What Matters that has been lost …

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I acknowledge the Gadigal People of the Eora nation, on whose lands we meet today. I pay my respects to their Elders past and present, and also to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples here today.

In my talk today I will seek to demonstrate what a loss to industrial justice it's been that work value cases are no longer possible in NSW. They provided a voice to teachers and a platform to present up-to-date research on teachers' work in 1970, 1980-81, 1990-91 and 2003-4. Such inquiries oozed with the pragmatism traditionally associated with Australian industrial relations but no bad thing was that; it kept changed conditions on the agenda.

Secondly I will attempt to show that – to quote Susan Moore-Johnson – "the workplace matters" when it comes to inquiring into education outcomes as well as what we understand to be "wage justice". Workplace conditions are not just an industrial issue, they have educational consequences too.

Thirdly I will outline the differing accounts of what matters in education and how they are related to the money matters (or not) debate in the politics of education. To seek more – or less – comes with assumptions about the very purposes of education.

Finally I will argue that the relative position of teachers in the labour market is not just about the gap that exists today but the wider market pressures in play. As each day goes by the teacher shortage crisis in NSW is growing. It too is both an industrial and an educational issue.

Let me begin with the Work Value issue and the comment: "Who said history is not capable of producing patterns from which we can learn?"

A VOICE FOR TEACHERS

From 1970 to 2011 the opportunity existed for Industrial Relations Commission inquiries into the work value of teaching and how that should be recognised and remunerated. It meant looking into changes in the nature of work, the skills needed

and the responsibilities required – as well as the conditions under which work is performed. One could conclude, and appropriately, that such inquiries gave a voice to teachers, a platform to bring the realities of work to public attention and around which the Union could campaign on behalf of the profession. No watertight guarantees here but a sense that justice is given a chance, the very idea that came to be known as the Australian system or as Higgins put it "a new province of law and order".

Although there were definitional limitations attached to such inquires, they were formal and they did set salaries. One can see the results that followed – significant salary increases in 1970, 1981, 1991 and 2004, the date of the last such inquiry.

In the final report of the independent inquiry, **"Valuing the teaching profession"** which I chaired we summarised the history of increases from these cases as follows:

- 1970: 21-24.3%, payable over 13 months, with a further 3% National Wage Case increase paid within this period.
- 1981: 9.5% payable over nine months.
- 1991: Teachers 9%-13%, executive staff 20%-29%, payable over seven months.
- 2004: 12%-19.5%, payable over 18 months.

Along with these increases there were "various structural changes to key career elements". The status of teachers as professionals was raised in the 1970 Report, and as we know, it wasn't until this century that the matter was legislated and an Institute of Teaching established. Special payments came to district guidance offices and education officers in 1971 and executive positions of principal, deputy principal and lead teachers were reviewed in 1991 and again in 2003-4. It's a tale of progress underpinned by laws that don't just close the debate at the point of employer aspirations.

Contrast this with the situation today; increases of up to 2.5 per cent allowed and more if "productivity savings" could be established. This replaces the freeze

established in 2020 in the heat of the Pandemic. It sits worryingly in relation to a current and forecast shortage of teachers – and in the context of a real gap between the salaries of teachers and other professions.

It was the view of Dr Kavanagh, Mr Lee and myself that issues related to attraction, recruitment and retention needed to acknowledge the "scale and intensity" of changes experienced by public school teachers that dwarfs the findings in 1970, 1980/81, 1990/91 and 2003/4. Many of the very factors that were at play in those earlier work value cases were in play again and "dangerous to the public standing of the profession, and for the quality of education available". Certainly, it is our view that a work value case, had it been possible, would have reached the same conclusion.

THE WORKPLACE MATTERS

"The workplace matters" is the title of a publication by Harvard Professor Susan Moore-Johnson. It's a good summary of an area of investigation that is all too often overlooked. This is not just what we might call an "ideological" point but a "methodological" point, which governments – and researchers – can too easily ignore when looking into questions like teacher supply, occupational health, and education outcomes. It also requires us to take into account the considered views of principals and teachers, and not just those who develop and manage the policies teachers are required to work with.

