

## How the right teachers can teach our children to think

There's a fundamental problem with education in Australia. We're too focused on traditional academic metrics and spend too little time preparing our students for tackling real-world challenges. The issue encompasses not only what and how Australian students learn, but also whom we choose to teach them. It's time to rethink teaching from the ground up. We need to focus less on memorization and assessments, and more on teaching our students to problem solve. For that we need teachers that come from a background of doing the same.

Why can't scientists, engineers or medical professionals be encouraged to contribute to society at some point in their careers through teaching STEM subjects? Or, how about former journalists, marketers, historians, psychologists, sociologists teaching the humanities? Or how about trade people or nurses teaching transferable skills they've learned in their careers? The value lies in the fact that these people have used their knowledge or skills in the real world, and in the classroom they can encourage our students to practice doing the same.

Former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's government recognized this by [announcing in February of 2018](#) an initiative that would open opportunities for people with diverse backgrounds to become teachers. People without academic degrees, or people without formal teaching degrees but with an industrial background, can apply to become teachers.

"Having a former tradie or nurse as a teacher can bring more perspective to a classroom and can be especially beneficial for the teaching of vocational and trade skills," former Education Minister Simon Birmingham [had said](#). "Those different life experiences could shake up Australia's schools and add more depth to the talented teachers we have," he explained.

This makes sense because the traditional way people are becoming teachers in Australia isn't working. One problem is that people can apply to get teacher training without necessary any real-world experience in any other field or industry. Why would we want a teacher whose sole experiences involves sitting in a classroom to learn how to grade exams?

Moreover, government figures recently showed that students with [extremely low school](#) grades are regularly being accepted into university teaching courses, and those that do become teachers [are frequently](#) underpaid, overwhelmed, and limited as to what and how they are able to teach. [Even more alarming](#) is the fact that the Australian Bureau of Statistic reports that 53 percent of people who have a teaching degree no longer work as teachers. Additional government research conducted in 2014 also estimated that 20 percent of those who graduate university with a teaching degree never actually register as teachers. This reality not only fails our students, but also fails those skilled professional people who would actually be motivated to teach, and could do so in a new and innovative way.

We're not saying that we must discount teacher training completely. But society does need to get away from the idea that people are only qualified to teach based on teaching certificates, just like we need to get away from the idea that education is just about memorizing facts or figures. If we hire teachers who can teach our students how to apply knowledge in different situations, then our students will be more prepared when they have to do the same later on at universities, vocational schools, and in the workforce.

Turnbull's program is a start in the right direction, but it isn't enough by itself. Changing whom we hire to teach our students is dependent on all of us switching our mentality to this entirely new education philosophy. That's not simple considering how engrained our current system of education remains. It largely looks like this: The teacher stands in front of the classroom lecturing a pre-defined curriculum. Then the students are assessed with standardized tests based on this curriculum.

One midway shift in education could transform our teachers from lecturers to facilitators. They would offer students parameters and tools, and then assist them in designing their own approach to learning what interests them. This system is somewhat more experiential, but it's still removed from the real world. The ultimate change would involve creating simulated business or industrial problems. Kids would spend much less time in the classroom, and much more time challenging themselves to find solutions to genuine problems with real impact. This must involve not only teachers and school administrators, but also the close collaboration of real companies and organizations.

Students would not only learn how to problem solve, but they would also learn to work in a team, to communicate, to be leaders, and other soft skills that are increasingly necessary in the modern world. Critics might question whether this kind of system takes responsibility away from the teacher. It doesn't. Rather, it changes what this responsibility is. Considering how the world we live in is changing, we do not know what challenges our children will need to face tomorrow. In the face of the unknown, we need to teach our children to think.