

## **SUBMISSION to Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper 2023**

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In this submission, we would like to focus mainly on ***Reform Area 1 : Strengthen ITE programs to deliver effective, classroom ready graduates*** - though we will present brief commentary on other Reform Areas

### **Context**

We begin with a brief discussion of the larger policy context as a reference point for our specific commentary on the Discussion Paper. The National Teacher Workforce Action Plan sets out to deal with the ‘teacher shortage right across the country’, to be addressed by recognising that we ‘need to attract, train and retain people in the profession’ (Education Ministers Meeting, 2022: 3). Its Terms of Reference specifically refer to the previous Quality Initial Teacher Education (QITE) Review and two of its recommendations (Recommendations 7 and 15). It is worth remembering that the QITE Report itself was rooted in the then Minister’s stated concerns about ‘Australia’s declining Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) outcomes in both absolute terms and relative to other countries’, identifying ‘quality teaching as one of the key areas of focus to return Australia to the top group of nations’ (QITE Expert Panel, 2021: 1). It should be acknowledged, then, that this places the Teacher Workforce Action Plan and, hence, the current Discussion Paper – though each ostensibly concerned with teacher workforce shortages – firmly within the now long-standing neoliberal culture which places blame for educational decline at the feet of teaching, teachers and teacher educators, rather than recognising policy failure as the root of that decline. Such policy includes:

- marketisation of education and the expansion of the private sector
- instrumentalist and managerialist approaches to education and loss of educational expertise and experience in favour of collections of consultants and think tanks

- education constructed as a positional good for the benefit of individuals rather than as a social good
- devolution
- privatisation and commercialisation of educational products
- obsession with standardised testing

And what are the results of these policies?

- **massive inequities in education**, including highly segregated schooling, creating a system which is increasingly marginalising those who rely on it most. In 2020, Australia delivered the fourth most privatised school education spending in the OECD and the national government spent 75% of school funding on private schools, having delivered in the 2016-17 financial year, for example, almost 4 times the funding to private schools as to public schools – what Adam Rorris, who managed the school resourcing taskforce between 2002 and 2008 has described as a ‘grotesque policy disaster’ (Baker, 2019).
- **residualisation of public education** (Lamb, 2007; Lamb et al, 2015)
- **focus on basic skills** and teaching to the test with consequent dumbing down of the curriculum and with improved NAPLAN results now the very purpose of education
- **the deprofessionalisation of teachers and teaching** (the most centrally relevant here) : limited term contracts for teachers; ‘expertise’ located outside schools with consultants, think tanks and commercial providers (witness the current push to outsource lesson planning to unaccountable content providers, many of whom are producing largely low quality busywork as curriculum); teachers burdened with administrivia - often associated with monitoring and demonstrating performance on standardised tests - and general compliance requirements involving endless forms and records; the erosion of professional autonomy, with teaching increasingly prescribed; focusing on test performance, rather than actually engaging students in a rich, intellectually high level curriculum. Teachers in the UK, from where Australia derives much education policy (including this Discussion Paper – see below), have reported leaving partly because their jobs have become too much about complying with mandated practices, driving students towards test performance and generating data, and too little about using their professional skills, insights and judgements to help children learn (Allen & Sims, 2018).

**- growth of questionable knowledge masquerading as evidence, rigour and even science:**  
the cherry-picking or misrepresenting of research and the movement of fringe knowledge to the centre of policy (witness the movement of speech pathology practitioners to the centre of literacy policy via the phonics debate in Australia, England and France, for example)

Neither the Minister who set QITE in train nor any consultant, think tank, commercial provider or other commentator on Australia's decline has been able to explain why any of these policy outcomes can be laid at the feet of teachers or teacher educators. On equity, for example, as we have known for some time, 'The market model provides a permanent buffer for government from blame about the quality of the school system as a whole.... The promise of choice means that there are no serious attempts to redress the social segregation of student populations, even though this appears to be one of the most powerful levers to reducing inequality'. (Windle, 2014: 320)

Why do these consequences lead to decline, as opposed to teacher action in the classroom? Let us take inequity as one clear issue. As the OECD – the ultimate arbiter in the view of Ministers, and clearly in the view of the Minister who set up QITE – argues repeatedly, 'When more students learn, the whole system benefits. This is an important message revealed by PISA results: in countries and economies where more resources are allocated to disadvantaged schools, overall student performance... is...higher' (OECD 2016: 233). As Wilkinson & Pickett show, '...the achievement of higher national standards of educational performance may actually depend on reducing the social gradient in educational achievement in each country' (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010:108). Inequity is not the fault of teachers or schooling. Neither is poverty - and, of course, we know that SES correlates strongly with educational outcomes. But some countries break that linkage, and the countries that most successfully break it are countries characterised by:

a) the comprehensive nature of their education system in which all students, regardless of their background, are offered similar opportunities to learn - importantly, socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged students attend the same schools.

b) high levels of school autonomy in formulating curricula alongside low levels of school competition (eg OECD, 2010).

