What Teachers Want:
Better Teacher Management

Dr Ben Jensen

25 May 2010

Transcript

Grattan Institute released their second education report on Monday 24 May 2010. The report What Teachers Want: Better Teacher Management is the first of a series of reports on teacher evaluation and development. Following on from the release of the report, Dr Ben Jensen, Program Director School Education, Grattan Institute, presented a seminar about the report's findings. The report presents teachers' views about the evaluation of their work, the development of their teaching and how this impacts upon school education.

Speaker: Ben Jensen (Ben)

Moderator: John Daley (John)

JOHN: And it's my pleasure to welcome you here this evening to another Grattan seminar, this one on education and in particular looking at a recent publication. We have its author here this evening, Dr Ben Jenson. The first thing I'd like to do is acknowledge and show our respect to the traditional owners of the land on which this meeting is taking place. And Aboriginal Australians, as we know, have contributed a great deal to Australian education, as indeed have non Aboriginal Australians, and we have much to learn from each other.

So, with that as an introduction, we're here to look at this report that Ben has published in the last day or two, looking at the way that we evaluate teachers. And this report is obviously part of Grattan Institute's wider programs; we have five programs, one in productivity growth, one in cities, one in energy, one in water and finally this program in school education. Ben, this is the second report you've put out, the first was looking at how we go about, and how we should go about, measuring schools, and in particular measuring students and therefore measuring schools, and in particular the way that schools have been constructed from the My School website. So, that's where you started last time, what led you this time to looking at the evaluation of teachers?

BEN: Well, I think it was an important issue with the development of the My School website to focus then on school performance and really the My School website does focus on school principals. It looks at what school principals, they're charge of the school, and holds them responsible for a school's performance, but if we really want to get at what drives school performance and how we can improve schools over time, we really have to get at teacher quality. We know that teachers are the drivers of school performance, the most important aspect in a student's outcomes, the most important factor in determining how well a student does in their education is the quality of teachers. So, that's why I think we focused on teachers this time to build on the work on school performance last time.

JOHN: Thank you. And so you wanted to look at how we evaluate teachers, what was the plan of attack? I mean obviously we could look at how we evaluate teachers in lots of ways, what did you choose to do, and why?

BEN: Well we utilised an OECD survey of teachers, which is the most comprehensive survey available and we focused on various aspects. First of all we focused on how teachers are evaluated, what's the focus of their evaluation? What are we really getting at when we look at teachers? Then we looked at, okay, what's the recognition that teachers get when they receive that evaluation? What are the consequences of the evaluation and most importantly, how is it linked to teacher development? We know that developing teachers is the key to improving school education, so how is that linked to teacher development? And I think that's an important point, the government spent an awful lot of money on professional development for teachers and virtually all of them have the same question, we don't know if it's effective or not. So, we're really looking at that link there, because as I say, teachers are the drivers of student performance and that's really what we have to get at, teacher development and student performance.

JOHN: You chose to look at this primarily through a survey of teachers, why was that?

BEN: Well, there are several reasons. First of all I think it's very important that we get the voice of school principals and teachers into the debate about school education. I think too often

this debate is dominated by institutions, politicians or external analysts, we don't hear enough from school principals and teachers. Second of all, I think what we need to do is get some accurate evaluation about what we hear about teachers, get some real quantitative analysis in there, and, therefore, what we had there was the most comprehensive and accurate survey of teachers in the world. It hadn't received much attention in Australia. In other countries, it received considerable attention, it had a considerable impact on policy and here it was largely being ignored. So, we considered there was a real vacuum there that the voice of teachers and school principals just wasn't being heard in Australia.

JOHN: If we look at the other things that you could have done, in terms of looking at teacher evaluation, what was the state of the existing literature? What gap is it that this is filling?

BEN: Well, the emphasis in teacher evaluation has really focused on teacher standards. We spend an awful lot of our resources, an awful lot of money on teacher standards and developing stronger and more complex and more intricate teacher standards. The latest teacher standards in Australia; there's a new draft of teacher standards out and that is going through that process at the moment. But what we really wanted to do was to focus on what is actually happening in schools? And to do that you have to ask teachers, you have to ask school principals, what is actually happening in schools? They actually don't have enough involvement in the development of standards, and what they say is, that actually the standards don't make much of a difference anyway. So we really need to focus much more on what is happening in schools, and to do that we had to focus on what school principals and teachers were saying.

JOHN: And in terms of this survey, I mean what did you do? Go and talk to 100 teachers?

BEN: A bit more than that, sorry. This is actually the most accurate and comprehensive survey ever done of teachers in the world. It was an OECD survey that surveyed 4,000 teachers of lower secondary education in Australia across government and non-government schools. This is not just a story about government schools, this is government and non-government schools. Those teachers were randomly selected, we had randomly selected schools, 200 randomly selected schools throughout Australia and within those schools, 20 randomly selected teachers. So, that made around 4,000 teachers give or take which then led to an overall sample of approximately 90,000 teachers across 23 countries, which represented about 2 million teachers of lower secondary education across these countries. It's by far the most comprehensive, by far the most accurate survey. The sampling requirements for an OECD survey are incredibly strict and that's why actually a lot of countries were, I guess a bit afraid of joining. Normally when you have teacher surveys, you get response rates of about 10, 15, 20%. OECD demanded 75%, which is generally unheard of and that put a lot of countries off and it actually meant that some countries tried to participate but couldn't because it just wasn't accurate enough.

