

Stronger Smarter Institute Research & Impact Footprinting Reading Review

“Building quality in teaching and teacher education.”

An ACER report by Prof Nan Bahr and Suzanne Mellor provides a summary of current debate around teacher quality in Australia and what this might mean for teacher education. In our review we have focus on the discussion around teacher quality, and in our discussion, we have brought in information from a 2011 project run by the Institute on ‘what makes a deadly teacher’. This shows that the results of the Institute’s project align closely with the recommendations from the ACER report.

Bahr suggests that if we take the ‘zero-defect’ approach to quality – where quality is something that doesn’t have flaws – we miss the unquantifiable elements such as the impact of relationships. This leads her to conclude that there is an equation for quality where the difference between a competent teacher and a quality teacher is the personal qualities – the forces that bring about quality

Quality = (competencies + productive behaviours) x personal qualities.

Key points that we have drawn from Bahr’s paper are:

- ▶ **Relationships are key:** We agree with Bahr when she describes the personal qualities of quality teaching as high expectations, kindness, care and humour. As Bahr says, while teacher competency frameworks are useful to assist in the basic competence of the teacher workforce, something more is needed to fully capture the personal attributes that transform an effective teacher to one of quality.
- ▶ **Teaching as a profession:** We agree with Bahr that teaching should be regarded as a full profession and when this is the case, it is clearly inadequate to focus solely on a task list or suite of competencies. The quality teacher goes beyond competence, and it is the professional relationships dimension of teaching that makes a quality teacher.
- ▶ **A belief in the power of educators** – As Bahr describes, we need to look at how our education system perceives teachers. If our political system promotes pedagogical approaches that are designed to take the quality of the teacher out of the equation, this undermines both the profession of teaching and the quality of the learning environment for students.

Stronger Smarter Provocations and discussion

- ▶ **Personal vocation – believing in the education profession.** We agree with Bahr that education is complex work that should be considered as a profession. We believe in the agency and ability of our educators and the need to bring their voices into the system and policy-level discussions. When we see schools take a strength-based approach – starting from a belief in their teachers and an understanding that the school communities already have the skills and knowledge to solve complex issues – this is when we see success.
- ▶ **Purpose and identity – responsibility for change.** The Stronger Smarter Approach is about ensuring that educators can maintain their positive attitude to teaching and become agents for change.
- ▶ **Developing High-Expectations Relationships – Firm and Fair.** Bahr describes the democratic classroom where a teacher with a cooperative and democratic attitude can provide a context for students to safely explore their understandings. She describes effective teachers as overtly demonstrating fairness and impartiality as a key component of developing positive working relationships with their students. These attributes are the same as those we describe as High-Expectations Relationships. We describe a High-Expectations Relationship as a relationship that is both firm and fair (i.e. both challenging with high expectations, but also supportive and caring). A High-Expectations Relationships learning environment is one where students feel they can ask questions, and where their teachers are interested in the individual strengths they bring to the classroom.

The Stronger Smarter Approach

- ▶ **Metastrategy 1: Promoting a positive sense of student identity.** For Indigenous students, promoting a positive sense of student identity in the classroom is interwoven in the characteristics described for a quality teacher. This is about making sure a student feels welcome in the classroom and that being Strong and Smart in school is a part of their identity.
- ▶ **Metastrategy 3: High Expectations Relationships.** As we discuss in the full review, the four key personal attributes described by Bahr are clearly those also described by High-Expectations Relationships.
- ▶ **The Stronger Smarter Approach** - Teachers need to be able to build compassionate, trusting relationships with students to create a safe, positive, and productive teaching and learning environments. We believe that bringing together the elements of the Stronger Smarter Approach and the Stronger Smarter Metastrategies with a foundation of High-Expectations Relationships do just this – for Indigenous students this creates a safe, positive and productive learning environment with high expectations.

For more information, see the Stronger Smarter Institute's full research review of the ACER report, and more details about the Stronger Smarter metastrategies on the Institute's website at www.strongersmarter.com.au . Contact us at enquiries@strongersmarter.com.au.