



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

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Submitting as a: Academic person or institution  
State: Vic.

### Summary

1. Australia cannot achieve excellence if we do not know what it is. The terms 'excellence' and 'success' are also different and these can be measured in many ways.
2. A strong philosophical basis is required. On which overriding philosophy do we base our educational values?
3. There has been a focus on data collection such as NAPLAN resulting in stress and anxiety and competition between students and schools.
4. The NAPLAN tests should be scaled back and the results not given to parents nor published. As an alternative, tests in the primary and secondary years should be used to indicate whether additional support teachers are required to help students including gifted and talented students.
5. To improve the quality of learning and teaching, more teacher aids and specialists for those who require extra assistance should be employed in schools.
6. Teaching as a profession is not highly regarded compared to other professions and this has impacted the attitude towards the profession and the calibre of students entering the profession.
7. Universities are under financial pressure to accept as many students as possible. This impacts the standard and quality of students. We cannot be a clever country if we do not focus on attracting clever pre-service teachers.
8. There is an excess of teachers. The courses should be capped and universities only select the top pre-service teachers.
9. Personal skills are an important factor to be a teacher. Each pre-service teacher needs to be interviewed to determine their suitability for the profession.

10. Online courses are increasing in popularity. Teaching is primarily a face-to-face profession and students who cannot attend face-to-face classes should spend more time in schools during their training in order to better prepare them for the profession – ideally in the first semester of university.

### Main submission

My name is Dr Sharon Lierse and I am a lecturer in Education at Charles Darwin University (Melbourne campus). Prior to this I lectured at universities, was the manager of Professional Learning at the Australian Council for Educational Research and have taught in the government, private and independent school sectors for over 20 years.

My main research area is Excellence in Education in which I am conducting a global systemic comparison of excellence in the education sector. My focus is understanding the concepts of excellence, success, failure and how they impact learning and teaching. The countries selected so far have been based on the global PISA results. To date I have investigated outstanding university lecturers in Australia and compared Finland and South Korea.

In the past year, I have visited Finland twice in which the focus has I am investigating the importance of empathy and altruism in education. Last month I have just completed a project on Educational Excellence comparing South Korea and Australia. This grant was through the Australia-Korea Foundation. The research has shown that Finland and South Korea are different societies with their own languages and cultures. However, they are more similar in their educational practices compared to Australia than first perceived.

This review is of utmost importance and is imperative that the Commonwealth of Australia follows this through. Australia has the potential to be the best country in the world for educational excellence, but we have focussed on the wrong themes and issues.

#### 1. Issues

1. Australia cannot achieve excellence as we do not know what it is. The terms 'excellence' and 'success' are also different and these can be measured in many ways.
2. A strong philosophical basis is required. On which overriding philosophy do we base our educational values?
3. There has been a focus on data collection. This has been exemplified in the NAPLAN tests which originally were for years, 3, 5, 7, and 9. There is now a proposal to extend this to year 1. The issue with how these tests have been manifested has resulted in stress and anxiety amongst students, and

competition between schools. Websites such as [www.myschool.edu.au](http://www.myschool.edu.au) provides transparency but as a consequence ranks schools against each other.

4. There has also been a focus on 'school improvement' and 'upwardly trending schools'. The focus here is on the problem and again measuring improvement. At what point do these strategies and programs reach their end point?
5. Professor John Hattie's Visible Learning has been useful in identifying 195 factors related to learning outcomes. Originally 138 factors, these are again useful in identifying the problem and improving these. Also, it has generated much data which is useful for research purposes.

#### School System

- (a) Australian used to be known as a land of opportunity and students would attend their closest government school. There has also been the choice of private, independent and alternative schools for those who had the resources. Now many government schools have also become selective in their specialisations offered to students which impacts the culture of the school and the students. All students should be provided with the potential for excellent learning regardless of geographic location and socio-economic background.
- (b) The NAPLAN tests should be scaled back and the results not given to parents nor published. Research has shown that more testing and competition does not necessarily result in higher grades. As an alternative, tests in the primary and secondary years should be used to indicate whether additional support teachers are required to help students. This can be also for gifted and talented students who require extension work.
- (c) To improve the quality of learning and teaching, more teacher aids and specialists for those who require extra assistance should be employed in schools. These should be concentrated in the foundation and primary years.

#### University Teacher Training

As a university lecturer who works primarily online for students in regional and remote areas, I have taught students from a wide range of backgrounds from around Australia. Many pre-service teachers would not otherwise be trained if they did not have this opportunity. There are issues which require attention to improve the quality of teaching.

- (a) Teaching as a profession is not highly regarded compared to other professions and this has impacted the attitude towards the profession and the calibre of students entering the profession.

- (b) Universities are under financial pressure to accept as many students as possible. This impacts the standard and quality of students. We cannot be a clever country if we do not focus on attracting clever pre-service teachers.
- (c) There are an excess of teachers. The courses should be capped and universities only select the top pre-service teachers.
- (d) Personal skills are an important factor to be a teacher. Each pre-service teacher needs to be interviewed to determine their suitability for the profession.
- (e) Online courses have their place in higher education and these seem to be increasing in popularity. Some teaching units can be taught online effectively. Teaching is primarily a face-to-face profession and students who cannot attend face-to-face classes should spend more time in schools during their training in order to better prepare them for the profession – ideally in the first semester of university. Currently, pre-service teachers complete up to 80 days in schools.

#### Selected references

Lierse, S. (2017) “Excellence in Higher Education: Repositioning and restructuring higher

education for lifelong learners”. Presented 20 October at Lifelong Learning for All: Designing sustainable learning society at Seoul National University, South Korea.

Lierse, S. (2017) “Excellence in Teaching and Learning: fostering altruism, empathy and equity through music.” Presented 7 April at the Sibelius Academy, Helsinki.

Lierse, S. (2016). “Outstanding university lecturers: ambitious altruists or mavericks of

the academy?” *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 41(12) 1-12.

What should educational success for Australian students and schools look like?

- What capabilities, skills and knowledge should students learn at school to prepare them for the future?

All students should have access to all subject areas including the five arts, languages and sports. There has been a focus on literacy, numeracy and science which is the focus in NAPLAN testing, but is narrowing their range of skills. Digital learning is important in the twenty-first century but is a tool for learning.

How should school quality and educational success be measured?

High quality teachers can measure the ‘success’ of students. ‘Schools’ should not be measured or compared – rather the need of the students. There can be points where

students are measured such as year 1, 5 and 9 but primarily to ensure they are on track or need additional help.

What can we do to improve and how can we support ongoing improvement over time?

Please refer to above.

- (a) Additional teachers in schools.
- (b) Improve the quality of pre-service teachers.

Are there barriers to implementing these improvements?

- If yes, what are they and how could these be overcome?

Yes

- (a) Too much 'data' collection and school 'improvement' rather than focussing on 'excellence'
- (b) Higher quality pre-service teachers
- (c) Put money into additional teachers into schools to help students who require assistance.