

Nordic Talks: A plus or F minus? Educational Equity in Finland and Australia

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In conversation with

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Ebony Bennett [00:00:04] Goodbye, everyone. I'm Ebony Bennett, deputy director at the Australia Institute. And welcome to the very first episode of our Nordic Talk's series of webinars. I'd like to begin by acknowledging where I live and work is narnaul country. And pay my respects to elders past and present. Sovereignty was never stated, and this always was and always will be Aboriginal land. Just a few tips before we begin to help things run smoothly today. There will be a Q&A session towards the end of this session and you should be able to see a Q&A box in Zoom where you can type questions for our panellists. And you should also be able to upvote questions and make comments in the comments section. Reminder to please keep things civil and on topic in the chat or you will be removed. And lastly, a reminder that this discussion is being recorded and it will be posted up on the Australia Institute's YouTube channel at Australia Institute TV later today. And there is also a chance that it will become a Nordic Talk's podcast. I'll explain what that is in just a little second. So this is the first in our special Nordic Talks series. It's a five episode series presented by the Australia Institute's Nordic Policy Centre and supported by the Nordics, the Nordic Council of Ministers. And I encourage you all to listen to their podcast. Nordic Talks. You can find that wherever you normally listen to podcasts. Each episode will tackle a pressing policy issue shared by Australian and Nordic nations and explore Nordic policies and the exciting possibilities that they provide to overcome some of Australia's seemingly intractable problems. Before introducing our guests, we are going to play a short video from Nordic Talks. If I can make sure I get this right. Here we go. Thank you very much. So today's webinar and the issue that we're focussing on today is a plus or minus educational equity in Finland and Australia. More than a decade after the Gonski review into Australia's school funding aim to reduce the impact of social disadvantage on educational outcomes, it seems that those outcomes for Australian schoolchildren are getting worse. Meanwhile, the success of the Finnish educational system and its outcomes shows that equity drives excellence for all students. So today we're going to be discussing how Australia could move closer to Finland's world leading achievement by putting equity at the heart of education. And joining me today are our expert panellists, Pasi Sahlberg and Correna Haythorpe. Pasi is a Finnish educator, teacher and author. He's worked as a school teacher, teacher, educator, academic and policymaker in Finland, and he has advised schools and education system leaders right around the world. His 2013 book, Finnish Lessons What the World Can

Learn From Educational Change in Finland, won the Grammy Award in the United States for an idea that has the potential to change the world. He's currently a professor in education at Southern Cross University in Lismore, and Correna Haythorpe is federal president of the Australian Education Union, a role she began in 2015. She spent 17 years teaching in public primary schools. Most of her teaching has been in low income areas of northern Adelaide and Port Pirie in regional South Australia. But she's also taught in the UK and Japan and as president of the A.U., she led the union through a long running industrial dispute with the South Australian Government, as well as organising the I give a Gonski campaign as well as the stop tax cuts campaigns. Today we are going to talk a lot about equity in education and I thought it would be useful for us to begin with a little explanation of what we mean when we say equity. Firstly, it is important to state that equality of opportunity is not the same as equity, but sometimes equity and equality are used as if the terms are synonymous. They are, however, distinct. As Pasi Sahlberg has written. Equality of opportunity does little to address wide inequalities in learning outcomes, and there is nothing wrong with providing equality of opportunity. But equity is something different. Ten years ago, the Gonski review defined equity as ensuring that differences in educational outcomes are not the result of differences in wealth, income, power or possessions. But Pasi Sahlberg, if I can start with you. You've recently written that this definition of equity from the Gonski review probably needs to combine equality of access and equality of outcomes. How do you define equity and why is equity important to have a goal as a goal in education policy?

Pasi Sahlberg [00:06:06] Yeah. Thank you so much, Ebony. And it's a it's a pleasure to sit down virtually with Correna to talk about this very important thing. I also want to say that it's extremely important that we start this conversations with this this question that you were asking me. So what are we talking about? Too often we include equity in education as a as an idea or goal without being very clear about what we what we are talking about. For example, it's often, often believed that equity actually is the same as the equality of opportunity, which just make sure that every child has the opportunity to choose the school that they, the parents or the students want to have. And as you said, that this this is not a necessary condition at all. So there has been a significant amount of work recently about trying to clarify the what we mean by equity. First of all, I think it's very important to keep in mind that in many of these conversations, certainly what we what we are going to have today, equity in education often refers to outcomes. So equity of outcomes. And that's the important thing. Of course, there are different different aspects like equity of funding or resources or curriculum or something, something like these. But I think the my definition for equity in education is built around this idea of equity, of outcomes. And there we can see we can we can include two different dimensions. One is the what we in our work has called an individual goal or dimension of equity that that requires that everybody or the children or students will accomplish or achieve a certain level of education or adequate education, as it is sometimes called. For example, here in Australia, we could say that all young people should have at least 12 years of education, not necessarily the same type of education, but 12 years of schooling that will then allow them to live a good, healthy and prosperous life of their own choosing. So this adequate education is one dimension that we make sure that each and every child as a student will learn what they need to know and be able to do to live a good life. Then the other dimension is what we often call the social dimension of social equity that requires that the the education outcomes, whatever they are, not necessarily just literacy and numeracy, can be something else as well are similar across the different equity

