

TERRITORY Educator

Magazine Of The Australian Education Union - NT Branch

**SURVIVING
COVID-19**

**Job security is
essential
How DI failed**

Term 2/2020



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Submissions and photographs to Territory

Educator are always welcome and should be

sent via email.



Students at Milikapiti School practising good hygiene

Photos: Bridget O'Dwyer

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Matt Guy receiving his May Day award at Taminmin College from President Jarvis Ryan

Celebrating a ripper rep

Member Matt Guy has been awarded the AEU NT's Sub-Branch Representative of the Year Award for his union activism. Matt received the May Day award from President Jarvis Ryan. Matt has been a union rep at Taminmin College for the past several years, building membership and organisation in one of the NT's biggest schools.

"Good representatives ideally need to consider that the role is about serving the needs of others," Matt reflected. "The longer I have been in the role the more I see the need to approach it with empathy for all around you. This includes the larger union body, the school in which you work and most importantly, those in the sub-branch who have elected you.

"The other important thing about being a rep is to have others around you to support you and who are included at a sub-branch executive level. I have been privileged to hold a role for several years and to have been mentored by others to gain understanding of the role of representation.

"Support from home and others enable me to continue also. This is part of my story being a union representative and I realise that we all have our own stories which will differ from mine."

Branch elections

Subject to approval by the regulator, elections for the following positions on our Branch Executive will take place in Term 3:

- Branch President
- Vice-President (General)
- Vice-President (TAFE)
- Treasurer
- Women's Officer
- Executive Councillor representing Indigenous members

Each of these positions is elected for a two-year term of office commencing in January 2021. According to Branch Rules, subject to the decision of the Returning Officer, nominations for these positions typically open on 22 July and close on 21 August. If required, ballots will open on or about 14 September and close on 15 October.

If you would like more information about these positions and standing for Branch Executive, contact the Branch Secretary, Adam Lampe.

2019 financial report

The AEU NT 2019 financial report is now available on our website or can be supplied to members on request.

Conference going ahead

Branch Conference will go ahead on the revised dates of 12-13 September (the end

of week 8 in Term 3) at the Hilton Darwin. Conference was postponed from its original date over the May Day weekend due to the coronavirus crisis.

With biosecurity restrictions lifted, we expect members from across the NT will be able to travel to Darwin to take part in our most important decision-making forum.

Every sub-branch is entitled to elect a delegate to attend. The deadline for registrations and sub-branch motions is Friday 31 July.



Sign up online

AEU NT membership has grown strongly in the first part of the year. We have welcomed 175 new and returned members, including more than 100 recruits in March and April at the height of the Covid crisis.

These members are now enjoying the protections and benefits of being part of our union.

We have achieved strong growth despite our organising team being confined to base. Thank you to members and reps who have had those crucial joining conversations with your colleagues.

We are hoping to resume regular workplace visits in Term 3. In the meantime, encourage your colleagues to sign up. In these uncertain economic times, union membership will become more important than ever. Let them know we now have a quick and easy process which enables them to sign up in five minutes from their computer, tablet or phone.

All they have to do is visit www.aeunt.org.au/membership.

Covid fallout will be nasty

Economic devastation from coronavirus will create pressure for wage and job cuts, making strong unions more important than ever, writes Jarvis Ryan

Seriously, what a year. Have we ever experienced anything like it?

As I write, life has started to return to normal in the NT. People are breathing a little easier. Businesses are reopening. With the lifting of biosecurity zones, we will soon be able to move around freely, within the Territory at least. Hopefully our borders will reopen sooner rather than later.

For several weeks there in March and April, though, the levels of stress were incredible. We were all trying to adapt to a situation that changed almost daily.

Through it all, our membership and our profession showed dedication and integrity.

Our schools are amazing places. Perhaps more to the point, the people who work in them are. Despite the incredible stress everyone was under, teachers, principals and support staff continued to create a safe space for your students, maintaining routine and a sense of normality in a world turned upside down.

Although there were calls in some quarters to close schools, the overwhelming sentiment from members was to ensure there was continuity of education for children.

Even as student attendance declined to historic lows, staff kept turning up every day, working hard to plan for alternate delivery in Term 2.

Some teachers were classified as vulnerable and commenced working from home arrangements. That created additional challenges, but I've seen nothing but solidarity from AEU members in terms of how you've looked out for one another.

Remote members have done it especially tough, not knowing until very recently when it might be possible to leave your communities for a reprieve.

Your union has tried to be there to support you in a stressful time. We logged more than 100 cases specifically related to COVID-19 and held numerous meetings via Zoom to keep you updated, answer your questions and take on board your concerns. This was union organising in action, ensuring your voice was heard and urgent issues acted on.

This crisis has highlighted the vital role that unions still have to play in our society. The union movement has spearheaded the campaign for job security and safe working arrangements. Having a strong union presence will be even more important as we move into the recovery phase, with mass unemployment and huge government deficits creating pressure for wage and job cuts.