Benchmarks in this context are listed by Moore-Johnson as follows:

- teaching assignments, load, class sizes and out-of-field work
- working relationships amongst teachers
- induction support for new teachers
- support for teachers in working with students
- curricula support
- resources and materials made available
- assessment and the role of teachers in it.
- professional development
- professional influence and career growth

- buildings and facilities
- principal's leadership as active brokers of workplace conditions.

What we see here is a list of the contextual factors, physical, organisational, sociological, political, cultural, psychological and educational, that help or hinder the teacher in the classroom and the status of the profession in the community.

One more factor **Valuing the teaching profession** included as important context could be headed simply as "the position of public schooling in NSW today". It's seen by some as little more than a collection of semi-independent schools, minimally united and externally supported, but competing for students rather than as a significant system whose aim is to ensure minimum standards for all and, in concert with others, to tackle educational inequalities across the student population. Such inequalities are growing and the public sector is on the front line when it comes to dealing with students with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, students from a language background other than English and students from a low socio-educational background. Note, for example, one-third of NSW low socio-educational disadvantaged students live in regional, rural and remote areas and 86 per cent of those are enrolled in public schools.

What this all means is that talk of improving educational outcomes for all students without initiatives such as extra time for classroom teachers to plan and collaborate and for school executives to lead and mentor, an overhaul of the relationship between department and school so that support is better delivered, proper provision of new technology so all can benefit, and serious attention to reducing the burden of administration and the management model from which it emanates is going to fall short of the market. It's not "populism" to consult those working on the front-line, nor "unprofessional" to highlight and campaign around workplace matters. It's good public policy.

I am pleased to report that there are three appendices of our report written by Tim Roberts from New Law which summarise the views of teachers about our terms of reference. What they give us, as was also the case in the earlier work value inquiries, is the voice of the profession about the nature of education today. We learnt of

policy and curriculum overload, the time factor when it comes to being up-to-date with research, preparing lessons and reporting as required, the nature and challenges of teaching youngsters and relating to parents today, the incentives or otherwise to engage in continual learning and be up-to-date with technology and the data it throws up. Emotions as well as intellect are involved and psychology is a big part of the story, as are human rights and how they are to be applied in a diverse community. For radically inclined economic rationalists it may look like a factory but perceive it as one and trouble emerges.

It's not surprising given the budgets required to fund the public school system that what we might call "normal" process of politics has a tendency to become out of touch in respect of the real world of teaching. Add to that the good will of teachers themselves and complacency can set in, followed by denial and even hostility when teachers begin to stir. Angelo Gavrielatos commented accurately when he noted that the industrial action of 7 December 2021 was "10 years in the making". Government policy has fallen behind what is needed for the public system to deliver on its challenging goals.

CONTESTED TERRITORY

Let me now look at how all of this relates to the "does money matter" debate.

It would be easy wouldn't it, if (1) all agreed on the ends and means of government schooling and (2) educationists agreed on what amount of money was needed to ensure that system delivered properly. A united front could then knock on the door of government and make a strong case in the budget process. The problem, of course, is that education doesn't sit alone in a government's budget and nor is there the overall level of agreement about goals, systems and teaching methods.

This is heavily contested territory and it's important for all involved to understand the different positions taken – and why they are held.

The "money" debate in education circles is more than just that. It's actually about the system itself. There are two tribes competing for the ear of government. Is what matters the way that system is supported financially and in other ways? Is it a

case of the healthy ambition of credentialed and committed professionals in a system that works against them delivering as they can? Explicit in this tribe's account is the workplace matters theme and a re-energised commitment to education that takes us to the person. As Gert Biesta put it: "Any education worthy of its name should always contribute to processes of subjectification that allow those educated to become more autonomous and independent in their thinking and acting".

