

Melbourne – Engaging Students: creating better classroom environments for learning

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When students are engaged in class, they learn more. But too often, this is not the case. Grattan Institute recently published *Engaging students: creating classrooms that improve learning*. The report finds that forty per cent of Australia's school students are regularly unproductive in a given year. The main problem is not the sort of aggressive or even violent behaviour that attracts media headlines. More common – and more stressful for teachers – are minor disruptions such as students talking back, or students simply switching off and avoiding work.

When schools and teachers create a positive environment in the classroom, student engagement and learning reinforce each other in a virtuous circle. But classrooms can also get caught in a dangerous spiral of distraction, disruption and further disengagement. Teachers are calling out for more guidance but too often get dropped into the deep end.

In this *Policy Pitch* event, Dr Peter Goss, Grattan Institute School Education Program Director, hosted a panel of leading educators to explore:

- What is happening in Australia's classrooms?
- How can schools and teachers create better classroom environments for learning?
- What policy changes would help schools the most?

Moderator: Pete Goss, School Education Program Director, Grattan Institute

Speakers: Linda Graham, Associate Professor, School of Early Childhood & Inclusive Education
Irene Iliadis, Principal, Hume Central Secondary College
Jerome Hollemann, English/EAL and Humanities Teacher, Keysborough College

PETE GOSS: Thank you to the State Library for hosting these events, we really value the relationship that we have. We do a number of these events each year and it's always tremendous to have the opportunity to talk about an area in school education, the program that I run. Thanks to you all for joining us on a Tuesday night and taking some time out of your busy week, hopefully you avoided the rain. I caught it earlier on; it's a bit of a bleak Melbourne night. Thank you to my three panellists here, we're going to have a lot of fun tonight on an important and really interesting topic. At times it's very challenging to hear some of the things that are said.

As I wrote the report, I have school age children and I remember my own schooling, I remember not everything was always wonderful in a classroom, but as I looked at what the research said I was quite shocked to understand just how frequent some of the challenges are, but also what the nature of the challenges are in Australia's classrooms. The media likes to talk about classrooms out of control and there are some and that's horrendous and the teachers who work in those classrooms need every support we can reasonably give them. But far more common and the teachers themselves said far more of a challenge were kids who were silently switching off and disengaged or kids who were acting out a little bit and disrupting others. As I looked more and more into this topic I found it more fascinating because there's no simple answer to how do you engage a student. There's not even a

great answer as to what does it mean to be disengaged? Some of the people that we talked to said it's just because the kids are bored, but as a parent if you're told "I'm bored" what do you do about that? Our teachers have to deal with this each and every day. I'm not going to go through the details of the report, anyone who would like to you are welcome to download it from our website, but I'm looking forward to a discussion with three people who each in their own way faces this issue much more directly and much more frequently than I and we will hear what they have to say.

First of all I'm going to introduce Linda Graham. Linda has flown down from Queensland tonight to be with us, so thank you very much for taking that time, where she is the Associate Professor in the School of Early Childhood & Inclusive Education at the Queensland University of Technology. Her research focuses on how some of the organisations and institutional elements affect disruptive behaviour and particularly I understand you look at some of the harder core end of this, so you've probably seen what can happen when things are not caught early.

JG: Yes, definitely.

PETE GOSS: Linda put in her bio that she can often be found on Twitter @DrLindaGraham and certainly I can attest to that, we've had a number of very good Twitter conversations. So in Linda we have someone who has spent many years understanding this from a research perspective.

Next we have Jerome, who has been living this. He is an English and English as an Additional Language and Humanities teacher at Keysborough College in South Springvale. He's in his fifth year of teaching, so fresh enough to remember some of the challenges of the first year or two, but now is in a position where I understand that he's are helping others to figure out how to improve their teaching, including how to build engagement, so I suspect there might be some quite fresh lessons there that we can all benefit from hearing. Then we have Irene Iliadis, who is the Principal at Hume Central Secondary College. She has over 30 years of experience in education and 20 years in leadership roles. When I was doing this report I spent a day in the back of classrooms in Irene's school and what I saw was fascinating, both the proactive way that the school was talking about it and also some of the real life challenges and, as a Principal, Linda has to not only deal with them on a day-to-day basis, but also help others deal with them. So we have a researcher, a relatively new teacher and someone who leads teachers to provide us insight into this topic.

That's it from me. I'll pose questions and I'll jump in occasionally. We'll spend the next 40 minutes or so having a discussion with the panel about different elements of this topic and then I will throw open to audience questions, so start thinking about the questions that you want to ask. With that introduction, I'm going to start with Linda and just try and understand what is happening in Australia's classrooms. What does the data show?

LINDA GRAHAM: That's a very big question, thanks Pete. Well, in the report you talk about a number of different studies that have been done and the one that I know best is led by Anna Sullivan in South Australia. In that they surveyed 1,750 teachers in South Australia and one of the most important things, what I really appreciated out of that research was that it didn't confirm what you see on the front page of the Daily telegraph or the Courier Mail. The discourse out there is that behaviour is completely out of control and kids are throwing chairs across the room and all that sort of stuff. That does happen, but it's relatively infrequent. What she did point to was, I think, the wearing down of the kinds of behaviours that teachers find most difficult, which is things like talking out of turn and, my

actual favourite, not doing work. I find that really fascinating because I think you have to try and get into the headspace of the kid who's actually doing that. One of the things that I think teachers find most difficult is that you cannot actually make a child learn and that is something that they can withhold, so that's where engagement comes into it, which is, "Okay, how do we lure them into this process?"

