

The Policy Pitch – Targeted Teaching: how to close the gap between theory, policy and practice – Melbourne – 15 September 2015

A huge spread of achievement in the typical Australian classroom makes it hard for teachers to target their teaching to the needs of every individual student. Our most advanced students are not adequately stretched while our least advanced are not properly supported, despite heroic efforts by many teachers and principals. Students learn best when they are taught material that is targeted to what each individual is ready to learn next, rather than the standard year level material that may well be too easy or too hard. We have known this for decades. It is part of our national professional standards, and our expectations of schools. Yet it is easier said than done. Grattan Institute's latest school education report, *Targeted teaching: how better use of data can improve student learning*, explores the gap between the theory, policy and practice of targeted teaching.

Speakers: Dr Peter Goss – Director, School Education Program, Grattan Institute
Margery Evans – Foundational CEO, AITSL
Simon Kent – Deputy Secretary, Department of Education & Training
Coralee Pratt – Principal, Camberwell Primary School

PETER MCMAHON: Welcome to tonight's *Policy Pitch*. My name is Peter McMahon. I'm the Director of Community Engagement here at the Library. Tonight's event is being held on the traditional lands of the Kulin nation. I wish to acknowledge them as the traditional owners and to pay my respects to their Elders and to the Elders of any other communities who may be with us this evening.

I'd like to start by welcoming the members of tonight's panel, Margery Evans, Simon Kent, Coralee Pratt and, at the end, Dr Peter Goss. I'd also like to extend a warm welcome to Grattan Institute members and staff and also to members of our Friends of the Library program. As you may know, *The Policy Pitch* provides a platform to generate conversation, debate and ideas on key public policy and it brings together some of the foremost thinkers in their chosen fields, and tonight is no exception. Drawing on a wealth of experience in schools and education policy, we will hear from our panel of experts on the topic of *Targeted Teaching: how to close the gap between theory, policy and practice*.

To introduce our guest speakers and lead the discussion it is my pleasure to introduce Dr Peter Goss, School Education Program Director at Grattan Institute. Peter has over ten years' experience as a strategy consultant, most recently with Boston Consulting Group advising Federal and State Governments on service delivery innovation. He's worked with Noel Pearson to improve education outcomes for Cape York Primary School students and has advised the Federal Government on the future of international education in Australia. Please join me in welcoming Peter Goss.

PETER GOSS: Thank you and welcome to all of you for what should be a fascinating evening. Firstly, I would like to thank the State Library of Victoria who supports these regular *Policy Pitches*, it's a great opportunity for us to talk about issues that we care about with people who also care about those issues and can shed some light, and to have an engaged conversation with a very diverse audience. I'd also like to thank our Grattan affiliates who support us and help make some of this work possible. In terms of the audience, thank you for coming along on what's turned out to be a beautiful evening.

In the audience we have roughly 30 schools from the government sector, the Catholic sector and the independent sector; we have representatives of all three of those sectors. We have several universities, policy makers, some academics who have been involved in some of the foundational thinking in this space, and also many people who are generally interested. So I'm very excited to have that diversity.

The core challenge that we're going to talk about today is something called "targeted teaching". Grattan Institute published a report on this about six or seven weeks ago that noted what it was, but noted that there was a problem that it wasn't happening well enough. So the panel members today have been chosen because they are at various levels, either at the frontline or in the policy space, involved in taking some of these ideas from the theory and the policy and helping them to be put into practice. So I would first of all like to welcome Coralee Pratt, who is the Principal of Camberwell South Primary School, who is doing some fantastic work at the frontline in actually helping her school change into a place where every student's learning is focused every day at the right level.

Secondly, I'd like to introduce Simon Kent who is working at the Department of Education & Training, he's the Deputy Secretary in charge of the strategy there, and in that work he is leading a very important reform in Victoria called *The Education State*. Some of you may have noticed that there was a political announcement yesterday. There was also another policy announcement and a deeply important one, although it might have got less media coverage because of other things that were going on in Canberra, and that's a document called *The Education State for Schools*. Simon is the man who is leading this and we hope to hear a bit more about that tonight. And finally, Margery Evans, who is the Foundational CEO of the Australian Institute of Teaching & School Leadership, having had many roles in many different parts of Australia from the frontline, now up to leading policy. Margery's team helps set the standards that we expect from teachers and from principals and how to help them implement some of these. So could you please welcome very warmly Coralee, Simon and Margery?

We have about 75 minutes and we're going to spend about 40 minutes in a panel discussion covering four questions - what is targeted teaching, what does it look like, what are the current policy settings, and how do we move to somewhere closer to it - and then we'll move to audience Q&A. Many of you were kind enough to send through some questions and I tried to incorporate these where I could.

So, to start off, why is targeted teaching important? I'll put a starting view out here. There's a great inefficiency at the heart of Australian education today, but it's largely hidden. The students who are affected by it might even call it a great injustice. Every school day in every lesson a substantial proportion of the roughly 3.5 million students in Australia will not be learning well. Sometimes that's because of factors beyond the classroom, and that's really hard to deal with and teachers make heroic efforts in that, but too often it's because the teaching is pitched at a level that is either too easy, in which case the children are bored and not learning much, or too hard, in which case they're lost, bored, and potentially disruptive. These students are not learning at their best. There's a better way. We know in theory that the answer is to teach at a level which is at the right level for each child for what they need to learn next and we've known this for a long time. It's written into our professional standards.

Although it's hard, there are pockets of great practice and the challenge is now how to move from pockets of great practice to a system where every student is taught at the level that is right for them

as much of the time as possible. That's why I think targeted teaching is important. But I understand that I'm not the first person to have noticed this, so I'm going to hand over to Coralee on that.

CORALEE PRATT: To start Peter, I'd like to thank you for inviting me tonight, I feel very humbled to be in this position. I'm usually, like you, sitting in the audience and admiring the people on the stage, so I hope I can add value to the conversation this evening.