Another tribe asks another question: Is it a workforce at all levels from research to administration to teaching, balking at, even undermining what is needed to reform a system that is well financed but inadequately devolved and performance managed around measurable data and what have been labelled as traditional Australian values? Explicit in this account are the ideas associated with new public management such as choice and competition and a re-energised conservatism.

Interestingly it has been these two tribes and the agendas they set that have been brought to the table of education policy since the last work value case in 2003/4 – and where they sit uneasily together in NSW today. On the one hand the professional agenda (educate and empower teachers) and on the other the performance management agenda (control and constrain teachers).

DOES MONEY MATTER?

For those who say professional development is crucial, money certainly matters. First and foremost it's needed to ensure there are enough teachers overall and enough support to ensure that they can perform as is expected. Get the support right and good outcomes will follow.

Those outcomes they relate to ministerial statements such as the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration of 2019 and the national, state, and territory curricula, both formal and with policy additions in areas like anti-racism, multiculturalism and disability. They relate note just to minimum standards for all but also to equity where, we are reminded by Pasi Sahlberg and Trevor Cobbold, wider social and economic policies

designed to reduce inequality will have to be marshalled as well. As they say “schools are in a constant battle against the reproduction of inequality and poverty in society”.

For those who say it is “the education bureaucrats, university-based education academics, and recalcitrant state ministers” and the culture and policies they embrace, money doesn’t have the same significance. To quote Glenn Fahey from the Centre for Independent Studies: “All students and taxpayers would benefit from a more productive school system that delivers greater educational outcomes with the same or fewer resources”. Indeed, one of the outcomes to be sought – if not often stated in bold ink – is system efficiency. Inasmuch as money matters is the objective of keeping it to the minimum required that matters. Why? To keep taxes down. Overall, then, what’s thought to be needed are “smarter approaches to funding – grounded in evidence and in market – based principles”.

When it comes to outcomes sought, standardised testing has special importance, whether NAPLAN or PISA, as providers of measurable material about the effectiveness of schools and teachers. When it comes to the socialising function of schools the values associated with a specific – and conservative view – of the Australian traditions are given emphasis. Patriotism is part of the package.

When it comes to recruitment, Fahey says “there should be fewer entry restrictions to teaching – both at initial level and for mid-career transitions. The focus to improve quality should be on developing teacher’s capacity through de-regulated performance management practices”. He argues that “additional credentialization” has “harmed, rather than helped, the status of the teaching profession”.

I trust I haven’t created straw men here and, indeed, I’m sure there are some areas of common ground here, for example, on how we can learn from successful schools. However, when looking into the system it’s hard not to recognise the different advice given to government by the two tribes. I do see this division of values and attitudes and the policies they create; different versions of the meaning of devolution and professionalism as well as different emphasises in relation to assessment and

accountability are at stake. These matter because both sides will be seeking the support of government with claims as to what they say will best serve the interests of the public.

One side, then, urges us to knock on the door of Treasury and make a case not just for more money but on the delivery of the Gonski promise of "needs-based" funding, NSW being underfunded according to the Commonwealth's own Resource Standard. Whether the money required related to time and its use or dollars to programs and whether it was just about minimum standards for all it was demonstrated in the course of the Gallop inquiry that extra effort was going to be needed – and that before the wider question of equity was put on the table.

The performance management team will, on the other hand, say that more can be achieved "with the same or fewer resources". That requires the right "tools to conduct performance management practices needed for building capacity and providing a supportive incentive structure". That's the message they deliver to government – and one that is deeply entrenched in important parts of the public sector, most notably Treasury and Finance.

THE REAL WORLD OF DEMAND AND SUPPLY

Money certainly matters when we consider the relative position in which teachers find themselves today, not only in respect of the gap between their salaries and those of other professions – this John Buchanan has established clearly in his submission to our inquiry – but also in relation to the labour market more generally.

To this end I go to the paper of choice for the professional and managerial class, the Australian Financial Review (AFR). The class and private sector bias in its editorial opinion is one thing but the way it reports on and seeks opinions on the contemporary economy and the politics and society that frames it is quite another. If only it would go beyond its class and sector bias and reflect more deeply about the information it gathers for its readers.

