Mind matters at work p26
How do we produce literate students? p8
Create in a Makerspace p16
Support staff – tell us your story

In the next issue of IE we’d like to run a section focusing on the fascinating and diverse work that is done by support and operational staff in our schools.

Please tell us what matters to you and what you’d like to read about in IE.

Archivists
Aboriginal Education Workers
Bursars and accounts staff
Teachers aides
Clerical and administrative staff
Journalists and communication staff
Foundation and event management staff
Maintenance staff

Operational staff
Gardeners
Tradespeople
Canteen staff
Uniform shop staff
Nurses
Counsellors
Information technology staff
Boarding house staff
Bus drivers
Caretakers and security staff
Lab technician

We want to hear your story, so contact us at iemagazine@ieu.asn.au and tell us what matters to you.

Most see a disruption.
Some see a Propulsion Engineer.

Everyday you inspire and help people grow so they can recognise their full potential. That’s why we’re committed to working closely alongside our customers, to help you build your own healthy and prosperous future.

As a mutual bank our profits go back into providing more competitive rates and more personalised services. So no matter what you’re aiming for, you can bank on us to be there.

Call 1300 654 822 or visit victeach.com.au

Bank | Save | Borrow | Invest | Protect
### Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Create in a Makerspace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Kaleidoscope Stewart Condon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Australia wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>How do we produce literate students? Misty Adoniou Associate Professor in Languages, Literacy and TESL writes...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>What kind of future do we want for our children? The Australian Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey 2015...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>These are testing times Will teacher tests make a difference in the classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Building students’ ICT skills for the 21st century – what’s the answer? The close of last year saw a flurry of government and media comment...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Smoothing the transition to school Starting school is an important milestone for all children, and when a child has a disability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Smarter Assessment: How to combat overload It is an experience all of us have had, NSW ACT IEU Professional Officer Matt Esterman writes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Learning and teaching outside the box For many years I implemented outdoor learning programs with K-6 classes, Amanda Leggett writes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Mind matters at work We all understand the importance of good physical health...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Overworked and undervalued Australian teachers put in longer hours in bigger classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Schools and the law... A new pilot program is bringing legal education and support for students and parents into schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>How to manage stress and an increasing workload Teacher wellbeing coach Patti Glasgow discusses how teachers can juggle...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>What do you think about IE? The IE editorial committee recently ran a survey of our readership...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Starting your own education revolution My motto for 2016 is to make learning fun for all students...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Building blocks for a glorious retirement Forgoing some salary now allows you to benefit from tax concessions...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Create in a Makerspace

What began as a small mentoring program 11 years ago with...
Stewart Condon is President and Board Chair at Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) Australia. He also works as a locum at emergency departments in Illawarra area hospitals. He studied medicine at the University of NSW, and worked as a doctor on the south coast before moving to central Australia to assist Aboriginal communities.

Stewart started his association with MSF as a volunteer, travelling to Sudan, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to provide emergency medical aid.

Condon told IE Journalist Sue Osborne that he has been disturbed by recent events that have seen MSF hospitals or hospitals supported by MSF bombed, particularly the US airstrike last October on a hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, which left at least 42 patients and medical staff dead.

His tenure as President will end soon and he’s looking forward to getting back out in the field.

I was born in Sydney but I spent my earliest 10 years of schooling in Adelaide. I went to Belair Primary School then had a year at Unley High School before we moved back to Sydney. I had one year at Concord High School before I won a scholarship to Newington College.

I don’t think changing schools a lot was detrimental to my education. It gave me an interesting insight into how schools function in different ways. I was surprised how South Australia can operate a different curriculum and at a different speed to NSW. Year 8 in Sydney was behind Year 8 in Adelaide.

I went to Belair Primary School then had a year at Unley High School before we moved back to Sydney. I had one year at Concord High School before I won a scholarship to Newington College.

I don’t think changing schools a lot was detrimental to my education. It gave me an interesting insight into how schools function in different ways. I was surprised how South Australia can operate a different curriculum and at a different speed to NSW. Year 8 in Sydney was behind Year 8 in Adelaide.

It was only towards the end of school I realised I wanted to be a doctor. I was always interested in maths and science and I came from a medical family. Mum was a nurse/midwife and dad was a radiographer. In Year 12 it crystallised that science felt more real to me than the humanities but I wanted to do something that involved communicating as well.

My enjoyment of science started in primary school, from a teacher who...
taught us computing, Dr Jay. He was a flamboyant teacher who gave a really interesting flavour to the subject and it was more hands on than other subjects. I had a physics teacher at Newington, Dr Newcombe, who was fantastic. He saw my talents in science and maths and encouraged me to take part in Olympiads.

Equal opportunity
I would say my interest in social justice came from my family although I think school had an effect too. At Newington there was more of a Christian ethos. But being at Newington made me uncomfortable because I was aware of the privilege. I had stayed in touch with a best friend at Concord High where we had been competing closely for marks. When we got our final TER he got 90, which is great and really good for Concord High, but I got 99, and I found that difficult. People should have equal access to opportunity.

Newington also had a program where they gave scholarships and board to boys from the Pacific Islands on a rugby program.

I got to know some of their stories. This made me aware that people, just a few hours flight from Australia, had no running water and other problems and I found this shocking.

I loved being at school. We remember the teachers but the environment was important too. I still dream about the leafy ovals at Belair. They seemed so big to me at the time. Newington was also amazing with its big open green spaces.

Keeping people safe
I have been President of MSF Australia for about 18 months and on the board for almost five years. It’s a coordinating role, we meet every four to six weeks and there are international meetings. The field missions are coordinated from Paris and we supply the human resources and finances.

As President I have a WHS responsibility to try and make sure we are sending staff to a safe environment. We don’t want our staff to die for the cause. Under the Geneva Convention warring parties are supposed to respect the Red Cross on the roof of a hospital, but warring parties are changing.

The hospital in Kunduz was the only one in the area available to patients with traumatic injuries. The cost to staff is horrific but the impact on the community is huge too.

West Africa was another good example. No hospitals were destroyed but staff were in insecure conditions because of the Ebola virus.

We have to make sure we put people into the right circumstances. We assume medical work can happen and we can treat patients and I hope that will continue.
NSW ACT Campaign for fair treatment of asylum seekers

The Union is engaged in a range of equity and social justice initiatives including activities in support of fair treatment of refugees and their children. Following an announcement by the Minister for Immigration to return 72 children to Nauru that are currently held in detention on the Australian mainland, the IEU joined the campaign against the transfer of the children. A rally was held in Sydney on 4 February.

IEU members have great concern about the impact of detention centres on children with IEU Council members donating generously to Chilout (Children Out of Immigration Detention) on World Refugee Day 2015. It is reported that the average length of time that asylum seekers (including children) spend in detention is 445 days. Alarming statistics are available about the devastating impact on the mental health of children in Nauru. There is also great concern about the exposure of children to abuse and sexual harassment in the centres.

The Union will continue to work with Chilout to make 2016 the year that ends child detention. The IEU also has a broad commitment to campaign for fair treatment of asylum seekers. The High Court’s recent 6-1 ruling that Australia’s detention regime at Nauru and Manus Island is lawful opens the door for the return of more than 220 asylum seekers to Nauru. This includes children and 37 babies born in Australia. The legal decision however has sparked significant community comment about the moral issue. We invite all IEU members Australia wide to join this important campaign.

Ambitious program

The NSW/ACT IEU Women’s Committee launched the year with the IEU International Women’s Day Event held on 4 March at the Union’s Wattle St Office. Union leader and Assistant Secretary of Unions NSW, Emma Maiden spoke about ‘Women in Unions’ and IEU member and secondary school teacher, Cassandra Pride presented ‘Boys Reading Women’. These now annual evening events are popular get togethers for members and friends of the IEU.

The Committee has an ambitious annual program with networks in city and regional centres. The biennial Women’s Conference will be held on Friday 19 August 2016.

Queensland Coding on the curriculum

Students in state schools will begin learning digital literacy from prep and will be taught coding until Year 10 under a new education plan. The Government also plans to establish a specialist coding academy to connect students and teachers with industry experts and cutting edge technologies.

IEUA-QNT Branch Secretary Terry Burke said while it is pleasing to see the government focus on teaching children digital literacy, teachers and students in all schools and areas must have access to the resources required for meaningful delivery of the coding curriculum.

“While our Union recognises that the primary focus of the government is education in state schools, it is important that students attending non government schools, and schools in regional and remote areas, also have access to quality education,” he said.

Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk and Education Minister Kate Jones announced in November last year that coding “is a new literacy that every child must have”.

With the unveiling of the government’s Advancing Education plan and #codingcounts discussion paper, Ms Palaszczuk reiterated that coding and robotics are essential to students’ learning in 2016 and beyond in STEM jobs.

“This is all about preparing students for the jobs of the future through embracing new technologies,” Ms Palaszczuk said.

Victoria Landmark laptop court case

November last year saw a landmark court case win for the Australian Education Union (AEU) Victorian Branch against the deductions from teachers’ wages for laptops.

The government had introduced a scheme a number of years ago that provided laptops to 90% of teachers and deducted between $4 and $7 per fortnight from their wages. After three or four years, the laptop was returned to the Department and a new one issued.

Personal use was allowed on certain conditions. Being in the scheme was not really optional.

The AEU lodged a court action because the Fair Work Act prohibits employers deducting money from wages except in very limited circumstances.

The Federal Court found that the laptops were a “tool of trade” for teachers, and decided that the deductions from wages were unreasonable because:

- the teachers had no real choice
- they mostly had to participate
- the deductions were greater than the value of teachers’ personal use, and
- the deductions were not made “principally for the teachers’ benefit.

The Department was ordered to repay $37million to 46,000 teachers and principals.