Australia is not one of those countries. This is not the fault of teachers, but blaming decline on teachers erodes trust in the profession and makes teaching an increasingly undesirable job option.

This is not to say that schools and school systems do not contribute to dealing with the educational consequence of failed policy. Indeed they do – and they should. Our point is that the claim that the problems lie in schools and teachers, while centralised policy is the solution, has reality the wrong way around: while many solutions may be located in schools, it is policy that is most often the problem (Thomson, 2002; Hayes et al, 2017).

Educational equity – and, relatedly, strong educational outcomes – relies on policy on poverty and inequality, on policy and systemic practice on educational equity, and on teacher action in the classroom. It is the latter that is dealt with indirectly in this Discussion Paper through the medium of teacher education. Nevertheless, all of the policy factors named here are well known and well attested to in the literature. Any review or consequent action which assumes these fundamental factors simply do not exist in relation to equity is being disingenuous at best, negligent at worst. Not even lip-service is paid to these realities, nor is equity even mentioned in relation to schooling outcomes, in this Discussion Paper. The assumption underpinning QITE that the decline in education represented by PISA results is the fault of teachers and schools is left to stand unacknowledged and unquestioned. For the information of the Panel, key comprehensive texts which have dealt with this whole area of policy recently and are readily accessible include Reid (2019) and Lupton & Hayes (2021).

### **On Reform Area 1: Teacher Education: practices and ‘context’**

As the former Minister explicitly linked educational decline in Australia to the need to build on TEMAG reforms (QITE, 2021:1), another driving assumption is that this decline can further be laid at the feet of ITE. This also remains unquestioned, though clearly teacher education cannot be any more blamed for policy failure than can teachers or schools.

Nevertheless, we have Recommendation 7 of the QITE Review (*Strengthen initial teacher education [ITE] programs to deliver confident effective, classroom ready graduates*).

AERO in its *Practice hub* includes as its highlighted school practices, for which it has ‘high quality evidence’ (AERO, n.d.A), resulting from ‘relentless attention’ to ‘rigour’, the following:

- Classroom management (Including routines, high expectations)
- Explicit instruction (dealing with long-term memory, working memory and cognitive overload, as well as modelling, formative assessment and feedback)
- Family engagement (including primary and secondary practices)
- Formative assessment (more on long-term memory)
- Mastery learning (more on long- and short-term memory and on cognitive overload)
- Spacing and retrieval (more on cognitive overload and memory) (AERO, n.d.B)

The Discussion Paper has much to say on – or explicitly refers to AERO’s work on:

- Short- and long-term memory
- Cognitive load
- Retrieval
- Explicit modelling
- Assessment and feedback
- Explicit (teaching/instruction)
- Routines
- High expectations
- Family engagement (primary and secondary practices)
- Mastery learning
- Formative assessment
- Explicit instruction

Thus one large set of answers on how to ‘deliver confident effective, classroom ready graduates’ were presumably already known before the Panel met. AERO’s role in providing

this material is openly acknowledged in the Discussion Paper (p. 5)<sup>1</sup>, but it does make us wonder what the point of the Panel is, since it has largely adopted a preconceived framework. And in fact, the proposed framework in Reform Area 1 largely reprises the model in England, where the government recently adopted recommendations for teacher education reform which conceive of learning to teach as being about acquiring a set of techniques that can be mastered and universally applied and are predominantly centred on strategies to promote student memorisation. These strategies issue from particular conceptualisations of student learning based on cognitive science principles which currently have a limited classroom evidence base (Dfe, 2019; Bauckham, 2021). We elaborate on these issues separately below, but introduce them here to highlight the point that the Discussion Paper sits firmly within, and simply echoes practices of, the Global Education Reform Movement ('GERM': Sahlberg, 2011), aspects of which we discussed in our opening.

