Australian Government
Productivity Commission

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

INQUIRY INTO THE NATIONAL EDUCATION EVIDENCE BASE

MR J. COPPEL, Presiding Commissioner
MS J. ABRAMSON, Commissioner

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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INDEX

MR COPPEL: Welcome to the public hearings of the Productivity Commission Inquiry into the National Education Evidence Base. My name is Jonathan Coppel and I'm the presiding commissioner on this inquiry. My fellow commissioner is Julie Abramson.

Just by way of background, the inquiry started with the terms of reference from the Australian government in March this year, who asked us to investigate the further development of a national education evidence base. The task is to consider the case for and specific nature of a national education evidence base for use in forming policy development and improving education outcomes in early childhood and school education.

We released an issues paper in early April and we've talked to a range of stakeholders with an interest in the issues. We then released a draft report in September that included our draft recommendations, draft findings and some information requests. We also held a roundtable last week to discuss governance and institutional arrangements to drive improvement in the creation and application of evidence and we have received over 130 submissions in total in response to our issues paper and draft paper. We are grateful to the organisations and individuals that have taken time to prepare submissions and to appear at these hearings.

The purpose of this round of hearings is to facilitate public scrutiny of the commission's work and to get comment and feedback on the draft report. Following this hearing in Melbourne, hearings will also be held in Sydney this coming Thursday. We will then be working towards completing the final report to government in December, having considered all the evidence presented at the hearings and in submissions as well as other informal discussions. Participants and those who have registered their interest in the inquiry will automatically be advised of the final report released by government which may be up to 25 parliamentary sitting days after completion, a requirement of the PC Act.

In terms of the proceedings today, we do like to conduct the hearings in a reasonably informal manner but I do remind participants that a full transcript is being taken and for this reason, comments from the floor cannot be taken. But at the end of the proceedings for the day, I will provide an opportunity for any persons wishing to do so to make a brief presentation. Participants are not required to take an oath but should be truthful in their remarks. Participants are also welcome to comment on the issues raised in other submissions. The transcript will be made available to participants and will be available from the commission's web site following the hearings. This usually takes about a week. Submissions are also available on the web site.

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and safety legislation, you are advised that in the unlikely event of an emergency requiring the evacuation of this building, you should follow the green exit signs to the nearest stairwell. Lifts are not to be used and please follow the instructions of floor wardens at all times. If you believe you would be unable to walk down the stairs, it is important you advise wardens who will make alternative arrangements for you. Unless otherwise advised, the assembly point for the commission in Melbourne is at Enterprize Park, situated at the end of William Street, on the bank of the Yarra River, in that general direction.

Participants are invited to make some brief opening remarks. Keeping the opening remarks brief will allow us the opportunity to discuss matters and participants' points raised in submissions in greater detail. I would now like to welcome Stacey Fox and Kate Torii from the Mitchell Institute to the table and when you're comfortable, if you could, for the transcript, give your name and who you represent. Thank you.

DR FOX (MI): My name is Dr Stacey Fox. I'm a policy fellow at the Mitchell Institute.

MS TORII (MI): And I'm Kate Torii, I'm a policy analyst at the Mitchell Institute.

DR FOX (MI): Thank you, commissioner. We really welcome the opportunity to speak at this hearing. The Mitchell Institute is an independent policy think tank based at Victoria University and we work from early childhood through to tertiary education. We're interested in an education system that fosters creative, confident, entrepreneurial and resilient learners. We have a special interest in the nearly quarter of kids who are missing out at each key milestone.

We submitted a lengthy submission to the issues paper and a briefer response to the draft report and in this fairly brief opening statement, I just wanted to reiterate a couple of our key points. We strongly support the development of a coherent and strategic approach to developing the education evidence base, something that's grounded in shared priorities for education in this country and that builds our data and evidence capacity over time. We also very much welcomed the commission's inclusion of early childhood alongside primary and secondary education. We believe that's a really critical element of the education evidence base, although we'd also suggest that tertiary education and future workforce participation are also critical.

Obviously participation in higher education and vocational education and workforce participation aren't the only outcomes that matter for education, but they are very important outcomes from education, even in a data linkage sense, connecting children's education data to their future trajectories, our ability to understand the impact that education is having or failing to have, for some kids, is

limited.

We also strongly welcome the focus on strengthening research capacity and commissioning additional research. We think that's a significant gap in Australia at the moment and we warmly welcome the commission's recommendations in that space, although we would also suggest that researchers are not the only ones who benefit from additional access to data. Schools, educators, early childhood centres, communities, policy advocacy organisations like our own, and researchers from other fields and disciplines also benefit from access to data. I think you can see that from the impact that the Australian Early Development Census has had on communities where access to that data has catalysed collaborations at a local level, has enabled organisations from different sectors to come together to address shared priorities, to boost school readiness. There is a whole lot of impact that we can have through better utilising and making available the data that we have.

While research studies are really critical to generate the kind of evidence that we need to make decisions about investment, point-in-time research studies alone aren't enough to continue understanding the impact that education is having and to monitor impact on the ground and in specific contexts. I think the international evidence base on preschool is a really good example of this. So international studies, Australian studies have shown beyond a shadow of a doubt that access to preschool and attendance at preschool has a significant and sustained impact on children's long-term outcomes. Off the basis of that, Australia has implemented universal access to preschool for four-year-olds, so the research study told us that this was a worthwhile investment and it was a priority for the nation and we acted accordingly.

What that international and even Australian evidence base can't tell us is whether the current delivery of preschool programs in Australia is meeting the objectives and achieving the outcomes that the research studies suggest that it could. We don't know at the moment if children are receiving an adequate dose of preschool, if one year of preschool is an adequate program duration, and if all children are receiving the level of quality that you need in order for preschool to have sustained developmental impacts. We know from that research base that low quality preschool has very few ongoing impacts for kids and we're not measuring the flow-on effects of that access to preschool education across the long term. We have that information available. Centres know which children are coming and how long they're coming for. We have some mechanisms to measure quality but in the absence of a sustained, coherent, systematic approach to maximising and linking our data, we're not in a good position to measure the impact of that policy decision in the real on-the-ground application in Australia right now.

The Deloitte report on the national collection which was the data collection established to measure the impact of this policy initiative said that we don't have

enough information to tell whether or not we're meeting the policy objectives. So we strongly support moves to strengthen the quality consistency and comprehensiveness of administrative data to more systematically link that data across sectors and really make best use of the data that we have.

We believe that information infrastructure is a core part of an effective system, that systems should have built into them the mechanisms for collecting evidence of their impact and that if we're able to do this, we're able to better target our investments into the future. If it turns out, as I strongly suspect it will, that one year of preschool isn't enough, particularly for some cohorts of children, we should be able to generate that evidence and then make informed decisions about where to invest. Say we implemented universal sustained nurse home visiting in this country, so for two years following the birth of the children, it might turn out that we have less need then for three of four-year-old preschool because those children would have received a top-notch home learning environment. At the moment, we don't have any way to kind of track the impact of those policy shifts. I strongly suspect that children, particularly from disadvantaged cohorts, need both sustained nurse home visiting and two years of preschool, but that's just my hunch. It would be really great if we had an information infrastructure that generated that information. We're happy for questions.

MR COPPEL: Thank you, Stacey. I thought I might begin asking you a few questions about data gaps because you've mentioned these in both of your submissions to the inquiry.

DR FOX (MI): Yes.

MR COPPEL: In the post-draft submission you picked up on the sort of measurement of non-cognitive skills and you made a reference to the middle years development index as one approach to fill that gap. Could you explain a little bit more about that notion and how it would fill the gap as it relates to non-cognitive skills.

DR FOX (MI): Absolutely. At the moment we have the AEDC which provides a reasonably comprehensive measure of children's social and emotional wellbeing, physical and cognitive skills in the first year of school. It's not perfect but it's a pretty strong measure and I know that we're the envy of some other countries for having a universal measure like that. After that, which is - I think children are about five and a half on average when that measure is taken, we don't have any nationally consistent wellbeing data or data of non-cognitive skills and we know that children's social and emotional wellbeing is, firstly, a critical predictor of their cognitive - and ability to kind of achieve and sort of academic performance - or at least should be a key outcome of education itself. We don't have any nationally consistent measures

of those.

Individual schools, some regions, some states and territories have measures but it's not a systematic or consistent source of data and because the data we have is so fragmented and isn't consistent, it really limits what we can do with it. So we think we absolutely need, you know, probably in the middle years as the first priority and they possibly in later years as well some form of measure of children's wellbeing and non-cognitive skills.

The evidence base for wellbeing measures is much stronger than some of the non-cognitive skills. We still haven't landed a comprehensive measure of non-cognitive skills that enables comparison between schools and until we have that it's possibly not the first cab off the rank for increasing measurement. We talk through a little bit of that in our submission to the issues paper. But we absolutely have some robust and ready to go measures of wellbeing and things like the Middle Years Development Index are being tested in Australia, have been used internationally. I would want to refer the question back to some methodological experts in making the decision about what is the most appropriate measure. I think we mentioned a couple of potential measures in our submission.

But if we had that information we would have the ability to track children's wellbeing over time, compare whether or not the children who are developmentally vulnerable in their first year of school continue to be developmentally vulnerable in the middle years. Some of Mitchell's earlier work has tried to trace some of those trajectories in a report called Educational Opportunity but that process of try to track children's trajectories from early childhood through to tertiary education required grappling with multiple datasets, we had to impute a whole heap of findings, there were really significant methodological challenges in that. If we had a consistent measure in the middle years that would significantly help us understand those trajectories.

MR COPPEL: Measuring non-cognitive skills is a lot harder than it is to measure the cognitive skills and in that context a lot of measures are being put forward and I wonder how practical it is to think that there would be a - does there need to be a single or a consistent measure to evaluate these forms of skills or skill achievement among our kids?

DR FOX (MI): The international evidence base is transforming really rapidly. There are a lot of top quality researchers around the world who are working on landing a robust, internally consistent, useful, practical measure of a range of non-cognitive skills. I don't think we have necessarily landed on kind robust validated measure yet. Our recommendation and our submission to the issues paper was that Australia stay abreast of this international research and start working out

models that might work in Australia and being involved in that exploratory research.

The work that we are doing at the moment with the Victorian Curriculum Authority is looking at how you foster and measure creativity and some of those other capabilities in the curriculum, so how teachers explicitly teach those skills and then how they assess them. That's a different notion to having a survey or a unique validated measure that's rolled out universally. I think probably at the moment that's the priority for Australia, the understanding how to teach and assess those capabilities in the curriculum in the classroom, but that we should stay across what's happening internationally and as those measures start to develop and become more robust.

I know there is work happening in the OECD to do with scenario-based assessments which are looking like they will be much more reliable than teacher-report or self-report measures. We should absolutely stay across those developments.

MR COPPEL: One of the other areas in your post-draft submission that relates to data quality refers to the early years learning where getting consistent measures is not possible in part because of the many forms of delivery of early year learning and also different jurisdictions. You bring that forward as an area where data quality could be improved. We have a draft recommendation that supports improvements in data quality, we conceptualise data quality as a form of potential gap in the evidence base.

DR FOX (MI): Yes.

MR COPPEL: Can you elaborate a bit more on how you would visualise that area as improving data quality and how you would priortise vis-a-vis other possible options to improve the data that we use.

DR FOX (MI): Yes, absolutely. We welcome that recommendation, although we did feel like it could be a stronger recommendation given the importance of high quality and consistent and useful administrative data. The potential value of having that data repository and a really robust source of data across a long term is hard to overstate. In the early childhood space in particular because of the way that the sector has evolved, as you say, we have different forms of delivery, we have for profit, not profit, non-government sectors all involved in the early childhood space.

The jurisdictions have, I know, been working very hard over the last few years to improve the quality and consistency of that data collection, particularly through the national collection and what sits in the information we need for the National Partnership Agreement on universal access. But there is still a really long way to go and some jurisdictions, I think, could benefit from some additional support to

improve the way that they collect their data.

In terms of understanding the impact that early childhood education has on long-term outcomes, some of the critical questions are around quality, so the quality of the learning environment. We know that poor quality, low quality, even moderate quality early childhood education doesn't yield sustained long-term impacts so it's a lost opportunity for Australia. So consistent measures of quality are really critical. The other things that determine the impact of early childhood education are access and we know that there are whole priority cohorts of kids who don't have access to early childhood education through either financial or non-financial barriers that they experience. Dose matters, so the number of hours per week that children are able to access a high quality program and the duration of that program. The evidence is suggesting that two years of preschool has more impact than one year of preschool.

So I would suggest if a key priority for understanding the impact of early childhood education, if that's our priority, the data then needs to support collection of dose, duration, quality and we need to then be measuring outcomes across all of the domains that matter in early childhood, so children's physical development, their social and emotional development, the peer and social skills and early indicators of cognitive outcomes, oral language, early numeracy. So in terms of where the gaps are at the moment, we don't collect dose, we don't collect duration. We have a measure of quality but services are assessed every five to six years and not using the world-leading, internationally accepted validated instruments that enable robust comparison between services, so measures like ECERS or CLASS. We don't embed those in our quality assessment process which is something that we could do that would generate internationally comparable quality data.

MR COPPEL: When you say "we don't collect dose and we don't collect quality", are these not things that are picked up in the administration of early learning provision and child care provision? You make another point about making maximum use of existing datasets, including through linkage to administrative datasets and other datasets. Are these not areas where they would also be amenable to making better use of what we have, even though it may not be perfect or on a consistent basis across jurisdictions?

DR FOX (MI): The trouble with the way we collect dose data at the moment is we tend to collect data on bookings, so how many hours a child is booked in for at an early childhood centre and we know that the way that the sectors is that parents don't pay by the hour, they book in a session. So they might book; the child might be there for five hours or six hours but they've booked and paid for a 15-hour block. At the moment we don't collect children's actual attendance data. I think particularly as technological developments occur and you have electronic sign-in and sign-out, it should be feasible to start moving towards the collection of children's actual

attendance hours rather than the number of hours they're booked in for. That would be a shift but it's a feasible shift.

Again in terms of the quality data, I think embedding a validated assessment tool in the quality assessment process would also be a small but feasible shift and having a unique identifier for children would enable us to measure their cumulative access and exposure to early childhood learning environments over time. Because we don't have individualised unit level record data that links dose quality and duration, we can't do that now, but that's sort of what I mean by the huge impact that we could have by systematically collecting high-quality administrative data and then using it effectively.   We then wouldn't need to commission a research study to tell us what those patterns of access look like because we'd have access to that data.

MR COPPEL: In the draft report, getting back again to the issue of linkage, we referred to the two longitudinal surveys, LSIC and LSAC, and suggested that there be a new cohort there. That would enable us to pick up a number of the major changes to early learning policy over the last few years.

DR FOX (MI):   Yes.

MR COPPEL: There are other potential longitudinal surveys, not necessarily at a national level, which could also be potentially leveraged. Do you know of other longitudinal surveys that could be useful to fill some of these evidence gaps that we haven't mentioned?

DR FOX (MI):   I would know who to direct you to.

MR COPPEL: Sure.

DR FOX (MI):   ARACY Longitudinal Studies Network have been working on mapping Australia's existing longitudinal studies and cohort studies. I don't know if ARACY are here this afternoon?