This is an immediate live issue in the Territory with an election just two months away on 22 August and no clarity about the NT Government's finances. Budgets that were already stretched thin have taken a further huge hit from Covid. We don't know the full extent of the hit yet, but it will be in the hundreds of millions.

You may recall the Gunner Government has already endorsed harsh measures from the 2018 Langoulant review such as capping annual

pay increases at \$1000 and restricting back pay in enterprise bargaining. The resulting budget repair plan saw education funding squeezed, in breach of Labor's promise to increase funding in real terms.

With the economic devastation of recent months, I am very concerned that after the election as we prepare to negotiate a new agreement, we could see wage freezes and job cuts on the table.

The AEU NT is seeking guarantees from all parties contesting the election that education funding will be protected from austerity measures. We will continue to fight for job security for members on contracts, and for the improvements that our schools need such as infrastructure upgrades and additional support for special needs students.

The AEU NT is in a better position than many unions. We have many hard-fought conditions protected in enterprise agreements that can't easily be taken away. And we have a union presence in towns and communities across the Territory.

I urge you to be active and engaged in this process, before the election – and after. The solidarity you showed during the Covid crisis will need to remain.



Job security: an essential item?

Job security in public education and VET is vital in the post-COVID NT economy, writes Adam Lampe

With the unemployment rate growing and the projection of 20,000 job losses in the Northern Territory due to the Coronavirus, people should be members of a union now more than ever.

The majority of the hardest hit by the economic shutdown are those in the hospitality and tourism industries, where casualisation is high and union membership is low.

As the crisis mounted, the union movement lobbied government to introduce improved safety nets around the introduction of unpaid pandemic leave, annual leave at half pay, wage subsidies and stricter WHS practices. Industries with strong union representation were able to activate stronger protections embedded in enterprise agreements, such as the ability for teachers in the Northern Territory to apply for additional personal leave at half pay.

Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of Australians have been thrown out of work, and the economy continues to bleed jobs as our society tries to bounce back from the virus.

Hardest hit in the education sector are universities. Predictions indicate that 15,000-20,000 jobs will be lost in higher education. This is largely a result of the loss of revenue from international students.

Universities have negotiated with the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) to agree to

variations to enterprise agreements around the country to allow for changes to wages and work schedules, if necessary, to save jobs.

In the national context, AEU members in the TAFE/VET sectors will not be affected by these moves to address academic jobs. However, Charles Darwin University is one of the few dual sector universities, where VET and higher education are delivered by the same institution. Workers in both sectors fall under the same enterprise agreement.

However, the revenue streams between the sectors are quite different. VET is not as dependent on international students, for example, and there is a steady commitment of government funding for vocational training.

Without strong union representation, the situation for workers in tertiary education would be a lot worse. The AEU NT continues to protect the wages and conditions of our members in the VET sector and remains vigilant toward any moves to use the pandemic as an excuse to cut jobs and courses.

On a national level, the union movement is focused on improving job security by reducing forced casualisation, outsourcing and the overuse of fixed term contracts.

Permanent employment remains a priority issue for the AEU NT. We continue to press the NT Government and Department of Education to honour its commitment to reduce the number of fixed term contracts in NT schools. Also, the move to replace executive principal contracts with ongoing principal positions is good news for those principals who have little security

of employment. Permanent NT employees are currently required to surrender their ongoing job to take up executive principal contracts. The change to ongoing employment should encourage more teachers who have permanent jobs to apply for those positions.

None of this focus on permanent employment and security would have occurred without union influence. Essential to rebuilding the nation's economy in a post-pandemic world is investment in public education and VET. Job security for education workers is a necessary part of that strategy.



The COVID pandemic continues to wreak havoc on employment

Education on country in Utopia

Teaching on country is a shared endeavour with Aboriginal communities that allows them ownership over their children's education

Arlparra School is a school of around 300 students ranging from FaFT to Year 12. It is based on five sites serving the 17 communities of the Utopia Homelands in central Australia. The homelands themselves cover an area of 3,500km² – for comparison you could fit all of New York City in three times over.

To reach the students and bring them to the classrooms, we run a fleet of 12 vehicles. That said, given the condition of our dirt roads out here, at any one time at least two of the vehicles are in Alice Springs for repairs. Our longest daily run is 96km and was featured on

the ABC as possibly Australia's longest school run.

The programs we run at the school include a FaFT unit, a pre-school, and three homelands sites for Transition to Year 5. A further homeland site runs pre-school to Year 12 and our high school covers Year 6 to Year 12.

The high school was built 11 years ago after much campaigning by the local people for a secondary facility on country so that students did not have to leave their own land to finish their education. The homelands sites all date from the early to mid '80s and were refurbished last year.

