SUBMISSION- EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA 27/09/16

I read with great interest your article regarding how Education standards have dropped in Australia and indeed across the wider Western world in spite of a substantial increase in funding.
Could I suggest that the answer and the problem lies in the age of technology where everything is available 24/7 and both adults and students have not really adjusted as to the best way to use this avalanche of constantly changing high tech information.
This is the first generation where the students know more about computers and technology than most of the teachers.
The problem however is that the majority of students only use technology for games or other distracting pastimes including social media but very little time is spent on education.
On the other hand the teachers are in many cases teaching the same way that they were taught 30 years ago and are finding it difficult to keep up. The average age for a teacher in Australia is between 45-55.
Unless we can find a way to bridge this gap then we will continue to fall behind. I have been trialling some ideas and initiatives with a fair degree of success and I thought I would share them with you with my top ten recommendations.
Very importantly there is both short term and long term goals if we are truly sincere about improving Education in Australia.

1- PRIMARY SCHOOL

We need to find at risk students from Kindergarten and split them into groups of four and if students are still having trouble with English and Maths than we need to have some serious one on one learning.
What we invest in these early years will reap tremendous results in later years.
Students in Primary schools are also not taught to be creative. A lot of the activities that they do involve matching or select the right word or short answer questions.
One of the major concerns in Primary School is how much time is wasted teaching students to give one word answers, or circle the correct answer or match the correct word as well as working through a work book for each subject. They do not learn to write essays till High school and cannot even answer questions in paragraph form. This leaves them ill prepared for entry into High School and so much time is spent in High School trying to teach them these basic skills.

The problem is so severe that students can get under the radar and give the impression they can read and write and answer questions when all they have been able to accomplish is master the most basic reading, writing and maths skills and we breed a generation of students who need to put in such little effort to complete Primary School and they receive a real shock when they get to High School.

The comment I always hear from my Year 7's is this work is so hard, or we have never done so much work before in Primary School or we have never written essays before. The students also have immense difficulty studying for exams or doing homework as in many cases they have never had to study or do work at home before, and they don't even know how to study. Students must learn essay writing skills from as early as Grade 5 and be encouraged to be creative and do much more in Primary School than just circle or underline or match answers.

2- PARENTS

The biggest help to students especially in the early years is Parents. Unfortunately prior to going to school the child has one on one learning by 2 parents, but when parents send their kids to school they think that that is the end of their teaching their child and now that job will go to the teacher. Unfortunately little real teaching is happening in the early years as the teacher spends a lot of time basically babysitting 25 students around 6 years old. Parents need to remain involved especially in the early years where they can have the most impact and teachers need as much help as possible in those early years so that they can focus on teaching rather than just behaviour management.

3- BEHAVIOUR

Many behaviour issues can be traced to a lack of understanding by the students. If they don't understand what is being taught, especially if they have poor English skills then the downward spiral begins with the student trying to cover up their lack of understanding by poor behaviour which progressively gets worse over the years.

4- STUDENT

The biggest impact on student learning is the student themselves. If the parents and teachers can't motivate and instil in the student the desire to succeed and do better, than you are fighting a losing battle.

5- HOMEWORK/AFTER HOURS

One of the greatest impacts on student learning is if the student can spend time each night reinforcing what they have learnt and preparing for the next day's lesson. Imagine if the parents and teachers can instil this habit in students from a very young age and spend about 1 hour a day going through the day's work and preparing for the next day. In my opinion this has had the biggest effect on student learning.

6- TECHNOLOGY

As alluded to earlier one of the biggest problems is the disconnect between the student's computer competence, and their inability to use it for education. It is important to use innovative techniques to make learning fun and allow student's to use their computer skills for educational purposes. Some of the techniques include the use of online quizzes, flashcards, slide shares, power points and interactive activities. Some of my student's work is truly amazing and showcases their ability to transfer their skills in technology to the class room for Education purposes.