I don't think that it's just boredom. I thought that when I started my research career a long time ago, but there are lots of different types of disengaged kids and you would know that, you have them in your class. The ones that I'm particularly interested in and the ones that I think we can do something most quickly about are the ones who are built over time and they're the ones who begin school with learning difficulties that remain unaddressed through school and then become major problems later on. Does that answer your question?

PETE GOSS: I think that answers it a good deal. I'll tease out a little more, what does the evidence say about this interaction between learning and engagement? I remember when I was working in Cape York someone told me that 80% of behaviour problems can go away if instruction is at the right level and appropriately engaging and the students can succeed at it. Is that right?

JG: Yes, I mean, there's an element of truth in everything. I do think that there is a problem when the curriculum is pitched too high, so we do need to differentiate obviously for certain kids. But speaking of that issue of engagement, we were talking about that this morning at QUT and one of the things that I find most interesting is that people don't necessarily look at the research on engagement. We talk about it being a multidimensional construct and that's because there are a number of different things that are feeding into it and a number of different things that are essential. A lot of the time we're just looking at social and behavioural engagement and we're not thinking about intellectual engagement and, to me, I think that's the most important part because what's the point? Intellectual engagement is necessary to learn, but a lot of the time we're just focusing on whether someone is on-task, whether they are being compliant. Of that 40% there are quite a lot of kids who are floating under the radar. They're not actually learning, but because they're not a problem we don't notice them as much. One of the things that I feel really strongly about is that for intellectual engagement to happen you need the curriculum to be right, you need the pedagogy to be right and the teacher, that's their role most of all. They need to be the ones to be an intellectual leader to lift that kid from here up to there.

PETE GOSS: One last question on the research evidence, we have some kids who are passively just not doing the work and some who are playing out. What's the impact on their learning?

LINDA GRAHAM: Well, they're not learning very much. We've already had studies around that have looked within classrooms that there is a great spread in terms of the capacity of students, which makes it also incredibly difficult for teachers because they have to teach across that spread, but if they're not engaging in class then that contributes to gaps over time. My interest is in the kids who are not the ones who are sitting there silently failing. I'm interested in the ones who end up throwing chairs across the room because they're the ones that end up out of school and all that sort of stuff. I do think that we could do much more than we currently are at recognising what it is that all of these kids are reacting to. What is it about their learning? Why don't we ask them in terms of do they enjoy what they're learning, do they think it's relevant? It was interesting, my son the other day, he's in Year 10 and he said, "Mum, in maths what we did today only one person in that room I reckon is ever

going to use” and my response to him was, “That’s great darling, but in ten years’ time it’s going to be only that one kid who has a job, so you need to learn this”. So there is a kind of disconnect with kids I think and we’re not doing well enough at the moment bridging that gap between what they think is relevant and what they enjoy and what we think they have to learn.

PETE GOSS: Thank you. That gives some flavour of the complexity of this area and some flavour of the number of things that we still don’t know about. There are a number of things that we do know, some things that work. Jerome, think back to the first year that you were in the classroom. I’ll allow you to talk about how you’ve evolved, but in the first year what did it feel like when suddenly it was your job to be leading that classroom?

JEROME HOLLEMANN: I can still remember my first lesson and it was a positive one for the most part. I started out doing quite a bit of team teaching, so we had larger groups of students with two or three teachers at one time, and that was a really positive learning experience for me because I could look at others and what they were doing and then reflect on my own practice and seek feedback and so on. So that was really good, but it is one of the most difficult and daunting things, to be thrown in front of a room of 25 teenagers that all have their own agendas and hormones going all over the place. We’re in conversation with parents every day, they’re telling us that they can’t control them at home and discipline them at home, so we’re getting a lot of that coming back into the classroom. My first year was scary and I worked so hard to try and make all my lessons interesting and engaging. But it was really about building my connections with staff and students and about just focusing on one small step at a time and slowly growing and improving my practice until I had a good culture of learning where the students felt respected and I was kind to them and I was able to deal with issues in a reflective way, which helped them grow and develop as young people.

PETE GOSS: Could you give us an example of that, when you had a challenge but actually you found the way to re-engage rather than butting heads?

JEROME HOLLEMANN: One example is when a student is off-task or expressing the sort of disengagement that we’re talking about, whether that’s annoying someone in the class or just refusing to do the work. My first question is, “Are you okay?” So I walk over to the student and I ask him is everything okay, is there something wrong, and most of the time they go, “Oh no, I’m fine” and they pick up their pen. They’re less likely to want to engage in a conversation about their wellbeing, so they jump straight back into the questions or the task that I’m asking them to do. It’s not always as easy as that. I spent period two today sitting next to one of our most challenging students in Year 9 that’s got so much going on and I just had to sit next to her and keep directing bit by bit, bits of feedback, going round the class and then coming back to her because she was just trying to derail, so much was happening. It’s testing me even after five years and feeling like I am pretty good at it because you’re trying to balance that intense - I don’t know. There’s so much going on and you’re trying to really motivate a young person to want to learn and have a reason to learn and the ability to learn, so I guess that’s the beauty in teaching, that’s why it’s so exciting every day and that’s why sometimes we cry, because it’s so hard, but so far so good.