Having the children taught on country is one of the key factors in the education of children for the people here. For this reason the schools sort themselves into family groups. There are a number of advantages to this model of education, such as students and assistant teachers being

familiar to each other and, perhaps most importantly, there being a sense of ownership of the schools.

I strongly believe that without this shared sense of ownership there is very little chance for a remote school to be successful. If Aboriginal people are made to feel that education is something that is done to them rather than with them, then there is no real reason for people to send their children to school.

Educational progress can only be made if we can find a way of working together that is transparent and open, where people are genuinely consulted on their educational needs and their desires for the future. Without this we are simply going through the motions and one thing we should have learnt from history is that going through the motions does not lead to good educational outcomes.

Stephen Nimmo
Principal



Soapy Bore is one of the homeland sites served by Arlparra School

A FAILED intervention

John Guenther is a senior researcher at the Batchelor Institute who recently co-authored a paper in The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education evaluating the impact of the Direct Instruction (DI) program in remote schools. He spoke to Jarvis Ryan about his findings and what they reveal about problems in how governments approach Indigenous education

Could you firstly explain the methodology you used to conduct your research into the DI program?

We used data from the My School website that anyone can access. For this study, I looked at the schools that were identified as Direct Instruction schools through the Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary Schools program that was funded by the Australian Government with about \$30 million.

I looked at the schools classified as “very remote” on My School. They are the ones that struggle the most, particularly those very remote schools that have lots of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. I wanted to see whether or not the introduction of Direct Instruction in

some of those schools led to those students doing any better, or similar or worse than schools with a similar student cohort where they hadn’t received that intervention.

I looked at the data three years before the Intervention (2012-2014) and three years after DI was introduced (2015-2017). What I tried to do was establish if the schools that received the Direct Instruction intervention had an improvement in literacy.

I am also aware that there are shifts and patterns over time in the general school population so I wanted to see how comparable schools that didn’t receive that intervention fared over that period.

The important thing here is that you had reasonable sample sizes and you were as far as possible comparing like with like.

That’s right – that’s why I limited my study to those schools that had more than 80% Aboriginal kids in their student population and only in very remote schools. We are not comparing schools that were in more urban areas which had fewer Aboriginal kids.

In the cohort of the Direct Instruction schools there were about 25 we could have chosen from, but not all those schools had NAPLAN scores published, so we had a sample of 18 DI schools. That was enough to do an analysis.

You focused your study just on the reading component of literacy in Direct Instruction. What did you find in terms of its impact over those three years?

I chose reading because it is a measure used by other national reports, and governments tend to take a view that reading is a good proxy for English literacy generally.

What we found was the schools with DI intervention actually did worse post-2015 compared to the 2012-2014 period and worse overall than the non-DI comparison schools. That is a worry for a few reasons. Firstly, because this program was funded significantly by government and then renewed even though the early signs were



Former Education Minister Peter Chandler observes students at Borroloola School doing Direct Instruction learning activities
Photo: AAP/Neda Vanovac

that it didn't work, so there is an accountability issue.

The second concern is that you are putting money into a program that is doing harm to kids, it is not actually benefitting them. Not only did DI not achieve its goals of improved literacy, but the outcomes from the schools involved were worse than the comparative schools.

The third finding is also worrying: schools with a DI intervention had a faster rate of decline in attendance than the comparison schools. Average attendance declined quite rapidly for the DI schools. The earlier evaluations treated poor attendance as a factor that contributed to outcomes, but I am not sure that is necessarily right. I think it is more likely the other way around, that because of Direct Instruction and what it does in the classroom, and what it does to the kids, they are less likely to want to attend and their parents probably see that as well.

There were a whole lot of worries that weren't captured in the evaluation report, and that needed to be addressed. To be honest, after the first round of funding that was effectively a trial for two years, the program should have been stopped. It wasn't achieving results then.

The attendance issue is really telling. We had many stories about kids getting bored of the program quickly and as you reference in your paper it appears many teachers also got bored of the program. From what I have observed based on the knowledge and experience of AEU NT members, in many of the DI schools we saw close to a turnover of 100% of teaching staff over the three-year period.

I think it is something about the method that is fundamentally flawed, not just the intervention or a program. It dumbs down teaching so that everything has to be to the formula, you have to follow the script all the time and that takes away the teacher's professional ability to be able to respond to where their class is at, where the individual children are at and work with them at a student level, not just for a program.

That is possibly what is going on with the teachers getting disenchanted with it, because it takes away their professional ability, their pride and their ability to do what is best for their children and their class. It leaves it up to a scripted program.

I want to end on a slightly more positive note. I picked up in your writing that there is not a lot of evidence to support these silver bullet-type ideas of a magical pedagogy or

program. You make some reference in your paper to evidence-based approaches to improving outcomes in remote schools. What kinds of things can we draw on into the future to build a stronger foundation?