JOHN: Thank you. So, you talked to a lot of teachers, surveyed them, what did you find?

BEN: Well, generally if we look at the four areas, so what's the focus of the evaluation of their work? How is it linked to their development? So we deal first with that initial question of what is the focus of teacher evaluation? And what we see is that the focus actually isn't what it should be, it's not on what they're doing in the classroom, it's not on their teaching, it's not on the improvements in their teaching and it's not on the impact on students. What it focuses on generally is what we talk about, we talk about teacher standards and what teachers are telling us, is this is largely a bureaucratic exercise that doesn't focus on what is most important in schools and that is the teaching that students receive.

JOHN: So, teachers are telling us, at least in Australia, that in their view the evaluation isn't particularly focused on their effectiveness. How bad is it?

BEN: Well, it's actually quite bad and that brings us to the next point of recognition where we have the situation where over 90% of teachers in Australia say if they improve the quality of their teaching, they'll receive no recognition whatsoever. Over 90% of teachers in Australia say that if they are more innovative in their teaching, they receive no recognition whatsoever. Now, the impact of that is, what 90 ... again, over 90% of teachers say is if they receive ... sorry, the

recognition given to teachers in their school, goes to teachers that are comparatively ineffective. They say the most effective teachers in their schools do not receive the greatest recognition and that actually makes sense, if the evaluation process doesn't focus on what teachers do in the classroom. So, actually Andrew has some slides here ...

JOHN: I was going to say, you know, if it was an evaluator from McKinsey, they'd be saying you know, you're not effective Ben, 'cause we haven't seen a slide yet (chuckling).

BEN: Slide. Okay, there are not many slides, because unfortunately they all say the same story. Australia's constantly at the wrong end here, here we have teachers looking at what's the percentage of teachers who say they would receive some recognition if they improved the quality of their teaching. Less than 10% of teachers are saying they would receive any recognition for improving the quality of their teaching. Recognition here is not about money, it's not just about receiving some sort of monetary bonus, it's about broader recognition, it's about receiving some sort of recognition from the school principal, their peers, a multiple non-monetary reward, it's not just about financial bonuses, 'cause I don't think that would be so surprising for us, we know that unfortunately in education, teachers are not rewarded based on their effectiveness, but this is actually a very significant finding that teachers aren't recognised more broadly for improving the quality of their teaching in schools.

JOHN: So that was around the evaluation of their effectiveness, what about their innovative ... their innovation, innovativeness (laughing)?

BEN: It's difficult, I know. It's the same story again, over 90% of teachers, if they're more innovative in their teaching don't receive any recognition and I think this is really important, given that every government over the past two years in Australia has announced new schemes to try and increase innovation in our schools. It's the new thing we're trying to get our schools to be more innovative, create this knowledge economy, more dynamic sector. However in doing that, we're ignoring the innovation within schools, we're ignoring the innovation of teachers because we have these top down processes that don't harness the quality and innovation that happens in our schools. And so we've really need to reverse the situation there.

JOHN: Well, I guess that's the story around whether the evaluation is looking at the right things and whether or not anyone's getting recognised about it. I guess one of the other things that evaluation, one of the other purposes of evaluation, a lot of management, is around consequences. You know ideally you want to have an evaluation system that identifies good people and make sure they get promoted and all of those good, kind of good things and ideally you want to have a system that if there are people who are persistently underperforming, something happens.

BEN: I don't mean to sound like a broken record, but again it's a similar story. What we have is over 90% of teachers saying that the school principal does not take steps to address poor performance in their school. And what I was surprised at, I'm not so much surprised at finding that teachers don't receive financial bonuses, we know that's not the case, but over 83% of Australian teachers said that the evaluation of their work has no consequence on their career progression. So, to me I was quite astounded by that, I thought okay, what are we really using the evaluation of their work for? I know that in my opinion there's too much of a focus on standards, but surely there must be some connection to what teachers are doing in the classroom and 83% of teachers to say it's not related to their career progression says to me that's there's no real consequences. And this all makes sense to me in terms of if the evaluation of their work doesn't focus on what they're doing, doesn't focus on effective teaching, then obviously there's not going to be consequences. Obviously it's very difficult for a school principal to do something about an underperforming teacher, if there's no meaningful evaluation of their work. If there's no evidence they can use to say we need to move this teacher on or we need to develop these areas that need to be developed, that can't occur if we don't have meaningful evaluation of what teachers are doing.

JOHN: Ben, how does this fit with the other existing literature around Australian teaching, in terms of the impact of evaluations?

BEN: Well, what it does is say that… it fits in with a lot of the literature about the relationship between teacher evaluation and career progression, in terms of how we deal with underperforming teachers in our school. We all know that most teachers progress along the career path, we know that over 90% of teachers progress along the career path at each year level. What this report shows obviously backs that up, and it's obviously teachers saying, this is a severe problem in our schools. So, I think that's important but obviously we look at the administrative data saying that teachers all progress along the career path, each year they get passed on, regardless of the evaluation of their work and I guess this is teachers saying, well that has an impact on schools, it's not a positive impact, it's a very negative impact.