or social groups, for example, rural and urban and Aboriginal students and and the rest, or immigrant students or those who are not speaking English and those who are in the speakers, and that the learning outcomes, the distribution of this learning outcomes across these different social equity groups are similar. So if we if we include these two conditions, this adequate education and the social equity into this definition of equity of outcomes, I think we are much closer to to have an understanding of equity in education that will lead to more precise conversations and conclusions. Also, what do we need to do? You also asked why this is important. I think equity simply firstly is important because it's a human rights issue. It's something that we all should be concerned about, that every that we need to include every every single child into this conversation. So when we talk about education that everybody must be on the same bus, so to speak. But then the other other thing, why equity is such an important thing is that we know from evidence and research that those education systems, whether they are states or nations like we have here, where the equity has been deliberately broad as a as a policy priority, they seem to do well, also better in in terms of quality of excellence. So that's why we today we say that equity in education and quality of excellence in education work hand-in-hand, that you're going to have either of those without the other. And that's why I think our policies need to be much more clear about how we build this connexion between equity and excellence.

Ebony Bennett [00:10:30] Yeah. Correna, if I can come to you next, do you have a similar view of equity and how do we account for equity in the Australian system currently? Is it well understood?

Correna Haythrope [00:10:40] Yes. Look, think seven and firstly just acknowledge that I'm joining today from Ecuador. I'm country here, land of the connexions and pay my respects to the elders. Past and present is always was and always will be their land. And certainly the issue of equity is something that we've just spent the last two days talking about with our land committee, which is the Committee of Leadership of Aboriginal culture and people. For our union and the impact of disadvantage and compound disadvantage. That is the lived experience of so many of our students and members so intense. I'm very interested in positive comments around equity and the fact that I would agree with you that we do not have a clear definition of equity here in Australia. We welcomed the findings of the Gonski review and certainly the comments around equity and the need for a greater investment in particular cohorts to ensure that they had equity of access, equity of opportunity, equity of resourcing. But it's the lived experience of our members unfortunately that that's been a major policy failing here in Australia. It's been a major fiscal failing and indeed if you look to the OECD, they're very clear in terms of the fact that when you have funding that is equitably distributed across the system, across sectors, that that is, you know, there's a direct correlation there to the high achievement in terms of educational outcomes. So from our perspective, this is it's interwoven with funding and resourcing. We cannot separate the two issues. And the lived experience of our members, of course, is that we cater for all students, regardless of their background, of their specific needs. And it is the public system that, in fact does the heavy lifting and has the greatest cohort of students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and particularly those cohorts of students that were referenced in the original Gonski review and that was handed down almost over a decade ago now. But the reality is,

of course, that the resources have been denied for those students and that has a deep impact on equity in Australia.

Ebony Bennett [00:12:59] Yeah. Correna, I wonder if I might just keep with Gonski for a little while because that is obviously kind of the biggest thing of recent years that has happened in in education. The whole idea around the Gonski review was to introduce needs based sector blind funding and it really was to address that gap of equity in outcomes that Pozzi has been talking about between disadvantaged students and their more privileged peers. But where are we on those Gonski reforms? What type of disadvantaged students are we talking about in the system and how are they going in terms of their educational outcomes a decade after Gonski?

Correna Haythrope [00:13:43] So there's a very long story here. So I'll try and I'll try and address this briefly. But in fact there was a promise to the children of Australia that our schools would be resourced properly. We have a schooling resource standard which is the benchmark for funding and as part of that standard we have loadings that recognise the disadvantage to date, the content disadvantage of a number of cohorts of students that we work with. In 2017 under the then Liberal government, changes were made to the Australian Education Act, which effectively jettisoned the original recommendations of the Gonski review. An arbitrary cap of 20% was put in place on the Commonwealth's contribution of that SRS, and then agreements were struck with states and territories which effectively slowed down the path to 100% of that SRS for public schools across the nation. And one of the one of the tricky things in those agreements is what we call a 4% depreciation tax, which effectively allows state and territory governments to reduce their share to that SRS. And the direct result of that is that apart from the actually there's not a there's not a school in the nation that actually sits a public school that sits at 100% of the SRS, while the vast majority of private schools are either at or above a any data will be above it by at the end of this round of agreements. And so for us there's a deep vein of inequality that exists and it plays out in our school system in terms of the national workforce crisis that we're currently experiencing, in terms of the lack of support that we believe should be in place for students who have a disability or who are Aboriginal and Islander background or live in rural and remote locations or live in poverty, or his first language is not English, and this really impacts on what schools can do to support those students. And I a big shout out to all of our members, the fantastic teachers and principals and support staff across the nation, because they are working in incredibly difficult circumstances at the moment, ensuring that they deliver a high quality public education, but they do not have the resources to do that properly.

