



Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Submitter: Fogarty Foundation
Submitting as a: Other (NFP working in education)
State: WA

Summary

Summary

The Fogarty Foundation seeks to advance social change through education. Founded in 2000 in WA, the Foundation has a strong track record and has produced effective, measurable outcomes across a number of education initiatives.

The summary recommendations for the three submission questions posed are:

Q1 – ACARA General Capabilities provide a useful general framework for education success, but need to include more consultation with industry to identify work-ready skills and attributes and more support to be provided to schools and teachers in effectively teaching these.

Q2 – Areas for improvement recommendations:

- Schools leaders need support in developing a systemic approach to school outcomes. Schools need a realistic view of their current situation and support in identifying the most appropriate approach, or adopting an approach that may be beyond their scope. Effective, stable school leadership should be encouraged, supported and rewarded.
- Special consideration needs to be given to disadvantaged schools in dealing with the specific challenges they face. Support to identify best practice for their context, systems providing mentoring and support for school leaders in disadvantaged schools, and incentive to invest extended period of time as the leader.
- Re-assessing the instructional model for Year 7 students as they enter high school to allow for accelerated acquisition of basic skills, to enable more students to have a successful transition to the high school curriculum.

Q3 – There are several systemic, cultural and structural issues that provide barriers to implementation. A close proximity to the evidence base and the provision of clearly navigable pathways is needed.

The Fogarty Foundation supports the Federal Government approach via Gonski 2.0 in focusing on how school funding should be used and we welcome the opportunity to discuss in more depth any of the aspects of this review.

Main submission

The Fogarty Foundation is well placed to contribute to the review of achieving educational excellence in Australian schools. For 17 years, we have delivered our own programs and supported many others.

The Fogarty Foundation strongly agrees with the Federal Government approach to focus on how school funding should be used, rather than how much, as was the focus of the initial review (Gonski 2011) . McKinsey and Company research identified that between 1970 and 1994, most OECD countries doubled or tripled spending on education, with often little return on investment in terms of improved outcomes.

Q1. Educational success

Students need to be equipped with the skills that create the greatest capacity for employability, creating an agile, adaptive mindset and prepare them for life-long learning. This ‘whole of person’ approach remains at the forefront of what successful Australian students look like. Fogarty Foundation believe the seven general capabilities, as identified by ACARA (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority) continue to be relevant in identifying a range of capabilities encompassing knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that prepare students for the future. These general capabilities are:

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Information and communication technology (ICT) capability.
- Critical and creative thinking.
- Personal and social capability.
- Ethical understanding.
- Intercultural understanding.

Identified in 2010 and reviewed in 2011, these capabilities mirror the composition of capabilities regularly identified world-wide as a composite list. One omission from this list that supports the development of 21st century skills, however is enterprise skills.

An issue here is that schools and teachers need support in preparing our students for the future. The competencies are many and varied, meaning that teachers and schools may struggle to adequately provide the level of teaching required.

Recommendation:

1. The Fogarty Foundation believes that while this reflects generally held views within the education sector of general capabilities for students, input is missing from industry and employers. For example, the ACARA General Capabilities Advisory Group was comprised entirely of education experts, with no apparent input from employers. The VET sector was not represented, and higher education was only represented by faculties of education. Greater consultation with industry, who will be employing our graduates, is needed to better represent what skills are required and therefore, what good education outcomes are.
2. Specific, accessible support for teachers and schools in effectively providing current skills sets to students is required.

Q2. Improvements

McKinsey have identified that almost every country has undertaken some form of school system reform during the past two decades, but very few have succeeded in improving their systems significantly. Those that have, demonstrate several core elements.

While many aspects of Australian education is strong, there continue to be challenging trends. The nation's academic results, according to PISA, have been in steady decline in international rankings for science, maths and reading since 2000. Australia ranked a shocking 39th out of 41 countries in terms of quality education on the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report card in June.

Improved school quality and education success is a slow burn and schools, classrooms and systems should avoid jumping on the next shiny new initiative/intervention and look to embedding long-term, evidence-based practices that ensure sustained improvement. Countries that have made sustained improvement have taken at least six years to achieve sustained level of improvement (ie 5 years continued growth). The Fogarty Foundation recommendation is to resist the temptation to 'cherry pick' and consider the context in which these successes operate and follow a guiding principle. The McKinsey research identified 575 intervention across the 20 systems reviewed, demonstrating a one-size-fits-all recommendation is neither possible nor desirable.

From the Fogarty Foundation's seventeen years' experience in education, four significant areas have been identified as demonstrating some urgency to be addressed. They are:

- a. Taking a whole of school approach to improvement, based on evidence and with sustained support for schools and their leaders to develop effective teaching practices.
- b. Focus on disadvantaged communities to close the gap in educational outcomes
- c. Systematic acquisition of basic skill opportunities for school students as they fall behind and may fall further into situations of failing outcomes.
- d. Review of Initial Teacher Education to increase the status, quality, competence and fit for purpose of teachers in our schools. Here, the end-users (employers) should define and demand what is required of our teachers. For example, including basic literacy instruction for all primary and secondary teachers.

