



Proficient and committed

March 29, 2018

I am writing this in a hotel room in Canberra having spent the day wandering the corridors of Parliament House, accompanied by parents and teachers, dropping in on politicians to argue for a fairer funding model for public schools. It's a quiet room and as the sun sets, I'm reflecting on the past 40 years.

I finished university at the end of 1977, so this year represents my 40th year as a teacher. I've taught in a number of rural, regional and outer metropolitan public secondary schools in just about every kind of position, as casual relief, a permanent classroom teacher, a student adviser, a head teacher, a deputy principal and a principal.

English and History are my two teaching subjects.

I taught in schools located in the middle of some seriously disadvantaged communities. It was (and still is) tough, confronting and demanding work but it certainly made me become a teacher.

A few weeks ago, like many of my pre-2004 colleagues, I received in the mail the package from the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) with my Proficient Teacher Accreditation.

I have to admit, I felt proud. After all, proficient means skilled.

Even though I was a secondary school principal for 10 years, and held other executive positions, I started in 1978 as a teacher, and still define myself to this day as a teacher, albeit now in the role as president of Federation.

If there's a form to fill out asking for my occupation, I proudly print the word, Teacher.

When working as a principal, I used to remind myself and my principal colleagues that the word "principal" was originally used as an adjective, not a noun, as in "principal teacher".

Indeed, I can think of no other greater compliment than to be called a teacher, regardless of the position held.

To be called one is to be recognised as undertaking the most important work a nation can ask of you.

I am a teacher and I would be happy with just that label, teacher, but equally just as pleased to have it confirmed that I am skilled, proficient.

So, the certificate in the mail labelling me a “proficient teacher” will do me just fine.

But there’s more that I reflect on these days, perhaps prompted by a comment made some years ago by Dr Ken Boston that I’ve never forgotten.

“The teachers in our most disadvantaged schools are at least as good as those in our most advantaged schools: the issue is not their competence, skill or commitment. The issue is that their number, resources and support are unequal to the task.”

I look back and I know that in my 40 years as a teacher, I felt I had to compromise.

Compromise every day, in every class, in every position held.

Compromise on what I could do for my students, just for the want of specialist behaviour management intervention or the employment of additional counsellors or smaller class sizes or more time to collaborate with colleagues or to be able deploy one-on-one literacy support or establish a senior study centre or ... and the list goes on.

So, in my 40th year as a proficient teacher, I know this: I certainly do not want the next generation of teachers to have to spend their careers compromising on what they can achieve for themselves and for their students.

I want, in the words of Dr Boston, for them to be given the resources and support equal to the task.

So yesterday we drove, once more, down the Hume Highway towards Canberra to prepare for the launch on the lawns outside the national Parliament of the next phase of the school funding campaign.

The hit to public schools meted out by the Turnbull Government is just so unfair.

The figures are clear. Over the next two years, all Australian schools will lose \$2.2 billion but, of that amount, public schools are the hardest hit losing \$1.9 billion or 86 per cent.

Teachers are proficient. We are skilled and adept at what we do but we are not miracle workers.

We need strong systemic state-wide programs of support, not the lie called Local Schools, Local Decisions, which has left NSW public schools isolated.

We need to fund all public schools to a level that brings them all up to at least the national Schooling Resource Standard.

We need to campaign until that is achieved.

Join up at www.FairFundingNow.org.au