million for new training places and \$10.3 million for apprenticeship initiatives. There's also \$57 million to upgrade and rebuild facilities, and \$300 million towards building new facilities.

While this budget continues to assist our TAFEs to get back on track, the union will campaign to ensure at least 70% of state government investment in vocational education and training goes directly to our public TAFEs. 

Union wins

Wins we've had and gains we've made for our members across Victoria

Taking a stand on TAFE conditions

When TAFE member Robyn Stanton-Long lodged a complaint against her manager at Federation Training, she had no idea she would spend the next two years fighting her employer on a charge of wrongful dismissal.

"Not in my wildest dreams did I think I'd be sacked," Robyn says. "There was plenty of work. It was just a personal thing in the end. My manager wanted me gone because I'd complained."

When she was dismissed in February 2017, Robyn had been working at Federation Training for the best part of a decade. Coming from a background in retail, she had originally been hired to teach in her area, but instead developed a program teaching literacy and numeracy to migrant women.

When she first began work, there were already signs she was entering TAFE at a challenging time for the sector. "I really did come in at the start of the decline, the start of all the mass sackings and cutting of courses. It was a bit of a baptism of fire. But if you take away the nonsense of management, the camaraderie with your fellow teachers means TAFE is a great place to work. I went into a really welcoming, great bunch of teachers."

She was particularly unhappy with a shift in management focus that increasingly took teachers away from the classroom. "We were told at one stage that teaching was secondary to what we did. At least 60% of our time was admin and compliance. If we had time left over, we could teach."

Robyn was moved from one campus to another and then, without consultation, was shifted sideways from teaching into marketing. When she refused this last shift, her manager brought in another teacher to take her classes and confined Robyn to her desk. Aware that other teachers were also being treated poorly, Robyn wrote to the CEO, outlining her concerns about her manager. She was sacked the next day.

"The women I was working with at the time, most of whom weren't in the union, weren't game to make a complaint about him. They were worried about losing their jobs. I probably should have been a bit more worried about losing my job. Hindsight is a wonderful thing."

As soon as she recovered from the shock of being fired, Robyn journeyed in to AEU headquarters, where she met with industrial officer Michael McIver. At that time, her only concern was to get back the job she loved. A quick riffle through the years of correspondence Robyn had kept soon made it clear she had a case beyond wrongful dismissal. There were widespread breaches of the MEA by Federation Training, including hiring Robyn as a casual for more than 720 hours in 2014 and engaging her as a "maximum term" employee rather than a genuine fixed-term employee.

"Michael was fantastic," Robyn says, remembering her weepy first visit. "Poor Michael and his tissue box! To know there was



AEU legal team celebrating a major victory outside the Federal court in Melbourne. L-R: Deputy Vice President of TAP Phil Smith, Michael McIver, Robyn Stanton-Long and counsel Fiona Knowles.

someone who had so much experience and expertise – that was great. I went home that night feeling much better."

Federation Training initially offered Robyn a measly \$1000 in compensation, which later rose to \$11,000 and finally \$40,000. Aware that this would cover her lost wages, Robyn was briefly tempted to accept.

"But I thought, this is just pin money to them. What have they learned? Nothing. By then I was too determined and bloody-minded. I thought we should just fight it all the way."

Almost two years later, the judge ruled that Federation Training had committed 12 contraventions of the Fair Work Act, Fair Work Regulations, the 2015 TAFE MEA and the 2009 TAFE MBA and must pay Robyn \$57,000 in compensation. They were also ordered to pay \$200,550 in penalties (a payment split between AEU and Robyn). This is thought to be the largest award of penalties against an employer in a case of this kind brought by a union.

"I burst into tears," Robyn says. "It was wonderful. My greatest moment was when the first judgement came in and said I was a fair and honest witness. I didn't care then whether I got \$10,000. It didn't matter. To be vindicated that way, to be believed, was all that was important."

Robyn says she hopes that other members will be encouraged by her win and know they have the support they need to stand up for themselves if they suspect their institution isn't following the agreement.

"You shouldn't have to fight your employer every pay day, but it's very common. That's what made me stay true to this fight. What's the point in having an MEA if nobody abides by it?"

"My win shows some TAFEs are breaking the rules. I hope people reading this know that you might feel that you can't do anything, that the little person can't do anything. But that's why we have unions, because we're not individuals. We're a collective."

Settlements and agreements

MICHAEL MCIVER, AEU INDUSTRIAL OFFICER

At the start of this year, the industrial workgroup welcomed a new, highly experienced industrial relations practitioner, Renee Mooney. Renee has wasted no time in achieving outcomes for members. In Renee's first application – an appeal to the merit protection board for a member whose employment was annulled during her probationary period – she won an order that the member be reinstated to the teaching service.

Towards the end of last year and the start of this year, we have assisted a number of dismissed members. Some have been settled favourably and others are progressing through the Fair Work Commission, Disciplinary Appeals Board or being prepared for the Fair Work Commission. Some settlements include:

- approximately \$17,000 for a dismissed member
- a substantial settlement for a member's reasonable notice claim
- approximately six months' wages for an early childhood member (including unpaid entitlements).

The industrial team has also been busy with a bargaining dispute at Victoria University. VU put an enterprise agreement out to vote in December 2018 without the agreement of the AEU.

The AEU alleged that VU misled employees about the terms of the proposed agreement (particularly in relation to attendance time). The union opposed the employer's attempts to approve the agreement at the Fair Work Commission and sought to force the employer back to the bargaining table. Ultimately, management returned to negotiations and the AEU is confident of achieving an improved outcome for members at Victoria University.

A win without the pain of court

LISA PAUL, ADVICELINE INJURY LAWYERS

Adviceline Injury Lawyers recently resolved a member's claim for 'pain and suffering' compensation quickly, and without the need to go to court.

The AEU member was an education support worker at a special school. She was injured as a result of numerous physical assaults by a particularly violent student, but the most debilitating consequence was the psychological impact. Sadly, the worker was unable to recover from the post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety caused by the assaults.

A Serious Injury Certificate was granted but at a settlement conference the lawyers for DET's insurers denied the school was responsible and refused to make any offers of compensation. As partner at Adviceline, I maintained that the school was liable for the injuries and was willing to proceed to court on that basis. Thankfully, the member's reasonable settlement offer was accepted by the school and court proceedings did not commence.

At Adviceline, we strongly believe that all teachers and staff must be protected from violence – including those working with special needs children.

Adviceline Injury Lawyers, the personal injury division of Holding Redlich, is AEU's approved provider of legal assistance to members with workplace injury or illness, where legal representation is required. The AEU has a proud, longstanding relationship with Adviceline. AEU members must be formally referred to Adviceline by the AEU, and enter into an agreement with the union about the conduct of their case.

Injured at work? We can help.

For free advice directly from a lawyer, call (03) 9321 9988.

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Know your limits

Agreements the union has won for school and TAFE employees provide almost unprecedented limits around workload, writes AEU industrial officer MICHAEL MCIVER.

A central feature of the employer and employee relationship is the imbalance of power that exists between them. At the heart of this imbalance is the doctrine of “managerial prerogative”. It holds that:

- an employer has the right to manage their own business in their own way
- an industrial tribunal (such as the Fair Work Commission) will not intervene with this right unless it is satisfied that intervention is justified because, in the exercise of this right, the employer has made unjust or unreasonable demands.

As a result of this doctrine, an employee must follow the lawful and reasonable directions of an employer. An employee also has a duty to cooperate with an employer.

One way in which unions, including the AEU, seek to redress this imbalance is to negotiate terms in enterprise agreements that limit the power of an employer to dictate what an employee must do. For example, unions have won limits on the number of hours an employer can demand that an employee work.

However, it is rare to find limits in agreements on what duties an employer can demand that an employee perform. And yet, the Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2017 (**VGSA**) and the Victorian TAFE Teaching Staff Agreement 2018 (**MEA**) are two enterprise agreements that, at their heart, do just that. Both contain an unusual amount of regulation around what duties employers can require employees to do.

In light of the professional responsibilities of teachers, and the

demands placed on them, it is necessary to place firm limits on employers.

The VGSA does this with the 30+8 model. Within the 38 hours of the working week, there is a limit of 30 hours per week for work that is directly related to teaching and learning – only 20 hours (secondary teachers) and 22.5 hours (primary teachers) can be face-to-face teaching.

There is a limit of eight hours a week for “other activities”, meaning duties not directly to teaching.

The 30+8 model operates in conjunction with other parts of the VGSA. At the front end of the model, it presupposes consultation with sub-branches and effective long-term planning in order for there to be professional discussions about the work that is required of teachers.

In the 18 months since the VGSA has been operating, the AEU has been monitoring the operation of the implementation of the 30+8 model. The union has observed that, at some schools, the provisions of the VGSA are being interpreted in an opportunistic way, including meetings being scheduled within the ‘30’ rather than within the ‘8’. We are working with sub-branches to gather evidence as to how the 30+8 model is working in practice.

Similarly in TAFE, the MEA also provides for a work allocation model that provides express limits on what duties an employer can require an employee to do.

The MEA provides for a wide definition of teaching, including direct student instruction and educational delivery that is required for curricular or pastoral functions.

In light of the professional responsibilities of teachers, and the demands placed on them, it is necessary to place firm limits on employers.

For each hour of teaching – capped at 800 hours a year – a teacher should be allocated half an hour for preparation, planning, curriculum development and assessment. This means that teaching and duties directly related to that teaching is capped at 1,200 hours per year.

There are additional provisions for teaching-related duties and non-teaching duties (capped at 160 hours per year).

Without these workload provisions, the power of employers to direct employees would be largely unfettered. Compliance with the provisions will not happen automatically. In the first instance, it requires collegiate discussions at the workplace to set required duties and the time allocated for them.

Where that is not possible, or the limits are exceeded, it will be necessary to seek compliance by making claims.

AEU regional meetings are a great way for members and sub-branch reps to raise issues, hear from other members and offer feedback to the union. All members are encouraged to attend their local meeting. See the schedule at aeuvic.asn.au/regional



COMMENT

The right sort of teacher

Forcing teachers into a one-size-fits-all model prevents them from doing their best work, NED MANNING writes.

When I first started teaching in the early 1970s, I tried to be the right sort of teacher. I was very young. Barely 22. I put on my mauve body-shirt and wide purple tie and walked into Tenterfield High School trying to pretend I knew what I was doing. I had the words of the department's man ringing in my ears. "Forget all this airy-fairy nonsense you've heard at university. Your place is at the bottom of the pile. My advice to you is shut up and do as you are told. In ten years' time you might become a good teacher."

For a few weeks, I tried to follow his words, but before long I realised that I couldn't be a standard-order teacher. I had to relax and be myself. From that moment on, I began learning how to teach.

Because it was the 70s – and I was in one of the smallest and most remote high schools in the state – I was pretty much able to do my own thing. I threw Wordsworth out the window and taught Cat Stevens (as Yusef Islam was called then). I encouraged my students to draft and perform scripts; to write about what they felt and experienced and not worry too much about grammar and spelling.

While I am the first to admit I went a bit too far with this, the fact is I got kids who hated writing to write. I took my class into the park and they performed *Jabberwocky* in the rotunda. I coached the rugby league team and drove a car-load of kids to their homes scattered around the district every night after footy training.

Looking back, I have to concede I was a very opinionated 22-year-old, sure he knew anything and everything – and yet, the fact is I had a lot of success with those students. And the reason for that was the level of professional autonomy I was given.

Or, perhaps more accurately, the level of professional autonomy I took.

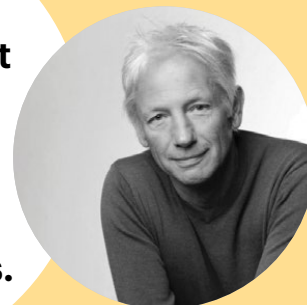
I wasn't the only one. A group of young teachers at Tenterfield High, unshackled from rigid course prescriptions and excessive paperwork, were free to express themselves and change the lives of their students in ways that would be almost impossible today.

These days, I find I spend as much time filling in forms as I do preparing lessons. I am told that this is about 'accountability'. In my humble opinion, there was a lot of accountability at Tenterfield. If you didn't do your job, the kids tore you apart!

Now, if I have a class that is struggling with the curriculum, I am not only forbidden from wavering from it, I have to prove I haven't wavered by filling in reams of paperwork. The message seems to be that if the admin is up to scratch, then I must be doing my job. The fact that many of my students might be disengaged doesn't matter. What matters is that someone can point to the paperwork and 'prove' that they have been *taught*.

The problem is that teaching isn't a 'one-size-fits-all' profession. In any one class, the needs of the students may vary greatly. Trying to standardise them or force square pegs into round holes is not serving anyone, except the politicians and bureaucrats who point to the paperwork as evidence of success. The fact is that Australian schools are lagging behind in the international league tables, while the most lauded education system on the planet (Finland's) eschews standardisation in favour of gearing its teaching to students' individual needs. Sadly, this is a fact that seems to have escaped most Australian politicians.

In having to meet increasingly narrow standards, we are no longer able to meet our students' needs.



I have witnessed, first hand, the dire consequences of putting unnatural pressure on teenagers at the end of their high-school careers by forcing them to reach certain standards. The focus on academic achievement over personal development makes that last year at school a nightmare for many kids – and their parents. Year 12 students are so driven by academic success they opt out of all the activities that, once upon a time, made their last year at school so memorable.

Sadly, teachers are now obliged to spend more time on administration than providing pastoral care and guidance. Instead of helping students learn to express themselves, teachers are overloaded with 'accountability' measures. They don't have time to coach sporting teams or direct plays. School reports have become so standardised they leave no room for meaningful, individual comment. Rather than develop the whole person, we are focusing on a very limited version – that tiny part of a student that can be quantified within one-size-fits-all standards.

In short, the biggest obstacle to teaching is having to prove that we're doing it. A large part of being a good teacher is the ability to draw on your own unique abilities and experiences to build a connection with students; to put the content in a context they can understand. Meeting students' needs means giving teachers the professional autonomy to be themselves, free of endless paperwork and constrictive reporting models. Without this, we might be ticking all the right boxes but we are failing our students.