Ebony Bennett [00:16:05] I'm sure will keep coming back to funding. But Pasi, I wanted to come to you now again with the kind of the Finnish experience and we might come back to resourcing. But can you just give us a bit of an explanation about how Finland performs in terms of those educational outcomes and equity? And I wonder if you can talk to us about what it is that we lose if education doesn't have equity in outcomes.

Pasi Sahlberg [00:16:38] Yeah, it's another good question. But again, since this is a Nordic talk, I would probably begin by saying that it is not just Finland, it's all the Nordic countries have very similar policies when it comes to social policies or public policies in general. And so there are some some differences in how education is. What does it look like in practise? But the main idea is the same that the equity is one of the key values behind the education thing. Your question about Finland is interesting because the the and the answer actually should have almost have two parts. One is that in the the early on in the beginning of the time when we have had internationally comparable data about how education systems perform, meaning 2010, 20 years ago, Finland, as most people know, has been one of the high performing education systems when it comes to excellent quality of learning outcomes and also the equity of education outcomes. And that's why Finland has often kept as a as a model for others, including here in Australia. What has happened during the last ten years is the decline of education performance both in quality and equity. Interestingly, it's not just the the PISA results that people often refer to in the Finland case, but also the equity has been declining. And there are many people, including myself, who is likely to argue that the declining learning learning outcomes amongst our students in the this piece of study is probably mostly driven by declining equity in the system. And then the question is that why the equity has been going down in Finland from where it used to be 20 years ago? One thing is going back to the big Correna's talk about funding is that we have had as a consequence of the 2008 global financing crisis, we had a really serious negative impact on our national economy and particularly public sector funding that always treated the public systems in a delay. So this was something that happened in the middle of the last last decade when the funding for schools began to decline, and especially funding that was meant to help those schools and those students who have particular special educational needs. In other words, the school system today in Finland is suffering from underfunding and in terms of providing all the necessary support and help to those students who need help. And Finland also has an increasing growing number of non Finnish speaking students in the system that would require these additional resources. So one thing that the Finnish educators are quite, quite of the same same opinion is that the because of the the system has not been funded properly as it should has been before. We can see this declining equity in the system and because the equity is getting weaker, that is also having a negative impact on the quality of the learning outcomes. So this is a kind of illogic in many ways in the system. And the question about, you know, why, why equity plays an important role in education policy and should play even more important roles now in the post-pandemic era is exactly this, that there will be no excellence in education without stronger equity and all the world class education systems that Australia quite correctly desires to be have followed exactly the same same thinking that there has to be both equity and excellence at the same time. In Finland, the policymakers and educators are quite clear about the situation. So it's it's not something that we wouldn't know there. The thing is that how the how the government policies and public public sector funding would be responding to the situation that has been quite dire actually in Finland during the last five years. And so it remains to be seen how the how the the fund this funding system will change is a little bit similar to the debate that we have here in Australia, that the system would require more money and resources to be able to turn back to the stronger track policy.

Ebony Bennett [00:21:24] If I can stay with you, I'm just also keen to understand some of the features of Finland's approach from when it wasn't on the decline due to funding issues. What are some of the ways that Finland has put equity at the heart of its education system?

Pasi Sahlberg [00:21:48] Yeah. First, the most important thing is that it's an entirely public system. So unlike here in Australia where we have a number of different systems and they're differently funded in Finland like all the Nordic countries basically has just one public system that is much, much easier to manage and handle. So that's what that's one thing. And then within this public public system space, the Finnish system has been like all the other Nordic systems are very much focussing on individual students rather than rather than almost like a impersonal way of looking at education, which means that special needs education, for example, Finland has been probably the strongest single element of this equitable system that has been able to prevent failure in the school and continues to do so. But as I said earlier, because of the lack of resources and funding, it's harder and harder for the for the schools to do that. And then, of course, teachers are important part of the the equitable system. It's very difficult to have equity in education without having teachers who are able to keep schools going and focus on those individual needs. So I would probably add in the Finnish case as well that we have a very highly educated teaching force and teachers who are widely trusted by parents and everybody else, and that means that they are able to do what they think has to be done to make sure that these and every child would be successful in the school. But, you know, this is this whole whole story about why why systems have equity or why education systems lack equity. It's much more complicated than just looking at education. So in the Finnish case, for example, we also need to look at other public policies like health and social policies and child policies and youth policies, just like here in Australia. I think. I think believing that we can build equitable education system just by through education is, is going to be a difficult, difficult road ahead. We need to we need to make sure that these other public policies are working with the education sector for each and every child in the system.

Ebony Bennett [00:24:05] Thank you. Correna If I can come back to you and the Australian context, I feel like there's a lot of families across Australia that very well understood the importance of education during the pandemic when a lot of people were kind of forced to be at home. And schools really are the heart of a lot of communities. And I want to pick up what it is that we lose if students who are coming from disadvantaged backgrounds or have special needs in some way, if they're not realising that potential in the education system, that seems to me, you know, to have very long term consequences for Australia as a whole, not just for those lost opportunities for those students individually. Is that the case?