PETE GOSS: One last question on that, what’s going through your head when you’re both intensely focused on this young person who absolutely needs you to help provide them some hope, some support, an experience, hopefully, of getting something done and achieving something, and then

knowing that you've got 20 other kids in the class and they also have needs from you as a teacher? How do you think about that?

JEROME HOLLEMANN: Sometimes you need to put out the spot fires in order to make sure that the rest of the students can just be focused and on-task, and sometimes you need to tactically ignore the student that is shouting out for attention and then ask the other students also to ignore them while you continue with the lesson; if they're not getting what they want out of you they will quite quickly change track. But that's when your school support and the behaviour management plans and so on come into play because if the student continues to disengage and is disruptive to the point where they're not following instructions then we call for support, so I would call for the junior AP or even the Principal sometimes to come in and remove that student. Often that's me, but sometimes it's someone else as well. So just having that support and structure in place to make sure you can look after the learning needs of everyone else as well.

PETE GOSS: Thank you and hold the rest of the thoughts on the other tips, tricks, techniques etc. because I'm going to jump to Irene now. This gives hopefully a bit of a flavour of both what's happening on the macro scale, what the evidence is and what the nature of the challenge is, but also what it feels like. I'm in awe of someone who can go through that and say, "And this is the excitement of teaching". That's just fantastic. Irene, in terms of how to create a better learning environment, you've been through this and done it in your own classrooms. Now, you're not in every classroom, you're trying to set up a school where this is happening at scale in a school that's in the northern suburbs of Melbourne where some of the kids come from backgrounds where education would be highly valued and some maybe not so much. How do you think about the challenge of setting up an environment that is going to give every kid the best chance every day?

IRENE ILIADIS: I think I might start, because I'm envious of the last two speakers. Unlike Jerome, I don't remember my first, but I definitely remember my worst class. Unlike Linda, I went in thinking, "I can make you do whatever I want you to do" because I decided I was going to be a teacher very young and so here's my chance. Of course, my Year 7s or 8s, whoever they were, didn't agree with me. I set the task and they did everything but the work I set them, I think it was my first year, so I said, "Okay guys, it's lunchtime, no-one leaves," and I stood at the door, "Until you've done it" and I stood there until the first kid went out of the window. So I realised that I had to think and search deeply within me to find strategies that were going to be much more effective than my belief of what was going to happen and my will to drive all the young people to do as I wanted them to do.

Since then, and it's been quite a number of years but I still remember it, teaching and whether you're at work currently and you've got someone coming new into the office, whether it's one person or lots of people, it's complex. It's about giving something but also the other person being ready to take it. My overall belief is that young people, like all of us when we come for an opportunity to learn and grow, we have to at some level, even though we don't articulate it, ask ourselves, "What's in it for me? What's the purpose here? Why do I want this?" I'm not saying that we're always aware of that, but that's an important thing to remember. Secondly, "Who around here if I should need it is going to help me to succeed? And if I'm not sure then I'm out. Of course, I've got to be at school, mum says that and dad says that, but I'm going to make it pretty difficult and I'm going to have fun and it's not necessarily going to be on-task". Over the many years that I have been teaching it has been in schools where students I think have aspirations, but they don't necessarily have the models. If you go into a middle class school young people from very young have been exposed to all sorts of

experiences, so they've done learning, they are confident in different environments, have seen models, mum and dad, speak on the phone with people and use language that they obviously understand.

So in some of your middle class schools you might not get the extreme behaviours because they know it wouldn't quite be right and most kids get it, so everyone will look at them and think, "What are you up to"? If you haven't had those models you still have all the feelings of wanting something for yourself, but how that pans out is more of a challenge for the young person because they haven't got as many experiences, but also for the people who are leading the classroom, the environment. Having said that, I think that an important part in that learning context for any teacher, and I think others have mentioned it as well, the challenge is for all of us in order to learn we're vulnerable. If we're doing what we do well we're doing it, but if we're in a situation - and some of you might have tried to ski, Lord forbid I have and regretted it - you're really vulnerable because your skills are going to be challenged and you're not alone at home playing on the internet, you're there with another 25 young people and they're adolescents and they're cruel. They are cruel, they'll laugh at anything and everything, and so to actually do it then you're only going to do it in an environment that is safe, it's predictable and you're going to be supported.

Now that sounds really easy, but you've got 25 individuals and each one will be two or three people, given the right context, and you can't predict, so it's like having 150 in there at any given time because of the demands. So the challenge is huge. It's doable though I think. It sort of sounds that way. The ingredient is that you're a culture, you're an organisation; you're not just a single person. If you're a great teacher in a bad school you're done for and if you're not such a great teacher but in a good school then you're pretty safe. When I say good or bad school I'm talking about a culture because in all schools I think teachers that decide to be a teacher, they've haven't decided to because I'm going to go and make adolescents or preppies miserable. I think you go in there because you feel you're going to support others to learn and thrive, but I think the culture of a school is quite difficult to make happen. In my experience, a good culture is when the majority of teachers are behaving like good teachers and they feel supported by an organisation that is going to support them. When you have that increasingly so and people know that it's not just my show, it's our show, then we're likely to be collegiate, we're likely to be sending key messages together.