The review of teacher education is beyond the terms of reference of this review, so is included for noting.

- a. Whole of school approach, leader support and effective, consistent teaching practices

Good teaching is at the heart of improving educational success.

Evidence indicates that improved outcomes for schools and systems across the world is underpinned by the following principles: employing good teaching practices; having stable, long-term and committed leadership; and adopting a well developed school improvement program.

- Good teaching. This means getting the fundamentals right and focussing on what is core to education. This includes a focus on effective, early learning, thereby giving students the greatest chance of success, such as a whole of school commitment to a single instructional model that has evidence to support its success in the context of the school setting, to which it is applied. For example, there is considerable evidence to support the use of high impact instruction (Explicit Direct Instruction) in disadvantaged school communities in improving basic literacy and numeracy.

If students do not acquire skills in the early years, they fail to catch up, and this has devastating repercussions on their ability to learn, participate effectively in their community and get meaningful work. McKinsey research identifies that the students with the best outcomes receive teacher-directed instruction in most or all classes, together with inquiry-based teaching in some classes. What this evidence suggests, is that schools take a whole of organisation approach, rather than having different approaches in different classrooms. The ACER report (2013) states that individual programs rarely have a significant impact on learning, but instead, by schools adopting a guiding principle, clearly articulated in each class, the capacity to make considerable and sustained improvement is increased.

- Stable long-term and committed leadership. It is almost impossible to make continued effective change if the principal/leadership teams at schools is changing. While this is unpreventable in certain situations, education systems should develop conditions that support the extended tenure of principals within a school.
- A well-developed school improvement program. School improvement does not happen spontaneously. School leaders need to develop strong change management principles that will guide their progress. This should follow the general guidelines 1. Diagnosis – assess current levels of performance, 2. Explore alternative interventions and select the most appropriate intervention programs, 3. Adapt the intervention to the context and apply it. Taking a holistic, systematic approach is key, and thereby avoiding the temptation to jump on the band wagon of the latest fad. These interventions should be grounded in evidence and be clearly navigable, and may require guidance and support for school leaders to clearly identify what this looks like and the best approach to take.

Recommendation:

Schools leaders need support in developing a systemic approach to school outcomes. Schools need a realistic view of their current situation and support in identifying the most appropriate approach, or adopting an approach that may be beyond their scope. Effective stable school leadership should be encouraged, supported and rewarded.

b. Education in disadvantaged communities

Too many people are starting behind in their education, and staying behind and remaining disengaged. The gaps between low and high achieving students continue to widen, as do the gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students. The Mitchell Institute identify in Australia an ‘entrenched inequality of educational outcomes and opportunities.’ Inequity in our schools continues to drive performance down. The gap between advantaged and disadvantaged schools is not narrowing. We know this has a serious consequence in further widening the gap in adulthood in gaining meaningful employment for those who bear the burden of lower educational success.

The Fogarty Foundation welcomes the attention by government on improving outcomes for all students, including those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable. Understanding the specific needs of disadvantaged schools, both in metropolitan areas and remote communities, is key to improvement. A whole of school approach to improved outcomes, support for good teaching practices and instructional design, focusing on basic literacy and numeracy, is required.

“Overcoming student disengagement is complicated. What is taught and the way it is taught are crucial. But creating a good learning environment in the classroom is necessary too.” The Grattan Institute research goes on to suggest that “governments should direct more support to disadvantaged schools where student engagement is weakest.”

Recommendation:

Special consideration needs to be given to disadvantaged schools in dealing with the specific challenges they face. Support to identify best practice for their context, systems providing mentoring and support for school leaders in disadvantaged schools and incentive to invest extended period of time as the leader.

c. Systematic accelerated acquisition of basic skills – early high school

The standard secondary model is not well matched to the needs of many of our students, particularly those in disadvantaged and remote areas. In many of these secondary schools there is:

- A lack of teaching expertise in the skills that the majority of students need to learn i.e. the skills that students develop between Years 3 and 6 that enable them to become confident in reading, writing and maths
- Insufficient time for teachers to teach these skills (under standard timetabling approaches)
- A lack of students making sufficient progress to access the upper secondary subjects that would be enable them to get an ATAR or valuable vocational qualification (eg Cert III)
- General disruption from disengaged students

There is an imperative to intervene. Whilst working to build primary school student skill capability, our bottom end students will continue to enter highly residualised low SES schools, where they will continue to attend school for six years and make insufficient progress in their learning. Many secondary schools feel this mismatch but lack the confidence to transition their school and staff to a different model. The evidence base in Australia about successful models that accelerate student growth in Years 7-9 is more limited than that for primary schools. Only one low SES secondary school in WA is able to achieve state average results for their students – Manjimup SHS.

As WA has transitioned Year 7 students to high school more recently than most states (in 2015), the impact of inadequate literacy and numeracy standards have been highlighted.