Despite already possessing the answers to the Panel's work, there are interesting issues arising from AERO's contribution. The Discussion Paper defines 'rigorous and relevant evidence' in this case as 'identified practices that have been shown to be effective across a variety of contexts including primary and secondary, across different subjects and for students with additional learning needs. This is to promote the teaching of practices that suit the largest range of learners possible and to support graduate teachers in being classroom ready, whatever that classroom may look like. As such, they form the essential foundations for *all* teachers, regardless of specialisation or age range of students' (p. 5). Context would seem to be irrelevant (except oddly the national context : only evidence generated 'in an Australian context' was considered. This would seem to be a particularly odd application of Australian exceptionalism: the only important practices which are *universally* applicable are generated intra-nationally - except, as we note above, the framework simply echoes that in place in England). More importantly, though, this contradicts AERO's own statement on 'context' on its website where 'context' is defined as 'cultural and environmental factors (that )can affect the outcomes of research (i.e. evidence generated in one context may not necessarily apply to a different context). Evidence is most relevant when it has been generated in a context similar to the context in which it will be

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<sup>1</sup> Stand-alone page references throughout are to the Discussion Paper unless otherwise indicated.

applied.’ (AERO, n.d.C). Context would seem to be quite important, contrary to the overarching sense of the Discussion Paper’s advocacy of particular practices and frameworks. Where does this leave the universality of those practices which are to form the ‘core content’ of ITE?

### **On Reform Area 1: Core content: The brain and learning**

We begin this section by examining the ‘extensive evidence base’ that has been produced using AERO’s rigorous evidential standards. Fortunately, at least at the beginning of this discussion, AERO lists its ‘seminal works’ for this rigorous evidence base.

*1) **Cognitive Science in the Classroom: Evidence and Practice Review** (Perry et al. 2021). A review of 499 studies found that understanding and managing cognitive load can have a positive impact on learning outcomes. Cognitive science principles were significant factors affecting rates of learning and retention of information in the classroom. (p. 8)*

This is a very confident and assured statement of the importance of this seminal study as underpinning the essential rigorously evidential core content on managing cognitive load. What do Perry et al, therefore, actually conclude on managing cognitive load? We quote extensively:

*There are numerous studies showing appreciable positive effects for strategies to manage cognitive load within the evidence we have. There are also appreciable numbers of neutral and negative results, suggesting complexity in the principles and challenges of making it work in practice. Much of the evidence we have is highly concentrated in specific age ranges and subject areas. Tests of worked examples have almost exclusively focused on secondary maths and science. Considering worked examples and other forms of scaffolding (for example, support and guidance for complex learning or problem-solving spaces) together suggests wider subject and age applicability (age 7 to 16) of the principle and provides greater confidence in the overall result. However, we note that this confidence is in the value of optimising cognitive load per se, rather than a specific strategy for doing so or for specific learner needs (Perry et al, 2021: 250-1).*

This would appear to be somewhat less confident than it is reported in the Discussion Paper. Perry et al continue in their overall findings:

1. Cognitive science principles of learning can have a significant impact on rates of learning in the classroom. There is value in teachers having some working knowledge of cognitive science principles. They should also be made aware of the serious gaps and limitations in the applied evidence-base, the uncertainties about the applicability of specific principles across subjects and age ranges, and the challenges of implementation in practice.

2. There are large disconnects between the evidence-base for basic cognitive science and applied cognitive science. Applied cognitive science is far more limited and provides a less positive, and more complex, picture than the basic science.

3. The applied literature has many gaps relating to subject areas and age groups.

4. Applied research surfaces many theoretical and practical problems not encountered in controlled lab or pseudo-lab conditions.

5. The evidence-base is largely working at the level of principles rather than tests of specific classroom strategies. Principles do not determine strategies and do not determine specific approaches to implementation. (Perry et al, 2021: 260-262)

And, finally, they conclude:

*Based on the findings of this systematic review of the evidence, we are convinced that basic cognitive science and applied cognitive science have the potential to offer, respectively, significant insights into learning and pedagogic practice.*

***We are also convinced, however, that the rapid popularisation of cognitive science inspired practice has led to the premature recommendation—and even mandating—of education practice underpinned by particular elements of cognitive science.***