We can't ignore the importance of targeted teaching and my background is in early childhood initially, so I really admire the work of Lev Bukovsky and the idea of students learning best when they're in "the zone". To get them in "the zone" we have to have information and knowledge about how they are learning, how they're travelling, and where they are at a certain time in their learning, and to determine what they already know and scaffold their work around it. So the concept of targeted teaching just fits naturally with what I really truly believe. We can't ignore it because there's so much research that shows us that we have to start with what children understand before we go any further. At my school currently and my previous school, which I'll talk about a bit further in the conversation, we've been influenced by the work of Geoff Masters and ACR reforming educational assessment, it's been very important to us. Also the work of Dylan William who talks about formative assessment and he says that if there's only one thing you do for school improvement, do formative assessment in your school, and that's been the basis of our work over the last few years.

I know from firsthand experience that targeted teaching does make a difference; it does drill down to that individual level. My previous school in Queensland, for three years in a school of 1,100 students we used targeted teaching as our main strategy, along with the National School Improvement Tool developed by ACR. The school's achievements showed through NAPLAN. For example, Years 3, 5 and 7 below national minimum standards in nine areas of the 15 areas in 2013. For the fourth year of implementation the school was the most improved government school in the whole of Queensland. I've got no doubt those strategies added to that.

PETER GOSS: So it's still relevant today in the classroom, even though it is quite old, and you showed me just before that it's not new. How old is the book you have that talks about this?

CORALEE PRATT: 1923. Trash and treasure, I've used it on many occasions. It's called *Individualised Work in the Infant School* and there are some fantastic quotes from that. I've used it with leadership development, as well as how to identify individual needs in students, and there are some great quotes in there.

PETER GOSS: Thank you. So Simon, why do you care about these ideas?

SIMON KENT: Thank you for the invitation to be here. I was really pleased when you invited me when I saw this date in the diary and thought, "We're doing something the day before". At least, we were planning on doing something the day before and that plan stuck, so I'm very pleased to be here on the other side of the announcement which includes some very clear references to targeted teaching and what we can do, which we'll come to. I suppose as a non-educator I reduce it to something pretty simple, that if you don't know what a kid knows how can you know what to teach them next? It's just so obvious when you say it like that. Why I am interested in it as a policy maker, as an advisor to government is effect size. That's what we chase in developing policy and strategy.

PETER GOSS: Could you explain effect size? Many will know it, not all.

SIMON KENT: So how much gain do you get for the intervention? And this consistently comes through research as being a very high effect size. So it's a common issue for us in developing policy that there are tens if not hundreds if not thousands of things that can be done that are all positive because you're putting in effort, you're going to get something out the other end, or you certainly hope you will. It's what the return on that effort is and this has a very high return. So focusing our effort on the things that give the greatest return is a key thing to be pursuing as a system, to say focus, focus, focus on the things that are going to get the greatest return, not just any return.

PETER GOSS: Margery, this is deeply embedded in some of the things that AITSL (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership) says, but where do you see this fitting into the range of things that could be done and amongst the ones that should be done?

MARGERIE EVANS: Again, like my colleagues, thank you very much for the invitation Peter.

One of the things I think we have to be careful about when we talk about targeted teaching is not to make assumptions that each day is a new experience for every teacher and every student. Simon has picked that up to some extent and I think we have to be cautious, thoughtful about what can be achieved in classrooms and what can be practically achieved. So of course, best teaching occurs when we're well aware of what kids are interested in and what they know, that some learning has become automatic for them and so that they can learn the next new thing. But we also need to recognise that there are things that, as Simon says, work best, and they're the things that we should focus on, but what works best for one child won't necessarily work best for another.

So I'm having a bob to weigh here by saying that there are some practical and pragmatic issues that we need to deal with when we think about targeted teaching: what are the highest probable interventions, what things in my repertoire should I apply to the children in my class or the individuals at this time to have the greatest effect? But simultaneously I need to think about how am I going to capitalise on individual skills and individual needs within a particular time period? So it's that thing about what's common about teaching, what's the stuff we know that works and, therefore, where should I put my effort, balanced against the individual needs of particular students and my capacity to know and understand that, and my capacity to understand the impact I have as a teacher on individual children, so I know which of the things within my repertoire to pick.

So targeted teaching I think is inclusive of all of those things in a context that needs to be relatively pragmatic.

PETER GOSS: I would agree. I think it definitely does need to be pragmatic. There is no point having a concept that is actually not practiced, and we spent a lot of time when we were researching the report trying to find where are the schools that are doing this?

So we've talked at a high level about why we find this interesting, let's get down to the next level which is what is it, how does it work? The core idea is to ensure that the level of teaching is at an accessible level for each student. I've put on the seats a sheet there, it's got two sides. If you turn to the one that has the picture on it I'll give a very quick overview of how we described it, but it's really important to Margery's point, that this is no magic bullet. It's about how does this work in practice in the classroom amidst the myriad of other factors that teachers have to deal with? What we would say, based on the research, is that targeted teaching is going to happen best when, firstly, the teachers assess what the students already know. As Simon said, that's a baseline for every student from

where you can set an appropriate learning goal. Secondly, the teachers have to actually respond to that and one of the reasons that hasn't come up yet, why this is so hard, is because not all students are at the same level in a class. If they were it would be really quite easy to teach, however every teacher who's ever lived knows that there is a range of abilities in the class, but maybe not quite what that range is.

The data show that within a typical classroom there is a five to six year gap in current ability. What that means is that if you're a teacher of a Year 8 class you may well have students who are operating in their mathematical understanding or in their writing or reading at a Year 3 or 4 level. You might also have some students that are operating at a Year 9 or 10 level. If every one of those students gets the same tasks and is expected to perform them at the same level, it's not going to work that well. Other examples say it's actually up to an eight year gap in some of the mathematical understanding that is required to keep going. We have not been too prescriptive, we have tried to describe what it looks like when schools and teachers try to face this gap and target teaching to address what each student is ready to learn next.