Ned Manning's memoir *Playground Duty* is published by NewSouth Books.



GROWING A BETTER FUTURE

New film *2040* argues that education and collective action offer our best chance of tackling climate change, STEPHEN A RUSSELL reports.



“I want to be able to tell my daughter solutions exist, if enough of us get motivated. That her generation, with our help, can actually do it.”

A community garden out the back of a childcare centre in West Brunswick is the perfect spot to have a chat with director Damon Gameau about his new documentary *2040*.

On the one hand, the unfeasibly sunny late-Autumn morning is a stark reminder of the frighteningly weather-bending effects of the climate crisis. On the other, the West Brunswick Community Garden and Food Forest – a volunteer-run effort that uses coffee grounds from local cafes along with residential food scraps and paper waste – is a reassuring example of positive action to combat it.

The fact that the gardens are attached to a childcare centre also highlights the bigger message that educating kids – and getting them to work on the land – is our best hope for the future.

Our members won't be surprised to learn that Gameau (who also directed *That Sugar Film*) says education will be key to saving the planet. For one thing, UN research suggests that educated girls with reliable access to health services are likely to have fewer children, later, significantly reducing the impact on the planet by about 1 billion people by 2050.

“That was staggering,” Gameau says. “It’s a no brainer. Let’s do it now.”

Rather than curl up into a ball and despair at the doom and gloom pronouncements on the nightly news, Gameau decided to seek real-world solutions already in motion, both here in Australia and across the globe. Embarking on a (carbon offset) three-year trip, he went looking for ideas that could turn things around and secure a healthier planet by the time his five-year-old daughter Velvet turns 21.

The ideas featured in the resultant film include Australian farmers re-embracing

ancient ways of farming the land that rely on animals grazing freely rather than constantly breaking up the soil, which releases harmful carbon and leaves it unable to sequester more.

There are seaweed farms that can provide food for livestock and humans alike while cooling the overheating oceans and supplying biofuel. And there are the Bangladeshi villages de-centralising energy supply, embracing micro solar grids so neighbouring houses can share with each other, using only what energy they need.

“That action narrative has been sorely lacking from the mainstream and I guess *2040* was just a motivation to see if there were things we could do, because I want to be able to tell my daughter solutions exist, if enough of us get motivated. That her generation, with our help, can actually do it.”

It isn't the first time Gameau has been inspired by his daughter. The actor-turned-director hit on the idea for 2014's *That Sugar Film* when his wife Zoe was pregnant with Velvet. Turned on to healthy eating, he wanted to educate audiences about the hidden sugars in our food. Enlisting a host of celebrities including Hugh Jackman and Stephen Fry, the film was a great example of using comedy and an approachable personality to get people thinking about their diets and making achievable, incremental change without once feeling they were being lectured at.

Making for a great classroom resource, the documentary was accompanied by an internet-driven follow-through campaign, That Sugar Movement, which helped viewers clue themselves up.

There's a similar push behind *2040*, dubbed The Regeneration Movement,


which is driven by an easy-to-use website, whatsyour2040.com. The site helps prosecute the argument we can all bring about change in small but achievable ways.

Doing so involves bringing everyone along with us, showing them what options already exist in their local communities. Most importantly, it means not simply pointing the finger at people living in mining communities, for example, who have genuine concerns about their livelihoods.

“We've got to be careful we don't demonise the people that didn't get involved [in the recent election],” Gameau says. “What happened was that they weren't sold the narrative well enough, in the sense that these solutions can actually provide security and jobs and strengthen communities. That narrative got lost, and I think people got a bit scared of the change.”

Gameau says collective action is crucial. We need to break down binaries and communicate better with each other, whatever our differences, to build a brighter future together. “The onus has always been on people to keep going, to teach the leaders how to lead on certain issues, and never has that been more relevant than right now.”

Speaking to school students the world over has filled him with hope, he says. “The response by kids has been great. They don't understand why we aren't getting the leadership we deserve and are frustrated that some adults don't seem to care about their future.

“We need people to step up. This is a galvanising moment where everyone has to find their agency even more and make it happen at a local level. That's how changes happen throughout history.” 



The perfect Finnish

PHOTO: MICHAEL HARSANYI

Having revolutionised school education in Finland, Pasi Sahlberg has come to Australia to help us change the conversation about equity, play and trust in teachers. MYKE BARTLETT reports.

In education terms, Finland is so hot right now. The small Nordic country surprised the rest of the world when the first Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results in 2000 revealed Finnish youth to be the best young readers in the world. By 2006, Finland was first out of 57 countries (and a few cities) in science.

This was all the more surprising considering Finland was taking an approach to education that went against prevailing trends for weightier curriculum in favour of shorter days, lighter backpacks and a much greater focus on play. In other words, it seemed they had topped the charts without even trying.

As director general of the Ministry of Education in Finland, Pasi Sahlberg was one of those responsible for this shift in pedagogy. Having improved the lives of students and teachers alike in his home country, the author and former teacher made the somewhat surprising decision to educate his two young sons on the

other side of the world, after accepting the role as professor of education policy at Sydney's Gonski Institute. He isn't backward when it comes to spelling out the difference between schools here and at home.

"I think the biggest difference with Australian primary schools is [teacher] workload," Sahlberg says. "The whole system is expecting more, not in terms of quality of work, but quantity of work."

It isn't just the schools expecting more, he says, but rather a culture in which many Australian parents tend to judge their children's progress in purely academic terms.

"In the first grade, you hear Australian parents talking about NAPLAN, which I find strange. At home it's much more about happiness and wellbeing and making friends."

Since taking up office at the Gonski Institute, Sahlberg has been very critical of the way NAPLAN is used by governments and parents alike. While he believes some

form of standardised testing is essential for making good policy, he would prefer to see a sample-based model used, with results that couldn't be abused as a de facto league table.

"Parents would be primarily informed by the assessments schools are doing. I think there's a need in Australia to trust much more in teachers' judgement. That trust is currently very weak, because most parents seem to think the best judgement of their child's learning comes from NAPLAN, which is not the case."

Trust in teachers is a key issue for Sahlberg when it comes to improving our schools. The current Australian system too often interferes with the vital sense of autonomy teachers need to do their job to the best of their abilities – and to find satisfaction in doing it.

There are three critical elements that make teaching an autonomous, independent profession, Sahlberg says. One is being able to make decisions about curriculum planning: what teachers teach and in what order. The second is pedagogy: the freedom to choose the best way to teach. The third is assessment: measuring the progress of student learning.

“Something like NAPLAN works against all three of these critical elements. The whole teacher, their professional identity and their ethos all suffer when the testing works against them.”

The solution, Sahlberg says, is to make it clear to everyone that teachers possess the same sort of professionalism as workers from careers such as law and medicine. Part of the answer to that is to make it more difficult to gain entry to the profession – an idea that runs counter to the conservative notion (one that fuels initiatives such as Teach For Australia) that we need to make it easier for anyone to become a teacher. In Finland, every teacher is required to have a master’s degree.

“The situation at present is that anybody can get into teaching. That would be lethal for the legal or medical professions. When you have the luxury of a culture where teachers are trusted as professionals, it spreads throughout the society, including to children and young people. If parents think anybody can teach and the teachers in a school are nothing special, the kids will learn that from them. They will treat teachers in the same way.”

He isn’t worried that more rigorous entry standards will prevent young people applying, leading to the sort of teacher shortage that tends to panic right-wing media.

“When we require a more rigorous degree, it will attract higher quality candidates to consider teaching. Countries all around the world are currently redesigning teacher education to make entry into the profession harder. Young people don’t look for the easy way out, they look for things that very few people can do.”

Of course, fair funding will play a key role in making teaching more desirable. Sahlberg is concerned by the number of teachers who drop out of the profession within the first five years, leading to a dearth of experience and knowledge. If higher salaries would help stem that exodus, he would be in favour of

governments spending more on wages. But his main concern is the lack of fair funding across the Australian school system.

Non-government schools often receive more public money than government schools, despite the fact that government schools accommodate the vast majority of indigenous children and 85% of students with special needs, who would benefit most from increased funding.

Sahlberg stands by the first Gonski report, which pointed out that federal money was not being spent where it was actually needed.

“It’s going to be very difficult to move the needle towards more equitable education in Australia unless the funding somehow changes towards needs-based funding,” he says. “Australia has one of the most segregated education systems in the world, with the biggest proportion of disadvantaged children going to disadvantaged schools than any other country.”

As far as he’s concerned, addressing this inequity will be essential if Australia genuinely wants to improve its education results. Instead of encouraging teachers to limit their teaching to fit the narrow demands of the NAPLAN test – essentially gaming the system – governments should commit to fair, needs-based funding and address the root causes. Sahlberg is modest about the Gonski Institute’s chances of fixing the system, but says it has a key role to play in changing the conversation about school education in this country.

“We can try to change the conversation and the quality of public debate. Most educators

don’t actually know how the money is spent or what’s happening in other countries. What the OECD is now saying is that when equity doesn’t improve, improving the quality of learning outcomes becomes very difficult. For Australia, investing heavily in improving equity will be the best way to improve the learning outcomes for everyone in the system.”

He is confident that a change is coming. When I ask him what he hopes Australian schools will look like in five years time, should he be successful, his vision is clear.

“In five years from now, if I’m successful in what I want to do, there will be many more schools in Australia who allow their children to have more time to play, more time to themselves and who are less concerned about academic achievement.

“I hope there will be more communities where parents and elders will realise that equity is the way forward. My hope and expectation is that the time will come.” ^{AEU}

Investing heavily in improving equity will be the best way to improve the learning outcomes for everyone in the system.



Why all the fuss about Finland?

PHOTO: ISTOCK

We often hear about the high achievements of students in Finland. Teacher **SASCHA STEINBECK** shares the insights she gained after spending time observing the world-leading system.

receive a small payment for having one parent remain at home until their child is four. However, every child from the age of one has a right to a place at their local early childhood education and care centre. At these centres, each child has an individual learning plan, and play-based learning experiences are planned by a team of teachers and school assistants. Educators document their observations of children's interests and skills and extend their learning using this information.

There is a multitude of research that indicates the long-term benefits of early intervention and quality early childhood education on student outcomes. When children play, they are developing their oral language and communication skills, curiosity, social and emotional skills, gross and fine motor skills, critical thinking, collaboration, literacy and numeracy skills, and are able to engage in personal interest projects.

So why, when we discuss Finland's PISA results, are we not linking these to the high-quality early childhood education its children receive?

Last September, I was fortunate enough to travel to Finland to study the Finnish education system after winning the Public Education Foundation's First State Super Teacher Scholarship. Motivated by my passion for play-based learning, I wanted to gather evidence to support my continued advocacy for play to be considered a 21st century pedagogy that should be firmly established within the foundation years of schooling in Australia.

When we hear about Finnish education, the common catch-cry is: "Finnish children don't begin formal schooling until the age of seven!" This is simply not true. Children in Finland attend a full year of compulsory play-based education – in classes, at schools, with their peers – at the age of six. Children are in classrooms with teachers and school assistants, following a schedule of learning activities. As a primary school teacher and early childhood educator, I consider this to be formal education.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED



Finnish children clamber over boulders at a forest school.

Early intervention

Early childhood education is free for most families in Finland, with cost determined on a sliding scale according to income. The most any family will pay for full-time childcare is around AUD\$600 per month. For children of families with low socio-economic status, this means accessing early childhood education entirely free from the age of one.

In Finland, the attitude is: “A child does not choose the family they are born into.” As such, each child deserves full access to the support and early interventions they require to be healthy, happy and safe. From birth, families regularly visit community health centres for regular check-ups. If a child is exhibiting challenging behaviours, developmental delays or signs of special needs such as autism or a speech and language impairment, families can access free psychological assessments and consultations with specialists.

Ratios

Staff-student ratios in Finland are low in comparison to other countries, including Australia. In Finland, it is common to have 20 students in most classes. The common view is that: “Of course class size makes a difference – we *know* this as teachers.” Every pre-primary class (six-year-olds) has one teacher and one school assistant. In early childhood education and care centres, staff student ratios are one adult to four for babies (0–2) and one adult to eight for three- to six-year-olds.

It is typical for a class to have the same teacher throughout primary school. This way, the teacher comes to thoroughly understand how each student learns and there is strong incentive for families and teachers to build positive and respectful relationships.

It also eliminates the time-consuming process of determining new class

structures year by year and of spending much of the first term getting to know your new class and working out how to best accommodate individual and family needs.

From the age of seven, when children begin Year 1, they attend school for four to five short, sharp, well-structured lessons, with a 15-minute play break after each. They also share a free, hot, healthy lunch before finishing their school day around 1pm to spend the afternoon playing or engaged in after-school activities.

Why are we not linking Finland's PISA results to the high-quality early childhood education its children receive?

No bad teachers

Another Finnish view is: “There are no bad teachers.” If a teacher is having trouble, they are asked: “What do you need and how can we support you?” Instead of blaming teachers, it is accepted that individuals may require more support and/or development at different times in their careers, provided in a positive, non-judgmental way.

“All teachers have a master’s degree,” is also often emphasised as central to Finland’s educational success. Teachers do need a master’s degree in a subject area. However, an individual can teach a class or be a relief teacher without a teaching qualification – including, at the principal’s discretion, university students studying to be teachers – though those without a degree are not paid the equivalent wage of a qualified teacher.


The teacher training school I visited in Rovaniemi, connected to the local university, welcomed approximately 80 student-teachers at a time each term. There, they completed their practicums in groups of three or four per class, observing and providing feedback to one another, with the support of their mentor teacher, with notable collegiality and professionalism.

No benchmarks

In Finland, there are no benchmarks for a child’s education. There is an understanding that each child will develop differently and so there is no pressure to force children to learn faster or earlier than they are able. In fact, there is a strong drive not to cause educational stress for children by pushing them to work at levels for which they are not developmentally ready.

As such, teachers are not caught up in trying to meet specific benchmarks to justify their own performance as educators. Each child is taught at the level they are at and celebrated for what they achieve. Learning is made fun – and encouraging a love of learning and a positive attitude towards education is clearly documented within the curriculum.