It's a bit like a household. If mum and dad are in unison, kids are more likely to toe the line and when things go wrong there's a greater chance that things are going to come back to where they need to be quicker, rather than take longer. I think that often in all schools in part of that culture you get what you expect, so as a leader you've got to create high expectations. If somebody walks into a classroom or lecture and they come in and are clear about what they want to do with a belief that you will listen to them and they will have something to offer, then it's very rare that kids don't respond to that. And they'll try you out for the first week, maybe month, but when they know that you're there for them, that you've actually prepared, you might not be perfect but you're yourself, you're there consistently prepared for them and to engage them - and I'm talking about not an individual, but a climate in which teachers are that way inclined - then you do maximise learning.

PETE GOSS: Thank you. You talked about having high expectations and a consistent culture and predictability and one of the things that I saw in your school during the week that I was there, there was one particular element of behaviour that the school was focusing on. I forget which one it was, but it picks up on that idea that not all kids actually know how to behave. This one might have been

what does it look like when you're working in a small group, but you really formalised that process so that everyone focused on it, the teachers got good at that specific piece, the students understood it. What was the thinking behind that and what impact has that approach had of being very specific about an element of culture, not the broad bit which is sometimes nebulous?

IRENE ILIADIS: The context for Hume Central was a regeneration project in Broad Meadows. Lots of things needed to change, but the culture was to increase the expectations and change the attitudes that young people had about themselves. Years ago when I went as an Assistant Principal, just as a quick example, there were teachers that were walking around with tubs and in those tubs were bits of paper or books that they'd brought for the kids, because if you left it up to the kids they'd never bring the equipment and forget about trying to send them backwards and forwards from lockers. The teachers carried them so the kids had no responsibility. We're in a situation now where that never happens; nobody carries any books except the student. We had, maybe if we were lucky, attendance that maybe 60% of the time kids were there, now we have closer to 90% consistently 7 to 12; we had about 20% of kids if they finished Year 12 would go to university or even tertiary, like TAFE, now we have 98% of kids that finish year get a tertiary placement and 60% of those are at university, so not all academic but it's important; and a lot of that was the expectation.

Now, we got a lot of traction, classes were relatively humming, there was a lot of co-operation with staff, but we also felt that with behaviour, this was going back maybe three/four years ago, that our exits from class gave kids opportunities, you still had to go through the process of exiting and saying you've lost your right to be here in a very calm and adult way but, nonetheless, exclusion, I guess. Then there were suspensions and there were expulsions and we felt that, whilst we had made huge inroads, it wasn't quite where we needed to be. We always had an approach that you look to research, you see what it says and you say, "What does it mean for us? How do we roll it out? Where do we begin? How do we make it everyone's business, rather than a good idea in one class?" We came across yet another evidence base which said a school-wide positive approach to teaching behaviour. In essence, I'm not going to tell you the whole bit, it says that the school has to have clear maybe three goals, what they are and to be clear about what do they look like in all the spaces, in learning in the corridors, out in the community; engage the community, the kids, your staff and decide on what they are, crystallise; and then you make it part of your role as a teacher to explicitly teach aspects of it.

They drew a comparison which stuck with me and that is that if a child in your class can't read or write and they stumble on a word, you don't turf them out of a class do you? You spend time teaching them, however, when someone demonstrates a behaviour that's not what it needs to be, they're out. So at what point are you providing opportunities for young people to learn in that regard and to be really clear about what you're expecting and why you're expecting it? In doing that as a whole school we thought what does it mean? We had to engage kids. So we were talking about the way to wear uniform and there were a few media teachers who decided to ham it up a bit, they grabbed a few kids and did a bit of a parade and filmed it in terms of looking good and this is the uniform. They had a bit of fun and it was shown to young people. So you engage them with a range of all the behaviours that you have in your matrix and we talked about ways of making it every teacher's business, how do we roll it out at Year 7, and we trialled it and now the matrix is at 7 to 12. We found ways of making it relevant to the whole college so that on a given three-week cycle there are particular behaviours that are the focus.

So you might say at the start of a lesson where you're going to do a little bit of group work, "One of the focuses on behaviours that we're honing in on today will be this because we're doing group work, so listening to each other and respecting others' opinions might be something I'll be looking out for". The idea is that you look for that behaviour, the positive not the negative, and that you reward in some way, you acknowledge it for kids. It educated all of us in doing what we do best or what we want to do best, and that is focus on the good stuff that's happening, rather than punishing the not-so-good stuff. Over the last couple of years we've had maybe a 50% reduction in suspensions and exits from class. For a number of years, other than last year, we had 10 to 12 expulsions a year, which is a lot. Last year we had none at the senior campus, no expulsions, and just two on the junior campuses for extreme behaviour. So that changed what was happening in the classroom and the feel became very different as well.

PETE GOSS: Thank you, that's a tremendous story and important to understand that real change doesn't come about by accident or by good intention, but by action, thoughtfulness and planning focus. Jerome, back to you, I don't know if that broad approach resonates? If so or if not, what does it take to go from here is what the school as a whole is doing to how to translate it into the classroom, what are the things that really make a difference day-to-day, class-to-class?