Thirdly, you want to track the progress of all of your students. Tracking the progress so that students can perform more difficult tasks than they were a while ago is at the heart of schools. I think sometimes we would call that learning and we want to know that every child is learning. That requires both evidence that the teacher just gathers on a day-to-day basis about what's happening and then ideally crosschecking that so that we can ask, are students learning enough? As Simon said, nearly everything works so that students learn, but we want to know are students learning enough so they will get to a level where they'll be able to thrive in life? That also helps identify if a student has stalled in their learning and then you can do something about it. Finally, to take that information about what have we done and how well has it worked, both Simon and Margery talked about that, and to ask can we understand what it is that has worked best and do more of it, and what it is that hasn't done as well in terms of maximising student learning and then either change it or adjust it.

So that's the broad concept that I'd like to put on the table. I'm keen to see what does it look like in practice in a school, but anything to add before that? Coralee, over to you.

CORALEE PRATT: I think this is a typical example of what Michael Fullan calls "simplexity", a simple concept but complex in detail. It is a journey and I think we need to start with winning, capturing the hearts of our teachers, the hearts and minds of why you need to do it. My mantra has always been that we need to use data because it's a tool that will support you, it will help, it's a tool of your trade and you need to be able to rely on that. I have seen that increase teachers' confidence talking to parents because they can use the data to justify, to inform their judgements. I've seen it build their professional credibility, and also support them in the classroom in planning the curriculum that's appropriate and then monitoring, identifying individual students that need that extra intervention, whether it's support or extension, which are both important.

I think the key is the leadership in the school. You have to be committed, you have to understand why you're promoting this, and you have to be consistent in the application. Then you have to be brave, you have to be courageous, because sometimes people don't want to go on the journey but you have to help them to understand why we need to do that. So in practical terms what we have done at Camberwell South is to start with we audited the assessment tools we were using and we identified what we wanted. We wanted tools that we could use every year that gave us good information about students and we wanted tools that we could triangulate data with. So, for instance, for mathematics

we use the Progressive Assessment Tool for Maths, we're implementing the Early Years Numeracy Interview because that's on a developmental continuum, and then we triangulate that with our Portfolio of Tasks.

PETER GOSS: Coralee, could you explain what a "developmental continuum" is?

CORALEE PRATT: It shows where the students have been and where they need to go next. Now, you might be sitting there thinking, "Okay, Early Years Numeracy Interviews is fantastic, but it's very time consuming" and you're absolutely correct. So another thing a leader needs to do is to be innovative and a risk taker. We wanted to have some benchmark data, so every student from Foundation Prep to Year 4 we have got information from the Early Years Numeracy Interview and then a list of students we felt were at risk from Years 5 and 6. It's a huge amount of work. We approached Deakin University and we've developed a partnership with them, a relationship, where we're training pre-service trainee teachers on how to implement the interview and, in return, they gain that knowledge and they're implementing it at the school, so it's a win-win situation.

If you're sitting there thinking, "The teacher should be doing this" I agree. For students who are at the highest risk the classroom teacher is doing the interview, but it was impossible to get that data for all of those students because of the intensity. But we think the value we gained from it is really important.

PETER GOSS: So Coralee, I think that gives an indication. And for those of you who aren't familiar with the tests, these are tests that are detailed enough to give precise information that can be compared over time and that gathers a lot of data. How does this change what happens in the classroom on a day-to-day basis?

CORALEE PRATT: This informs the curriculum, the classroom planning. So the teachers can then identify, particularly through the test items, what they need to be focusing on. Previously it was more of, "This is what happens every second term/term three/term four". The content was set. Now it's much more needs-based. We know this is happening because after we triangulated the data in 2014 we found that the students that we identified that should have individual learning plans - and I believe all children should have them, all students should, but at this stage it was just the two ends of the cohort. We identified that no student was on a learning plan that should have been and, in fact, three times the number should have been on a learning plan, and that there were students on a learning plan that shouldn't have been on it, they were getting confused with behaviour. Now we couldn't have had that conversation before if we didn't have that data, that's what's really empowered those conversations. And the need for accountability is another really important area that perhaps we'll go into later.

PETER GOSS: My last question, and this is one from the audience, how do you set up the classroom organisation to be able to do this in practice?

CORALEE PRATT: Teachers have a lot of groups, this is normal practice in classrooms, group work, but group work isn't rotating activities. The group work is related directly back to what students already know and taking them that next step forward and, of course, then open-ended tasks are also very important for students to be able to progress at their own rate. You'll see the teachers interacting with a certain group. They might be assessing or monitoring achievement and progress, but also flowing through the room, understanding what the other groups are doing. It's nothing new, I'm sure

your schools are doing the same thing; it's just that we're starting from a much stronger database than we ever have before.

PETER GOSS: I really wanted to have Coralee, as someone who is living with this on a day-to-day basis, recognising that it is possible, but recognising I think it's maybe a little harder than you're making it sound to do it systematically and to put it into every classroom. So I'll throw it over to either of you, how common do you think this sort of story is? Is this what's happening in every classroom in Victoria and Australia?

SIMON KENT: It's definitely not happening in every classroom, we can be certain of that. When I look at the name you've given to tonight's session, *Targeted Teaching: how to close the gap between theory, policy and practice*, I feel like just about anything we do could sit before that colon. And I'm going to use Coralee as the example of how you do that because she's beautifully woven those three things together, but what we don't have is that happening everywhere. That's the challenge because it's hard, as you say. Our role sitting in the centre is how to make that easier, and a key part of making that easier is the data side of things, how to make it hard not to know these things. The point Peter that your report really drew out beautifully was the spread of achievement across a classroom compared to a teacher's perception of a spread of achievement across the classroom, and the role of data in drawing that out and making it abundantly clear that there is a much wider spread of achievement and performance across a classroom.