Correna Haythrope [00:25:00] Yeah. That's a very big question. Absolutely. Look, like I talked about this sometimes with our members about the fact that, you know, as teachers, we actually hold the future of humanity in our hands because the work that we do in public schools across the nation actually creates a just democratic society. We teach our children how to be part of a community, how to stand up for their rights. And, you know, a significant part of that is respect for each other and respect for the people who live in our community, who come from diverse backgrounds. And it saddens me that in Australia we now we have a

funding system that is has such deep inequality that those children who need the greatest respect from our government set out bureaucracies. Children that you've mentioned and that we've talked about already are denied the support that they need to be successful at school, even though, a, when we survey our members, we know that principals in schools, excuse me, are taking funding from other parts of their budget to meet the shortfalls. You know, I think just imagine, just imagine if we could deliver the promise that was made to the Australian community around Gonski funding and indeed was a commitment of the ALP going into the last election to ensure that every school was funded at 100% of the schooling resource standard. Just imagine how life changing that would pay not only for our kids but also for Australia as a community more broadly. Hmm.

Ebony Bennett [00:26:47] We're going to go very shortly to questions from the audience. But Correna, if I can stay with you, I'm wondering what lessons do you think Australia can learn from the Finnish example when it comes to putting equity more at the heart of our education system? And I guess I'm not thinking just of resources, but I guess differences in the approach to education.

Correna Haythrope [00:27:16] Look, I think we can learn a lot from Finland and had lots of conversations with my colleague Pasi about this over the years. We are we are part of the system. And having strong systems support is critically important for our members with their work. And I think that, you know, one of the things that that we can learn from Finland is the investment in the workforce. It's the also the investment in making sure that initial teacher education is a huge priority and that teaching is respected and seen as a genuine career option for for young people and also for, you know, I guess, midlife mid-life career changes as well. Currently we're having a discussion in Australia around the workforce crisis that we know is impacting on our schools across the country. And Minister Jason Clare has been leading a process nationally around the development of a workforce action plan. And as part of that plan there is indeed a move to prioritise initial teacher education, also to do with some of the workload issues and other workforce issues that that we are facing. And I think there is much to be learnt from Finland. But I would just say you cannot separate the issue of funding and he's a piece of data shows that we are, you know, amongst the worst nations as part of the 77 countries in terms of investments or equity in teacher resources, but also in material resources. And we invest significantly lower than countries such as Finland, Norway and Sweden. So I think there's much to be learnt there.

Ebony Bennett [00:29:02] Yeah, absolutely. And Pasi, I know you've written about different ways that we can put equity at the heart of education. I do wonder if you could just talk me through some of those ideas that you've been putting out into the public space about ways to achieve equity in education. What are some of those ideas that that you've talked about?

Pasi Sahlberg [00:29:26] Yeah. Can I just say one thing? I think a fair question would also be that what Finland can learn from Australia before we're.

Ebony Bennett [00:29:35] Going to get to.

Pasi Sahlberg [00:29:35] That. But yeah.

Ebony Bennett [00:29:36] Definitely.

Pasi Sahlberg [00:29:37] Yeah, because I think it's too good to continue from what Correna was saying. I think it's very important for everybody who is following this webinar conversation to understand that we can always learn from one another. And I'm definitely one of those who is always looking for these opportunities that all the education systems, wherever they are, that they can also both learn from others, but then also say what they do. You know, I've been here now in this country for four years, and I guess I've seen enough to be able to say something about, you know, how things are here. And I often tell my my colleagues and friends back home in Nordic countries that when they ask about my views about the Australian education system, I think that we have the best education in the world here, but it's not for everyone and that's our challenge that the most interesting, innovative schools that we have ever seen anywhere are actually here in Australia. Everywhere they are public schools and they are rural and remote schools and independent schools and Catholic schools, all kinds of places where people do amazing things. And that's something that certainly my colleagues in Finland are interested in. See that. How do you how do you kind of build a future looking, interesting, inspiring place for young people to learn where they live, where they can really cultivate and discover their own strengths and futures? So that's certainly one thing that that Australia has a lot to offer for others. But also, you know, the fact that we we have a very segregated education system in general here. Is that correct? Social segregation means that that we have public schools, for example, catering 85% of our most disadvantaged students and 85% of our indigenous kids as well. And those are the places where a lot of a lot of lessons can be taken from other places like Finland. That is just basically learning, learning how to how to run the school with such a wide diversity of of students. So so those are the things that some of those things that Finland certainly can and has been learning already from what's happening here. And everybody should keep in mind that, you know, what what you read in media or hear people saying about the horrible situation in our education in Australia is not necessarily the full story, that there are a lot of strengths and positive things that we need to build on as well. Can I also respond to your question about the equity, what's what needs, what should be or could be done? Because I think it's very important question also for this conversation that what what the schools or communities or leaders can do with the equity. I think it all starts with how we started this webinar that the first thing is really to make sure that we we talk about same things because if we are not, if we are talking about different things when it comes to equity in education, not much will, will happen. And it's the same thing here as a nation. And now what the the government is is deciding this new national school reform agreement. You know, in that agreement, we do not have a commonly said understanding of what equity in education means. We're going to have another period of time when not much will happen when it comes to equity. So that's why at the school level or individual level, it's a very important thing to do. So the thing I think is equally important is that every teacher and principal, every school realises that you cannot fix these inequalities in the Australian