MR COPPEL: They will be here today, yes.

DR FOX (MI):   So they might be able to fill you in on that. Prof Craig Olsson is leading that work and would be the person to talk to. We would suggest though that having a backbone of administrative data can tell you things that cohort studies never can. So we would think that the ideal situation would be to have a robust information infrastructure that collected and generated and contained a whole lot of really useful, robust administrative data on the whole population and then those cohort studies, things like LSAC and LSIC and LSAY be used to understand much more complex and more comprehensive data, so that those two forms of data would

complement each other.

We also were really pleased to see that you were suggesting that there be a new birth cohort on a regular basis. We've been doing some work on preschool for three-year-olds and LSAC data was collected when kids were two and three, and then four and five, and again then before the national quality standard came into effect. So that kind of data source isn't that useful for that key question that we have about whether or not Australia should deliver a second year of preschool. There have been huge policy changes since those cohorts were born, so we actually need a new birth cohort on a really regular five-year basis in order for those collections to be really valuable and able to track the impact of policy changes.

MS ABRAMSON: Stacey, can I ask you about the unique student identifier because you did actually just raise that in your conversation. We had an information request on that. What do you think would be the important features of a unique student identifier?

DR FOX (MI): We suggested in our submissions that one of the biggest gaps in the education evidence base in Australia is the ability to track children across their educational journeys and to do things like understand the impact of early childhood education on participation in university, for example. You can do that now, kind of cobbling together the best you can and imputing a whole bunch of data which we did in our Educational Opportunity report, but a unique student identifier would make the tracking of student trajectories infinitely easier and generate considerably richer data. So ideally we would think that it should start from birth because of the impact of children's home learning environments and access to high quality maternal child health care, the impact of those things, things like playgroups on children's outcomes, but as a minimum, starting I think at age three, and then tracking through to tertiary education as well, both vocational education and higher education, particularly because that cohort of kids who are the ones who are missing out, around the quarter of the kids who are missing out at each milestone, have quite complex patterns of transition from school education into vocational and higher education that we don't really understand very comprehensively yet, so consistent across that whole educational span I think would be really critical.

MR COPPEL: One of the points that's been made in our consultations since the draft relating to a unique student identifier is that a number of jurisdictions do have a student identifier that is able to cut across different sectors and potentially expand it to the preschooling years and within a jurisdiction is where a large chunk of the benefits from such a device come into being. What in your view would be the benefits that you could see over and above a unique student identifier within a jurisdiction such as where we are now, in Victoria?

DR FOX (MI): I think one of the major priorities would be understanding the impact of different policy settings and different system arrangements on outcomes. So the idea of competitive federalism is that states work within a common framework but implement in ways that suit their own needs and that there are therefore opportunities to learn from what other jurisdictions are doing. So as long as it was possible to gain that national picture, to compare outcomes across jurisdictions in consistent ways and as long as researchers were able to work cross-jurisdictionally in relatively seamless ways, it may only be necessary to have jurisdiction-specific unique identifiers. But I'm not a specialist in that space and I would defer to the expertise of the people who work in the data linkage space who are the ones who would face those challenges.

MR COPPEL: One of the major gaps in a national education evidence base is more connected to the application or the use of the evidence and we have put forward in the draft report an institutional arrangement and governance arrangements that would, we think, help support a greater application of the evidence.

DR FOX (MI): Yes.

MR COPPEL: I'm interested if you have any comments on that part of the report but also if you have any views on how to bridge that gap between the creation of evidence and the application of that evidence.

DR FOX (MI): Yes, absolutely. We were really pleased to see that focus on dissemination, use and uptake of evidence in the commission's report. It was one of our big recommendations in the initial paper. It is the key issue facing an education evidence base. We already have rings of evidence but we experience significant difficulties in getting that evidence into practice. It's one of the reasons why an overarching data infrastructure is so important so that schools and educators can understand what the priority is their for cohort of kids and communities can understand what the priority is for their cohort of kids and, therefore, know what is the right intervention to be implementing and then also to understand how all of those individual interventions fit together and how they're packaged and sequenced and then if they are being implemented with fidelity on the ground, if there are interactions between different sorts of programs and different sorts of teaching approaches in practice on the ground and then if they have any impact that we need.

So in some ways the research study that proves, say, that preschool works is really just the start of the journey and it is really right at the beginning. There are a whole bunch of models out there for how you get research into practice more systematically. The Mitchell Institute is working on a project trying to integrate pre-service teacher training, ongoing teacher training and professional learning and partnerships between universities and schools and how you set those relationships up

to be systematic, sustained long-term, ongoing partnerships so that the practice knowledge of the schools feeds into the universities and the research expertise of the universities feed into the schools. Those relationships take a long time to build and schools and universities have competing institutional drivers that sometimes work against partnerships like that. But they are one of the key ways that you could build those relationships.

We are quite interested in the Chicago Consortium of School Research. Many years ago Chicago instituted a whole range of large scale education reforms and commissioned this body to set up an ongoing relationship with schools and data infrastructure. They collect really comprehensive, really rigorous data on the performance of schools and feed that data back to schools in ways that help them make decisions about what to prioritise. They collect longitudinal data and they have really strong institutional relationships between that centre and the schools. How you do that at a national level and in a federation I think would need some working through. But that type of model where the data expertise of researchers is harnessed, made available to schools and communities helps them make decisions about how to structure and deliver their programming and then measure the impact of those decisions in an iterative way.

MS ABRAMSON: Stacey, do you with that model, are there leaders in the school that have the responsibility for taking the thing further into the schools as opposed to just the link between the researchers and the school?

DR FOX (MI): That's a really good question and I don't know the answer to it. I can try and track it down. But I would suspect there would both need to be an individual who is responsible but also a collective commitment from the school. We know from my work in trying to embed parent engagement in learning in schools in a more systematic way - the research there shows that principal leadership is absolutely critical and where you don't have principal leadership and commitment it's really hard to make change. But that you also need to have teachers and educations who kind of share that vision, feel appropriately skilled, are supported in the institution and if you don't have all of those elements at play it's really hard to deliver change and that's just kind of one element of delivering more evidence-based schooling.

MS ABRAMSON: It seemed from what you said one of the benefits was it delivered research in real time. So in other words, "Here's the problem and here is a real time response."

DR FOX (MI): Absolutely. There was a school that I was speaking to recently that is really trying to understand the needs of their student cohort so that they can deliver the whole suite of interventions that the schools and family and community need to

support students to succeed but also do things like deliver social and emotional learning programs that are tailored to the needs of their students. They're a Victorian school so those kids do the school entrance health questionnaire which includes, I think, the strength and difficulties questionnaire, a really robust developmental measure, a whole range of really vital information. But the school themselves don't get access to that data for 18 months. Those kids are 18 months into the school journey by the time they get their data.

They don't get all of that data and they only get some questions and those questions change every year which makes it really hard for them to track change over time. This is a school that has an embedded early learning centre so they want to understand if the very high quality of the learning they're providing is filtering through to the school readiness of their kids. They don't have access to that data in real time which significantly impacts their ability to tailor the learning program to that specific cohort of kids that year. There is so much more we could do with data that we already have that we are already collecting to make use of it to maximise outcomes for the kids.

MR COPPEL: If I could just ask one final question and it gets back to this issue of the application of the evidence and we have set out a structure but within that structure there are various relationships and you mentioned the importance of the head teacher, the principal.

DR FOX (MI): Yes.

MR COPPEL: But there are also relationships between the researcher and the school or the principal, between the researcher and the student, the researcher and the parent of the student and I'm an interested because we have a number of submissions, including participants in the hearing that have put the emphasis on the relationship between the school and the parents. I think you trace that back to the evidence, you could say also between the parents and the researcher. Do you have any views on how that relationship could be harnessed in a way to improve the success of applying robust evidence?

DR FOX (MI): Do you mean the parent-teacher relationship or the researcher-parent or researcher-teacher or just the whole - - -

MR COPPEL: I have in mind both but I think it's particularly once the evidence is accepted as being robust and a scalable practice, then it becomes the relationship between the school and the parent and that is what I am interested in, your views on how you can build that relationship to support the application of the evidence.

DR FOX (MI): Yes. I have done a lot of work in this space and wrote the ACT

government frameworks for all parent engagement and all of the research in that space shows both that parents have a huge impact on their children's educational outcomes and that the quality of the relationship between families and schools is a foundation element that enables and enhances the role of parents in supporting their children's education. That relationship starts from day one in the way that the school builds a relationship with the families, the extent to which families at the school, the way that schools communicate with families about their approach to learning and how they're supporting their children's learning.

But we know that in Australia building those kind of relationships and equal relationships that respect the family's knowledge and expertise and the child isn't necessarily the norm. Traditionally school has been seen as the responsibility of teachers and families often feel excluded from that relationship. We know that a lot of, particularly beginning teachers feel ill equipped to build relationships with families, particularly families that come from a different cultural or socioeconomic background of their own. Parent engagement and building relationships with families is not necessarily a core part of all pre-service teacher programs and in all the surveys we've done with teachers is also with families is a kind of significant amount of anxiety about that relationship.

So the specific question of how families and schools can work together better to understand and apply their research I think is underpinned by that broader need to build systemic, sustained, high-quality relationships between families and schools and to build the capacity of schools to articulate to families the nature of the learning process, the philosophical orientation that school and therefore the role that this new research has in improving their children's outcomes and being able to have that as a legitimate engaged dialogue with families.

MR COPPEL: Thank you.

DR FOX (MI): I direct you to the ACT's Parent Engagement Framework as a kind of synthesis of the evidence and a kind of model for how those relationships might work.

MR COPPEL: Is that something we could have access to?

DR FOX (MI): Yes, it's online but I can send you a copy.

MS ABRAMSON: I just have one thing, Stacey. I was very interested - I don't know, and I apologise, if it was in your submission, but the Chicago consortium school. Was that mentioned in your - - -

DR FOX (MI): It is, it's the Chicago Consortium for School Research, I think.

MS ABRAMSON: Thank you.

DR FOX (MI):   They have put out a number of publications about their model describing how it works and what the benefits and impacts have been.

MS ABRAMSON: Thank you.

MR COPPEL: Thank you very much.

MS ABRAMSON: Thank you very much.

MR COPPEL: Our next participant is Yvonne Meyer. If I could ask you to come to the table and when you're comfortable, for the purpose of the transcript, if you could give your name and who you represent, thank you.

MS MEYER: Hello, my name is Yvonne Meyer. I was a committee member of the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy. We reported in 2005. Our recommendations were accepted by COAG but very few of them have actually been acted on. I am very interested to hear about the unique student identifier because we recommended that that should happen over 10 years ago in the literacy inquiry, so there's a lot of deja vu.

My main concern is that so many of our kids leave school without being able to adequately read, spell, do their sums and write a competent sentence. One of the terms of the literacy inquiry was to find out what teachers knew about how to teach beginning reading and we found that they knew next to nothing, that they were taught next to nothing in their pre-service education. For most teachers, the only information they have on how to teach beginning reading is reading recovery which is the least effective form of reading intervention and even though it's entrenched, it's finally now being wound back.

We provided educators with all the information they needed on the evidence for the effective teaching and learning of beginning reading. What we were unable to do was have that evidence acted upon. Since then, since the literacy inquiry reported in 2005, the UK has introduced their phonics check which me and others discussed in some detail in our submissions. This has been the most effective way we've found to actually change teacher behaviour and have teachers start to teach beginning reading effectively. Since my response to the response submission, the UK have released their latest results, the 2016 results, which has showed yet another increase in children being able to meet the benchmarking, their knowledge of sound-letter correspondences. It's up now another 4 per cent, so I think 81 per cent overall of children can meet the required level of knowledge in their first year of formal schooling, and it's up to about 90 per cent by the second year of formal schooling.

So really my issue is we can't improve education unless we're teaching our kids to read. In order to teach kids to read, they need to know their sound-letter correspondences. But if we started to test children's knowledge of sound-letter correspondences and made that information available, we would do more than any other single thing to improve education outcomes. By that, I mean the social, emotional, the academic, all aspects of educational success depend on kids being able to read. Any questions?

MR COPPEL: I thought, just to set the scene for the task that we were given -

which was to evaluate the national education evidence base from the perspective of whether there are gaps in the data, gaps in the evidence - that using that data and then also in the application of that evidence in schools and other learning centres - and it's less the specific practices - but we did include reference by way of case studies or the number of specific practices and one of those was phonics instruction because it has a number of those preconditions for subsequent learning. So I just wanted to clarify where our emphasis is coming from. We don't want to get into the whole raft of the specific practices that may work or may not work. That would be a vast task in itself. I just make that point.

But let's get back to the example of phonics because you've proposed that as an area where there is more systematic collection of data. Is there a point in time where this collection of data would be the most appropriate in terms of the period in schooling?

MS MEYER: If we were to follow the UK example, classroom teachers test the children themselves, so the feedback to the classroom teacher is immediate because they're sitting there with the child and checking that the child can read out loud the words in the test. So informally, the teacher knows immediately. Again, the UK example, the data is collected and crunched and fed back to the schools within I believe a term or two terms, I'm not exactly sure, but it's very quick. It's not a massively difficult exercise for anyone to undertake. The test words are formulated based on the common sound-letter correspondences, the pseudo words. They're provided to the teachers. The teachers take only a minute or two to run through the list of words, so the teacher can test the whole class in a day, half a day. That information is then fed back and the results fed back to the school, as I said, with relatively little effort compared to some of the other endeavours, some of the massively difficult issues. This is relatively easy. This is not a hard thing for any system to do. It can be designed, implemented and become part of the mainstream with relatively little effort compared to any other thing, and of course it would have massive benefit.

I would like to also point out that we have the NAPLAN. NAPLAN doesn't test reading. The grade 3 and 5 NAPLAN tests how well a kid can guess the answers. It doesn't actually test whether a child can read. The only way to test in a written test whether a child can read is to test spelling. When I saw the instructions to markers that I asked for during the literacy inquiry back in 2004-2005, the instructions to markers, they were given the option to accept incorrect spelling as correct; close enough was good enough. So the information we have from NAPLAN, which is a massive undertaking, doesn't actually tell us which kids can read and which kids can guess well.

MR COPPEL: But presumably you need to read to be able to understand the

question being asked?

MS MEYER: Not necessarily. This is where there's so much confusion, especially amongst teachers. If we take the simple view of reading which is decoding times comprehension equals reading, every two-year-old can read McDonald's. They see the big yellow M and they know that's a McDonald's because they've memorised the landscape of the word. They smell the hamburgers and they know it's McDonald's because they have guessed meaning from context. Now, there are about half a million words in the English language, but 80 per cent of all written and spoken communication involves about 300 words. Kids can memorise the landscape of words very, very well. They get very, very good at it.   Memorising the landscape of words and guessing meaning from context is an ultimately self-defeating method of learning to read. So the amount of brainpower, if we describe it in terms of the amount of brain energy, that's required to memorise the landscape of words and guess meaning is phenomenal, whereas automatic decoding frees up the brain for comprehension.

