

## **Adelaide – Engaging Students: creating better classroom environments for learning**

**4 May 2017**

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 event, in partnership with the State Library South Australia, 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:** Associate Professor Anna Sullivan, University of South Australia  
Kerry White, Principal, Holy Family Catholic School  
Rhoni McFarlane, Deputy Principal, Wirreanda Secondary School

BEV SCOTT: Good evening everyone and welcome to the Hetzel Lecture Theatre in the Institute Building for our second Grattan Institute lecture. Before we begin, I wish to acknowledge that this evening we meet on the land of the Kurna people and that we respect their spiritual connection with their country. We also acknowledge the Kurna people as the traditional custodians of the Adelaide region and that their cultural heritage and beliefs are still as important to the living Kurna people today. My name is Bev Scott, I'm the Marketing Manager at the State Library and I'm representing our Director, Alan Smith, who is unable to be here this evening. We have wonderful guest panellists and I thank you all for coming and participating in this lecture. I'll now hand over to Megan French from the Grattan Institute who will introduce our panellists to you. Thank you.

MEGAN FRENCH: Welcome everybody. Thanks for being here tonight and thank you Bev for getting us started. Our partnerships with state libraries, such as the State Library of South Australia, are a truly valuable asset to the Grattan Institute and we really appreciate the opportunity to be here tonight at the Hetzel Lecture Theatre. You may have noticed I am not Pete Goss, who is our School Education Program Director at Grattan. Unfortunately, we had some flight delays so I am substituting, or attempting to be a poor substitute, for Pete until he, in his mad dash, manages to get here. He'll hopefully be here in a few minutes, so I'll kick off until his arrival. As Bev said, I'm from the Grattan Institute, I'm the Events & Marketing Specialist at Grattan and I also host our weekly podcast

with guest spots from our many talented research staff and Program Directors, including Pete Goss who spoke on our podcast when the *Engaging Students* report was released, which is what we're here to discuss tonight.

The report found that 40% of Australia's school students are regularly unproductive in a given year, but what was probably most surprising in this research was not only the frequent challenges, but also the nature of the challenges. There were, of course, problems with aggressive or even violent behaviour, the sorts of problems that are attracting media headlines and teachers need all the support they can get to deal with these sorts of students, but more common and, in fact, more stressful for teachers were minor disruptions, such as students talking back or simply switching off and avoiding work. Of course, there is no simple answer to engaging students or, indeed, what it means to be disengaged. There are so many different definitions of what it means to be a disengaged student. Some suggest it's just boredom and, if that's the case, how is that to be dealt with? These are the questions that our teachers are dealing with on a day-to-day basis. We aren't going to go through the report page by page tonight. Instead, I have beside me three fantastic panellists, each with a unique point of view to contribute to this discussion.

Firstly, Associate Professor Anna Sullivan, who is a leading expert in the field of school discipline and managing learning environments at the University of South Australia. She recently led a major Australian research project which investigated behaviour in schools and in 2016 edited a book called *Challenging Dominant Views on Student Behaviour at School: Answering Back*. Dr Sullivan brings over ten years of school teaching experience to her research, having taught in the primary, middle and secondary years of schooling across South Australia, New South Wales and England. Next is Kerry White, the Principal of Holy Family Catholic School at Parafield Gardens. Kerry accepts the Loris Malaguzzi assertion that children are competent citizens from birth and continues to broaden his understanding of the image of the child and the 100 languages that all learners bring to the teacher/learner interaction. He believes that high levels of engagement are achieved when learners have a voice in what they learn and how they learn, when they create their own authentic knowledge, and when their parents or caregivers participate in the learning process.

Finally we're joined by Rhoni McFarlane, Deputy Principal at Wirreanda Secondary School, a co-ed 8 to 12 school in Southern Adelaide. Rhoni joined the secondary school in 2012 and has been part of a leadership team which has focused on continual improvement with a specific focus on developing relevant, authentic, innovative and engaging learning for staff and students. This is in addition to a passion for equity in education, including increased opportunities for our hardest to reach young people and dedication to working with children with significant disadvantage and challenge. Rhoni is a connected educator that you can find engaging and collaborating in person and online via Twitter @rhonimcfarlane and through her blog *Cultivating Learning*. I'm going to kick off tonight with a question to you Anna. You completed one of the foundation reports on what's happening in this area, indeed, Pete cited you heavily in his *Engaging Classrooms* report. Can you talk us through your research a little bit and what you see happening?

ANNA SULLIVAN: Sure. I'm delighted to have one of the partners on the project, Mary Carmody, here. I've been leading a project called *The Behaviour at Schools Study* and as part of that research project we looked around at what other research had been done, and I think you drew on it in the report as well. There was a large study done in Western Australia published in 2009 called *The Pipeline Project* and when we read the report we were astounded by the findings. I thought I'd

start by sharing some of that information first. They did a study over four years that aimed to investigate the trajectories of classroom behaviour and academic progress, so they were trying to map the two together. They also introduced a new term, which you used in the report, and that was “unproductive behaviour”. So instead of using the terms “misbehaviour”, “naughty”, “challenging” and that sort of thing, they decided that it was better to look at the characteristics of student behaviours that impede a student’s academic progress. So they talked about productive behaviours and unproductive behaviours, which takes away some of the responsibility in who’s at fault here and we found that very useful conceptually.

