

# Lifting Up, Not Holding Back: System Enablers for Quality Teaching



“The key policy tasks are not only about refining the features of autonomy for schools, but also **redrawing the role and responsibilities of education systems to optimise the benefits of autonomy.**” Suggett (2014), *“School Autonomy: Necessary but not sufficient”*.

DECD schools have a high level of autonomy that is the envy of most other Australian states and territories. But, as Dr Dahle Suggett argues, for the benefits of school autonomy to be optimised, the roles and responsibilities of the State’s education system need to be “re-drawn”.

This paper makes the SASPA case for quality teaching to be more “system enabled”. Essentially, SASPA and DECD Senior Executive Group agree on the desire to have **quality teaching in every classroom and in every school.** But, if we are to achieve this end, SASPA argues that some of the services provided by DECD People & Culture and DECD Learning Improvement need to be “redrawn”.

## What are some of the blocks to achieving quality teaching?

Essentially, for secondary school leaders there are “blocks” experienced at 3 stages of the quality teaching system; i.e., teacher supply, teacher development and teacher movement.

### **Teacher Supply**

*Context:* Most early career start teachers are poorly prepared for entering the DECD workforce via merit selection. Further to this, those who are successful often enter as permanent employees before demonstrating proficiency. Is this helping or hindering?

- Should a 1-page statement, plus referee comment and/or interview equal permanency?
- If the idea of a Masters of Education is to be acted upon for future workforce entry we need to remember that this will not make better teachers, just better educated teachers!

### **Teacher Development**

*Context:* The research regarding teacher variability has been compelling for more than 20 years. It does not help that teachers are members of a long-standing profession but, more and more, find their work reduced to a technical level more associated with a “trade”.

- There is most likely a significant variance between schools regarding how teacher variability is being addressed.
- The time for undertaking changes to teacher practice in schools is limited. The more changes being asked of schools (and, therefore, of teachers), the greater the competition for how this limited time is used. Perhaps we should remember that “less is more”?
- Beyond those few teachers who should be placed on Managing Unsatisfactory Performance (MUP), most leaders find that it is the “mediocre” teacher who proves to be the biggest development challenge (and, in some schools, this group exists in large numbers).

### **Teacher Movement**

*Context:* Most teachers (particularly those over 40 years of age) seem resigned to being in their current school until retirement.

- Teachers who are resisting change believe they can “outlast” the principal. (In most cases, they are right!)

- With few teacher vacancies advertised, experienced teachers are finding it difficult to win a position in another school. This means that for schools with a stable or declining enrolment, the staff list is not easily refreshed or rejuvenated.
- Some school leaders are “gun shy” when it comes to placing poor performing teachers on Managing Unsatisfactory Performance (MUP).
- Some teachers are not candidates for MUP but would benefit from a “fresh start” in another school, if one could be facilitated.

### **What are the “system enablers” that we seek?**

First and foremost, we advocate for DECD’s HR Consultants to work collaboratively with each school’s principal as problem solvers; “conspiring together” for improvements to the quality of teaching and the configuration of the HR profile in each school.

Secondly, we advocate for a Learning Improvement Division consultancy approach; one that is geared to understanding what schools are doing well with regards to the system’s improvement agenda (e.g., learning task and assessment design) and harvesting this work for adaptation and/or adoption across the system.

Beyond these two things, we suggest the following enabling strategies for improved teaching quality in our schools.

#### ***Teacher Supply***

*Context:* All universities with a teacher education program are obligated to meet the TEMAG recommendations with regards to improved practicum experiences. Likewise, employers are obligated to improve the induction experience of graduates.