Teachers who can teach English as a second or other language will do better in the classroom. It is not necessarily an argument about bilingual versus non-bilingual approaches, it is an argument about the importance of professional development and learning for teachers.

You can't just run a program for one year and hope that it is going to have an impact for five years. Every year you have got to run these programs to build the professional capacity of teachers. When education departments run professional learning for teachers will benefit from it and the kids will benefit from it.

Another key area where the evidence is pretty clear is that schools with higher proportions of local people on staff do better in terms of attendance and NAPLAN scores. It is heartening to see that the non-government sector has picked up on this. The trend in recent years, again using My School as an indication, is that non-government schools, particularly in Western Australia and the NT are using the increasing resources that they are getting from the Federal Government to train and support local people into roles within the school.

Unfortunately, it hasn't been taken up as much by the NT Department of Education in public schools. Part of the reason for that, in the Territory at least, is the role that "effective enrolment" has played – the funding model that reduces a school's funding based on lower student attendance rates.

Schools with lower teacher-student ratios in remote areas do better than schools with higher teacher-student ratios. The claim that the student-teacher ratios make no difference is wrong. It does make a difference in remote schools at least.

One of the reasons I think is that it means kids can get more individual attention and that they have got a combination of small class sizes. With local support and local staff supporting them, they have got a much better chance of grabbing hold of the concepts being taught, the language being taught, and benefit from it.

So, there's a few things that we do know work generally. Of course, it is not a one-size fits all. We have got to take each community on its own. But I think as a principle, having these factors in play, will make a difference to the learning that happens at school.

COPING with COVID-19

We asked members to share their COVID-19 stories with us. We have published a selection here and you can read more on our Facebook page

Johnny Minyarama and Andrew Lansdell, sub-branch reps, Shepherdson College

The ever-changing landscape of COVID-19 at the end of Term One was confusing for both Yolngu and Balanda. The lack of clarity and mixed messages did not help ease anxieties of staff and the community. This was further exacerbated by the widespread concern across Australia and the globe.

It has been perplexing hearing of the social distancing measures, yet still having education continue in schools. The staff here have been extremely flexible and have dealt with these challenges in a highly commendable manner.

Due to the unknown nature of COVID-19 and the lack of medical explanations in Yolngu Matha being given early on, rumours circulated regarding the virus. This has seen Yolngu Radio and the medical clinic play a crucial role in informing the community and clarifying messages from Government.

Uncertainty still exists as to the legalities that are enforceable across the Territory. The recent reinforcements of defence force personnel and police sent out to several Arnhem communities has created further uncertainty. The role these reinforcements play has not been made clear.

For those whose homes are not in the community, this time has been stressful as people are

unsure when it will be practical to leave and visit family in different parts of Australia. This is likely to take quite a mental toll as time goes on.

Hygiene practices have improved across the community and people are taking steps to look after their families and one another. Government financial assistance has been well received.

It has been encouraging to see the extremely low rate of COVID-19 in the Territory.

Alessa Fremmer, sub-branch president, Milyakburra



Zoom lessons with Leonard

Milyakburra School is situated on Bickerton Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Living on, well, a remote island has suddenly provided us with unexpected advantages. We live in our little bubble of normality.

Pubs and retail shops closed? No problem, we don't have those anyhow.

People can't come to the community? Not many did before.

Staying away from strangers? None here anyhow.

Toilet paper shortages in the rest of the world? Freight is so expensive you tend to buy things like toilet paper and tissues at the beginning of the school year for the whole year. So, what is everyone going on about?

Staying in touch with loved ones via Facetime/ Skype/ Zoom? When a round trip to Darwin sets you back \$2000+, you tend to do that anyhow.

So, what changes have this pandemic brought to us so far? The game commonly known as Tag/ Police & Robbers/ Branding is now called CORONAVIRUS. The students who were



Sub-branch reps Johnny Minyarama and Andrew Lansdell

champions at hand washing when prompted before are now champions without prompting. We work hard on remembering not to touch faces or share bottles. We have started raising awareness of things that will be impossible once the virus reaches us (like playing basketball). Many people here place their faith in God, but we all work towards giving him a helping hand. A weekly barge and a weekly mail plane now look even more like blessings.

People who pitied us for not being able to drive out, envy us now for our infrastructure that does not rely on driving in or out.

So far, we are the Lucky Ones. Our hearts go out to schools cut off from usual supply lines, with water issues and no local shops.

We hope to live in our little bubble for some time to come, using the time to live as normally as possible whilst getting prepared as best we can: playing basketball and CORONAVIRUS!

Borrooloola School, Maria Pyro, Assistant Principal and Garrwa Woman

At the start I was confused and worried for my families and community. Lots of our old people died here with the Hong Kong flu in the 1960s. People are moving out to their homelands because they think they are healthier and safer places. I am feeling less worried now because I know that Borrooloola is part of a restricted area. My concern is that students are not coming back to school because they are out on their homelands without good internet or resources for a good education. This Coronavirus has highlighted the need to get homelands updated so that our students are able to feel safe while also having access to a good education.