JOHN: One of the other things that's in the report, Ben is that you talk about, what is the impact of good teaching and effective teaching relative to less effective teaching and there's some interesting evidence I think starting to emerge on just how much of a difference that makes.

BEN: Yeah, I mean it's without a doubt we see, I mean I think it's getting back to this picture. I think historically education and education research has been poor in focusing on teaching. Historically we focused a lot on curriculum, different pedagogy, but we've only relatively recently, I think in the past couple of decades, started to focus more on teacher quality and the impact of teachers in the classroom. The latest research in Australia supports research in the United States showing that, if for example, if we compare a highly effective teacher with a relatively less effective teacher, the amount of learning a student with those two teachers can get through is quite substantial. With a highly effective teacher, a student will get through about 18 months' worth of learning, or the curriculum in a given year with someone at the other end of the spectrum, the student will get through about six months. Now the research varies, I won't say that's exact, between six and 18 months, the research varies between say six or seven or eight months for a less effective teacher as opposed to 16 or 18 months for a highly effective teacher. But I think that shows the magnitude of the potential that can occur with meaningful reform, I think it shows also the magnitude of the problem when teachers are also saying that they're not developed, they're not meaningfully evaluated. In many respects the key aspect of school education, the quality of teaching received, we're not looking at, at all.

JOHN: And in terms of does it add up? I mean what happens if I have two good teachers in row?

BEN: Two good teachers in a row? A, you're lucky. I was actually very fortunate, I had several in a row but what we are showing is, the impact is cumulative and I think most worryingly is that the research, the longitudinal research, and I admit there's not a lot of good longitudinal research, but it shows that those students that had a relatively ineffective teacher one year, while they did make up some of the lost ground as they moved to more effective teachers in subsequent years, that lost ground actually stayed with them and for many students, they weren't able to make up the lost ground of having that less effective teacher in that one year. And, unfortunately, this has a strong impact on inequality in a school education system, highly effective teachers have the greatest impact for those students who most need it. Those students most in need, those students who have lower levels of literacy and numeracy, those students from disadvantaged backgrounds and the research shows that actually, the most experienced teachers don't teach these students, so what we have in a situation whereby perhaps our education system, just through the way it operates, through the movement and distribution of teachers in the education system, that perhaps the less effective teachers are teaching those students where we really need to concentrate our resources.

JOHN: One of the things that struck me was just the size of the impact as it starts to add up, if you take two students both at the precise middle of the class and you give one of them three really good teachers in a row and one of three less effective teachers in a row, one student will wind up basically at number 75 in the class and the other one will wind up down at 25, that's a pretty big difference when you think about a number 75 student as being kind of pretty good, you think about a number 25 student as starting to struggle a bit, and yet those students actually started off three years ago with essentially the same set of skills, the same potential.

BEN: I do find it particularly worrying that with all the discussion of NAPLAN assessments, with all the discussion of My School focusing of students with low levels of literacy and

numeracy, and we do have too many students who were performing at minimum levels of literacy or below levels of literacy and numeracy. I do find it worrying then the greatest impact we can have in improving those students isn't being concentrated on in schools. The greatest impact we can have is obviously high quality teaching, so perhaps we should focus our resources there much more than these external policies to focus on literacy and numeracy. There have been studies done overseas, oh sorry I shouldn't say studies, there have been programs run overseas where teachers and schools have been evaluated on their ability to lift those students who are at the lowest levels of literacy and numeracy. Those programs have proven to be very successful and some of the most successful programs in helping these students. Historically Australian school education is not good at helping those students with low levels of literacy and numeracy. Our tendency is to let them go through and the problem gets worse as they reach the higher levels of school education. The evidence from overseas suggests that perhaps a good way of addressing this is to focus teacher and school evaluations on those students, that may give greater rewards than perhaps all the policies and programs we have at the moment focused on literacy and numeracy.

JOHN: Does that show up in the numbers? Do we have more students down the bottom?

BEN: Compared to other countries?

JOHN: Yeah.

BEN: Overall, I mean Australian school education, I shouldn't try and create the impression that Australian school education is poor, or that this is an indication that overall Australians do not have high performing students. But what we do is, we have too many students at the bottom of the distribution and that shows up on a number of international tests, compared to other countries, we have more students at the bottom of the distribution. And part of that is because these international tests actually happen when students are 15, or 13 depending on the international test, and as I said, we have a problem in that instead of picking up and addressing problems with these students when they're five, six, seven years of age, we just let it go and so by 15 years of age, internationally speaking we actually have a relatively large problem.

JOHN: I guess that's around the development of students, I guess one of the other things that ideally an evaluation system does is help you develop the teachers themselves in terms of identifying where are the areas that an individual teacher needs some help?

BEN: Exactly, and that's why we focus in the report constantly on teacher evaluation and development. I think one of the interesting things is that we actually have decoupled teacher development from teacher evaluation and really, whenever we want to improve, we all know that if we want to improve our skills or our quality, the first step we do is assess where we are at the moment, we assess our strengths and weaknesses. Now what teachers are saying in Australia, is that teacher evaluation is not linked to what they do in the classroom. Around two thirds of teachers say that the evaluation of their work has no impact on what they do in the classroom, and around two thirds of teachers say it's largely an administrative exercise. The evaluation of my work is basically an administrative exercise to say that yes, I've reached teaching standard X, Y, Z. So, it's not having an impact on what they do. Compared to other countries who do have more meaningful evaluations, who have larger consequences for teachers, this has a greater impact on their teaching and I think this gets back to what we were saying about inequality, about addressing the focus on students with special learning needs or the focus on students with low levels of literacy and numeracy. Clearly if we focus teacher evaluation on those issues, we'll hopefully have a greater impact on teaching those sorts of students.