They started with 1,300 students from Years 2, 4, 6 and 8 and tracked them for four years and they got teachers, as part of that project, to describe the classroom behaviour of their students twice a year and then they mapped it against their achievement data, the testing data that was available. When they analysed the data statistically they came up with four categories of student behaviour. One was productive behaviours, which were described as those behaviours that support academic progress, and they found in any year about 60% of kids were exhibiting productive behaviours. Then they had a group of behaviours that students were exhibiting called disengaged behaviours and they were when students lack engagement with schoolwork. They’re not aggressive or not non-compliant or disruptive and they might be doing their work, but they’re not openly engaged and they found that in any year 20% of kids were disengaged. Then they had the unco-operative students, they were the ones who might have been described as aggressive and non-compliant towards teachers and peers, and they found 12% of students were in that category. The fourth category was low-level disruptive students, they were ones which were possibly seeking attention, interrupting, provoking others, that sort of thing, and not necessarily disengaged. They had about 8% in that category. Over the four years what they found was that 40% of kids remained productive, 20% were consistently unproductive and 40% fluctuated. We found that finding really, really interesting.

One of their recommendations or their understandings of it was that when we think about schools and systems and what happens with students there are a lot of resources and time that are spent on the unco-operative group, that’s the aggressive, non-compliant students, yet there’s only 12% of them. What they were arguing was that the disengaged students, who aren’t causing any problems in the classroom, actually are going under the radar, yet there’s 20% of them and it also fluctuates from year to year. The other thing that we found astounding was when they were mapping the behaviours against academic progress and achievement they found that the students in the unproductive group did not usually catch up academically, but, more concerningly, were the disengaged students who are doing their work and not causing much problem but are not overly engaged in their learning, they have a similar trajectory in their academic performance as the unco-operative students. So that’s 20% of kids every year and we found that finding to be very, very significant.

As part of the first phase of our *Behaviour at School Study* we wanted to find out from teachers what was going on in their classrooms and in the school more broadly, and I’ll focus on the classroom side. We did a survey in South Australia, we had 1,380 teachers complete the survey - more started it, but they didn’t finish it! When we analysed the data statistically we were wondering if it would map against those four behaviour categories, but it didn’t. We came up with three others, it didn’t work out statistically. One group of behaviours were the disengaged behaviours again, another group were the low level disruptive behaviours, and the third group were aggressive antisocial behaviours. What we found though was that teachers encountered low level disruptive behaviours and disengaged behaviours on a daily basis. It was really prevalent and, to some extent, anyone who’s been a teacher

or probably been a visitor in a classroom you can sort of get that, but things like talking out of turn, avoiding doing schoolwork and disengaging from classroom activities were the most prevalent unproductive behaviours reported by teachers in South Australia. Over two-thirds of teachers though said that they saw disengaged behaviours on an almost daily basis and over two-thirds of teachers reported that aggressive and antisocial behaviours either did not occur at all in the last week or only occurred on one or two days.

When we ranked them the most frequent behaviours were disengaged and low level disruptive, but we also asked them about how difficult they find it to manage different behaviours and we got them to rank them. They said the most difficult behaviours to manage in classrooms were avoiding doing schoolwork, disrupting the flow of the lesson, disengaging from classroom activities, talking out of turn and being late for class; that's the list as it goes down. So when you think about it, they're the disengaged and low level disruptive behaviours that teachers tell us are the most difficult. We also gave them a list of behaviour management strategies, the more typical ones that you would see in schools in Australia, and what teachers told us is that they use some of the behaviour management strategies like timeout, verbal reprimands, STEP systems (so warnings, timeout, detention, those sorts of things increasing in severity) and reasoning out of class, but that they don't work very effectively. 33% of teachers said that they're effective. One of the findings from that particular bit of research is, in summary, there are a lot of disengaged and low level disruptive behaviours. Now, there's nothing new about that, to be honest. I probably shouldn't be saying that, but there's isn't. You do research to find out what's going on and other research has reported similar things; that the low level disruptive behaviour that's repetitive wears teachers down. 53% of the teachers told us that they were stressed. They're not stressed about the aggressive antisocial behaviours, but they are stressed about the disruptive low level and disengaged behaviours. So that's what teachers are telling us about what's happening in classrooms.

MEGAN FRENCH: Yes. Kerry, for you, how does that research translate to the classroom? What does it look like on a day-to-day basis?

KERRY WHITE: I think what we're about, and listening to Anna reminded me of it, is very much about establishing a new paradigm in our school. When I first went to Holy Family a number of years ago I think there were some prevailing stereotypes about the community and a lot of labelling and blame was being apportioned to the community. It was northern suburbs, and even "northern suburbs" in itself conveyed a message. There was great diversity. I was coming in from a more middle class environment at Aberfoyle Park and when I decided to take this position people said, "Why are you going there? You won't be able to do the things you'd like to do there". It sounds pretty amazing, but that was kind of what I was hearing. So I think when I answer the question what's happening in a contemporary primary school like ours it's very different. I was thinking at the bus stop on the way in tonight that Holy Family these days is a very welcoming place. It's very beautiful, it's very safe, it's extremely organised, it's happy, it's fun to be there, it's inclusive, it's a wonderful place, and I think when I first went there not many people would've attributed those characteristics because those prevailing stereotypes of deficit were firmly in place. I think, sadly, to some extent at that time schools and systems almost traded in those commodities.

That was one of the things I noticed in Pete's report, there were still the terms "disadvantaged" and "young teachers" and there was an implicit criticism. We played Pete's podcast to the whole staff and it was interesting, we put it out there and we listened as a whole group and they were the things that

the teachers picked up on, you know, “We don’t know so much about that”. So I think Holy Family these days, our response to these issues that Anna has been discussing is that we don’t so much have a focus on behaviour in our school. Our Deputy Principal, Adam Slater, is here tonight, he was saying to me we revolutionised the way we support learning in our school and we were commenting that a number of the structures that previously dealt with behaviour that was of concern, they’ve almost disappeared. There’s no-one in those structures. We’ve dismantled them. I think that the focus in our school is not on behaviour, it’s on learning and, specifically, how people learn best, because we extrapolate it’s not about the children, it’s about children grow up, so we see all people in our school in the same way. People tell us there’s a palpable vibe and energy evident in our school, not that we’ve got everything sorted but that’s the common response we get.