Another important tool is to give student access to eBooks at home and in that way they can leave their textbooks at school.

7- ORGANIZATION/ COMMUNICATION

By using the above techniques such as flashcards, quizzes, and mind maps, the students are than encouraged to organise the units together into a chapter review so that when it comes to revision they have a system in place. The idea is to encourage students to use their time wisely and to find a good study system that works. The students even collaborate together by sharing each other's work such as flashcards and quizzes online thus again making learning interesting and fun and using technology for their benefit.

My students are in communication with me and send me copies of their work online and I constantly give them feedback and encouragement. Their work is stored online and can be accessed by their class mates for review and revision.

8- EDUCATIONAL SUPPLIERS

It is important to work with the suppliers of textbooks to enhance student learning through the use of online techniques which are already available and include techniques such as lightbox which enable student's to do work online such as quizzes which are automatically marked and allows teachers to keep track of student's progress against the rest of the class and indeed against the rest of the same year group.

9- TEACHERS

Another big problem discussed earlier is the inability of teachers to grasp technology and in many cases teachers are teaching the same way they were taught 30 years ago and the problem is endemic. Universities are in many ways just as guilty and spend too much time on theory and are not embracing the technology of today to teach the teachers to be up to date. Teachers need to be taught the same way that at risk students should be taught from Grade 1. They need to be taught how to use technology and the latest programs and innovative ideas in small groups and those still at risk need to be taken aside and given one on one tuition. This will go a long way in investing in the future of the students by bringing teachers on a par with their students.

10- PRIMARY SCHOOL- HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION

This is a very important area that has been neglected. Many students are not equipped for the transition between Primary school to High school with many falling behind and never catching up. Students in Primary school and even up to grade 7 have a quality that is lacking in High school students and that is enthusiasm. We need to introduce programs from as early as grade 5 and possibly even Grade 4 that are similar to High school, for instance flashcards. In this way when they get to High school they can be doing something that they are already familiar with and help smooth the transition. In Grade 6 the classes can be structured similar to High school so that the students
can familiarize themselves with the High school system and possibly the last semester of grade 6 they can be taught the same topics to be taught in first term High School.

CASE STUDY

Please find an example of some work sent to me by one of my lower ability Year 7 boys, who had been in my class for just two days as his previous teacher could not handle him due to behaviour problems.
I told him that if he was to remain in my class he would have to do what everyone else was doing and this is an example of his work. I also insist that wherever possible students include diagrams as it helps reinforce concepts, much like word association, and helps make learning easier.
This is what I am always doing in my class room during school hours and follow up with feedback to students on a daily basis wherever possible.

(example omitted due to privacy)

The methods have proved so successful that my better ability students are averaging marks of 91 and my lower ability students are averaging marks above 70. Again the reason the methods work is that students are getting into the habit

of doing extra work after school and they find it enjoyable using technology but in this case to improve their education.

Again I appreciate the efforts of all involved in the Production Commission in trying to improve Education in Australia.
I welcome feedback/comments about the methods and suggestions that I have outlined and I truly believe that with proper use, technology is the great equalizer and has the potential to dramatically improve Education in Australia.

Regards,
Oussama Magar
Secondary Teacher, Perth Western Australia

The three-tier model will turn children into proficient readers

- BY:KEVIN WHELDALL
- From:The Australian
- December 22, 2012 12:00AM

IF all children are to learn to read to a good level of proficiency in their first few years of schooling, we need a clear plan to ensure that no child falls through the net.

Such a plan must be both effective and cost-effective. It has become increasingly accepted in recent years that a three-tier, phased model of reading instruction, known as Response to Intervention (RtI), is the best means of achieving this.

The RtI model is predicated upon a first tier of exemplary initial instruction in reading for all students during their first year of schooling (kindergarten in NSW). This first tier of instruction should essentially comprise the best scientific evidence-based instruction.