If you look at the NAPLAN test, if you look at the layout of the NAPLAN test, there will be, for example, a recipe - I'm talking about the grade 3 in particular. There will be a recipe. The kids look at the way the page is laid out and they know it's a recipe. They have been taught, they have practised beforehand how to answer a layout like that, so they're using multiple clues. What they call the multi-cueing method of reading works to a degree and where we see the slumps, the grade 4 slump, the year 7 slump, the year 9 slump, what happens at each slump is the literacy and numeracy demands have overwhelmed the student's ability to memorise and guess and that's the reason for these slumps. You're looking at an ineffective process that could be taught effectively much more easily. I don't know if that makes sense. I'm sort of waffling a bit.

MS ABRAMSON: Can I just ask a point on that? We've put quite an emphasis on the role of teachers in applying evidence, so there is this research, strong research, so why is it you think that it's not being applied into the classroom?

MS MEYER: Bear in mind that we now have the second and we're coming up to the third generation who were taught this way themselves. So back in the 70s, it was called "whole language". They now don't call it "whole language" any more, they call it "constructivism". It's a philosophy that's entrenched, and the entrenched philosophy says that how you learn is more important that learning. Constructing your own knowledge is more important than a teacher actively - teacher-directed instruction is considered inferior to child-centred discovery learning. So that's the entrenched philosophy. So when you present teachers with evidence that says the most effective way to teach kids is direct, explicit, systematic, intensive teacher-directed instruction, this goes against everything that they've known from

when they were at school, everything that they were taught in their teacher education.

To give you an example of how entrenched it is, in your briefing paper, I think the definition of "literacy" that you use is the constructivist definition, which is this great long wordy paragraph that just goes around in a big circle and is essentially meaningless, in the sense that it doesn't tell teachers what to teach, let alone how to teach it. The simple view of reading, which is decoding times comprehension equals reading, actually gives teachers the information that they need to know what to teach and how to teach it. I don't know why the evidence is not leapt upon. I don't know whether for some people their ideology outweighs the evidence. For others, they just don't know that the evidence exists.

Again getting back to the phonics check, this is one way to turn the light bulb on for many teachers, and the most common thing we hear from teachers when they start to teach reading effectively is, "But I didn't know any of this." So there's this huge gap in teachers' knowledge which is how to teach reading, beginning reading effectively. So in prep and kindergarten, year 1, year 2, they get caught up in all sorts of extraneous things which wastes a lot of time that could be spent actually getting the beginning reading happening and happening well.

MR COPPEL: Are you aware of any schools which do apply a phonetic - - -

MS MEYER: Phonics. Phonetics is different again. There's phonemic awareness, phonics, phonetics. They all refer to different things. The best example we have at the moment is Cape York, Noel Pearson's work in Cape York. He has implemented Direct Instruction, DI, relating to what was said a little while earlier about early childhood. This is a little bit divergent but actually feeds into it.

The biggest, most expensive, most thorough evidence we have of what constitutes high-quality effective early childhood education is a research project called Project Follow Through which was in the US. It started in the mid-70s. It concluded in the mid-90s. It cost over a billion dollars US. It followed hundreds of thousands of kids over 20 years. It showed us not just that some preschool education is better than no preschool education, it showed us exactly what sort of preschool education had the biggest bangs. Now, that information has been available since the mid-90s. Very few Australian teachers, educators, educators of teachers are familiar with it. The Engelmann Bereiter DISTAR method was then consolidated into something that we now call Direct Instruction, capital D, capital I. The organisation that runs the DI program, its acronym is NIFDI, the National Institute for Direct Instruction. Now, Noel Pearson has implemented the DI programs in his schools in far north Queensland. It's been massively effective. These schools have had zero progress for something like three decades. They've now got, Noel Pearson tells us, a third of kids progressing at twice mainstream speed; a third of kids progressing at

mainstream speed and a third of kids not making any progress at all, and these are the kids who are still not attending.

MR COPPEL: Weren't there issues with these schools, I seem to recall, not so long ago?

MS MEYER: Yes, the ideologues hate it. The ideologues hate DI because it goes against their philosophy because it's direct, explicit, systematic, teacher-directed instruction. Aurukun is a highly dysfunctional community (they implemented DI). Subsequently about 30 non-attending students went on a rampage and broke into cars and attacked the school principal's house. The Department of Education closed down the school, so 300 students - Noel Pearson has written about this, his letter was published in The Australian a couple of weeks ago. The Department of Education said, "We can't guarantee the safety of our teachers and our principal," so they closed the school down, despite the fact that there were 300 students who were attending and were learning and that there was this ratbag group of about 30 who were getting into trouble.

So, yes, there is enormous resistance and there are individual schools dotted around who have seen what Noel Pearson is achieving and have picked up on it, so there are schools in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. There are various schools in the capital cities who are using DI to some degree or other. If we could have beginning reading and beginning maths taught with DI across all schools we would see - well, the evidence informs us that there would be a substantial benefit. I have said that as cautiously as I can.

How you get DI implemented when - Kerry Hempenstall also made quite a detailed submission, as he has said previously, "Teachers don't know what DI is but they know it's bad," because it goes against the philosophy, it goes against the ideology of child-centred learning which is entrenched. So you're in this downward spiral of teachers trying to make a sow's ear into a silk purse and working harder and harder and getting nowhere.

MR COPPEL: So are you advocating for phonic testing data to be part of the national evidence base?

MS MEYER: The more of that information is collected, the more of that information is made available to everyone the better. When it gets hard - when we look at this small percentage of the population that are really, really difficult to reach and teach effectively - what we need to do is take out all the kids who are instructional casualties, in other words, kids who are perfectly capable of learning but just haven't because they were taught properly. So all the remedial energy and money is taken up with kids like mine, middle class, bright, well-behaved kid who

went through a massive amount of remediation just because nobody taught him sound-letter correspondences and he was memorising and guessing.

Kids like mine fill up all the space and squeeze out the truly disadvantaged. Kids like mine have articulate, well-educated, empowered parents who go and fight the battles with the school, with the individual teachers. We have the money to pay for remedial intervention for testing for all these things. The truly disadvantaged, the kids who have multiple overlapping problems that are really, really hard to address don't get a look in. They're not getting into the intervention programs because our kids - when I say "our kids" I mean middle class kids who are instructional casualties - are squeezing them out.

So teach all kids beginning reading effectively and those who don't learn you're going to identify very quickly. In the first year of formal instruction teachers are going to be able to pick up that small percentage of kids who are going to require intensive and ongoing remediation and intervention and not getting side-tracked with parents like me rocking up in the classroom saying, "But my kid's not learning."

MR COPPEL: Thank you. So your point would be that if phonics were taught in the classroom the teacher would be able to identify where there are issues with individual students, it's not suggesting that there be some form of national testing and the results of that collected in a similar manner to, say, NAPLAN for numeracy?

MS MEYER: I'm saying both, that it's an immediate benefit to the individual teacher and, again, the example in the UK is those children who have not reached the expected benchmark by the second year there is additional funding, that then unlocks the door to all the additional resources and funding. For universal data collection I don't see how any of the information can be beneficial if they don't know which kids can read and which kids can't. So if they're looking at kids in year 9 who have social and emotional problems, who are truanting and throwing chairs through windows, you know, they need to know, "Well, we realised in year 1 that this kid had a problem, that they weren't able to learn. We know they were taught effectively but they were still unable to learn their sound-letter correspondences."

So by the time the kid is in year 9 there should have been remediation all the way along. The kid who's truanting in year 9 that we know were taught to read effectively in year 1, well, we know that then can't be the underlying cause, there has to be other issues. Again, the majority of problems in high schools can be tracked back to weak literacy and numeracy skills, that these kids are turning up at high school and they can't access the curriculum. The high school teachers don't know - I mean, if the primary school teachers don't know how to teach and test for beginning reading, the high school teachers know even less. So they start looking at the child's behaviour and looking at all sorts of other causes, you know, maybe there's problems

at home, maybe it's just teenage behaviour and all of this.

All high school teachers should be able to test beginning reading to then be able to discount that as an issue. At the moment they're just overlooking it. They're just ignoring the fact that maybe these kids can't read. Maybe the reason these kids are not turning up to school is because they're given a text book and they can't read it.

MR COPPEL: So if there were testing of phonics among students, would you see this as being required at a census level, all students, or samples of students?

MS MEYER: Again, there are people with more knowledge of this than me. I certainly think that by the end of the first year of formal schooling all children should be tested to see if they know their sound-letter correspondences. Beyond that I don't see how a sample - and I'm talking about the basic sound-letter correspondences in the first year of formal schooling - would really give the information we need. Because what we're looking for are the small percentage of kids who are going to struggle to learn regardless of how effective the instruction is. Having done that testing in the first year of formal school - the UK do it in the first year and then the kids who didn't reach the benchmark get retested in the second year, so the remediation kicks in immediately. After that there is no need for it.

The sound-letter correspondences, we're looking at the 26 letters of the Latin alphabet, the 44 phonemes that make up the English language and the 70 common spelling rules that allow the 26 letters to cover the 44 phonemes. All the effective phonics programs require 15 to 20 minutes of instruction a day, every day for the first two terms of the first year of formal school. So we're looking at a finite body of knowledge which should be able to be taught and learnt in a finite amount of time and then everything else happens. All the other things that are of concern to us happen after that but without that core teaching and learning of beginning reading, then I don't see how any of the information that's culled after that is really meaningful. Because, again, as I said, my son with zero knowledge - when he was tested at the Royal Children's Hospital Learning Difficulty Centre he scored zero on a test of sound-letter correspondence yet he had top scores in the grade 3 NAPLAN. Now, the grade 3 NAPLAN just told us that this was a kid who was really good at fudging.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that by the time the kid is in year 3 the initial teaching and testing of phonics has become habituated and there is no going need to test for it. Reed Lyon who was head of the US National Institute of Child Health and Development who has been responsible for the US report to the National Reading Panel. He estimated the number of kids who have some sort of brain glitch that makes it really difficult for the them learn to read, he put it at something like less than half a percent of the population, yet the entrenched understanding of teachers is

at least 10 per cent of their class is going to be dyslexic and some schools have 80 per cent of their cohort labelled dyslexic. You would have thought that that information alone would tell you that there is some sort of problem with teaching and learning of beginning reading.

MR COPPEL: Thank you. Thank you very much.

MS ABRAMSON: Thank you.

MR COPPEL: We're going to have a short break. I think there is coffee and tea outside if you want to have a cuppa and we'll reconvene at half past 10 with the Australian Association for Research In Education. Thank you.

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MR COPPEL: Our next participant is Julianne Moss. Welcome.

PROF MOSS (AARE):   Thank you. Julianne Moss and I'm representing the Australian Association for Research in Education. I'm an immediate past president of the association and I have also been a member of the executive from 2011 to 2014 and an ordinary member since 1994. The association welcomes the opportunity to be able to respond to the draft report. But before I actually provide you with some more detail about our response I'd just like to position the Australian Association for Research in Education in the national context.

We have approximately 700 members. The majority of our members are based in an Australian university but our membership base also includes members of state and national bureaucracies, independent and consultant researchers and teachers and school leaders. Most of our members would say that they conduct a very broad range of educational research and their approach to research problems in education comes from diverse philosophical, epistemological and methodological standpoints. So there we're talking about what we might think about is educational research, the way that we go about that and the sort of knowledge claims that people make in their work.

At the outset the association is broadly supportive of the argument that a new longitudinal study of Australian children should be funded and the commission's call for an increased emphasis to be placed on gathering evidence around the early childhood education and care. In our short response to the draft submission we would actually like to draw attention to what we have described as two problematic assumptions that are evident in this draft report. First, the draft report ignores the debates about the primacy of what works in education and in our initial submission we drew upon the work of internationally recognised scholar of assessment and measurement, Dylan Wiliam - and the spelling is correct, it's one "l" not two - and his argument "In education what works?" is rarely the right question because everything works somewhere and nothing works everywhere which is why in education the right question is, "Under what conditions does this work?"

We want to reiterate that it's essential for discussions of the National Education Database to take the limits of generalisation across the vastly different educational contexts into account. If we just think for a moment what it might be to be a student, a teacher or a principal in, for example, Aurukun, in Albury, in Altona, in Avoca - which is in Tasmania - in Adelaide, in Albany, in Alice Springs or in the Australian Capital Territory. This is our way of actually stressing the importance of understanding the interplay between educational outcomes and local context. The argument which is pervasive in the draft report is that evidence of what works will improve education generally is perhaps simplistic and potentially damaging. What is required is high-quality evidence of good educational practice within a variety of

systemic, geographical and demographic contexts along with high-quality evidence of the differing, enabling and constraining practices for those who are in those situations.

Secondly, the draft report ignores a highly contested area in the area of educational research and evidence and that is the argument that randomised control trials and measured analysis provide the gold standard for educational research. Such an assumption is highly problematic and it takes a very narrow and myopic view of what constitutes good educational evidence and education and if allowed to drive a national vision of the evidence base of education, runs the risk of a national vision that is going to be highly impoverished. Think again of those places that I described that make up our country that we know as Australia.

The utility and appropriateness of any research method depends upon the aim and the purpose of the research and to narrow the definition of quality evidence to that gathered by randomised control trials and meta-analysis would be very short-sighted in the extreme. To this end we dispute the legitimacy of the classifications of the quality of educational evidence incorporated in and taken at face value within the draft report, such as those described and discussed on page 69 and 70. It is essential that our national vision for an educational evidence base be informed by a more expansive and nuanced understanding of quality evidence and in our original submission we actually pose the question, "What constitutes good evidence in education?"

The issue of what constitutes good evidence in education depends largely upon the scope and context of the research, the use of appropriate methodology and on constructive alignment between these and knowledge claims that are produced. NAPLAN data, for example, produces a useful broad picture of national achievement on literacy and numeracy for Australian school students and this realm might be said to constitute good evidence while at the same time it constitutes poor evidence when used as a proxy for teacher quality. Lee Cronbach, who was a giant in the fields of developmental psychology and statistics, wrote in 1975, "When we give proper weight to local conditions, any generalisation is a working hypothesis, not a conclusion."

Members of the Australian educational research community are very keen to be able to remain connected to this agenda and to be able to make a contribution to the national evidence base. However, there are some areas that still require a focus and I would like to raise the issue of our workforce capacity both in context of educational researchers but also for our school workforce. I would also like to raise the problematic issues that we face between our states around data sharing and also the ethical issues that are raised as we actually begin to think about an evidence base that initially should be a strategy.

It has been a long time coming in the context of Australia that we might want to think about a national evidence base for education but we like to stress, and we have outlined in our submission, some of the problematic issues that are there and also to be able to think about what we are working for is something that's not only going to be good evidence but is going to be educational. Thank you.

MR COPPEL: Thank you, Julianne. I think a lot of what you have said we would agree with and I think there are parts of the report where that sentiment is reflected. We use the words "what works" as a shorthand, almost a rhetorical tool, but when it comes to the messages that are in the draft report we do say, "What works, for whom, and in which circumstances?" So we are trying to recognise that there are different contexts and situations which will not generalise. So I did want to make that point. In a similar vein, with respect to randomised control trials we do put them forward as a very high quality methodology for research but not at the exclusion of other methods. There are certain natural experiments where a practice may have been adopted in one set of schools and not in another and you can use that as a natural type of experiment.