So these are the ways we approach these issues around behaviour, it’s in this holistic way and, just quickly, the way we approach it is we developed and embraced a common language for learning, we have a common purpose and pillars in our school. Our pillars are around identity, ecology and pedagogy, our values around positive emotion, sharing and, going with that, a sense of trust and also support. We also invest heavily in our teachers and so there’s been an ongoing program of professional learning across a whole myriad of influences that we’ve embraced, like positive psychology from Penn State, Berry Street from Melbourne. It’s great to see Greg here from Apple tonight; they’ve been a big influence on us. Carla Renaldi, Reggio, ecological conversion through Professor Paul Clark from the UK, Harvard’s Project Zero, Michael Fullan, we’ve had ongoing discussions with him even though we’re not in the big league of systems. We don’t actually pay him anything; we just meet him at other functions when he’s in town. Bristol University, we’ve worked with the staff from there and we used the CLARA Analysis. All of these, a whole range of disparate influences have been embraced in our school and that’s the way we approach it.

A big influence at the moment is our work with Berry Street because once we’ve taken on the ideas of positive psychology and that’s the why you do things, but the pressing matter is how you do it? Our partnership with Berry Street in Melbourne has been so useful. I don’t really think it matters that they’re from Melbourne. I think that’s okay, but not everyone thinks that. They’ve helped us see the absolute importance of starting with the body. We know that if learners are present and centred they’ll learn, but if they’re escalating they won’t learn. The importance of stamina, growth mindset, resilience, engagement, flow, play, fun, a sense of wonder, character strength and a sense of hope and gratitude. All of these influences play out and have influenced all of our learners, starting with our teachers. As I said, we invest heavily, this doesn’t happen by accident. We don’t believe in drive-bys, so we don’t send one or two people who then come back. We engage everybody in it. Also, the Reggio influence has been enormous for us, but we’re not a Reggio school. We just love the way that that has provoked us to think about what is our image of the child. We see the child as a competent citizen from birth and so that then leads us to if we believe that, then what’s our image of teacher? You can’t have it both ways. If you believe that, then you have to see the image of the teacher differently, the image of the school, the image of the spaces in the school, and also the absolute importance of the learning environment as provocation for learning.

Also Maluguzzi, that was mentioned in the introduction, we’ve learnt a lot about that and that learning doesn’t occur through transmission or reproduction, and that’s where I think we’re diverting from that traditional paradigm that is so healthy out there and in so many ways you see it creeping back in, that we don’t teach someone unless we make it happen. We see that quite differently. We also believe that technology is an important issue in the mix, but we don’t see it as a driver. So we’ve identified



what the drivers are, we think the drivers are about negotiating the curriculum, learners producing authentic knowledge, involving parents and caregivers in the learning processes, teachers reflecting on their change, leaders designing for change. So they're the directions we're going in and our use of technology, we think it is so important that the way we use technology is to redefine tasks, so we're about redefinition, not about simple substitution. Our learning areas in our school have changed immeasurably and we're always changing in our school, but our current learning areas are now open, they're shared, they're homely, they're well-lit, they access indoors and outdoors. I think, interestingly, the children are so proud of those areas. In our school the children actually helped shaped the areas, they love to talk about it, they write about it, they draw pictures about it and, in the same way, I'd say the same thing with the staff areas. The staff areas now reflect this more contemporary approach to learning.

So that's, as quick as I can say it, our response. A long way from the old pre-occupation of let's get behaviour right and go from there.

MEGAN FRENCH: Thank you so much Kerry. Thankfully, it looks like Pete's plane has finally arrived, so I'm going to handover to him so that he can have a chat, Rhoni, about your arguably very different experience.

PETE GOSS: Firstly, my apologies, but the stars of the show here are Anna, Kerry and Rhoni, so very nice to have you here. Secondly, thank you all for turning up tonight to listen and, thirdly, thank you Megan for stepping into the breach; a quick round of applause please. Kerry, I caught your descriptions and we've spoken about the way you envisage setting up a school and how that engenders learning. I cited Anna's work very carefully, so hopefully I knew some of the things you said. I'm keen to move now to Rhoni and say how does this play out in the classroom? I understand you've given a bit of description of what it looks like, but how to get engagement in the classroom is where we're at in the conversation.

RHONI MCFARLANE: Well, we haven't got that far yet. A little bit of context about Wirreanda Secondary School, it's a southern secondary site from 8 to 12 and we've got just over 900 students and 40% school card. That comes with significant challenges, obviously we've got a disability unit onsite and a lot of focus that we have been working on is about raising the aspirations of our community and our students, which means raising expectations. That work started before I arrived at Wirreanda six years ago with our previous Principal, Tony Lunniss, who is here tonight. I think a lot of work in terms of working in schools where perhaps the community itself has low expectations of what occurs in schools or low aspirations of the young people involved in it, that's the big challenge that you have faced. But it's also interesting in terms of the discussion around engagement and some of the research obviously you've done, Anna, because when you talk about 40% of students perhaps not engaging in classes, how that looks in different settings is very different. I think in a site where there are some certain challenges that when students are disengaged, perhaps in our setting, they let you know that they're disengaged and it perhaps plays out a little bit differently.

PETE GOSS: What does that look like?