In non government schools a variety of laptop schemes apply. Advice from the IEU helps members identify whether their circumstances are similar to the government scheme.
On renewal of registration all SA teachers are required to make a declaration that they have completed 60 hours of professional learning in their current term of registration (three years). Teachers must keep a summary record of professional learning undertaken to verify their participation.

An easy way to keep a record is through the Teachers’ Portal accessible through the Teachers Registration Board (TRB) website, or one can download and complete the TRB Professional Learning Summary Record template from the website.

The Teachers’ Portal provides a secure way for teachers to access information and services, such as:

- updating contact details
- viewing registration details
- recording and tracking professional learning activities, and
- accessing and completing the Application for renewal of Registration during the renewal period.

Teachers will need to sign up for an account before they can access the Teachers’ Portal at https://online.trb.sa.edu.au/register.aspx. Only currently registered teachers are eligible to log in to the portal.

To ensure a broad sample across all cohorts of teachers the TRB will randomly select 25% of renewal applicants for evaluation. The evaluation aims to collect evidence as to how teachers are meeting the new professional learning requirements.

Being involved in the evaluation will not delay the renewal process and provided that teachers meet normal renewal requirements, registration will be granted. Teachers will be contacted via email or letter and given 28 days to respond. They will need to provide their professional learning summary record to the TRB. If they have recorded their professional learning on the Teachers’ Portal, the evaluation team will access the summary directly. Otherwise, they will need to send in a signed hard copy of their professional learning summary record.

They will need to complete a survey that will ask for demographic and evaluation information about their professional learning experiences and may be invited to participate in focus groups to be held in Adelaide and regional locations.

In 2016 the IEUwa will be working with an organisation linked to the Faculty of Education at Edith Cowan University, Network Teach. This is a not for profit organisation that supports aspiring teachers across the two metropolitan and one regional Edith Cowan University (ECU) campus sites in Western Australia.

Network Teach was established in 2011 by a small dynamic group of undergraduate education students at ECU. They recognised the need to supplement formal university study with additional and more practical professional learning opportunities. Network Teach hosts an array of professional learning courses, teaching expos and orientation events. Participation in the Network Teach leadership team and in general student participation in professional learning sessions enhances employability. Students are also introduced to a collaborative network for educators well before they reach the classroom. Network Teach is an independent organisation that is staffed by a changing group of Faculty of Education students working alongside Network Teach employees and a University staff member liaison. Network Teach is a voice for the student body; it advocates for improvements such as more meaningful practicums and useful university orientation sessions. Another role is the support of Individual students. The IEUwa partnership with Network Teach presents an exciting opportunity for us to support our early career teacher program and raise our profile amongst education students. The Network Teach model will be taken up by other West Australian University campuses in 2017, with long-term focus on Australia wide growth.

The Northern Territory now has a new Education Act and set of regulations which came into force on 2 January. The Northern Territory Government said the new Act and regulations provide an updated framework for delivering high quality contemporary education to develop students’ potential and maximise their education achievement.

Minor amendments were made to the Act in 2009 and 2011, but the legislation remained largely unchanged since its introduction in 1979. The Government initiated comprehensive reforms to the outdated Act in 2014. Our Union has played an instrumental role in providing vital stakeholder consultation since 2014 in order to address the much needed reforms and share the concerns of non government schools in regulating and implementing curriculum.

Listening to the arguments, mostly made by media and politicians sitting far outside of education, it is clear they use the terms with little comprehension of their meaning or their origin. ‘Whole language’ seems to have become ‘learning words by heart’, and ‘phonics’ seems to have become ‘learning words by sounds’. Both are simplistic and unhelpful characterisations. They imply ‘phonics’ approaches are disinterested in meaning and that ‘whole’ approaches are dismissive of the constituent parts of words. Neither description is accurate.

The difference between ‘whole’ and ‘phonic’ approaches is in their theorising of how literacy is learned. Both agree the aim of literacy is to communicate meaning. Where they differ is in the sequence of events to reach that end.

Phonics based approaches, and more specifically, synthetic phonics based approaches such as those championed by politicians and commercial phonics programs in Australia, the UK and the US, take the position that students must first learn the phonetic code and this will give them the skills to build their way into meaning. This can be described as a bottom up approach to literacy learning.

Whole language based approaches take a top down approach to learning literacy. They begin by teaching students the whole meaning of a text, a sentence or a word and then unpack how those words make their meanings, including how the phonetic code works within words. Whole language approaches have a significant pedagogical edge over phonics based approaches. They are intrinsically engaging because they begin with the end game on view for the students – meaning. This gives an immediate purpose and motivation for learning, and engages the students. Potentially, both approaches can produce literate students, but both approaches are only as good as the teachers who teach them and the effectiveness of both is severely compromised if teachers lack language knowledge. And research has repeatedly shown us that teachers have significant gaps in their understanding of how English works. (Alderson & Hudson 2012, Hadjioannou & Hutchinson, 2010; Moats et al., 2010; Washburn, Joshi, & Cantrell, 2011; Wong, Chong, Choy, & Lim, 2012).

**Loud chorus**

In recent years there has been an increasingly loud ‘phonics first’ chorus in Australia which has led to the mandating of phonics first approaches, as is evident in the recent changes to the Australian Curriculum. There is a real risk that this tacit favouring of phonics first approaches in policy documents will lead to a marginalising of the other crucial components of becoming literate – most particularly meaning, and how words, sentences and texts make their meaning. In the hands of teachers with limited language knowledge, literacy teaching may simply become decoding.

Students who are schooled predominantly in ‘phonics first’ approaches are left with one predominant strategy for tackling new words when they read and write – ‘sounding out’. An analysis of the reading, writing and spelling of underachieving students reveals phonic knowledge is the only tool they draw upon. Unfortunately for them, English is not a language we can sound out – it is...
not a phonetic language. It is a morphophonemic language. This means that sound units of the language are important (the phonemes), but equally important are the meaning units of the language (the morphemes). For example, if English was phonetic we would spell ‘jumped’ as ‘jumt’. Instead we spell it according to its meaning units of ‘jump’, and ‘ed’. ‘Ed’ is the morpheme we add to indicate past tense.

**Applying knowledge**

The Year 7 student who spells ‘beautiful’ as ‘butterfoll’ is telling us she has some sophisticated phonetic knowledge. She knows it is possible for ‘u’ to make the ‘you’ sound she is seeking for this word – as in ‘cute’. She knows ‘er’ can make the long vowel sound she can hear in the word when she pronounces it. She knows that ‘t’ and ‘l’ can be represented by double letters, particularly in the middle and final positions. However, all of this phonetic knowledge is ultimately unhelpful to her. Although she knows the meaning of the word, she doesn’t know how the word makes its meaning. She doesn’t understand the word has two morphemes – the abstract noun ‘beauty’, and the suffix ‘ful’ which turns abstract nouns into adjectives. She doesn’t know she can apply this same knowledge to many other words to help her both write them and comprehend them.

**French origin**

Because she doesn’t understand these two components of the word, she doesn’t know to implement the convention of changing the ‘y’ on the base word to an ‘i’ before adding the suffix.

She doesn’t know that the base word ‘beauty’ is of French origin, and indeed English is in fact a hybrid French/German language, and that the letter pattern ‘eau’ is a direct borrow from the French. She doesn’t know that many of the letter patterns that she is seeking a phonetic match for when she spells will also be carrying their foreign roots with them.

How could she know these things, when she hasn’t been taught them.

Ultimately,
What kind of future do we want for our children?

Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey reveals a disturbing picture

The Australian Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey 2015 results released in December last year www.principalhealth.org.au/reports.php reveals disturbing evidence that far too many of Australia’s schools are struggling to cope with high levels of incivility, Associate Professor Philip Riley writes.

Since 2011, approximately 40% (4388) of Australia’s school leaders from every state and territory and every school sector have taken part in the annual survey. The latest report paints a picture of an Australian education system quite out of balance. The report shows job demands are increasing while resources to help cope with the demands are decreasing. This is a recipe for poor health and that too is confirmed in the study.

Decline in mental health and wellbeing
Despite being well educated, in secure employment, coming from stable backgrounds and in stable families, school leaders score below the average in mental health and experience stress, burnout and sleeping problems at nearly double the population rate.

Clearly something needs to change. The report’s findings probably indicate a much more widespread trend in Australian society that we should be mature enough to address as a nation. Worryingly high prevalence of violence and bullying in schools by adults is antisocial modelling of how to conduct relationships in tense times, for our nation’s children to witness and eventually copy (see figure 1).

The upward five year trend is even more worrying. Adult-adult bullying increased from 4.1-4.3 times higher than the general population; threats of violence (4.9-5.3) and actual violence (increased from 7-8 times higher).

While parents are the main perpetrators, bullying from colleagues and subordinates has also risen from 6.2% and 6.9% in 2011 to 8.2% and 10.5% in 2015 respectively, showing that stress is being distributed widely within and across schools. Anecdotally, teachers also report being bullied by principals. These are signs of a profession overloaded. As a nation, we need to acknowledge these issues so that the process of dealing with the evidence in a mature way can commence.

Volume of work out of control
While it would be easy to only focus on the incivility in schools, which does need serious attention, the job strain is considerable on many fronts, and rapidly increasing. The sheer volume of work for school leaders is putting the greatest strain on them. The increasing volume of work is largely red tape, which explains why a lack of time to focus on teaching and learning is the second highest stressor reported in the study, just behind sheer volume of work. The stress is also affecting their families at rates approximately double the average worker, because partners and family members provide the most support to school leaders, while the
The least amount comes from Departments of Education and other employer groups. This finding challenges bureaucrats to re-examine the effects of system requirements on principals and teachers.