To the layman this sounds obvious, but in many Australian schools a less effective implicit model of reading instruction has held sway for the past few decades. Much of this approach is highly desirable as a bedrock upon which to build, and it may even be enough for a minority of children, but most will need direct, explicit and systematic instruction in the five pillars of teaching reading: phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

What is often lacking in initial reading instruction, in particular, is effective, specific instruction in what is known as synthetic phonics; how to relate letters to sounds and to blend letter sounds into words.

Even when afforded such exemplary instruction, there will always be some children who take longer than others to catch on. It is important to identify these low-progress readers as early as possible so that they do not fall too far behind their peers as their difficulties compound.

Children who do not learn to read in the first few years of schooling are typically destined to a school career of educational failure, because reading underpins almost all subsequent learning. A safe strategy is to target students who fall into the bottom 25 per cent of the population for remedial reading intervention, as soon as their difficulties become apparent. Students' progress should be checked regularly, in order to provide intervention for those who need it from the beginning of Year 1, at the very latest.

The RtI model recommends that struggling readers, the low-progress readers who comprise the bottom 25 per cent, should be offered more intensive Tier-2 intervention in small groups of three to four students. Again the instruction provided to these students should be based on what the

scientific research evidence has shown to be most effective: essentially the same five big ideas of reading instruction but more intensive and more individualised.

In small groups, teachers are able to be more responsive to the idiosyncratic needs of the students with whom they are working. Small group instruction can be just as effective as one-to-one instruction for children without severe reading difficulties.

Even with a solid Tier-2 small-group reading program in place, there will still be a very small number of students who "fail to thrive", perhaps about 3-5 per cent of all Year 1 students. These are the students for whom we should reserve Tier 3 one-to-one intensive reading instruction, preferably with a specialist reading teacher with a sound background in special education. The same five big ideas are still critical.

What is different, of course, is the intensity of instruction. Having successfully taught the vast majority of Year 1 students the basics of learning to read by Tier 1 and, where necessary, Tier 2 small-group teaching, it is a far more manageable proposition to provide these few remaining students with the individual reading support that they will need, for as long as they need it.

With this three-tier model in place, predicated upon scientific evidence-based reading instruction, almost all, if not all, children will become proficient readers. Of course, the RtI model does not stop at the end of Year 1; it is important to monitor reading progress closely for all students, especially for the first three years of schooling. But by employing these procedures rigorously and teaching scientifically, it is not too much to expect very nearly all of our children to learn to read.

*Kevin Wheldall is chairman of MultiLit Pty Ltd and director of the MultiLit Research Unit.*http://kevinwheldall.blogspot.com.au

Maths every day compulsory for kindy kids

DAILY maths lessons will be compulsory in the first three years of school under measures to improve numeracy skills being introduced by the NSW government. As a condition of funding under the state's literacy and numeracy action plan, schools will be required to schedule a block of time every day for maths for students in Kindergarten to Year 2.

The move is similar to the literacy hour introduced in English schools in the late 1990s, which resulted in a significant improvement in students' reading skills.

The state government is providing $261 million over five years under its literacy and numeracy action plan for schools with a high proportion of students failing to meet minimum standards, which will be required to schedule daily numeracy lessons for students in Kindergarten to Year 2.

NSW Education Minister Adrian Piccoli wrote to the government, Catholic and independent school sectors this month setting out the conditions for the extra funding.

The Education Department will also be required to sign

the funding agreement that includes conditions on evaluation and accountability.

Mr Piccoli told The Weekend Australian the recommendation came from the ministerial advisory group on literacy and numeracy, headed by former department chief Ken Boston.

"His group identified that there's not specific training on numeracy; there's time set aside in primary school for literacy but not numeracy," he said.

Mr Piccoli said the intense focus on literacy in recent years had raised concerns that numeracy was being overlooked when it was equally important.

While the government is not specifying the amount of time that should be dedicated in the daily maths sessions, schools will be required to detail the period of time they are allocating in implementation plans due in February.