But I am wondering whether that is the sorts of considerations that you have in mind or whether you have specific methodologies that you think are equivalent in terms of their robustness to inform teaching practices that are effective in terms of improving outcomes.

PROF MOSS (AARE): Yes, I think that clarification is helpful because at an association level we are well aware of the sorts of debates that have happened in the US and the UK at points in time through the American Educational Research Association and the British Education Research Association and the way that policy has had an impact on the sorts of evidence that is supported through research, research opportunities, research grants and we all know that at the micro level of the school and the classroom the nature of that evidence is going to look different and also if that evidence is going to have an impact on the way that the teacher, that the principal may well then reconfigure the teaching and learning practices and/or the way that the curriculum gets taught is very central.

We have researchers in our association that would speak both to the broad macro level and also those who are very engaged with that evidence gathering in the local classroom context and school. The concerns about what works - and we have seen in this country what we would describe as policy borrowing, things actually are said to work in one context are suddenly imported into Australia without any understanding of either what has been done before in the context of educational research but also how it is going to work in this particular site where this is a major issue. Of course, our geography works against us, as does the kind of - I don't think

it happens in a way that's intentional but also, as we know, the way that education is configured in Australia, the cooperation, the collaboration, the very practical issues that people face if you actually want to do a national study that involves classroom-based evidence you actually require ethical clearance from all of the statutory bodies that are involved in that and even though there have been some efforts that have been taken to be able to do that, these can be long drawn out processes and frustration on everybody's level about the time limits on us to be able to do the work that people recognise needs to be done at a particular point in time.

MS ABRAMSON: We have made some recommendations about those issues.

MR COPPEL: One is the idea of a form of mutual recognition relating to approval from ethics committees if there is a national research project, rather than going through - and it can be more than just each of the jurisdictions, it can be as many as 20 different ethics committees, depending on the nature of the research, there be a form of mutual recognition. I understand in the area of health there is something quite similar to that but nonetheless it still does not guarantee that approval is sufficient to get the green light for that research. I would be interested in your views on whether you see that sort of approach, mutual recognition, as being one that would help.

PROF MOSS (AARE):   Yes, and I think as an association we have already taken some moves to be able to support people who are engaged in that work. Of course, educational researchers often do work in the crossover between the two sectors and people realising how that takes place, so I think that's something that could be very productive, yes.

MS ABRAMSON: Professor, if I could just ask you a question about research priorities. One of the recommendations we have made is about the Australian government and the states having a coordinated view about research priorities. Given your focus on - we use the words "in what circumstances" but you talked about local areas, how do you see that those two would fit together?

PROF MOSS (AARE):   I guess there has been a long campaign that has both gone on within our organisation, a decade or so working through the Australian Research Council to be able to talk about having a distinct fund which actually focuses around educational research and a major piece of work that the association did some five years ago now actually looked at the distribution of where educational research was actually happening and it does not only happen in schools and/or that have education of course, it's a multidisciplinary practice. But I guess what we all often know is left hand and right hand and being able to generate the sorts of conversations that we need given where we are at in our national evidence base and I think we can be aspirational but also we need to be very pragmatic about where we're at in

Australia and also what we need to progressively build that agenda with a vision about how we're going to systematically do that because we know that the resources that are available for educational research currently that come through the Australian Research Council, our two-digit code 13, less than 2.5 per cent of that. Some people are using numbers even less than that.

Of course it's dominated by the medical research but in what ways are we looking at what element of that might be educational and then we could have a stronger multidisciplinary focus around what we know is needed to be able to reach the sorts of desired goals in our work.

MR COPPEL: You made the point in your introductory remarks that the evidence base should be a strategy. I guess this is an element of that. Could you elaborate a little bit more on what you mean by that and what you would see - - -

PROF MOSS (AARE): I guess it's some of what I've just said, that it's really taking a hard look about where we are as a country around our educational research base and we can all make comparisons to other larger western democracies about that. But if we look at the idea of how we - there is so much systemising, so many players that actually need to be brought into the conversation. This is a large undertaking. If we think about where could we be in 10 years time if we actually took a very strategic direction in our work as educational researchers who all have the same goal which is to be able to improve the educational outcomes of those students who are most disadvantaged and we know that the connections between education, poverty and life chances are where they occur and hence the appreciation of the importance of a focus that actually does look around the early childhood area as well.

When we look at the comparative inputs in our near neighbours in Asia, for example, the funding towards educational research is way, way in excess of what is contributed. Also there's the broader question around philanthropy and educational research as well. They are major issues because all educational research of a kind does require some sort of funding base.

MR COPPEL: The approach in the draft report interprets the terms of reference as, "What are the capabilities that needed to apply an evidence-based approach to education policy?" That has led to a focus on the gaps, whether they relate to the data or the evidence or the application of the evidence. We sense a great consensus in terms of what the goals are and what the objectives are in a quite high level form. You're suggesting that the strategy could go beyond or interpret in a different way the goals of educational policy. Do you see a bridge between the two approaches? We take as a given the goals and we are quite comforted by the fact that within Australia and across the various jurisdictions that are responsible for education that

there is that consensus.

PROF MOSS (AARE):   The area that I'd want to highlight - and it's a lot of the work that the association does - is around the capacity building for educational researchers and a lot of our resources and our members' voluntary time is committed to that issue. It's well known that we do not have a large number of people working in Australia who have quantitative expertise in educational research. So there is huge capacity building. While some of those people might be in some of the other disciplines, the cooperation and the collaboration between that and to seeing that education is a significant area for people to engage in who might have specialised skills in that area I think is a really important message.

If we are looking in the university system to be able to recruit for quantitative expertise, we know that we are not going to recruit here, we are actually going to be recruiting internationally to be able to find - because our capacity has already been absorbed in that area. I think that educational research in its own way has come a long way in the way that talks across - we use the word, "Have the conversation" - between the way that we might think about our evidence gathering and coming back to the central issue, always in research is, "Well, what's your question?" What is your question and what is the best way that we can put together and how we can gather this team of people.

I don't mean that we should be insular as a country, of course we need to continually be working in collaboration internationally. But when we look at the skill shortage and also in the succession planning in Australian universities, we really do need to build that next generation of people who are going to do the work around producing educational evidence.

MR COPPEL: On the workforce capability, we often draw an analogy with health research and the relationship between the health researcher and the health practitioner and the health practitioner is well placed to interpret or translate the research into practices. We see it quite differently in education where the nature of the research is a lot broader but also the ability to translate research results into practices and the connection between the teacher and the education researcher. Do you see this as being - - -

PROF MOSS (AARE):   I see that as part of the workforce capacity issues that we have around teachers and teaching and their future growth as they enter the profession. It still remains the only profession where after you finish your qualification on day one you're supposed to be able to undertake the same responsibility as somebody who has been teaching for 10 and 15 years. The other major issue that has happened for teachers is access to award-bearing university courses as well are typically full-fee paying so we have seen a rapid decline in people

who are undertaking that form of professional learning beyond their initial training. That is one form of professional learning. We know that what works in the context of making real change is for that to be able to be led inside a cluster of schools. But, again, the way that schooling and schools are organised actually doesn't look much different to when I started my career as a teacher, some 40 years ago.

So with all the level of differing requirements, the new knowledge, and it happens across every area for a practising teacher, what are the ways that teachers get access to that insight, to that understanding because this kind of work all involves a commitment of your time. Teachers are so often wronged in conversations. There is a very deficit trajectory that is created about teachers.

MS ABRAMSON: Can you just unpack that a little bit for me.

PROF MOSS (AARE): Pardon?

MS ABRAMSON: What did you mean?

PROF MOSS (AARE): "Teachers can't do this, teachers don't know this, teachers are unable to do this." But the fundamentals sort of way that I actually - my responsibility for either 28 to 30 students to be teaching five or six lines a week. The way that teachers' work is orchestrated has not actually changed to be able to allow the space to be enabling of the new kind of skill learning. That is like in every profession, of course, is rapid, is dynamic but for teachers it has a sharpness because it impacts on - you know, we know what works but the opportunity for the translation, if we compare it to the health sector, there's a very basic issue around the time and the way that the teachers' work is organised.

Yes, there are mandates about the amount of time that people might need for teacher professional learning but it is insufficient to be able to keep pace with the knowledge demands that are upon teachers.

MR COPPEL: One area of an evidence-based approach which would involve both the researcher and the practitioner relates to evaluation of programs and teaching practices.

PROF MOSS (AARE): Yes.

MR COPPEL: Here I read in a recent OECD report that looked at 450 programs that concluded only 10 per cent of them actually conducted an evaluation of the program which struck me and I am wondering whether you have any view as to why - it may be higher in Australia, I'm not sure - but if you have any reasoning as to why that number is so low.

PROF MOSS (AARE): I suppose it speaks back to something in the field is that the ongoing use of evidence but also the trust in the relationships between the practitioner and those outside. That kind of scepticism, I suppose, builds up in a profession when perhaps your recognition, your valuing as a professional isn't that strong. I think that anybody who has been teaching for some time is very well aware of the programmatic approach that is often taken to curricula, not a systematic understanding of curriculum in this context, how it works, people with expertise in a school around curriculum and evaluation, for example, those kinds of specialised knowledge skills - and we can look again in what's happening in the history of teaching of curriculum courses in Australia, they have declined dramatically and I can compare that to the US, they are still there.

So I think it's part-knowledge, it's about part-scepticism but also it's about having people with both the leadership skills and we haven't spoken much about - the role of the principal obviously is key in what happens around the local implementation and there are a couple of Australian projects that are running specifically looking at that issue about how we can both support but also find out what are principals' knowledge about understanding educational evidence base but, more importantly, how they can apply that in the context.

MR COPPEL: The back half of the report proposes a governance and institutional structure that would systematise these practices. That doesn't necessarily guarantee that they will happen but we think it is important to have a body that is assigned these functions and given responsibility to deliver and held to account. Do you have any views to the prospective efficacy of what we're proposing in the draft report in this context?

PROF MOSS (AARE): Yes, I'm aware of a similar strategy that AITSL is also doing around teachers and pre-service teachers as well and I think that, again, proposing the strategy, the governance - and I think anybody would applaud that but it's the implementation of that and so the significance of being able to involve stakeholders in the process and that those stakeholders are representative of leading teachers in classrooms, school principals, people who are in educational/health/early childhood leadership positions that can ensure that what is proposed is actually going to work in the context that we work in which is not Sweden, which is not New York.

MS ABRAMSON: Some of the issues that we looked at very carefully were around privacy, confidentiality and Jonathan has already mentioned the mutual recognition. Do you think that some of those sort of issues are a disincentive for people to do work in the education/research area?

PROF MOSS (AARE): I have colleagues in the US who actually would say to me,

"Why do you do classroom-based research. It's just so difficult for you to be able to do that." I guess that at this point in time in the Australian context our ethical approaches have been reasonable and I would hate to think that we move beyond that kind of position because if we're talking about examples such as some of them that have been raised this morning, we do need to do very close-up, fine grain work in different contexts. I don't think there is a culture in Australia that at all that wants to work against that.

People are very much committed to those kinds of approaches but recognition of what it does take to be able to do that work and longitudinal studies over time, the long, slow - and if we costed it, well, we would never do any educational research.

MR COPPEL: You made a reference several times to practices in other countries and you're insinuating that you can't just borrow them and then drop them into an Australian context. Looking at international practices as one of the elements of our terms of reference and we think that there can be features of international practices that could work in an Australian context. How do you find that out? What are you suggesting then as an approach to sensibly draw lessons for Australian schools from international experience?

PROF MOSS (AARE):   Certainly we have a number of scholars in the association who are very, very closely involved with initiatives in the OECD large teacher education studies et cetera. But to put it in a nutshell is that I think the view would be that people get very frustrated when it's an international expert that is perhaps called upon where it is the Australian person who has the expertise in the international community. So I think knowing who and what our Australian educational researchers have contributed - and I'm using that term broadly, they may not necessarily be located within a school of education or have that title - but knowing who are the experts in our country first and foremost and ironically often we can never get hold of some of our local experts because they are busy elsewhere in the world because there are a few of them.

So I think first and foremost let's actually know who we are and what our strong contributions have been and our association is very well connected to all of the major international educational research associations in Asia and in Europe as well.

MR COPPEL: Thank you very much. Thank you for your submissions as well.

MS ABRAMSON: Thank you.

PROF MOSS (AARE):   Thank you.

MR COPPEL: The next participant is Caz Bosch from the Australian Parents Council. Welcome. When you're ready, if you could give your name for the purpose of the transcript and then a brief opening statement. Thank you.

MS BOSCH (APC):   Caz Bosch from the Australian Parents Council. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to our brief submission on your draft report and just for the record to say the Australian Parents Council represents the interests and needs of parents with children in non-government schools but also parents more generally. We established a national charity about four years ago that works across all school and early learning services, delivering practical programs to parents, particularly in low socioeconomic areas. So we have that representation role. We have a minor research role and we also have this practical service to parents.

I think when I outlined in our submission the context for our response, I started - John, I met you at the ACECQA forum and posed a question about the positioning of parents in the research domain and I do have some potential comments to make around that. But my organisation's interest is actually, as you will have read, in saying that in this sort of emerging education effectiveness research domain, we are now moving to a focus on teachers, what happens particularly and what works at the classroom level, and we were probably a bit mischievous in saying to you we've gone again to, "Yes, there's all this stuff about student characteristics, yes, but we'll move on, and on that basis say teachers are the most significant influence beyond student characteristics," and we all focus our attention on there.

From a policy perspective, we understand that there has to be significant interest in the effectiveness of schools and we believe not just high-performing schools but we think it's really important to look at low-performing schools. But policy should also be looking at the other things that are part of the mix, and from that perspective, since about 2002 under then Minister Brendan Nelson and then Minister Julie Bishop, Australia has lost enormous momentum. At that point, we were internationally respected for our focus on partnerships between families and schools, between teachers, principals, schools, families and communities and we've slid away from that. So we had the Melbourne Declaration, saying that partnerships was one of the most important things but really since then, momentum has gone. So we're making a case to say the classroom is clearly important but why is it that we just keep picking up on the one student characteristic typically which is the family socioeconomic background and park all the rest and focus again on teachers.   So we're asking you in essence to expand the compass points in your report.

MR COPPEL: I think we've had a couple of participants this morning who have made the point that the data that is collected can be used in a way that leads to a misdiagnosis and I think the point you're making is that we risk, by considering parent engagement as an external influence that's not amenable to policy

intervention, a misdiagnosis and also as a consequence of that, the wrong treatment to respond to the issue. So my question then is what sort of information do you think could be collected that would reduce this risk of I guess misdiagnosis?

MS BOSCH (APC):   We appreciated fully that you were not looking at the evidence base. Equally we appreciate that you have identified there is a gap in terms of parent engagement. The key focus however and the key understanding needs to be, "What is parent engagement?" in terms of what matters, what makes a difference to student outcomes and indeed to school performance. On that basis, I heard Stacey this morning indicating the ACT work. I'm not sure that that technical definition is going to cut it, in part because that has two components. It says, "We know from the research that there are a number of things that do make a difference," and they tend to be things like parents having high expectations that children will be successful, parents reading to children, and then as John Hattie identified, at some point switching and parents listening to children read and a range of other things. But those things sit in a research base that is quite old and is certainly not focused on what parent and family engagement looks like for 21st century learning or even something as simple as what's going on in secondary schools, a huge gap there.