*Of particular concern is the application of findings from particular subjects, age ranges, and contexts to other—often quite dissimilar—areas. Moreover, given the weaknesses in the applied evidence-base, cognitive science in the classroom is at present largely underpinned by evidence from controlled (laboratory) settings in conditions not typical of everyday classroom practice and with different populations such as university students. **We suggest that the education community should not change its practices substantially without further applied evidence and more thorough and rigorous investigation into how practice might best be adapted.***

*Finally, our findings indicate that substantial investment is needed by the education profession to understand and model how practice might be adapted without eclipsing understandings of other important factors that influence learning, and ensure that members of the profession are skilled to understand and respond practically to these complexities (Perry et al, 2021: 264)*



Based on the Discussion Paper's own seminal work, there appears to be NO warrant for claiming that this aspect of the work – fundamental, it would appear, to the section on 'the brain and learning' – should become 'core content in all ITE programs'. Despite its misrepresentation, let us be very clear that AERO's own rigorous evidence-base is warning against the very thing this Discussion Paper is advocating,

2) On **Cognitive Load Theory**, the relevant 'seminal work' has this to say: *(CESE (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation) 2017). This literature review provides an overview of cognitive load theory, which is a theory of how human brains learn and store knowledge. Grounded in a robust evidence base, cognitive load theory provides support for explicit models of instruction.*

Again, this is a very confident and assured statement of the importance of cognitive load theory in underpinning 'support for explicit models of instruction'. It is indeed the case that CESE (2017) argues that '(c)ognitive load theory provides theoretical and empirical support for the ... explicit model of instruction' (p. 6). It is also the case that its discussion of the relevance of cognitive load theory in different contexts concludes that:

*Cognitive load theory is particularly relevant to teaching novice learners in so-called 'technical' domains such as mathematics, science and technology. A large number of RCTs demonstrate the effectiveness of the instructional approaches recommended by cognitive load theory in subjects such as maths and science ... Far less research has been done on whether cognitive load theory is effective for teaching in less technical, or more creative subject areas – such as literature, history, art and other humanities subjects (for exceptions, see Kyun, Kalyuga & Sweller 2013; Rourke & Sweller 2009; Schworm & Renkl 2007). (CESE, 2017:8)*

This seems a much less confident statement than is presented in the Discussion Paper's 'Summary of seminal works'. Again, the relevance is restricted to particular subjects, which severely puts into question the generalised utility of such theory as 'core content' for all ITE students (eg for teachers of Visual Arts or English). In fact it is here that the obvious point should be made that subjects and disciplines have epistemologies and

epistemological histories which are, simply, different. Curricular sequencing, for example, in one subject may be fundamental in a way that is different from, or less true for, another subject. That it is important to be able to count before undertaking algebra seems obvious (though ‘mastery learning’ appears to see this statement of the obvious as an important discovery). Does one need to have done work on Renaissance drama, on any drama, on knowledge of stagecraft or on iambic pentameter before first reading Shakespearean drama? Does one need to even begin reading Shakespearean drama with a whole play? The answer to all these questions is ‘no’ - as can be attested to by teachers whose primary school classes work with Shakespeare (Gibson, 2000; Burdett, 1996). The reality is that, say, ‘literary knowing’ (McLean Davies et al, 2023) is conceptually different from knowing the propositional knowledge necessary in, say, Mathematics – as the debate over ‘powerful knowledge’ has shown (eg Doecke & Mead, 2018). Subjects and disciplines that rely on ‘creating’ and/or ‘interpreting’ sit in quite different epistemological spaces from those which do not. Does ‘reading’ a painting mean the same thing as answering a Maths problem in terms of memory, cognitive load, etc.? Such questions of epistemology fill libraries, yet are not deemed relevant to the discussion of cognitive load theory here, although they are apparently important to cognitive load theorists themselves who seem much less dogmatic about the universal applicability of aspects of cognitive load theory and managing load outside specific contexts<sup>2</sup>.

**3) *Understanding the Brain: Towards a New Learning Science*, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (OECD 2002).** *Examines how scientific developments in understanding how the brain works can help educators and educational policy makers develop new and more efficient methods for teaching and developing educational policies and highlights the significance of the distinction between nature and nurture in learning and brain development*

What does OECD (2002), then, actually say? In fact, this This OECD paper seems much more concerned with NOT rushing in on the connection between brain science and education:

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<sup>2</sup> The ‘exceptions’, by the way, listed at the end of the CESE (2017) long extract above are each concerned with the most ‘technical’ aspects of the relevant subjects such as formulaic approaches to essay writing for assessment and the value of models in first encountering these – ie the ‘exceptions’ deal with the assessment of aspects of the subject, not with how one ‘comes to know’ in these subjects.