So without getting into an unpaid announcement, part of yesterday's announcement was the inside assessment platform. I'm going to embarrass Ian Burrage in the fourth row and acknowledge his work in getting this up and running and about to be rolled out and trialled across schools in Victoria. But how to get high quality assessment tools easily available and analytics that sit behind that so that teachers are able to know the progress and improvement that individual students are making across their schooling years, be able to know how their class as a whole is tracking to know where there might be gaps where things are going well, and to make that easy. Take the time away from sitting there and extracting information, plotting it and doing the Excel spreadsheet yourself to track these things, to make it really easy, to make it really accessible, and to not be able to not know that information, because that's the key first step in being able to harness that power. Now, it's not the only step by any stretch, there's a lot of skill in implementing, but you've got to know that you want to be doing it, you've got to know that it's an issue before you're going to address those issues.

So for me, that's one of the great things that we can do sitting in the centre is to make that really easy and really accessible, to make it student-centred, to make it follow the student throughout their schooling life between schools, so that we're putting the power into the hands of teachers and principals to be able to know where kids are up to.

PETER GOSS: That's something that I want to just pick up on. So if we want to see the progress of children in their learning then we want to see that over many years, and anyone who's been a parent will know that babies get weighed regularly and their height gets taken and that gets tracked and that's a way of finding out if the child is growing well, but that's best done when it's done over many years. Why is this hard? As a non-educator, Margery, maybe you can help us understand why these things that we feel should be done are actually quite tough in practice?

MARGERIE EVANS: Before I answer that question I'd like to put a plug in for our teachers. I think there's fantastic expertise out there in schools. Simon's absolutely right, is every school like

Coralee's? Absolutely not, but there are great practices going on. One of the things that AITSL's very committed to doing and thinking about is trying to bring those excellent practices to the fore so that the public, parents, who have often great confidence in their own school but somehow less confidence in the education system, can really see and understand and know what good practice looks like and, indeed, teachers can know what great practice looks like.

So one of the reasons I think that some of the things that one might think would be pretty obvious don't happen is that teaching is a complex, complicated, non-linear business and in Australia it's somewhat fragmented between independent, Catholic and government schools, and it varies between states and territories. So there's no clever answer to your question Peter. I think we have to accept that the business we're in is a complex and complicated one and some of the systems and processes haven't kept up perhaps with the sorts of things that we now know and understand are very important.

PETER GOSS: I think that's right, it's this tension of the reality on the ground and then desires of some things that are shown to be good practice. Could you talk to us a bit about what the policies and the national professional standards say and how you see them ideally being used to close some of this potential disconnect?

MARGERIE EVANS: So the standards provide for the first time in Australia a very coherent picture of what teachers should know and be able to do at the four levels, leave university as a graduate, when you work as a proficient teacher, as a highly accomplished and lead teacher. The standards won't make teachers better, but they're a great underpinning for teachers to talk about their practice, to have views about what it means to get better at their practice, and to allow people into the business of teaching. So at AITSL we think that there are probably really three important things that we want to achieve through policy settings, through providing people with the tools and expertise, to working with systems and sectors like Simon's and, indeed, into schools, like Coralee's.

One of those is to really make explicit and to revere the expertise of teachers. So in order to deal with that multiplicity of abilities and interests in a classroom a teacher needs to be expert, they need to have a wide range of strategies in their repertoire and know how to apply them, and know the impact that they're having and therefore how to adjust them. So one of the things that we think is really important is to continue to focus on building that expertise. Second are the professional conversations that take place between teachers, and we talk a lot about collaboration and mentoring and coaching. At the heart of all of these things there is the conversation that an individual has with their peer, with their principal, with a parent, with the students themselves. So how do you make those conversations targeted, meaningful? The last thing, and we hear about it all the time, is the business of collaborative expertise, how can we work together to solve those practical problems that Coralee talks about, to understand the impact that we are having, to have someone watch me while I work, so what did happen with that bunch of kids there while I was paying attention to those?

So they're the three things that we think are going to help drive real improvement, real targeted teaching: a revering and a growth in expertise; deep and supported professional conversations; and then the notion of I'm not in it alone, I'm not reinventing my work program every single day for every single child, but there's genuine collaboration and support.

PETER GOSS: So I suspect that across this panel there would be a very strong agreement with all of those, and those last two particularly? It's about working together and building on professional conversations. The days you could say the teacher gently closed the door – there's a great quote in

one of John Hattie's books – and then worked in isolation are certainly passing and leading into a different approach. Coralee, how does that look in your school?

CORALEE PRATT: I just want to pick up on that point of consistency that Simon made. The challenge is about consistency across our schools, but it's also consistency within our schools. Our research shows that that's our biggest challenge. Now the points you just made Margery I think really help that, those professional conversations. One of the key strategies we've used is professional conversations with the principal or assistant principal either twice a term or once a term - twice a term it was in Queensland and once a term in Victoria. The teachers come with a pro forma of those students in their classrooms that are performing above and below expected levels, what they're doing about it, what the data shows and what support they need. So that's one way of getting that consistency. The collaboration, I think collaboration time, which used to be called planning time, must be built into the daily curriculum and also the leadership, the coaching, the coaching in the classrooms to support the teacher and that feedback in a respectful relationship.

I don't know a teacher that doesn't come to work every day not wanting to do their very best, but sometimes they're just working on the wrong thing because they haven't been given the guidance or there's not the leadership structure there to support them. So I think that consistency within a school is where we have to start, as well as across our system.

PETER GOSS: I'm going to change gear a little bit now, I think we've heard and hopefully got a bit of an understanding of what some of the goal is and what some of the challenges are, and certainly there are pockets of fantastic practice out there and teachers working hard and working in new ways.

I do think there is evidence that the educational outcomes that we're getting in Australia are not what we should be hoping for or potentially could be expected. I'll bring in a couple of the pieces of data that if we compare ourselves at age 15 to some of the leading nations in the world, and I think there is no reason we should not compare ourselves, then we get roughly half as many students into the top levels of mathematics proficiency. We have more than twice as many students who are performing at the lowest levels of proficiency, which means they are not necessarily being set up to succeed and thrive in life. And I think this is a challenge, that the work on the ground is being pushed forward as hard as the individuals can and yet as a system we're not seeing the results.