- The “internship” model of undergraduate experience in schools holds great appeal to secondary schools because it provides a more authentic and fine-grained experience of the profession. (It is also a more attractive proposition for teacher recruitment than a standard “block” practicum.)
- SASPA’s understanding is that current “internship” arrangements are undertaken through an MOA between the university and the school. We are advocating for something to be coordinated at the system level.
- Given the risk / reward scenario of schools accepting responsibility for recruiting teachers (many of whom are recruited as permanent), SASPA suggests that initial appointments be made as “provisional” with DECD permanency only achieved after the teacher demonstrates the Proficient standard (AITSL).
- Given the risk / reward scenario of schools accepting responsibility for recruiting teachers, SASPA advocates an expansion of the processes and instruments used in the teacher selection process (e.g., video footage of teacher facilitating learning or demonstration lesson, student on the selection panel etc.). An extended time frame to conduct the selection needs to be part of this because the current “rush” is a major issue and risk.
- The system’s placement of any teacher into a school must be undertaken through the lens of advancing the quality of teaching in that school. (For this to happen, teaching quality would need to have primacy over balancing the teaching or staffing budget line within DECD.)

#### ***Teacher Development***

*Context:* Teachers must be “learners for life” and have a “growth mindset”. Whilst teacher collaboration is an important capacity builder we need to remember that collaboration costs.

- SASPA advocates a more consistent and system-wide approach to Performance Development in our schools; one that focuses on learning task and assessment design

(on the understanding that this is the biggest lever for improved student learning and achievement) and one that interfaces with the AITSL standards.

- Teacher collaboration is a key to changed and improved classroom practice. SASPA advocates for a system-wide expectation for teachers to participate actively in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) or Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement (C<sup>2</sup>,I<sup>2</sup>) and for the time to undertake this work to be protected from other competing demands.
- As Dylan William reminds us, “changing teacher practice is difficult, because it involves changing long established habits”. We must achieve a deeper systemic understanding of this proposition so that the improvement agenda being asked of teachers is sharply focussed on the habits we need them to change. Importantly, this challenge needs to be met with the right level of system supports (including resources).
- As mentioned elsewhere, SASPA members are concerned by the “mediocre” teacher and positively influencing their development. The PLC or C<sup>2</sup>,I<sup>2</sup> approach, if done well, may go some way towards creating a “peer review” culture that will shift many of these resistant teachers. For the few who cannot show adequate growth in their performance it may be time for us (i.e., DECD school leaders and DECD Senior Executive Group) to consider extrinsic motivations; for example, a Week 41 T&D intervention.
- If we are going to expect teachers to have a Masters of Education in the future, SASPA re-affirms its advocacy for an in-service qualification (ahead of a pre-service one). Hattie’s research shows that teachers plateau after approximately 5 years of service. This would be a good time to target and incentivise an in-service post graduate qualification.

### ***Teacher Movement***

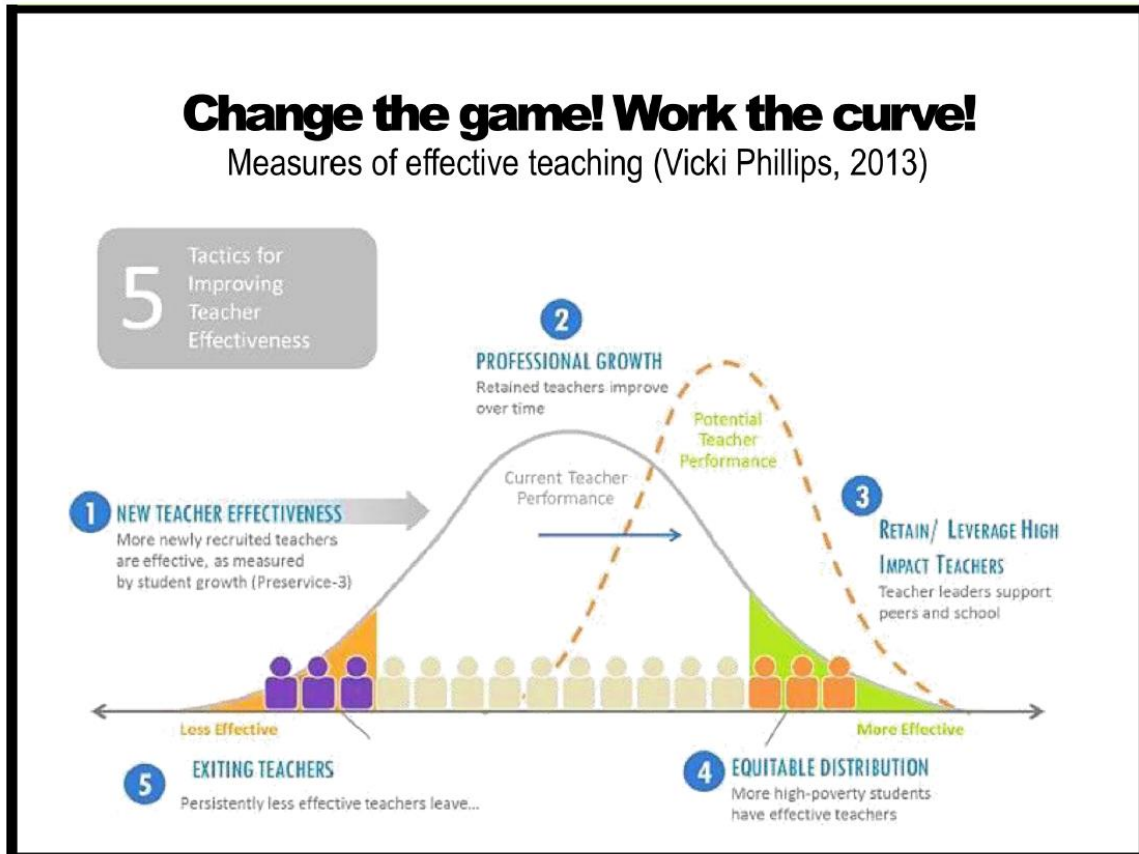
*Context:* It is counter-productive to go back to a systemised approach to teacher movement. The 10 year tenure model was a placement process. What most school leaders want is a process for selecting all staff on merit.