The aim of the research project

The survey has run nationally every year since 2011 in response to growing concern about principal’s occupational health, safety and wellbeing. The aim of this research project is to conduct a longitudinal study monitoring school principals and deputy/assistant principals’ health and wellbeing annually. The health and wellbeing of this group of educators in differing school types, levels and size are monitored, along with lifestyle choices such as exercise and diet, and the professional and personal social support networks available to individuals. Monitoring the turnover of individuals in these positions within schools will allow for investigations of moderator effects, such as years of experience prior to taking up the role. The longitudinal study allows for the mapping of health outcomes on each of the dimensions being investigated over time.

What can be done?

The report makes recommendations for every level of society. These are based on six foundations that would radically change Australia’s education system:

- No single stakeholder group is responsible for the state of education in Australia, nor do they hold the power to effect much change to the system on their own.
- Many issues impacting negatively on the education system are entrenched in the wider Australian culture.
- Taking a long term, rather than short term focus is essential for significant improvement in the system.
- Taking a holistic inquiry approach to both the successes and failures in the Australian education system is also essential.
- Depoliticising education at the macro and micropolitical levels will promote equity, continuity and transparency.
- Australian education needs a change of mindset: moving beyond sectorised thinking. The problems and the solutions are very similar in all sectors so the differences between the sectors are more superficial than substantive.

This change of fundamentals in Australian education systems might be difficult, particularly point five, but together they hold the greatest chance of long term success, and there is strong international evidence to support it. If we want to look after our children and our future as a nation, we need to look after the people we entrust them to every day. We need to have a serious discussion as a nation about deeper issues than national curriculum and teacher standards and begin the difficult conversations about the future of our society through schooling.

Associate Professor Philip Riley works for the Australian Catholic University and has overseen the project. He is a former school principal and is also the Chief Investigator for the Irish Principals and Deputy Principals Health and Wellbeing Survey.
This test was one of the significant recommendations on how to improve teacher quality identified in the Report of the Teacher Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG). The review undertaken in 2014 by this advisory group was the 102nd inquiry into teacher education in Australia. The test itself is the resultant product of the deliberations on how to supposedly measure that “initial teacher education entrants will have personal literacy and numeracy skills equivalent to those of the top 30% of the adult population”. This benchmark figure is part of the ‘standards’ required to be met by universities in respect to the national accreditation process for teacher education courses in Australia.

The Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) designed the trial test which contained 130 items, including reading comprehension, technical writing skills, algebra statistics and geometry. ACER claims that the test has been designed to reflect the contexts in which aspiring teachers are likely to exercise personal literacy and numeracy; personal and community, schools and teaching and further education and training. The first phase of the trial test was undertaken by 5000 volunteer student teachers across the country, with 92% passing in literacy and 90% in the numeracy component (or if you prefer the reporting style of some media, 1 in 10 failing the test).

**Test to graduate**

The second phase is the implementation of the test from 1 July 2016. The cost of sitting the test will be the responsibility of the students. Student teachers will be required to pass the test in order to graduate.

It is not yet clear how many times the test can be retaken. It is also not clear what universities will do to assist student teachers undertaking preservice courses who do not pass the test. It is clearly ludicrous to have students undertake years of study in teacher preservice courses, be they four year bachelor degrees or two year post graduate education courses, who cannot graduate because of performance on a one off test at the end of their course.
What are the proper skills to teach, then how exactly do these literacy and numeracy tests assess those skills?

Will these tests do the job?

Of course, the first question to ask is what are the proper skills to teach, then how exactly do these literacy and numeracy tests assess those skills?

A quick glance at the website of the Queensland Department of Education – the biggest employer of graduate teachers in the state – lists the following as the skills and qualities of good teachers:

- having a strong knowledge in particular subject areas
- enthusiasm
- being good at explaining things to others
- ability to work in a team as well as using your own initiative
- being a people person and enjoying working with a diverse range of people
- good time management
- having patience, a sense of humour and fair mindedness, and
- coping well with change and enjoying a challenge.

None of these are assessable in a single test. There is a broader discussion going on at the moment about lifting ‘teacher quality’ in Australian schools, fuelled by the Federal Government’s Student First policy platform and an enthusiastic mainstream media. Some of the measures include raising university entrance scores, undertaking personality testing for teaching applicants, and ensuring that teachers are in the top 30% for literacy and numeracy. These tests are intended to ensure the latter.

Yet there is little evidence of a causal link between effective classroom teaching and the academic performance of prospective teachers. It is also unclear exactly what this style of pre-emptive testing means for meaningfully deciding who is classroom ready and who is not. While it is hard to argue against having the very best and brightest in our classrooms, there has not been a convincing case made for how these tests will ensure that we produce competent and effective teaching graduates.

Perhaps we should turn to the providers of initial teacher education to ensure that graduates are ‘classroom ready’.

There are already robust accreditation processes in place for universities that deliver initial teacher education programs and moves are underway to better align these nationally against the AITSL professional standards as well as the existing state regulatory authorities.

Take, as one example, a four year bachelor of education that requires preservice teachers to connect theory and practice in their coursework and professional experience placements. There are increasingly sophisticated literacy and numeracy demands placed on them throughout the program, as well as a range of professional learning experiences that cannot be pre-empted either through high school academic results, ATAR scores or standardised literacy and numeracy testing.

Put simply, there is no way that a test can possibly come close to the level of professional learning that needs to be demonstrated by teaching graduates in order to pass their teaching degree and become registered teachers.

This of course begs the question, why have the tests at all?

Dr Stewart Riddle, Senior Lecturer (Curriculum and Pedagogy) Section School of Teacher Education and Early Childhood at the University of Southern Queensland.
Building students’ ICT skills for the 21st century – what’s the answer?

The close of last year saw a flurry of government and media comment focusing on Australia’s recent performance in various STEM benchmarking tests, writes IEU VicTAS Assistant Secretary Cathy Hickey.

Australia’s students are falling behind in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. What’s the problem and what are the answers? It’s time to move beyond the quick fix.

In mid November last year, the 2014 National Assessment Program (NAP) ICT Literacy Report was released by the Education Council (of education ministers). While the report confirmed the general belief that Australian students are frequent users of computer technology and continue to express interest and enjoyment when working with computers, the report showed a significant decline in their ICT literacy compared to previous performance.

There was a decline in the mean performance of Year 6 students in 2014, compared to the last assessment in 2011. Similarly, the mean performance of Year 10 students is significantly lower than the mean performance in all previous NAP-ICT literacy assessments (2005, 2008 and 2011). The NAP-ICT literacy test assesses student ICT knowledge, understanding and skills, as well as students’ ability to use ICT creatively, critically and responsibly.

In October and November 2014, approximately 10,500 Year 6 and Year 10 students participated in the NAP-ICT literacy online test. Samples of students were randomly selected from over 650 government, Catholic and independent schools in metropolitan, rural and remote areas around the country.

The results showed that 55% of Year 6 students achieved expected standards, and 52% of Year 10 students achieved the proficient standards, being deemed competent in completing “challenging but reasonable” tasks, such as the creation of tables and charts, sorting data in a spreadsheet or editing graphics and text. State and territory figures ranged from 43% (Year 10) in the Northern Territory to 60% in the ACT.

Decline from previous years
The decline from previous years has raised interesting challenges. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding the Proficient standards for Year 6 increased by 13 percentage points from 49% to 62% between 2005 and 2011, however the percentage decreased between 2011 and 2014. The percentage of students attaining the Proficient standard for Year 10 had been stable from 2005 to 2011, but it dropped from 65 to 52 between 2011 and 2014.

Where are the challenge areas?
The report highlights that most of the relationships between ICT literacy and student characteristics have remained similar over time, so it does not appear that the overall decline is associated with particular groups of students. The decreases also appear to be similar in each of the jurisdictions (state and sector).

That being said, there are differences in performance that (and teachers will say ‘continue’ to) stand out:

● Students with unemployed parents or parents with very low levels of education, had lower test scores.
● Students with parents who were senior managers or professionals, or had attained a bachelor degree or above, had higher test scores than those with parents who were unskilled labourers, office or sales staff, or had a Year 9 level of education or below.
● Non metropolitan students – inner city Year 6 students are achieving the highest scores in computer literacy (58%) compared to students in provincial areas (48%) and those in remote areas (36%)
● Indigenous students – these students performed lower than non Indigenous students over the past nine years – 57% of Year 6 non Indigenous students achieved the expected level of competency in 2014, compared to 22% of Indigenous students.
● Boys – while boys tend to be more confident in performing computer related tasks, girls are more digitally competent. Sixty per cent of Year 6 girls attained an expected level of competency, compared to 52% of boys.

Reasons for the decline
The NAP-ICT Literacy Report proposes that the decline does not appear to be a result of changes in the test content, in the way the test was administered or sample obtained. It puts forward that one of the possible interpretations of the decline in ICT literacy is that the increased use of mobile technology devices has resulted in less emphasis on communication applications.
It proposes that it is also possible that there has been less emphasis placed in schools on the teaching of skills associated with ICT literacy, with the development of young people’s literacy competencies increasingly being taken for granted.

The problem is not so simple
Research by Michael Phillips, lecturer in Digital Technologies at Monash University believes that the challenges may be much more complicated than this. He outlines that the issues may be focused on the ways in which teachers, school principals and policy makers negotiate learning outcomes in terms of both knowledge and skills. He says that the most significant challenge facing us now is to consider

the ways in which digital technology is being used, or not used, in schools. In his view, current data underpinning decision making and the new digital technologies curriculum isn’t working for ICT in schools for the following four reasons:

• Curriculum is taking too long to introduce – he states that the new digital technologies curriculum will take several years to become fully embedded in schools. This doesn’t help the current generation of students as teachers try to grapple with changes to the curriculum and the expectations of learning outcomes.

• Teachers are not equipped with the skills they need – teachers in schools are not given enough professional support to understand how digital technologies can be used effectively in the ICT classroom. Another challenge teachers face, he says, is that the resources provided often become rapidly outdated as the focus of curriculum changes.

• There is too much choice of digital tools to use – it is already very challenging for teachers to be able to make effective and informed choices about what technology to focus on and when. This will only become more challenging.