All children are provided with the opportunity to play regularly throughout the day during their early childhood, pre-primary and primary education. Integrated with explicit, structured lessons, play can deliver all of the 21st century learning skills in the most effective way: enhancing curiosity, communication, creativity, collaboration, critical thinking skills, literacy, numeracy and even digital technology skills.

The Finns protect childhood as a time that should be joyful and stress-free. They understand the research behind play-based learning and recognise that providing quality play in the early years will have a strong positive effect on children’s academic and social outcomes in the future. So, given all the evidence, why are we still not embracing play-based learning consistently across Australia throughout the foundation years of schooling? 

School for life

Philosophy can sometimes be dismissed as an inessential subject, but Victorian schools are finding it has a crucial impact on students and their community, writes MYKE BARTLETT.

As every teacher knows, getting students to answer simple questions can be a hard task. So it's encouraging (and a little surprising) to see how enthusiastically Northcote High School teacher Elliot Wall's Year 11 class tackle questions that don't have an easy answer.

Today, his philosophy students are discussing whether or not there is a god as part of their community of inquiry – a structured form of argument, where ideas are interrogated, built upon or dismantled, without the emotion that often characterises disagreement. As with most philosophical discussions, it isn't the answer that is important, but how well the questions are asked.

"The obvious benefits of philosophy that I always talk about with my students are the critical thinking skills," Elliot says. "The ability to communicate clearly, the ability to distinguish between a logical and well-reasoned argument and a poor argument.

"In this age of fake news, it's particularly important to be teaching students to be able to think for themselves and ask questions."

While he admits some parents can see VCE philosophy as being impractical or lacking a career-focus, Elliot says the skills it teaches are vital to creating engaged citizens ready to cope with a rapidly changing world – and job market.

“There’s a big trend in education towards transferable skills and philosophy is a big part of that. What is a more transferable skill than being able to think for yourself?”

“There’s a big trend in education towards transferable skills and philosophy is a big part of that. What is a more transferable skill than being able to think for yourself? I think these are highly practical skills.”

Practicality aside, the teaching of philosophy reflects another trend in education towards mental health and wellbeing – teaching the ‘whole student’, rather than simply imparting academic knowledge. Philosophy might prepare students for the workplace, but it can also prepare them more broadly for adulthood, in a way other subjects would struggle to match.

“I say to my Year 12 students, ‘Imagine that at 18 years old, you’ve figured out what a good life is. You can spend the rest of your life just going and living it. You’ve got a big head start on everyone else.’”

Elliot stresses he is being somewhat facetious with this comment; few students will have worked out exactly what a good life is by the time they graduate from high school. But there’s little doubt that early exposure to different ways of thinking and well-established theories about what a good life looks like will give them an advantage in making healthy decisions. Little wonder then that an increasing number of primary schools are also building philosophy into the curriculum.

One such school is St Kilda Park Primary School (SKIPPS), where a Philosophy for Children program has been running for well over a decade. Students at all levels spend an hour a week on philosophical matters, from ‘community of inquiry’ projects to discussing ethics or unpacking ideas and concepts from storybooks.

“Even in foundation, they’ll start learning about asking good questions and then dig into topics like what friendship is,” says SKIPPS principal Neil Scott. “That allows us to develop social skills and emotional awareness.”

Last term, teachers used the brain-bending drawings featured at the NGV International’s MC Escher exhibition to not only inspire creative works of art, but to stimulate rich philosophical discussions. As with Northcote High, SKIPPS also takes part in the annual Philothon, organised by the Victorian Association for Philosophy in Schools. Unlike a debating contest, participants aren’t rewarded for winning arguments but for how well they’ve dug into the topic.

Neil says that rather than treating philosophy as a subject in its own right, the school treats it as something that reflects its core values. While there are definite academic benefits, philosophy is a reminder that the impact of good teaching goes well beyond the report card – or NAPLAN results. “It’s very easy as a principal of a primary school to obsess over NAPLAN results, and we’re certainly judged on those,” Neil says. “I’m not saying NAPLAN is without value, but we do accept it’s a fairly narrow way of assessing a fairly narrow set of skills.

“We need to keep our eye on the larger picture, which is being proud of the sort of adults our students go on to become, beyond how well they can read or write. I think philosophy is a really good way of allowing that to happen.”

The success of this approach can be measured in the reports Neil receives about former SKIPPS students from neighbouring high schools. “The feedback

we get from secondary school principals is that they can tell our students apart, because they have that approach of being good at reasoning, thinking things through and putting forward arguments.”

This approach to education is shared by the school community at large, Neil says. He feels parents would generally rather the school produce well-rounded kids than hot-housed students in the top two bands for NAPLAN. Indeed, the philosophy program is often seen as a key attraction by prospective parents. Perhaps there’s an awareness that the program is not only producing better, happier students, but also helping to create a better society at large.

One of the most important skills students pick up from philosophy, Neil says, is the art of listening – a skill that currently seems to be in short supply. “Given the way adults behave on social media and the standard of debate and discussion in public life – you don’t really see a space in which people respect other people’s opinions. It’s certainly something we try to teach the students.”

Back at Northcote High, the class may not have reached a conclusion about the existence of God, but they are displaying an admirable ability to agree about disagreeing. Elliot says it’s something students initially struggle with, wary of causing offence, but the benefits of practice have been profound – in the classroom and beyond.

“Ultimately, I believe philosophical thinking builds resilience. If you can practise developing your argument and put it out there for constructive criticism – and either accept or rebut that criticism – it does build resilience.” ^{AEU}

Getting philosophical

You needn't be Nietzsche – or even a grown-up – to ponder the big questions. MYKE BARTLETT lists a few of his favourite introductions to philosophy.

Big Ideas for Curious Minds

The School of Life



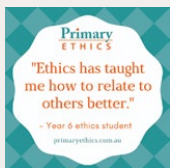
Established by popular philosopher Alain de Botton, The School of Life runs public adult classes that apply philosophical ideas to a gamut of modern experiences and quandaries

– from how to find a job you love to uncovering the meaning of life. This beautifully illustrated hardback takes the same approach but aims at a younger crowd, acknowledging that children's natural curiosity makes them born philosophers. Starting with a clear explanation of what philosophy is, the book considers key concepts such as the mind-body problem in a clear and accessible fashion, intermingled with important ideas from thinkers such as Seneca and Simone de Beauvoir.

See also: [The School of Life YouTube channel](#), www.youtube.com/theschooloflifetv

Primary Ethics

primaryethics.com.au



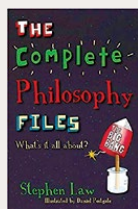
Established to provide non-religious kids with a secular introduction to ethics, this website is hosted by the Ethics Centre in NSW – a

not-for-profit organisation that develops ethics curriculum for kinder and primary kids. The intention is to foster critical thinking and respectful discussion on moral and ethical topics. Curriculum outlines are available to download from the site and a quarterly e-newsletter will keep schools up to date with new materials.

See also: [The Philosophy Club](#), thephilosophyclub.com.au

The Complete Philosophy Files

Stephen Law



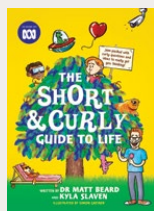
An ideal text for middle-school students, this amiable introduction to philosophical concepts helps students ask better questions, rather than providing them with all the answers. These include

moral questions around vegetarianism, existential questions about the nature of life, and questions about what we can and can't know. Each chapter is based on a different question, boiling down complex ideas into everyday words, and illustrated with humorous cartoons likely to appeal to even the most reluctant of philosophers.

See also: [What is Humanism? How do you live without a god? And Other Big Questions for Kids](#) by Michael Rosen and Annemarie Young.

Short & Curly

www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/shortandcurly



Should we stop giving birthday presents? Is a child's life more valuable than an adult's? Should pugs exist? With a tone that veers closer to *Play School* than high school,

this fun ABC podcast series should help get younger primary kids interested in ethical dilemmas that feel close to home. Scenarios are play-acted, with consequences considered. Best of all, there's a pause towards the end, with young listeners encouraged to discuss their thoughts with their family (or classmates). A recently published book would make a useful classroom text.

See also: [Pickle: A Philosophy and Ethics Podcast for Kids](#), www.wnyc.org/story/pickle-philosophy-podcast-kids/

The Lost Thing

Shaun Tan



Shaun Tan's prize-winning picture book is a perfect text for encouraging a community of enquiry. While out hunting bottle tops, a boy finds a strange creature that seems to have

no place in his (equally strange) world. He sets out to discover where it belongs, but nobody else is interested, too absorbed in their day-to-day lives to deal with something that doesn't fit. What does it mean to be lost? Can you feel lost even if you do belong somewhere? The Oscar-winning animated version makes a worthy supplement to the book.

See also: [The Bunyip of Berkeley Creek](#) by Jenny Wagner and Ron Brooks and [Shaun Tan's Cicada](#).

Gattaca

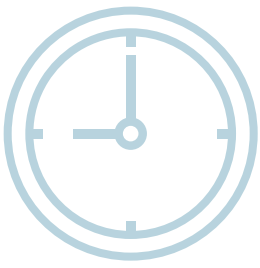
Andrew Niccol



Conceived in the heat of a debate around the new science of cloning, Andrew Niccol's 1997 science fiction film remains a powerful reflection on the nature of the self. The film posits a

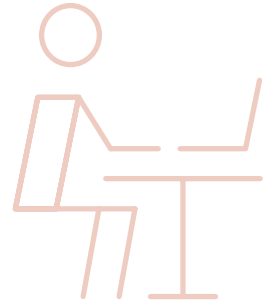
world where eugenics rule, allowing parents to create designer children whose destinies are shaped by their genetic profile. Born the old-fashioned way, Vincent (Ethan Hawke) is excluded from playing a meaningful role in society until he finds an elaborate way of fooling the system. There are some powerful discussions to be had around what makes someone a good member of society, what societies might value or reject, and what dangers might arise if parents were able to design their perfect child.

See also: [Inside Out](#)



MAKING PPDs WORK FOR YOUR SCHOOL

Workload continues to be a pressing issue for most teachers, but professional practice days are helping them find time to complete essential work. [STEPHEN A RUSSELL](#) reports.

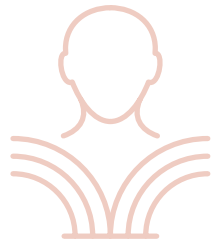


Seir Holley, assistant principal at Keilor Heights Primary School, says the introduction of PPDs has had a profound and positive impact for teachers at her school. “The workload never ends, so just having an opportunity to get on top of things and know that you can focus without interruption has been so good for our staff well-being,” she says. “It’s wonderful.”

Because teachers at Keilor Heights do their forward-planning collaboratively, they opted to use their PPDs individually, rather than in teams. This has allowed them to focus on other specific areas, such as creating individual learning plans for students who need extra help, generating reports, catching up on professional reading and making headway on practical work. It’s also provided some much-needed time for professional development.

“Some have organised to go on peer observation at other schools, which is particularly useful for specialist teachers like our visual arts teacher, who is the only one in this setting,” Seir says. “That’s great for our team leaders too, so they can get tips from each other. We have lots of network meetings with the principal class members, but teachers rarely get that opportunity and this allows them to build those networks, which is great.”

The freedom to work on things such as individual education plans has given teachers valuable



breathing space that helps them get ahead of timelines, Seir says, resulting in less stress and smoother operations across the school. It did take a bit of fine-tuning to get things just right, however.

“When we first started, we opened it up and asked staff to nominate any days that worked best for them and tried to give them their first preference,” she adds. “We found that a lot of teachers opted to take their PPD around assessment and reporting time, which I fully understand, but we ended up with days when we required up to eight CRTs to accommodate that. And there were challenges arising with students like behavioural issues, because we had so many familiar faces away.”

In a smart workaround, they turned to part-time staff, many of whom had returned from family leave and were looking for extra hours. They have stepped in one day a week across term to provide the continuity needed. “Technically, that means staff don’t always get their first preference, which isn’t ideal, however they understand that this is the way we’ve found that works.”


Michael Essex, a technology teacher and leader at Hume Central Secondary College, says that the dedicated time allowed by PPDs has given him the breathing room he needs to get on top of marking SACs and folios.

“Having an opportunity to get on top of things and know that you can focus without interruption has been so good for our staff wellbeing.”

“I’m also using it to prepare for new units of work and it just gives you a massive chunk of time in which you can get a whole lot done,” he says. “I can hide myself away in a good spot and work through it, knowing that I won’t be interrupted. Normally I wouldn’t have time to do that other than over the weekend.”

Essex has really appreciated his principal’s trust in teachers, encouraging them to select a time and decide how to best use that time to their advantage.

“We’ve definitely got control and, even though we are a fairly large school, I haven’t had any trouble being able to lock in PPDs when I want. Also, we don’t have to report on how we use the time. As long as we’re using it to improve our teaching and learning, it’s okay.”

While he jokes there will never be enough time, Essex is happy with how PPDs ringfence a significant block away from normal duties. “It’s a lot better than getting one period off a week or an extra hour of non-contact time, which would just disappear.” 



Students performing at Hamer Hall as part of the Betty Amsden Participation Program (see page 29).

FACING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

As we imagine the sort of future we want for Australia, we can already find a glimpse of how it might look in Western Melbourne. Here, public schools and TAFEs are finding new ways to be inclusive of a rapidly changing society.

Breaking new ground

One Werribee primary school has opened its doors to Indian dance classes, Iranian mothers groups and English conversation sessions, breaking new ground in community relations.

SUZANNE TAYLOR reports.

Dah Moo and Louise Holley with students at the Karen Learning Club.

On Tuesdays after school, while most kids are scampering around the playground or heading home, there's a hive of activity in the community hub of Wyndham Park Primary School. Fifty kids pack into the Karen Learning Club for lessons on the written language and culture of their parents.

For multicultural aide Dah Moo, who runs the class, it's "the best job" she's had since moving to Australia as a Karen refugee herself. "For these children to learn language and culture, it means they will not be losing their identity and their relationship with their parents," she says. "It's important. I really love to do this."