JOHN: I guess one of the obvious questions that all of this begs is, at the end of the day, does evaluation in fact matter? Are those countries that are evaluating better seeing any difference in terms of the outcomes of how their teachers are teaching, and then ultimately, obviously, student outcomes?

BEN: Actually, no. I mean as you see from the report, the countries that actually have meaningful evaluation are not what we would call high performing systems. I think that says two

things, obviously teacher evaluation is not the policy that's going to turn round our entire education system, there's a lot more when we talk about international comparisons, there are a lot more that affect student performance. I think there's aspects where Australia is worse than Bulgaria in recognising quality teaching in their schools, but we won't look at Bulgaria and say, I wish our school education system had their outcomes. They're not as good as Australia. But there are lots of other factors that affect student outcomes, particularly when we compare across countries. What we do know, however, is that the way we improve schools, the way we improve student performance, is through improving teaching, and the first step in doing that is evaluating teachers, providing the development they need, and providing the recognition they deserve for their quality teaching.

JOHN: What gives us such confidence that evaluation is such a necessary element? It may well not be sufficient to improve teaching quality, but what gives you such confidence that it's necessary?

BEN: Well, we spend an awful lot of money at the moment on developing our teachers, we spend an awful lot of money on trying to improve schools. All the research has shown that the additional money that we have spent in Australian education over the past 10, 15 years has actually met with either stagnation in our standards, in terms of international tests, we've either stagnated or declined slightly while expenditure has gone through the roof, 125% we're talking about increases over the past decades, while standards in international testing have either stagnated or declined. If we want to improve those sorts of figures, if we want to improve literacy and numeracy, high school attainment, these sorts of things, the key is quality teaching and the first step in that, in doing that is to say, okay where are teachers at the moment? Where are their strengths and weaknesses? How can we build on their strengths? How can we address their weaknesses?

JOHN: Are there parallels with other forms of people management?

BEN: Well, I think it's always dangerous to say that school education should be more like the corporate sector or more like other areas, but if we think about the evaluation we have ever had in our own work, the development we've ever had in our own lives, obviously a realistic assessment of where we are at the moment is the first step in moving forward in our development to say, here's what you're doing, here is the strengths in what you're doing, here are the proactive, here are the development steps you can take to become a better professional or an employee.

JOHN: Well, Ben, it's not an entirely pretty story around evaluation, what do you reckon we should actually do about it? If you were Julia Gillard, or whoever, what would you be doing?

BEN: If I were Julia Gillard, I'd be looking forward to my next job. What I think I would do, is I think what we are seeing is that teachers and school principals are saying first of all, that teacher evaluation and development has no meaning. So, therefore, we have to shift the focus on to what teachers do within schools, what their practices are in the classroom, how they adapt their teaching for individual students, how they identify individual learning needs, what they're doing in schools and what is the impact of those practices on student progress? I mean there's obviously a lot to a teacher's job, I won't go through that detail here, I know. Nor do I want to dismiss it as a rather simple job at all, so it has to have focus on what teachers are doing and the impact it has on students. Then we have to link it to real consequences, we have to recognise teachers, we have to recognise high quality teachers, not just through more money, although I definitely think teachers, more effective teachers should be paid more, but there are other non-monetary rewards and forms of recognition that teachers should receive. Part of that I think is having a greater say in the teaching profession overall and the school education overall, but also it has to have other consequences for low-performing teachers. Part of that is a developmental aspect where a good teacher evaluation identifies strengths and weaknesses, so development, such as professional development or other development opportunities should be linked to that, and those development opportunities should be monitored over time. What teachers are saying to us is that their professional development actually doesn't meet their needs because it's not linked to their evaluation. And then finally we do have to take steps for

persistently underperforming teachers, because teachers and school principals are saying that that's a severe problem.

JOHN: Ben, that sounds like a cultural revolution, as you said, there's a danger in applying corporate lessons, but maybe one corporate lesson we can apply is to actually bring in a genuine performance management culture to any organisation, particularly perhaps a school, is a very tough thing to do. Any thoughts about how you'd actually get that transformation in culture?

BEN: I would like to think we've taken the first step by listening to teachers and school principals, because at the moment the debate has been stuck in the same area for about five years, where anyone who says we should change teacher performance management invariably either talks about performance based pay based on test scores, or is labelled as such, and the response to that is generally well, teachers are professionals, they don't need that sort of evaluation. We need to move away from that and have meaningful evaluation because that's really what teachers and school principals are asking for.

JOHN: Well, that's been a useful introduction to the report, perhaps we should throw it open and ask anyone who's got any thoughts or a question. If you'd like to identify yourself as you begin, if you'd like to raise your hand and we'll rush a microphone to you, not because you won't otherwise be heard, but because that makes it much easier for us to capture all of this for prosperity. So, if anyone's got a question they'd like to lead off with, please do and bear in mind that there'll be far more hands at the end, so get in quick.

