

## All in the family

June 15, 2019

"I am an English/drama teacher and started teaching in Bombala, NSW, in 1981. I have taught at one of the most southern schools in the state, Bombala High School, and at one of the most northern, Woodenbong Central School. I was actually on strike for the first two days of my face-to-face career, and was present at the Day of Action demonstration in the Domain in 1988.

Without Gough Whitlam's free university education, I would never have been able to gain a tertiary education. I became a teacher for many reasons, but being offered a teachers' scholarship and a guaranteed job after my degree was a compelling factor.

I had 10 years out of full-time teaching, in the 1990s, when I raised our children and gave career priority to my wife, who is also a teacher. During this time I did some postgraduate study, completing a Masters degree and some of a doctorate.



I have had the unusual experience of teaching my son, Callan, in Kindergarten when I was working casually, and in Year 12 for the HSC when I taught him English. I actually taught him English for four of his high-school years and drama for two of them in a small rural town, at Molong Central School.

I am a housing commission kid from a single parent – my mum – so social justice and mobility has been a prime motivating factor all my life. I am a proud product of public schools and have been on Federation Council since 2013. I stood for Council so our area would have a representative; attending a Central Schools Conference made that apparent to me.

Federation works to promote the future of public school kids. It sees our young as social beings more than as economic numbers. Belonging to, and working for, the union are acts of humanity serving fellow citizens. We are inspired by the desire to help; to explicitly make the world better."

### — David Eccleston

"I always had an interest in teaching, having seen the joy and success my parents have experienced throughout their careers. Following from them, I'm also a secondary English teacher at Billabong High School in the Southern Riverina town of Culcairn.

My story of Federation activity started when I was a child. I didn't understand why I didn't have to go to school and why mum and dad didn't go to work on certain days, but I thought they were pretty good deals. It wasn't until I was much older when I figured out what was happening with industrial action and strikes and how significant it was for teachers to gather in a room to campaign for conditions that would improve my time at school.

My family history of activism actually goes back much further than my parents. I recently discovered my dad's family's steelworks background in Northern Wales. A recent trip there gave me insight into the importance of unions and the consequences of a lack of union membership.

When I started my education degree, dad encouraged me to join Federation. My first practicum presented an opportunity for actual involvement in Federation and it was the first time I needed to decide between doing things for my own benefit or standing up for students and my future working conditions. That stopwork meeting in 2012, in the first year of my degree, set the tone for my future activism. I learnt that decisions were made by those who choose to put the collective ahead of themselves.

When I entered full-time employment, it was a given I would involve myself with Federation. I'm currently President of the Culcairn Teachers Association and have been in that position since my third year of teaching. The end of 2018 gave me the opportunity to stand for election as a Councillor. I attended as a proxy a few times in 2018 and was elected for the 2019-2020 biennium. For me, Council is the logical extension of my Federation activism as it helps to connect people.

My first few times at Council were difficult, but thanks to dad I was able to develop a working knowledge of what happens and why. Being a Councillor allows me to show my colleagues they are not alone, that their school experiences are not isolated and that their union is working on a solution.

Every council features discussions about issues that matter. I am blown away by how incredible it is that we have 200 teachers in a room together, discussing issues that affect us every day which prevent us from teaching our students in the best way possible.

The biggest issue affecting schools in my association is the significant lack of casual teachers, as well as difficulty in attracting people to apply for temporary and permanent positions at the school. The lack of casual relief compounds issues of isolation and access to quality professional learning, the majority of which requires significant travel."

— **Callan Eccleston**