JEROME HOLLEMANN: I think that behaviour management or the idea of managing a class, when I started my teaching program it had a lot of mystique surrounding it and there isn't actually a lot of practical training in universities as to what the steps are to follow in a classroom in order to deal with difficult behaviours and disengaged students. I've reached a point now where we're looking at updating our behaviour management rubric or our step-by-step process and revamping it a bit in the leadership teams, but there are really, I would say, simple steps that you can do that enable students to feel respected and given choices, where the bad choice is actually the worst option for them so they tend to choose the best. It's only when they're extremely dysregulated where they're going to step out of line and exhibit some of the extreme behaviours that we've spoken about.

PETE GOSS: So that's in terms of some of the reactive stuff and the evidence base that we found very much picks up on both of those, that you need to reinforce effective behaviours and then have consistent responses when kids break out of line. High expectations are very much part of it and the relationships. What about routines in a classroom? How important is that? What do you do and what have you seen that can head some of these things off at the pass?

JEROME HOLLEMANN: Routines are absolutely essential in a good classroom. We have a school-wide approach to our lesson plan, our lesson framework and it goes by the acronym of GNAG. Basically it starts out with learning goals and the tasks that the students will be doing, then you give them new information and then a chance to apply that new information to a task, and then you reflect on it at the end. I've seen so many different lesson plan pro formas and they all follow a similar structure, that the students know why they're learning, they know what they're going to do, they know what's expected of them, and then they've got a chance to apply that and then reflect on it at the end. When I first heard about it I was kind of like, "Oh, but I know how to do my lessons and this sounds kind of stupid" because sometimes it's fun to just do this or that, like when you start out you have a lot of crazy ideas that completely fail and a few that work. I have come back to it and I find it really helpful because the way you think is the learning path of your student for that lesson and you go, "Okay, this is a skill I want to focus on and this is how I step through it". Then you're constantly communicating

with your students and giving them and pointers, and if they're off-task you're giving them opportunities to correct their behaviour and so on.

I don't yell, I don't raise my voice; I speak very firmly and clearly and sometimes a bit of, I guess I can't help it, emotion comes through. It's always about giving students choices and the ability to self-regulate until the next choice will be, "Look, if you keep doing this I'm going to have to call your parents and bring them in for a meeting. If that's what you want to happen then that's your choice and we can do that" and then I'll walk away and give them a minute to think about it. Nine times out of ten they make that positive choice. I wasn't taught this at teacher school and I didn't see examples of it. I think it would be hugely beneficial for teacher training to have some videos of how to approach some of these difficult situations.

PETE GOSS: Linda, you look as though you're itching to jump in. What do really effective schools do differently or whatever else you want to jump in on?

LINDA GRAHAM: I just want to make a comment about teacher training, or teacher education as we call it. There's some difference around the country. The teacher education program that you went through was a little bit different, so it wasn't a four year Bachelor of Education or a two year Masters of Teaching like you would do at, say, QUT or whatever. There is I think some diversity in the quality of what is offered and some universities have got people who are teaching behaviour management who have never really been in that role themselves. Not my university. At our university it's taught by someone who has been doing it for 25 years and her job before she came to QUT was as an itinerant behaviour support person at a regional level, so there is diversity out there. I've lectured in her unit and one of the things that she does teach is about routines, about lining up, about all of those sorts of things.

The other point that I would make is that behaviour management isn't everything. I think sometimes this sort of discussion becomes bogged down in how do you get the buggers to behave, but that's not all it is. In the research that I do, I've got two projects at the moment and one of them is a longitudinal project that's following kids from Prep to the first year of school in Queensland through to the end of Grade 5. We did a whole bunch of assessments with these kids to work out what they brought to school and then we want to watch what's happening. We're assessing these kids every year. We're doing classroom observations using a standardised tool from the US every single year and we're interviewing teachers. It's a massive project and one of the things that we're trying to unpack is how does very severely disruptive behaviour develop? I have to say that in the observations that we do we watch multiple contributions to that. The other thing that we watch is that teachers can actually be quite good at the technical components of behaviour management and it is one of the things that particularly early career teachers are putting their hands up for PD and they're getting a lot of PD in that sort of area. But there are other things that can derail that, so your technical competency is only one part. Some of the things that can derail it are if you are an extremely hostile, critical person and create conflict within your classroom. That can be one of the issues and that is something that we are watching. I'm very glad to say that it's a small minority, but it is happening and we watched it in a Prep classroom.

Some of the other things that can happen are when there's a lack of productivity, if kids are sitting and waiting for things to occur, if the teacher is not well-prepared. We watched it last year when they were in Grade 2. It was excruciating to sit and watch as these kids are getting in trouble, but they've been

sitting on the carpet for 30 minutes with nothing happening. So we all have to look at behaviour and engagement in learning as something that is a complex issue and it's not just kids that contribute to it. This is a *Policy Pitch* so I'm going to make one right now which is another thing that contributes to it is a residualisation of schooling. In another project that I've done, which has been with the really hard-core kids who end up in special schools for kids with disruptive behaviour, we went into their feeder schools and their feeder schools were in the main very residualised, so they were the last stop government school that anyone who could get out did get out. I was horrified when I went to these suburbs in outer Western Sydney and was astonished. The schools that used to have a thousand kids in them now have 300 and these are all extremely high needs kids, but then we also have other practices that are occurring at the school level which are choices being made by leadership which is let's put all of the high needs kids into one class. Of course, that teacher is going to crack and then there are contract teachers put into that.