RHONI MCFARLANE: Similar to the things that Anna's already raised in terms of non-compliance and students not following instructions. Schools are living, breathing spaces and they change over time. I know just in my time at Wirreanda things are very, very different in five years and I know that people

walk through our school and they expect a Category 3 school. Schools come in certain aspects and postcode mentalities that we've had to really, really challenge. They expect to see something different than when they arrive and a lot of people comment on how calm the school environment is, how the students are working and how the staff and the students are really happy. I remember my first visit to Wirreanda before I actually arrived there, it was not as a teacher going there but the students welcoming me and showing me where to go in terms of arriving at the right spaces. So I think people are certainly surprised when they come to our site but, at the same time, there are challenges that our students and our community face.

It was interesting to hear you say, Anna, about the fluctuations because I think that is about classroom environment and I think that is about developing strategies within classes. I think most of us would have read reports or seen students who have achieved well in some areas and not in others and how they feel in those sorts of spaces, and that can be different classroom to classroom not necessarily across the school, how they feel in every classroom. I know we've also done a lot of work on how our students feel safe and secure in their environment. Our data still shows that we've got some students who don't feel like they've got an adult they can trust and I think that's really important to know that every student in a school should feel they have someone that they can trust in terms of an adult person. So we look at our wellbeing data, we do MDI surveys with our middle school, we look at our student feedback, we have a big focus on student voice and getting their input into a range of things that we do, but we also have, and it's consistent across, behaviour should be focused on what works for learning. We did a significant change a few years back around not behaviour management, but how do we develop behaviour that is conducive to learning and that should be the focus. If we're a school environment and our focus is about learning, then the behaviours that we want to see in our students are focused on what works for learning, rather than responding to.

If you're talking about the timeouts, the withdrawals and things like that, I think the main focus we need to ensure is that all our staff, and that includes early year teachers, are ready with strategies to use prior to when they enter that classroom, because they're the ones, the pre-emptive processes and strategies and routines that we develop, that are dependent on the relationships you build with students and they're the core things that we need to keep developing in classrooms.

PETE GOSS: As a way of getting an insight into the classroom, when you get a brand new teacher, and that must happen, they have the benefit, from the sounds of it, of a broadly calm school but they still have a group of kids in their classroom and what they do in there matters. How do you support them to maintain the overall good situation that the school is in? What challenges would a new teacher face?

RHONI MCFARLANE: That probably is painting a fairly rosy picture of the classroom environments at our school. It depends on obviously the new teacher to our school's experience. Induction is a really important process for new staff, being aware and provided with people around them to support their transition into our school site. We tend not to paint rosy pictures. We try as a leadership team to be really honest about the challenges that are going to be faced and the communicating around what students will need extra support. I think in terms of behaviour we have some systems that are in place that support classrooms. We have an active roaming duty at our school, so someone's always around. We try and create collegiality, because I think your peer support in terms of teaching staff is critical in terms of any new placement, whether it's as a classroom teacher or working in any space in a school. I think understanding that you can trust your colleagues and they're there to support you is

really important and I think we established that and we're going very well in terms of collegiality and welcoming people so they feel like they can be supported. We've got, actually, quite a few of our new staff members here, so they can either nod or shake their head at me, or maybe ask questions later.

PETE GOSS: Fantastic. Kerry, it's very useful to hear about the overall philosophy, very useful to hear about the things to do to maintain something that is going broadly well - I'm not trying to paint it as a bed of roses. When you and I spoke you said that maybe not every single decision you had ever taken was perfect, there might have been some mistakes along the way and it's important to learn from mistakes. So if you're willing to share briefly a couple of those that helps everyone.

KERRY WHITE: I found that discussion really interesting. When I was considering the section about what I'd learnt I was reflecting on the fact that I think these days we're quite eclectic in the influences we consider, but I think we've become much more choosy and selective. I was saying to Pete that there was a difference. I think in his research he'd found that there was a big difference between knowledge and learning and I immediately resonated with that, because when I was first a very young Principal and Dave Gellof, who was down at Seaton Park, introduced me to the work of Glasser I enthusiastically implemented some of the Glasser techniques at Mount Barker with Mary Carmody. I think it was a classic case where I took some knowledge from Glasser which he had developed with some reform schools in the US and that kind of stuff and, because there wasn't much in place, most schools in South Australia at that time didn't have a coherent policy and procedure around discipline or hadn't really discussed with discipline meant, that was pretty interesting. So we went down that track, but I find myself now some years later as a leader systematically dismantling every vestige of that approach.

PETE GOSS: Give us one example, if you would, because not everyone will know Glasser.

KERRY WHITE: Glasser was big on steps and hierarchy of consequences, so what Adam and I and the staff have done is we've evaporated most of those steps, we've truncated the process. It's quite a different approach now, it's a very simple thing and the imperative is always to keep the learner in the game. So it's a very short hierarchy, it's kind of you're in the game and if you're not in the game you get some support. We recognised very quickly all the awful punitive aspects of systems, like buddy class. You send the victim off to the buddy class and the kids in the buddy class all frown at them knowing why they're there and that kind of stuff, so we've dismantled that. We're in the process of working through with our staff that punitive nature and that's not what we're on about. The one that you mentioned in your podcast, that's a technique we use if there's a child with an issue. Under the old paradigm the child is removed from class. Now we remove teacher and child from class and we take their class, so that's an example of one thing we're doing.

PETE GOSS: Thank you. So it sounds like there are still consequences when needed but you don't quite as easily put people onto that escalator and it's probably a down escalator, isn't it?

KERRY WHITE: Yes, more of a support and to get them back into the class as soon as possible.

PETE GOSS: You look as though you want to jump in. What have you see that works really well?

