

**UP CLOSE AND BIG, BURNIE HIGH SCHOOL
SPEECH BY HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE
HONOURABLE
KATE WARNER AM, GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
BURNIE HIGH SCHOOL, TUESDAY 31 MAY 2016**

Good afternoon. I would like to acknowledge the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, the traditional and original owners of this land and to pay respects to their elders past and present.

Dick and I are very appreciative of having been invited back to Burnie, after our wonderful engagements here during our official visit to the Burnie region in June of last year.

May I begin, then, by thanking Vincent De Santis for his invitation.

And thank you also to Judith Fahey, Burnie High School Principal for hosting this event.

Which brings me to the wonderful meal put together by the students. Well done to you all – and what a terrific experience for you to have accomplished this for the guests here today.

It seems to be one of the things the “UP Close and BIG” series is all about: that is, where local students in particular can benefit from participating closely and actively in an event such as this one.

And I’m looking forward to another UP Close and BIG event this afternoon, at the University, engaging with a group of students in a discussion forum and question and answer session.

It has been suggested that I speak to you today with some emphasis on my background and experience in education; and to share with you some insights I might have into the challenges and opportunities I see for students and their future careers, particularly for those living in rural/regional locations.

Since I have been Governor I have been asked a number of times how this happened. How did I come to be the first female Governor of Tasmania and only the second-born Tasmanian to be Governor of Tasmania? Invariably I say it started with a good education for me, as a girl brought up in Hobart in the Fifties and Sixties when it was not the

norm for kids to complete Year 12 or sixth form, or Matric as the final year of school was called.

I grew up in the knowledge that I was expected to stay at school to matriculate and this I willingly did. My parents had always emphasised the importance of education and of me having a profession so that I could be financially independent. In 1966 Australian universities all charged fees with no ability to defer through a HECS system, although quite a number of Commonwealth scholarships were available based on matric results. I was awarded a scholarship but I am sure my parents would have paid my fees had I not received one. So at aged 17 I went to University and studied law whilst living at home supported by my parents for the duration of my four-year degree. My parents never indicated that my university degree would be wasted if I married and had children, as was sometimes suggested about professional education for girls in the sixties and seventies.

When I did graduate, marry and have children, I was lucky again. Dick, my husband, encouraged me to continue my casual tutoring job and to undertake a higher degree. I received a lot of help and encouragement from my family throughout my university career. For me my education led to a career I very much enjoyed. In fact my education has been ongoing, as a university academic it has been a life of learning. And it has left me with a conviction of the empowering effects of education. I see education as the key to gender equality and gender equality as key to tackling social problems such as family and sexual violence and of course to address the fact that women are significantly more likely than men to be living in poverty in Australia.

The Burnie region has positive economic prospects despite a decline in manufacturing and the vicissitudes of mining. It has a continuing stream of unfilled vacancies but at the same time high rates of unemployment including youth unemployment and low rates of higher education attainment. The answer, as BIG has recognised, is in raising aspirations, encouraging the community to value education, improving school attendance and motivating students to go on to Year 12. Whilst valuing education in general is important, we need particularly to value science, technology engineering and maths and we need to encourage the young people to study these subjects.

Raising educational aspirations is one of the goals of the Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment which was set up last year. I chair the Advisory Committee. There are a number of programs that fall under the

umbrella of the Underwood Centre's aspiration arm: the Children's University; Bigger Things; Pathways to Success; and Rural Aspirations/Warm Connections.

As well as programs to raise aspiration, it has a professional development arm and a research arm (research on educational aspiration and attainment). The Centre is in the process of recruiting two deputy directors, one for 'aspiration and attainment' and one for research (programmatic research and social transformation). As I understand it, the third deputy director (workforce/professional development) is likely to be a Department of Education person based in Devonport. Shortly the Centre will have a 'research and policy workshop' from which 'a guiding framework' will be generated containing an agreed set of objectives; priority areas to be progressed over the short and medium term.

How do we raise aspirations, improve school attendance, motivate students to stay at school to complete Year 12?

Earlier this month, I attended a wonderfully stimulating and optimistic lecture about education futures, focusing on Tasmania. It was presented by John Hattie of the University of Melbourne and was refreshing in that it gave concrete ideas for the way forward.¹

John Hattie started by talking about the 'influences' on student achievement, making the point that there is very little we do that harms children's learning – almost everything works. We need to stop asking what works because almost everything does to some extent. There are about 60+% of teachers and schools in Australia where students gain above the average of all effects on achievement. We need to dependably recognise those who do, form a coalition of success around them and invite others to join. He argues that there needs to be a common conception of progress. Teachers need to believe in their collective ability to promote successful student outcomes within their school and this needs to be reinforced by evidence that they collectively have an impact.