AUDIENCE: My name's Robert Bender, I'm a TAFE teacher in William Angliss TAFE, I'm interested to hear what do the top performing countries in evaluation do that we don't?

BEN: I should start by saying this is a problem that exists across virtually all countries. This is an area of reform that countries are just starting to tackle. When the report was first released by the OECD in other countries, virtually in every country it started off a major round of reform. But, what the most effective countries are doing is focusing their evaluation much more on what teachers do, the emphasis I think on teacher standards is not as great, instead it's focused much more on what teachers are doing, how they are improving and what's their impact on students? Now, I think sometimes that's a bit too much focused on students' test scores, but that's generally what, the focus is where it should be in terms of what happens in schools, rather than this bureaucratic process of standards. Some countries have much larger consequences for teachers, so it is linked very closely to either their remuneration, or their career progression. Some countries, I think have very strong links between evaluation and moving a teacher on who's persistently underperforming, and I think some of the more successful countries who do this are linking their professional development programs based almost entirely on the evaluation of teachers. I don't think enough countries are doing that well, but I think that's where a lot of countries are moving.

JOHN: Thank you. There's a question just here.

AUDIENCE: Yeah David Campbell from the Office of Knowledge Capital. Being married to a high school teacher, it's often a topic of conversation around our dinner table about performance management; with my corporate background and my wife's teaching background, so I'm very interesting in the challenge of applying that. Two questions, did the issue of class size surface at all through this survey in some way of impacting teacher performance? 'Cause it always seems to come up in conversations with teachers, and reading through the report I was a bit alarmed about the amount of time teachers are still being forced to spend on dealing with disruptive behaviour, etc., and we know that a lot of the problems of society are finding their way into the classroom by default. Do you want to comment on both of those?

BEN: To the issue of class size first. It was definitely included in the survey, teachers were asked about their class size, and like most pieces of research into class size, the impact was negligible. The impact definitely on these sorts of issues was negligible, it's something that's an issue I want to explore further with the data, but there's no major findings on class size there. You've raised a really important issue, because it's fine for us to stand up here and say, well we

need to focus development on these sorts of issues, but then the question begs, okay is development necessary? And we can talk theoretically about the need to develop teachers and the need to develop better quality schools, but you're right, teachers and school principals are saying that there are severe problems in their schools that need to be addressed and the notion of time on task, if I can use the education language of what the percentage of class time is spent on effective teaching and learning. We have a situation where a quarter of teachers report losing one third of class time to factors other than teaching and learning, and roughly a bit over a quarter of class time is spent on classroom management issues or keeping order. For 11% of Australian teachers, we see them losing 50% of class time and that translates to about 44% on classroom management issues. It's a severe problem. Now that doesn't mean that they're bad teachers. That can be a product of many reasons, school climate, the areas they're in and I think that requires further analysis, but it does mean that those teachers have developmental needs to improve and they're clearly not being met through the evaluation and development of their work. There are other issues where school principals are saying that a lack of classroom preparation hinders instruction in their school, unfortunately, only Australia I think that was an issue considered by school principals in Australia to be worse than all but four countries in the study. So, these are issues that require evaluation and development, it's not about pointing the finger at teachers, it's about saying the systems are not there to support them.

JOHN: In terms of that time on task and the discipline issue, Ben, is it different in Australia relative to other countries?

BEN: It's different in Australia in the sense that the classroom management issue, the maintaining discipline is an issue. It's not so much an issue of ... Basically, teachers were asked to say look, how much time they spent on effective teaching and learning? How much is spent on classroom management and other sort of issues? Then there's always the issue of administrative tasks, that's a very important issue for teachers, how much time, often government bureaucracy? In Australia that wasn't too much of an issue compared to other countries, in other countries it was a big issue, but in Australia the issue of classroom management and student discipline seems to be much more of an issue.

JOHN: Thank you. And I guess the other issue that just got raised was around class size, I guess this ties into a seminar we had recently on productivity and education's impact on productivity. I mean what is the evidence on class size and its impact on outcomes more generally across the world?

BEN: Generally the evidence says there is no impact between class size and student outcomes, I mean this is consistently found in the research and I think it's a problem in teaching, because what we've done in say the past 10, 20 years is reduce class size and increase the number of subjects taught at schools. Now, when you think about this topic, this means that we have spread our teaching resources as thinly as possible. Now we really need to start to turn that around to focus much more on teaching and the quality of teaching, rather than trying to spread them across as many classes and as many different subject areas.

JOHN: What's the economic impact of that shift in class size?

BEN: Virtually zero.

JOHN: Well, but in terms of cost?

BEN: Well, the cost is substantial, it's the greatest cost. Obviously, teachers make up the greatest cost in a school education budget. For most government schools at least, about 90% plus of their budget is taken up on teachers' salaries and the greatest determinant of the number of teachers you hire is, of course, requirements for class size. So, therefore, we have a history of reducing class sizes, most states will have minimum requirements for class sizes and that obviously puts up the cost of teacher salaries within a school. Interestingly, given the debate about government and non-government schools, and everyone knows we see more and more people going to non-government schools, non-government schools have bigger classes than government schools, and it's an interesting thing when we think about parental preferences.