Important as they are, these questions may be too general. Reports such as this may well reveal valuable insights, **but they can hardly be expected to offer a fully-articulated “new map” of learning.** But they can be expected to be subversive of the *status quo*. The more we learn about the human brain, especially in the early years, **the less comfortable we find ourselves with the traditional classroom model and imposed curriculum of formal education....** It seems doubtful whether current arrangements for the education of the young are best designed to enhance imagination and creativity, self-reliance and self-esteem (p. 14)

It would be a mistake to promise or expect too much too soon. While some valuable insights and results are already available, **it may take years before the findings of this new science can be safely and readily applied in education** (p. 27)

Current research methods in cognitive neuroscience necessarily limit the types of questions that are addressed. For example, questions such as “How do individuals learn to recognise written words?” are more tractable than “How do individuals compare the themes of different stories?”. This is because the first question leads to studies where the stimuli and responses can be easily controlled and contrasted with another task. As such, it becomes understandable in reference to known cognitive models. The second question involves too many factors that cannot be successfully separated during experimental testing. **For this reason, the type of educational tasks favoured by society will remain more complex than the ones that might suit cognitive neuroscience** (p. 48)

Here the theme of the nature of tasks being undertaken in classes is raised as a key relevant concern (again not unrelated to the question of subject epistemologies). Additionally, the OECD paper offers a view of an ideal curriculum and pedagogy that would seem to be worlds away from that being advocated in the Discussion Paper: ‘imagination and creativity, self-reliance and self-esteem’ as ‘the type of educational tasks favoured by society’ are little in evidence in the discussion of pedagogy as presented here. And, finally, the very thing being advocated in the Discussion Paper is the thing most urgently warned against. As the seminal work stresses that this science is NOT a new map of learning, should it constitute core content in ITE?<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Lest it be argued that the OCED paper is from 2002, we remind the Committee that it is their nominated seminal work and that, in any case, the central points are reflected in the work of Bowers from 2016 and in Perry et al from 2021 – another ‘seminal work’

It is, of course, neither new nor unusual that learning theory should constitute some of the content of ITE. Many models are available, though always in the context of a range of learning theories. We think of frameworks popularised through the teacher education work of Darling-Hammond (2006) and her colleagues for quite some time now (for example, the *How People Learn* [HPL] framework of Bransford et al, 2005). This work drives far more comprehensive approaches to learning theory, as well as being far more sophisticated in relation to the interaction of learning theory/subject content and pedagogy. The view of learning presented here, for example, has affinities with just one of the views of learning on the HPL framework. Nevertheless, the Panel is pressing for what is in effect a ‘state theory of learning’ (Alexander, 2012: 6<sup>4</sup>) which is less comprehensive and which its own literature does not support, but, rather, effectively undermines.

And finally, it is worth noting the following conclusion on what neuroscience currently has to offer classroom instruction following an extensive review of the literature:

... it is hard to see how neuroscience is relevant to teaching in the classroom. At present the strong claims regarding the successes of educational neuroscience are either (a) trivial, in the sense that the recommendations are self-evident, (b) misleading, in the sense that the recommendations are already well established (based on behavioral studies), or (c) unwarranted, in the sense that the recommendations are based on misrepresentations of neuroscience or the conclusions do not follow from neuroscience...there are no examples of novel and useful suggestions for teaching based on neuroscience thus far (Bowers, 2016: 608-609)

### **On Reform Area 1: Pedagogy**

The Discussion Paper is explicit about specific pedagogies growing out of this particular conceptualisation of learning (‘explicit modelling, scaffolding and formative assessment practices ... support student learning because they are responsive to how the brain processes, stores, and retrieves information’ - p. 6). Particularly highlighted are *Mastery learning*, *Formative assessment* and *Explicit instruction*. In fact, the links supplied to AERO

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<sup>4</sup> In fact not only is its state-mandated character similar to that described in Britain in Alexander (2012), but so are the constituent details of public policy, viz: ‘the idea that a combination of repeated high stakes testing, a national curriculum and mandated pedagogy in literacy and numeracy will raise standards’ (Alexander, 2012: 6, footnote 38) – another instance of Australia simply on board with GERM.

evidence on p. 11 of the Discussion Paper take us only to an AERO page on a discussion of context. When we try to track down each of these topics through the *Practice hub* in the AERO website, we are given links to the 81, 138 and 328 studies respectively (Discussion Paper, Table 1.2), but each of these links brings us back to this same 'context' page. It's a circular exercise that keeps the literature reviews entirely opaque. Moreover, in the Discussion Paper's section on 'What is the evidence?', both supplied references (Burns et al, 2005, and Burns & Symington, 2002) are reporting on work with students with specific learning difficulties or Special Education students. Of course, this is not to say that Special Education teaching is unimportant knowledge for ITE students. It is to say, however, that work in this specialised area is being presented as evidence of more general (indeed, universal) applicability.