ANNA SULLIVAN: I'm just thinking about what we teach our pre-service teachers at the University. There's an emerging strong body of literature about what works in classrooms and when I went



through the College of Advanced Education, so it was a while ago, we didn't learn any of that. There's a vast majority probably of teachers here who didn't learn from the research about what works in classrooms, so there are lots of myths and lots of experiences, "Oh, this works for me. Try this". But we know now that there's a strong body of research that's suddenly been put together in better ways so it's more accessible to people. For example, just teacher behaviours and where they stand, how they communicate, how they request kids to do things, how they deliver instructions from the basic things, which we all learnt, but we didn't really understand if we didn't do it like that that it can have these implications. So just the teacher skills and strategies and the way the kids come in or not or whatever. With an absence of those in the UK they've had numerous reports about behaviour and discipline over there. The advice to secondary schools is to not let kids sit wherever they like, that's strong advice over there.

Well, I don't think we need that advice so much here in Australia. I think, as a country and educators, we understand the way you physically set up your classroom, where the passages are, how kids can get access to resources, all the routines. Then you get into more sophisticated skills like how do you teach them to manage conflict, how do you teach them to deal with disappointment or solve problems or whatever. It goes from very simplistic skills, so when people ask me, "What do you do differently?" it's very hard. We teach it over a long course and then our teachers graduate with knowledge of that, but not necessarily always the experience with that. I do a lot of research on early career teachers and what we've found in that research is some still experience, like I said, that aggressive antisocial behaviour and when they do it can be very frightening and they can feel very lonely and very vulnerable, but not all feel like that. Some of our research is showing that in some schools they might experience really violent and extreme behaviours, but when they're wrapped around collegially and they're not isolated on their own in a classroom with four walls and a door, they're working with other adults in collegial teams, they tend to manage those behaviours and learn from that in a more positive way. So I just wanted to add that.

PETE GOSS: That's great. A couple of things that I found in the report as I was learning about it, one, I think some of this is too hard to expect teachers to do on their own, but not when they're working collegially. The second, and I'd be interested in your thoughts, is there's a difference between knowing about something and being able to do it. One of the things I have learnt is about tactical avoidance, choosing when not to pick a fight. Every time I go home and my youngest kid picks a fight with me I walk straight into that. I kind of know a bit more what I need to do, but I haven't yet built the experience in knowing how to do it and be able to rely on it. So that's a deep behavioural change. These are hard things, is what teachers tell me.

ANNA SULLIVAN: The research shows that the stricter, the more confined the rules and the expectations are, the more tension there is, the more stress there is, the more kids don't cope with that, then the teachers don't cope and it escalates. What is a better environment is a more collaborative environment where you go with the flow a lot more. If you think about it and the way we work, I'm at work and I will have conversations about something I did on the weekend. Well, why can't kids do that? Just being more reflective of the normal natural environment for children is really important and allowing them to learn and work collaboratively in similar sorts of environments. I think that's what you were talking about, the physical space being very welcoming, but also the environment at school.

RHONI MCFARLANE: As we all know, young people need to feel safe in the environment. Now, in terms of our setting, some of our children come to school not feeling safe at all, so sometimes being ready to learn is not where they're at. That means that it might be that they're put in a situation where they're already challenged and it might mean that a conversation with a teacher is not going to solve that problem or how they're feeling at that moment and they may actually be needing to spend some time outside that classroom or go home because they're not ready to learn that day. So I think for us, we need to have opportunities to say, "You're not ready to learn today, so we need to think about something different". I think in terms of behaviour responses, we've moved away from traditional withdrawal rooms and things like that but, having said that, we have had to suspend students and we do regularly follow-up on certain behaviour consequences, but they're for us warning signs that this young person doesn't know yet, hasn't learnt the strategies to either cope with regulating their behaviour, they don't know how to communicate clearly. So these for us are warning signs about something needs to be learnt here.

PETE GOSS: And as someone said to me earlier in the week, if the student doesn't know that a sentence ends with a full stop you don't say, "Out of the class". You teach them that. So there is some teaching in here. We're talking a lot about the behavioural things. The safety aspect is deeply important and having an adult that you can trust. Let's go beyond that, let's assume that that has been built. I'm keen to talk briefly about the interaction between learning itself and the engagement levels, whilst the audience gets their questions ready - so this will be the last round of panel discussions, get your questions ready - and things like pacing and keeping the class moving. As someone put it to me, if a young person's brain or even an adult brain is not engaged in learning it will find something else to be engaged in. How do these play out?

ANNA SULLIVAN: Again, there's a lot of research out there that shows us how we can do that. You've mentioned negotiating the curriculum. We've known since the '80s that if you can negotiate the curriculum, you can negotiate, say, the product or how you're going to demonstrate that and all of those sorts of ways, they require quite sophisticated teaching skills. I think the problem there is they can learn a bit of it, but they're not continuing to learn that and when you work in collegial teams you can see other people doing that and you pick it up and you keep practising, get feedback and all of those sorts of things. So the more that you can engage - and I hear different voices now, the students' voice, negotiating, whatever, but engaging the students in things that they want to learn. I've got three children and I said, "I'm giving a talk tonight". My little one said, "What are you talking about?" and I said, "Oh, disengagement". "Oh yeah, I'm often like that." He's in Year 6 and I said, "Well what do you mean?" and he said, "Oh, we often have to do stuff. I really find it boring. If I have to learn how to do a procedure or persuasive text again I'm going to shoot myself" or something.

Often we're given ideas about how to teach, but they don't always work and context does matter. As we're becoming more constrained by the federal government and state governments about what is taught we're getting sameness across everywhere and that doesn't work. We had a lot more freedom, we had teachers who were treated with respect for the professionalism that they could show where they designed curriculum, where they could be innovative and work with kids and families and communities to do things which were really exciting. Now we've got situations where we've got four Year 4 classes all teaching rainbows or something. There's a sameness about that which means we're assuming all kids are at the same place, that they're all interested in the same thing.

