

Crippling reforms, public distrust and an obsession with standardised testing is “unfortunately” crushing the spirit of educators and students, a panel discussion about the future of education has heard.



Peter Hutton, former principal of Templestowe College in Victoria and current director of the Future Schools Alliance, used his place on the panel to firstly point the finger at the current ENTRY SCORES ranking system.

“ENTRY SCORES” have to go.”

"It should be taken down. Just keep the subject score. ENTRY SCORES exist for the top universities. Let them run their own exams, at their own expense if they're so keen about it."

The validity of the ENTRY SCORE came into question recently when a leaked Grattan Institute report found some Australian universities had admitted students into teaching degrees with scores of less than 20.

Social commentator and lecturer Jane Caro weighed in on the preservice pipeline issue.

“There are a lot of people who find their way into teaching via other pathways and who are probably incredibly valuable teachers because they have a lot of passion for it,” Caro noted.

The panel discussion included host Dr Sunil Badami from the University of Technology, Sydney and novelist/creative intelligence expert from UTS, Dr Bem Le Hunte.

It covered what education would likely look like in the future and what capabilities tomorrow’s workforce will need.

FUTURE WORKFORCE IN FOCUS

Badami said education’s challenge today was to prepare children for the “unimaginable changes of tomorrow”.

“For many parents, students, educators and policymakers, there are many concerns about the state of education today and how to address and meet them not just now in the age of disruption, but ... whatever the future brings.”

Caro pointed out there was a lot of “clickbait” hype (in the media and online) going on with schools.

“I’ve never bought the belief we have an education system in crisis or failing schools,” she said.

In fact, Caro argued, society had “mistaken education for work-based training to turn out little worker bees”.

“The reason we have universal free secular public education – until the government gets finished with it ... was if we’re going to have a democracy ... we must have a well-educated citizenry,” she said.

“What I want is a well-educated general population who can then very quickly skill up for whatever they need to do because they’ve learnt how to learn.”

MAKING SENSE OF THE CURRICULUM

Fellow panellist Le Hunte said there was a powerful shift from the 'quality of knowing' to the 'quality of being' at her university.

The course she runs, the Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation, is a case in point.

"The whole idea of four or five general capabilities and the discussion around 21st century learning skills are all about the quality of being, that is, someone who can be a learner, be a good citizen," she said.

"That's rather than a curriculum that goes towards just knowing ... just filling up a bucket in your mind with facts. It's a powerful shift and we're trialling it at the University of Sydney.

"That the whole notion of education as an intergenerational social contract should involve all of our industries, and more organisations should be ... coming on board."

Hutton unpacked the word 'curriculum', which he said should mean 'journey'.

"But now it means 'bag of facts'. Every day, kids are subject to stuff that is irrelevant. The role of the teacher is to expose kids to exploration, new challenges and things that are relevant to them," he said.

This meant the current education system was "unfortunately" crushing young people's urge to learn, give and create, Hutton added.

"[Teaching] is about getting out of their way and fostering their natural way to learn, not leaving them to their own devices. The role of a great teacher is to inspire and connect them with great resources.

"In the old days, teachers were the font of all knowledge. Students weren't fact-checking you on Google while you were teaching. Now they're fact-checking while you're in mid-flight, so to speak."

So, while students don't always trust the teachers, increasingly many teachers don't feel the system trusts them with the onslaught of standardised testing and standards.

“It’s a terrible situation where no-one trusts teachers,” Caro argued.

“[The system] is checking what they’re doing, it’s hammer, hammer, hammer killing creativity dead in the classroom.

“I would argue the infection of accountability, which I’ve never liked because it’s a blame-oriented measure, kills creativity because creativity by its very nature is risky and possibly you’ll fail.

“It’s across the whole of society and education is no more protected.”

Hutton made the point: “We need trust for the school leadership team in a school – they should be held accountable. You can’t hold people account and tie their hands behind their back.”

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM REFORM LACKING TRACTION

That lack of trust appears to be placing our education system in a stalemate despite the push for reforms, the panel concluded.

“Why we’re not getting any traction anywhere in the world is that education departments are too big, run by bureaucrats with no background in education.

“They don’t want to make any significant changes. We know the ship’s going out to sea rudderless,” Hutton said.

The discussion then moved to the issue of how to empower today’s students to be lifelong learners so they can pivot between jobs, careers and seemingly inevitable stints of unemployment in the future.

“What about just-in-time learning, inspiring students, exposing them to new concepts and new ways of thinking and to provoke and challenge and allowing that natural desire for education.

“That’s what should be happening to communities and indigenous communities - teaching what’s relevant to them,” Hutton said. Le Hunte echoed this sentiment, saying learning must become more individualised.

“We don’t know what do to education yet. It’s created so much change already, I see it as inventing electricity before we’ve invented the vacuum cleaner.

“We’ve yet to see the benefits of it and it will be up to our innovators to see the best ways that will transform education in the right ways”.