So I'm interested in how some of these ideas and the national professional standards, which reflect what is good practice and being done in so many places, can become the norm, can become the baseline that teachers bring their individual personality and relationships to, but that will actually shift the dial in terms of some of the results that we are seeing. So how do we move to building improvement in a broad way? Simon, I'm going to start with you on that one.

SIMON KENT: Wow, that's an easy question. Again, I suppose one of the key parts of my job is to try and make things simple before we make them complex again. Teaching is basically a human interaction, so the way you're going to change it is by changing what people are doing, what teachers are doing, and how they're interacting with their kids. How does that happen? Well, that's a question of time and using it well.

What Coralee's pointed to about working together within the school and, again, as a non-educator thinking about all the best professional development I've ever had, and I've done some great courses and studied some really interesting stuff, but all of the best professional development that sticks with

me is having watched somebody who was really good at the job I wanted to do and seeing how they've done it, and have them watch me do what I do and come to me with questions about how I was doing it, what was I thinking when I did X, why did I take this approach, did I think about other approaches, and really pushing me to think about it. Getting more of that. It's clearly shifting, but we need more still of that kind of interaction within the teaching profession, it's absolutely critical.

So that behaviour, that sharing of good practice, what that requires is trust and understanding, what that requires is practising as a community, and these are all easy to say but they're really hard to embed in any organisation. It requires fantastic leadership, it requires systemic leadership, it requires local leadership, it requires the time to do it and it requires the trust and skill of people within that organisation, in this instance a school, to be able to execute that. Now, that both takes time on a daily basis, but it takes time on a policy cycle basis as well and we need to stick at these things. When we look, again, at systems that have improved, one of the key things is that you get a plan and you stick to it for at least ten years, preferably 20 or 30, but at least ten years to say, "This is what we're going to do. We're not going to have policy attention deficit disorder and jump from one thing to another". So that clarity and consistency to be able to pick the things that work and improve within the organisational unit of school and classroom, they're the ingredients but there's no magic way to get there.

PETER GOSS: Margery?

MARGERIE EVANS: Let me add two things to that. Simon's very right about all of those things. I think we need to focus on achievement and growth, so it's not just where we get to, but how much a student, a school, a system moves from here to here and how that's done. So there's an achievement and growth thing. Also I think Australia's done pretty well at focusing on the kids that were just below the benchmark. I think where we haven't serviced ourselves and our country and our students well is those 40% of the high potentials that do pretty well, but they're not stretched and they're certainly not challenged in the way that they could be. So in addition to what else do we need to do to improve Australia's performance? I think it's growth, focus on growth as well as achievement, and that real concentration on stretching those high potential kids.

PETER GOSS: Then we have the question of what is the role of the system, and what I was hearing Simon is that's not to try and define, that wouldn't work given, you said, teaching is a very human interaction. It doesn't seem to be either to leave it alone entirely. And some may say that that has happened in some Victoria schools over the last number of years; that I think is moving away. Coralee, do you feel that you're getting enough support? Or what support would make the most difference to do these things that you're trying to do, to do the things that make the difference that are being described so well, and to both lift up the students at the lower end and, very good point Margery, to stretch the students at the top end?

CORALEE PRATT: I agree Margery, very good point, that crisis of underachievement. In many of our schools it's the coasting students, that stretching is really important. I'm going to choose your three from your report, time, tools and training, and add trust. I added trust. See how aligned we are in our thinking, the Four Ts rather than Three Ts? I think that's what schools need. And sometimes that is generated systemically; sometimes it's just generated because the leaders or the school are innovative. Not everything does have to cost, it's about thinking differently about things, but, of course, funding does help.

If we're looking at time we need time for the coaches, for those collaborative conversations to take place. For training, we do need training but I would recommend the training happens as much as possible in the school environment, looking at that Richard Elmore model of the closer to the classroom the bigger the difference. I think some people do need to have some external training. But to bring it back to the school, the more the school is aligned and in agreement about what we're doing, the more chances of success. And then the tools, we have fantastic tools already available to us, some are quite costly which is prohibitive for some schools, we just need to be thinking differently, auditing what tools are available to schools and perhaps being supported a bit more in that area.

And what we haven't mentioned also I think in relation to tools is having a really good learning management system to be able to store that data that's collected, to be able to access it and to be able to present the information in really informative interesting ways. We can't ignore range of levels within the classroom. Well, when teachers actually visually see the range of levels, which I've done on many occasions with data walls and actually had the photos and names of those little students and they actually see they've got five or six levels within their classroom, the impact is amazing and you capture their interest and you know, they know they've got to do something about that. So that visual presentation is really important as well. So the Four Ts I think.

PETER GOSS: Very good. Before we throw over to the audience for questions, what do you think the biggest barriers are? Are there any other biggest barriers that we haven't raised here?

MARGERY EVANS: I reckon there are a couple. We've got to beware the fact that all wisdom, all change must come from the teacher. So there's something here about as we work, absolutely in this business, to improve the quality of teaching and school leadership that we recognise that we actually do work in an ecosystem, to use the jargon, where a whole lot of people contribute and there are a whole lot of resources and services out there. So I think beware all wisdom and responsibility resides with the teacher, albeit that they have the greatest in-school influence on kids. Beware the fact that if we could just find where a kid was at then learning would keep going and if we only knew where to start everything would be alright.

PETER GOSS: So it's not the data, it's the dialogue and what happens after that?

MARGERY EVANS: Correct. So learning's not uncomplicated and not linear. And I think we do have to beware the over-test syndrome and I think that perhaps some of our colleagues in the US would be saying that to us loudly and clearly. So while these aren't barriers, they are things I think we need to think about as, with all the best intentions in the world, we're trying to move into an improved and improving system.

CORALEE PRATT: I was going to say over-testing, that's why you need quite a clear coherent assessment schedule to keep you honest, keep you on track, but to show we're not just grabbing stuff from everywhere, we are quite organised and we have a framework. So an assessment schedule is really, really important.

PETER GOSS: Simon, one barrier?

SIMON KENT: I actually want to hear from the people in this room as to what the barrier is for them and particularly teachers and principals in the room, what can we do to help you?