ARACY is presently doing work around a nationally agreed definition that could be measured and trying to get the states and territories to agree on what that might comprise, but I think in essence it has to be the focus particularly on partnership development, partnership activity. Stacey talked this morning about the development of effective communications and conversations as the basis for partnership development. Looking at where this work might fit with the directions you're taking, I think in addition to the focus on the classroom and the school, we need to say that parent partnership activity gets caught up in an understanding of what effective teacher practice looks like and what effective school leadership looks like.

MS ABRAMSON: Caz, do you have any examples of that in practice?

MS BOSCH (APC):   As in what it looks like when it's being effective?

MS ABRAMSON: Yes.

MS BOSCH (APC):   There's a fair range of examples. A really reasonable one was the Victorian Catholic Education office, which is actually the Archdiocese of Melbourne, ran an excellent program under the Smarter Schools National Partnership where they employed family school convenors and worked across a range of schools, so in that cluster format, to work on the relationships and then on the partnerships. So I think that's a pretty good example and there's plenty of other individual ones in the Family-School Partnership Bureau. There's seven projects that have just been

completed, one of them up in the Northern Territory, looking at really how do you take this engagement and partnership theory and put it into an action research form with parents and teachers and kids in the classroom, against something like the development of literacy. So there's that sort of work going on, but of course it all tends to be case study work. Case studies have not for a long time been collected and evaluated for practice and so on.

But also at the end of this year - there is a document called the Family-School Partnership Framework that was signed off in 2008 and that framework is being revised presently. I'm actually writing the content for that but it's been revised for the Family-School Partnership Bureau and the Australian government. I think in reality if we were looking at better integrating parent engagement into the new reform strand, you would look at that tool potentially as a way to then say, "How can we use that with teachers or use that with schools?" and put some benchmarks or something in there.

MS ABRAMSON: How does it manage diversity because you mentioned before that there's the Catholic schools, there's the independent schools. We've also talked about early learning which is incredibly diverse, so I'm assuming from what you say, it's merely a framework document because everything would need to be specific for the circumstances.

MS BOSCH (APC): Yes, it doesn't really reach down to early childhood, Julie. It specifies dimensions of partnership. It places the partnership as a strategy within that broader domain of parent engagement. It provides some practical examples and tools and then it's a collecting up of resources. It's still not perfect but one of the things that is evident because of this reduction in effort is most of the things that we're doing in Australia are a bit old. You could make the point that Australian research around parent engagement, specifically in children's learning, does need to take place.

MS ABRAMSON: What about the disengaged parent, because the model of parent participation is based on parents being involved in their child's learning, so the models that you're talking about, are they things that actually reach out to parents in a way that facilitates engagement?

MS BOSCH (APC): They do when you have people on the ground, almost in that bold style of the Aboriginal liaison officer or the migrant resource worker and so on; things that were more common around the 70s and 80s are really effective ways. In that Melbourne Archdiocese project, the creation of the family school convenor role really has that "reach out and let's help you reach into the school" type thing. But I think also some of this area does comprise fairly simple actions and attitudes. If you knew what they were and you knew how to almost consistently reinforce them, then

as parents and families, you'd realise this area is not about creating a whole lot more work or sense of responsibility for doing X, Y and Z, that it in some ways is a way of parenting and conversing with children, but linked to that understanding more explicitly of what is going on in the classroom and how you can support that.

So if you think about how do you support a year 11 boy doing maths when you stopped doing maths in year 8, then in this area there are still ways you can do that, but you can't if you're not connected to teachers, and teachers don't see as that part of their role and their opportunity is to work with parents to facilitate reinforcement of learning.

MR COPPEL: When it comes to parent engagement in schools, are there obstacles or impediments that are limiting that engagement?

MS BOSCH (APC):   Yes, they always get trotted out the same way. Your report made reference to teachers perhaps not being equipped, either in their pre-service to work effectively or to communicate effectively with parents. A 2008 study which I think is actually pretty tired gets trotted out to say, more than anything else teachers fear parents; schools are busy, curriculums are crowded, parents have less time, dual-income families, competing family needs and so on. I suppose those obstacles will always be there and are quite convenient, unless you decide that this is important enough to engage in a culture change process and if you were to do that, you would begin to have a different concept of obstacles and opportunities. The disengagement that you're talking about - - -

MS ABRAMSON: I should say - because I wasn't putting it in any pejorative sense - - -

MS BOSCH (APC):   No.

MS ABRAMSON: - - - it was merely as a statement of fact.

MS BOSCH (APC):   Yes. I have a really simple example from my own perspective. It's an international one. But if you live in Thailand and you don't have a washing machine and you wash your clothes in a filthy river and you get your children up and you send them to school at 8 o'clock in the morning, that's parent engagement. So some of the biases, if you don't see parents and families in the school, you think they're disengaged, not engaged, under-served, when you don't know what's going on. One of the things out of the OECD report a couple of years ago, 2011, which I don't think Australia participated in, but one of the greatest links between what parents do and children's outcomes at 15 is the type of social and political conversations you have with your children, so that doesn't really take that much time.

MR COPPEL: Which report was that? If you could maybe send it through later, because there are a lot of OECD reports.

MS BOSCH (APC): I can.

MR COPPEL: Thank you. So you put the emphasis on a culture change to foster greater parent engagement. Elsewhere in our report, we identify culture change in terms of the use of evidence, the application of evidence. I guess this is a more general question as to how do you pursue culture change. It's not something you can recommend obviously.

MS BOSCH (APC): America did.

MR COPPEL: Recommended a culture change?

MS BOSCH (APC): America legislated it in the No Child Left Behind Act, and I don't think that's the answer for Australia at all. So part of it is - and momentum will build - understanding that this does make a difference. It makes a difference to teachers' work but it makes a difference to students' outcomes and in that broader thing, to school climate. So the more that is understood, the more culture change becomes interesting and possible.

But I see culture change is possible through the work you're doing because if you can consider that there are elements that are being ignored in the school effectiveness and education effectiveness research - and they are being ignored because the parent partnership, however defined, keeps popping up as an important characteristic of high-performing schools and so on - so if through your work that was acknowledged, then almost automatically there would be more incentive, if not momentum, for a whole range of different people to take notice, researchers, teachers, educators, governments and so on.

MS ABRAMSON: How do parents access information, because we talked a lot about the need for evidence to become application in schools and we focused on the teaching workforce, but how would a parent access the evidence about what works and what works in what circumstances?

MS BOSCH (APC): First off, you make the point that there's a multi-tiered different set of needs, if you like. At some point in the report you also made the point that lots of evidence is available to parents but then from that point, you start talking about information more so than evidence. I think one of the hardest things for everyone is - we know there's multitudes of information, what's hard to find or figure out is what's good information. So if I have a child recently diagnosed with a

learning disorder, I could type in "dyslexia" and find 95,000 different references and I could find some good stuff in there. In this area, part of the role of parent organisations is to try and distil some of that and distribute it out.

I made the point in the submission that when you talked about there were early childhood networks and principal networks, there are parent networks that can distil and disseminate information. But I think also, in pointing you to this paper from Heather Weiss and her colleagues from the Harvard Family Research Project, some of the evidence and data that parents need to support their children's learning is of a different order and it's more about that data about their own children's progress and performance in real time, and then how do schools collect that up, what does the data system look like at a school level, and feed that out, and at the same time, educate and equip parents to understand it and appreciate it and not to be isolated. So some of that data collection and research is a very different level to what you've heard from other people this morning, but it's still really, really vital data and it's really, really vital research. So in that multi-tiering, in our submission we did encourage you to constantly think of how you are positioning parents as decision-makers and, if you like, as data consumers or data customers.

MS ABRAMSON: Just on that point you mentioned about things being known about a child in school but the importance of real time, do you have a view about a unique student identifier so that each student would be identifiable in a national sense as opposed to a state sense?

MS BOSCH (APC):   Yes. John will remember ACECQA did a little straw poll around the room, I think. APC does not have a formal view and didn't see this as the time to be saying to you we totally agree or disagree. I personally and I believe my parent colleagues would say we can see some real benefits, including where children move schools I think between early learning and so on. The question then is how do you have the conversation with parents so that the fear and the anxiety and the notion about there being a number branded on your brow doesn't take off and run away. If I focus more broadly on the research again, I'd say right now, just like with NAPLAN, I could ask anyone what they think about direct instruction or phonics screening and most people would fear it, be anxious, be thinking somehow it's more testing for testing's sake than for the good of their children and the ability to help their children.

So if you have that notion that parents are proper decision-makers and properly integrated even in the research institute - because there would be parents who would be more than capable of sitting at that level with other people - if they are integrated as decision-makers and you change that power relationship, then you can have different conversations. I think the way the USI should go is opening up a great conversation so that people understand both what's good about it, fears about privacy and so on, and see where that takes us.

MR COPPEL: Regarding the institution that we propose in the report for taking responsibility for bottom-up evidence creation, we identify a number of other roles. One is to identify the research priorities; the second is to engage the research, to validate the research, to translate that research. Do you have views on how the perspectives of parents can interact with this institutional structure to give input on the points that you've mentioned thus far?

MS BOSCH (APC): Without wishing in any way to sound cynical, because I'm not cynical, what often happens is that we have very good involvement in policy development strategies and so on and then when it comes to seats around the table and especially when they're important seats, over the last probably six to eight years - so we have people who are teachers, people who are researchers, people who are important people and so on, but we don't have the parents because the parents are just the parents. That to me really denies the fact that parent organisations have within their networks people who are parents, and that's their focus, but who also are enormously competent and able to sit at a table and cut it with anyone. One example, presently one of our presidents is a psychology education researcher. I'm sure she could do quite a good job.

So that's the thing about who's sitting around the table. When you have someone sitting around the table then they have to also be accountable for ensuring that, you know, the connections between what that group is doing and what it wants to achieve are made. But I think also the links around evaluation probably sits more on the research side. When you do good evaluation work someone still needs to reduce that into bite-sized readable, accessible pieces. Once that's done parent organisations and teacher organisations and so on can spread that out. But, you know, I'm not making a grand claim that parents are entirely capable of doing everything, but within that governance structure that you are proposing, I think it is centrally important that there is a seat a the table for a merit-based parent-type person.

MR COPPEL: I presume there's more than one parent association in Australia. When you speak about parent engagement and your views, is there a consensus about the importance of parent engagement at schools and their relationship - - -

MS BOSCH: Between the parent groups?

MR COPPEL: Between different parent groups. Is there a consensus, in your view, on the points that you have raised that is shared among other parent associations?

MS BOSCH: I would not claim consensus around the specifics of the submission

about the equivalence or the central component of school effectiveness research and the missing bit there; certainly claim consensus that a missing piece in the puzzle is parent engagement in learning - directly related to student outcomes and not just academic - wellbeing outcomes as well. So consensus around there; and very much consensus around the second component as to how you are conceptualising and presenting parents in decision-making, would be clear consensus around that. But amongst the parent organisations too there is still unfolding understanding of what this area looks like and what it needs to look like in Australia.

MR COPPEL: What do you mean by that, that it's unfolding?

MS BOSCH: Well, I could give you my full preferred definitions of parent engagement, and every single one of those would emphasise that there are many things parents can do and that's really good. But if we're going to work at this from a policy perspective that is constructive and validated as the policy direction, we should be focusing on that line of sight between these things: student outcomes, academic wellbeing, school performance.

So the other things around parents participating in school boards and so on are great, brings in lots of resources to schools, but parent participation in school boards does not change student outcomes as we know it at this point in time. It might, if school boards were doing something a bit different.

MS ABRAMSON: Is that because, in your view, school boards tend to be focused on things like the governance of the school, as opposed to getting into conversations about the education?

MS BOSCH: Depends partly on what those boards are. So in a Catholic independent non-systemic school, the board must focus on governance, absolutely must. In a school that sort of belongs to the system the board would still focus on governance but has less responsibility, so potentially more opportunity to talk about faith and parent engagement and so on. In the independent schools, because they are stand-alones, nearly every single one of them would have to be focused on governance more so than the broader questions.

MR COPPEL: Okay, yes, great. Thank you very much.

MS ABRAMSON: Thank you so much.

MS BOSCH: Can I just say one more thing?

MR COPPEL: Sure.

MS BOSCH: I'm sorry, I should have raised it before, but the positioning of gifted and talented children and your thinking around the evidence base for supporting those students and their acceleration. It's simply a comment, but I think we're missing something. I understand it's very important to look at the long tail and so on, but APC believes that the focus and the specific interest in the gifted and talented area has declined, and that we're not necessarily serving our brightest students at the top end and their needs and their aspirations. Thank you.

MR COPPEL: Thank you.

MS ABRAMSON: Thank you.

MR COPPEL: We're running a little bit ahead of time, so we're going to need to take a short break and we'll reconvene when Stephen Bartos is among us. Thank you.

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MR COPPEL: I now invite our next participant, ARACY, to, for the record, give your names and who you represent and then I invite you to make a brief opening statement. Thank you.

MR BARTOS (ARACY):   Thank you for that. My name is Stephen Bartos. I am the chief executive officer of the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, ARACY, and with me is my colleague, Tim Sealey, who is one of the senior researchers at ARACY. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. We actually see this as being very important in that the quality of education or, more broadly, learning is a major determinant of the wellbeing of Australia and it's something where basing practice on evidence, as opposed to what frequently happens and that is either gut feel or political expediency, is a much preferable course of action.

Our view is that to the extent that we can assist the commission we are very keen to do that. What I might do is just very briefly run through the main points in our submission but then open it up to yourselves for discussion. Essentially we take the view that it's important to have not simply evidence but good, well-tested evidence and in particular in anything to do with the wellbeing of children and young people and education in particular, evidence that's useful. So a point that we would make is that not all evidence is equal, some evidence is more useful for improving outcomes than others.

It might be helpful here to just illustrate where ARACY sits in relation to making evidence useful. ARACY was founded 13 years ago to bring together researchers, policy-makers and practitioners; and of our membership of more than 4000 around 30 per cent are academics, so people who are good at gathering and analysing evidence; around 30 per cent government policy-makers and the remaining 40 per cent people who are engaged in practice in the field, either parents' organisations - and you've just been hearing from one of our very active member organisations a moment ago - or, in many cases, individual child care workers, teachers, principals, whatever they might happen to be. The other thing that is, I think, distinctive about ARACY and a point we make in our submission is that education, or in our framework which is called the Nest we refer to it as learning, is best seen as part of an interconnecting set of preconditions for wellbeing which include children having their material basics, being safe, healthy, participating and having a positive sense of culture and identity.

I suppose just to illustrate that in terms of good learning outcomes, if a child is in extreme poverty or suffering from repeated abuse or going hungry, they're not going to get good learning outcomes. But conversely and this is a very important point that our members who are interested in social determinants of health are keen to get across and that is that better education actually leads to better health outcomes,

for example. It's not simply an income effect, it's the fact that people with better educational outcomes can make better health choices, so it has knock-on effects so the things all interrelate.