The letter to the school systems also requires schools to develop and trial a program training volunteers to deliver literacy and numeracy programs in school, and to trial innovative ways of lifting literacy and numeracy levels.

School systems will be required to provide annual progress reports detailing the schools participating in the action plan and the funding they receive, the number of students involved and evidence that the activities are contributing to improvements in children's literacy and numeracy skills.

Mr Piccoli said evaluation of the programs implemented in schools was a key part of the action plan to build an evidence base of the approaches that were the most effective.

"One thing that has shocked me as Education Minister is that we spend a lot of money on things and we don't know what's effective," Mr Piccoli said.

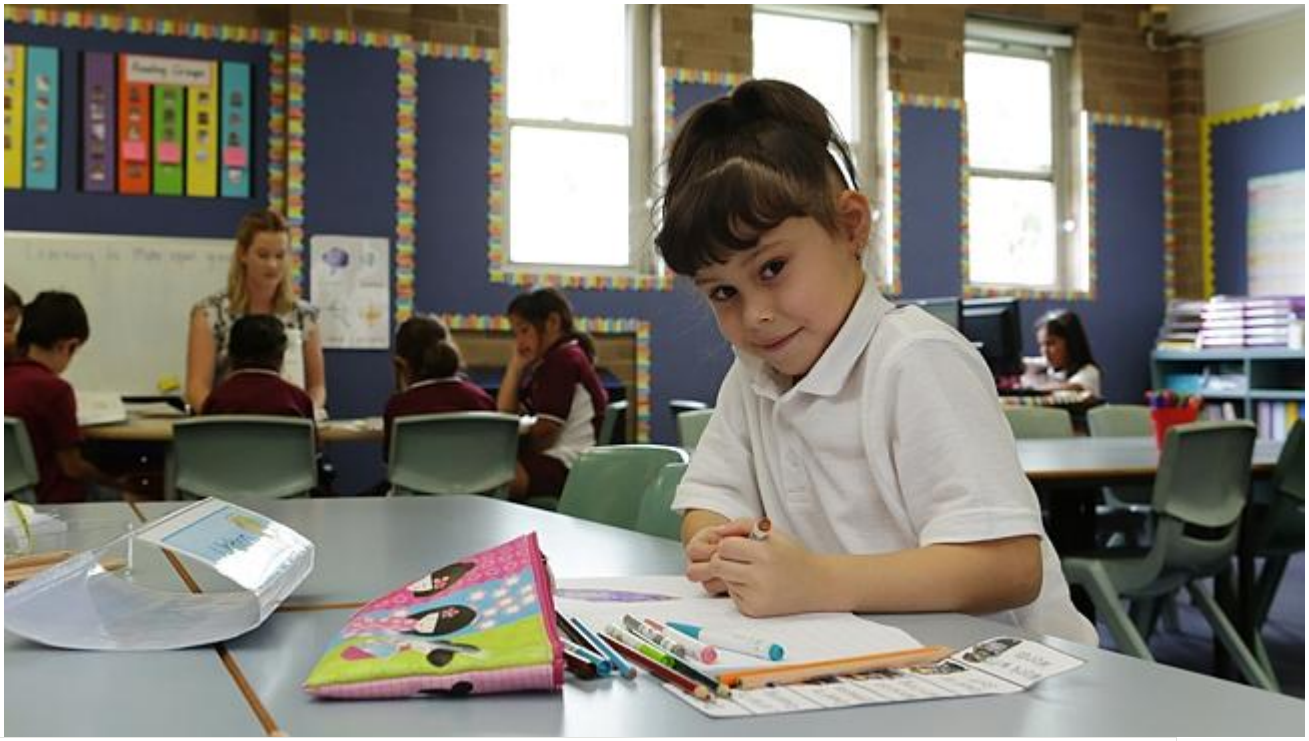
"We spend a lot of money on various programs in schools but we don't even know if they work, therefore we don't stop doing things that are ineffective."