PETER GOSS: I would like to just offer one which is the reinvention of the wheel. There are lots of people thinking about these things, at some level it has to be done with groups of teachers working together understanding the challenges in front of them, and we've heard that. I also do think that there are some things that don't necessarily need to be done in schools. One school that I have spoken to going down this pathway realised that to understand the progress of their students they needed to have what Coralee referred to as a learning progression, the fine grain steps. They spent the next two years building one. This is awesome on one level, but it's also a little horrifying on one level because that's technical expensive work and what would have been the difference if they had spent that two years taking one off the shelf and really understanding it and saying how does it apply here, what can I do about it to move forward? So a lot is known. We're not starting from scratch.

With that over to you, are there questions or comments on what the real barriers are or any questions to this fantastic panel?

AUDIENCE: I feel like all of the theory sounds completely reasonable and I think all teachers know the theory now, however it seems like there's a lot of extra things that are being asked. I was just writing down some things like differentiation, giving feedback, data entry, analysing the data, having time to reflect on your own practice, collaborating, planning. All of that's going up and I don't feel, certainly not at the school that I'm teaching at, that there's too much give in that in terms of being able to actually do that effectively. We're given, what is it, 2.5 hours is still the recognised amount of time and I don't really see how we can get around that if it's not acknowledged that there is actually more work that we need to do to be able to do it effectively.

PETER GOSS: So teaching is in fact a busy job and simply expecting more is a recipe for failure. I would agree, that's why time is the first of the now Four Ts. What I saw in some of the case study schools is that they brought in some extra resources to help with that, and that was something that was funded, they shifted around who had to be on duty during playground use, they redirected professional learning, but the time to do it was always one of the biggest elements. So what else have we seen in terms of making it realistic and not just asking more and more and more? What can be taken away to enable this?

CORALEE PRATT: I'm not sure it's always more, sometimes it's just doing things differently, but Brian Caldwell always talks about how bad we are in schools at abandoning everything. So that's one we thing we did, we did an audit of all the extras we were doing and decided what we can abandon, what things weren't really part of our culture, what our expectations were. That's where the funding's important too, to be able to provide these collaborations time, this planning time. That's important and we're lucky in Victoria because we do have a fair bit of flexibility in our budget, in our financial management compared to other states.

So, again, it's about thinking differently, being innovative. Rick Hess wrote this fantastic book called *Cage-Busting Leadership* and it's about thinking differently about what you really want to achieve and how you can get around it and do it, and that's driven me to think like that. I'd love to have some of my teachers here and have them respond to your question because I think they would say, "We're just doing things differently" for all the reasons I've mentioned already. We're doing it together, being aligned and going on this journey together. It's never been a top-down model. There's always that dilemma, that sense of urgency to get it done, but unless you take people with you it's not going to be sustainable and long-lasting. So I think that's what they would say, the decisions have been done

together and we've abandoned things along the way and looked at our work in a different way, not a "more".

Just one more thing from before, I think what our system can do is consistency of message. At the school level sometimes you get mixed messages about what priorities are in schools and when you've been around a while, like me, you can work out what is relevant to your school and your culture and what you're doing and just ignore the rest. But some new principals, new leaders get confused, so I think our system needs to be consistent and I've noted some phrases in education today which link directly back to the concept of targeted teaching. So if that can continue we'll be on the right track.

SIMON KENT: I endorse all of what Coralee said from the coalface of implementing it. I suppose, given the importance and the effectiveness of this intervention, we can't afford not to be doing it. So it's a question of what else are we not doing instead? It's a resource prioritisation question in any organisation and leaders need to be willing to say this is more important and we're going to less of something else which is not having the same return. Grattan previously produced a report that went into some detail on this that I'd really draw out as a great practical piece of work about how do we prioritise within an organisation to say are we always focusing on the thing that's going to have the greatest return? It's a discipline we all need to have.

I need to have it as a manager of my bit of an organisation. I'm very good at saying, "That would be good to do as well, I'd really like to do that as well" and then I need to start taking some things out the bottom and saying, "Actually, we're going to run a line through that and we're not doing that anymore". That needs to come from the leadership.

PETER GOSS: That report by the way is called *Making Time for Great Teaching*, it was by my predecessor and it focuses on this issue because all of the things we ask there has to be time from somewhere.

MARGERIE EVANS: I think you've nailed one of the biggest issues that we have and I think these are all entirely appropriate answers. I think that they don't play out necessarily that way in schools all the time.

One of the dilemmas and one of the questions that AITSL keeps asking itself is there are that many tools and that many things available that should indeed make teacher's lives easier, they don't have to reinvent them, they don't have to make up their own test or their own lesson sequence or whatever it is, and yet I don't think that often happens. So how do we help teachers like you to make choices about the materials that they have without trawling through a whole lot of resources? So I guess all I'm saying is I have absolute sympathy with your position, I think it's a trial or a dilemma that we haven't quite come to terms with yet and I think will always continue to beset us. Maybe it's sort of the perils of professional autonomy when we think we have to do everything ourselves and we have to do it for every single child differently, that's one of the things we have to overcome.

PETER GOSS: Could I pick up on that and give one very practical example that we saw in the school that we call Bright Vale in the report? They were using the same material for understanding student learning, they were gathering the information every day in the classroom and they were marking it down and questioning each other about how do we know that a student can do that? After three years they had the common language, they were using the same way of doing it, and that started to make

the day-to-day discussions a little more effective and efficient. And that starts to get to some of the time bit; they knew what they were looking for once they were all working in the same way.

And then there was another fascinating piece. When the students moved year they told us they didn't have to spend the first six or seven weeks figuring out who was in their classroom, what level do they know, what level do I have to teach? They were using the same way of thinking about learning as was used the previous year, they had all of that data, they knew it, they trusted it, they said they got going with targeted teaching for every student in week two of the term and they had bought themselves effectively five or six weeks by the way that they had got working together in terms of maximising the learning. The efficiency I talked about at the beginning, from week two every student was being taught at the level they needed to. That took them time to get there, but they reckoned it was worth it.