KERRY WHITE: It's one thing to talk about student voice, but I think the learners generally need some help with that. As I mentioned in my first comments, they need a language with which they can describe their learning. Structures like character strength, they need to know their character strength so that they can start from that point of strength. Our work with Bristol where we've used the LE program and CLARA, each of the students undertake an online assessment and they get a graph of themselves as a learner and the underlying feature of that is that those learning dispositions are all infinitely growable. If they don't have these structures and sources of language then it's just a bit trite to say they have a voice, because they don't have a language with which to express where they're at.

PETE GOSS: So if we're going to talk about student voice and negotiating the curriculum, that's not a completely unstructured thing?

KERRY WHITE: No.

PETE GOSS: Right.

ANNA SULLIVAN: There's a lot of structure within that and high expectations. We've all known for years, there's so much research, that every kid isn't at the same place, but the challenge for teachers is what do you do about that, how do you differentiate the curriculum to meet individual needs? We've been talking about that for years and one way is through the curriculum and the learning activities that are designed to facilitate learning can be different. It doesn't matter if Mary learns something slightly different to Adam, who cares? At the end of the day, we know that they're not all going to learn the same thing anyway, so why can't we be more flexible in that? I think that's really important.

KERRY WHITE: Yes. We've also learnt, like with our learning design, to be less black and white about that. So when the teacher sets out the provocations it's much more open about where the children may want to take that to, either directions that the teacher had already considered or, even more exciting, being open to the idea of where the children might take it because we go back to the competent child, and we can't say that if the educator then shuts that down.

PETE GOSS: I have questions in this about how that then interacts with the need, and I think there is a need, to have students learn certain things as they go through school. A student who starts secondary school reading at a Grade 3 or 4 level, and there are a lot of those, is still learning to read and secondary school has got to be an awful place if you don't get proportional reasoning. On the other hand, the idea of differentiation, I will be talking tomorrow about targeted teaching. In a typical Year 9 class, for those that don't know, the top tenth of students will be seven years ahead of the bottom tenth of students. That's extraordinary and this is one of the challenges that we expect our teachers to manage, along with all of this. Brief comments and then we're out to the audience.

RHONI MCFARLANE: I would just say in response to that I think if we are working in an environment where there are huge gaps between students and you're starting at a point of content you're never going to engage students who should be challenged at the higher end or supported to bring them up to be challenged for those students that have got those big gaps. So I think if you start with content you're never going to win that race because that's linear. So in terms of meeting students and personalising it, then if you're starting at different point it's not as hard.

PETE GOSS: So that we hear a diversity of questions, I'm going to call on three or four people and then throw that to the panel and hope to repeat that a couple of times.

AUDIENCE: The panel was talking about what works in the classroom and I'm wondering about that as a distinct body of practices, whether teachers have permission to try and perhaps even fail to find out what works in the classroom for themselves to meet some of the challenges that we're talking about and how important that is?

PETE GOSS: Great question, almost what works, where, how and for whom.

AUDIENCE: I'm wondering if you could expand on Berry Street. You mentioned them a couple of times and talked about the children being present and centred. I'm particularly interested in mindfulness and how that can help students in the classroom and beyond.

AUDIENCE: This is more directed to Kerry. It sounds like you've brought about a lot of change in the school and I'm wondering if you had any challenges with the parent community and how you faced that or how you changed those views that you were talking about?

PETE GOSS: So how does change play out with the parents, a specific Berry Street one. Why don't you take the Berry Street one and change with parents, and then we'll broaden that into change in general and how that applies to each teacher trying things?

KERRY WHITE: Berry Street, it came about because we did a lot of Martin Seligman work on positive psychology through our partnership with Geelong Grammar. Each staff member, including ESOs, undertook a four day course at our school over a few sessions and it seemed to me that that sustained the case for the why, why we should do these things. I was wondering about the how, so that left me with that problem and I heard about Berry Street in Melbourne. So I went to Melbourne and undertook the course myself and could see straight away that in that course - which was also a four day course, it worked on body, stamina, relationships and character - it provided the teachers with a whole lot of hands on strategies which they could use to flesh out the bones of what they're learnt in the former course. So we negotiated for them to come to our school and that's been an outstanding success.

PETE GOSS: Then the impact on the parent body and the other people involved in this.

KERRY WHITE: We've also started working with the parents. The basic strategy was we're not big on telling people what to do, so we worked with the teachers and the teachers found that information so compelling and helpful for themselves they just naturally started using it with the children. Then the children would go home and start talking about specks of gold and gratitude and so on, so we followed up and, with Adam and some of our other leaders, our school counsellor, have conducted sessions for the parents and now Berry Street, and that has just gone on and on. We're a bit different to other schools, we don't actually teach this as if it was a subject, it's kind of in the fabric, it's the way we deal with the children, but in our staff meetings and so on we're always using those techniques with each other and what we're finding is that we are eliciting these responses from the floor. So Adam and I don't have to say anything, it's coming from the staff.

RHONI MCFARLANE: In terms of anything, I don't think you could teach in isolation if you're trying to build culture. Whether it be capabilities across the curriculum or values, I think that all has to be embedded otherwise you're just going to have isolated aspects.

PETE GOSS: Then in terms of the other questions, Anna, how much do teachers need to have latitude to try, explore and fail, and then, just to be cheeky, Rhoni can say whether that reflects the reality on the ground.