If the consistently high student turnout is anything to go by, the feeling is mutual; some students even come from neighbouring schools. The club is held in the school's designated "community hub space". Think: Indian dance classes, Karen playgroups that double as English conversation classes, Iranian mothers groups, multicultural cooking classes, free boxing sessions, parenting workshops, maternal and child health clinics... and the offerings are growing.

Teacher Louise Holley was hired as community hub coordinator to create stronger links between the school and the community – and the results are astonishing. "Families love it. We have all the different linguistic groups coming together – Karen, Chin, Indian, Iranian, Vietnamese and English. It's fabulous."

For Louise, the hub provides an important opportunity for families – many of them newly-arrived refugees and migrants – to integrate into the school and, ultimately, their local community. "We often say that we enrol the whole



"We enrol the whole family, not just the student."

family, not just the student. We know from all the research that children succeed at school if their parents are partners in their education, so building that community and parental involvement is just as important as teaching literacy and numeracy."

Louise runs a Parent Learning Walk every term, sharing what the children get up to in the classroom every day. "I once had four parents who'd never been to school themselves, having grown up in refugee camps in Thailand," she recalls.

She also runs classes for adults, spanning everything from reading to technology, as well as one-off events aimed at breaking down barriers between teachers and parents.

"I asked our Karen community to share their culture with the teachers, and they cooked up a huge feast for everyone," she says. "I met the teachers downstairs beforehand and said, 'I want you to talk to the parents and come away knowing at least one name'. Then, tomorrow morning at line-up, go and say hello to them."

The night was a hit. "I had a few Karen parents tell me afterwards that they'd never met or spoken to a teacher before. It was so powerful and so simple: sit down, have some food and talk!"

Louise works with two multicultural education aides, Dah Moo and Mark Kunoo, to assess community needs, facilitate programs and match people up with services. Karen parents can



Teachers, parents and multicultural aides work with students to learn the language and culture of their families.

come in and seek help from an aide with everything from filling in an excursion form to paying a parking fine.

“That help and support extends to all parents,” Louise adds. “If they’re Iranian or from another language background, I will organise an interpreter and that’s a free service for them.”

The cross-cultural learning goes both ways, and Louise is conscious of the importance of educating the teachers as well. “Last year I was floored when I had a really capable Karen mum ask me out of the blue, ‘What does ‘initial’ mean?’ She was talking about the take-home reading that she was meant to initial. I thought – how many other parents must be struggling with things like this? Without understanding the language challenges, a teacher might assume that parent just never bothers to sign the reading.”


The school’s focus on community extends beyond the hub space. Wyndham Community Education Centre runs the school canteen, Saffron Kitchen, which is staffed predominantly by refugees studying for food handling certificates. They serve vegetarian meals and snacks to the students for \$5 a day. Some Karen families adopted the community garden on site, handing out fruit and vegetables to other parents after school.

“That just started from one parent who had the initiative to get it going,” says Louise. That, she says, is the ultimate goal: “To build up parents to be leaders and have greater input into the running of the space.”

Many would dream of having this kind of community space in their school – but for Louise, the program owes its success to the people. “I have visits from other

schools and they’re jealous we have this space. But actually the most important thing is having a dedicated coordinator role that is valued and supported by leadership, and having people like our amazing multicultural education aides to strengthen community relationships. That takes time, it doesn’t just happen.”

For Louise, the community hub has had a ripple effect across the whole school that’s hard to quantify. “I just don’t see racism here. People get along so well. There’s this culture of caring which is pretty unique,” she says.

“One of the key signs we’re on the right track is when the children come back to visit the school to say hello and feel like they belong to it. We wanted to create a place that’s owned by the whole community, where everyone feels welcome – and we have.” 

Deaf Mettle

Whether they're tearing up bike tracks, playing inter-school soccer or performing on stage at the Arts Centre, the students from Furlong Park School for Deaf Children are smashing down barriers. SUZANNE TAYLOR reports.

It's become commonplace to see an AUSLAN interpreter at the side of the stage at major events, but one unique school choir is bringing signing out of the fringes and into the spotlight. When they were invited to perform earlier this year at Hamer Hall as part of the Betty Amsden Participation Program, the Furlong Park Primary Signing Choir joined a line-up that included rock royalty Adalita and Ella Hooper, Yirmal, and Vika and Linda Bull. The Furlong students performed on stage alongside their parents, sisters, brothers and teachers, both hearing and deaf.

According to Maria Burgess, the assistant principal of Furlong Park School for Deaf Children, it's often the quieter students who come into their own when they're performing. "They go from being on the fringe to being centre stage – literally," Maria says. "And that's powerful. Their different personas suddenly come out;

"If you have a signing child who goes home to a family who don't use sign language, the parents will often only see a small glimmer of that child."

they can be creative, theatrical and, the truth is, we rarely have a platform like that for children who use Auslan."

Maria is also aware that exposing more of the general public to sign language will ultimately help to create a more inclusive world for the children to grow into. She knows, because it's something she's experienced first-hand. "The more people see signing, and interact with deaf people, the less fearful they are. As an assistant principal, the more I go to regional meetings and expose other people to me and my interpreter, the more they approach me. The fear leaves. It's like getting your learner's permit – you need to put in those hours before you can let go and trust."

To those ends, Maria and her staff have dreamt up some innovative and creative ways to challenge the children beyond their comfort zones. They take their three and four-year-olds to another kindergarten where they can explore nature play in a different environment with hearing children. They built a bike track on site to teach them how to ride with skill and confidence.

Then there's the inter-school soccer training with their counterparts from over the road at Albion North Primary. The students nominate the captain and negotiate the rules with the



Maria Burgess with students performing at an international exchange conference held in Melbourne.

other team. "Because deafness affects language, often our children know what they want to say but are not sure of the social skills or the intricacies of how best to say things," says Maria.

Most of the Furlong captains have no usable spoken skills so the school hires interpreters to come along. At the start, Maria says, it was all a bit awkward. "Both sides were really shy, inhibited and nervous. But now they give each other high fives, and shake hands at the start and end of each match."

Then there's the camps and excursions, which they introduce from day dot. The students learn everything from how to use public transport safely to how to order a meal in a restaurant – communications strategies to express themselves with confidence.

That extends to throwing out challenges closer to home. The school hosts weekly visits from local hearing students and its own students are regularly taken to a local shop and encouraged to interact with the shopkeeper.

This holistic approach to education extends to the families as well, with the school running free signing classes for parents, and tapping into innovative technology to keep them in the loop.

Maria says the signing classes often turn into something more akin to a self-help group. "Sometimes we put our signing to the side because the conversation is more important. When parents are starting on this journey, they can feel very much alone. Often what they need to hear is a tried-and-tested point of view: tactics, strategies, tools that work. Often they just need to connect with other parents and feel like they're not lost in this new world."

Given most parents in the area not only need to learn Auslan from scratch, but also come from non-English-speaking backgrounds, the school has introduced an app called Seesaw, which works like a personalised Instagram feed about their child. As with the choir, the idea is to help parents see a side of their child that might otherwise be hidden from them.

"If you have a signing child who goes home to a family that doesn't use sign language, the parents will often only see a small glimmer of that child," Maria says. "So when they see them expressing themselves on stage in such majestic ways, it's like watching a maestro painting a picture before them. They see their child's personality, purpose and the intricacies of how they express themselves in a whole new way." ^{AEU}



All Sunshine

A TAFE program in the inner-west is building social cohesion – and nailing it. SUZANNE TAYLOR gets a tour.

advertising both orchids and assistance with tax returns.

“It’s the United Nations here,” chuckles Norm Colling, a carpentry teacher who runs the Certificate II Pre-Apprenticeship program at Victoria Polytechnic. He’s seen huge change in the demographics of his student cohort over the past 17 years on the job.

“When I started out we had a lot of Vietnamese; they began settling in the Sunshine area from the 1970s onwards,” he recalls. “Then around 10 years ago we started to see a lot of Burmese Karen refugees, and more recently Iraqi, Indian and Sudanese.”

For Norm, one of the sweetest parts of his job is going out on sites to visit apprentices – especially the ones who have been hired by his own former students. “The real success stories have been in the last seven or eight years. A lot of our students have come from refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border. They’ve done their pre-apprenticeship training in carpentry and bricklaying with us, and then they become employers themselves, and contact us asking for apprentices. It’s the same with our Vietnamese students, too. It’s fantastic.”

Norm has also noticed a broader attitudinal change amongst Anglo-Australian employers. “When I first started 17 years back, there was a perception that the Aussie employer had to employ another Aussie. But then they found that [these new arrivals] are extremely hard-working and reliable. That’s all you want: someone who’ll turn up every day and work hard. Word travels around.”

The united nations of Sunshine

According to a recent census, the most common ancestry in Sunshine was

PHOTO: MEREDITH O'SHEA

Norm Colling (at right) and carpentry students at Victoria Polytechnic.

A bike ride through Melbourne’s west will see you pass bustling African hairdressers, hookah cafes with cherry and apple smoke hanging in the air and shiny red Peking ducks dangling in restaurant windows. Post-World War II continental migrants run market stalls next to new arrivals from across Asia and Africa. Head further west, and on one side of the road, you will pass Gilmore College girls in hijabs chatting together at the bus stop. While across the street there’s a hipster t-shirt shop, a pizza joint, and a mystifying Vietnamese office with signs

“Creating a positive, high-functioning learning environment doesn’t just happen. You need to actively create that culture of inclusivity.”

Vietnamese at 12.9%, with Australian at 11.4% and English at 12.5%. Less than half the population was born in Australia, while the other most common countries of birth were Vietnam, India, Burma, Philippines and Nepal. The west, particularly the Wyndham area, is the third largest growth area in Australia, so it’s unsurprising that Norm’s construction pre-apprenticeship program is brimming with enrolments.

“There’s plenty of building work out there,” says Norm, “That, combined with the fact that Dan Andrews made TAFE free, has meant our student numbers have increased big-time. It’s provided real access to people who may not have been able to afford to go to TAFE a few years back.”

So how does this extraordinary level of cultural diversity play out at TAFE? And how does Norm achieve such consistent success with his pre-apprentice students when so many of them struggle with language and cultural barriers?

“Creating a positive, high-functioning learning environment doesn’t just happen,” he says. “You need to actively create that culture of inclusivity.”

An inclusive culture

For Norm, that begins with laying down the ground rules and getting the students collaborating closely early on. “For a start, we won’t tolerate racism. It’s not accepted in the workplace and it’s not accepted here. And then, right from the get-go, a lot of the jobs we do, we do as a team. It sets up that teamwork culture, where everyone’s accepted based on what they

bring to the table. You just don’t see any racism, it just doesn’t come into it.”

The strong culture of egalitarianism and mutual respect is central to TAFE’s ethos – Norm is quick to mention he treats the students like adults and everyone relates on a first-name basis – but there’s something deeper at play. He says that he’s also come to understand the importance of flexibility, acceptance and empathy.

“Since being here, I’ve really learnt to have compassion for people and their circumstances and not judge them. I try to accommodate them and understand where they’re coming from. It’s a TAFE approach I think, to take people as they come.”

He gives the example of having a student who would routinely arrive late because, as it turned out, he had to drop his little sister off at school. “That’s something we want to accommodate, not punish. At the end of the day, the most important thing is that he’s made the decision to come to TAFE, so let’s make that work.”

For students with additional literacy and numeracy needs, the TAFE system kicks in early with the offer of intensive support. Students who are struggling can access up to 30 hours of individual tuition throughout their 15-week pre-apprenticeship course. “The tutors teach them carpentry maths or bricklaying maths. They don’t teach them things that they’ll never use in the workplace. We’ve designed a program where we hope that every student who comes in here will be successful.”

Norm is quick to add that disadvantage isn’t solely experienced by students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. “In the past they may have been told by teachers that they’re stupid. To learn and achieve, you need to be able to take risks, but you can’t do that if you don’t believe in yourself. So, if you can lift the students’ confidence, you’re half way there.”

In some cases that can be as simple as teaching to their preferred learning styles – and embracing, rather than fighting, their affinity with technology.

“When they’re not doing that hands-on work, half of them will pull out their mobiles and then you’ve lost them. So I’ve had to change the way I teach. I show the kids carpentry apps to help with pitching roofs or building a staircase.”

A tour around the huge building and construction workshop reveals separate areas for bricklaying, furniture studies, hand tools, power tools, door-hanging... and then there’s the house.

“Yep, we do full-sized projects here – they made that themselves,” says Norm. The ceilings are slightly lower than the standard 2.4 metre height – “You need a full scaffold for anything over the two-metre mark” – but, aside from that, it’s a bona fide house-frame.

For Norm, completing the building is one of the best points in the 15-week course.

“You know you’ve done something right when they all want photos of themselves sitting up there together on the top plate to show their mates or their mum what they’ve done.


“For a lot of these kids, they may have never been proud of something they’ve done at school before, so it’s a big moment. We hope that helps set them up for life.” 



PHOTO: VICTORIAN SCHOOL BUILDING AUTHORITY

A new school of thought

Principal Jackie Daniali had big dreams for her new Point Cook school, engaging families in her inclusive vision even before the first brick was laid. [SUZANNE TAYLOR](#) hears how she did it.



Saltwater P-9 was one of nine new schools that opened around the state this year to meet the needs of the burgeoning Point Cook population. “Starting up a new school is like giving birth,” says Jackie Daniali, laughing. “It sounds funny but that’s what it feels like.”

“You attend to every bit of the school – from the uniform, to the subject offerings, to the furniture. When you see your vision come alive – when I stand next to the bike racks and greet the students every morning – there is a sense of pride that the vision’s been delivered on.”

In the mid-1990s, Point Cook was basically a rural area with a RAAF base and a population of around 500. These days, it’s closer to 50,000, with 13,000 families. More than half of Point Cook’s residents were born overseas, predominantly in India, China and New Zealand.

Jackie had big dreams for her new school-baby. Conscious of her diverse pending student cohort, she had read voraciously about the future job market and trends in globalisation.

“I wanted to provide an education that was internationally minded and underpinned by cultural *inclusiveness*, not tolerance,” she says. “I don’t like the word tolerance; people want to be understood and accepted, nobody wants to be tolerated.”