AUDIENCE: I've been teaching in classrooms for over 30 years and I don't profess to have any answers as to being the perfect model of a teacher. However, I've started to wonder whether teacher knowledge is one of the biggest issues that personally I grapple with because there have been so many changes that I wonder whether we need to think differently and maybe specialise in primary schools? So where this young lady was talking about taking the load of so many things, I find that although I have less commitments at home and things than my fellow teachers, I still battle with having perfect lessons because there's so much that I have to learn myself, especially perhaps in the computer area.

I just think maybe if there was a way we could collaborate so that someone has that expertise, it then takes that load of teacher knowledge from me and I maybe do maths. I know it's easier said than done, but maybe that's another way that we might be able to take a bit of pressure off?

PETER GOSS: So two parts to that question it strikes me, one is about the specialisation and the need to actually understand hopefully more than your students and where it's going next, but secondly also preparing the materials and especially preparing them in an unfamiliar way. Who would like to take that? Margery?

MARGERIE EVANS: I think it's exactly what I was referring to, the peril of professional autonomy, I have to do everything myself every time and I have to do it better than the last time. So I think there is something very much in that notion of collaboration, "I'll do this piece, you do that piece, we can combine" and in that combination we become better.

SIMON KENT: Definitely. Again, one of my outsider observations is just the transition between primary and secondary and the really sharp distinction and the benefits for each of picking up some of the other's strengths.

So the specialisation being bought particularly into the upper years of primary and some of the more pastoral care and continuity in the lower years of secondary, it feels like a very sharp divide when I'm going in and visiting primary schools versus visiting secondary schools. So it's something that we're absolutely interested in, primary maths and science specialists announced yesterday at one end. But also thinking about that remaking, to some degree, of the mode of secondary education to bring in some more of that pastoral care, more of that individual understanding in what is a very sharp transition when you think about it from the perspective of the child.

CORALEE PRATT: I'm thinking, whether it's right or wrong, that perhaps the emphasis shouldn't be so much on the knowledge and the content, but more on the implementation, more on the pedagogy because the knowledge content can come from the internet...

AUDIENCE: And actually thinking of the content, I was just thinking that even teaching just, say, computer technology, there are people that have got so much more scope to teach it better than what I can do myself, so why wouldn't we try, as I think Margery did suggest, so that we're working more in collaboration? As I said, it's very easy to say without being the one in charge of doing it, but that would take a lot of pressure off so that you do become a little bit more expertise and know where you're taking the children to. As I say, it's not a perfect world.

CORALEE PRATT: It's worth considering, but no-one doubts the complexity of the teaching role. It's absolutely huge and the daily interactions but yes, probably something worth considering.

PETER GOSS: And I think that we've got into a mode where there's almost a paradox of choice, particularly if you're taking about, say, computer coding, I suspect there's a program out there to help do that. In fact, I suspect there are probably hundreds of them if not thousands. And Margery pointed out earlier that that's not necessarily the most helpful and therefore finding ways of saying, "What are the good bits? What are the things that are really going to make things easier? What do you need to know about them?"

In a slightly different space I'll give a shout out to Victoria here and Social Ventures Australia, they've put in place an Australian Teaching & Learning Toolkit which is about some of the pedagogies but is very, very practical, what are the good bits, what does it take to implement them? Maybe if for some of these areas there was a curated list of what are the good bits, which ones can you jump into quickly, that might help save some of the time?

AUDIENCE: What about personalities in classrooms rather than just knowledge or content? If you've got someone with a very lower than average understanding of the issues, you might have someone with ADD, you might have someone that just has a low attention to span or various issues like this, how do you deal with those in your targeted teaching program?

PETER GOSS: I'll give my answer while the panel things through.

I think that targeted teaching of recognising that there's a spread can reach a very large number of students, but I'm not saying that it can reach every student. Whether their learning is outside the ends of that on either end or whether they have very special needs, I think there will always be a need for specialists who can provide second tier support, maybe an auditory processing thing, or very highly specialised support. In the targeted teaching I would want to see as many students as possible well-supported at their level so that those specialists actually are dealing with hopefully a smaller number of students and they're very highly skilled and very valuable. That's how I would see them fitting together. It's no panacea. But others?

CORALEE PRATT: If your underpinning philosophy is that all students can learn, that learning just looks different across your classroom, and those students that need more intervention because of special needs, their learning just looks different to the others. I'm not saying it's easy, it's difficult, but all students can learn, in my belief.

PETER GOSS: And we know that having the belief that all students can learn leads to better outcomes.

SIMON KENT: It's really about making the spread that a teacher can reach as wide as possible. This is a discussion that Jill Duncan, who's here tonight and leading the review of the program for students with disabilities in Victoria, and I have been talking about which is that targeting teaching at the high end is very similar to targeting it at the low end and being able to push that spread out as far as you can, acknowledging Peter's point that there will be limits to that. That's probably not 100%, but it's how far can you do that to make the schooling system as inclusive as possible for as many kids? Because as many kids going to the same school in the same classroom is good in itself so yes, just pushing the spread as wide as we can.

AUDIENCE: My question is for Coralee. I'm interested in some of the strategies that you've used in implementing this at your school, but specifically I'm wondering what sort of strategies you've used to engage your parents and carers in this conversation? Because I think that this needs very specific leadership and you've described that in the way that you've taken it to your teachers with the photos, and I think that's just so powerful, but I'm wondering how you have engaged your parent community in this conversation?

CORALEE PRATT: Good question. Probably the concept started from our strategic plan being focused on personalised learning and, that being such an abstract concept, what it actually looked like in classrooms. So by using this targeted teaching approach we could actually identify this is one way, and I know personalised learning is a bit broader than that, but this is one identifiable way. Our school community is 100% professional families so their expectations are very high, and so going back to empowering, enabling the teachers to have those high level conversations with our community was one of the great advantages of targeted teaching. So it's about keeping them informed and having good communication channels.