ANNA SULLIVAN: Well, I think it's important to think about the three behaviours that we found teachers reported, if they're low level disruptive, disengaged or aggressive and antisocial. You can't treat them as all the same. You were talking before about prevention, you can't prevent them all in the same way. They're all different behaviours and they're brought about by different things, so I'm sort of going to the question about having a go as a teacher. If you're trying to engage the 20% of your kids who are typically disengaged, I think teachers should be excited and be trialling things and I think that's what we want to teach our students to do. Now, my expertise is not curriculum, but in terms of preventing problems or challenges around behaviour what we know is that schools that deal with the bigger issues like values and "this is the way we treat people here". We can't focus on the teacher in the classroom. It can't be left to that teacher. So when we've got schools that are trialling things, whatever it is, it's going to be different in every context. That's okay because you generate an excitement which flows into the way we do things in this school and you're helping to address the disengaged problem. Then the low level disruptive, the calling out and that; if they're engaged then they're not doing that either, so I think it's really important.

PETE GOSS: So within a broad school-wide approach how much flexibility do individual teachers have/should they have?

ANNA SULLIVAN: In our research we did case studies of schools that were doing it well and there was absolutely no flexibility from the Principals about how we treat kids. We were surprised to the extent to which these Principals went to to ensure that every staff member, whether they were in the canteen, at the front desk or teaching Year 12 maths, treated kids well and they were relentless about that. There was absolutely no flexibility to the point where teachers were given choices about moving on because we cannot have people treat kids like that in our school. That was non-negotiable in different ways in those schools, but what we noticed was flexible was the way they worked in teams, there was an expectation that staff worked collaboratively together. So there were things that were non-negotiable, but then within that the teams made decisions about what they were going to teach, who was going to do what, how they're going to work together, where the students could work. We always saw a calm chaos, if you like, where kids were doing multiple things and staff were going everywhere, but it was very exciting.

PETE GOSS: That sounds awesome. "Freedom within a structure" is what the Jesuits would call it. Rhoni, on the ground?

RHONI MCFARLANE: I think there needs to be a mix of both. I think there needs to be a culture that's developed from the Principal throughout the whole school about who we are as a community, and that drives certain aspects of what's expected. However, if we want students to be risk-takers in our classrooms in terms of their learning then we expect our staff to be risk-takers, whether it be pedagogical approaches or the strategies that they use in classes. So it has to be a mixture but



obviously the support of colleagues, again, to try things, see it reflected, did that work? The reality is every classroom and every student is different, some things are going to work for some and you can't use the same strategies in every classroom. You have to take risks and try new things.

KERRY WHITE: The question about the parents. It's been really interesting and I think the answer is to be really honest with parents and not to be fearful. I think that's what I notice in education at the moment, there's a lot of fear at all levels. There's a fear about doing new things in new ways, there's a real aversion to risk. Whether it's in early years or use of technology, the way you implement the Australian curriculum, there's this inherent fear. Our school serves quite a disparate community, about 50 different ethnic and cultural groups, and we're conducting a really contemporary curriculum which bears no relation to what these families expected when they came from their homeland, which are very traditional. We thought about it and we decided we do things because we think that they work, so we discussed this with the staff and discussed the fact that if we persist with this pedagogy, this use of technology, this way of thinking of positivity, we will lose some families. We don't to lose them, but in the end we basically said we'll lose some, but we'll gain many more.

So everyone needs to be brave and I think the bravest of the brave are the class teachers who, like in the reception class, the parents are looking for reading, writing and arithmetic, and they've had kindy, now let's get down to the real learning and they come in and they find this process approach. The brave people are the class teachers who do it and report on it. The interesting thing is in the end they'll say, "Mr White, they didn't do this in India" and that's almost a provocation, then later, when it's been solved, they say, "Actually, India wasn't that good".

RHONI MCFARLANE: I would say our context is really different because our largest challenge is actually getting parents engaged in our students' learning, but the flipside of that is that we can pretty much do anything we want with curriculum and the way we teach because our parents aren't going to raise their voices and say, "That's not how I got taught". So we want our parents engaged more and we want them to see the value in the different things that we're doing in our school and the pedagogical approaches we're taking that we are creating environments of really innovative spaces for students to learn and we want you to see the value in that and then engage, because we obviously know that the more parents are engaged the more students will be engaged in their work. So that's our challenge, but we certainly don't have the backlash from our families around the curriculum that we're doing, which is fortunate for us.

AUDIENCE: Mainly this one is directed at Kerry. I was lucky enough to visit your school several years ago and the culture that you've built at that school, it's over an extensive period of time and you mentioned also an extensive number of initiatives that you've worked through with your staff over, again, an extended period of time. You also commented that your process is to take them all on board and get them all singing from the same page and not sending small groups or individuals off to conferences or doing individual style learning. How can you connect that with more of a secondary school situation where you've got probably groups of people who are faculty-based and, although they're interested and always very concerned about educating the whole child and the whole school community, they still mainly have a focus on their areas of specialty?

PETE GOSS: So the question is how does that make it different in a secondary school?

AUDIENCE: Yes.

AUDIENCE: I'm from Queensland and my question is around rewards, punishment, consequences and acknowledgement. It's something that hasn't really been a focus tonight and it's something that in Queensland, the school-wide positive behaviour support that operates in our schools is very focused on and perhaps even, at the risk of being a bit different, over-focused on.

AUDIENCE: This question is probably more directed at Anna. I found what you were saying in your research really fascinating, being a fairly early career teacher and often wondering is this happening in other classes as well. In terms of things that can really have a big impact on those percentages of disinterested and unproductive students, some teachers might argue that streaming is a possible avenue to make a teacher's life a bit easier. I was wondering what your views were on approaches like streaming?

AUDIENCE: Kerry, you mentioned learner voice as being a significant part of the shift that you've been able to make and I know, Rhoni, at Wirreanda that's a very important part of the work that you're doing. I wonder if you could talk about that in relation to student engagement and what you've actually been doing?