That's another thing that we don't talk about enough in this country and it makes me really cross, which is we have graduate teachers going out and what happens to them? Departments of Education have casualised, let's talk about that, the fact that these people don't get a full-time position. They're very lucky if they end up in a school like Irene's, but a lot of them don't. Many of them have got short term contracts and they're going from place to place or they're supply and they're being parachuted in and told to "just teach something" for that day and they've got chaos in front of them. How are they going to learn quality skills that way? Where's the support for them? Where's the induction that you talk about? You mentioned that 40% or 50% of teachers said that they had not received any kind of induction. So there's an awful lot of criticism of teacher education, but that is the first step in preparing somebody for what is an incredibly difficult and complex job. There you go.

PETE GOSS: Thank you. I've seen some of this in Cape York, when I was up there. The teachers would say that a good day was when you put the video on at 12 rather than 11 in the morning. They were able to change at least some of the behaviour partly through better preparation, but also really explicitly saying how are you going to support positive behaviour and also how are you going to teach at a level that is going to engage the students? But that was not an individual teacher trying to sort it out on their own, that job I think is too hard. That's not what we should expect. Jerome, you wanted to move in. We're moving to solutions and ideas.

JEROME HOLLEMANN: I'm just going to tag onto that thought before I go back. Linda, you mentioned that your son came home and said, "Oh, why should I learn this skill because it's not relevant to my world?" Whilst changing the curriculum and shaping it around the moving times or the fact that all these jobs are going to be lost and so on, I think that it can be easy to be pulled down that track and forget that the main skills that students need to learn are to be able to read information, to be literature, to understand the world around them, to communicate with others and then to think critically, and literacy is a broader concept than just reading a book, obviously. I've been in conversations with staff talking about how can we make this more exciting or more relevant and the relevance is one thing, but if you find a student and show them that they're growing and that they're improving the engagement they click and learning is a beautiful thing. When you see that student has just had an a-ha moment and that has happened for them, then they're going to have twice the motivation to tackle the next problem or the next thing. It's about positive praise and building that kind of culture. Even in the most abstract mathematics, if you can get them seeing growth and I've seen that in many inspiring teachers.

LINDA GRAHAM: Like Mr Woo last night.

JEROME HOLLEMANN: Yes, I didn't watch that. My colleagues were telling me about it, so I'm going to have to go back to that.

PETE GOSS: Start getting your questions ready because this is the last panel comment and then we'll throw it open to the audience.

IRENE ILIADIS: I think in education, like in all parts, if you do things and you tick boxes you miss 90% of the most important bits. In doing whether it's the school-wide positive behaviour or whatever behaviour management policy we have, as a leader you've got to say this is about relationships, it's about building a relationship with young people. One of the challenges and you can't underestimate this and I don't want to get political, but even with the Gonski you might say if it's a good teacher they can do anything anywhere. Well that's rubbish in the sense of I became aware when I had my firstborn, because I was always teaching in schools with kids with high needs - and this is going back a while - I'd often have young children, 12 year olds, 13 year olds, who couldn't read. Not all, but there were some that hadn't worked out that this movement that we made related to making meaning from something and that it actually told me a story. Now you think rubbish, but it's true.

When I first was a graduate teacher I had a couple of students like that in my class and when I had my firstborn what else do you do except talk about nothing and you read to them from a baby of months old. My child sat on my lap at six months old and was doing this and I thought, "What on earth?" I didn't think I had a genius, but I thought exposure to resourcing is so important. I have three sons, I don't think they're geniuses, but it's that exposure to resources. So to say that my child when they go to school needs exactly the same amount of resourcing, both the teachers that teach them and my child, at a school where in some of my experience in the past you have children where there's nothing wrong with the child, they're not lacking in intelligence but they've been under-resourced in a number of ways. They might have very loving families, but some of them hadn't been to the beach, they'd never left Broadmeadows or wherever I was working. To say that that school in order to meet the needs of that young child as well as the staff who teach them and are trying to maintain core curriculum and behaviours, you're being ridiculous to actually say that.

Also, when you think about any profession, whether you're talking about doctors or anyone, how often would you go into a workplace and somebody briefs you, says to you, "You're going to have to manage this office, there are phones, there are letters you have to write" and then closes the door and goes to a different building? It doesn't happen. You have someone who works with you, you work together, you stumble, you ask, whereas teaching it was believed that, even though you're a novice, you close the door and whatever you do is your business and it's not right, it's a weakness to say, "How did you do that?" or, "How can I learn, come and tell me? What am I doing wrong?" Society is changing. Maybe when I was little my parents told me to sit in a chair for whatever and listen and I did, but how often do we tell our young children that now? If you have a majority of staff who are dinosaurs, as I might have been, in terms of expecting to walk in and the kids will listen and obey everything, you need to be sophisticated in the way that you skill people because things have changed and not only children, but parents. If you say to a child, "Sit down" they want to know why. You can't just frame it, "Because I said so". You can, but it won't work. And even if a parent comes they'll say, "Why didn't you explain it to him? You can't say that. You're being a bully to my child".

PETE GOSS: And the goal here is not compliance, the goal here is learning.

IRENE ILIADIS: But I think it's complex.

PETE GOSS: Absolutely.

IRENE ILIADIS: It is funding, it's about how do you support every single teacher and give them feedback in a positive way, that your approach, the way that you made them wait for 30 minutes, you've got to change that and I'll support you. Not that you're useless, but let's try a few strategies. Unless you put resources into opening your classrooms, supporting your teachers through observation, getting them to observe other colleagues and pick up and learn from them and not feel it's my problem but, "How are we going to work together to solve this? Your problem will be mine tomorrow". So unless you resource it and support it, then you're not going to get the change with kids' expectations, community expectations and our own expectations.

