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ETS 76 Best Features of AUS Education Part2.pdf
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The Best Features Of Australian Education

Part one of this two-part article in the previous issue of Education Technology Solutions described the first six of 15 commendable features of education that can be found in Australian schools and universities that should be celebrated and shared:
1. Australian education is student focused.
2. Australian education develops students’ minds and bodies.
3. Australian students are taught to think and how to learn.
5. Australian teachers build strong and caring relationships with their students.
6. Australian education is personalised and equitable.

Part two concludes the article by outlining the remaining nine features:
7. Australian education provides pastoral care to those in need.
8. Australian education is varied, giving students access to numerous disciplines.
9. Australian students have access to portals and learning management systems.
10. Australian students do most of their study on their own computers.
11. Australian students have access to useful software and applications.
12. Australian assessment is well designed and promotes quality feedback.
13. Australian students are given rubrics to guide their work.
14. Australian education focuses on graduate outcomes.
15. Australian graduates have skills for careers and further study.

By Shelley Kinash
7. Pastoral Care
Pastoral care means that schools and institutions create an environment of care and nurturing. They provide the supports that students need to thrive academically, socially, physically and spiritually. Schools and universities have counsellors, nurses and sometimes doctors, tutors, career advisors and many other types of professionals. They provide elite sports centres to help students to make arrangements with their teachers when their training schedules and competitions take them off campus for extended periods. There are prayer rooms and student lounges. All of these services and supports are genuinely provided and there is no negative stigma applied to the students who access these resources.

8. Multi-disciplinary
The world is not compartmentalised into tidy separate boxes of science, maths, language, arts, business, law and other such disciplines. Neither should education. In order to thrive in careers and lead change, people need to be able to draw upon and interconnect thinking and processes from across and between disciplines. It is vitally important not to stream students into disciplines and careers too early and, even when they have made a career decision, they need to turn the lenses on understanding from multiple perspectives and frameworks. One of the champions of multi-disciplinary education in higher education is called the Melbourne model. Students complete a generalist and varied undergraduate degree before specialising through their postgraduate studies.

9. Online Systems
Almost every school and post-secondary institution in Australia organises education online through a learning management system (LMS), such as Blackboard or Moodle. Students and teachers have one-stop-shop access to assessment instructions, learning materials, schedules and interactive tools. Through the LMS, students submit their assignments and teachers provide feedback. Students can test their subject mastery through completing formative online tests and they can access tutorials and demonstrations for extra help. They can track their grades and progress. They can post comments and ask questions of their teacher and peers. Online education systems to complement the face-to-face teaching approach have become so successful that they are nearly invisible technologies in Australia.

10. One-to-One Computers
Over the past decade, Australian education has increasingly moved away from paper towards digital and networked systems. The main item in a student’s backpack is now a laptop computer or tablet. Textbooks are increasingly online and interactive. Assignments are written on their computers and submitted online, after which teachers reply with online feedback and enter grades into digital grade books. Rather than asking students to open their textbooks, teachers give them a URL. Many classrooms have smartboards rather than blackboards or even whiteboards. Smartboards are internet-connected and can display the work from an individual student’s laptop.

11. Software and Apps
Alongside supporting student one-to-one hardware (laptop computers or tablets), Australian educators ensure that students have the software and apps they need to maximise digital capacity. Most Australian laptops that are used for education are loaded with the latest versions of the full Microsoft and Adobe suites. That way, students are learning the tools that they will likely be using in their future workplaces for desktop publishing, digital video editing and spreadsheeting. One of the more popular education apps that is common to find on tablets and smartphones is Evernote, which allows students to take notes, capture photos, share perspectives and access on any device because the content is stored in the cloud.