PETE GOSS: Thank you very much. We're going to start with rewards and consequences and the value of streaming, so maybe some more of the technical aspects, and then build out to learner voice, the applicability of secondary school and a final thought.

ANNA SULLIVAN: Yes, that's a really good question. I think there's been a strong wave in press for school-wide discipline policies that enact the same sorts of positive consequences in an attempt to be fair and reasonable and consistent. But the emerging research, particularly out of the US but in Australia as well, is that it doesn't necessarily meet the needs of individual kids or groups of kids in that way. I've got a Masters student here, Jamie, who's doing some research on the use of ClassDojo, for example, an electronic tool that's going to solve all your classroom management problems, by the way, and teach you to be healthy and mindset. Anyway, besides the sarcasm that is another form of surveillance and control of distributing positives and negatives and letting people know what's good and bad and judging and controlling, then letting parents know as quickly as possible. There are huge concerns about that and I don't think, as a profession, we've really engaged with the problems that technology, like ClassDojo, is producing. So the short answer is I'm very concerned about these same blanket approaches because I do not think we do that with the curriculum.

Like Pete said, everyone has different needs. If someone's presenting aggressive antisocial behaviours I think you deal with them slightly differently to someone who turns up late to class. If you ever do research with kids and ask them about getting rewards and awards you'd understand that it actually causes a lot more problems than it solves so.

PETE GOSS: That's a very clear answer on that one. Streaming: thumbs up/thumbs down from a behaviour point of view? Because the answer on educational outcomes is clear, thumbs down. On the behaviour side, is anyone going to defend it?

ANNA SULLIVAN: No, I wouldn't defend it. The US has used streaming quite significantly and there's a movement away from that for various educational reasons. If it's not meeting the needs educationally then it probably isn't for behaviour reasons either.

KERRY WHITE: I'd also attack it on the basis of the hundred languages, so what are you streaming on? You're streaming on the old paradigm.

ANNA SULLIVAN: However, they stream them according to behaviour and they're the behaviour schools or the behaviour units where schools decide that these children are so antisocial or so inappropriate that we need to get them out of the mainstream. We call them "flow schools" here. In different states they're called different things and we have different - sorry, I don't mean to offend anyone.

RHONI MCFARLANE: Sorry, can I just challenge that? We have at Wirreanda a very, very successful Wave program which is our flow program and the students who attend that are not removed and sent there because of behaviours. These are often students who are extremely disengaged because of wellbeing issues and the majority of our students in our program - and our program is on a SACE pathway and I would never have anyone speak out against anyone.

ANNA SULLIVAN: Yes, but what I'm saying is the streaming side and moving them all together, which is a form of streaming, around behaviour issues.

PETE GOSS: Some different views for kids with different backgrounds or different current needs, rather than being sent there as a form of punishment, is that your distinction?

RHONI MCFARLANE: Look, I can see that historically there have been students moved based on significant behaviour issues to programs like that, but that's certainly not the case for many flow programs and certainly not for ours. We're really proud of our work.

PETE GOSS: Kerry, we're going to wrap up and I'm going to only allow it to go on for two more minutes so that we can have final closure. What's the one thing that means your approach might be translatable to secondary and what's the one thing that you see as most different?

KERRY WHITE: I think it's interesting that a number of secondary schools do come and visit and are looking for some insights. We had one this week where the imperative was change, they felt they had a number of entrenched staff in the school and they came to us, they want us to go and speak to their whole staff around the area of positive education and Berry Street, dealing with traumatised children.

One of the things we do is we've been influenced by the TEFL framework and so we've got to a situation in our school where we can freely speak about the three teacher world views and reserving judgement. So we talk about the evolving pedagogy which we practise pretty widely, but we don't disparage content and control relationship and rescue. So there's no one-size-fits-all. I would say the situation is exactly the same in a secondary school. I would do it exactly the same way. I think it's eminently applicable but there's a whole lot of work you need to do about teacher world views and people understanding that, and also that sense of trust. That's the most common thing we hear from teachers at all levels in our school, they appreciate that sense of trust and freedom and some of them would know well where they stand in those areas of teacher world views.

PETE GOSS: Thank you. A last comment, what one-sentence message would you want to send to our policymakers from this stuff? What do you want the policymakers to do differently? What should they take away? What's the top of mind, the policy that could make your lives easier?

RHONI MCFARLANE: I think there are a thousand things that would make our lives easier. I think in terms of us it's the capacity for us to make decisions around who we're working with and responding to students. I think some autonomy around that would be beautiful.

PETE GOSS: Thank you. Kerry?

KERRY WHITE: I think suspend judgement and trust.

PETE GOSS: And Anna?

ANNA SULLIVAN: In South Australia I would urge policymakers to rethink their discipline policies in conjunction and think about how they interact with other policies and legislative requirements.

PETE GOSS: Thank you and thank you to the audience for coming along tonight. This is a huge and complex area. I hope that the report I wrote raises the profile of the topic. It points to some of the few things that are known within this space compared to, in a sense, the many things that are still not known, but it's a discussion that we need to have. I'm delighted that you've come along tonight. I thank the State Library of South Australia for hosting us here, we're really looking forward to more of these, Megan and our three tremendous panellists, and Bev is going to have the final word.

BEV SCOTT: My final word is please join me in thanking Pete and our panellists, Anna, Kerry and Rhoni, for such a wonderful insight into their views with their schools. Finally, it's the State Library's absolute pleasure to partner with Grattan Institute. We expect to hold another lecture in 2017, I'm not sure what the topic will be as yet, but please keep watching the Grattan Institute website and the State Library website, we'd love to see you back again. Thanks for coming this evening.

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