- The current industrial award has categories of workers who hold priority in being placed in a school ahead of school leaders having priority for the advertisement of a vacancy. It cannot be changed overnight but, in our view, such a policy has become anachronistic. The AEU and DECD should work towards an improved incentive regime for teachers in Aboriginal, Anangu or Country schools; one that does not put pressure to “place” these teachers upon their return to the city.
- The more teacher vacancies we have that go to open advertisement, the more encouragement permanent teaching staff have to explore a move from one workplace to another. Therefore, other policies that limit schools being able to advertise vacancies such as the need for out-of-tenure leaders to be placed in schools need to be challenged.
- There are sometimes very good reasons for a teacher to be moved from one school to another (e.g., curriculum grounds or the need for a “fresh start”). If HR Consultants are working in a collaborative “problem solving” manner with principals, an aspect of such work could involve brokering “trades” between mutually agreeable schools. For example, permanent teachers could volunteer to be put on a register for a 1 year placement in another school (knowing that they still have a right of return to their current school). The school taking this teacher can adopt a “try before you buy” approach, if the vacancy goes to an on-going one.
- SASPA is still of the view that the MUP process could be made more effective and efficient (without any loss of the core principle of natural justice). Our suggestion is to have an appropriately resourced DECD Unit\* to undertake the MUP work related to the persistent unsatisfactory performance stages of the process. (This would mean the Principal would only have personal responsibility for managing the initial intervention work. Such an arrangement would reduce the emotional charge within the school’s environment whilst the process was underway.) A DECD Unit approach would achieve

greater consistency for producing evidence and mounting a case for the Chief Executive to act, if required.

(\*We already have a DECD Directorate that undertakes External Reviews of Schools. It is not too gigantic a leap to think that we might one day have something similar where it is an external review of a teachers' persistent unsatisfactory performance that is being undertaken.)

## Appendix:



**Diagram:** This graphic was used by Professor Jenny Gore at her October 2016 presentation to the School of Education, University SA. It explains where school and system leaders must place their efforts to increase teacher effectiveness at the site and system level.

Change the Game! Work the Curve!

The graphic resonates with SASPA's interests in working with DECD and others. It essentially provides the "game plan" for improvements to:

- Recruiting early career teachers
- Professional growth and building increased capacity
- Retaining high impact teachers and harnessing their capacity to develop others
- Providing system incentives to have highly effective teachers in our most disadvantaged school communities
- Improving expediency through the process for exiting teachers ill-suited to the profession from the system.