It was the kind of education that Jackie herself never had. Born in Iran to Armenian refugees, she came to Australia at 14, “having lived through a war, persecution, the whole thing.” When she arrived, she could barely speak a word of English and her school “just didn’t value” multiculturalism.

“I could have become quite bitter, but what I’ve learnt through my experience is there’s good and bad everywhere, and it’s my goal to teach kids to understand the different cultures, values

PHOTOS: SUPPLIED



“To make a school successful, you have to build relationships – but the school wasn’t built yet!”

Above: Students Edward Abala, Noah Thomas and Ozyrious Toamau-Cowan making the most of the athletics track.

Left: Students enjoy the brand new playground at Saltwater P-9 College.

Below left: Georgia Cameron, Ata Ozbilgi, Tex Williams, Max Nyeholt, Mujei pokawa-Tucker and Tanatswa Chiura.

and beliefs within their own community here in Point Cook, and beyond.”

Jackie knew her vision would only be realised with the backing of her future parent community – and with no bricks-and-mortar school in which to bring them together, she found the next best thing. She turned to Facebook.

“I knew that to make a school successful, you have to build relationships – but the school wasn’t built yet and these parents didn’t know me from a bar of soap. Social media was one way I could introduce myself and start by building a digital community.”

Jackie’s approach worked; her school now has 150 students and 2,000 Facebook followers. Well before the doors opened, Jackie connected with parents by posting photos charting construction, uniform designs and digital surveys about the curriculum. She asked parents everything, from which language they wanted her to run (Spanish) to whether they wanted their kids to study the International Baccalaureate (97% said yes).

The digital engagement strategy not only democratised key aspects of her decision-making, but also helped build a grassroots community.

“Parents from diverse backgrounds get to know each other online first and then they meet up for coffee, get involved with parent club, and even volunteer their time at the school,” she says.

One such parent, who is in the military, volunteered to run the ANZAC Day service; another helped teach the children the Maori words to the New Zealand national anthem.

“We had parents crying they were so moved by hearing their language. And the Maori kids themselves were incredibly proud,” Jackie says.

“Parents love to see their kids learning about the world.” 

7 destinations for a cross-cultural excursion

Expand your students’ horizons

Bonegilla Migrant Experience, Wodonga

Bonegilla museum teaches students about the role the migrant reception centre played in creating a multicultural Australia in the post-war era.

bonegilla.org.au

Bunjilaka, Melbourne Museum

The state’s largest exhibition celebrating the history, culture, achievements and survival of Victoria’s Aboriginal people.

museumsvictoria.com.au/bunjilaka

Golden Dragon Museum, Bendigo

This museum provides an overview of the history of Chinese immigrants in Bendigo and ancient Chinese history.

goldendragonmuseum.org

Immigration Museum, Melbourne

Permanent exhibits encompassing diverse immigrant and refugee stories are complemented by temporary programs.

museumsvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/

Islamic Museum Australia, Melbourne

Educational experiences showcase the artistic and cultural heritage of Muslims in Australia and abroad.

islamicmuseum.org.au

Jewish Holocaust Centre, Melbourne

The centre’s permanent exhibition takes students on a journey through the history of the Holocaust.

jhc.org.au

Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne

The Birrarung Wilam Walk teaches students the significance of the area to the local Kulin peoples.

korieheritagetrust.com.au

Have you found an excellent cross-cultural experience for your students that’s not on this list? If so, please let us know, so we can share it with other members: editor@aeunews.asn.au

THE REWARDS OF WORKING REMOTELY

Preschool and primary teacher LOUISE COOKE has built a career working to change lives in some of Australia's most remote Indigenous communities.



I have always believed in education as a key mechanism to achieve social justice. My earliest career aspirations included teaching in areas where children experience disadvantage and to use my training to provide opportunities for change.

Yes, I was one of *those* university grads – I wanted to change the world. When the opportunity came up for me to complete my final teaching practicum in a remote Indigenous community school, I jumped at the chance. After only a few weeks, I was hooked. I knew this was the kind of teaching I wanted to do and I was ready to pursue it.

Fortunately, one of the perks of teaching in the Northern Territory is that opportunities abound. One week prior to completing my placement, I was offered the preschool teacher position at the very same school I had fallen in love with. Ramingining was going to be my home for the next five years.

During my time at Ramingining, I dived into a number of extracurricular activities, including running the healthy dog program (which helps community members care for their canine comrades), tutoring a group of passionate and hardworking Indigenous assistant teachers in their further education studies, and coordinating the community music sports and arts festival.

The Ramingining community festival I coordinated was the first in many years and, as it turned out, the one that propelled the Chooky Dancers (an Indigenous troupe who perform traditional dances to Western music) to international fame. I was also able to start a facilitated playgroup with support from the Smith Family, and was promoted to senior teacher in the primary program. I am certain I would not have had the opportunity to pursue these exciting and fulfilling opportunities if I wasn't living and working in a remote Indigenous community.

Five years and many opportunities and experiences later, it was time to

move on. I was fortunate enough to secure an Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development volunteer placement working with Karen and Karenni refugees on the Thai and Burmese border. I spent the next 12 months living in a remote part of Northern Thailand, travelling in and out of the refugee camps to support women's organisations within them to strengthen their early childhood programs.

I think my most successful work during this time was facilitating meetings between the organisations that ran the primary school and those that ran the early childhood programs, to help them develop a strong transition-to-school policy. Often when I spoke during these meetings I would need to be translated into Burmese, Karen (or Karenni) and sometimes Thai as well. I learned very quickly how to say what I needed to say as quickly and as simply as possible. This was challenging and exciting work – and to top it off, I was living in paradise.

While I was in Thailand, an early childhood colleague of mine was leading the initial implementation of a new program in the Northern Territory called Families as First Teachers (FaFT). This program would be rolled out in very remote communities across the territory, aiming to empower families to give their children the best possible start in life.

When she contacted me about potentially working with her on this program, I jumped at the opportunity. Returning to Australia, I spent the next nine and half years working to support the implementation of the FaFT program. I was even fortunate enough to be paid to complete my Master of Education at the University of Melbourne, working with highly respected academics to examine the program's effectiveness.

I feel I have been incredibly privileged to work in some of the most rewarding, challenging and fulfilling education positions over my almost 15-year career. I have lived and worked in a number of very remote Indigenous communities, working with incredible children and

families in Arnhem Land. Although a number of these positions have allowed me to pursue my passion for parent and family empowerment, early childhood and Indigenous social justice, it is my work with the FaFT program that has been the most rewarding.

This work allowed me to travel across the Northern Territory, Victoria and Western Australia to follow career paths I never thought possible. Most importantly, it has allowed me to witness and reflect on the strength and resilience of Indigenous children, families and communities and develop deep relationships with people for whom I have enormous respect. I believe that every one of us teachers, wherever we teach, has the power to change lives. Ultimately, that is what makes me most proud and most grateful to call myself a teacher. 



Your questions answered

Our best advice on your most common – and uncommon – concerns.

Q I've arrived at school this term to find my timetable has changed and I'm suddenly expected to teach Year 8 Humanities. I am employed as an English teacher. Are they able to do this?

A The principal can allocate duties that fit within the roles and responsibilities outlined in the agreement. If you don't feel your knowledge base is adequate to teaching this course, then you should certainly voice this, and request any PD that may help you successfully deliver the course. We suggest asking for some time release early in the term to undertake planning.

It would be appropriate to sit down with the head of Humanities to address expectations regarding what will be covered throughout the semester and to request information such as term planners, lessons and resources.

If this level of support is not forthcoming, inform the principal, making clear that you can only work within the confines of your knowledge and abilities. Also, talk to the AEU representative on your consultative committee about ensuring best practice is in place regarding adequate notice of timetabling changes, for the sake of both staff and students.

Q I work as an instructor in a disability day service. I have to regularly transport clients to and from the centre for outings using my own vehicle. Should I be reimbursed for the cost of petrol?

A Where possible, your employer should be providing you with a fleet vehicle that it owns or leases for the purposes of transporting clients. Where no such vehicle is available, and you are required to use your own, your employer should cover the cost of the fuel used when transporting clients or pay you an allowance (typically an amount per kilometre). Your employer's enterprise agreement or local policy may contain details on how you are to be reimbursed. Bear in mind that your vehicle is unlikely to be covered by your employer's insurance, so collisions would be subject to your own insurance policy and may impact on your premiums. Where possible, always use your employer's fleet vehicle.

Q I am an early childhood teacher employed at a committee-run preschool under the VECTEA. I have been teaching for five years and hold a four-year teaching qualification. Is it worth my while to undertake validation?

A Validation is a process that allows early childhood teachers employed under the VECTEA or EEEA to move from level 2 to level 3 of the pay classification table. For a full-time teacher at the top of level 2 who validates today, the difference in gross salary over five years (at current rates) would be \$68,862, with the difference between levels 2.5 and 3.5 being \$26,460 per annum (\$77,378 p.a. compared to \$103,838 p.a.). The validation process is run by an external skills assessment

organisation, VETASSESS, and requires endorsement from your employer. The AEU runs training sessions throughout the year that are an invaluable resource for anyone considering validation – visit aeuvic.asn.au/training-events

Q My wife has been offered a job in Sydney. Do I need to resign from my position as an ongoing teacher at a secondary college if I move interstate for a while?

A Before making any decision to resign, investigate what other options are available to you. Teachers and ES employed at public schools have the right to apply for a specific type of leave without pay called 'spouse leave': a non-discretionary form of leave that must be granted for periods of between three to 12 months, once every three years, to an employee whose spouse is moving interstate or overseas to pursue their career. Depending on circumstances, there may be other options, too – ring the Member Support Centre (MSC) for advice.

Q My TAFE HR department told me that because I don't have a specific unit of applied research in my diploma of VET, I don't qualify at AQF5+ for salary classification purposes. Is this right?

A Schedule 4 of the TAFE Teaching Agreement does not prescribe any specific 'unit' of applied research that must be undertaken for a teacher to qualify at AQF5+ or AQF6+. It only requires teachers to demonstrate that they have undertaken 'studies in' applied research. Nor does the Boyer Framework of scholarship have to be explicitly mentioned in a course description for it to apply. The Boyer Framework is a broad set of educational principles

that studies can be measured against. Every TAFE teacher's individual portfolio of qualifications, including overseas or interstate qualifications, needs to be looked at in assessing salary classification. There is no single endorsed 'course' or 'unit' required to qualify at AQF5+ or AQF6+.

Q I recently slipped on some spilled water in a prac class, landing hard on my knee. The doctor says it seems OK, and I feel fine. Should I log this on EduSafe?

A Yes. People often think that if they are not terribly injured or unwell, they do not have to log an incident on EduSafe. All incidents/injuries – and near misses – across the whole of DET should be recorded on EduSafe. This provides accurate data of what is happening in workplaces and can drive continuous improvement in health and safety for employees. At the workplace level, notify your health and safety rep (HSR) of the near miss, too. Employees are often best placed to identify OHS hazards in the workplace and to suggest appropriate controls. The principal will be notified of the near miss via EduSafe and should consult with the HSR.

Q At our recent preschool committee meeting, there was discussion about the current lack of enrolments for next year. I'm worried that the committee may reduce my teaching hours if the situation doesn't improve.

A Clauses within both the VECTEA and EEEA require employers to engage in true and meaningful consultation with employees where a major change to their conditions is being proposed. This includes a proposed change to the number or arrangement of staff hours. Consultation requires an employer to genuinely consider any submission made by an affected employee – however, there is some capacity for the employer to make a decision the employee does not agree with. Where a proposed reduction in hours is for more than 25% of the employee's existing hours, there is an entitlement to a redundancy payment. The MSC can offer advice on the consultation process and how to proceed.

Q How are increases to monetary allowances in modern awards calculated?

A Allowances typically fall into one of two categories: wage-related allowances (such as a first aid or on-call allowance) and expense-related allowances (such as a uniform or meal allowance). Wage-related allowances are calculated as a percentage of a particular rate (e.g. 1.5% of a level 2 hourly rate). Where there is an increase to the relevant wage rate, there will be an increase in the value (not percentage) of associated wage-related allowances.

Expense-related allowances are linked to consumer price index (CPI) categories. An assessment is done annually using the ABS figures for the March quarter. If the relevant CPI index figure has increased, the quantum of the allowance will also be increased. Increases to monetary allowances typically take effect from 1 July each year, following the Fair Work Commission's annual wage review.

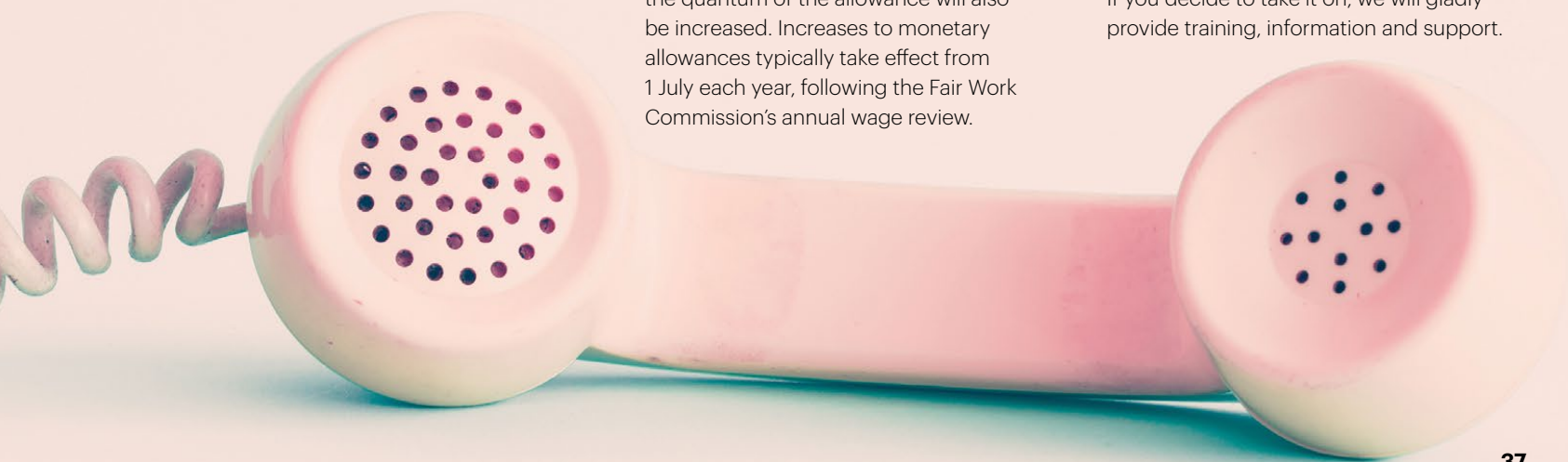
For advice on these or any other work-related matters, call our Member Support Centre on **03 9417 2822**.