education system or society alone. You need to understand that it takes its take kind of a wider, wider approach, other public sector policies, particularly health and social issues to work with and then kind of figure out what is the role, role of the school at the school level. I think the probably the best thing that individual school or teacher can do is to, first of all, try to adapt as much as possible to what we call the whole child approach to education, so that when we are looking at children in our schools, that it's not just literacy and numeracy that we are concerned about, but it's a whole child, including wellbeing and health and many other things that are important things. When we are when we are looking at what the outcomes of the schooling, schooling would be, and then try to build wherever you can the kind of individual, more individual approach to educating students. And the individual approach here doesn't necessarily mean that everybody has to have an individual plan or a programme. It means that we more and more understand these individual needs that young people have when they come to school. And as we all know, that some children have much more severe and complicated needs when it comes to being successful or learning in school than the others. And that's why when Corrina was talking about the importance of teachers and teacher education is such an important thing that we have teachers in our schools who are able to understand these individual needs and understand why they play such an important role when we are seeking more equitable education in Australia.

Ebony Bennett [00:34:52] And Correna, finally, I'm going to ask you both, but I'll start with you. Given that we are here talking about equity in education, what's one thing that viewers today and we've got about 350 people on the line with us today. What's one thing that you think we could all take from today and and start doing to support equity in education?

Correna Haythrope [00:35:13] Join us in the campaign. We've got an act. We've got an election commitment that's not yet being met by the ALP in that fight to deliver a pathway to 100% for all students, for all public schools in particular. We're yet to see what that's going to look like. And so any any conversations. You know, text messages, emails that people can send and talk to their local members about how important this is. And certainly, you know, sending letters to the PM would be very helpful as well. We need to we need to see the realisation of this promise. It was a it was a commitment that was made to our students and to our children. And we've had an entire decade of children who have gone through schooling now without seeing the full implementation of the Gonski recommendations. We've got a real opportunity with the National School Reform Agreement process, which is coming up. Negotiations are due to begin at the end of this year and that next school year agreement can deliver the funding that our schools need and it can start to address the equity issues and indeed support all children to access a high quality public education. That's critically important to us. And we'll be campaigning on that issue. And I would urge anyone that's interested, too, to join us and have those conversations with them.

Ebony Bennett [00:36:36] And I will go to questions straight after this about policy, you two. What action point would you want people to take away from today to support equity in education?

Pasi Sahlberg [00:36:47] The actually the North Korean. I steal your idea and say that if you can find a campaign to join, start a campaign, start a movement in your own community about talking about these things because there's no better place, a better way to do what we need to do than start from home and from, you know, talking about these things with your your friends and communities and your own schools, you know, asking these questions, what is equity? Why is it important and what we can do about it. They are such important ways to start a movement and then then join the campaign. I often try to avoid a kind of giving three things that you need to do or you can do, because they are often things that some people agree with and some people can do and many others don't. But we all can do is to have deeper and more kind of focussed conversations and debates, particularly now when we have a holiday season. Of course, everybody should go to the beach and have their baby and enjoy the the the kind of well-deserved, deserved holiday. But this is also an opportunity for us to sit down and get into this conversation about equity, education and what type of schooling do we want to have here and see in the future in Australia. And big part of that conversation, of course, is the question that how do we make sure that we do not continue to have the world class schooling for some students and some kids in Australia? But how do we make have a system that is equal and fair and inclusive for each and everyone.

Ebony Bennett [00:38:22] MM. Well we'll with that go to questions from the audience. And as I said, we've got about 350 people online with us today. So don't forget you can type your question into the Q&A box if you've got one there. And the first question I want to ask is from Bernie McComb and I'll ask both of you to address this. One pertains to Finland and the other to Australia. So Bernie asks, Is it true that schools in Finland are a maximum size of 400 students? And what do you think about schools in Australia that have up to 2000 students or more so poorly? I might put that to you first about the size of schools in Finland.

Pasi Sahlberg [00:39:03] Yeah. No, it's not true. And I do think that, you know, large schools, like 2000 students is it's probably too too big. We don't have any we don't have any schools that would be 2000. But that's, you know, the trend there has been that the size of schools have been growing and now we have fewer schools that are have more than a thousand students. And, you know, many people that if you go and talk to teachers or principals, they think that it's a quite a quite a lot of students. But, you know, there's no there's no no such a limit of 400.

Ebony Bennett [00:39:36] Yeah I'm Correna that question around school sizes here do you have anything to kind of contribute on that in particular?

Correna Haythrope [00:39:45] I think the issue is less about school size and more about class size. You know, our members will tell you that that we see increasing complex class complexity in terms of the students that they're working with. And yet, you know, many of our classes are around 30 or even more. And it's always rather amusing when I meet politicians or other commentators who say, look, class size doesn't matter. And then you discover that their children are attending a private school that's not a class size of 17 or 18, I think. But it

might not matter in your school and in your context, but it certainly matters in our context. And that capacity to have a reduced class size actually enables more time for the teacher to spend with all students, but particularly those students who require additional help. So I would say, rather than the school itself, let's actually focus on the issue of classes.