In WA, data from 2015 indicates that 66% of all year 7 students at schools with an ICSEA of 1000 or less, have a reading age of year 5 or below. 35% have a reading age

equivalent of year 3. Writing and numeracy data tells a similar story (52% year 7 students writing at year 5 or below, and 68% with numeracy levels of year 5 or below).

This means that between 50 and 70% of students entering high school do not have the basic reading, writing and numeracy skills to tackle high school curriculum.

Year 9 NAPLAN results confirm there is little progression in competency. Year 9 data indicates that for schools with an ICSEA of less than 1000 in WA, 42% of students are still reading at a year 5 level or below. These results are consistent across a number of states in Australia including WA, NSW and Queensland.

Twice as many students in low SES schools are two or more years behind, compared with higher SES schools. 80-90% of students in remote schools are two or more years behind the national average by the time they reach Year 7. The reasons are many, including high student mobility (one in 20 students across the country are classified as highly mobile, and disadvantaged groups are much more likely to experience high mobility) ; experience of poor, ineffective and inconsistent teaching practices; limited opportunity for supported focused tuition; and a lack of capacity by parents and community to support learning.

This results in students becoming disengaged, displaying poor behaviour, getting further behind during the high school years and a high school model that provides limited opportunity or capacity to catch up on fundamental basic skills. While time and effort is, rightly, being poured into helping older high school students to get into further education, training and meaningful work, this is often redundant as they just don't have the basic skills to meet these expectations.

The Fogarty Foundation recommends some systematic opportunity for the accelerated acquisition of basic skills (literacy and numeracy) at Year 7 level to create a better fit for student learning at high school level. We are currently trialling, in partnership with instructional experts, a high impact instruction model with several low SES high schools in metropolitan Perth. The key objectives are to improve student engagement, support a more orderly learning environment within the classroom, create better alignment of instruction to the (generally low) literacy levels of students and drive faster progress in learning to close the gap to their state level peers.

Early feedback from the schools involved in the trial is very positive – across students, teachers and leaders. Key highlights to date include:

- Increased self-confidence and greater self-efficacy (of both students and teachers)
- Increased student engagement and accountability to their learning
- Less disruptive student behaviours and a calmer learning environment

- Improved learning and quicker progress for the cohorts overall
- Better retention of learning, with more learning maintained between lessons and across terms

While it is too early in the pilot program to claim this is the panacea for the problems of low literacy and numeracy rates in low SES schools, the evidence does suggest that providing systematic support in a targeted, timely manner can have significant impact on performance outcomes. All classes reported an increase in results. One class reported a 20% increase in the median mark after just 5 weeks of the high impact instruction.

What does this look like in schools? High schools are able to identify at risk students from existing data. High schools may be required to adopt a high impact instructional model across all teaching areas in the first instance, until suitable levels are achieved. This requires a re-think of what early high school instruction looks like and the provision of support for these teachers in developing the skills to teach basic literacy and numeracy. Currently, secondary teachers tend to be subject matter experts, rather than have the instructional knowledge to teach basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Recommendation:

Re-assessing the instructional model for Year 7 students as they enter high school to promote the accelerated acquisition of basic skills, enabling more students to have a successful transition to the high school curriculum.

Q3. Barriers

The Fogarty Foundation experiences have identified the following as potential barriers for implementing some of these improvements:

- Resistance to change – strongly held traditional views by stakeholders, often based on sentiment but lacking evidence.

Recommendation: Clear provision of evidence-based learnings to debunk falsely held views and an opportunity for schools to investigate these options in a meaningful, supported way.

- Divided public debate, thereby creating uncertainty about the best course of action.

Recommendation: A clear focus on what works and what does not.

- Lack of commitment and experience in a consistent ethos

Recommendation: Targeted support for school leaders in creating a model of leadership and instruction that is the best fit for their context

- Structural inertia – change in thinking about high school model

Recommendation: A change in initial teacher education to ensure the teaching of literacy is mandatory across all year levels and a clearer understanding of the competency levels of students as they enter high school.

- Teacher unions – Their actions are centred on the welfare of teachers and while the Foundation does not belittle the importance of this, the focus on teacher well-being may be the catalyst for initial resistance to the implementation of effective initiatives that support student outcomes.
- Recommendation: Ensure all initiatives are clearly resourced and that communication with school leaders, teachers and union representatives are clearly articulated and understood.
- Disconnect between teaching universities and what skills are needed by graduates

Recommendation: Greater consultation between teacher education providers and schools (the employers) to inform pre-service teacher training. Increase time spent in the classroom by pre-service teachers to gain usable insights into the world of teaching.

- The National curriculum is full and content heavy allowing little scope for broader student development. Those students choosing an ATAR pathway are even more constrained by the entry requirements demanded by universities, with little opportunities for the development of individualised skills and attributes.

Recommendation: Continue to modify the pathways to university entry, recognising alternative capabilities.