Q Where can I obtain AQF6+ qualifications so I can access level 3 on the TAFE teacher classification scale?

A Federation Uni is currently offering an Associate Degree of VET and a one-year Graduate Certificate in Education (Tertiary Teaching), both of which qualify TAFE teachers at AQF6+. In 2020, Deakin will also be offering a Graduate Certificate in Adult Vocational Education and Training at AQF6+. The AEU expects further AQF6+ courses to become available in the future.

Q We don't have a health and safety representative at my school and so my principal has asked me to take on the HSR role. I'm concerned it will be too much work. Can I refuse?

A Yes. It is a voluntary role. Victorian OHS legislation requires your agreement to be nominated as the HSR and you must be elected by your designated workgroup. Your principal should instigate this election process, and the HSR should be allocated time to perform their duties and allowed to attend a five-day HSR training course. The role of the HSR is to represent staff health and safety views in any formal discussions with management. It does not require you to fix and repair health and safety issues. Improving people's health and safety at work is one of the most important goals of the union movement, and the AEU greatly values the role of HSRs in the workplace. If you decide to take it on, we will gladly provide training, information and support.



GREEN THUMBS AND BIG SMILES

Working with disability clients on re-vegetation and recycling projects, disability educator and horticulturalist Craig Bennetts has found the perfect way to combine his passions, as he tells **STEPHEN A RUSSELL**.

Craig Bennetts has always had green fingers. His grandparents and his mum instilled in him a love of the outdoors as a very young lad and it stuck to him like dirt to a toddler's knees. Finding peace in the back garden, he pursued this passion through school and went on to study horticulture at Burnley. Planning to become a professional gardener, it was while he and his wife were both job-hunting that she suggested something which changed Craig's course unexpectedly.

"She's was looking at jobs in the community services section of the newspaper for herself when she saw a plant nursery role advertised that involved supporting people with intellectual disability," he recalls. "It was something I'd never considered."

Joining a not-for-profit organisation specialising in assisting people with intellectual disability, he found the work proved to be a natural extension of his abilities and his calm temperament. "It's great how things worked out, because working with indigenous plants on re-vegetation projects is a low-stimulation, relaxing environment, so for some of the folks that we work with, who can get quite overwhelmed, it really helps them, while learning new skills."

Craig, who has been an AEU rep for three and a half years, says it's rewarding to see how his clients flourish. "Through your own enthusiasm and passion, you can see the subtle ways in which you can have a really positive impact."

His role has expanded into a variety of in-community support services, including a cooking program based in Warrandyte in conjunction with a local community church. "Over time you definitely see your clients' skill base increase and, because it's based in the community, they also start to build up that social connection," he says. "That's really important, and it's great for the broader community too, to get to know people living with intellectual disabilities."

Sustainability is at the root of gardening, and it's inherent in his NDIS support role too, with a recycling program where clients are encouraged to save as much as possible from going into general waste. That spins out into another novel way of working in the local community.

"We take some waste, like plastic bottles, and turn them into feed dispensers for animal shelters, so our clients get to be around dogs or cats who need a bit of love and a sense of calm in that situation."

Getting to work with people living with intellectual disability is greatly rewarding, says Craig. It's the individual transformations that ensure he so often heads home with a big smile on his face.

"Over the years, I've worked with so many clients who have started off very insular – they just don't have much access to the community at all. Working with them as a team, in conjunction with my colleagues, you get to see first-hand how that personal growth benefits them as they begin to get out and about, meeting new people and enjoying new experiences without the stress.


"We all chip in together and all of those small advances are so rewarding. I really enjoy making those connections."

He gets a similar kick from his role as a union rep and says he's been blessed by brilliant colleagues, giving him a genuine sense of pride in supporting them. "Over the years I've worked with some fantastic people and that has been a big drawcard for me. Everyone's been very supportive and encouraging."

He adds, "It's an invaluable position to be in, as a union rep, because you're really aware of what's happening at the grassroots level, what needs improving, and how we can work together to get that continuous improvement met, both here and across the sector.

"Again, it wasn't something I planned. It's just that, as time has gone on, I've taken on more responsibility and it's been quite enriching, looking at life from another angle. My negotiating skills have definitely been enhanced."

Craig is hopeful that with collaborative communication across the sector, any kinks in the roll-out of the NDIS can lead to a happy, healthy industry for everyone involved.

"I think that's why I've stuck around for so long. You mention to people that you've been in one place for 17 years and they sort of give you that funny look, but I love it. At the end of the day, you're just trying to improve the lives of people with intellectual disabilities, ensuring that the people you support have the best day they possibly can." 



The most important thing I take into my job every day is... a good mood, because in our line of work I find that if you're having a bad day, it filters down to the people we support.

The most important thing to leave at home is... a bad mood.

The best advice I ever received was... when I first started here and my manager told me, “Stand back and observe until you feel confident to engage in a situation.”

My top piece of advice to someone starting out in disability support would be... the same advice I was given. I pass that on to everyone.

My favourite teacher was... my statistics lecturer at La Trobe when I studied computer science and mathematics in a past life, before leaving that for horticulture. She was a real mentor.

The people I admire most are... my colleagues who support me every day.

My favourite album is... *Ocean Machine: Biomech* by Devin Townsend, because it takes me to another place every time I hear it. A true soundscape.

In my other life, I am... in the garden. That's just what I do.

If I met the education minister... I'd remind him that healthcare and education are a priority, and how important it is to remember that every day.

The most important thing the union does for its members is... just letting them know that support is there. It's almost like an insurance policy for rainy days.



WOMEN'S FOCUS

KERRY GREEN,
WOMEN'S ORGANISER

The F word

A well-meaning woman gave me some advice about our upcoming Women's Conference last week. She advised me to avoid the F-word as it (according to her) "puts some people off".

Well, I looked up the meaning of 'feminism' and this is the definition: the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of the equality of the sexes. I can't think of any other word which better describes what we are doing here at the AEU, so for now I'm sticking with it.

Feminism is about equality. Not all women experience the world in the same way. Women of colour, queer women, migrant women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women affected by mental illness or physical disability, face challenges above and beyond what might be imagined by those who don't face such difficulties every day.

Those who don't sit at one of the many intersections of race, sexuality, gender, class and health need to step up and be better allies to all our sisters – both the ones we work with and the ones we teach.

That's why our 2019 conference, taking place on 24 August, is going to be all

about: *Fostering Feminists of the Future*.

This conference has been designed based on your feedback. It will challenge you and empower you. You'll learn new strategies that you can use every day at work, and you'll have the opportunity to have your say in the future of the union.

We have an incredible line-up of women speakers, including the fabulous Nyadol Nyuon as our keynote speaker. Nyadol is a lawyer and community activist for the settlement of African Australians in Victoria who, among her many other endeavours, has appeared on ABC's Q&A and *The Drum*.

We're also incredibly lucky to have AEU Federal Aboriginal education officer Darcel Russell join us to moderate a panel of diverse AEU members to dig further into the experiences of women of colour in our schools and workplaces.

Our sessions after lunch will be guided by AEU women organisers and will include: women and workload; gendered violence in education workplaces; making superannuation fair for women; and self, school and system leadership.

Of course, we'll make sure you're nurtured as well. You'll be greeted by a coffee van sponsored by Teachers Health and have the chance to explore mindfulness with Red Deb.

What are you waiting for? Register now at aeuVIC.asn.au/women. And remember to also join our Facebook group, AEU Victoria Women, to stay across all the current issues.



EDUCATION SUPPORT

KATHRYN LEWIS,
ES ORGANISER

An action-packed term

Term 2 has been a whirlwind. With so much ES action, it has been hard to keep up with it all.

Education support staff have been taking part in our *Fair Funding Now!* campaign by door-knocking, making phone calls and 'doing their block' with campaign leaflets. This campaign is dear to the hearts of many ES members, who understand that fairer funding means more ES staff in schools and so more support for students.

Celebrating ESP Day

We profiled some of our most active ES members in the lead up to Education Support Personnel (ESP) Day. If you haven't seen them on our social media channels, you can read all about them at aeuVIC.asn.au/ESP_day

Each one has taken actions that have led to positive improvements for others in their school and in their union. It is astonishing how one individual's courageous stand can have a powerful effect on so many others.

I'd like to give a big shout out to all our wonderful ES reps, who advocate for their ES colleagues and make our schools better workplaces. I'm

sure there are many similar stories out there – if you've got a good one to share, I'd love to hear it.

Dimensions of Work Working Party (DWWP)

As outlined in previous articles, a Dimensions of Work Working Party (DWWP) has been set up to review ES work. It is often frustrating that the work ES are doing in schools is not articulated clearly in their job descriptions or in the dimensions of work.

The aim of this working party is to ensure the value of ES work is accurately reflected in the dimensions of work, which will better inform schools and ensure more accurate job descriptions. This in turn will assist ES in managing an ever-increasing workload.

If the DWWP is to be effective, it is essential that ES members are actively involved, so we are setting up several reference groups. At this stage, we have 20 such groups, each led by one of our elected ES councillors. Keep your eye out for more information soon.

Are you interested in getting involved with the DWWP? If so, email kathryn.lewis@aeuVIC.asn.au



SAFETY MATTERS

MEAGHAN FLACK,
OHS ORGANISER

Addressing the impact of occupational violence

Working with Occupational Health and Safety can allow me to see our workplaces at their very best. Unfortunately, I also see their most challenging side.

In the previous term, I have assisted many of our hard-working Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) as they endeavour to manage the complex issue of occupational violence.

Whether the violence occurs in our classrooms, our offices, our staffrooms or online, it is always unacceptable. I have

recently assisted many HSRs as they've worked through incidents ranging from verbal abuse to physical assaults – all of which can impact on the health and wellbeing of staff.

HSRs sometimes report difficulties in helping members of their designated workgroups when incidents of occupational violence go unreported. Some staff feel they don't have time to log incidents on EduSafe, or believe that only serious incidents leading to physical injury need to be reported.

All incidents that impact on a staff member's health and safety should be logged on EduSafe – including those that impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Ensuring a full record of incidents assists in painting a complete picture of what's occurring and will help in developing solutions.

Like most elements of our working lives, health and safety is always better managed when

there is thorough consultation at the local level. The OH&S Act requires employers to consult with HSRs on matters of safety, including the management of situations of occupational violence.

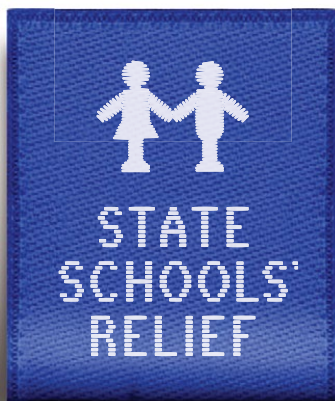
But not only is consultation a requirement, it is also the best way to develop long-lasting solutions. While these issues are often very complex, it is usually the people most directly affected who are best placed to explain what might lessen the risks. Having a HSR collating this information, representing staff and putting forward their concerns, is the best way of ensuring employees' health and safety is protected.

Most importantly, all workplaces should have an elected, trained HSR to represent staff in matters of health and safety. There are many workplaces – schools, TAFEs, early childhood settings and disability settings – that

don't have someone filling this role. Without an elected HSR, the powers under the OH&S Act cannot be fully realised. I encourage all workplaces to elect a HSR and ensure that person receives training. HSRs really are worth their weight in gold.

Addressing occupational violence in our workplaces can be very difficult, but having an elected, trained HSR is the first step towards ensuring the best outcomes are achieved for everyone involved.

Any members facing situations of occupational violence should ring our Member Support Centre on **03 9417 2822** to seek advice.



*Confidence
to connect*

A donation to State Schools' Relief makes a "real difference" to a Victorian child. We provide assistance directly to the child through quality school clothing, footwear, socks and underwear.

100% of your donation goes toward providing quality clothing and footwear to disadvantaged students in Victoria. Not one cent of your donation will go towards supporting the organisation's administration needs. State Schools' Relief acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.

To donate go to:
givenow.com.au/stateschoolsrelief



PRINCIPAL CLASS ASSOCIATION

TIM DELANY,
PRINCIPAL CLASS
ORGANISER

Improving principal health and safety

Over the past two years, AEU PCA members have been contributing to a wide range of new DET policies and initiatives to improve health and safety for principals and other staff. These include the complex matters case team, the policy template portal and additional support and resources for OHS.

The PCA has authority in this space because we support thousands of members each year to resolve complex issues and respond to incidents at

schools. We are also keen to involve PCA members in campaigns that will result in significant changes to DET policy, practice and resourcing.

For example, as part of our campaign to 'educate' DET about their responsibilities under the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act 2004, we will be providing current training to PCA members on how to interpret and apply the OHS Act in schools – particularly how DET, as the employer, has duties to protect the safety of all school staff, including principals.

If we build our collective knowledge about DET's legislated duty to develop systems to prevent such injuries, then we can work collectively through PCA meetings and the Principal Class Designated Workgroups to force DET to improve these systems.



NEW EDUCATORS NETWORK

ADAM SURMACZ
GRADUATE TEACHER/
UNIVERSITIES ORGANISER

Hitting pause and taking stock

As Semester 2 marches on, the days are getting shorter and the physical, emotional and mental demand of teaching can start to take a toll. It's a great time to hit the pause button and check whether you're getting the balance right.

Get back to basics

As the demands of work increase, small things can start to slip. Are you getting enough sleep? How's your diet and water intake? Exercise?

