

Post Olympic Special

With the vibrancy and colour of the Rio Olympics still in our minds it's good to reflect on the thoughts of Sharyn O'Neill (Director General of the Western Australia Department of Education) who stated at the recent WACSSO conference that all Olympians have had someone who has stood behind them in the initial stages of their development – and as we all know it is usually parents that have recognised and encouraged a particular talent or disposition in their child. Therein lies the foundation stone of parent engagement - taking a vital interest, and helping, and encouraging our children to achieve their very best and accomplish their life goals.

Learning the skill of learning

Parent engagement is also a lifelong appreciation of the value of learning the skill of learning. For almost all of us this goes beyond the compulsory years of education and into the vocational and tertiary streams. At the recent ADC Education Summit the whole nature of Australian education was explored and compared against those of other nations, together with the potential of ongoing developments in future delivery models. Enough to say that we ain't seen nothing yet and the traditional tertiary model that we are all so familiar with is destined to see an extraordinary range of new opportunities for students – both in the very nature of study, and its delivery and assessment. One of the many outstanding speakers and provocateurs was Professor James Flynn who explored the nature of a classical education with its foundation in skills such as critical thinking, reasoning, rhetoric together with an awareness of the historical context and culture of current events - skills that are part of the Foundation for Young Australians' report into what employers want. Coupling this with his contention that students are losing the ability to read and understand serious literature made for a fascinating discussion. He did go on to expand on his view that the ability to improve learning potential and raise intelligence is entirely within an individual's capabilities. His TED talk that gives a flavour of his thinking and hope for the future can be found [here](#)

The dust settles on the election results

Looking to the future in the post-election landscape ACSSO continues to lobby all sides for fair, simple and transparent funding agreements that anyone can understand. This is especially important as negotiations for the next round of post 2018 education funding agreements are due to commence. It's interesting to note that Will Hodgman, the Liberal Tasmanian Premier, has written to the Prime Minister seeking the full Gonski funding for his state with the full support of his education minister.

Overarching this is the ongoing debate surrounding evidence based policy. If education policy is to be founded on evidence then it seems appropriate to ask whose evidence is to be considered and is it of sufficient quality, and of a suitably objective nature to have value. Evaluating the quality and veracity of research findings is a question that was explored in some depth as a key theme of the Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference. The other point of reference in this debate is the value of intangible evidence that comes from anecdote and lived experience. However, if it cannot be measured does it have a place in deciding policy and perhaps therein lays one of the conundrums that besets so much of education policy – the says who question. The evidence base and where it comes from is a topic that we continue to explore with all side of politics, and the Department of Education and Training in Canberra, as is of crucial importance for the future of public education policy. Could this vital topic have the potential for some cross-party consensus?

Spring has sprung

There does seem to be the hint of some warmer weather on the way with the longer days and shorter nights. There is also the sharp reminder of winter with a few sharp nights and the odd wild storm. Despite this the spring flowers here are already marking the start of spring, and the start of Paralympics in the next week or so – for me it's one of the most enjoyable demonstrations of sportsmanship and inclusivity in the sporting arena going – and a perfect excuse to stay up late.

Phillip Spratt