AUDIENCE: I've got two questions. One is about cultural differences in engagement. Are, for example, Singaporean children more engaged or Finnish children more engaged? The other question and, again, it's a cultural thing is about ability versus effort, the mindset, is it, "I'm able to do maths" or, "If I make a greater effort I could do maths better"?

LINDA GRAHAM: I'm happy to take the cultural difference part, mainly because I've worked with a Professor from the University of Helsinki. The Finns are different, and he would agree with me on that. He and I both have interests in kids who drop out of school, who have behavioural disorders and all that sort of stuff. They still have those issues, but they do have I think a different culture to us. Look at it for a start in terms of they're more other-regarding than us in terms of they've got a very different welfare system. It's expected that you are going to pay high taxes and look after somebody else through your taxes, but I think they're also a lot quieter than us. That's a sweeping generalisation, but when you go over there it's really different to Australia. It's nice though, it's very clean.

JEROME HOLLEMANN: I'd like to jump in. My school is so incredibly diverse in terms of the student population. We've got 82% of students from non-English speaking backgrounds and I think the last time we counted 34 different nationalities. When I'm teaching English I'm aware of their native languages and some of the common mistakes that they make and I will change things and talk about pronunciation and articulation differently. You need to be extremely mindful of the traumatic experiences that some young people might have been through when you're choosing content, but a lot of teenagers adjust very fast to their surroundings. When I came into the school an older staff member told me a story about the Cambodian students having a lot lower expectations because it was a cultural thing to do with the genocide and so on, so really heavy stuff. I was curious and within a month or so I couldn't really tell the difference between the Vietnamese students, who supposedly had higher expectations, or their parents and the Cambodians. They were parents that loved their children and wanted the absolute best for them. We had amazing students that had had really rough times that shouldn't have been so great on paper.

The next question was about effort versus ability. We teach something called the Growth Mindset, which some of you might have heard of. It's Carol Dweck's research and it's a great way of teaching students that intelligence is not fixed, that effort is the key to success in life and to use the language of process versus person/praise. That was in your paper Pete, that you praise the action and the effort

and the hard work, rather than “Oh, you’re so smart” or “You’re so intelligent”. Heaps of research out there and that’s been a great inclusion into our practice at Keysborough.

PETE GOSS: A particularly Australian thing, those of you who have kids might have sent them off to swimming classes and squad training. They’re not going to be Olympians most of them, in fact very few are going to be Olympians, but they can get incredibly engaged in it and one of the approaches there is the personal best. It’s not about who wins always, it’s about can you do better than your previous best? I’m going to take a number of questions now so we get a diversity of perspectives.

AUDIENCE: To take a slightly broader look at the environment for learning, Irene, you touched on this a fair bit in your conversation, so I’d be interested to know what Linda and Jerome’s thoughts are. Given that everything you’ve described today has highlighted that teaching is an incredibly intense, high pressure role and we know from a lot of recent research that educator wellbeing is in serious decline, what more can be done to make sure that teachers and educators are supported to be at their best to get the best out of their students?

AUDIENCE: My question is for Irene and it follows on from some of the comments that you made in relation to a good teacher teaching in a difficult school has challenges, whereas an average teacher teaching in a good school will be fine. What is your advice for teachers who find themselves in a situation where they are a good teacher, but they’re teaching in a difficult school?

PETE GOSS: That’s a tricky one. I’m going to take two more questions.

AUDIENCE: What are your thoughts on the idea of Unconditional Positive Regard, so not just in the extreme cases of a student with traumatised experiences, but also in an everyday classroom environment where if you’ve got a student coming in late, instead of making the assumption that they were lazy and they didn’t want to get out of bed, to actually have a positive regard towards them and have an understanding, maybe ask them, like you gave an example, “Are you okay? Was there an issue getting to school?” What are your thoughts on that?

AUDIENCE: I work as a primary school teacher, a relief teacher, but also in the juvenile justice system, so I work across the board. I can see that personal responsibility as a teacher in the way we hold ourselves is so important, that being reflective of how our kids respond. In terms of when we talk about the success of how kids are going, we can sometimes measure success, say, for example, we might have kids that are just knuckling down and working all the way through to Year 12 and go on to study and things like that, but I’ve worked with kids where you ask them to talk about who they are as a person and they come up with nothing, they can’t tell you that they’re amazing, they can’t tell you that they’re awesome. So, on one hand, at school it looks like they’re doing well but, on the other hand, they’re not doing well. I can see there’s a real balance of having to build the person and the being equal to building the knowledge, to bring all of them to what they do in life, because I can see that down the track it creates openings for them to easily fall off the rails if, for example, their job doesn’t go to plan or whatever.

PETE GOSS: So I think there are two themes in there, one about supporting teachers, including those who are in tough schools, and one about the feelings we should be engendering in students, Unconditional Positive Regard and creating a whole person. I read a book recently which talked about

the model student and, lovely, they might get As all the time, but are they set up for the world? Let's start with the whole person and Unconditional Positive Regard. Irene?