Getting back to your basic health needs can be an antidote to stress and help ward off the germs going around the class and staffroom.

Prioritise

Work commitments can start to encroach after hours and on weekends. Make some regular time for the people and pastimes that are important to you.

Reach out

Struggling with your planning, a particular student or an aspect of your practice? It might be time to reach out to your colleagues and broader networks for some mentoring and support. You might also find you have one too many work commitments. Allow yourself to give something up or to say no to the additional commitment – you'll be making a more effective contribution by not overburdening yourself.

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KEYNOTE SPEAKER
Nyadol Nyuon

Nyadol Nyuon is a lawyer, community advocate, writer and accomplished public speaker.

Born and raised in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya, even as a young girl Nyadol aspired to becoming a lawyer, though some in the camp said her “dreams were big and impossible for a refugee and too ambitious for a woman”.

In 2005, at the age of 18, she moved to Australia as a refugee. She went on to complete a Bachelor of Arts from Victoria University and a Juris Doctor from the University of Melbourne, and now works as a

commercial litigator.

Nyadol is a vocal advocate and regular media commentator for human rights, multiculturalism, the settlement of refugees and those seeking asylum. In both 2011 and 2014, Nyadol was nominated as one of the hundred most influential African Australians.

In 2016, she was the recipient of the Future Justice Prize. In 2018, her efforts to combat racism were widely recognised, with achievements including the Australian Human Rights Commission's 'Racism. It Stops With Me' Award.



CASUAL RELIEF TEACHER NETWORK

JON FERGUSON,
CASUAL RELIEF TEACHER
ORGANISER

Our duty of care

At the last AEU/IEU CRT conference on 9 April, I presented a session on duty of care and legal liability to the 120 CRTs who attended both in person and online. This is a topic that the AEU regularly presents about at a school level. Unfortunately, due to the nature of their work, CRTs often miss out on attending these sessions.

From the reactions and responses I received, I have decided to create a webinar version of the presentation that CRTs can attend and/or access online throughout the year. In the meantime, I thought it would be valuable to provide you with some of the key points that the presentation makes.

Legal framework

There are over 170 pieces of legislation that cover duty of care and legal liability for teachers in government schools. The consequences of an alleged breach of any of this legislation for a teacher can include: risk of injury for students and staff; DET sanctions; loss of VIT registration; and criminal convictions.

Child safe legislation

New child safe legislation was introduced in 2015, with the *Child Wellbeing & Safety Amendment Bill 2015 (Child Safe Standards)* and *Ministerial Order 870*. Each school has a child safe leader who can provide staff with support. It is good to identify who that is at the schools you work in, especially if it is a school you attend regularly.

Mandatory reporting

The *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* states that any person registered as a teacher or granted permission to teach under the *Education and Training Reform Act (2006)* is required to report a belief, not just a suspicion, that a child is being abused. As a CRT, it is valid for you to report this belief directly to the principal or another leader at a school.

Negligence

There is a legal requirement that teachers owe a duty to take reasonable care to prevent injury to students under their control or supervision. The three questions that help determine negligence are:

- Did you owe a duty of care?
- Did you breach that duty of care?
- Did the injury occur because of this breach?

Negligence is further determined on what is considered 'reasonable care' and is often more about your inactions than your actions. For example, was supervision adequate? Was it a safe environment? Was it foreseeable or preventable?

The 'reasonable teacher' test

In establishing a teacher's liability, the courts will consider:

- the knowledge you've gained from qualifications, work experience, professional development, awareness of DET and school policies and guidelines, etc
- your years of experience as a teacher
- your professional judgement, based on your knowledge and experience
- common sense, which is heightened for teachers because of the above points.

Social media

You need to remember that you are not only a private citizen but a representative of DET. Ministerial Order 1038 states that an employee must not: a) behave in a way which impairs the employee's influence over students or standing in the community; or b) act in a manner unbecoming of their position, including outside their hours of duty.

You need to remember that social media is immediate, not easily erased, and can quickly 'go viral'. Therefore, it is important when it comes to social media, including gaming and dating sites, to:

- get your privacy settings right
- avoid making students your 'friends', including former students who may have siblings that are or could be your students
- be aware of the risks of having parents as 'friends' and know what they can see on your profiles
- do not access social media during class time, whether from your mobile device or a school computer.

To see the full presentation, look out for the upcoming webinar to be announced soon. If you have specific questions about any of this information, or you need advice or support, contact the Member Support Centre on **03 9417 2822**.

GET CONNECTED, GET INVOLVED



Keep in touch with the AEU and your fellow CRT members online through our Facebook community:

facebook.com/groups/AEU.CRTs



MONEY MATTERS

GEOFF ALLEN,
FINANCIAL CONSULTANT &
AEU ASSOCIATE MEMBER

Managing personal risk

Over the years, I've had numerous conversations with my adult children about the need for personal risk insurance. It's a topic that often gets put on the back-burner, along with preparation of a will and arranging powers of attorney, but it's an important component of any financial strategy, warranting action, adoption and regular review as financial and lifestyle needs change. This is particularly true if you have a partner and, perhaps, young children.

Mitigating risk is something we do daily, if unconsciously. Surrounded by potential hazards, we modify our behaviour to overcome them. That could mean driving defensively, eating sensibly or reducing our alcohol intake. But no matter how careful we are, we simply can't anticipate every adverse situation we might encounter.

Insure yourself

We tend to insure our homes, contents and cars, but often pay minimal attention to personal cover such as death and disability, income protection and trauma insurance. Uptake of private health insurance can also be patchy, but it's worth considering.

Start now

The cost of personal insurance is usually age-related, with younger applicants able

to secure extensive cover inexpensively. Death and disability cover and income protection are often available through your superannuation fund, so premiums can be paid in regular instalments.

Prioritise

A good starting point is to consider how your partner and/or family would be able to cope financially if you became disabled, unable to work for an extended period or, worst case scenario, died. How much sick leave do you have? Would you need replacement income when your sick leave ran out?

In the case of permanent disability or death, you would probably want to expunge all debt, including an existing mortgage. If you have children, how much would it cost to plan for their future? By asking the right questions, you can establish the types of insurance best suited to your personal

circumstances and the appropriate level of cover.

Next steps

Contact your super fund and make an appointment to have a risk assessment and receive a quote. If you already have cover but haven't had a review for some time, it's worth getting back in touch. Avoid procrastination. Good luck.

Note: This article is in no way intended to provide you with personal advice and you should discuss your own circumstances with your authorised financial adviser before committing to any decisions on matters raised in this article.



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Building blocks

A new foundation course is giving AEU reps the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to assist members and build their sub-branch, writes **RACHEL POWER**.

Taking on a union role can be a daunting prospect, especially without the right support and information. That's why the AEU has developed its Level 1 Reps Training courses, offering a foundation for new schools reps, or a refresher for longer-term reps who haven't yet done any union training.

The one-day course aims to strengthen reps' knowledge about the AEU and skill them up on key aspects of the role including recruitment, the agreement, building engagement and activism, and how to take up sub-branch issues in the workplace or with the union more broadly.

It is also a great opportunity to meet and discuss issues with teachers and ES staff from other schools, according to three AEU reps who attended the training in Bendigo last year.

"Initially it provided a lot of clarity about the role and the responsibilities that go with that," says Danielle Scanlon from Bendigo South East College. "But it also helped give us all confidence about where we stood – who we could speak to about issues and the type of issues we could take up – and what advice to give or who to refer it on to. And be much more informed to deal with those issues, especially if they had a bit of complexity."

Corey Gilmore, teacher at Kangaroo Flat Primary School, agrees. "I was very

new to the responsibility at a union level in the school. The training really enhanced my knowledge about how to assist members at a school level. Also, ways to recruit new members that I wasn't aware of. It certainly helped me talk with staff and to assist leadership with union issues that pop up at a consultative level."

For Strathfieldsaye Primary School teacher Lucy Lang, the course helped recharge her commitment to the union.

"When you're teaching, the union stuff can often come second, so it was nice to be refreshed.


"I liked chatting to the other reps and seeing what they're doing to promote the union in their school, what they did with their sub-branch money, how often they're meeting and what they're meeting about."

Working alongside a very experienced sub-branch president, who covers most of the paperwork and industrial advice at her school, Lucy has been able to focus on improving the AEU's presence in the staffroom – acknowledging members on the noticeboard to highlight that the union is a special thing to be part of.

She says the course helped her feel more confident about approaching people regarding membership and union-related issues – "especially if I'm less experienced

than them. It's easy to think that because I think the union's good, everyone thinks that way."

Corey agrees. "People often already have their own ideas about unions before we talk to them about what we do for our members. The training's been really good for having those recruitment conversations. Some staff don't even know there's a union out there and the benefits of being part of it."

Danielle says the course assisted her to approach people in a non-confrontational way and get them on-side. But it also reinforced the value of membership and her own sense of comradeship. "Especially if you're in a small sub-branch, being part of a bigger organisation and having that backing. It built my own personal activism, feeling like I had that connection with members in other schools, and brought back some of that positivity about getting out there and taking action." 

The AEU is offering Level 1 and 2 Reps Training courses for members in metro and regional areas.

For more information, contact your local AEU organiser or rowena.matcott@aeuvic.asn.au.

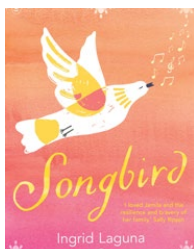


Tales of the City NETFLIX
★★★★★

When British network Channel 4 first broadcast their six-episode adaptation of author Armistead Maupin's novel *Tales of the City* in 1993, it provoked controversy and, of course, became a ratings smash.

Depicting the sweetly melodramatic lives of the kooky residents of 28 Barbary Lane, a hilltop San Francisco apartment block owned by marijuana-smoking trans woman Anna Madrigal (Olympia Dukakis), it was one of the earliest shows to portray LGBTIQ+ characters positively. New arrival Mary Ann Singleton (Laura Linney), a naïve Midwesterner, forged an adoring friendship with gay man Michael 'Mouse' Tolliver (Marcus D'Amico), expanding her worldview over the three seasons.

This triumphant return, drawing on Maupin's final three novels in the nine-book series, revisits these beloved characters in middle age, with Mouse now depicted by Australian Murray Bartlett. Bittersweet and tinged with mystery, it adeptly services long-term fans and welcomes newbies with a raft of younger residents. Wearing a fiercely beating heart on its sleeve, expect tears and cheers. **–Stephen A Russell**



Songbird INGRID LAGUNA (TEXT)
★★★★★

As a teacher at the Collingwood English Language School, author Ingrid Laguna has drawn on her first-hand experience of working with newly-arrived migrants and refugees to write a fun, tender and uplifting portrait of a young Muslim girl's struggle to belong. *Songbird* is a story that any child who has dealt with bullying or being the new kid at school will relate to, while offering a gentle insight into the refugee experience.

Eleven-year-old Jamila lives with her mother and little brother in a council flat in Reservoir, having fled Iraq for Australia. Working hard to learn the language and forge new friendships, Jamila is hampered by the needs of her mother, who – depressed and unable to speak English – needs constant help with shopping and appointments.

Fearing for her journalist father and missing her best friend back home, there is one thing that provides Jamila with solace – her love of singing. When she joins the school choir, things start looking up, until Jamila is forced to make a difficult choice between honouring her family traditions and embracing her new life. **–Rachel Power**



2040 (G, 92mins) MADMAN ENTERTAINMENT
★★★★★

If the mere thought of climate change makes you a sweaty, despairing mess, then stop. Breathe. Don't freak out. *That Sugar Film* director Damon Gameau has the answer. Or, at the very least, some of them.

His new documentary *2040* is all about positivity. Yes, that might be in short supply right now, but perhaps that's what's holding us back.

There are brilliant solutions already in play all over the globe, from community gardens to seaweed farms, from light touch agriculture to public transport fuelled by food waste. With his bright and breezy style, Gameau meets the experts presenting the big picture, but also highlights small ways we can help our local communities.

The cutest aspect of the doco is the time he takes to talk to school children all over the world and pick their unjaded brains about how to make the world a better place. On its DVD release later this year, *2040* is sure to prove a great resource for schools and a real optimism generator. Maybe we'll all be fine if we just stop, look and listen to the kids.

–Stephen A Russell

WINE with Paddy Kendler

Among the many relatively recent grape varieties looking for favour on the Australian palate is the white viognier (vee-on-yair).

Its spiritual home is in the Northern Rhone Valley, where it appears either as a straight varietal or as a minor component in the Cote Rotie blend with shiraz. Many Australian winemakers have tried the latter with excellent to ordinary outcomes.

An enjoyable viognier usually features some orange, even mandarin, aromas and flavours, sometimes with a suggestion of apricot. The texture is akin to chardonnay although not usually oaked: not as lively and sprightly as riesling or sauvignon blanc – smoother, rounder and somewhat richer.

Among the leading viognier procedures, Yalumba stands tall after some 30 years of pioneering research and excellent results. It produces at least three versions at varying price points starting with the Y Series at \$15.

Other makers use it to impressive effect in blends with the other major Rhone whites, marsanne and roussanne, including d'Arenberg, Tahbilk and Rutherglen Estates. Imports from southern France are also worth sampling, as are any locals from cooler regions such as southern Victoria, Eden Valley and the Adelaide Hills.

Jacob's Creek Cabernet Sauvignon 2017 (\$9)

Young cabernets usually aren't as likeable as this, but its makers were clearly not aiming for a cellaring style. A savoury if simple dry red designed for casual meals.

Thorn-Clarke Sandpiper Barossa Shiraz 2016 (\$20)

Not as weighty as many from the famous Valley, but drinking a treat right now, featuring bold sweet berry fruit characters. Neatly structured, well balanced.

Frogmore Creek 42°S Pinot Noir 2018 (\$26)

Fresh and lively bouquet, distinctively pinot; gentle texture with fine silky tannins. Quite delicious and better than many pretenders at twice the price.



A holiday that makes a tradition of eating sweet bread and chocolate is still my kind of holiday. But when I was young, I wouldn't feel guilty about it. Now, it's complicated.

Leading by Eggxample

SARAH WARD

Like most of us who spend too much time on social media, the results of May's federal election came as a shock. Everyone I knew was so sure the Morrison government would be history and that we would be waking up on 19 May to a better, fairer Australia.

Instead, my Facebook feed was full of people who, like me, couldn't understand what had happened. Hadn't we all been making progress? Weren't we all on the same page? Who were these mysterious Australians voting in a prime minister who seemed so unpopular and whose party was so recently in complete disarray?

Of course, when it comes down to it, my Facebook account is just a reflection of me: an echo-chamber of my own opinions. It makes me feel like I'm making a difference but, really, I'm a couch activist.

At the end of last term, there was an Easter raffle at my local primary school. The proceeds go to the school and it's a highlight of the annual calendar. Lots of people score big baskets of chocolate and it's all good fun – and yet, it troubles me.

I have a photo of myself at five years old in a white leotard and rabbit hat, walking in the Easter Bonnet parade. I still remember making the hat with my mum out of cardboard and cotton buds. It brought me close to her and to my community and I loved Easter.

A holiday that makes a tradition of eating sweet bread and chocolate is still my kind of holiday. But when I was young, I wouldn't feel guilty about it. Now, it's more complicated. We have access to so much information.


We know that too much sugar can kill us, "a glass and a half of full cream dairy milk," threatens the survival of orangutans, and the foil covering our eggs will hang around on the planet for hundreds of years. Taking part in the traditional Easter chocathon now feels like conspiring in further damage to the whole planet, let alone our own bodies!

So, what did I do? Right before the Easter holidays I made sure to remind all of my Facebook 'friends' that Cadbury, Lindt and Nestle use palm oil and not to support

companies that destroy jungles and ecosystems. I self-righteously bought Easter eggs from local chocolate makers, which was expensive. (My political views don't always match my income.)

I'm not sure any of my Facebook friends were influenced by my announcements. Being my friends, I was no doubt preaching to the choir. My bold political statement was probably about as disruptive as a group hug. After all, outside my echo chamber, all the playful Easter rituals – chocolate egg hunts, raffles, leaving carrots out for a make-believe bunny – continued on as usual.

In the aftermath of the election, maybe we need to remember that it's what we do in our day-to-day offline lives that really matters. Most of the real change happens when members of the community sit with each other and talk, or rally and march together in large numbers. That's why schools have the potential to be such powerful places for change. One of the best things about local public schools is that children from different religions, beliefs, cultures, classes and sexualities are all in one place, learning together: hearing from the teachers and each other.

All change starts with a vision. I don't know what a better future looks like but I'm going to continue protesting in my own little ways through the choices I make about what I buy and how much I consume. As for the election, I'm too busy comforting myself with locally made choccies to post about it right now. Actions speak louder than words. 

Sarah Ward is a multi-award-winning chanteuse, cabaret artist and performer, otherwise known as Yana Alana.

We all want to believe that we treat every person the same, regardless of their race, background or sex, but we all have unconscious biases.

Through which lens?

KEMI NEKVAPIL

Recently I was sitting in my local café, where I write on the same day nearly every week, as do several other familiar faces. That familiarity means that we are used to starting debates with the room at large and jumping in on conversations we didn't start.

One man said to another in his group: "You're from Colombia, you must be happy to be here in Australia with all the drug cartels over there."

The man from Colombia was clearly taken aback.

"My country has many wonderful things", he responded.

"Yes, for tourists," said the man.

"There are lots of good things for Colombians, not just for tourists," replied the Colombian man.

I couldn't help joining the conversation. As someone who is used to other people's narrow projections because of my race and gender, I felt compelled.

"There are drug cartels in every country in the world," I said.

Another woman in the café said to me, but loud enough for the room to hear: "Everyone lives in their bubble."

She was right, of course. One of the founding principles of coaching is that everyone sees life from their own perspective, through their own lens.

I never used to understand it when someone would say to me: "I don't see your colour". Although I understood the intention behind this comment, I also found it offensive.

I am a black woman. I see the world through my lens of belonging to a minority group (in the UK and Australia). My empathy

comes from this experience, my resilience comes from this experience. I see the world through this lens. If you don't see my colour, you don't see me.

I cannot tell you the amount of times people have spoken to me more slowly, assuming that English was not my first language. And yet, I can also be guilty of making assumptions.

I will never forget a moment when my own unconscious bias raised its head, soon after I first came to Australia. I was shopping at Melbourne's iconic Queen Victoria Market and an Asian man spoke to me with a broad Aussie accent. I think my brain exploded right there in front of him. I did not even realise I had assumed that he would speak with an Asian accent, until he smashed my lens to pieces. I did to him what others do to me, and what we all do to each other.

I know we all want to believe that we treat every person the same, regardless of their race, background or sex. We each want to believe that we have no unconscious bias, that we have no lens. I am sorry to be the bearer of truth, but we all have unconscious biases. We are all looking at life through a lens we have crafted over time. This lens distorts, amplifies and curates our beliefs, our actions and how we communicate with others.

Within your classroom, there are going to be students who you feel more of an affinity with than others: the ones you 'get'. There will be others with whom you struggle or who challenge your assumptions: the ones you don't 'get'. We communicate differently with people we perceive to be different to us.

If you find yourself with a student who repeatedly plays up in class, it is hard to not see that student through a lens that says "troublemaker", and communicate accordingly. The same way that if your partner is always late, it is hard to not to see them through a lens that says "unreliable", and respond accordingly. We are all




working from our own assumptions and perspectives.

What we need to be aware of is when that perspective is restrictive. Once we decide that our way of seeing things is the only way, we start to shut down the opportunities for growth and connection – not just for ourselves, but for others.

So, how do we start to widen the lens?

Through self-awareness and honesty. When we can recognise our biases and then confront, explore and unpick them, we have the opportunity to see things and people differently.

Try it the next time you talk to a student who rubs you up the wrong way. Be aware of the baggage you're bringing to that conversation – all the assumptions you're already making about them. While you're talking, give that student a chance to surprise you, and take the opportunity to consider how your own assumptions may have been wrong. This way, you might start to see the other person for who they really are, not just how they appear through a pre-conditioned lens. 

Kemi Nekvapil is an ICF accredited life-coach and author of *Raw Beauty – the 7 principles to nourish your body, transform your mind and create the life you want.*
keminekvapil.com

It was the prospect of doing *nothing* that had sustained me through the last weeks of term.

Should I stay or should I go?

A.J. BETTS

It's around the seven-week mark of term when conversations start veering towards the holidays. 'Got any plans?' Immediately you're positioned in one of two camps: the goers or the stayers. The former proudly and loudly answer with a destination, often accompanied with a reason, as if requested. 'Bali, for a wedding.' 'Byron, to go surfing.' 'Ireland, for a *Game of Thrones* set tour.'

'Ooh,' others dutifully undulate in chorus, followed by the requisite, 'lucky you!'

But the truth is, those who identify as stayers aren't envious of their counterparts' trips – not even a bit. I know this because, over the past holidays, I was one such stayer. After a taxing term, the mere idea of travelling exhausted me. The hassle of last-minute packing, cramped seats on no-frills flights that nevertheless cost a fortune in peak season, the hazards of food poisoning and/or encounters with White Walkers.

I didn't need to be an economics teacher to perform a quick cost-benefit analysis: I knew that going away would be more effort than it was worth. Which is why I smiled smugly on the last Friday of school

as others madly sought currency, organised insurance and dashed off for vaccinations.

It was the prospect of doing *nothing* that had sustained me through the last few weeks of term. Empty, glorious nothing. If I wanted to do *something*, I reasoned, I may choose to read breezily in a hammock at home, or potter around the garden. If energised, I might take a stroll in a park, engaging in the Japanese *shinrin-yoku* practice of 'forest bathing'. I imagined that time would slow right down, along with my pulse. For two weeks, I would be a master of Zen.

But by day two, I'd remembered the inconvenient truth: I am not a natural stayer. For one, I have no hammock and, even if I did, I'd have trouble sinking into it. My sitting-still skills are more akin to a Labrador puppy's than a Buddhist monk's. And I'd become suddenly aware of all the things I'd been neglecting for 10 weeks. Medical appointments to make. DIY to attempt. A garden to rescue. A social life to resurrect.

To-do lists proliferated like weeds, first as scrawled post-it-notes, then as spreadsheets on my laptop. Rather than letting time wend its way through my holidays as an idyllic, free-flowing stream, I found myself plotting it, Tetris-like, into satisfying stacks of quantifiable units: hour upon hour; task after task. Non-teaching friends – who assumed I'd be swanning about the house in a sarong – emerged with requests for catch-ups and coffees. (Why must they always be running late? Then boast about not owning a watch?!)



PHOTO: SUPPLIED

I wasn't always like this – I'm 80% sure of it. Hadn't I once scoffed at clocks? Slept in till mid-morning? Drifted aimlessly through the days like I had all the time in the world?

But 20 years of teaching can change a person. With every hour accounted for and every year partitioned into smaller portions of time, it's easy to become fond of frameworks. Even my body clock is now synched with the school schedule.

I take pride in my time-keeping efficiency. I've come to learn, for example, that a lot can be achieved in two minutes: a cup of tea can be made, its bag left in to infuse on the walk to the next class; an email replied to on my smartphone; an essay marked – though, granted, only a bad one. (I don't want to brag or anything but, on a good day, I can do all three at once.)

So, it's not easy to simply switch this off during the holidays. It requires real effort to relax, mindfulness to be mindless. It takes me at least five days to step away from the spreadsheets. Another five to desist with the lists, replacing them with one instruction. *Relax*. If feeling audacious, I might even slip off my watch. Only then does time start feeling less like Tetris blocks and more like playdough: heavy, pliable and willing. Only then do I remember my motivation for being a stayer, and stress less about the time-wasting implications of *nothing*. That's when I finally stop, look up, and marvel at the shape-shifting clouds, wishing there were more days like this.

Make no mistake, though: I'll be a goer next holidays. It'll be easier that way. **AEU**



Pretending to go to Tasmania was the best holiday Ms Nguyen had ever taken.

A.J. Betts is a teacher, speaker and author of award-winning YA novel *Zac & Mia* (Text). Her latest book is *Hive* (Pan Macmillan). Its sequel, *Rogue*, will be released in July.



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when you're at your best, you can
bring out the **best in others** too.

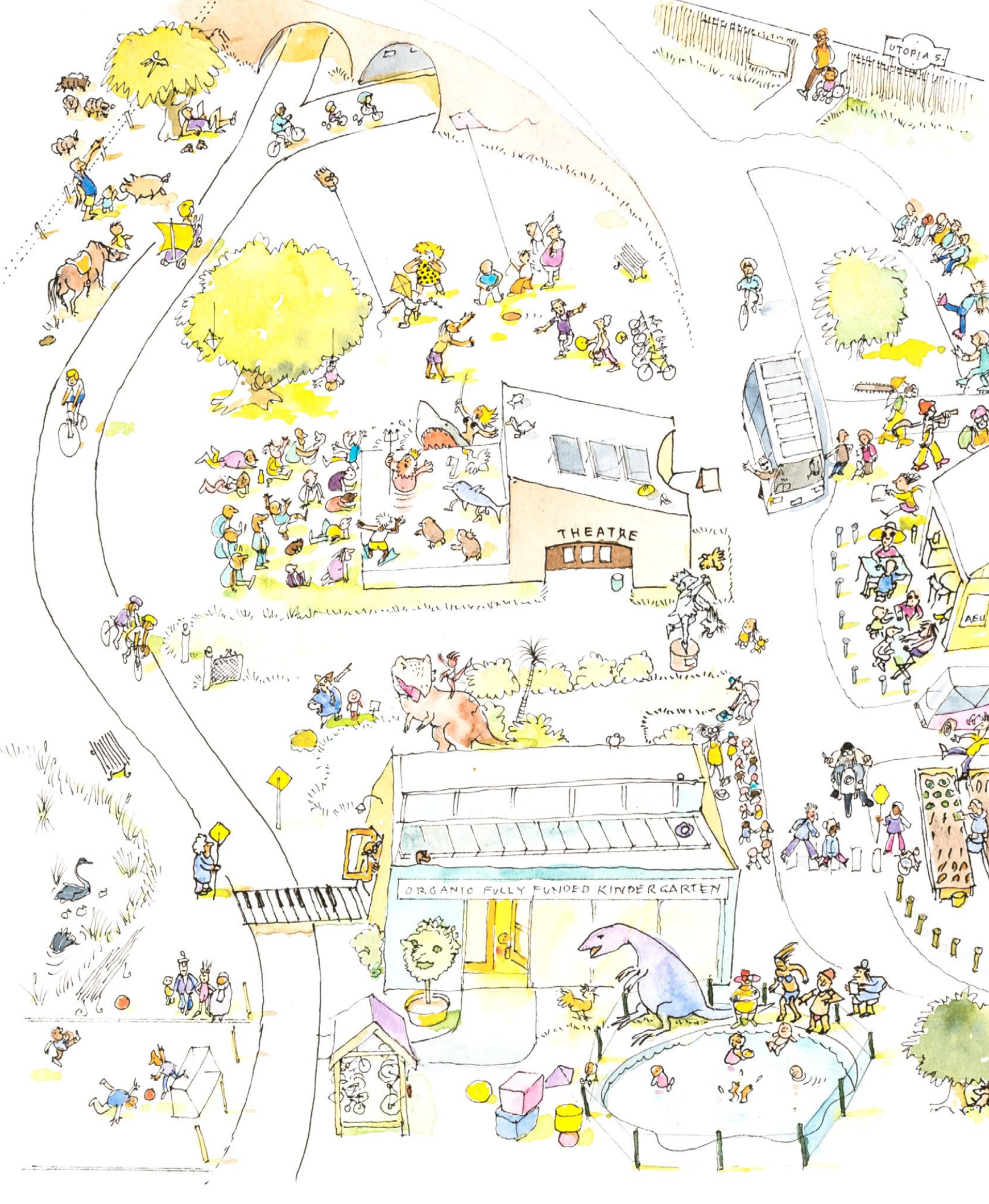
Andrew, School principal & THF member

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