

Experts discuss crisis recovery

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The requirement for remote, or online, learning during the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the public education system in Australia to opportunistic edtech companies that have been waiting in the wings.

It has been acknowledged that these for-profit entities had online resources and lessons ready to roll out before the pandemic hit and they seized the moment to peddle their wares as classrooms moved to online scenarios.

On 23 July, the Gonski Institute for Education, Centre for Professional Learning and UNSW's Centre for Ideas presented "Fighting the Privatisation of Education", a live-streamed panel discussion hosted by Jane Caro and watched online by Australian Education Union members across the country.

The panel included Federation President Angelo Gavrielatos, Finnish educator Pasi Sahlberg and Dianne Ravitch, a historian of education, educational policy analyst, and research professor at New York University.



Ms Ravitch began the discussion by detailing how America's public schools suffer from inequities that are not faced by charter and religious schools, predominantly due to a lack of funding and unionisation.

The Network for Public Education, the activist group she leads, works closely with allies, including unions, in the fight against the privatisation of education.

Her new book *Slaying Goliath: The Passionate Resistance to Privatisation and the Fight to save America's Public Schools*, examines the resistance to the forces leading the privatisation of American schools.

She noted having to home-school their children during the COVID-19 pandemic is helping American parents realise teaching is difficult and requires skill.

Mr Gavrielatos said teachers and principals had turned themselves inside out to provide learning continuity. "There is a much deeper appreciation ... growing appreciation ... and deeper trust and admiration for the work of teachers and principals. We certainly hope it lasts beyond the pandemic."

He highlighted how the pandemic has exposed deep inequalities within the system, and used the examples of the additional funding allocated to already overfunded private schools and the opportunism of private edtech corporations to illustrate the way privatising education can amplify inequities.

Mr Sahlberg agreed the community will look at teachers with different eyes after the pandemic, having now realised their worth in society.

He cited the OECD's clear message to governments that market mechanisms do not create a successful education the way fairness and equity do.