In terms of the draft report, as I said before, we welcome it. We would suggest perhaps expanding out the focus when we look at policies and teaching practices beyond more than classroom teaching. Student, parent and community engagement in education are very important factors leading to better education outcomes for a country and we actually, in terms of the point I was making about let's make evidence useful, have suggested a case study on parent engagement. We are undertaking a major project on parent engagement funded by the Commonwealth government to look at what practices lead to better parent engagement, how to roll them out effectively, how to get parents engaged in learning and by parent engagement we mean more than parents turning up to an occasional parent-teacher interview, we mean active engagement in the process of their child's learning and complementarity between what happens at home and what happens at school.

How do you get that? Well, we haven't completed our project so the evidence is still being gathered. But I think the reason we put that in as a case study is that it illustrates a way of making evidence gathering relevant and useful because we have involved a very wide network, including parents and teachers and each of the jurisdictions, education departments and academics in that as a collective endeavour. One of the big success stories is formation of a Parent Engagement Network which already has around 500 members - even though it's only been going this year - of people who are desperately keen to find out what works, what the evidence base is and how to apply it. So it's actually a really good case study of the fact that people are keen to find useable evidence and then apply it and I think that's an important message from our submission.

Finally, I suppose, worth from our perspective suggesting that as you continue with your inquiry, you might think more about what the barriers to adoption of evidence might be because it does seem to us - and this is one of your terms of reference in terms of term of reference 7 - that evidence itself is not enough. There are, as we've documented in our submission to you, countless case studies where compelling, convincing, well-founded evidence has been put before people who have totally ignored it for various reasons and rather than indicate what those reasons are because actually this is an inquiry about evidence, the evidence in Australia isn't that strong as to what those barriers are, which are the most important barriers, which aren't, we have suggested that it might be worth the commission applying some resources to investigating that a little further.

But there are the issues that we've identified in our submission including path dependence, the tendency for a practice, even if not supported by evidence, once it's

put in place to stay in place regardless and we refer to the excellent work that was done in New South Wales in examining Reading Recovery. It was a great initiative that the New South Wales Education Department established a centre for statistics and evaluation in education and they examined that particular program, found it wanting but the telling thing is that that was after it had been in place for 30 years and had stayed in place for 30 years without evidence.

We also think that it's really important to make those connections between people in practice and people in academia which is what ARACY tries to do. We communicate extensively with our membership. We send out to a mailing list of almost 5000 people a weekly ebulletin and a monthly electronic news. Not everyone opens them but more than half do, which is a pretty good average for any organisation and we spread information and share practice. I suppose an example of that is the fact that this submission to yourselves wasn't just done by the staff of ARACY, it includes inputs from a large number of different ARACY members. So can I finally put on the record our thanks to the members who contributed to the submission and open it up to yourselves for the things that interest you in this.

MR COPPEL: Thank you, Stephen. My first question is just a bit of clarification on the roles that AITSL and ARACY play - seem to have some similarities. Can you comment on how ARACY is different from AITSL in terms of the dissemination of teaching practices.

MR BARTOS (ARACY): A big difference is that ARACY is not focused on teaching practices. So our conceptual framework for looking at child wellbeing, the Nest, is that holistic picture and it looks at those interactions between the different dimensions of wellbeing which is, I think, a key difference with ARACY, so that's important to us. We look also at children and youth from zero through to 24, so we cover a very wide age range. What that means is that we can focus on some of the important transitions, so into early learning, from early learning into school, from school into work or school into tertiary training and those transition points are important ones and so we look at that.

I suppose the last point is we are very much a membership-driven organisation so that wide membership and that mix of membership is what makes ARACY a little different from other organisations that might have an interest.

MR COPPEL: Thank you. I wanted to pick up on the point that you made about barriers to the adoption of evidence because this is a point we have had some discussion in the earlier participants this morning. I made a reference to an OECD report from 2015 that looked at over 400 teaching programs and practices and looked at the extent to which they were evaluated and concluded only 10 per cent were evaluated. You have suggested that we look at the barriers to the adoption of

evidence and I think evaluation may well be one of those.

MR BARTOS (ARACY): Yes.

MR COPPEL: I would be interested in your views, even though you haven't researched it, as to what those barriers may well be to give us a bit of a pointer on where we could look or where at least we could shine a light on the possible nature of those obstacles to the adoption of evidence.

MR BARTOS (ARACY): Yes. One of the ones that strikes us is that the evidence standards for existing practices aren't nearly as stringent as those for new and what that means is that there is often a tendency for what's currently in place to simply remain in place and crowd out new or better practices because it's assumed that they must be okay because they're the status quo. It's also, I think, problematic - and we refer to this in our submission - that if you are gathering evidence for a new practice, there are extensive requirements in terms of, say, ethics committee approval for a trial, privacy requirements and so on, whereas introducing a practice without evidence doesn't get put through those hoops, which is a perverse outcome. It seems that there should be, for any new practice, some minimum evidentiary standards, that it has to have at least been subject to evaluation or trial before introduction but systemically we have set up barriers to that happening and I think they're unintended but that's their effect but it does seem to us to be that effect.

As the Productivity Commission itself knows through countless past inquiries with any attempt to introduce evidence in favour of change, there's a set of vested interests who are vested in the existing system who will resist that and I think the best source of evidence on base is your own previous reports which have covered them in a range of different sectors. The lack of decent communication between the researchers who understand evidence and the people who are applying that evidence in practice doesn't always apply. There are some really good examples of the contrary and your own draft report has referred to some of the good reports in Australia recently but it is frequently observed that academics and teachers, for example, don't communicate as well as they should.

MR COPPEL: You have made reference to a number of the reports that we have referenced in the report and you have hinted at practices that are preferable in terms of a communication between researchers and the educators and this is a point that has come up in a roundtable that we held last week here in Melbourne about the importance of having a relationship between the researcher and the practitioner.

MR BARTOS (ARACY): Yes.

MR COPPEL: Do you have any sort of pointers as to what constitutes good

consultation practices, the way in which they could be institutionalised , for want of a better word?

MR BARTOS (ARACY):   Probably the best recent example - and I might call on my colleague Tim Sealey to add to this - is the parent engagement work we're doing which has from the start embedded a really productive and respectful interrelationship between researchers and practice right from the design of that project. Would you like to add, Tim?

MR SEALEY (ARACY):   Yes, I think one of the key things is that all stakeholders have been consulted, not just the researchers and not just the practitioners, but we brought them together as well. So we've talked to them separately and we've talked to them together and we have worked out both the positive and negative sides of the argument and come to working relationships so that the research builds on best practice but the practice then feeds back into the evidence.

One of the things I think is really important is that research to practice is not a one-way flow, it's a two-way flow and it has to come back from the practitioners feeding back into the evidence so that it becomes a cycle of continuous improvement. It's one of the things we've tried to put into parent engagement. While we've imported a lot of American standards and a lot of American research, we've actually pilot tested it and reshaped it and got input from both focus groups and from quantitative methods to actually make a better framework for parent engagement within Australia. We don't just want to import what happens in America and say, "It works in America, it's going to work here." We've got a much more holistic viewpoint. And as Stephen says we have to make it fit into the health and other outcomes of childhood, not just education, that education is both a driver of and a recipient of that interrelationship.

MR BARTOS: I suppose the other lesson from that work is that we make it easy for the interaction to take place, so we have established a network that people join virtually and communicate with each other through blogs. That's a way of just harnessing the power of the web to make interactions simple and easy.

The thing that we've been discovering is that academics are actually extremely keen to communicate in language that can be used in practice, given the opportunity, given the platform to do it. Often though, academic means of communication aren't that platform. Certainly journal articles in many of the international refereed journals are no way of communicating between academics and practice, whereas a simple blog post is.

MR COPPEL: Can I come back to your project on parental engagement? I've looked at your submission and I've looked at the appendix which gives the case study

on this project. Your approach there is a qualitative analysis, and what we have been asked in our terms of reference is, inter alia, to identify where there may be gaps in the data. So I'm interested whether this project that's currently under way, in your view, has identified a gap in the data that is collected to inform a national education evidence base and whether this project has scope to fill that gap.

MR SEALEY: We engaged the Parenting Research Centre to do a data stocktake for us and to look at what data was collected and what was useful at a national level, because one of the things that we're very keen about in parent engagement is we want a national consistent approach to parent engagement, so we looked at national data collections.

We found, I think, there was about 22 various datasets that could be used, but none of the datasets in and of themselves fully encapsulated what parent engagement is or should be and how it should be represented. Together the 22 datasets probably do, in that, well, the data's there, it's just not accessible because there's no linkages between those various datasets. So one of the things was a data gap in terms of what's actually collected. The bigger gap is how the data is actually connected and how the dots are connected with each other to make it useful for people.

So we have the national school opinion survey and then we have state surveys of parent engagement. The state surveys collect different information to the national school opinion survey which collects different information from the LSAC and the LSAY and the LSIC. They've all got some questions which you could say yes, they're measuring parent engagement, but they're not specific enough that you can actually say this is the whole concept of parent engagement and what parent engagement represents. So there are gaps both in the depth of the collection and the linkages between those data elements. For my money the linkages are much more important at the moment.

MR COPPEL: Is that stocktake analysis something that you could share with the commission?

MR SEALEY: Yes, we can share that. I can send you the papers for that stocktake analysis.

MR COPPEL: Thank you. So getting to the point about the linkage, I think this is a view that we share in our draft report, we see there are a number of gaps but they're smaller than the gaps that are evident with respect to the ability to use the data; the power that linkage provides to get leverage from existing data collections. We have identified a number of issues that act as impediments, including privacy concerns and consent and so forth. Can you share with us what you see as the barriers to using linkage techniques to make better use of that set of parent engagement data?

MR SEALEY: Well, I'm a strong advocate of data linkage, so I'm probably a bit biased in that respect, but one of the big fears is that privacy concern. But you don't have to link data with all of the information. You use data linkage keys so you can actually make the data more anonymous. That reduces the power of the data completely for an individual. You can't be one hundred per cent you link individual A to individual A over here. But within statistical tolerance we know that we get at least a 95 per cent confidence interval if we do a data linkage appropriately. Probably the best example of that is the METeOR database that the AIHW does with health records. I think that's the way we need to think about education-related and learning data, is we've got to try and get that sort of semblance of it, a system and structure, in place.

There's a lot of myths around privacy and confidentiality. If people actually read the information privacy principles under IP10 and understood them better - again, I think we need to make the language more accessible on information privacy principles - then people probably wouldn't be scared as they are.

MS ABRAMSON: Tim, this is the federal legislation you're talking about?

MR SEALEY: Yes, the information privacy principles. Again, it's very difficult, it's quite a complex read. I think if it was made much simpler and more accessible people wouldn't confuse individual rights with collective rights. Data we use at a collective level predominantly: we want to know what happens for a society, for a community, for a specific group of people but not any individual within those groups. If people were aware we're not actually after an individual's data to focus on an individual but to look at a collection of individuals about a certain aspect of that group of individuals, then perhaps we alleviate a lot of that stress concerned around privacy and confidentiality.

So I think maybe we need to do a bit of work on how we present privacy and confidentiality concerns and issues. I think we're all a bit guilty of that. Some of us don't want people to look at our data so we say, "Any cell that has less than five people in it we're not going to identify." That's fine in one sense, but it also doesn't help a researcher who's never going to use the data in that way, shape or form to actually write a paper about the whole scenario, and yet we deny the access to the database because there's cells with fewer than five cases in them, irrespective of the fact of how the research is going to use them. So I think some of the work that has to be done in the background is how we allow access to information and data and how it's utilised. Maybe we need to come up with a set of principles and practices around that to again satisfy privacy and confidentiality concerns but allow research to be undertaken in the spirit for which it's supposed to be done.

MR COPPEL: One of the recommendations in the draft report is to adopt a similar exception that applies for health research for public policy. Do you have any views on whether that recommendation would go in the direction of facilitating data linkage?

MR SEALEY: Yes, I think it would and I think it's a very sensible approach to take, because ultimately we want to make society better for everybody. If we don't use the evidence collectively in the way it should be we're never going to get there. We're all going to have these fights, we're going to have these half-realised outcomes and half-realised answers and we're always going to be chasing our tail. If we actually did it properly and showed the value and the continuous improvement that such an approach would take, then we'd get better value for money for the outcome and we'd get more people coming on board; which is the other thing, is the response rates to surveys and data collections and stuff.

At the moment some of that fear factor stops people from answering surveys, apart from survey burden itself where we keep sending the same survey to the same people. Maybe we need to be a bit smarter on who we actually ask to do a survey, if we're going to do a randomised survey. We should keep lists of who has been used in the past and try and get a fresh set of random people in the future.

MS ABRAMSON: Do you have a view - bearing in mind what you've just said, Tim, about data linkage, do you have a view about a unique student identifier?

MR BARTOS: We would support a unique student identifier, and we say so in our submission. I mean I think it's desirable. But one of the things that I was going to add to what Tim was just saying, and another element that I think is important in your draft report, is that there be a trusted non-government intermediary organisation; because we relate this to the increasing evidence of low levels of trust in government and higher levels of trust in not all but some community organisations to be able to act as a reliable intermediary. I think that that's important, that if we're going to have better data linkage, if we're moving down the track of a universal student identifier, we also need to have institutional reforms to rebuild trust.

MR COPPEL: Yes.

MR SEALEY: On top of that, that's something that - I've pushed for a universal student identifier ever since I've been involved in education. One of my previous jobs was at Universities Australia and one of the first meetings that I went to was at the ABS. I put forward the idea of a unique student identifier and one of the people on the panel said, "That will never happen in our lifetime." I said, "Well, if it doesn't, that's very sad," because it's one of the ways that we can actually show longitudinally what happens to people both coming into education, what education

they get, what interruptions they have to that education process along the way and the pathways back into education and out of education that they utilise. That, surely, is something which is of benefit to everybody, both to the individual concerned and to society, to make sure that we close off the bad pathways and keep the good pathways open.

MS ABRAMSON: In terms of a national approach though, to it - because there might be a view that, well, if the state can identify a student, why would we need to have it on a national basis?

MR SEALEY: Very simple: people move, they don't stay in the same state. They are highly mobile. In fact student mobility is one of the barriers to good parent engagement. The family who moves every five minutes - it's very hard for school to engage with that family in terms of making a good educational outcome for that child. So while I'm a great believer in stable relationships, we also have to be mindful of the fact that not everybody has a stable relationship in their environment and things change.

MS ABRAMSON: Would you have a view about when that identifier would start, so I'm thinking about the early childhood years, or would you have a view that, really, it starts once the child enters the school system?

MR SEALEY: It depends whether you want to reinvent the wheel or to use the identification system we've already got, which is the Medicare card. If you use the Medicare card, it starts from birth, effectively.

MS ABRAMSON: Which is locked, I think, in terms of how Medicare - - -

MR COPPEL: At present it is, yes.

MR SEALEY: At the moment under the Health Act it's actually locked for that purpose. Again, this is how do we change the fit for purpose aspects?

MR BARTOS: Look, ideally you would track from early years, because as we mentioned before, some of those transitions are really important and working out what leads to a better outcome or a worse outcome at those transition points you can't do unless you can identify in some way what's happening to the students. Again, as Tim said, you don't want to find it out for an individual but you want to find it out for cohorts of kids going through the system.