JOHN: I guess one of the interesting ways to think about that is just in terms of the dollar impact. I mean if you move your class size from 29 students to 25, implicitly you've increased your teacher budget by a bit over 20%.

BEN: Correct, whereas you would ask, should that money be better spent on developing and perhaps paying teachers more?

JOHN: Thank you. Got a question over here?

AUDIENCE: Dahle Suggett, I'm just exiting the New South Wales Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet. The report's really useful and I think particularly say for states like Victoria government system, there is a lot of teacher data that these findings could be put against, so there's a sort of micro-study there I think which would be really helpful. But and I know the first question on impact, one of the last things that John said in talking to you was the puzzling factor though about your distribution across all of the surveyed countries, because at that top-end where you ... I mean I'm quite amazed that Australia comes out down the bottom end, and I know sort of the education data well, so that's puzzling. Then you look at the top-end as you said, and it's not the equivalent of high performance, so what is it? There's a mix I think at that high-end, there are some systems there that are your very sort of centralised, hierarchical, probably quite efficient in certain ways, possibly like Australia had, you know going back 30 years when there was an inspectorate, where no teacher would have said they weren't subject to regular evaluation. At the other end of that spectrum at the high-end, hopefully there are some systems but I can't see them, hopefully there are some systems that have evolved from what our system is, which is you know more about the organisational health of the school, looking in a more sort of democratic way. So I think our challenge is not to emulate, I mean it's nice to know about it but I think we could probably find out about it in five minutes. It's really where do we take were we are, given that we have high performance? And I think that while you've picked and you've qualified just that element of development, and obviously it's got to be larger, but I think that element of development you've got to look at very carefully, 'cause you've got to put it in a cultural context and that's where the ... an organisational context, and that's where the parallels with the private sector do help. Because people don't talk only, when they talk productivity in a firm, they're not only talking about your performance appraisal system, they're actually talking more profoundly about how you get teams, how you get innovation and as we know one of the really big challenges in Australia is that there is low recognition, you know culturally it sort of works like that. So I just sort of ... where would you take this, if you've set yourself up to do a sort of series of reports, 'cause I think you've left us with something quite puzzling?

BEN: I think there's about 10 questions there, I'll try and get through them. No, that's fine, that's totally fine. In terms of the countries at the top, I totally agree with you, there's another bracket, or another group of countries I'd add in there, and that is Eastern European countries. And I find their approach to education very, very different to ours and part of the reason is they're not coming with the institutional structure that we are, so they're starting and if we could create our system again, our school education system now, therefore we'd probably do it very differently. So, I think that's a factor, that doesn't necessarily help us though, because we're obviously starting with centuries of school education. I think it's also interesting for me personally, I had expected a substantial difference between these findings in government and non-government schools in Australia and that difference doesn't exist. This is a problem across all sectors of Australian school education, so I thought this might be a bit of a school autonomy issue, about trying to give perhaps principals greater power to hire and fire teachers. I originally thought perhaps this would be an issue of trying to get the government bureaucracy out of there or those sorts of issues. It's not that, it's really you know this is a problem that exists, so I think this actually requires a cultural shift in how we think about appraisal and evaluation within schools and I also think that this sort of change makes us think about not just the issues that you've raised, but I'd just add another one, it's what does this system say about the people who we attract into teaching? I think this has large implications there, at the moment the structure's set up, if you want to be effective in your profession, there's not a great incentive to move into teaching and obviously that's clearly something we want to address. There's lots of rewards in teaching, but they don't get the recognition they're clearly deserving. I mean, in terms of the

next step, my personal next step is okay, how do we make evaluation meaningful? How do we link that to teacher development? And I would like to think of teacher development much more broadly than professional development, I think we need to move away from this notion that the only development you have as a teacher is your course that you do at the end of the year. Development should be ongoing, it needs to be about process of improving teaching within schools. Sorry if that doesn't answer all your questions, but yeah thanks very much.

JOHN: Ben, one of the questions that maybe was implicit in Dahle's question, 'cause I guess given your background, you used to work at the OECD, you did go to a lot of OECD countries to talk to very senior people about their education systems, were there any where you did see this evaluation thing being done at least relatively better and what would you take away from those countries? Which countries and what would you take away from them?

BEN: I saw a lot of countries that did this very well, that did this very differently. The most complex and comprehensive teacher evaluation system in the world is in Chile, where you basically have a very strong link between assessing teachers' practices in the classroom, teacher test scores and with substantial consequences for teachers. I believe it has a problem of linking student test scores far too strongly to teachers' careers but that's the most complex. I think Singapore has a very good way of evaluating teachers and linking it to their development and I think there are some countries who perhaps don't do the ... say the consequences of evaluation too well, but particularly some of the Northern European countries are much better at identifying teachers' needs and matching it to their developments. So, I don't look at a country and say, that's the one we need to follow but I think there are aspects we can pick from various countries to say that's a way forward.

JOHN: Thank you. One up the back there and then across over there.