• Outdated skills – the way teachers consider digital technology use in schools has changed over the past decade. While it may be considered important to have an understanding of

basic computer skills, it is the application of those skills in new and different scenarios that may contribute to students’ future capabilities.

Where is the ICT funding?
While the December meeting of the country’s education ministers [the Australian Council] endorsed the Federal Government’s new STEM strategy, it also warned that more federal funding may be need for the states to pay for the measures. Media reported that the Council Chairwoman and Queensland Education Minister, Kate Jones, said that the states expressed concern that the STEM strategy, including the need to train and recruit more specialised teachers, would be difficult to implement unless the federal government reinstated $30 billion in schools funding cut in last year’s budget.

Not only is an increase in funding necessary, but there are continuing concerns about the wastage of education dollars in failed implementation of technology in schools and TAFEs. Most recently in December last year, NSW Education Minister Adrian Piccoli, was under fire over the installation of the Learning Management and Business Reform Program to schools and TAFE after it was revealed the cost had blown out to $576 million. Schools described the rollout as shambolic and it led to staff taking stress leave. An Upper House inquiry into TAFE recommended the government cut its losses and abolish the computer system in TAFE. In a separate report tabled in December, the NSW Auditor-General said TAFE’s component of the botched system cost $40.2 million. NSW is not the only state with this problem. It surely must be time for a well thought out and resourced strategy for ICT education in schools.

References
National Assessment Program -ICT Literacy Years 6 and 10 Report 2014, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2015
M. Phillips, ICT is failing in schools. Here’s why. The Conversation, 19 November 2015
New tools and technology, such as 3D printing, robotics, microprocessors, wearable computing, e-textiles, ‘smart’ materials, and programming/coding languages are being invented at an unprecedented pace.

The Maker Movement creates affordable versions of these inventions, while sharing tools and ideas online to create an innovative, collaborative community of global problem seekers and solvers. The Maker Movement in education is built upon the foundation of constructionism, which is Seymour Papert’s philosophy of hands on learning through building things and sharing with others. The Maker Movement overlaps with the natural inclinations of children and the power of learning by doing.

A place to tinker
A Makerspace is a virtual and physical space that serves as a community hub for the Maker Movement in education – a place for inventing, tinkering and hacking. It’s an innovative and non-structured environment where learners can connect, create, collaborate, share, and explore the elements of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and maths) through experiential play.

The aim is for students to acquire skills and knowledge while solving an authentic problem, creating a product or generating a new understanding. Ultimately as 21st century teachers in a digital age, we want our students to turn their knowledge into action, to become creators, not mere consumers of technology.

A Makerspace is flexible by nature, where tools, technology, expertise and networks evolve and change to suit the range of student led DIY projects, sometimes with the help of mentoring from experts in the field. In some schools, these areas are found in libraries, media centres and computer labs. For teachers with limited space, creative use of tinkering tables in the class break out rooms or a dedicated corner of the classroom suffice in providing students with the same learning experiences. Ideally, every classroom has the potential to be a makerspace.

Pop up space
At St Finbar’s we have transformed an unused corner of the library into a pop up makerspace, by upcycling old computer desks into high standing tinker tables, coated in whiteboard paint. We have used old library shelves to store our resources and projects. This year our students have had opportunities to amplify their learning experiences through interaction with innovative materials in our makerspace. Digital fabrications such as physical computing including arduino, makey makey, robotics and electronic modules like littlebits have expanded our
The aim is for students to acquire skills while solving an authentic problem, creating a product or generating a new understanding.

students tool box with new ways to make things and new things to make. They’ve learnt to empathise when designing solutions for existing problems through design thinking and to embrace failing as part of an innovator’s mindset.

Making is about the act of creation with new and familiar materials. Essentially, there are different processes to introduce ways of learning and knowing in a makerspace. These include tinkering, making and engineering. During the tinkering phase our students have ‘played’ with different materials and tools to experiment and discover ways of solving simple problems. When making, our students have used tools and materials to follow a task and create a product. The engineering phase extracts learning principles from tinkering and making. This process involves students using a design thinking process to identify and seek potential ways to solve authentic problems, usually resulting in the creation of a new product using a range of tools and materials.

In our agile makerspace we have a range of fixed and pop up learning stations that change based on the learning needs of the project and students. An example of a pop up station would be the take apart tech lab where students take apart old technology to learn how it works and attempt to put it back together. A fixed station is our littlebits lab which is where students can use magnetic electronic modules to create a range of circuits to make things do things, often there is a design challenge left on the table for students to complete with others.

Code club
Making, like creative thinking is not limited to a makerspace and is best integrated in a range of key learning areas. The school has a code club that runs projects from code.org and scratch. Students from all classes have access to these projects and teachers have been exploring different ways to incorporate coding into the curriculum. In the lower grades students have used Scratch Jnr to learn about direction and position. The use of robots like spheros have also been coded to explore angles and shapes in the middle years. In the upper grades students have created a maths fractions computer game. These are just some examples of new knowledge students created using the latest tech tools available. Whilst having access to these tools has amplified learning experiences for our students, they have also experienced great ways of thinking and collaborating with their peers using simple things like cardboard. Our school participated in the Global Caine’s arcade Cardboard Challenge with almost one million makers from around the world.

Students created innovative cardboard arcade games using cardboard and everyday recycled materials.

When designing makerspace learning experiences it is vital to consider student learning needs and interests, this can effectively be done through the use of a provocation or prompt. The best prompts emerge from a learner’s curiosity, experiences, wonder and challenge. Last year the Year 6 girls redesigned a school uniform using wearable technology in a design project called ‘Fashion of the Future’ sparked by their interest in Fashion Week.

Another example of making is when Kindergarten students explored architectural principles and materials through the picture book The Three Little Pigs: An Architectural tale. The provocation was from the building renovations that were taking place outside of their classrooms. During this process, students were to design, build and assess the effectiveness of a pig house using a design restraint brief. The buildings were then quality tested by the school builder.

During both experiences students were thinking critically and creatively, collaborating and communicating their learning with others. The school twitter account @StFinbars has been an effective and convenient way for students to showcase their learning globally, their hashtag #stfmaker is a collection of makerspace learning experiences that their parents can also view on the school website.

Zeina is a dynamic educator and international presenter with teaching experience in primary schools and university. In her role as Leader of Learning and Innovation, Zeina leads ‘disruptive’ change in digital pedagogy and personalised learning – creatively integrating technology and design thinking to transform learning experiences and connect communities of learners. In 2015, Zeina was awarded the Brother John Taylor Fellow Research Prize from the Catholic Education Commission (CEC) to further explore innovative ways to develop creative thinking in a Makerspace through a STEAM curriculum (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Maths). She also won a ‘New Voice in Leadership’ Scholarship from ACEL (Australian Council for Educational Leaders) for her work in Digital Pedagogy, Gifted Education and Mentoring with pre-service and beginning teachers.

Zeina is a co-founder of #aussieED - Australia’s largest educational professional learning network on Twitter and founder of the #makerEDau twitter chat. She was recently announced the winner of the 2015 EduBlogs Awards for the Best Individual Tweeter Category. Connect with her @ZeinaChalich and @makerEDau
Ignite your passion for youth wellbeing and effective education at this definitive wellbeing and positive education conference. A two day event for all teachers, school leaders and allied professionals.

Fourteen keynote presentations, ten practical workshops, Mind Food lunch time talks, The What Works Expo, Positive Teacher of the Year & Ita Buttrose, AO, OBE.

Be entertained, engaged and informed by world renowned experts as they discuss effective communication, positive relationships, technology and mental health, Indigenous wellbeing, mindfulness, resiliency, secrets to successful teaching, rights of passage and much, much more.

Getting to KNOW You

Alfie Kohn
Motivation

Maggie Dent
Teacher Success

Richard Pengelley
Knowing You

Helen Street
Classroom Glue

Arne Rubinstein
Rites of Passage

Janet Etty-Leal
Mindfulness

Chris Sarra
Stronger, Smarter

Michael Carr-Gregg
Technology

Toni Powell
Anxiety

David Bott
Relationships

Tim Cope
Community

Karen Martin
Lonely Kids

Kerry Howells
Gratitude

Linda Graham
Disengaged Kids

www.PositiveSchools.com.au
TWO IMPORTANT WAYS TO GET INVOLVED IN POSITIVE SCHOOLS 2016

1. THE WHAT WORKS EXPO

WHAT WORKS EXPO

The What Works Expo is free for all Positive Schools delegates to attend and will be held on the Thursday afternoon of each event. The What Works Expo will showcase ideas, big and small, that WORK to nurture wellbeing, positive mental health and a love of learning in Australian schools.

Would you like to represent your school? Visit the Positive Schools website to apply to enter your school for The What Works Expo. A chance to share your successes with others and receive a group discount to the conference.

2. POSITIVE TEACHER OF THE YEAR 2016

POSITIVE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Visit the Positive Schools website to nominate a teacher or school leader who deserves recognition for the work they do to support mental health and wellbeing in your school. All nominee names are featured at the events. Selected Positive Teachers of the Year will be invited to attend Positive Schools 2016 as our guest and will be invited to the stage on day two to be thanked by Ita Buttrose.

www.PositiveSchools.com.au
The research says the most seamless transitions to school occur when the focus is upon readiness for the school, family, and early childhood services, rather than purely focusing upon children’s skills (United States National School Readiness Indicators Initiative, 2005). When the transition to school is positive, there are short and long term benefits for the child, family and staff in schools.

Early Childhood Intervention Australia (ECIA) NSW/ACT has developed a Transition to School Resource which contains pertinent information for teachers, and support staff, families, early childhood educators and early childhood intervention practitioners. The resource can be viewed at http://www.transitiontoschoolresource.org.au

Below are some practical tips about how the elements of the Transition to School Resource can be utilised by staff in independent schools.