We wish to make a number of points about the pedagogy being presented here:

- 1) Any learning theory may, of course, attach to a range of pedagogies. As Perry et al (2021) argue: 'Principles do not determine strategies and do not determine specific approaches to implementation'. (Perry et al, 2021: 262)
- 2) Much of the pedagogy presented here is simply glaringly obvious - as is true of much of Rosenshine's list also: Planning? Questioning? Modelling? Scaffolds? Formative assessments? Can the Panel actually believe these topics do not constitute the most basic work in ITE? This is just one of many indicators that expertise and experience in actual ITE is represented by only a minority of the Panel.
- 3) The Discussion Paper argues that 'the explicit, systematic, and structured teaching methods above support(s) teachers to apply these practices to specific curriculum content' (p. 14). This is naive in two important ways:
  - a) in postulating a simplistic model of ITE in which a generalised concept - 'pedagogy' - is just bolted on to a separate area of curriculum content (with the former to be always and only taught elsewhere in the course).
  - b) in believing that subjects do not have pedagogies which are intimately related to the ways in which knowledge is dealt with in these subjects. Again, we are back to the question

of subject epistemologies being, simply, different. By now a well-known notion, the concept of 'pedagogical content knowledge' ('the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others' (Shulman, 1986: 9) rests entirely on recognising these differences. As Darling-Hammond says of the 'exemplary' ITE programs which she has researched, all 'approach subject matter from a pedagogical perspective; likewise, they approach pedagogy from a disciplinary perspective' (2006:89).

The message from the Discussion Paper is: 'Just learn all these radically decontextualised principles and be ready to apply them - students and subject content notwithstanding'.

4) We make the further point that the ways in which these particular sets of strategies are presented here – particularly in the context of a learning theory that focuses on memory and cognitive load and in the repeated emphasis on the 'explicit, systematic and structured' (p.14) nature of the pedagogy – is easily seen as favouring low-level recall as the key classroom focus. As Darling-Hammond reminds us, 'behaviors that are easily prescribed prove much more effective at developing lower-level skills of recall and recognition than higher-order skills aimed at analysis, integration, and invention' (2006: 79). We recognise the place of explicitness, structure and system, but also recognise the need for ITE to present a broad set of approaches to classroom practice that create intellectual challenge and sophisticated understandings in school classrooms. The fact that the focus is repeatedly on explicitness, system and structure sends a clear message that whatever is taught currently in ITE (and by extension, in classrooms) does not include, contain or reflect these notions. We note that in AERO's *Tried and Tested practice guide* on explicit instruction, the latter is positioned against the situation in which students are left to 'construct or discover information without any guidance'. Similarly, the discussion of 'worked examples' and modelling on p. 13 of the Discussion Paper references a Kirschner et al (2006) paper entitled 'Why minimal guidance during instruction does not work: An analysis of the failure of constructivist, discovery, problem-based, experiential, and inquiry-based teaching'. To say that something 'does not work' rather depends on a knowledge of what that something was trying to do (perhaps giving formative assessment information to the teacher, rather than instructing students). However, our main point here is that anything can look good by simply positing bad examples of something else. We know, and have worked with, schools

where inquiry-based learning has invariably led to high-level intellectual work, strong student outcomes and sophisticated student understanding. In all cases, there was the necessary amount of structure, system and explicit instruction (students do need to gain the skills and knowledge to carry out an inquiry, after all). The caricaturing of inquiry as 'neglect' appears simply to reflect the not uncommon practice of creating a problem that doesn't actually exist in reality in order to justify one's own position. It also reflects the Discussion Paper's tendency to create simplistic binaries, the most obvious being 'theory and practice' - a binary referred to twelve times in the Paper, in which 'theory' occurs at university and 'practice' occurs in schools or in a working world outside universities (pp. 37, 49, 50, 51, 52, 56, 57, 59). Is the Panel seriously suggesting that teaching in classrooms by *any* teacher of *any* experience is *not* theorised, consciously or otherwise? Is the Panel suggesting that *any* teaching does not reflect a view of the world, of students, of the subject, of learning?