IRENE ILIADIS: When you look at best practice sometimes you have to break things down in order to understand it. We talked about behaviour as opposed to curriculum and as opposed to what people now call soft skills, best practice, and it's taken from the best practitioners. Schools can't be everything all the time, however the way that you set up your resources is important and you try to skill up your teacher in that the relationship is not disconnected from the content. Effort is not disconnected from achievement. You've got to have achievement at the back of your mind as a teacher and you've got to credit effort to engage all learners, the top, the in-betweens and everyone else. It relates to the context of your subject, but it also relates to the relationships and the interactions in the class. It relates to how you vary your pedagogy so that I, who likes to talk, have an opportunity, but it's also quiet sometimes for the other person who likes to not have interactions occasionally and to think more deeply and provide opportunities. It's about thinking in a classroom, a microcosm of the school culture and society, and providing complex possibilities both for the teacher and the student.

If you're working in Broad Meadows and many schools, it's not a different human being in Broad Meadows, I think that the kids are less refined in hiding what they're feeling and being appropriate. So the school that you talked about, cultural differences, in certain contexts kids are better at masking, but once you scratch beneath the surface they're adolescents and they're bored, except they're not showing it because they're meant to be respectful and they're yawning inside. So I think it's that human element, it's not one or the other. I think sometimes we focus more on achievement rather than effort and sometimes we're honing in on one or the other but in the end, as a leader you've got to make sure that you're tinkering and that you're doing all aspect of it. Even as a teacher, sure, it's the content knowledge, it's the way that they become more sophisticated in managing young people and developing relationships, but you also have the other element that you've got to be in tune, that the teacher is having a hard time because her husband or child's not well at the moment, so supporting both her but also every other community member. So it is complex and it's targeting as much as you can, rather than just one thing.

LINDA GRAHAM: You made me think about something Irene that I'm becoming increasingly interested in, but I just haven't quite got the time to do anything about it yet. Jerome mentioned Growth Mindset and you Unconditional Positive Regard. I think one of the things that is really important that we sometimes forget to do is to put the student hat on, to try and see things through their eyes. Whenever anyone mentions Growth Mindset I smile because my kids come home and go [makes noise] as in they don't want to hear about Growth Mindset and WALT and WILF. They're not the only two adolescents that I am around or hear from and I'm increasingly fascinated by the cynicism that young people have particularly for this push for achievement about NAPLAN. They openly ask, "Who's it for?" and a lot of them don't necessarily see. So our 40% disengaged, what fascinates me about these kids is that they might be ones who are not coming top of the year or whatever, but that doesn't mean that they're not thinking sentient, critical people. So quite often they're looking at what they're being expected to learn and messages that come back from schools, in my state it's about how many Overall Positions that school got, which is like ATARs of 100 or whatever.

The thing is, for the kids that are disengaging, they're the ones that are saying who's this for? There's a philosopher called Nel Noddings who back in I think the '90s was doing some work around an issue

that she called Ethic of Care. One of the things that she distinguished was the way that students perceive that teachers have a different ethic of care than they want teachers to have. One of the most common things that those disengaged kids are saying is teachers don't care, but teachers are saying, "Hell, we do care. We work really hard". But what Nel Noddings started talking about was that teachers have this long view about, "I care about you so I want you to succeed and I want you to do this sort of stuff" whereas the student is saying, "I want you to care about me right here and now". Like when you said, "Are you okay?" That's what they're looking for. The long view stuff is important and we can't do without that because we do need them to succeed and have a future. So it's sometimes I think about putting on the hat and Unconditional Positive Regard is a part of that. In one of my projects at the moment a boy was excluded because he was late and that led to this crescendo of effects and this boy ended up booted out of school. The whole thing started because no-one would give him a late note to be able to go to class. Instead, he got in trouble for being late when, in actual fact, this boy was somebody that we should be giving a high-five for turning up in the first place.

JEROME HOLLEMANN: I'd like to give a brief comment. One, put more resources into disadvantaged schools because the teachers are more stressed, as the research said, and that's where the real need is. Two, I would say that the social and emotional needs are very important for young people, whether you teach that explicitly or implicitly in your practice. A lot of people run away from Unconditional Positive Regard, but I think it's quite misunderstood. It just means care and respect basically, which I think is the cornerstone of teaching. That's it.

PETE GOSS: There you go. For those that have been following the news today, the Coalition has announced that it's going to do Gonski 2.0 and that will include a commitment to needs-based funding. The details remain to be seen, but actually maybe more money will flow to the most disadvantaged schools. One of the things that this conversation has done is hopefully to bring to light some of the reasons why actually resources are needed, not because it's money but because there are real challenges that need real types of support, the teachers need to be able to watch each other and learn from each other. This has been a fascinating discussion for me and I hope that you have found it as interesting. When I wrote the report we knew the issue of disengagement and engagement was massive, we knew that some of the things that we talked about, which broadly fit into behaviour management and classroom management, are important, they need to be there, but we also knew that there was much, much more besides. We've learnt something about that tonight, so could I have a very, very warm round of applause for Linda, Jerome and Irene?

Thank you again to the State Library and the partnership that we have. For those that are keen to learn more about education and, in particular, what are some of the positive skills that we want our young people to grow up with, please do look online to find the Australian Learning Lecture, which is in just over a week. I'm going and I'm looking forward to it, I hope I may see some of you there, and I hope that I see you again at future *Policy Pitch*. Thank you.

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