The ministerial advisory group provides ongoing advice about literacy and numeracy teaching in schools, including setting annual priorities, and Mr Piccoli said he hoped the group would also advise which programs were most effective based on the evaluations undertaken.

"If an evaluation shows outcomes haven't changed with the additional investment and different practices, then we should change it. The mistake we have made in the past is not changing: we stick to things that don't work as well as they should, and we don't change them. What's the point of continuing if it isn't working?"

Struggling schools chalk up win in standards

- THE AUSTRALIAN
- MARCH 07, 2015 12:00AM



Student Katja Ashton works at Shalvey Primary School in Sydney's west as teacher Laura Hassall helps her classmates in the background. Picture: Britta Campion *Source:* News Limited

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SCHOOLS that have struggled for decades to improve their students' literacy and numeracy skills are recording significant advances in NSW, under a strategy focusing on the early years of school that tracks students' progress in meeting expected standards.

An independent evaluation of the NSW government's $260 million, five-year action plan on literacy and numeracy being implemented in 400 of the state's most challenging schools notes "substantial headway" in lifting results in the first three years of school. The report, by Erebus International, says the biggest gains in student learning are among kindergarten (prep) students in government schools, with 64 per cent of kindergarten and 57 per cent of Year

1 students meeting the reading standard at the end of last year, compared with 44 per cent in 2012.

In numeracy, the improvement has been even stronger, with the proportion of students meeting the standard rising 28 percentage points in kindergarten, 22 points in Year 1 and 21 points in Year 2. But the report finds the biggest change is in school culture; changing the teaching practices in classrooms and "the ways that teachers and principals think, plan and behave".

"The action plan is much more than simply the implementation of new literacy or numeracy programs; it is, in most schools, a catalyst for cultural change," the report says.

"The action plan is not a quick solution intended to resolve issues that previous school reform initiatives have also canvassed.

"The real potential of the action plan is in its capacity to build a new way of working in the targeted schools, not simply correcting the deficiencies in the management and teaching practices of individuals in the schools."

LIST: Most improved schools

The action plan is based on research evidence of the most effective ways to improve teaching and student learning, with teachers tailoring their approach to teach children at their individual levels of understanding using five-weekly assessments to diagnose and track student progress.

A continuum of learning in literacy and numeracy for K-2 students sets out for the first time stages of learning for the youngest students for each year, with the aim of ensuring children do not fall too far behind. It is transforming "student-centred learning" — which has become the focus of much modern education — into "student-centred teaching".

Shalvey Primary School near Mount Druitt in Sydney's western suburbs is one of the 400 schools. Principal Tanya Rose said the school had been trying, unsuccessfully, for many years to improve learning outcomes. "In years gone by, I've seen a lot of kids go into Year 3 still learning to read and those numbers have been reduced. Now we have kids ready to read to learn," she said.

"At the end of last year, we had 60 per cent on target, and it's quite a high target."

Ms Rose attributed the success to a more individualised teaching approach, with students taught in small groups and teachers intervening early with

struggling students. Student progress is tracked on a “data wall”, which features every child’s face, and students even track their own progress, moving rockets or balloons on a vertical line as they pass each stage. The other main factor is the in-school professional development provided by Lydia Berger, so that teachers are given the skills and strategies to suit their children’s immediate needs, rather than the previous method of heading off to a day-long seminar.

“We have this sense of urgency. A few years ago, kids would come into kindergarten and we’d give them a term to settle in and it was a bit slower paced,” she said. “While we still recognise they’re settling into school, there’s more a sense of urgency to get things started.”

NSW Education Minister Adrian Piccoli said the early evidence from the action plan, which started in 2012, was “quite startling. In the four years I have been minister, in terms of changing results and changing schools, this is the thing I’m most proud of. What I like about it is every student gets the benefit of the skills of the best teachers in the school, as opposed to the luck of the draw,” he said.