Leo Boudib, First Year High School Teacher

I was concerned at the delay and lack of clarity from Australian authorities regarding COVID-19. I was concerned they were not taking strong enough action to protect us and our community. AEU NT officers' actions and communications reassured me that my concerns were heard. I am less worried now, despite knowing that things could still change with little notice. I am grateful that there are no cases in the community and I enjoyed the opportunity to stay here over the holidays. I would rather be here than in a city. I would like to see visible collaboration between

the Department and the union. I have faith in the union and trust they have our families' and local communities' health and safety at heart.

Danielle Schmidt, Borrooloola sub-branch president

At first, I was concerned about how my remote teaching practices would change and how this would affect the students' learning. My mental health declined trying to stay calm for the students and continue teaching while incorporating hand washing, social distancing and cleaning of the classroom. I was very worried about the continuation of quality learning, with many of our families not having access to technology or being able to help with worksheets that were not catered to EAL/D learners. My concerns have now turned to attendance, effective enrolment and the continuation of learning for our students. Many are staying away out bush because this is where they feel safe. This has meant a drop in our attendance which makes me question if this will affect our funding and thus impact the quality of education for our students. I have appreciated our union being proactive and having regular question and answer sessions for members. It alleviated a lot of my concerns.



Leo, Maria and Danielle

COPING WITH COVID-19



A remote relief teacher's perspective

Michelle Hawkins, Remote Relief Teaching

COVID-19 has entirely extinguished my relief teaching income however, I am grateful for the time I now have available for myself. The Term 2 calendar was completely booked travelling to various remote communities and almost overnight it was wiped clean. The uncertainty prior to the Easter break was intense. Although I felt strong personal support from members of the teaching profession, I knew that relief teachers had been legislated out of any systemic support from the Department of Education.

There is no consideration regarding relief teachers' needs nor our professional role from a departmental perspective. Travel allowances granted to relief teachers are designed to compensate for this despite the reality that these allowances are granted to anyone who travels for work related purposes regardless of their role.

It was through decisions made by the Federal Government that I knew I would not fall into hardship. This seemed ironic after over 10 years of serving in the classroom as a relief teacher and assisting the Department of Education with its goals. On the one hand, relief teachers are providing an assurance for the delivery of remote education and support in remote communities. On the other hand, the Department of Education has their own assurances and laws that state they do not have to reciprocate

the relationship with any incentives or benefits. And they don't. I am grateful for the appreciation and gratitude I do receive from principals and the teachers whose classes I take.

It is good that the bio security laws came into place and we have been very fortunate to not experience community spread of COVID-19 in the Northern Territory.

Ian Polak, sub-branch president, Ampilatwatja

Well, life is certainly different at the moment. The whole world has changed, and so too has life in our schools. I think a pat on the back is deserved for our wonderful staff and our school families for how they have handled this most unusual time.

Living in a remote community, we are affected less than those in cities and towns. While travel has been severely restricted, most other things are not too far from normal. Our schools have remained open and, although student numbers have been down, we are continuing to provide face-to-face learning.



Ampilatwatja students practising good hygiene

A few changes such as ordering of food and organising of supplies are now having to be done remotely, but the supply lines seem to be functioning quite well. While it has been nice to spend extra time in community, I think we are all looking forward to an easing of restrictions. I know many people are missing their families and looking forward to being able to see them again. It is wonderful that people have been doing the right thing. Keep up the great work.

Of course, one of the reasons we have done

so well is that there has been a strong focus on hygiene. Face and hand washing have been strongly targeted and the students have done very well in following the new rules. We have washing stations which are used regularly, as well as hand sanitiser in the classroom. Students have done some great learning about taking care of themselves and others.

It seems we may be on our way to returning to normal life again, (although normal will not be the same as before) and I am so proud of the way the students, staff and Ampilatwatja Community have taken care of, and looked out for each other during these unusual times.

**Steve Hawkins, sub-branch member,
Nightcliff Middle School**

Like most teachers and schools, staff at Nightcliff Middle School are feeling some reduction in anxiety due to the long break between Territory cases and are happy to effectively 'teach as usual'. Despite this, high levels of anxiety remain for family and friends interstate and the question of when we may be able to see them again in the flesh. And it's not just the fun stuff of spending quality time with people – there are a number of fraught issues that people are doing their best to deal with. The relative ease of a four hour flight was a level of insurance for our isolation up here, but that's now gone, and people are feeling it deeply.

Of course, concerns still remain about how

long we can dodge this bullet. We've seen how Singapore was travelling well with their infection rates and then that suddenly spiked. We fear the impact that any potential community spread of the virus will have on our physical health and workloads – the last few weeks of Term 1 were nightmarish as we worked to prepare for dual modes of teaching. The inability for social distancing in our classrooms and the lackadaisical approach that many teenagers have towards hygiene means any second wave of the virus is massively concerning. In saying that, teachers are doing what they do best – teaching!