### **On Reform Area 1: Classroom management**

The key point to make here again is that what is provided as recommended practice is a list of the banal and obvious. This again reflects lack of knowledge about what is taught in ITE. A list such as : *rules and routines/ proactive practices/consistency and predictability* is again simply a list of 'givens'. What ITE students usually want to know is what happens when these obvious things are not working for them. Developing lessons that engage and challenge is most fundamental, but managing classrooms where disruptive behaviour occurs despite this, and still when accompanied by routines, consistency, predictability etc., is where ITE students' concerns usually lie. This is why research literature would have ITE programs going beyond these obvious points to consider also '(ITE) teachers' knowledge, beliefs and understandings of young people and their behaviours' because '(t)o ignore these would be to ignore possible avenues toward improving teacher effectiveness' (Egeberg et al, 2026: 13).

### **On Reform Area 1: Diversity**

The section on diverse learners, including disadvantaged students effectively recommends 'do nothing different' ('The evidence based pedagogical practices presented above have been shown to meet the needs of the vast majority students [sic] most effectively, including

those with additional needs' [p.21]). Our specific expertise and experience is in areas of socio-economic disadvantage and we confine ourselves to such concerns – and as researchers familiar with the literature on disadvantage and schooling, we would differ strongly from the 'do nothing different' advice – as evidenced by the massive literature in this field

Australian research, for example, has shown that particular principles are important for success in low-SES schools. These include:

- high intellectual challenge – NOT dumbed-down curriculum or busywork of the sort involved in continual NAPLAN practice. (Why would we tolerate, for example, low-level literacy demands in contexts that require the complete opposite?)
- whole-school approaches
- knowing the context well and working with that: locally developed resources, targeted professional development, often with specialist trainers and coaches, professional learning teams - NOT scripted teaching rituals and low-level, worksheet pedagogy
- funding spent on people, not programs - classroom practice is dumbed down when schools are prey to all manner of educational entrepreneurs – and above all,
- **knowing that 'business as usual' does not work for students in these contexts**

Australian contexts in which teachers and academics work together in low SES settings around teacher inquiry into teaching practice have produced a number of projects which demonstrate the efficacy of these principles - evidence from actual schools about engagement and successful practice in actual schools. These include, for example, from South Australia, the RPiN (*Re-designing Pedagogies in the North*) and SILA (*Supporting Improve Literacy Agreements*) projects; turn-around pedagogies; culturally responsive pedagogies – and in Western Sydney, the *Fair Go* program. These, and related Australian research, are available in: Comber & Kamler, 2005; Prosser et al, 2010; Hattam et al, 2011; Munns et al, 2013; Comber, 2016; Hayes et al, 2017; Sawyer et al, 2018. As Lupton & Hayes argue, drawing on the close studies of Lareau and Comber& Woods in such settings:

in communities where there are high levels of poverty and social exclusion, the standard script affords fewer opportunities for learning and is more difficult to establish and maintain... So teachers who are working in already



resource-constrained environments need to adapt their teaching to meet the diverse and deep needs of learners through innovative and sometimes highly differentiated approaches to teaching. The imposition of prescribed pedagogies can tie their hands, especially when combined with a deficit understanding of children and families living in poverty, reflected in a 'pedagogy of poverty'...In classrooms in these contexts, there is a heightened possibility that the substantive purpose of what is being implemented is stripped away (Lupton & Hayes, 2021: 103).

There is not an abundance of consideration of high intellectual challenge in the Discussion Paper, and there is an explicit advocacy of 'do nothing different' for disadvantaged students, yet why would we not be stressing the principles outlined in the dot points immediately above - including in ITE where relevant? We conclude this section with another quote from Lupton & Hayes on the effects of the general principle of 'do nothing different' in both the English and Australian contexts:

In the past three decades ...the overall direction of policies to improve the quality of teaching has been to standardise both what is taught and how it is taught.... (this has) limited the professional judgement of teachers and narrowed their pedagogical repertoires so that teachers can make less difference, not more (2021: 95)

### **On Reform Area 2:**

Here we simply make some brief points:

1) Reform Area 2 is simply a set of further neoliberal proposals about markets in education within the 'audit society' (Power, 1997). The last 20 years have seen an increasing stranglehold of oversight of ITE at both state and national levels. The Panel's work, as we have said, is based on the assumption that ITE is not working, thus Reform Area 2 is advocating yet more oversight. Reid's comment is pertinent:

Despite thirty years of the standardising discourse in education, those who advocate it believe that educational quality continues to decline and that the answer is to ramp up standardisation! (2019: 17)

That everything will be solved by market principles of performance-based funding, along with more auditing and more uniformity, simply reflects a faith in competition creating higher standards (it 'should encourage higher education providers to focus on improving the

quality of their programs' [p.27] – which the Panel appear to believe ITE providers have no interest in doing now).

2) We note the explicit exclusion of the 2022 QILT Employer Satisfaction Survey (p. 37). We also note that in this survey Education graduates receive an overall employer satisfaction rating of 85.6, the third highest in the survey and in contrast to, say, Architecture on 79.3. (QILT, 2022). In fact, in relation to actual performance on the ground (what QILT calls 'technical skills'), employer satisfaction with the 'application of professional and technical knowledge and standards' among Education graduates was 92.6%. Moreover, in Education, while 93% of graduates thought their degree prepared them well for current employment, this figure was 97% among employers (QILT, 2022). These results somewhat throw into question the whole rationale of the Panel. Apparently employers are satisfied with their Education graduates. Moreover, this sits well with the Panel's own data, such as the proportion of Education students employed as teachers four months after graduation in 2020 sitting between 83 and 100 per cent across higher education providers (p. 36). (Even the results on how graduates felt that their qualification prepared them well for their teaching role in this survey has a 61-93% range. We wonder how many professions would score 2/3 of graduates feeling well prepared as their *lowest* score – and we also refer back to the QILT data on this question).

### **On Reform Area 3:**

In relation to Reform Area 3, we note no reference to ongoing, protracted and repeated temporary employment contracts as a prime source of teachers leaving the profession.

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### **Conclusion**

Decline in Australian educational outcomes vis a vis PISA results reflect failures of public policy in a number of areas, rather than a failure of teaching, teachers or teacher education. Such failure is a result of a suite of internationally accepted policies issuing out of an overarching neoliberalism with attendant policies and practices from GERM. Nevertheless, the response to these failures is, in principle, to respond harder with more of the same -

particularly here with more standardisation. The Panel needs to re-think its most basic assumptions.

Ironically Lupton & Hayes had predicted that the effect of AERO would be to ‘further narrow and standardise teachers’ practices, further over-prescribing their work’ (2021:99). Reform Area 1 in this Discussion Paper, the evidence for which was supplied by AERO, confirms this fear. It constitutes part of the ongoing deprofessionalisation of teaching that has now reached the absurd position, under the guise of supporting teachers, of taking seriously the notion that teacher planning be outsourced (eg Hunter et al, 2022) – thus replacing trust in teachers’ professional judgement about their own students with externally developed and imposed sets of practices. This is a process in which teachers are positioned not as intellectual workers whose expertise is of importance but simply as receivers of the pre-determined ‘what works’. As Loudén et al (2005) have pointed out about practice simply being ‘standard’ in the context of literacy, ‘Highly effective literacy teachers do similar activities to their less effective colleagues but achieve greater instructional density; they are more responsive to what children understand... They are more knowledgeable about their pupils’ lives, contextualise their teaching, frame activities to prompt intrinsic purpose and engagement and their teaching has more pace, meta-language and challenge’ (cited in Ellis & Moss, 2014:243-4). This is largely about knowing one’s students and not teaching to scripts.

Reform Area 1 clearly reflects a straightforward adoption of the practices of GERM, as demonstrated by its simply echoing recently adopted ITE practice in England. AERO’s evidence base for its proposed principles is weak, with its own ‘seminal works’ strongly urging caution about too-ready adoption of practices based on principles derived from neuroscience. Its approach to pedagogy offers little that is obvious in the way of high-level intellectual work or sophisticated student understandings in school classrooms.

In terms of evidence for the principles and pedagogies in Reform Area 1, the Discussion Paper starts to look very much like a victory of ideology over its own evidence base in some cases. In other cases, it simply presents what research into actual ITE programs would have shown as obvious and banal. Its approaches to education in highly disadvantaged areas is

lacking in awareness of research from classrooms, in particular about what might drive high-level intellectual work or sophisticated student understandings.

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