Ebony Bennett [00:40:40] Yeah. Okay. The next question that I've got is around funding. It's from Pamela Collette and she says, how can there be equity when private schools receive more funds than public schools? Karina, I wonder if you might tackle that 1/1.

Correna Haythrope [00:40:59] Yeah, absolutely. I mean, she's absolutely right. And that's why. Well, I guess we've been campaigning now for a very long time in terms of addressing inequality since 2017. This really escalated, particularly when Scott Morrison was prime minister. We've seen over \$10 billion worth of special deals that were just passed on to the private sector. A \$1.9 billion capital works fund at some time as the Public School Capital Works Fund was dismantled by the Commonwealth Government. And you know, it's just I think it is really just the greatest shame of our nation that we that we have this disparity in terms of funding from our campaigning perspective. You know, I don't represent members in private schools. I represent members in public schools. And we're very much focussed on the importance of ensuring that all of our schools reach 100% of the of that SRS. But it's particularly galling when you know that that we have two other sectors which are funded over and above the SRS while our students are denied that results.

Ebony Bennett [00:42:09] And yeah, Patsy, you've said that Finland in particular is an entirely public system. What are your observations there on the equity when private schools are receiving greater resourcing than public schools?

Pasi Sahlberg [00:42:25] You mean here in Australia? Yes.

Ebony Bennett [00:42:28] In the Australian?

Pasi Sahlberg [00:42:28] Yeah. Yeah. No coroner said. Said it I think. Well that I agree. I think it's particularly difficult to accept for somebody like myself who came from the Nordic space here four years ago to to see that we continue to have almost all of the public schools under funded at the same time when government taxpayers money is going to school. Non-Government schools that don't actually need that. And that's you know, if we were extremely wealthy country and all the public schools had what they need. But this would be another conversation. But, you know, as long as we continue to have public schools underfunded, I think it's also a moral question or ethical issue that why do we allow something like this? And for me as a Nordic person, it's very difficult to understand why this country is to continue to be in a situation like this.

Ebony Bennett [00:43:24] Um, I've got a question next here from Lee Bartlett, and I might put it to you first, partly because I think it responds to something that you mentioned. Lee says, We have three of the most vulnerable areas in Victoria in the region that they're from. The equity needs to be considered across the ecosystem that supports the child, not only within school, but especially for families who are not connecting with schools. And Lee's question is, is there examples of how school family partnerships work in Finland or that whole child, I guess, response that you were talking about earlier, Pozzi.

Pasi Sahlberg [00:44:00] Yeah, it's extremely important, I think. And I'm actually working, doing a little bit research and development work in my Victorian colleagues now in trying to, trying to build this health and education closer partnership in that might make my ask this great question would be that I think in the Finnish case and in the Nordic countries in general, these issues are much more carefully taken care by these other public policies that I've been referring to. For that, we try to kind of make sure that education policy would not the education that says to be a kind of an isolated island or silo in a society part, that the the other policies would support all the children. We have the separate youth and child policies as well that will help these communities. So when the when the parents and the community in general comes into this play, that they also they're able to do that within the the framework of network kind of a network of public policies in the Finnish sense is that it's not a perfect way to do. But I think that it helps people to to understand that, that often the support that individual students and children need to be in order to be successful in the school are the things that schools are not necessarily able to provide, for example, health and wellbeing issues. And increasingly now after the pandemic, I think their wellbeing and health are critically important things and that's why it's so important that at the level of the community, also these other sectors like a health, are integrated into the education. That makes it also easier for the people in the community and community in general to to be part of the work of the schools.

Ebony Bennett [00:45:47] Yeah. Correna It's a really good point that schools alone aren't going to solve inequity problems, but do you have any observations there? I'm thinking in the Australian context. I was listening recently to a podcast on the ABC about Victoria, for example, placing a lawyer to help families out with legal concerns or things like placing counsellors and other kind of wraparound services near a school community. How much is that a feature of Australia's education system at the moment? And yeah, if you could just talk about, I guess, how the community fits into solving that equity problem.

Correna Haythrope [00:46:27] MM Yeah, that's another good question. I think, you know the comment schools alone are not, not, not solving equity issues is really important because actually we're not alone, we're part of a system and it's the department's responsibility of bureaucrats, you know, bureaucracies, responsibility to provide the resources that we need. One of the benefits of the first four years of Gonski funding rolling out into our schools was that many schools were able to use that resource to put in place occupational therapists or speech therapy or, you know, mental health provision and supporting, you know, supporting our students across the board. And it was just so critically important, not just in terms of literacy and numeracy. You've mentioned the intervention, but

sort of, you know, for the for the other things that can impact on a student's learning and it their lives and the community is such an important part of this, of course, because education is about a partnership between between schools and between families and, you know, caregivers and and the community and having that close connexion. I'm a primary school teacher. So from my you know, from my personal experience, having that strong connexion with parents as part of the students education is critically important. And I think I think there are there are mechanisms that can be put in place if we have the resourcing around this whole notion of, I guess, birth to 12 provision around having passing mention, the importance of having conversations with the health sector and other sectors to, you know, to address some of the health and social services that our children need as well. But that requires the will of government superclass, the will of systems to deliver the resources. And we see that very much as a joint commonwealth and state and territory responsibility. Hmm.