I think our staff are very grateful for is the human focus our acting principal, Eva Kokkinomagoulos, had during the escalating events last term. A big shout out to her for checking in regularly with staff and students. She has shown that acknowledging staff concerns and frustrations as valid and worthy of consideration is an absolutely vital element of crisis leadership.

**Brad Calvert, sub-branch president,
Willowra**

The final week of Term 1 passed quickly, time being used for planning and PD activities, with a few video-conference glitches thrown in. When the full 10-day break commenced on Good Friday, the quarantine reality sunk in. Endless frightful news reports of events in the Northern Hemisphere allowed me to appreciate my confinement within the Central Desert Quarantine Zone, itself within the NT zone, within our recently closed-to-the-world island nation.

The situation reminded me of the post-apocalyptic 1964 film 'On the Beach'. It's been claimed that one of the Hollywood starlets said Melbourne was a good place to make a film about the end of the world. My birthplace, Frankston, a sure end-of-the-world destination, featured heavily.

While 2020 brought supermarket brawls induced by toilet paper fever; the looting, reckless motor racing and debauchery portrayed in the film seemed far away. Here in Willowra the sensible locals did not exhaust the shop supplies. It all seemed a bit of an anti-climax.

I munched through some chocolate, rode my bike and unicycle, played chess and soaked up the tranquility.



Nightcliff Middle acting principal Eva Kokkinomagoulos

PRINCIPALS CAN BE ACTIVISTS

important

Long-time member and principal Stephen Pelizzo writes about combining his principal work with his union activism

Most of my life I have combined being a school leader and a union activist/official.

Originally, I was a small school principal in Queensland in the 1970s and early 1980s, where all my principal colleagues were active members of the QTU. When I first came to the NT, my principal, Alden McCue, was on what was then the NTTF Executive, and ex-principal Col Young was the union secretary. Of all the various segments of our union, principals had the greatest density of membership.

When I first became a principal here, many of my mentors had strong union backgrounds. Additionally, this level of density and activism remains true in all other Australian jurisdictions, with principals playing a distinct, high profile role in other branches of the AEU.

However, over time, union membership and activity by school leaders has become rarer in the NT, which is odd.

So what happened to make the NT become different? I don't have a definitive answer, however I think that a combination of the following has contributed to this trend:

- Persistent negative views expressed by all stripes of NT governments towards teachers in general, and education unionists in particular.
- The success of a 'divide and conquer' strategy behind Principal Executive contracts.
- Interstate and out of system recruitment, both of principals themselves and senior management, who don't have a sense of our collective history.
- Growth of a mythology unique to the NT that principals are senior managers not educators, and employment is only ever short term.

On top of this, people join unions, or become union leaders, for a wide variety of reasons. For me, here are a couple of critical factors which

I consider should apply to leaders in both education and unionism:

1. Professional collegiality (us educators are all in this together)
2. Service to others (especially the more vulnerable)
3. Belief in the basic precepts of democracy; and, most importantly,
4. I'm not scared

It seems to me that for some school leaders points 1, 2 and 3 are problematic because they have a "me first" mentality, making it difficult for them to interact from a union perspective. Most often though, I discern the fourth point as a reason for not engaging with the union. Comments I've heard include, "it will be bad for my career", "my contract could be under threat", or "the Department doesn't like it." There are sadly many examples of previous leaders in our Department who have claimed that principals shouldn't be members of the union. Less sadly, few of them have ever remained.

I wish I could assuage those fears. But I know of enough examples of covert bullying to not be able to. Personally, my career has flourished, with some setbacks, despite that. And I am not afraid.

It is always sad when leaders (in any field) make decisions based on fear.

Being a union activist while being a principal is demanding. It does mean wearing different hats and looking and responding to the world from different perspectives, at different times. However, there is also much cross over, most especially in the basic values espoused. Being a good unionist means treating people decently, which is also always what being a good leader is about.

So to my principal colleagues who are union members, I salute you. To those who are not yet, I encourage you to embrace the collaborative values of our profession and join.



AEU NT Vice President and Borroloola school principal, Stephen Pelizzo

A Territory teaching adventure

Adelaide River School teaching principal Tony Clegg has been a teacher and union member for 35 years. Here he reflects upon his career in the Territory with Organiser Alyson Kavanagh

Tony completed an Arts degree in Tasmania and afterwards worked for three years in the family business, running the bottle shop in a suburban hotel in Hobart. The pay and career path were not great, so he went back to study to become a teacher in the hope of a long-term career. At the end of his teacher training in 1984 there were no jobs for primary teachers in Tasmania. The Northern Territory was advertising and he thought it sounded like a great adventure, so he applied.