Getting ready

The family as a knowledge base
Parents and carers know their children the best and working in partnership with them, can enable a smoother start to school. It can be helpful for teachers to let families know the best ways to communicate with them eg email, by booking a meeting, or phone. The communication pathways can be open and clear. Supporting families to understand the varied responsibilities of teachers can be helpful to promote realistic expectations. This page http://www.nsw.org.au/tts-content/do-you-work-in-a-school/do-you-work-in-a-schoolw.ecl has been specifically designed for teachers in schools and includes reflection questions for teachers to consider about working with families.

Working together
Listening to and learning from early childhood education and care (ECEC) professionals such as the child’s preschool or day care teacher about what has and hasn’t worked in that setting can save lots of time for staff in schools. Often a child’s early childhood intervention key worker can also be available to make a visit to the school, observe the child in the class and to show and talk through strategies to support the child within the context of the whole class. Information for families about forming a transition team and the different roles which parents and professionals may play can be found here http://www.

When hiccups arise
When challenges arise, or new experiences come up at school such as excursions, or new extra curricula programs, it can be helpful to consider what has worked in the past and whether something similar could work to support a child in your school. The Trouble-shooting guide http://www.transitiontoschoolresource.org.au/tts-content/trouble-shooting-guide is a solution focused reflection tool which can be used to determine the reason for a particular challenge and to plan for positive change.

Moving on
Sharing information when a child with a disability or developmental delay moves between teachers and classes is vital. Transitions will be more seamless when successful strategies and important aspects of a child’s learning profile are shared from one classroom teacher to the next. It may be helpful to ask the family to update and use the Snapshot of my child http://www.ecia-nsw.org.au/documents/item/1111 to aide this process at the end of each school year.

Case study
Jai was diagnosed with a mild global developmental delay and had participated in early childhood intervention services since he was two years old.

Around 18 months before he was due to start school, Jai’s family started looking for a school they felt would suit Jai and their younger child. After visiting a couple of schools and meeting with principals, they decided that their local Catholic school would be a good fit for them. They were impressed by the way they had been made to feel welcome at the school, and the way in which the principal asked them about Jai’s strengths and needs and didn’t seem too concerned about needing to individualise learning programs for Jai and adapt or adjust practices to support his inclusion.

In Term 4 prior to starting school, Jai, his family, attended the orientation sessions and staff had a chance to observe him in a classroom setting. A school staff member also made a visit to observe Jai at pre school. The school identified through discussions with the family and their early childhood intervention (ECI) key worker, that it would be helpful for Jai’s new kindergarten teacher to participate in some training around using visual communication supports. Information was shared between Jai’s early childhood services and the new school about how he learns and possible triggers for behaviours of concern.

When Jai’s first day came along, he seemed excited. During the first few days, Jai didn’t tend to sit down for group but seemed to enjoy playing chasings in the playground. The teacher’s aide, Jing, assisted with all children in the class, rather than focusing purely on Jai. This freed up the kindergarten teacher, Sally, and gave her time to observe and assess all the children’s skills. Sally took some notes about the times in the day when Jai was most engaged in activities and school routines where he seemed to need more assistance.

“Supporting families to understand the varied responsibilities of teachers can be helpful to promote realistic expectations.”

Sally let Jai’s family know that he seemed fairly happy at school and that she was gathering information and would soon be in contact with his ECI key worker to arrange a visit. Sally asked the ECI key worker to come in to observe Jai at school and meet with her in the fourth week of term during literacy groups and recess time.

In week four, the ECI key worker came to visit and observed the kindergarten class in action. The ECI key worker and kindergarten teacher discussed a couple of challenges and brainstormed some ideas to try.

The ECI key worker offered to come back to model some strategies in the classroom two weeks later. As Jai’s mum seemed anxious to hear how things were going, the teacher set up a short meeting time for after the next ECI key worker’s school visit. Sally also emailed Jai’s mum to let her know about a positive example of Jai settling into Kindergarten as well as letting her know that they were getting some ideas from the ECI worker to make group activities work more smoothly for Jai.
We’ve worked hard on an assignment, whether at school or university or even in the workplace. We put hours of time into it. We pour our creativity and intelligence into it. We draft and redraft and check what our teacher has put in the assessment notification or outline. Our hands shake slightly as we slide the final version into a box (or, today, submit to a dropbox or email account – hands still shaking) and then – joy of joys – the momentary relief of a completed project.

Then we receive the assignment feedback, or perhaps log on to a website to check our results, and we are faced with a big, silent, glaring letter or number: you are now a B; or you are now 73; or you are now ‘Satisfactory’. You have been assessed and branded by higher powers and slotted into your appropriate station in academic life.

Occasionally there may even be some written notes such as ‘needs more’ or ‘good’!

The unfortunate reality is that this type of assessment and feedback is all too common despite decades of research from Australia and overseas – much conducted with and by educators, not just academics – which clearly and overwhelmingly states that this does not help learning. If we want learners of any age to grow and improve to a point where they are the resilient, motivated and self reflective learners we expect, they need more than a letter or number on a page.

Many teachers strive to embed formative assessment strategies into their teaching and learning programs but summative assessment still dominates, particularly in senior years. This is fine if we only wish to have students remember the content and demonstrate the skills of curriculum areas for a limited time but not if we wish them to become intrinsically better learners.

Glen Pearsall, who runs the Smarter Assessment: Improving Feedback, Reducing Correction workshops for the IEU, has undertaken significant research into this area and now helps teachers understand the breadth of formative strategies that are available.

But what is formative assessment?

Formative assessment (also sometimes called ‘formative feedback’) is an approach to responding to student participation and submission of work in which the teacher responds more immediately – almost literally – to when students need guidance to change direction and improve their understanding during the learning process, rather than just at the end. John Hattie calls this “dollops of feedback”. For example, students might be working on a draft essay and instead of collecting the final product and correcting
As soon as a student gets a grade, the learning stops. We may not like it, but this is a relatively stable feature of how human minds work.

Dylan Wiliam, Embedded Formative Assessment

all the mistakes over the weekend, you might collect the introduction, discuss the key areas of strength and improvement with the student, then have the student continue another part of the essay. The final product is therefore richer and more sophisticated than it would otherwise have been, and the student is learning how to identify the areas of improvement themselves.

This allows students to digest and apply feedback in manageable chunks, instead of a torrent of criticisms and corrections that often accompany our grades.

Another way to look at this is to reflect on how teachers use results of assessment. Say you deploy a typical assessment task where students have to complete a test in a set time and the teacher marks the test. The results are individually distributed to the students (and there is a path of formative assessment to follow with this) but then where do those results go in relation to the teacher? For what purpose have we collected those results? If the test is to be of any real value, we shouldn’t just use the results as a list of numbers in a spreadsheet, but rather to identify areas of individual and collective strength and areas of improvement. This should then affect how the teacher approaches their next lesson. As Black and Wiliam (1998) suggest, “for assessment to function formatively, the results have to be used to adjust teaching and learning.”

How do I use formative assessment?

It may seem like an overwhelming prospect to ask ourselves to assess all students, all the time. However, if we change the nature of assessment from a huge load of marking at the end of a learning sequence to an ongoing, organic and inclusive approach of self evaluation and targeted feedback, the impact can be outstanding as Dylan Wiliam suggests below, with little or no actual increase in workload. Formative feedback strategies are a prime example of working smarter and not harder.

“When teachers do formative assessment effectively, students learn at roughly double the rate than they do without it.” Dylan William, Embedded Formative Assessment.

Formative assessment techniques can be used in very subtle ways and throughout lessons in order to gain a clear snapshot of student understanding and progress. There are questioning strategies, group discussion frameworks, thinking procedures and even technology tools available to help. Glen walks teachers through several of these approaches in his workshops, actively engaging teachers in the experience of being a learner which through a series of activities.

There are many readings online, including teacher blogs and articles that describe how they use formative assessment strategies and better feedback techniques in their classrooms. Some are listed below for you to begin your journey into using more formative assessment!

Remember that in Australia we only need to give grades twice a year. That’s two times. Once in Semester 1 and once in Semester 2. A to E per subject. Other than that, we can drive our practice towards what works for learners and learning.

Further reading

Wiliam, D 2011, Embedded Formative Assessment Solution Tree, New York, USA.

Links on formative assessment

Please note that the links below are merely a to get you started in a general sense. It is up to individual teachers and teams to decide the applicability of the ideas present in the links below. We highly recommend attending one of Glen’s Pearsell’s workshops to delve further into the material.

Ten formative assessment tech tools to put to the test


Twelve Awesome Formative Assessment Examples

https://globaldigitalcitizen.org/12-awesome-formative-assessment-examples

ASCD – Formative Assessment: Why, What and Whether


Assessment at High Tech High (Project Based Learning + Formative Assessment)

http://www.hightechhigh.org/pbl/this-new-house/assessment.html

Edutopia - Five Fantastic, Fast, Formative Assessment Tools

http://www.edutopia.org/blog/5-fast-formative-assessment-tools-vicki-davis

Formative Assessment Resources: Try Them Today, Tomorrow, or Sometime Soon

https://www.teachingchannel.org/blog/2015/03/04/formative-assessment-resources/

Lecture by Prof Eric Mazur – Peer Instruction Continuous Formative Assessment to Promote Learning (focus on Higher Ed)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_1464VMVU
Connection to nature

In his book *Last Child In the Woods* Richard Louv coined the term nature deficit disorder. He defines this as “The human cost of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illness” (Louv, 2008, p36).

It is a fact that children today have fewer opportunities to spend time in nature compared to 20-30 years ago (Laird, McFarland-Piazza & Allen, 2014). The opportunities for children to engage in the outdoors are rapidly decreasing for a myriad of reasons such as urban design issues, less unstructured free time and the predominance of screens for all measure of activities. The nature disconnect is apparent across all aspects of children’s lives, family time, unstructured play, social interactions, non formal education and formal education (Lloyd & Gray, 2014).