MR SEALEY: The other thing, if you actually use the Medicare card, not only do you have the student identified, you also have the family they belong to identified, which means you can look at family influences on that progress, which I think is also

important and sometimes missed.

MR BARTOS: But that one might be trickier - - -

MR SEALEY: It's very tricky.

MR BARTOS: - - - for this inquiry to pursue. But the general principle is that having an identifier of students that can track them through from early learning through until they finish their tertiary learning is actually really highly desirable.

MR COPPEL: The focus for us is broader than education. You mentioned it includes health and other areas of social policy. My understanding is a USI will help linkage within the education sphere but when it comes to linkage between an education dataset and the health set or another administrative dataset, I think it's not going to resolve the problems that you will have over and above any other linkage key.

MR BARTOS: That's correct.

MR COPPEL: If that's correct it would suggest that sort of the incremental value from the USI, at least from the perspective of looking at various forces that are acting on education outcome, is more limited.

MR BARTOS: Yes, that's right.

MR SEALEY: That's correct. Which is why I pushed for the Medicare approach, because I actually think that's the more sensible approach in the holistic wellbeing of the child, as opposed to any particular factor such as a student education outcome.

MR COPPEL: Do you have any further questions?

MS ABRAMSON: I just want to ask some questions about our institutional arrangements that we proposed, so we're talking about the bottom-up approach, and whether you had any views that you wanted to share on the various institutional framework things that we've set out.

MR BARTOS: Covered that a little bit before in terms of trust, and I think that one of the points that we would want to emphasise is that trying to look at education simply in terms of what happens in classrooms is too limited because of those important links to other determinants of those outcomes. So whatever institutional framework you put in place we would be advocating strongly that it is based on something that is broader than simply, for example, an organisation that looks at teaching practices. We would see that as being much too limited in terms of getting

towards better educational outcomes.

There's a couple of other points that I was thinking we might cover off in the discussion but we haven't yet and so if I might make those. One is the fact that the situation in terms of barriers to learning faced by indigenous Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, are significantly different in many ways to those faced by other Australians. I do think it would be worth addressing those separately as a chapter. That's something that we'd be advocating.

The other thing that we have probably not been as active in publicising as we should have is the fact that we've got a What Works for Kids web site in development with the support of the Commonwealth government which will do a lot of what the US What Works Clearinghouse does. We'd just like to draw that to your attention as something that is under way, is being built at the moment, as is a compendium of longitudinal studies. We know that this inquiry is interested in longitudinal studies; again, a compendium of Australian longitudinal studies which is broader than educational longitudinal studies, I should emphasise, as is What Works for Kids. They're covering all the different dimensions of wellbeing. I think those two things, the What Works for Kids and longitudinal study compendium are things that will actually help in this realm. It's a real pity they're not finished yet but they're at least under way.

MR COPPEL: So what is the compendium entail, is it a list of different studies?

MR BARTOS: It's lists of studies but also describes the studies and it gives an indication of how you can link studies, one to another. So that's being developed by some of our academic members. Although I said that ARACY aims to link practitioners and policy-makers and academics all together, I've got to confess that on the longitudinal studies the ones that are most interested are the academics. They're the ones who are doing the bulk of the work on that. But what they're doing is trying to develop a compendium that will allow people who are aware of one longitudinal study to look at those results and see how they compare with those of another longitudinal study.

MS ABRAMSON: So What Works For Kids, that's the clearinghouse and the web site?

MR BARTOS (ARACY): Yes.

MS ABRAMSON: It's not a process that commissions research?

MR BARTOS (ARACY): No. What it's doing is it's taking programs for kids that have an evidence base and it's rating the quality of that evidence and then it's

publishing that. So it's really a clearing house rather than a commissioning process. It goes to the point that we make in our submission that it's very important to validate evidence. Just because something is published in a refereed journal doesn't mean it's good evidence. Having an assessment independently of, "Is that useful? Is it well founded? Can it be replicated? What was the methodology?" that's all really important in terms of sorting out the sheep from the goats in terms of evidence quality.

MS ABRAMSON: I see here that you've developed evidence standards. I assume that that has been a lengthy process to get some agreement around those things?

MR BARTOS (ARACY): Yes, absolutely, but again we've drawn on work done by the Parenting Research Centre which is a very active collaborator with us on some of these projects.

MR COPPEL: I just come back to the point you made about evidence gaps vis-a-vis indigenous Australians. Our report is looking at the capabilities for an evidence-based approach to education policy and in that sense, we're looking at whether there are gaps in the data, gaps in the evidence or the application of the evidence, rather than what is the evidence. Are you referring to specific measures vis-a-vis what works in what circumstances with regard to indigenous education or simply the gaps in the education evidence base?

MR BARTOS (ARACY): In respect of indigenous education, we're at the moment trying to pull together a coalition of Aboriginal organisations and a couple of Torres Strait Island organisations to develop an indigenous version of our Nest framework and one of the points that many of them have been making to us is that the biggest gap in research is research on practice, what works. There is a massive amount of research identifying problems and a significant gap in terms of what specific interventions are applicable to indigenous Australians and they see that as a gap that needs to be filled.

MR COPPEL: They're the questions that we have for you, so thank you very much again for your participation and also for your submission.

MR BARTOS (ARACY): Thank you very much indeed.

MR COPPEL: Our next participant is from Deakin University, Prof Jillian Blackmore and Dr Shaun Rawolle. So if you could come to the table and then for the purpose of the transcript, give your name, who you represent and then a brief opening statement. Thank you.

PROF BLACKMORE (DU):   My name is Jill Blackmore, Deakin University.

DR RAWOLLE (DU):   My name is Shaun Rawolle, Deakin University.

MR COPPEL: Do you have an opening statement?

PROF BLACKMORE (DU):   Yes.

MR COPPEL: Please go ahead.

PROF BLACKMORE (DU):   A very short one really, just to summarise our statement, our submission. We thank you for the opportunity to speak to the commission about this particular proposal. Even to start off with, I'd actually support already some of the points that were made earlier about the importance of longitudinal studies with both quantitative and qualitative evidence, so just to support the type of work already that ARACY does is absolutely critical. It connects health and education, welfare, but a whole wider set of arrangements around interagency collaborations. I think you cannot treat education as something that's a discrete enterprise, a discrete activity, because it is about all the issues around health and welfare, as well as what constitutes a good community.

In our application, we're really concerned about the key focus on what you were saying, improving student achievement through evidence-based policy and practice.   I suppose our focus largely has been on the implications of particular understandings of what would be a desirable outcome, and if you think about the ways in which we talk about 21st century skills and what is required of that, then it's very much around how we want to prepare all students - and here I emphasise "all" - to be those type of 21st century learners. There's a discourse around the types of critical thinking, intercultural sensibilities, ethical stances, being self-managing et cetera, able to use digital literacies et cetera. All of these are the discourse and the question we would want to ask is around what then are the desirable outcomes that this particular type of evidence would produce and of course that raises issues around distinctions between standardised assessments and other issues around long-term improvement and the types of studies and research that will actually look at long-term improvement, both at an individual level, a school level, and at a community level I would argue is equally important.

It also raises questions about what counts as evidence. I think we've made the

point that there's a bit of slippage in the report between the notion of data evaluation and evidence around what that means. It goes down to the question - and we welcomed very much in the statement that we made - of the fact that you've already suggested that teachers have got too many administrative responsibilities, that the types of accountability mechanisms that are highly external are actually overwhelming in terms of what's happening in schools. They are very powerful and actually can be counterproductive and we know that it encourages teach for test and a whole lot of other things that we know are counterproductive. So therefore we want to argue the case and we have put the case that the type of evidence really that teachers and practitioners use in order to inform their practice and fundamentally change that practice needs to be something that encourages a variety of the evidence and recognises the variety of evidence that teachers use and the forms of professional judgment that they use in the classroom and the type of organisational contexts in which principals use that type of data and evidence as well.

We know that certainly there's an array of studies now that show that type of evidence that is used by teacher and principal practitioners is really around action research case studies, policy studies, as well as strong data around NAPLAN and other forms of standardised assessment. The point we'd make is that those forms of standardised assessments are merely one form of evidence that is used in the classroom and by school principals. In a sense, policy becomes practice once it's enacted by teachers in that context.

So we wanted to make the case that there's a level of complexity then that needs to be addressed in a way that we felt was perhaps not addressed as fully as it could have been in the report around how context matters. It raises the issue around how we know that to make significant change in any school, there's a whole lot of interacting things that are happening in terms of the environment in which any school operates and any classroom operates and that is very much about the locations of the school, the ways in which it's funded, whether it's in a disadvantaged community, and in a way, the complexity of things that teachers have to address in terms of the ways in which they have to address that. Real innovation in schools and changing practices is rather like trying to redesign the plane while it's still flying. There's no such thing as control, in the sense of something is out there that they've brought in as the innovation, it's actually about how do you change practice while you're actually maintaining what you're doing. So I think there's multiple factors and we think that that perhaps was not addressed as much as it could have been.

We do know that certainly in market-based systems, and there's OECD studies that have shown that, they are now happening largely in Australia as well, but in the more market-based systems of schooling, there is a greater disparity occurring in terms of poverty. We've just had recent reports coming out again about high levels of poverty in Australia and in particular how many children are affected by that. Therefore

there's a whole issue about what this type of evidence would do in terms of addressing that.

In other words, we know what the problem is. What types of evidence then will support that? What types of examples of evidence can teachers and practitioners use in the classroom that will be of value to them? Arguably there's different types of evidence that policy-makers are looking for at one level, a system level and perhaps at national level than what actually teachers and practitioners also need to have in the classroom which goes to the point around what works in the classroom. I think what works is actually very reliant on context. It's very reliant even on the individual classrooms and the social mix of kids in that classroom and it also relies heavily on teacher professional judgment.

So we would make the point then that in the sense of the complexity of the argument that we see that the question is does the constitution of this new body that has been suggested actually solve the problem that it is seeking to address. In other words, is more evidence going to help us when we actually know a lot about what we need to do in schools. There was a lot of evidence already. So it's how that evidence can be brought together in a meaningful way for practitioners as well as policy-makers. I think our major concern is that if we focus on a particular form of evidence which is implied but not necessarily advocated but implied in the report is very much around random controlled trials which we know have been highly problematic and highly criticised in the US and certainly have not shown any improvements there in terms of their ratings.

We need to look at systems where in fact - and there have been various attempts at value added types of ways of judging that. That has also been shown as not actually producing anything of any particular value and just been proxies for what really is not really particularly good evidence for schools. But actually those types of things can lead to counterproductive things and I just conclude in saying that the type of counterproductive tendencies of having a particular one form of evidence is very much a counterproductive effect is that it changes the ways in which schools operate in terms of what they value and so if there is a particular model of what constitutes evidence it's going to impact on the types of research that is valued, the types of research that is valued in universities, the types of work that is valued in distribution of grants. We know this happened with No Child Left Behind in America. It led to an incredible shift in the nature and way in which research was undertaken in America and most of it was counterproductive to actually changing and improving practice.

So we would argue that we need to be very careful about establishing one particular way of doing it and looking at a variety of forms of evidence and actually focusing on how policy gets enacted into practice is really the problem around here

and then what forms of evidence will assist teachers.

MR COPPEL: Thank you. Maybe I can start by just giving a bit of perspective on the role of the institution that we are proposing. It has several functions and one of those functions really is getting at the translation of evidence into its application but also the identification of research priorities, the translation of research into a manner which is interpretable at a school level and also promoting the standards of research that provides credibility and integrity and the results that come from it but it has a wider role when commissioning research.

PROF BLACKMORE (DU): I understand. I suppose my response to that would be that in turn those functions would indeed change the nature of what constitutes research through those various functions that you've just outlined in terms of, in particular, the ways in which - by setting priorities in what constitutes research assumes that this body will make decisions about, then that setting of priorities will be translated into practices and university research and other ways. So it will have implications and can quite often have a strong impact about what types of research is undertaken and funded and I think that is not necessarily - I think having one body that is determining those priorities is not necessarily the way of thinking about because actually research practice actually also comes out of the classroom, comes out of what teachers do and teachers action research in other forms of research. So I think having one body determining that is a bit of an issue in terms of priorities.

MR COPPEL: Many of your comments really get to the value of the indicators or the data that are used. You also question the value of some of the techniques in a sense quite agnostic as to what results we can extract from these datasets or from these research techniques or at least having a grain of salt as to how those results are used. I am interested in the nature of the data that you think is important to collect to inform evidence that will lead to improve student outcomes.

PROF BLACKMORE (DU): Well, I think I have made the case, there are multiple forms of data, both qualitative and quantitative. So, for example, the type of work that ARACY does is excellent, the types of the early childhood studies, very large - those types of database is excellent. I think those are of great value and they are used by both policy-makers and research practitioners. But at the same time I'd also argue there's other forms of evidence that actually - like, case studies and other forms of qualitative research that is of value in terms of specific contexts around which it works. I would argue - I'm certainly agreeing with regard to indigenous education, there's a whole new set of parameters and schema that we need to understand how that is very different perhaps from what's going elsewhere. So that again is a need for specific forms of research around that.

So I think the issue is around maintaining the diversity of the types of research

approaches but I suppose the caution that we were making is that if you have a body determining all the priorities and everything that does have a - it's not agnostic in the sense of we're not against quantitative research, it's just that we're saying that it has often unpredictable effects and we know from looking at what happened in the USA around No Child Left Behind we know exactly what happened and there is significant data around showing what happened when you have one particular way of viewing how research should be done. So that is more the worry that, I think, we were trying to expect rather than taking an agnostic view about data and particular forms of data because I think all forms of data are valuable, it's just what gets privileged, that's the question.

MR COPPEL: You answered that question though. We are asked to identify where priorities to fill data gaps lies and the view in the draft report is there are a number of gaps and there's work that is actually under way addressing some of those gaps. We have heard this morning that data on parent engagement, which is an area we have mentioned but we haven't specified as a gap - I would be interested in your views on where you see those priorities at a national level, at a national education evidence base which may not mean a single repository.

PROF BLACKMORE (DU):   I think the notion as a compendium is an excellent one. I mean, that's the type of the thing that is of value because it provides a whole array of different forms of data, it talks about applications, it talks about how it works in particular context. I think that type of data base is a very powerful one and I think that's the type of resource that teachers can use as well, principals can use as well as policy-makers. So certainly around the parent engagement I actually do research myself around that area and I do think that there is a gap in that and certainly I would encourage more research to be done in that area. I think identifying issues is very important, yes. The question is then what happens after that in terms of the ways in which people are encouraged to do that research.

DR RAWOLLE (DU):   I will just add one thing. I suppose one reading that we had of the report, and clearly we were focusing on the things that we wanted to respond to and we wanted to respond to things that we thought could lead to unintended effects of a vicious cycle and so one of the things that we were concerned with and we think there is a really important role to be played, for collecting an evidence base for both informing policy but responding back to and providing an account of policy and the effects of policy. We note, for example, the report says quite explicitly that there has been effects which relate to the growth of privatisation and the marketisation of schooling.