Ebony Bennett [00:48:21] The next question that I've got is probably for you, Patsy. It's from Meredith Doig. And they ask, how does the relative homogeneity of Finland contribute to equitable education outcomes? Or I guess how much does it I think you were referring there to there is more students with at a Finnish speaking background entering the educational system. Can you just have a response to that question, please?

Pasi Sahlberg [00:48:51] Yeah, it's a great and important question as well, that the 20 years ago, the I think it was quite fair to say that Finland was a homogeneous. Country in many respects. But that's not the case. The situation any longer, particularly the larger urban cities and towns, are quite diverse. So we are we are having the same types of challenges and also the richness that comes through the cultural diversity that many other countries have now. I think equally important is the socio economic diversity that is there that we have. Finland and other Nordic countries have been known for for a long time because of their very low child poverty rates and the income inequalities as well. There has been very, very different to compare to Australia, for example, or many other countries. But these things are changing as well that we are having we are seeing more kind of income inequality, which means that the distribution of wealth is not as even unfair as it used to be. And certainly we have more children living in poverty, coming to school from very disadvantaged backgrounds today compared to what it was ten or 20 years ago. And so this is not just this cultural diversity of the things that come with the migration of immigration. It's also the way the society is becoming unfair, unfortunately. And that's one of those things that the Finnish policymakers and current government, for example, and all the Nordic governments are very well aware of and they try to work on this. But this socio economic disparity is now in the societies, is a big driver of these education inequities as well.

Ebony Bennett [00:50:42] Mm hmm. Karina, I wonder if I might put that same question to you, but in a different way. Australia is very proud of its multicultural history. We're about to go to a referendum next year for an Indigenous voice to Parliament. And I guess I want to talk about I wonder if you could talk about how much of a strength that is of Australia's education system, that we do have a wide diversity of students and backgrounds and cultures that all contribute to the public education system.

Correna Haythrope [00:51:17] It's a huge strength and it's one that we're very proud of in terms of ensuring that all children, no matter their background or circumstances, have access to a high quality education. And as I said previously, it is through public education that we actually get to develop our nation and make sure that our children understand their roles as citizens, not only in Australia but also globally, and that they are able to respect diversity and understand what it's like to live in such a diverse community that we have here. But it does add a layer of complexity that our members are dealing with. We've got a number of students from a refugee or asylum city background who need extra support, particularly with English, and also might have particular wellbeing needs depending on the circumstances that they've been through. Many of our students experience compound disadvantage. They will go across the across the loadings in terms of where they live or, you know, if they have a disability and so on. So that adds to the complexity of our classes. And that's why why we campaigned so hard for the resources to be delivered, because it's through the additional teachers and personnel and support programmes in schools that we can make sure that all of those children are well supported for their education. And that is life changing, not only for their experience at school, but also for their outcomes as members of our community after school. It's life changing in terms of the justice system, and it's also life changing in terms of health and wellbeing. And just your reflections on this last couple of years of coverage that that actually has had a deep impact to students and their wellbeing. And we know that many of our members are dealing with that firsthand in terms of supporting students who have been seriously unwell and socially isolated throughout that time. So it's a it's a wonderful part of the public education system, but it also has an impact and has a great responsibility for us all.

Ebony Bennett [00:53:29] Yeah. Karina, I wonder if I might just ask you following up from that and I'm not sure if this is necessarily in your wheelhouse, so feel free to move on to the next question if it's not. But it strikes me that a difference between Finland and Australia, not just in terms of some of the the aspects that we've been looking at, but Australia is a massive country. I'm imagining that remote learning is a bigger part of the Australian education system than it might be for many other countries during the pandemic when. People were doing a lot of learning online. Was that useful actually for the Australian education system to have a little section of it that was used to kind of I guess doing things online or via radio and how much does remoteness and, and those schools who experience remoteness have to teach the rest of the education system after the pandemic?

Correna Haythrope [00:54:25] I think that's a bit of a yes and no question. Actually, I've got personal experience with outback education in South Australia through Port Augusta meeting with members there. So, you know, we are geographically remote country, there's no doubt about it. And as you said, there has been, you know, via radio online delivery. What the pandemic has taught us is that there is no replacement for the teacher. There is no replacement for face to face learning. And I think, you know, it's probably finally put to bed this notion that teachers can be replaced by computers and we can all move to a a digital world. Certainly there is, I think, genuine opportunity to, you know, to engage in sort of an online learning, but it should never be used as a replacement for the teacher. And the experience of our members is that as students have returned to face to face teaching

environments, you know, the social interactions that the capacity to collaborate together in small groups just cannot be underestimated how important that is to their education. And I guess from my personal experience of having a daughter who tried to do two years of university in front of a computer has been that that's been incredibly frustrating. And in fact, she's taken taken, taken time off because she's not met any anyone else in her course. So I don't think it's ever going to replace teaching. And I might be waffling a bit there, so I'll stop. Okay.