AUDIENCE: Thank you, Chris Watt from the Independent Education Union of Australia. Thank you for your contribution this evening, it's interesting to hear you speak to the report, compared to reading it, and I'd have to say that the approach you've taken this evening is somewhat different in my view to the way the report presents and that to a large extent, the report itself is purposefully perhaps provocative, and in my view, incorrectly provocative in some occasions. But what you've said this evening, I could agree with almost all of what you've said, there is no doubt from our experience with our members and having been a teacher myself, that teachers by and large would agree that their professional development needs, their professional needs, their learning needs aren't being met, and that by and large, they have very little control over that. So, development around that would be a welcome thing from you know the perspective of teachers, but that comes at a huge price, you know, where does that happen? When does that happen? Maybe there are cultural norms that have to be dealt with around that, but it's unlike most other industries, other than where people are expected to be in front of their clients, for want of a better word. And what I want to come back to in a sense is some of the propositions you actually put in the paper, and you've kind of alluded to them this evening, particularly one case about underperforming teachers, dealing with them. The report talks about them in the sense of we'll deal with them by holding them on you know their current rate of pay, or perhaps even penalising them by reducing their rate of pay. That's a proposition. They also make the proposition, although you say this evening that the monetary rewards isn't important, yet the paper is fundamentally built around that, because that's what the survey question ... you know questions alluded to and yet you're talking about the McKinsey work, and yet even the recent report in Australia, report by the Gerry Daniels mob from a teacher last year, clearly indicated that teaching professional life long career, in most instances, is more like the health profession, or perhaps public service or defence, rather than like companies that McKinsey was looking at. And so my concern I suppose is, what's the intent of the report? Is it actually about a proper conversation with teachers and with the education industry generally about how we reform the professional learning opportunities for teachers? Or is it more about the content of this, which is about a carrot and stick approach? Which in all honesty when you look at the international data, hasn't worked anywhere else any rate.

BEN: First of all, I disagree fundamentally that I'm talking about monetary rewards in this paper, and nowhere in the paper do I say that teacher pay should be reduced if they're poor performing. I say in the paper that the first step in dealing with poor performing teachers is

development. But I do believe that if you have a situation of persistently underperforming teachers, then it has to be addressed. And the reason I'm saying that, is because teachers are saying that, it's a major problem in their schools. So, that's why I say in the report, I don't focus on monetary rewards at all, there's a lot in there about public recognition. When I talk about recognition, that's not about pay and financial bonuses, it's about monetary and non-monetary rewards, there's a lot in there about recognition from the principal, discussion, some sort of recognition other than just pay, that's what I said throughout this tonight and I said in the reports, it's not just about money. Also, the reason I've done this report, as I said, is to highlight what teachers and school principals are saying about these issues and to highlight the need for reform in evaluation and development. My idea is not a carrot and stick approach, I link evaluation and development very clearly, but I do believe that if we are to develop teachers and schools, we have to have meaningful evaluation of strengths and weaknesses, like with anyone. I don't consider that evaluation is here and development is there. I consider the approach we have at the moment, is that evaluation is meaningless, and we've got professional development here, and I think that's part of the problem.

AUDIENCE: My name is Aibinu Ajibade. Actually I'm here tonight because I've got two little kids at school. I'm a lecturer at the University of Melbourne, I mean but because I've got kids in school, I just became interested in this seminar. I'm just wondering whether ... I think you have really answered my question, because my concern is the aspect of having to punish teachers when you evaluate them, and I wonder are we going to really measure whether a teacher is underperforming or high performance? I mean it's very easy to identify, I mean high performance teachers, but for underperforming teachers, I'm really wondering how we're going to do that? What criteria are we going to be using? Especially given that there may be so many other factors that may affect the student learning in class, for example, the background of the children, their behaviour and the time that teachers have to spend, I mean so many factors which are very difficult, in my own view to control when we do research. I'm saying my own view, the issue of linking evaluation to the professional development is very good, but to also to begin to go to the level of trying to punish teachers because of a certain criteria, whatever in terms of student performance, I think we are going to have a lot of problems and it may it be very unfair. I lived in Singapore for six years and the reason why I decided to relocate to Australia is because of the education system of the students. I mean even though I mean it is very true, they have got a very good way of linking performance to student outcome in terms of match, but honestly I mean I'm very sorry to say, I mean the kids are not that good in terms of being creative, their ability to move things forward, to break new ground, honestly and that's why personally, I decided to not to continue to live there, honestly, I'm very sorry to say that. So, my concern is just that, I mean to link development to evaluation, that's fine but we should be a bit careful once we are going beyond that to punishing teachers because they're not performing.

BEN: I couldn't agree more in what you're saying and I should just say, when I've talked about teacher effectiveness in this report, I haven't defined what is and is not an effective teacher. I've simply said, this is what teachers are saying about effective and ineffective teachers in their school, this is what school principals are saying about effective and ineffective teachers in their school. So, it's how they've defined it themselves, this isn't me coming in and saying an effective teacher is X, Y, Z. These are teachers and school principals saying this is an effective and ineffective teacher. I don't argue that teachers should be evaluated on student test scores for either highly effective teachers or for less effective teachers, I don't think that's the sole measure of a teacher's performance. There are many, many methods you can use to evaluate teachers, by looking at what they do, by looking at how they prepare for classes, how they address each student's learning needs, how they identify each student's learning needs. There is considerable literature on all the facets that go into making an effective teacher and these can be evaluated. I don't think they can be evaluated centrally, I don't think that you can put a number on it to say this teacher got 87% out of 100, this teacher got 83, so let's get rid of that teacher, but when you have over 90% of teachers saying that the greatest recognition goes to relatively ineffective teachers in their school, then surely teachers and school principals have a very good idea about what is and is not effective practices. I don't, I'm not saying this, I'm not saying I should be the one that makes that call, but teachers and school principals I think, have a very good idea about what is effective and ineffective teaching in their classroom and teachers are saying it's actually a problem that needs to be addressed.