There are interesting ways, I think, that the kinds of data that we collect, one gap perhaps relates to policies, how policies both influence particular systems, as in - I mean, it's not just that a policy affects particular schools but systems of schools.

But also the cross-field effects, the effects between policies, that policies don't exist in a vacuum. So implementing one policy doesn't mean that all of the other policy and even the people requirements of a school go away.

To talk to one comment that was made earlier in relation to initial teacher education not being influenced by evidence, there's a lot of things, I think, that initial teacher education needs to respond to which are about legislative issues, they're about specific requirements from different bodies about what that particular course needs to embed. So to the extent that that may or may not be informed by evidence but might be an imagined future for a school or a school system, initial teacher education responds to those things accordingly.

I think the question of how a dataset relates to those policy effects therefore seems highly important, given the investment that Australia and other OECD nations makes. If we're going to make comparisons with other nations we should have a good comparison of the policy effects. It seems sort of interesting I think then that if Australia's performance is then compared, which other nations do we compare our performance with and which instruments from those other nations do we take as being sort of the base point for our comparison? So I suppose our emphasis in this, and we are incredibly aligned on the need to coordinate and bring together the datasets, is just to point out those specific things that we think might lead to blind alleys.

We acknowledge that we focus a lot on randomised trials, because we read the understanding of bottom-up as being about randomised trials rather than other kinds of research, and we saw that as being a potential problem.

MR COPPEL: So, on that, we do characterise randomised controlled trials as being sort of a high-quality standard for research, we draw parallels with work in the health sphere, but it's not at the exclusion of other techniques. We mentioned sort of natural experiments where there may be a set of schools that have adopted a particular teaching practice that could be used, But on randomised controlled trials, you made the point in your opening remarks that there's no such thing as a control. Can you explain that?

PROF BLACKMORE: Yes. I think we made the point also in the submission as well. In a educational context, in a sense of the notion of being able to - there's so many complexities that are going on into a classroom it's very difficult to work out what - because there's multiple programs, multiple expectations; and so therefore it's very difficult to identify any causal relationships between what's happening there in terms of the outcomes, in terms of saying, "It's this particular thing or that particular aspect." That's the argument around the nature of a control where I'm saying that the very nature of the experimental model is much more difficult to input into an

educational context or the health model into an educational context than it is in a health system. It's just that you've got a whole lot of situations going on and complexities. I think we made the point of multiple forms of programs to identify which one is having the impact necessarily other than how individual children are having an impact on that.

MR COPPEL: But aren't there techniques to control for these contextual factors to isolate the actual program or policy that you're interested in evaluating? Or are you saying that the extent of the various contextual factors is a lot larger, a lot broader than it is?

PROF BLACKMORE: I think the extent of the context is much larger than is made out by those types of things. The types of studies that have been done, for example, that emphasise teacher quality has actually said that they're not taking into account context when they say that, when they're emphasising the type of teacher effect, because then you've got family effect, you've got home effect, you've got school effect, all of these different effects coming through and all interacting at the same time.

So to posit all of the responses on one particular aspect is sometimes dangerous, although we all agree that teacher quality is an excellent thing. We all want to have teacher quality, this is not going against that at all in any way, but what constitutes teacher quality is the question. I think there's a whole lot of evidence again that shows that that's around giving teacher profession autonomy, teaching judgment. There's no simple solutions. There's no tick sheets, check list sheets or simple solutions in the classroom. It is allow teachers to work through and be informed by research in that classroom.

MR COPPEL: What are the other methodologies then that can take into account these broader set of contextual factors, because it would be a common element not unique to randomised controlled trials that you need to isolate. How do you isolate, using other methodologies?

PROF BLACKMORE: That's beyond my - - -

DR RAWOLLE: Well, in our submission we do talk about alternate models. I suppose our focus really was if there's just a single methodology that's used to generalise whole populations that that might be problematic. In particular, if meta analysis of randomised trials have additional sets of problems which really are about time lag; that the construction of a model which is built on say 40 years of evidence presupposes that policies in the past 40 years haven't made an effect, or that they're not an easily measurable effect. So I suppose that there's technical questions, and so we do mention naturalistic experiments - what else do we talk about in the

submission?

PROF BLACKMORE: Quasi-experimental, yes.

DR RAWOLLE: Yes, quasi-experimental.

MR COPPEL: We mentioned earlier that we don't put forward randomised controlled trials as a single methodology, but we do put them forward as a methodology that is powerful. Another area, and I guess I'm sorry to always quiz you on sort of the scepticism or the doubts that you put on the things that are in the draft report, relates to the value-added measures. I guess we also agree that it depends on how the metrics are used, but we think there's scope to use such a measure to identify some of the schools that are over-performing and then through a case study approach, for example, to look at that set of schools more specifically to see if there are practices there that are different, and whether those practices are seen as making a positive contribution can be scalable. That's one example of where we see a potential value in such a metric. I'm wondering whether you would agree with that or whether you think that's too simplistic.

PROF BLACKMORE: Well, the school effectiveness movement now has been doing that for 30 years. They started off with high-performing schools in the high-performing areas and have done that and said the things that make a high-performing school are things such as principal leadership, coherent policy and have come out with about six or seven different things. There's a considerable debate going on now within the school effectiveness movement itself arguing that it's actually taken us only so far and that the issues around being able to take a set of characteristics and then looking for it elsewhere and scaling it up - it's not quite that simple.

So in a sense within that model already of how research has been undertaken there's some concerns around that because again, the ways in which you can just take up some particular aspect, and teachers do this all the time, and take it into another context and replicate it. I don't think "replicates" is the right word because what happens is it gets re-interpreted. Teachers get ideas. They get ideas about programs, but then they take it and they rework it every time in other contexts. So something that shows about the - stories about schools that do that, yes, that helps. But I think the issue around how then you - this has been the major issue for all departments and systems: how do you scale it up? I think it's an ongoing issue. I don't think, doing the reverse now, that is, looking at the schools that have overperformed regardless of context, is going to come up with anything significantly different than the previous measure. I think certainly having stories about what those schools do is very important and having case studies and a group of case studies, but then the issue is about what happens from there. Having a compendium around that type of thing,

having a capacity for teachers and for principals to look at that - I know certainly from the ways in which I have done work on innovative learning environments that the teachers and the principals come in and they swap ideas and that's an interchange and discussions, and having sessions where they undertake those discussions is the thing that's going to make more of a difference than having systems saying, "We're going to scale this particular thing up in this particular way."

DR RAWOLLE (DU):   Can I just add about value adding, I suppose there's two issues that we kind of raise in the submission and one is the technical aspect of how you go about value-added measures and the other I suppose is pointing to their policy uses of instrument and the way that they have been interpreted and used in America, in the US in particular. I suppose those are separable things because I think some of the negative response in relation to value-added measures has been its use as a way of identifying specific teachers or particular schools and closing them down unfortunately. So the technical aspect of using value-added measures, I think there's interesting things around it because it provides a more sophisticated way of measuring the performance of a school. How you deal with those policy potentials - I suppose those are the two separate things that we see in relation to value-added measures.

PROF BLACKMORE (DU):   Particularly if it's connected to teacher performance. That's highly problematic.

MR COPPEL: We have an information request in the report on the idea of adopting a national unique student identifier and we're interested in your views as to the value that a national USI would bring to improving the education evidence base or is it another one of those things that has its downsides?

PROF BLACKMORE (DU):   I think we did say that it was a good point but it does have its downsides, particularly in the early childhood area; because of the different providers and the way that occurs I think was the main area where it's more problematic there. I think Victoria already has something that is similar already. But I think the early childhood is specifically difficult in terms of the complexity of providers and all that occurs. Of course there's also the privacy and security issues that go with it all.

MR COPPEL: Is there experience at Deakin University using the Victorian system which has, within the jurisdiction of Victoria, a common identifier? Is that capability to use that number for linkage purposes used among your colleagues or research?

PROF BLACKMORE (DU):   No, I'm not in that area. I don't think so really, no, as far as I know.

DR RAWOLLE (DU):   It's a good question.

PROF BLACKMORE (DU):   It's a very good question. I'll have to go back.

DR RAWOLLE (DU):   I'm not sure.

PROF BLACKMORE (DU):   Prof Nolan is in that area and she'd be able to clarify that.

MR COPPEL: You made some points in asking us questions about the institution that we're proposing that has responsibilities and is accountable for commissioning of research, the validation of research and the application of research. In the roundtable we held last week, there were a number of points that were made about the details of that institutional structure and one in particular was the level of consultation between the institution and various participants in the education sector. One in particular of those was the relationship between the education researcher and the educator. I'm interesting in how that relationship can be - "formalised" is probably not the right word, but how to develop a system that can systematically build on that relationship and ensure that those connections between the educator and the researcher are captured.

PROF BLACKMORE (DU):   Are you talking here more about how research is undertaken or how you commission research, because I wasn't involved in the roundtable, so I can't - - -

MR COPPEL: There may be a research project where the researcher makes a particular effort to work with educators. I'm more interested in how to make that more systematic, make that a feature of the way in which a researcher engages the educator, and the reason I am is that we know that there's a lot of work and evidence that's created that's not translated in a way - you can't expect the application of that evidence to have much traction. So it would seem to me logical that formalising those connections in a more systematic way could help, and I'm interested in how you think you could go about that.

DR RAWOLLE (DU):   Can I jump in?

PROF BLACKMORE (DU):   Yes.

DR RAWOLLE (DU):   I suppose one model that we have done down in Geelong and further is partnership models, and there's a number of partnership models which embed learning circles that directly link researchers with schools and it brings the schools together around formalised engagement with evidence of learning and data that supports the judgments of evidence of learning. So there are partnership models

that Deakin itself is quite heavily involved with. The more formal example I think of how that would work at different levels - for example, how you would embed a link between principals and researchers is an interesting thing, in that principals' pressures are very different potentially from other members of schools.

PROF BLACKMORE (DU):   I follow up that same point, about the nature of the types of research that we undertake in those schools with an obligation to give some form of feedback and reporting mechanism. The question of whether that is something that is made more systematic or not is another question - in terms of actually providing the schools that we do research with in that particular way - but certainly in any projects most of us do, we all give that feedback to schools. We see that as part of our responsibility in terms of doing that. Now, how something like that could be systematised is again another way of thinking, and it's also about how the types of reports that come out of various things, like out of all the research grants, how those reports get more widely disseminated. I've produced reports for the ARC, we put them on our web site, but there's a whole lot of that type of work that is there and readily available that we probably don't capture as well as we could, so there could be something about how we do that and systematise that type of data. There's a huge amount of data sitting in that type of resource.

DR RAWOLLE (DU):   I suppose the complication is that research contracts have a limited time line but the social contract for that research, the warrant for the research in the first place, is not to finish those effects at the end of the funding cycle and so the question then is how you capture and embed feedback about what that initiative did in the school or district or wherever in a way that's meaningful. I don't know that that's a simple thing to capture, given the contractual obligations that go along with research provide - they're about limiting the kinds of engagement between researchers and schools, rightly so, so that there's not a continuous insurgence of research in school systems. But I think if there was a clause in contracts related to research that actually provided required feedback after certain time periods, that might be one way to capture it.

MS ABRAMSON: Is there an issue though with that evaluation time frame? So you get your research contract, but a lot of things we've heard in education is that these are longer-term projects in terms of the results coming through.

PROF BLACKMORE (DU):   Yes.

DR RAWOLLE (DU):   I think there's two things, the time lapse issue about systemic change in schools and people point to the difference between time lag in primary schools versus high schools, for example, but on top of that there's a layering of political - like a political will. So when you start a project with particular parameters which are set in place, notably you don't control a government's priorities,

so over the course of, say, a three-year project, your initial assumptions may completely go. So I think it's a complexity beyond the researcher, it's beyond the school, but it has real effects for the commitment of the school to particular research at particular points in the political cycle.

MR COPPEL: One final question and that relates to the way in which we extract value from practices in other countries or research work in other countries. It's been brought up from a number of participants in this morning's hearings. There's a tendency probably to focus on anglophone countries because it's a bit easier but I would be interested if you have any insights as to any particular countries where you think the approach to the way in which evidence is used in education policy stands out or particular approaches that may not be system-wide, maybe particular aspects.

PROF BLACKMORE (DU): There's always the Finnish case that everyone has probably already cited constantly and that was a long-term project of whole system-wide change that took 20 or 30 years around that.

MR COPPEL: But that was a case of practices - - -

PROF BLACKMORE (DU): It's a case of how a government, governance and policy came together with an understanding of what schools do and then over a period of time, undertaking systemic change which focused particularly on recognising the role of the teacher professional, autonomy and judgment, paying them well and also setting reasonably high standards about what it was to be a teacher. All of those things came together and also a general recognition about the significance of a school in a community. I think the Norwegians have a similar problem. We know that the Swedish went down the track of the anglophone countries and that's had a significant impact on their so-called performance, whereas Norway has, similar to Finland, a very strong notion of strong community-based education, community interaction, a focus on teacher leadership as well as principal leadership.

I think there's some other systems. Poland has just done a very quick leap forward in terms of the types of indicators that show that there are various ways in which certain systems have been able to do things quite significantly different. But I think other examples we have to be a bit cautious about; probably they've already been listed for you. Shanghai is another case to be careful about. Certainly the USA is not a good example to follow, if we can avoid that. I think some Scandinavian countries - Germany has got a very different system-wide approach there, yes. So again how schools are positioned and how kids get sorted works very differently in each country. So you can't ignore the way in which schools are governed. I think the governance issues are suddenly becoming a priority in terms of how much competition there is and how much cooperation is encouraged. I think if you're

going to get teachers to use data, it's the cooperation and collaboration that's so important.

MR COPPEL: Do any of these countries have something similar in terms of what we're proposing as an institutional arrangement to - - -

PROF BLACKMORE (DU):   There was - the UK attempted EPPI - I can't remember its name now, I actually went and talked to them - in about 2000 but that has not taken off. The one probably that has done this type of work is the Best Evidence Synthesis work that's been done in New Zealand by Alton-Lee that was set up within the Department of Education. That takes a broader view about what constitutes evidence, one that does actually address teacher practice, but it's about doing synthesis of - and they've produced some really quite good reports.

MR COPPEL: Sorry, I didn't get the name of that one.

PROF BLACKMORE (DU):   It's called Best Evidence Synthesis.

MR COPPEL: Is it like a clearinghouse?

PROF BLACKMORE (DU):   The Department of Education there actually has a unit within it that then undertakes work that they see is important, so they identify key issues, so they've done work around quality teaching, they've done work around diversity of learners. They've produced a number of reports, some better than others, but in general, it shows the ways in which research can be produced in particularly useful ways for schools but also for policymakers because that was the reason for doing it, for the policymakers as much as - - -

MR COPPEL: Good, thank you.

PROF BLACKMORE (DU):   Thank you very much.

MR COPPEL: Ladies and gentlemen, that concludes today's scheduled proceedings. For the records, is there anyone else who wants to appear today before the commission? If not, I adjourn the proceedings and the commission will reconvene in Sydney on Thursday. Thank you.

<p style="text-align:center">AT 1.17 PM THE INQUIRY WAS ADJOURNED UNTIL
THURSDAY, 20 OCTOBER 2016</p>