When he first started teaching in Nhulunbuy in 1985, all the teachers that he spent time with were members. "They told me that being a member gave me protection against injustice" – so he joined up.

Tony first started his teaching career at Nhulunbuy Primary School. He was one of five Year Seven teachers. From there he went to Nightcliff Primary School in 1987 where he "had 10 terrific years with some wonderful students and fantastic staff. Towards the end of this time I was lucky enough to meet my beautiful wife Erlyn."

In 1996 he moved to Batchelor and took up a leadership position at Batchelor Area School. While at Batchelor their "first beautiful daughter, Zoe, was born – it was a magical time," Tony recalls.

From there he moved back to Nhulunbuy Primary School and remained for five years, a period during which the couple's second daughter, Tayla, was born.

During the second half of 2003 the four of them left for Bulman School. Tony describes filling in as the Teaching Principal for a semester as "a magnificent adventure career-wise and family-wise."

The next job was Adelaide River Primary School. Tony has been the Teaching Principal since 2004 and is "still here in 2020 – we love the school and the town."

He thinks the best thing about teaching is being able to contribute in a significant way to the

development of young people:

"When a student makes a big gain in their learning – in their reading development, for example – and you see how that makes them grow in knowledge, ability, confidence, happiness... and how that can make their family feel proud – that is the best thing in teaching."

Tony's tips for early career teachers:

1. Work hard – be organised. There are no shortcuts to good teaching.
2. Enjoy your teaching and have fun. Being positive has a multitude of benefits to your success as a teacher and your mental health.
3. Look after yourself. When you are healthy and well rested things tend to work better.
4. When you have a bad day learn from it and move on.
5. Stand up for yourself and your colleagues.
6. Be a member of the union.

Tony believes that the essence of teaching has not changed and that "the importance of having control of your class, developing good working relationships with your students, having a good pedagogy... all those sorts of things were really important in 1985 and still are now."

According to Tony, the biggest changes to teaching include the way that the culture and language of business has made their way into schools. In his view, some of these changes, such as improved data collection and analysis, have been good and have improved teaching and learning. Other changes, such as the growth in compliance activities, have not been good and have taken teacher time and energy away from the needs of their students.

For Tony, being a teacher unionist means believing in and actively working towards a "fair go" for teachers and educators alike. In addition, being a teacher unionist has made his teaching life much more fulfilling and enjoyable. Union membership has given him opportunities to develop leadership skills and meet some fantastic people. Importantly, being a teacher unionist has given him strength and confidence when it comes to supporting colleagues and having a say.



Erlyn and Tony at Adelaide River Primary School

AO, AO, it's off to work we go

Industrial Officer Mick McCarthy explains conditions for school-based support staff

The working conditions of support staff in schools vary depending on how they are employed. Broadly, there are two different categories of employment: workers employed by the school council, usually on a casual basis, and those employed by the Department of Education (DoE) as Administrative Officers (AOs).

School Council employees

Workers employed by the school management council have pay and conditions based on the *Educational Services (Schools) General Staff Award*. These staff are typically employed on a casual basis, and many schools take advice on employment conditions from the NT Chamber of Commerce.

To provide advice to members employed in this way, the AEU NT office would need to see a copy of the contracts or letters of appointment.

Conditions of School-Based AOs

AOs employed by DoE are covered by the NTPS "general" Enterprise Agreement

2017-2021. This EA covers employees in administrative grades across the entire NTPS. Any AO positions within a school at level 5 or above are deemed to be on office-based conditions and are 100% (standard full-time) roles.

Within schools there are unique employment arrangements for admin officers at levels 1 to 4, spelled out in Schedule 2 of the agreement. School-based AOs can be employed on a 92%, 96% or 100% arrangement.

If employed as an AO at 92%, employees are required to work 6 hours and 15 minutes per school day. If employed as an AO at 96%, they are required to work 7 hours and 21 minutes per school day. If employed at 100% that also means 7 hours and 21 minutes, but workers don't get the 12 weeks off per year during school holidays like their 92% and 96% colleagues.

The most frequent question we get in the office is about employee breaks. For AOs in schools, start times are directly linked to the opening of the school and a meal break should occur not more than five hours later. Meal breaks are unpaid and must be at least 30 minutes long. The length of a meal break is also negotiable with the line manager.

A major difference between the conditions of AOs and teachers is that AOs are eligible for overtime. For example, if an AO is required to work for longer than five hours continuously, they are eligible for overtime until a meal break occurs.

Similarly, AOs are entitled to overtime if they are required to work more than their maximum allocation of weekly hours, unlike teachers who routinely work much longer than their notional 36 hours and 45 minutes.

The length of the meal break (along with the start time, which will be connected to the duties of any given role and the school's opening time) determines what an individual's finishing time will be. It follows that 4:21pm might be an accurate finish time for some AO roles, however a good degree of variation is entirely possible in every school. A finishing time of 4:21 may apply to large numbers of AOs and other classifications in the other Departments but would be overall unusual in schools and does not apply to teachers at all.