Surprisingly, so many of the debated issues in schools across Australia concern issues that are at the bottom of the list in terms of strength of impact: autonomy, teacher aides, more money, class size – and the list, he said, goes on. What matters most is expertise of the teachers and school

¹ John Hattie, 'Education Futures in an Island State', *Richard Selby Smith Oration*, University of Tasmania, May 2016

leaders; the expertise underpinning the moment by moment decisions that are made in the heat of learning. The things that matter are:

- Teachers working together as evaluators of their impact;
- their skill in knowing what students now know and providing them with explicit success criteria near the beginning of a series of lessons;
- ensuring high trust in the classroom so that errors and misunderstanding are welcomed as opportunities to learn;
- maximising feedback to teachers about their impact (especially from assessments); and so on.

Central to all of this is a teacher's willingness and capacity to see learning through the eyes of students, and students seeing themselves as their own teachers.

He went on to talk about 'dependably' recognising the expertise of educators, by teachers demonstrating their impact, such as exemplars of students' progress in their work, test scores and commitment to wanting to reinvest in their learning. He talked about the AITSL process (the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's professional standards and certification ranking process of teachers (four ranks from Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers). Tasmania is not part of this national process.

The state of schooling: changing our narrative about successful schools

Australia has been going backwards in Reading, Writing and Science in the PISA world assessments for 16 years despite a 30% increase in funding to schools.

What is at fault is our perception of great schools – they are not, Hattie argues, those whose students have high or above average attainment, but rather those who have high progress (measured by students gaining more than a years' growth). Too often we disparage those in the Growth zone, whose teachers and school leaders are making stunning growth. The PISA decline is because we have too many cruising schools – those who start above average but add little.

Hattie looked at the mean score for each school in Tasmania from Years 3 and 5 in reading and calculated the growth over Years 3-5. We are making more progress with students who are below average but we have too many cruising schools. Interestingly the lowest SES school in the

State (he did not name it) is in the top 15 growth schools across Australia. So rather than saying this school is a disaster because its reading average is low, it is among the best schools because of the value the teachers are adding.

Evidence at early years: the Matthew effect (accumulated advantage)

This based on the idea that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Translated to reading this means that if children do not get to Level 2 in NAPLAN by age 8 then they are unlikely to ever catch up. There are 8,715 or 17% of Tasmanian Year 3 students who do not attain this benchmark, distributed across all parts of the socio-economic status of schools. So he suggests we need to mount a major campaign to improve the teaching of learning skills from Year 0 to 8, if the life chances of students are to improve.

Evidence at the later years: there needs to be multiple ways to be excellent in upper high school

The best predictor of adult health, wealth and happiness is not achievement at school, but the number of years of schooling. So we need to make schools inviting places for students to want to come to learn. The decision to stay at school starts at about 11-13, drop out is a slow process. Only 55% of year 10 students continue to Year 12 and only 40% of Tasmanians complete the TCE (37.5% in Burnie) and we have a large percentage of young Australians not in employment, education or training (I understand it is 20% in Burnie).

This is a major indictment of our schools, not helped by our economy. He says the answer lies in changing our high schools, not blaming the students or their families.

New Zealand's experience shows we can improve retention rapidly by changing the assessment system in upper high school and increasing the range of subjects taught (to include such things as panel beating, sports coaching as well as physics and languages). The only criterion that a subject needs to satisfy for inclusion is that assessment can discriminate between excellent, Merit, Achieved and Not Achieved. This will help make schools inviting places to attend and to excel.

The list of targets based on his diagnosis include:

- % of students at L2 Maths and Reading by Age 8;
- schools need to show that they are inviting places to come and learn;
- there needs to multiple ways to be excellent in upper high school;
- every school needs at least one Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher.

I think there are some important lessons here, whether or not these ideas are explicitly embraced by the Underwood Centre. Whilst clearly the aspirations of parents is important, Hattie's ideas place the emphasis on what schools and teachers can themselves achieve.

Thank you Vince and your BIG team for inviting me to speak and congratulations in pursuing and developing this great initiative for the Burnie region.