We surveyed our community in 2014 about our reporting processes and we got very, very strong negative feedback about some of the reports, they didn't like the format, didn't like the narratives, didn't like the three-way conferences which involved the students, which we thought were brilliant. So we had to really accept that feedback and change a lot of our practices and we've kept the targeted teaching concept at the centre of all those changes and keep referring back to them as to why we've done the changes, how that supports what they wanted, that information, that concept of continuous reporting, again, our new learning management system enabling us to do that. So it's taking them on the journey as partners, true partners. You have schools talking about this partnership, this meaningful partnership with parents, but then really when it comes down to it no, we know better, we're the professionals. We try to avoid that at all times and keep the communication flowing.

PETER GOSS: Any comments from the panel on how this might look in a community that was not full of professional parents, where teaching and education was maybe not a first priority, yet it is equally important we know to try and get parents involved and ideally to build focus and to celebrate growth and the progress of their students? Any thoughts?

SIMON KENT: That's a really tough nut to crack. Again, when it works it makes a huge difference, but the evidence around what works is pretty thin on that front. We've been doing some work with the Mitchell Institute with some case studies around how do you get deeper community engagement in low SES communities, and that really does take time and resources and some really active outreach

and, again, building of trust. When it works it's absolutely fantastic but gee, it's hard and probably less evidenced than most areas of policy in schools.

MARGERY EVANS: I visited a very low socioeconomic school recently because they were doing targeted teaching, specifically in maths, but I wanted to learn more about it and I found their key to success was having high expectations of every single student in their school. I thought I was walking into a non-government school in an eastern region area, they were so proud of what they were doing, the facilities, the focus on the learning and the outcomes they were getting. I asked the principal and she said that all related back to having high expectations of every single student and family.

AUDIENCE: My first question is about class sizes and how you think that affects targeted teaching? My second relates to best practice, whether you suggest doing it in one class or, as we're doing at our school, separating the levels, so during maths time they go into ability groups with different teachers?

MARGERY EVANS: I think there's a really clear answer in relation to class sizes. If teachers teach a class of 30 the same way as they teach a class of 15 then the class size makes no difference, and there's a huge amount of evidence to show that teachers actually don't really change their methodologies. So you might as well be teaching 40 kids as 15. Where teachers change their methodologies, where they spend more time working individually with students, where they use group work differently, all of those things, then of course there's a capacity to capitalise on smaller numbers, although there is further evidence that suggests that in order to get the peer interaction and the community going in a classroom then it shouldn't be too small. But the biggest issue with class sizes is not necessarily the size of the class; it's that the teacher doesn't teach the way that they teach regardless of class size.

Your second question was about streaming. Again, the evidence is really strong that it's very useful to put kids into a clinic group or a small group to teach them a particular concept that they're struggling with, but ability grouping or streaming largely doesn't change. So practice is that kids get put into those streams and they stay there forever and, in fact, often they apply across subject areas, and that's incredibly damaging to students' capacity for extension, for change and for growth. So of course, as I said, that sort of, "I've got a problem, I don't understand this" so we're going to pull those kids together and give them quite explicit instruction around that is very different from ability grouping, where there's little capacity for students to change and expectations are set for them.

PETER GOSS: I know we wholeheartedly second this. We did a lot of work into saying what does the evidence say in this? Streaming is one of the few things that seems to have a negative impact overall because of the stigmatisation and some of those issues. So we say in the report you can't solve this problem by splitting up the kids, you have to face it head-on.

In terms of the groupings, if you have eight year levels worth of learning in your classroom, that's really hard for one adult even if you're doing the flexible groupings in that ideal way that you talked about Margery. We saw schools that did bring classes together, two sometimes three classes, and then on the day they would split up into the groups of the right level for that task, but when you have eight year levels of different groups and three adults in the room that's actually a lot easier to do than to have one adult in the room. So they had used it well and they really had changed their pedagogy.

AUDIENCE: I just wondered what role new creative technologies have, because it hasn't actually been mentioned? I'll give you an example: I just recently heard a bunch of teachers talking about how

they were using Facebook etc. to bring parents in – in my day of course we all tried to get parents to come to the school. But these new ways and equally, not just tests, but these new games that are available through maths pathways which actually free up the capacity of teachers it seems to me and to actually allow kids to be teaching themselves. So we are on the cusp of something that actually can lighten the load or multiply it.

PETER GOSS: So educational technology, a whole different *Policy Pitch* sometime, but a very brief response from our panel.

CORALEE PRATT: I think it's crucial to embrace it, the opportunities are huge, the apps that we use are vast, Nearpod, iDock a lot of the teachers use. I think we need to embrace it. We could talk all night about it, you're right. I saw two Prep students the other day, one was teaching the other one how to do and the third one was filming it on the iPad. The teacher put it on the interactive white board, the three of them got out the front and they told the rest of the class what they were doing. The power of peer tutoring, the opportunities are huge.

SIMON KENT: I agree and think that is the right way into it because, just speaking from a government perspective, trying to out Silicon Valley Silicon Valley is probably a path to rack and ruin.

MARGERIE EVANS: I just concur.

PETER GOSS: I'm going to put a very slightly different view here. I think there is tremendous potential, but in order to use these technologies well the teachers need themselves to understand all of these things. The teachers need to be able to do this on their own, and then the technology can be an enhancement, and know when to be done. I think that the allure of a program that can take this and differentiate to exactly where every student is sounds very powerful and done well it will be great, done poorly there are risks there.

So my call would be to say this actually demands the highest level of professionalism from teachers in order to use it and we cannot risk going down the pathway of saying that the technology will solve it because we will never get away from those human interactions that we have heard about so much to enable every student to be learning at the right level, to be engaged in their learning, to experience what it feels like to have success. And something we haven't talked about tonight is that when students feel that experience of success then they build confidence, then they build resilience, and that sets them up for the world. So there's a new world coming and it needs both.

Thank you very much for taking the time to come and join us this evening. Thank you very much to my panel. I will wrap it up there and look forward to joining you hopefully at a future *Policy Pitch*.

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