There is a growing body of evidence that interacting with nature in the school curriculum delivers measurable benefits to children in social, emotional, physical and academic spheres (Munoz, 2009, O’Brien & Murray; 2007 and Rickinson et al 2004). Natural spaces offer multiple choices, which enable different personalities to flourish (Groves & McNish, 2011). The self-directed essence of the outdoors allows children to develop skills specific to their lives, interests and talents. Consequently, this allows children to engage in known activities and increasingly complex tasks with greater enjoyment and proficiency (Knight, 2009).

When children feel familiar and secure in the places they encounter, they are far more likely to access, engage and experience nature (Kellert, 2012). Schools and the areas immediately around them are familiar to children. Therefore they are an ideal setting for children to connect to the natural world. Furthermore, revisiting the same learning environment multiple times increases bonds with place and allows children to develop intricate knowledge of their local environments and cultures.

Outdoor learning in practice

The focus of my PhD study was a Year 1 class who completed a half or whole day of learning outside each week. The most frequently visited learning site was the school playground. Local parks within walking distance, the Shoalhaven River and nearby Nowra town centre were visited often. While bus trips to nearby Jervis Bay and Arthur Boyd’s Bundanon were also pivotal to the program. The integrated curriculum taught spanned English, Science, Art and Geography, while paying specific attention to the cross curricula priorities of Sustainability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures. Corresponding lessons occurred inside the classroom.

Outdoor learning curriculum was scheduled into the normal teaching program. The creation of maps, shelters, story settings and artworks using loose natural materials were common activities. Children were encouraged to talk and interact with their friends as they made constructions, went on bushwalks, splashed in rivers or took photographs of land features. At all times the class could record their learning in their “Nature Journal” using pictures, words or sentences. There was no right or wrong and children were encouraged to show initiative, responsibility and take risks in their learning.

For many years I implemented outdoor learning programs with K-6 classes, Amanda Lloyd writes. With increasing academic accountability I was constantly asked to justify my teaching methods and pedagogical choices. At the same time the mainstream media picked up on the nature disconnect phenomenon. Drawing on knowledge gained while completing Forest Schools instructor training in England, a Graduate Certificate of Outdoor Education and a Masters of Environment, I embarked on PhD study to draw all the pieces of the jigsaw together, to provide evidence that outdoor learning had a rightful place in the Australian primary school curriculum.
An example session could look like the following brief overview based on English outcomes.

**‘The Stick Man’**
- The teacher reads Stick Man.
- Individuals make Stick Men using natural materials.
- Small groups make settings for the Stick Man to live in.
- Children use ipads to film Stick Man stories as they play with their groups.
- In class groups review their ipad footage and create posters to depict their story.
- Children write imaginative pieces of writing about the Stick Man.

Logistical considerations such as the provision of wet weather gear, risk assessments, permission notes, toileting in the bush, parental involvement and preparing an ‘off site’ kit ensured outdoor learning was never a burden or disruption to regular classroom activities.

**Empowered and engaged learners**
A plethora of advantages to completing outdoor learning were discovered throughout the case study. By combining research methods such as observations, interviews, academic records and photographs, a full spectrum of emergent learning themes were developed. The children themselves were empowered as researchers to draw pictures, make constructions and take video footage by wearing GoPro cameras. While the results from this case study are extensive and detailed at a glance they can be categorised into two key areas; curriculum/engagement and wellbeing.

Curriculum and engagement saw an increased vocabulary and improved oral language skills. Motivation to complete tasks, especially written tasks based on outdoor learning experiences was witnessed. Children were engaged on tasks consistently and reluctant learners often completed more work outdoors than inside the traditional classroom. Academic growth for the class exceeded a standardised year of learning growth when examined alongside mandated assessments.

Areas of children’s overall wellbeing that gained as a result of outdoor learning were; responsibility, risk taking, leadership, social skills, self-care and parental involvement leading to a heightened sense of community. Children made connections to past events, places they had visited before, environmental conscious actions and could link places to Indigenous stories they knew. The class began to look into the intricate details of local environments and could name, describe or experience nature with forever increasing clarity.

**Why teach outside the box?**
Outdoor learning enables a nature connection not afforded to many of our children these days. Yet it offers much more than that. It promotes learning, stimulates interest, enables social skill development and connects children to areas that surround them. It enables children to have direct experiences with their local environment and community. Outdoor learning is real life authentic learning, it prepares for future life in the places our children will experience it. As teachers we have the skills to implement outdoor learning – all it needs is the initiative to look beyond our walls and outside the box.

Amanda Lloyd has always spent her free time on a bike, in a boat, swimming in the ocean and generally enjoying the outdoors, leading her into a field of research that develops her life experiences into educational opportunities for others. Amanda was an executive level primary school teacher with 15 years experience as a classroom teacher before she embarked on her PhD studies researching the benefits of outdoor learning within the primary school curriculum. Amanda is actively involved in networking within the environmental education community, facilitating Nature Educators Network Australia (NENA) for the Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE). Her passion is holistically developing the skills of our children to become active citizens in our world. To tap into Amanda’s expertise and implement outdoor learning in your school contact her at amanda.lloyd@outdoorconnections.com.au.
Mental Health Nurse Marc Hopkins, who presented at last year’s NSW ACT IEU support staff conference Work Well, provides a brief overview of the importance of good mental health in the workplace and a few tips on how best to maintain it.

The World Health Organisation defines mental health as “a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.”

A report by the Human Rights Commission in 2010 said “around 45% of Australians aged between 16 and 85 will experience a mental illness at some point in their life, while one in five Australian adults will experience a mental illness in any given year”.

At some point during our lives we will all come into contact with someone who has experienced mental illness, to some degree. This could be through experiencing mental illness ourselves, or by a close family member, or even a work colleague.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010 put the annual cost of mental illness in Australia at an estimated $20 billion annually (this includes the cost of lost productivity and labour force participation).

Even though this monetary cost is staggeringly high, it does not take into account the greatest cost, which is the emotional turmoil to the individual and their family.

A report for the Mental Health Commission and Mental Healthy Workplace Alliance 2014, Developing a Mental Healthy Workplace: a Review of Literature said “there is increasing evidence that workplaces can play an important and active role in maintaining the mental health and wellbeing of their workers”.

Reduce stigma
Mental illness has a significant impact on absenteeism, poor work performance and can lead to long term illness. Australia’s federal and state governments and corporate organisations are looking at ways to improve workplace mental health and reduce the cost impact of mental illness in the workplace.

One of the most important things we as individuals and as a society as a whole need to do is change our attitudes towards mental illness to reduce the negative stigma associated with suffering any form of mental illness.

The stigma associated with mental illness can have a significant impact on an individual’s personal identity, self esteem, social recognition and our attitudes can make those with a mental illness feel excluded and marginalised. This stigma felt in the workplace can make workers reluctant to seek treatment out of fear that they might be further excluded and in fear of possibly losing their jobs. As you can imagine this leads to more fear and anxiety which compounds the problems they are experiencing.

Positive promotion
The workplace can play an important role in maintaining the mental health and wellbeing of workers. Timely treatment can help reduce the impact of mental health issues on the worker and have a more positive impact on their job performance. Unfortunately, many mental health issues often go untreated because they are often not recognised, or the individual is hesitant to seek help.

Promoting positive mental health and well being at work has benefits for the organisation and the individual. Through the promotion of a holistically healthy work environment, the organisation benefits from improved production, while the individual benefits through a more healthy lifestyle and more positive relationships with work colleagues, family and friends.

Through Work Health and Safety and Anti Discrimination legislation, employers and their managers are legally required to prevent both physical and mental harm in their workplace, but they are also required not to discriminate on the basis of a workers mental health status.

Reducing physical risks has been the primary focus previously, but now there is...
a need for employers to recognise mental health issues as a legitimate workplace concern and reduce any contributing risks. Organisation can do this by raising awareness of mental health in the workplace and building a workplace culture that promotes mental health and wellbeing. Employers and managers need to look at ways of strengthening the protective factors and promoting a healthy and holistic approach to mental health in the workplace. Education of the workforce in the understanding of mental health, prevention, early recognition and support, and good access to care along with good holistic rehabilitation principles, are all important aspects that need to be part of the organisation’s approach.

Having designated mental health first aid trained workers in the workplace (working alongside other first aid trained workers) is another positive step that some organisation have taken to improve the support offered to workers.

**Resilience can help**

Even though there is a move to improve workplace practices and reduce stigma associated with mental illness, organisational changes are often outside the control of most employees. But all individuals can take steps to improve their resilience. ‘Resilience’ is a combination of protective behaviours and thoughts that help improve our ability to adapt and manage the stress and the problems encountered during everyday living. ‘Resilience’ behaviour and thinking can be learned.

**Some of the ways for individuals to improve resilience are:**

- good communication and problem solving skills
- stress management training
- coaching and mentoring relationships
- improving physical activity and good sleep habits
- supportive and positive relationships with family and friends
- staying flexible and open to change, and
- remembering to focus on the positives in your life.

Remember to seek or encourage others to seek intervention early, such as counselling, when first feeling the effects of stress. Early intervention provides the best opportunity for a more positive outcome.

**Sources of help**

There are a number of websites such as beyondblue (beyondblue.org.au) or Black Dog Institute (blackdoginstitute.org.au) that provide resources for those that seek further understanding or are seeking help with a mental health issue.

There is also your local GP or the NSW 24/7 mental health line 1800011511 for immediate help.

Everyone in the workplace can make a contribution to improving mental health outcomes. This includes becoming familiar with the local policy in your organisation and the pathways to assisting someone with a mental health issue at your work – take a positive step to building your ‘resilience’ today.