Conversions between 92%, 96% and 100% are catered for in the EA and can be initiated by either the Department or the individual, but only implemented with the employee's consent.

Many other conditions are broadly the same as those of teachers, but our advice is not to make assumptions and seek confirmation and/or advice as needed.

Nearly all school support staff are eligible to join the AEU and if you are in this category, we encourage you to become members to ensure your rights are upheld.



Support staff from Namarluk School

Erin Lucas, Lajamanu School

New sub-branch president Erin Lucas is located in the community of Lajamanu, six hours' drive west of Katherine.

How do you view your role of sub-branch president? What aspects of being a sub-branch president do you like?

I view my role of sub-branch president as one that offers patience, understanding and empathy. It is my responsibility to represent and advocate on behalf of my colleagues and I don't take this lightly. I like being connected to other members of staff through our shared experiences together,

and I enjoy building trust and reliability with them as we go.

What tips do you have for new sub-branch presidents?

I still consider myself a relatively new sub-branch president and what I have found helpful is connecting with other members and with the office staff. So, my tip is to reach out! Ask questions and build networks, and most of all, develop strong professional relationships with your colleagues.

What is your favourite part about being a teacher?

There are so many parts of my role that make it worthwhile, however the part I love the most is seeing my students succeed in surprising ways! I currently teach a Year 1/2 cohort and every situation



Erin Lucas

presents a unique learning opportunity: shooting hoops becomes a lesson in data collection; collecting rubbish turns into counting practice; playing 'would you rather' builds vocabulary and oral language. This is what we are here for as teachers and it is definitely my favourite part of the job.

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Growing teachers on country

Life member Leon White along with colleague Kathy McMahon explain the history and purpose of the RATE program, following the NT Government's announcement RATE will return in 2021

Remote Area Teacher Education in the Northern Territory 1976 -1997

Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) was an accredited model of community-based teacher education developed by Batchelor College for local Aboriginal school staff and nominated community members in the NT. The onsite program commenced at Yirrkala in 1976 and extended to other communities over the next decades. The term Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) was for a 'both ways' teacher education program that developed the skills and knowledge of local educators to teach in their home communities. RATE operated until its demise in the late 1990s. Its efficacy can be shown by the fact that by 1995, 63 Aboriginal teachers were working in schools as classroom teachers, including some who went on to become Senior Teachers and Principals of their community schools.

What was the role of non-local staff in the RATE Program?

The Department of Education (DoE) staff worked as tutors and Batchelor College lecturers. Non-local teaching staff worked collaboratively within their school-based teams with the Assistant Teachers. These non-local teachers worked co-operatively during practicum periods; planning, programming and team-teaching every day as a normal part

of their classroom teacher duties. The role of these non-local teachers was important in the reciprocal learning processes which included the exploration, validation and affirmation of identity and culture.

DoE supported the program through the provision of:

- housing for Batchelor College lecturers in larger communities,
- a 0.5 allocation of a teacher to work with students in a tutorial role in afternoon sessions,
- appropriate study space and resources in the community.

What were some ideas that guided the design and delivery of the NT Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program?

In the design and delivery of RATE, collaborative and community-based learning was critical. The key driving power was the establishment of a community of Aboriginal educators from Northern Territory locations that worked together and learnt from and with their community Elders. Not only did RATE students come to understand and use Western curriculum, they were guided and taught by their own Elders in community-based workshops. These workshops included the yearly Aboriginal Languages Fortnight workshops, where students undertook research projects with community Elders and linguists. These projects formed one strand of their learning which was then interwoven into teaching programs, with the guidance and expertise of community mentors.

What was it that RATE delivered that was important?

Accredited RATE provided in the community and school fulfilled three primary functions:

1. Accredited pre-service teacher education for Aboriginal educators who, for a range of social, cultural and political reasons, needed to remain in community centred on cultural maintenance.
2. In-service training where professional development with a pedagogical focus was aligned with both community aspirations and accredited training requirements.
3. A powerful forum to create curriculum that had Aboriginal languages and knowledge at its centre. Language, land knowledge practices, cultural authority structures and family connections were all part of RATE curriculum. RATE students developed models of 'both ways' education appropriate for their communities. Examples of such curricula still in action today, twenty-five years later, are the Garma Maths Curriculum at Yirrkala and the Warlpiri Curriculum Cycle.

The RATE program provided participants the opportunity to maintain relationships and retain individual, family, community and cultural responsibilities whilst gaining recognised qualifications and developing expertise to become competent and effective teachers in their community.

There needs to be a strong investigation into what supporting the re-establishment of RATE means for workloads. Roles, assumptions and expectations must be clarified if the program is to be successful.



Northern Territory

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