12. Assessment and Feedback
One of the leading contemporary Australian educational theorists, David Boud, is famous for saying, “Students can survive bad teaching, but they cannot survive bad assessment.” Assessment is not just for confirming achievement in subject matter. Assessment is a key learning tool. Assessment and feedback go hand-in-hand, as Australian teachers give students lots of specific feedback throughout their studies so that students can apply it to continually reinforce and build their learning. When students look back on their education, one of the major features they often recall is significant assessment that helped them learn. It is important to map out the purpose and rationale for each piece of assessment. Australian educators provide a wide variety of assessment to accomplish diverse learning objectives. While multiple choice exams test memorisation and essays reinforce academic skills, reports prepare students for workplace skills. Increasingly, students are creating assessment that is posted online and can have real impact. For example, rather than submitting an essay that only the teacher will read, on a teacher-assigned topic, students will choose a topic that they are passionate about and create a published online blog.

13. Rubrics
When Australian students are creating an assessment piece, they usually have an online rubric open alongside. Rubrics are usually designed as tables. The columns of the table have the range of grades from High Distinction (A+) to Pass (D). The rows have the different elements of the assessment, such as Research, Critical Thinking and Grammar. Details are provided within each of the boxes. Students who are
striving for top grades can read specific
advice about what they will need
to do for that level of achievement.
Secondary school teachers often read
a draft of an assignment before a final
submission. They attach the rubric to
the front of the draft, and on that rubric
the teacher has highlighted the boxes
where the assignment currently rests.
If students want to improve their final
grade on the assignment, they know
which elements need more work.

14. Graduate Employability
To be employable is to have the
knowledge, skills, attributes, reflective
capacities and identity one needs
to secure and maintain careers and
contribute to the knowledge economy.
Being employable also means that
graduates will be able to ebb and
flow with career-market changes
brought on by digital evolution. In
Australia, graduate employability
features in the strategic plans of most
universities. Supports and strategies
for graduate employability are not left
only to campus-based career centres.
Employability supports go beyond
teaching students résumé writing
and interview skills. Employability is
embedded throughout the curriculum
and assessment. Educators talk to
students about what they are studying
and how this relates to their future
employability.

15. Skills-Based
There is increasing world-wide concern
that students are graduating from
secondary and post-secondary
education without the skills they need
to thrive in their communities and
workplaces. Specific technical skills,
such as learning to operate particular
types of machinery or software, shifts,
changes and becomes obsolete. This
does not mean that students should
not be taught these skills, because
this experience teaches them how
to learn. They will have learned the
processes and frameworks for the next
iteration of technical skills. Students
also need to learn and develop super-
skills. The main desirable super-skills are
communication (spoken and written),
 demonstration of motivation and self-
initiative, and leadership. Students
need many interactive educational
experiences in which to develop and
practise these skills.

What Students Need
In summary, what students need,
and what they are usually provided
through Australian education thanks to
dedicated teachers and well-designed
systems, are:
• teachers, schools and universities
  who care about students’ learning
  and their overall happiness and
development
• opportunities to learn, play, socialise,
  get fresh air and appreciate the joy of
  the world around them
• guidance in how to think and
  how to channel their brain power for
  learning, achievement and success
• variety and engaging learning
  opportunities that invite students to
  do, experiment, create and discover
• role models, inspiration and
  assurance of being cared for and
cared about
• education that is adaptable to
  unique student needs and
  that supports the development of
each and every learner
• extra supports and guidance, if and
  when each student needs them
• mind-expanding curriculum allowing
  students to learn about pure and
  social sciences, math, language,
culture, health, humanities and the
  arts
• efficient and user-friendly systems
  so that they can stay organised and
  have ready access to information and
  interactive tools
• infrastructure to allow students to
  bring their own devices, have
  support and training to use
  these devices, as well as access
to current software and reliable Wi-Fi
• assessment that helps them learn,
  and immediate and specific
  feedback so that their learning is
  shaped, guided and reinforced
• clear guidelines for their assessment
  so that students have the opportunity
  to meet teachers’ expectations
• employability support and strategies
  so that students graduate with
  the suitable technical and
  super-skills that they need in
  communication, problem solving and
  managing change to evolve with new
digital workplaces and careers.

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