JOHN: Question over here.

AUDIENCE: My name's Jeanne Shaw, and I'm just finishing my PhD at Melbourne University on the Good Teacher from this course, analytic approach, and I've just written a book on good teaching as well. I'm very fascinated by your report and what you're saying tonight Ben, thank you. When you mention the notion of evaluating strengths and weaknesses of teachers, which you've mentioned a couple of times, and it seems to be the core of some of the concerns about the report, my research centres on the notion that there is a problem internationally about developing a discourse for talking about good teaching, which touches on intangibles and the relational interpersonal aspects of a teacher's work. And my extensive research is showing that, if you ask kids what's important to them in terms of having a good teacher and appreciating a good teacher, and a teacher escalating their potential and enhancing their learning, it is invariably connected to a relational, interpersonal, intangible capacity that brilliant teachers have. I think that what we need to do is to be very confident of moving away from what can be measured and moving towards a description of what fine teachers do, which is not in the realm of the measurable, and obviously the Gillard philosophy at the moment is in making everything accountable and transparent, and things like inspiration and passion, and compassion, are not readily measurable. But my question is to you then, particularly for my research, is when you say that teachers want to talk about what they do, I'm just wondering whether your research has touched on what they do is connect with kids, what they do is take an interest in the kids' capacity to take risks, to feel valued, to feel encouraged? Just feel a sense of passion that the teacher has for them, was that mentioned at all? Did you get underneath that aspect of what isn't recognised, where the gap is in the discourse?

BEN: We didn't in the strict sense of what you're getting at. There was a lot of discussions and questions to teachers about how they feel they do in the classroom in terms of the focus on their relationships with students, about how they connect with, I forget the exact wording of the question, but how they connect with even the most, you know the student they have the strongest or the hardest time trying to connect with, how successful are they with connecting with that sort of student? So, those sorts of issues were discussed with the teacher, the extent that that was actually mentioned in the discourse of the evaluation, we didn't get into those sort of areas as much, but I think you've raised an important point about saying, trying to put a quantitative measure on this, and I don't argue that we try and put a quantitative measure on this, I certainly don't want this information on the My School website or anything like that. But it's interesting that the current approach on teacher standards seems that we have to try and say, this is what a good teacher does, this is what an accomplished teacher at this stage does, this is what a teacher at this stage does and this is what a teacher at this stage does. I would argue that we actually need to focus less on those sorts of issues and much more on issues of what you're saying because while I agree, they can't be measured, school principals know when they see it and school principals can therefore make a judgement about your evaluation and how you're doing with these issues and say, for teachers that are doing really well, put them in a position where they can teach teachers who are not doing very well. Now, and for teachers who are not doing it well, put them on a development path that allows them to do that and in the turn, recognise what is and is not effective teaching. So, really I am saying that's an incredibly strong part of what we need to do, less so on what we're talking about student test scores. So I think that is a way forward and in fact, many aspects of what I would consider to be more effective evaluation and development is moving away from categorising teachers as this level or that level.

JOHN: Ben, do you think that those things are linked? I mean is there a link between an inspirational teacher and ultimately what comes out in terms of measurable test scores?

BEN: Of course, it's really interesting. If you look at the research that compares test scores to school principals' observations about the quality of the teacher, now the school principal will focus largely on sort of the issues that you discussed, and there's a very strong correlation between a school principal's observations about what is an effective teacher and student test scores, actually not student test scores, growth in student test scores. So therefore, while I don't advocate a focus on student test scores, moving to a focus on what school principals believe is effective teaching actually will have the impact on student test scores they 're looking for.

JOHN: Time for just one more question unfortunately, over here, or rather fortunately for that question, but unfortunately there won't be any more after this one.

AUDIENCE: Duncan Kaufmann from Melbourne University. You said earlier that the countries who have the best evaluation systems don't necessarily have the best outcomes, and you noted Bulgaria. I wonder whether that's the full story, surely the question is whether they're improving at a faster rate than us, and if they are, then that's good news for better evaluations.

BEN: Generally we don't know the answer to that, there are a couple of countries that stand out as rapid improvers in education, Poland and Korea are the stand-outs. I don't know how much we can learn from either of those countries to say, this is what we want Australia school education to look like. You can look at some of the changes in Poland and say, yes that could be a way forward, you can look at some of the changes in Korea, and say that's got nothing to do with teacher evaluation, so unfortunately I don't have a great story there and I think it adds to the yeah, I mean as I said this is the first of a series of reports. I believe the objective of this report was really getting this information, the voice of teachers and school principals out there and to highlight the need for reform in these areas, and clearly we need more discussion about what these results mean.

JOHN: Well, I'm afraid we're going to have to leave it there, although I suspect we could very happily all stay here answering questions for quite some time.

End of recording