Ebony Bennett [00:56:05] No worries. And I was also going to move on to the next question, which was about from Sabina Padel Warren, who said that Sabina is a recent high school graduate. And the question is, does the selective school system in New South Wales and Victoria play into the inequality that we see in the education system? And would it be more equitable if we went without them? Craner I might put that one to you first.

Correna Haythrope [00:56:37] I thought you were going to put that one to me. Look, I think it would be inappropriate for me to make reflections on that. I mean, my role as federal presidents to deal with national issues. So I don't normally deal with the state by state issues. And that's a very direct question about, you know, education to your father in New South Wales and in Victoria. So I'll pass on that one. Thanks.

Ebony Bennett [00:56:59] No worries, Patsy. Selective schools. A feature of the Finnish education system.

Pasi Sahlberg [00:57:07] Yes, this is election selection, but only online high school, senior high school. So all the way until nine, the schools will go to comprehensive schools. And the assumption is that all the students will go to their neighbourhood school and that there's no there's no selection. But the high school senior secondary education is based on students on choice.

Ebony Bennett [00:57:29] Excellent. We've probably got time for one more question, and there's a whole bunch of questions in here around funding and resourcing so we can address all of them. But Patsy, I wonder if I can put to you first in terms of those resourcing issues that you were talking about before. What is it that Australia needs to do in the near future to put equity at the heart of education when it comes to resourcing schools?

Pasi Sahlberg [00:58:01] I think we had we had a fairly good plan ten years ago with the Gonski review that basically laid the foundation for the idea that this would be a fair funding for for schools based on their needs. And I think that, you know, although there are some things that obviously needs to be updated in the initial review, I think, you know, this this this would be a good starting point for the for the funding review. And I think that this is really what we do need. It's a difficult to for me to imagine that we are able to, again, have a world

class school system for each and every Australian child if we continue to spend money on education in the schools as we do right now. This funding has to be seen much more as an investment on people rather than spending on schools that don't necessarily need that. And that's why I think, you know, we don't need to invent new ideas. We just need to in Australia to go back to some of these conversations and ideas that have been done before and just update them. I think we have seen already enough reviews and commissions and reports in this country with very little impact or change in the system. And now I think it's time to take these things to heart and make sure that we we do what people people really want to do. And we also know that, for example, from our own our own research and work in Australia, the most people actually, most Australians would like to have a more equitable and fair education system that this is the. It's not true if somebody says that, you know, this is what people want. This is not what people want. This is what some people want to have a system like this. But most of us here in this country, we would like to see the education systems as they are in many other advanced nations, including places like Canada or Nordic countries. And it's all within our reach if we just want to do that. And funding funding our schools is one of those things that we have to start with.

Ebony Bennett [01:00:06] And Correna, you what's the job ahead when it comes to equity in funding?

Correna Haythrope [01:00:11] What's very easy. We need to deliver the promise that was made by the Gonski review to our children and that is to achieve at least 100% of the school resource standard. And the SRS is actually a benchmark that's well understood and accepted across all levels of politics. So it's not the SRS that's the issue, it's the will of governments to fund it and this has to be a joint responsibility. So the Commonwealth needs to be fair share and state and territory governments need to lift their share while they doing that. They also need to restore capital investment for our schools so that public schools can have sort beyond infrastructure and learning centres for children across the nation. So this is achievable. It's it not only is it achievable, but it must be achieved. And we would expect that this is led by the PM. You know, he talks about his understanding of disadvantage and I'm going to use lived experience of that. So we would expect them to make that commitment and get state and territories to step up and do so as well.

Ebony Bennett [01:01:16] Thank you so much, Patsy Sahlberg and Correna Heinz. And thank you, everyone, for joining us today. I'm afraid that's all we've got time for. Thank you to Nordic Talks for helping sponsor the series. Please keep an eye out on the Australia Institute and Nordic Policy Centre websites and your inboxes in the New Year will be announcing the new episodes in this series. We're hoping to look at cycling policy from Denmark and getting people into active transport as well as Swedish industry, and how it's greening its industry and manufacturing sector and a lot of other exciting issues as well as media reforms coming up. So keep an eye out for that in the new year. This recording from today's session will be available as a podcast for on the Australia Institute's Follow the Money podcast. Don't forget to subscribe to the Nordic Talks podcast as well. You can find that wherever you normally listen to podcasts and if you're interested in what Australia can learn from Nordic policies, don't forget to sign up at Nordic Policy Centre dot org are you. That's our specialist research

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centre that looks at various policy lessons that Australia can learn from the Nordic countries. Thank you so much again for joining us today and thanks again to our guests, Correna and Patsy, and we hope to see you all next year. Thanks very much. Thank you.

Pasi Sahlberg [01:02:43] Thank you.