I start by taking you to an article by Patten, Bennett and Pelly "Salaries jump 20pc …" (4 November 2021).

They point to shortages in professional labour with companies offering 20 per cent – plus pay rises to snap up investment bankers, lawyers, marketing executives, construction managers and sustainability and risk specialists. When it comes to mid-level specialists in areas like risk, cyber security, data analytics and financial crime they report on not just shortages but “profound shortages”.

Then there’s another article by Wootton (4 January 2022) that reports on a KPMG Survey of directors and business leaders. They speak of “acquiring and retraining talent” as the “key worry” particularly but not only in the ICT sector with its ongoing role in digital transformations. There we see an “explosion in demand” with all countries targeting the same skillset needed for this transformation.

I trust you would agree with me in thinking that surely the employer of government school teachers would see the challenge – indeed the dangers – here. This is the very marketplace from which we need to draw when it comes to a new generation of teachers.

Add to all of this the second half of the salaries/working conditions agenda. Here Wootton refers to the cultural shift going on. A Clayton Utz manager is quoted as saying that success in attracting and retaining is more than the two-weekly pay cheque. He refers to health and wellbeing support, professional development and pro bono work. Another from Maddocks reports that professional labour gravitates towards firms with “a strong culture, a track record of flexible work opportunities, and great client work and career opportunities”.

Interestingly as well the industry leaders reported that costs here will rise – and have to as new employees are attracted and settle in. These are, however, costs that need to be carried if firms are to progress.

I do note that there are COVID factors that are part of the story that is the labour market today. There’s that “new purpose” many employees are seeking; so too that demand for health workers of all sorts, whether hospital orderlies or skilled researchers.

Put it this way, money – and working conditions – do matter. Yes, there is a labour market. Yes, there is competition between and within the sectors of education. Competition too with other sectors of employment. We either bring to the table what BBC TV calls “hardtalk” or we choose to stay locked in a bubble of denial.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

What it all comes down to is the question: Who’s right and who’s wrong when it comes to the future of government schooling in NSW? What imagery do we have in mind – a **factory** for testing and reporting on a narrow range of objectives or a **collaboration** between educators and governments to “support all young Australians to become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners and active and informed members of the community?” Is it primarily about choice and competition or access and equity?

If you do believe it is necessarily for a collaboration and that the educational and social objectives should be expansive rather than limited – as indeed the ministers agreed in the declarations from Hobart, Melbourn, Adelaide and Alice Springs – then it follows, like night follows day, that money will matter, especially but not only in respect of teachers’ salaries but also in relation to the supports needed for classroom teaching today. As Commissioner Sheldon put it way back in 1970, and I finish with this quote because it says it all!

> “Teachers are certainly the biggest professional career industry group in the community. Their numbers are so large that any award materially increasing their salaries must necessarily involve a great sum of money, but this fact is not a legitimate barrier to their right to receive remuneration commensurate with their work and its contribution to the welfare of the community. Education is the concealed mainspring in national development and, more importantly, a vast contributor to the spiritual betterment of society.

The heart of education is teaching. Buildings, equipment, high-level planning and new educational philosophies are essential in an efficient and progressive system of education. But all this is meaningless waste unless it bears fruit in the classrooms where today thousands of individual teachers communicate with hundreds of thousands of individual children. All the departmental planning, organisation and academic groundwork are channelled towards this personal relationship and in the end, education is made or broken on the anvil of the human efforts, qualities and ideals of these teachers.

It must follow that, great as may be the cost of placing the salaries of teachers at a reasonable level, this is something which the conscience of the community must face. To do otherwise would be to exploit one section of the community in the supposed interest of all. Such an approach, originally based on the conception that some work is so vital that those who make it their vocation can be expected partially to live off their dedication, is today completely outmoded. It is certainly short sighted. In truth the cost of providing reasonable salaries for teachers is, I believe, less a public burden than a public investment which must return very real dividends although not being based on material values, they can never be quantified".