**References**


www.abs.gov.au

In November last year, the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) released its lengthy interim report Education at a Glance that compared working conditions and salaries of teachers across 34 OECD member states, IE Journalist Alex Leggett writes.

The data revealed that teachers in Australia are working some of the longest hours in comparison to most other countries.

Although Australian teachers’ salaries are well above OECD average, the amount of time Australian teachers spend in front of the class (on average 879 hours per year) was ahead of Germany (800 hours per year), Luxembourg (810 hours per year) and England (722 hours per year). For Australia, that is 172 hours above the OECD average of 772 hours.

With an ageing workforce of teachers, the data echoes the need to attract the best and brightest to the profession. Teaching hours and the demands beyond the classroom such as non-teaching duties and adequate preparation and correction time are big factors in attracting graduates to the profession on a global scale.

But if current trends continue, the teaching workforce will continue to shrink. In 2013, 36% of secondary school teachers in OECD countries were at least 50 years of age. With large proportions of teachers set to retire in coming years, governments around the world have a duty to train and retain top calibre education professionals.

This data shows Australian teacher retention policies ultimately must address the increasing hours spent in the classroom.

Our teachers, the workers on the front line of our profession, are under increased pressure with larger than OECD average class sizes. The average primary class size in the countries surveyed has 21 students, with lower secondary classes being an average of 24 students.

Australian primary school class sizes are slightly larger with an average 23 students in state schools and 25 in private schools. However, Japan and China still top the list with an average 33 students per class for Japan and 50 in China.

The great worry for teachers is the bigger the class, the less time they actually spend on teaching.

“Larger classes are correlated with less time spent on actual teaching and learning and with more time spent on keeping order in the classroom,” the report states.

“Specifically, one additional student added to an average size class is associated with a 0.5 percentage point decrease in time spent on teaching and learning activities.”

Other data released showed larger classes are associated with a higher proportion of students with behavioural problems, which, in turn, is associated with less time spent on teaching and learning activities.

“Teachers who teach classes where more than one in 10 students have behaviour problems spend almost twice as much time keeping order in the classroom as their peers with less than 10% of such students in their class.” (OECD, 2015)

The report suggests that more time spent teaching may also indicate less time spent assessing students and preparing lessons, leaving them to perform more tasks in their own time, and having an effect on teachers’ personal lives.

Although the annual number of teaching hours of teachers differs from country to country, two main findings from the 2015 survey indicated the demands on workload. The findings showed public school teachers in OECD countries teach an average of 1005 hours per year at the pre primary level, 772 hours for primary school teachers, 694 hours at the lower secondary level, and 643 hours at the upper secondary level of education.

In most of the countries with available data, the amount of teaching time in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education remained largely unchanged between 2000 and 2013. Australian teachers are not the only ones working long hours in the classroom. Where annual teaching hours range from less than 700 hours in Greece and South Korea, teachers in Norway and Sweden are putting in up to 1500 hours per year.

Teachers of general subjects in upper secondary schools teach for an average of 643 hours per year. Teaching time exceeds 800 hours in only six countries: Australia, Chile, Colombia, Latvia, Mexico and Scotland.

If Australia can improve its working conditions and salaries for teachers with less time spent in classes we will be able to retain better quality teachers, and ultimately, a better educated society.

Full a full copy of the report and more information on OECD, visit http://www.oecd.org/edu/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm
The School Lawyer Project aims to build the confidence of the school community to effectively engage with the justice system in order to improve the stability of school families and the attendance and performance of the school’s students. It’s all based on the idea of early intervention and trying to do everything possible to assist students stay engaged at school.

The pilot program was born out of the Youth Couch Surfing Project being conducted by Shorna Moore from Western Community Legal Centre, which explores the issues faced by young couch surfers. Prior to the launch of the school lawyer project, Shorna Moore and Marijana Graljuk were providing a weekly outreach drop-in clinic at The Grange College, working closely with Renee Dowling and the school wellbeing team.

Vincent is providing legal advice and representation for students and their families. He also delivers community legal education to inform the students and their families of their legal rights and responsibilities in relation to specific areas of law.

The project is funded by Jack Brockhoff Foundation, RE Ross Trust, Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, Slater and Gordon’s Community Fund and Newsboys Foundation.

The importance of legal education
Community legal education is an ongoing and important aspect of the project. This program is delivered mainly to the students but is also targeted at staff and parents and guardians.

The topics are generally in response to the work that is coming through to the lawyer, but also focuses on the general needs of the community. Some of the topics have been on the laws of sexting and employment. The sessions that the lawyer runs are specifically tailored for young people and involve activities to encourage student involvement.

Students have responded well to this type of practical information because it is so relevant to them.

Schools and the law working together
Every new partnership has its challenges. Given this is a cross sector partnership between the legal and education systems, invariably there were teething issues mainly around operational issues. However they have all been resolved and the program is working smoothly.

One of the key aspects is the great match between Vincent Shin and the project’s aims. Vincent has specialised in the areas of family law, intervention orders and criminal law. He is not only a qualified lawyer but is also an amateur boxer and rides a motorbike! Before becoming a lawyer, Vincent also spent several years working as a carer in residential care units for young people across the state. Vincent has an understanding of the needs of vulnerable and marginalised young people.

Vincent Shin is the school lawyer based at The Grange P-12 College and is an Australian first. Vincent is employed by Western Community Legal Centre Ltd and based at school four days a week and one day a week at the legal centre.
Teacher stress comes from many different sources. One source that we may feel like we have little control over is managing high expectations of yourself and others. If left unmanaged it can lead to constantly feeling overwhelmed, under pressure and eventually lead to burnout.

How can teachers manage stress?

Make peace with the perfectionist in you. As teachers we know the importance of setting high expectations for our students. However, we can often set unrealistic expectations for ourselves. For example, the perfectionist in me feels like I should work 10 hours a day including Saturday so that I can get everything done to my extremely high standards. Instead of this perfectionist mindset, of ‘I must’, ‘I have to’ or ‘I should’, we can adopt the optimal mindset which encourages us to ask, ‘What is the best I can do given all the constraints on my time and energy?’ Do I really need to help with the school production, given that I am coaching sport and going on school camp? Working eight hours a day and four hours on a Saturday is good enough for me this year.

Before the term starts you can apply this to the most important areas of your life. It may be health, work, family or friends. Let us look at another example – health. The perfectionist in me has to exercise five times a week for an hour like I did in my mid-20s. But now that I am nearly 40 with three kids under the age of eight, what is now optimal (good enough) given the constraints on my time and energy is exercising three times a week. The next step is to block out time in your diary for this activity before the week starts. I can manage my stress by the feel good benefits of exercise, achieving my goal and by decreasing the pressure I put on myself by deciding what I consider good enough.

Planning for a whole year?

Initially, planning for a whole year can be a very exciting time, however, it can also be challenging for teachers to relax and get their planning done. Planning can sometimes feel like planning for a marathon. There is so much ground to cover, it can be overwhelming just trying to figure out where to start and the worry can creep in about whether we are doing it right. If that happens, the next stop is procrastination. We can find ourselves putting the planning off until next week until suddenly there are only three days to go and then it is impossible to relax. Here are a couple of tips:

You do not need to reinvent the wheel. Find out what resources your school already has in terms of unit outlines, assessment tasks, units of work. Contact your Head of Department (HOD) or if you are a HOD, connect with other HODs and share resources. Connect with other teachers who teach your subject. If you are new to a school, you may not be able to do this, so check out the Australian Curriculum website and your state’s curriculum and assessment authority. They have yearly overviews, unit plans and units of work. But be warned, you can spend all week looking at resources and not get any actual planning done. It is essential to allocate a set time to research (say 60 minutes per subject) and turn off all notifications that may distract you during this time.

Rather than see planning as a marathon (working long and hard until we are exhausted), perhaps we can learn from the sprinters who alternate between hard work and time for recovery? To optimise peak performance we need to schedule when we will work (plan) and when we will recover (relax). Under the marathon mentality we often will say things like ‘I will do my planning on Thursday’. That means that it will take all of Thursday just to get the year overview done and maybe one unit outline. If we adopt the sprinter mentality we can allocate 60 to 90 minutes to get the year outline done, followed by a 15 minute rest. Set an alarm on your phone. Rest can be in the form of playing your favourite song, meditating, taking a walk around the block, chatting to someone or anything else you find enjoyable. This way you can still relax and be at your most productive.
We can often be overwhelmed when we start planning. Trying to get work done in this state is very slow and often scattered. Before doing any work, take a minute to close your eyes, take some deep breaths, put your hand on your heart and feel it beating. This will help you keep calm, focused and centred and get twice as much done.

Make a commitment
At the start of the year we are enthusiastic and can often say ‘yes’ without realising the implications of that commitment on our time and energy. When someone asks you to help, avoid the immediate ‘yes’. Most people do not like saying ‘no’ straight up. So buy some time to really consider whether you have the spare time to help. Perhaps respond with ‘I don’t have my diary with me right now, would it be okay to check and let you know in 24 hours’?

Sleep - get at least eight hours of sleep a night, which is essential to manage a classroom of not so keen teenage students or excitable preps. Darken the bedroom, limit caffeine in the evening, don’t use the laptop before bed or try meditation/deep breathing for a couple of minutes to let go. If you mind is racing, keep a notebook next to your bed and jot down what is running through your mind.

Exercise and eating regular healthy meals: No you do not need to join a gym. Just 30 minutes of walking three times a week will help release stress. Plan your meals by jotting down your lunch and dinner menu for a week and shop accordingly. You will save money. Consider online shopping and you can even order on your phone while you commute and have it delivered, saving you about two hours a week.

Share lesson/unit/assessment planning, marking and report comments with other staff. Also delegate one household chore to another family member, flatmate or outsource. For example washing, cleaning or cooking for at least one day a week can be done by someone else saving you another hour a week.

Build in some relaxation, meditation or time for your hobbies (even if it is just five minutes a day). These are often the first things to go when we are busy but these are the very things we need to be productive and creative.

Choose from one of the list above that resonates with you and commit to doing it for a month. Once you have implemented it and feel the benefits you may like to choose another strategy for the next month. I hope you find these tips useful so that you can continue to teach with passion, free of stress and workload woes.

For more information on Patti’s courses, resources and tips for teacher wellbeing, go to www.teachlovelife.com.au

“Make peace with the perfectionist in you.”
More than 1500 of you took the time to answer questions about what sort of stories you like to read and how you like to read them. The results and responses were very similar across all the states. Not surprisingly most of you (77% in NSW and ACT and 84% in Victoria and Tasmania) wanted to see stories about professional issues in the magazine, with teaching practice and curriculum close behind at 72 and 75% respectively. PD and accreditation articles were also popular, at 63 and 56%. One of the standout findings of the survey is that many of you would like to see more stories on support staff issues. Every issue of IE carries a story aimed at support staff, but following the survey the editorial team plans to provide more stories with a broader focus that might appeal to all staff in schools. For instance in this issue with have stories on transitioning disabled students from primary to high school and dealing with mental health issues in the workplace, that apply to a board range of staff.

Another standout result from the survey is that many readers asked for more industrial information in IE that is details about awards and other union matters. The IEU produces newspapers in all states (Newsmonth in NSW and the ACT, Viewpoint in Victoria and Tasmania and Independent Voice in Queensland and the Northern Territory) which aim to cover industrial and union matters in more detail and in a state context.

Professional journal
It is not possible to cover every state and school system effectively in a national journal. Rather IE aims to be a professional journal. Questions and requests for articles on Union matters should be directed to the respective newspapers, Newsmonth, Viewpoint and Independent Voice.

The survey also asked you how you like to read the magazine. In NSW 45% of you wanted to stick with the traditional print format, and in Victoria and Tasmania 55% preferred print. Thirty nine per cent wanted it online, and 22% on iPad in NSW and ACT. Some were happy to read on a variety of formats. At the moment NSW and ACT branch offer an online and iPad version, but other states do not. That situation is likely to change in the near future.

Hundreds of people left comments and ideas about what they would like to see in the journal. The comments were as diverse as the profession, relating to everything from hospitality to technical design, languages, STEM, the International Baccalaureate, visual arts, multiculturalism and many others.

The editorial committee endeavours to cover a broad range of topics in every issue, but with only three publications a year it may take a while before you see an article on your chosen topic.

We should acknowledge that 17% of people in NSW and ACT and 13% in Victoria and Tasmania that actually did the survey said they do not read the journal. The IEU is considering an ‘opt out’ version so that people can indicate online if they do not wish to have the journal posted to them.

The team at IE is always keen to hear any feedback from readers at any time, be it comments on stories, letters to the editor, ideas for future articles or article submissions.

The editorial committee plans to continue to survey its membership and extend the coverage to other branches.

Contact ie@ieu.asn.au.

IE Editorial Committee
Read and Write Gold

One of the best programs to assist student learning is Read and Write Gold (http://www.spectronics.com.au/catalogue/texthelp-readwrite-11-gold-2). The program comes as an app and an extension as well. It covers many aspects of a student’s development from improving the reading of the student or having the student speak and the program doing the typing for them. The aspects that I use most often with my senior students are the vocabulary and study skills functions. They help summarise, graphically organise and collate learning from various different resources. The app is limited in its functions and tends to focus on the simpler aspects of the program. For more on the program contact Spectronics at the link above.

Kahoot

Kahoot is a free website https://getkahoot.com that your students will love. Basically, it works like a game you can set up to quiz the students as a formative tool or as a summative tool to make sure they have learned what you have been teaching. You can set up the questions and send a link or password to the students. They then access the quiz you have created and you can view the results from their answers. The quiz is based on speed as well as accuracy. The website has many quizzes already uploaded and daily more are added by its users.

Minecraft

Staying with the theme of enjoyment, a tool you cannot go past is Minecraft. Students spark up with excitement and anticipation once the word has left your mouth. Anyone who has a go at this program will quickly see what the kids are enjoying because the scope of this program is infinite. There are many aspects to this program that can be used as a learning tool but one that stands out is focused on Maths components. For example, if students are studying measurement, teachers can set up parameters to have students build structures that are 4x4 spaces, having students work out the amount of blocks they would need. The uses are endless but there is a website just to help educators https://minecraftedu.com.

GAFE

I will finish with Google Apps for Education (GAFE). This, to me, is the future of education and one that if you are not already confident with, then now is the time to start. GAFE has countless apps and extensions to help you navigate through and enhance your learning experience like Google Drive, Sheets, Slides, Sites, Calendar and Mail to name a few. Once gaining a good understanding of these aspects you can progress to Classroom and Forms which will further develop your students’ learning. I find YouTube is a great place to visit for any assistance to hone your skills.

One of the best aspects to me is that your students will help you along this journey. Remember to keep the focus on the enjoyment of learning and help students to develop the skills necessary for their future. We need to help drive the students’ passion for technology and I promise you, once you start you will not be able to stop your own technological revolution.

Michael ‘Josh’ Walker
Experienced Teacher of the Year (2014)
McCarthy Catholic College
Tamworth, NSW

My motto for 2016 is to make learning fun for all students, Michael ‘Josh’ Walker writes. Anyone who has read my articles before knows that I love to use kerb cuts to help all students in my class reach their full potential. Kerb cuts are those tools, programs or any aspect of teaching that assists not only the student they are focused on but also the learning of all students that we teach. With the advent of technology and its rapid progression, new tools for learning are created every day. Here are some of my favourite programs, apps and extensions I use in my class daily.
Building blocks for a glorious retirement

Salary sacrifice contributions
Forgoing some salary now allows you to benefit from tax concessions and build your super for a better retirement. Voluntary contributions coming out of your pay are taxed at a flat 15% rather than your marginal tax rate. The earlier salary sacrifice contributions are made, the more your money works for you thanks to the power of compounding investment returns. Beware of the legislated caps – $30,000 per year for those under 50 and $35,000 per year for those over 50. Employer Superannuation Guarantee contributions are included within the caps. A great way to build your super over time!

Personal contributions
Super fund members under age 65 can make after tax contributions of up to $180,000 per year. Post age 65 personal contributions can be made if the work test is met. Personal contributions are not taxed when the deposit is made, but become subject to superannuation rules and conditions of release once in the fund. The most common source of larger personal contributions is from the sale of real estate or the receipt of an inheritance.

Investment choice
The majority of fund members remain in the default option which with NGS Super is essentially a 70% growth and 30% defensive investment. However, there is a full palette of possible investments such as international and Australian shares, property, bonds, cash as well as a number of pre mixed options. A direct investment platform where you can pick your own shares, exchange traded funds or term deposits is also available. The standard rule is the longer the time frame (time to retirement), the more risk an investor can take on. The choice is yours!

Transition to retirement pension (Income Stream)
Fund members over age 60 can choose to access their super while they remain working. This strategy entails the establishment of a transition to retirement income stream (pension) account in addition to their superannuation account. Employers continue to pay contributions into the super account and members salary sacrifice extra contributions (subject to the caps) into it. By doing this, members can boost their super balance without reducing their take home pay and at retirement both accounts can be amalgamated into one income stream.

Insurance
Insurance through super is a true member benefit. Many funds offer Death, Total and Permanent Disability, Income Protection (Salary Continuance) and Terminal Illness insurance. Members can customise their insurance (subject to acceptance by the insurer). For example, if your default Income Protection insurance covers a salary of up to $80,000 per year, and your salary is $92,000 per year, then $12,000 of salary is not insured. Similarly, if your fund has a 90 day waiting period before Income Protection payments begin, and your leave entitlements only allow for 20 days of leave, you will not be covered for the period between the expiry of your leave and the 90 day waiting period. A 30 day waiting period can be applied for, but premiums will be higher if accepted. With Death and TPD cover, it’s prudent to check your age based level of cover to see if it would be adequate to protect those you love. This may be particularly relevant to anyone taking out a large mortgage. Higher levels of life cover can be applied for and are subject to health evidence and acceptance by the insurer. Not an automatic right, but a true member benefit.

Over time these simple building blocks can help you to enjoy the glorious retirement you truly deserve!

Bernard O’Connor; NGS Super

(Important information: The information in this article is general information only and does not take into account your objectives, financial situation or needs. Before making a financial decision, please assess the appropriateness of the individual circumstances, read the Product Disclosure Statement for any product you may be thinking of acquiring and consider seeking personal advice. Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance. Any opinions are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the view of NGS Super.)
Challenge us to find YOU a better deal!

Union Shopper is a 100% union-owned service that provides members with discounts on a huge range of products and services.

Take advantage of Union Shopper’s collective buying power and be part of the savings!

Some of our most popular products & services include:

- electrical products
- motor vehicles
- travel
- accommodation
- tickets & attractions
- carpets & flooring
- cameras
- car hire
- computers & printers
- mortgage planners & finance
- manchester
- sewing machines
- furniture
- perfumes
- gifts
- vet products
- health products
- vitamins & pharmacy items
- tyres
- and much more!

On average, members save between 9% and 13% off their best price on electrical goods!

BIG savings on a wide range of products & services!

1300 368 117
unionshopper.com.au
We are a super fund. It’s our job to help build your wealth. However we believe that doing well is also about doing good. As a teacher, school or community worker, you couldn’t set a better example. So while we are proud of our track record as a high performing*, low cost industry super fund, we know that’s not all you care about.

You could say we’ve learnt from our 100,000+ members who have dedicated their lives to helping others.

We’re dedicated to educating our members and providing peace of mind.

We’re invested in being responsible corporate citizens committed to helping the community and the environment.

As any good superannuation fund should tell you, it’s all about giving a little to get a whole lot back.

*Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance.