C O R R E C T E D V E R S I O N

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the approaches to homework in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 29 April 2014

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Professor J. Hattie, University of Melbourne.

The CHAIR — I welcome everybody to the public hearings of the Education and Training Committee's inquiry into the approaches to homework in Victorian schools. It is important as our witness, Professor Hattie, that you understand that the material and commentary with which you provide us is protected by parliamentary privilege while you are here. However, that does not extend to comments you might make pertaining to this subject matter outside of the hearing. Hansard is recording today's proceedings, and they will provide you with a proof normally within two weeks. You can have a look at typographical errors on that, without making other changes. I formally welcome you, as we have been looking forward to your contribution today.

Professor Hattie, we understand that a formal submission is not coming from the University of Melbourne, but we will give you the opportunity to make some opening remarks pertaining to this inquiry. We are very interested in your comments on your role heading up the teaching institution. A lot of things have come to our attention through not only what has been brought to us in a written sense but also the things that have been raised with us during the course of our hearings yesterday. We are very much looking forward to your input. We invite you to start off if you have some opening remarks.

Prof. HATTIE — Thank you for allowing me to be here this morning. I will aim to keep this to 5 minutes. The work I have been doing over the last 20 or 30 years is asking that question about what makes the difference to student learning. I am at the stage now where I have around 60 000 to 80 000 studies of around a quarter of a billion students in a database to try to answer that question. The thing that strikes me more than anything else is that 95 to 98 per cent of the things we do to students in the name of enhancing achievement does enhance their achievement — so virtually everything works. That is really the most critical thing here.

No matter what the topic of your inquiry, you will get people arguing that it works. For example, the *Age* yesterday ran an article on class size — it works. The question of whether it works or not is not interesting, because everything works. The question is the magnitude of how big the effect is. The thing about class size that is fascinating is that the effect of class size is positive, but it is tiny. It is much smaller than the average effect of all other influences, and trying to explain why it is such a small effect is much more interesting than writing yet another article saying it works. Virtually everything works, and that is the place at which I want to put homework. Homework works, and that is totally uninteresting, because everything does. That is my first point.

In terms of the metric I use, the average effect of all the work I use is on a scale where the average is called 0.4. The numbers are not critical; the relativity is critical. I want to place homework relative to the average effect. Anything greater than zero works: 98 per cent of things we do to students is greater than zero. About 50 per cent of things are greater than 0.4. Where does homework fit? Homework is one of the more interesting influences, because it differs dramatically whether it is primary school or high school. The average effect of homework in high school is around 0.5 — that is, above average. The average at primary school is 0.05; it is almost not worth doing. The implication of that is what is critical. I am certainly not suggesting that because the effect is so close to zero we should get rid of it. Parents often judge the quality of schools by the presence of homework. My point is that because the effect of how we do homework traditionally is so close to zero in primary schools, then what a wonderful opportunity to do it better. We cannot fail by not doing it better, because it is so hopeless as it is.

I know that you met with the team behind this book yesterday. I think it is still the best, most recent book in the world. They have summed up it pretty much as I see it, because we are using the same kind of database. When I look at the effects of homework, I see the amount does not matter, whether it be 5 minutes or 50 minutes. It is my argument that I do not want to get rid of it because it is not worth battling the parents. I understand that you are meeting with the parents association tomorrow.

The CHAIR — We actually saw them yesterday.

Prof. HATTIE — All right. I do not think it is worth battling the parents, because they see homework as something that is related to the quality of schooling. But whether it be 5 minutes or 50 minutes does not matter. Seemingly the kind of homework makes the difference. The more homework requires project and

students' autonomy, the more it is a zero effect. If it relates to an opportunity to practise what has been done in the classroom, the effect goes up. But I am not talking about skill and drill, because we know from the research on homework that has a zero to negative effect. What a wonderful opportunity for teachers to use homework to reinforce something that has been taught. If students are at home and they cannot do their homework, for many of those students it is another explanation of why schooling is not much fun for them.

In relation to the role of parents, if parents in any way invoke surveillance — and I use that word quite strongly — that is, you must go into your room, turn off the TV and sit there for 30 minutes, our latest study showed what an incredibly negative effect that has. For students who are floundering with homework it is a negative effect, and the parents unfortunately see their job as surveillance. I want to come back to the role of parents because there is a role.

When we go to the other extent — projects — my children were brought up in North Carolina, where by law it is compulsory that in science every year in primary school they must do a science project. It took me three years to work out that there is a website — science projects for parents — because that is the effect you get. The more it is a project, the more for many of our students, particularly those who are below average or struggle at school, it is another explanation of why they cannot do it. With many of the projects, it is the input of the parents that makes a difference. That is where I want to come to parents.

You can give homework to some students and you cannot stop them. Some parents know how to help students with homework. There is nothing wrong with that, but unfortunately we are spreading the equity gap. Those who have parents who can and know how to do it are privileged. I have not met a parent yet in my career, from a low socioeconomic status that does not want to help their students; they just do not know how. Having those students go home to parents who do not know how but are keen to help them is where I have a major problem with homework. However, if it is of a nature where it is reinforcing something that is learnt and so does not require new understanding andwhere it is short it can make a difference. The third part of it is: is it assessed by the teacher? That is not because assessment is important, but the kid has to see that it is part of the day job. It is part of what happens in the classroom anyway. Those are the three parts.

Does homework help teach you study habits? Absolutely not; it just reinforces sometimes very bad habits that students have. That is something that should be taught in the classroom. Does it make a difference across subjects? Yes, it kind of does. Homework has more influence in maths, partly because that is where more often than not students are given opportunities to reinforce at home something that has been learnt.

I struggled to find it the other day, but I understand that Victoria has a policy on homework. My advice for homework is that it should not be too long. It should not be onerous. I would argue that it should be cognitively engaging but not drill and skill. It should support the work done in the classroom. The teachers are obliged to evaluate its impact — not only to show the students it is worthwhile, but that is maybe the only way we are going to increase the effect of homework in primary schools from zero to make it larger.

I certainly have seen many schools that have tried new ways of doing homework and have evaluated its impact with stunning success, but for the traditional homework in primary school it is zero. Also, the fact that it is a zero is a missed opportunity, where we can improve it. If the recommendation is that we have more of the same, then I am a great fan of abolishing it — even though I do not think it is worth the pain of the parents' upset where they want homework because it relates to their perceptions the quality of the school. The effect in high school is larger, and part of the reason is that students become more autonomous as they get older and they know how to engage in their work a lot more successfully in school, which translates to home. I think I will leave my opening statement there.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for that. In terms of the almost 0.05 effect in terms of the benefits in primary school, I can understand in the early years that that would have relevance. What about, say, year 6, when students might be in a transitional, preparatory phase — —

Prof. HATTIE — Cannot find an effect? It is reinforced in the Cooper work and the Horsley work. We struggle to find effects in primary school, and you have to seriously ask: what is it they are doing, at least to that effect?

The CHAIR — Can you answer that?

Prof. HATTIE — I think it is because what they do is they add stuff on at the end of the day — they add this bit. They do too much project work that requires a teacher. Many of the students do not have that person at home, and they do not then relate it to the day job when the students come back the next day.

The CHAIR — We are assuming that the project work has been done in a short turnaround or over a couple of weeks perhaps?

Prof. HATTIE — Unfortunately, more often than not it is over a couple of weeks, so it has a lag.

The CHAIR — So with project work they have set the bar too high? Is that what you are saying — that you do need support through the phases of accomplishing the task within the project?

Prof. HATTIE — With respect, it is kind of simple: if the kid does not know how to do something, they need expertise. Sometimes parents do not have that expertise. Some do, and some don't. You have an equity problem there.

The CHAIR — We understand the equity problem.

Mr BROOKS — I was just going to follow up. John, you mentioned some schools that have rethought homework and had stunning success. Have you got examples or can you generally point to things they might have done?

Prof. HATTIE — The general argument is that where schools say, 'Look, we are going to accept the evidence. What we are doing probably has no effect. Let us look to see what we are doing. More often than not it has no effect, so let us try something new'. Let me give you the example of Lincoln Primary School, which I think is a classic example. They looked at their current homework policy and the impact on students' learning. They noticed that not only did it have no effect, they had a differential group of students who did the homework. The brighter students tended to do it while the struggling students did not, so we have got that equity problem again.

They started by inviting the parents in and saying, 'What would you like to do?'. It did not take long for the parents to say, 'We can't answer that question until we know what you do'. They invited parents to come and look at the classroom and sit in during the maths and reading lessons, and then they created homework exercises together. They put them on their web. It did not take them too long to realise that the parents did not have a clue how to set homework assignments, so they worked together to do it and then they rotated the parents in, because they found it was only the same group of four or five parents that kept coming.

Each group of parents had to come in once a week — I think it was the maths class they mainly did it in — and work out with the teacher an exercise, and it went up on the web. It was a joint thing; they actually involved the parents, and the parents understood. They then had lessons for the parents and taught them how to help the students with homework, and they showed quite a big effect. That was one of the more stunning ways in which they got parents involved and they started asking what to me is the critical question: how do you evaluate it to show it has an impact?

Some schools keep doing that. For some schools where it shows no impact, again because of the parents, they reduce homework to 5 minutes — that is it. Some schools have tried doing homework in school and after school. The effect is no different. Students in their learning need expertise.

The CHAIR — In the model you just cited, which was particularly interesting, where they were rotating between the same four or five parents who came in to participate — —

Prof. HATTIE — Initially.

The CHAIR — What would have been the net effect across the catchment of parents who would have participated over time with different forms of inveigling and invitations to participate in that process? Would you say 50 per cent of all parents turned up?

Prof. HATTIE — At that school they obviously got them all because they rostered them on and they had to come in once or twice a year. Some of the parents did not know what to do. That was not the point. For me those parents for the first time saw what learning looks like in today's schools, and learning is not like what they got 30 years ago, so they started to understand what happens in classrooms. They started to have a much better appreciation of what their students were doing. That was its effect. It is kind of the reverse power of homework to get parents to understand what happens in the classroom.

The CHAIR — This becomes possibly an equity issue.

Prof. HATTIE — Yes, it does.

The CHAIR — There are going to be some parents who could participate and then others who could not. What was the effect on the students whose parents could not come along?

Prof. HATTIE — Ultimately in that particular school they got most of them, but yes, it is a problem. The major issue I have with homework is that you cannot stop some students doing homework; they love it. Unfortunately they usually start off well ahead of the other students. Homework does have a massive equity issue here. That is what you are raising as the problem — those parents who did not make it.

When we worked in the five lowest socioeconomic schools in the whole of New Zealand, we met every one of those parents sooner or later. We had to go to most people's homes. Every one of them wanted to help their students, but they did not know how. Some of them said, 'It's not my job. You've made schooling compulsory. Do it at school. I don't know how to help my kid'. That is a major issue. I think that is one of the reasons why I have a major problem with most of the homework policy as it is currently implemented.

The CHAIR — Is that because it highlights the equity problems?

Prof. HATTIE — Absolutely. But you will find that those parents who demand homework are usually parents who have students above average.

The CHAIR — Do you have a comment on the fact that it seems that sometimes schools outside the government sector actually have it as a product offering, saying, 'Your children will be guaranteed to have a certain measure of homework, and we guarantee a feedback loop for that'? It seems to be a feature of the product offering.

Prof. HATTIE — You are right; it is a branding notion. Again they are appealing to the parents' notion of the importance of good old-fashioned hard work. Yes, I think that is part of their branding system. The fact that it has no effect means they can do it without any punishment. I do not think that is the best branding that we should be doing in any of our school systems — that is, just doing something because parents want it. We should be doing something because it helps students. I am of the view that, given that the effect of homework in primary school is so low, we can treat it as an opportunity to make it better. Heaven help me if we get to the stage where we mandate a minimum amount of homework. Is that the best use of students' time after school? No.

The CHAIR — Do you still see that there is an element of it being a punishment factor?

Prof. HATTIE — Not in the eyes of the teachers. It would be unfair to make that comment. Some students do see it as another interference in their home life, but that is parenting. You can get around that.

Mr ELASMAR — Just following up on the parent issue, I agree with you that everyone wants their children to learn and do their best in their lives. Some parents may come home after hours when the

children have already done or not done their homework. Is it possible that students could stay at school after hours and do their homework at school under the supervision of teachers? Regardless of who the teacher was, students would at least have someone supervising them. They could get assistance from the teachers.

Prof. HATTIE — Firstly, what you are proposing makes eminent sense to me. Why are they not doing it within the regular hours of the school classroom? Australia has one of the longest school days and school years in the world. There is plenty of time to do it now. You have got to ask about the effect of this, where it is used in education and the efficiency with which we use our current teacher time. Secondly, evidence shows that homework classes run by teachers after school have close to zero effect mainly because teachers treat homework as something the students do by themselves. The students are sitting there, and it is just a matter of surveillance.

Some work is being done, for instance, with the current flip classroom where you ask students to do work at home that no-one knows the answer to. A teacher might say, 'Tomorrow we're going to talk about condensation. Look at this YouTube video about condensation. Your parents can watch it too. I don't expect you to know anything. Just look at it so that when you come to class tomorrow, at least you know some of the language. At least you know what you don't know'. Those kinds of strategies have a positive effect, but there is not a great deal of evidence that after-school homework classes have much impact. I seriously have to ask about the efficiency. Yes, when they have expertise there, it makes a difference. I am struggling with that. I would have to seriously ask why they cannot do it in the regular classroom.

Mrs MILLAR — That was one of the questions I was going to ask.

Mr ELASMAR — She asked the parents.

Mrs MILLAR — I am sorry I missed your opening comments. Is there any key research that you would refer the panel to at the moment in relation to homework that we may not have encountered?

Prof. HATTIE — I know you have encountered that one. I think it is a very good summary. I do not know if you have seen the Harris Cooper work.

The CHAIR — We have got some material.

Prof. HATTIE — This is probably the most antagonistic book on homework — you have got that? There are plenty of others out there; there is homework all over the place. The other one I referred to in my opening comments was my own work where I placed the effect of homework relative to all other effects, with the finding that in primary schools it is close to zero and in high schools it is above average.

The CHAIR — With the sample size, you mentioned, of 1 billion?

Prof. HATTIE — No,— a quarter of a million.

The CHAIR — A quarter of a million. Across which nations?

Prof. HATTIE — It is mainly Western nations — the US, the UK, Australia, New Zealand — —

The CHAIR — The Anglosphere sort of thing.

Prof. HATTIE — Europe, yes.

The CHAIR — We always see Korea, Japan, Finland and Germany brought into this as being the leading lights in terms of educational theory and high PISA scores and all those other sorts of measures — —

Prof. HATTIE — It is spot-on this topic, because many of those countries have a narrow conception of excellence. Certainly in those countries parents learn very quickly that success in life is getting selected to go on to a tertiary course; it dominates their systems. I find it fascinating that once you get into a university

in those countries you have a 95 to 98 per cent chance of completing three years later. I think we would love to have that here in Australia — but never mind. Getting in is absolutely critical, and one of the impacts of that is the incredible amount of work that is done at home but more in private tutoring — extremely so. In many cases you could argue that is one of the reasons those countries have high scores in that narrow excellence.

I find it intriguing that the education policy in China's white paper of last year said, 'We want to stop being no. 1 in narrow excellence'. They want to stop having students and parents pay so much for the after-hours tutoring services, which is extreme in their country. They want to broaden their education. We have got to be very careful when we follow them. This is one part of homework we need to be careful about. I have been talking about homework in the English, Western sense; in the Eastern sense homework is a totally different notion. It is where on a Saturday, sometimes on a Sunday and on many nights you go to private tutoring sessions. I know that one tutor in Hong Kong is on a salary of $1 million a year because he is so effective. As you said before, they are branded. You look on the buses in Hong Kong, and you see attractive males and females who offer this tutoring. That is not what I am talking about. Yes, that effect is incredibly high if you value narrow excellence, although we have to be very careful when we generalise from those countries.

The CHAIR — What I would like to do is just pick up on that term, 'narrow excellence'. I like the term, I must say. Can you expand on what you mean vis-a-vis — —

Prof. HATTIE — Maths, science, reading.

The CHAIR — How we regard excellence, perhaps looking at the complete person?

Prof. HATTIE — No, it is test scores. Again, I do not want to say that they are all surface level; there is some deep level in there too. China and those countries came out near the top in the problem solving that came out very recently from PISA, but it is a very narrow set of skills. Forget art, forget music, forget the notion of many kinds of excellence. In our system in Australia — and it is a passion of mine — we have multiple ways of being excellent. You can be excellent in schools at running a sports academy. You could be excellent at becoming a plumber. You could be excellent at being a physicist. What I would like to see more of in Australia — and certainly I saw this in New Zealand, much to my satisfaction — is a broadening of the notion of excellence so that many students could become successful learners.

I know I am off topic here a little, but the biggest crisis I see in Australia at the moment that I cannot get anyone interested in — and another parliamentary inquiry — is our retention rate through high school. I have met many ministers and many senior people and asked them the question about retention rate, and most of them cannot tell me what it is. They tell me it is too hard to measure, which is nonsense. It is around 80 per cent. One in five who start high school do not finish high school. I think that is criminal, and I think it is because while we do not have as narrow an excellence as many of those Eastern countries, we still have a narrow kind of excellence. I think there are many other ways we could help our students, particularly those one in five who do not make it. New Zealand, for instance, went from 80 per cent to 92 per cent in four years.

The CHAIR — How did you achieve that?

Prof. HATTIE — By dramatically changing the nature of the high school assessment. I could wax lyrical about it because I am very proud of what they did and I like to think I had a small part to play in it. They took away that notion of selecting to universities or to tertiary, which in the Eastern countries is like that. We are a bit broader here but we still unfortunately privilege those students. There are many of our students, some of our most successful adults, in our schools and possibly failing because we are not giving them ways of being excellent.

The CHAIR — Are those retention rates in New Zealand holding up?

Prof. HATTIE — Absolutely, and the wonderful thing about it is that the biggest impact was on Pacific students, then on Maori. Pakeha was already up there. Yes, absolutely, they have held up. But we are off topic, aren't we?

Mr BROOKS — We could talk about that for a long time.

Prof. HATTIE — I would love to get a higher interest.

Mr BROOKS — Just back on the homework reference, yesterday we had the education department here. I might be paraphrasing here, but the homework guidelines have been around for a long time. They are effectively out of date, and the department is looking towards this inquiry to shape the homework guidelines. Rather than guidelines that just give schools a few pointers, and given the evidence we have heard from yourself and others, it seems that the key point — I just want to clarify this and then see if there is anything you want to add — is that it is reinforcing what has been learnt in the classroom as a key factor, that it is shorter in time, that it is assessed or evaluated by the teacher once the homework is done and that there is some form of parental engagement but not overarching or hovering supervision.

Prof. HATTIE — I would drop the latter.

Mr BROOKS — Okay.

Prof. HATTIE — If there is, that is okay. If there is not, I do not think it should be penalised.

Mr BROOKS — You have mentioned an example. I asked you about an example earlier. Is that the prime example or are there different models? Should we be pointing schools in a certain direction through guidelines?

Prof. HATTIE — Certainly, yes. I understand there are guidelines even though I must say that I struggled to find them. Yes, they are probably not known out there in the sector and maybe I am unfair about that, but they have a purpose when schools have egregious homework policies. What I would like to see as part of the homework guidelines is that rather than giving specific examples — given what is happening at the moment in Victoria with moving towards having an evaluation of what is happening in schools and schools being asked to defend what they are doing — schools are asked to provide evidence of the impact of their homework positively on their students. Rather than prescribing a particular way of doing it, let us ask us them to provide evidence that the homework policy the school is adopting is improving the outcomes for students.

My whole mantra is 'Know thy impact'. Schools need to be asked to defend the impact of what they doing, and from that we can have an incredible number of good examples of looking at the nature of it because of course when you ask that question, 'Know thy impact', it begs the question, 'What is impact?'. It begs evidence of impact. That is what schools should be providing. That is what I would love to see in a homework policy. It would change this from zero to improve it, rather than having specific guidelines. We can do that, but the trouble with that is that schools love to pick off the bits they like, even if that has no impact.

Mr ELASMAR — You have probably heard of homework clubs; we heard about those yesterday. What is your view?

Prof. HATTIE — That was what I was going to come back to before. In many parts of the US now you can enrol in homework clubs on the internet and you get professional people who are available to help you when you are struggling. One of the downsides of it is that many of those and many tutors that parents employ in the home end up doing the homework, so the effect goes to zero. However if they are, to take your point earlier, to help with the expertise of teaching, many systems cannot afford that. They cannot afford that expertise to be sitting there.

Again I come back to saying, 'Why are we not doing this in the regular classroom and using homework as an opportunity to reinforce something that has already been taught, rather than having to invent whole new

systems of schools outside schools, teachers outside their usual teaching hours?'. The effects of homework clubs vary dramatically depending on whether they help the kid learn or whether they do the homework for the kid. I just think it is the wrong avenue to go down because again it privileges those parents who can afford it.

The CHAIR — I have fairly complex question to put to you. It goes to the heart of the fact that you are representing a teacher training institution today. One of the things we need to focus on is what is imparted to teachers during their teacher training course about their approach to setting homework. What do teachers receive in terms of setting homework? Does homework need to be tied specifically to the curriculum? If not, what role does homework play in learning? Are these sorts of things actually covered in teacher training?

Prof. HATTIE — I am speaking with respect to the University of Melbourne. I am sure, like every other university in the world, we will claim we are unique in this attribute, but I think we have some evidence for that. The philosophy that we adopt in our teacher education is not that we are going to train our teachers to know the curriculum, to know how to teach et cetera.

Our philosophy is a clinical model, where rather than start with all the knowledge and then put them out into schools, we start immediately with the whole student and say — if I could use an acronym— 'Teachers are to DIE for'. We teach them how to diagnose — so, 'You are in front of me today. What is the issue?'. I have to start by understanding you, not by understanding something about child development then applying it to you. I have to understand multiple Interventions, so that if I am applying a particular kind of teaching method to you and it is not working, I have to change and try another method, not label and categorise you, which is the norm. The third part of the acronym, which I think is the critical one, is I then have to Evaluate my impact, and if it is not having the effect, I have to change. That is what we imprint upon them in terms of homework.

Referring to this notion I was mentioning before about how you can then see the impact of your homework policy, how do you know it is having the impact? What do you have to do? Looking at specific students, asking students about students who are not doing homework, 'What is going on?', to try to understand it from their point of view. We have this very clinical model of trying to look at the effects of homework. I would think it would be fair to say that many of my colleagues would rather not prescribe homework, but given the mantra of parents, they are asked to do it. We try to impress upon them this thing that you were getting at before — 'Make it brief. Make it related to the work you do already, and show the students that it is valuable and part of the day life'. That is what we aim to do, yes.

The CHAIR — Are teachers equipped when they enter a teaching environment to make the case for what they have learnt by way of your approach to teaching practice against the whole welter of the mindset of a principal, of a senior teaching cohort, of a school council and so on, where they are imbued with other doctrines?

Prof. HATTIE — You did hint it was not an easy question.

The CHAIR — How does somebody actually make an impact? How do we create that change within the school entity, given that schools are given pretty much a free rein, albeit under guidelines, to drive their own policies? It is very decentralised.

Prof. HATTIE — With respect, you switched from teacher education to autonomy of teachers, and it is dear to my heart. I think that the whole debate at the moment in Victoria on the autonomy of principals misses the point. Should all teachers have autonomy? Our teachers, and most teachers in schools, have a tremendous amount of autonomy over how they teach, even those who are having low impact, and that bothers the heck out of me. I am delighted that here in Victoria we have so many teachers who do have consistently a high impact. Obviously I want to privilege those. If you looked at the new teachers going out, homework is probably not high on their list of deep-thought issues they have gone around with. It is dealing with the class as they have them, and that encourages me, because that is as it should be. Most of them go into schools where they are told what the homework policy is and 'how we do it in the school',

and that is the issue that I think we need to deal with, particularly for new teachers, that many schools do have a notion of what homework should look like. They are told on that one, so that is not high on their list of ones that they have a lot of autonomy over. I am not sure I have given true respect to your answer.

The CHAIR — Are you evangelical about how teachers are regarded in a society, say, such as in Finland, where they have a very high standing in the community? Many people aspire to that. Using our context, they might be seen as on the same ranking as a QC or a plastic surgeon or something. Many people with all the right sorts of attributes aspire to be a teaching professional. Is this what you aspiring to?

Prof. HATTIE — Absolutely. My TED talk recently was on: why are there so many successful teachers in schools out there? That was seen as novel, because most of the time in the community we talk about how bad our teachers in schools are. I think I have a reasonable amount of data. I have also analysed the Australian NAPLAN data for five years in a row. I would estimate a good 50, 60 or 70 per cent of our teachers in schools out there are doing a very good job.

The problem is that we have a community, we have a politic, we have a press and we have a teachers group who do not esteem excellence in that way. If I said to many teachers, 'If you put in $20 000 of your own money, if in this next year really did a stunning job, who would notice?'. That is the problem. Even in our own profession, we do not privilege excellence. We do not have Queen's Counsels, we do not have royal societies and we do not have boards. We do not allow teachers to be seen as excellent. We do not allow them to group as excellent. We have no professional group that is based on excellence. That is what is driving me. I think we need it. AITSL is as close as we have at the moment even though I think that whilst it is a government body it can influence, but it cannot be that body in the same way that these other groups would be.

It is interesting that in Finland and the countries you mentioned, it is tough to get into teaching. My gosh, if you have a pulse — or more correctly, if you have a wallet — we will let you in in this country. We allow people in with ATARs around 30. I would argue, as we have done at Melbourne, to up the standard to get in dramatically. We have postgraduates, so ATAR does not mean a lot to us, but we go back and look at their ATAR scores. Ninety-two is about the minimum. In the last four years our numbers have dramatically increased in terms of applicants to people we take. If we increased the criteria to get into teaching, we would start to change the perception. If we allowed amongst ourselves in the teaching profession the notion of excellence, I think it could make a difference. We have to do that; otherwise I despair where we are going. We have excellence. It is a passion — you are right. It is so evangelical.

Mrs MILLAR — There are some interesting themes in relation to that.

Prof. HATTIE — Yes.

Mrs MILLAR — To get back to a narrow field of just the homework, do you feel that there are some disciplines in which homework is done better, and if so, why is that?

Prof. HATTIE — The evidence shows that it is a bit better in the maths area; in social sciences and some of the sciences it is not. The reason for that is this notion of deliberate practice. It is much easier for teachers to give students deliberate practice in maths, but unfortunately in science and social sciences they tend to give them projects, which as I said before, is notoriously low and has a zero to negative effect. In fact there is a good argument to say that if you want to turn students off science, give them projects. Not for all students — fortunately, there is a minority who love it. Rather than saying it is a particular subject, if you generalise to this notion of deliberate practice, you can do that in reading, you can do that in science and you can do that in social studies. It is a reinforcement of something that is taught. It is the case that most of us, whether we are struggling or bright, need three or four opportunities to learn something before we learn it, over time. What a wonderful opportunity to use homework.

Mrs MILLAR — Do you think online resources are changing us at all?

Prof. HATTIE — Oh, nonsense!

Mrs MILLAR — Are online resources opening up fields where you are not so heavily reliant on a parent knowledge?

Prof. HATTIE — No. For 50 years the technological revolution has been coming, and it is still coming. Right now, if you named me a topic, I could find you — exaggeration — a million resources on the web. Everyone tells me it is going to improve in the next five years. They have been telling me that 50 years. The effect size of computers is very small. Why? Because most teachers do not teach in the way that requires the use of computers and technology.

Mrs MILLAR — Some do.

Prof. HATTIE — When it is used for knowledge consumption the effect is very low. That is often how it is used in homework. Putting more resources on the web is never the answer. They are already out there, and they are already not used. Can we use the technology to help in knowledge production through the notion of helping students learn? Yes, I think we can. There are a lot of resources out there at the moment. You have to ask why they are not used. Can we consider homework an opportunity to learn something we do not know, such as with the flip classroom? If you go to the Khan Academy, it must be one of the lowest-quality resources you have ever seen with one of the highest uses in the world, because it is based on the notion that the students know nothing and here is a chance to learn some language before you go into the next session. I do not want to deride technology. I think there are some answers out there, but I do not think it is the answer to homework.

The CHAIR — Are you saying in terms of the use of technology that people can be in information overload and that they need specialist skills to discern what to bring forward, what to synthesise and what to accommodate?

Prof. HATTIE — Exactly. When you are learning something, one of the hardest skills is to learn how to evaluate what is important. When you go to the web and you look up any topic and you are inundated with information, how do you make the decision? Most of us of little brain, at any one time, can take into account seven — plus or minus two — things. When you get 10 000 things to look at, most of us give up; and students give up. How do you know what is going to make the difference? Some of us can spend hours and hours trawling through that stuff because it is interesting, but we should not generalise that all students are doing that. They give up very quickly if it is not going to help them. They are very discerning, they are very strategical.

The CHAIR — From this we would get a lot of cut-and-paste activity?

Prof. HATTIE — Yes.

The CHAIR — And the progenitor, I would imagine, of rampant plagiarism, where you are not quite sure of the origin of the work.

Prof. HATTIE — I am sure that is the case.

The CHAIR — Does that encourage it?

Prof. HATTIE — Absolutely; it does, and I remember an instance in my own case when we took our sons out of school for a month — which we should not do — and we went to Europe. My son was involved in the assessment scheme and he would not do the work. Finally I gave up, and I did it. He failed. I failed that system, and I am afraid sometimes that is what happens when parents get involved and all the other resources get involved; they do not understand what the teachers do and they do not understand what is the criteria of success. They look at the piece of assignment work as something that they can do.

The art is in students understanding what the teacher thinks is valuable, and that is what students have and are privileged to have, and what parents do not have. That is where sometimes homework that involves parents is cut-and-paste work that is just pretty, it is nice, but it is not necessarily what we want to encourage our students to do.

Mr BROOKS — Just one more quick question around homework policies. We had some principals giving evidence yesterday. We asked them about the homework policies of their schools and the approach they take. They indicated that they would often change only when there might be a change in the parent group who wanted more homework or less homework, and things would fluctuate, not very regularly, but that was what drove the change.

Given that in a lot of cases parents drive the homework policies, particularly in areas where there might be middle to high socioeconomic areas, and then in lower socioeconomic areas there is going to be less interest or less ability to be able to impact those policies, what parents can measure is the amount of time their students are spending on their homework. That is why I am assuming that parents look at time as a good measurement of whether homework is successful or not. If my child is doing an hour of homework a night, then I am happy because I know they are doing homework. You mentioned that a broader policy should include evidence that the homework is working.

Prof. HATTIE — Correct.

Mr BROOKS — Is there a form of evidence that can be provided to parents that homework is working, that is easily understood by parents who are not trained educators, that is not time? Is there a way that can be done or is it too complex an issue and parents have to trust the school and the educators that the homework is working, even though it may be taking less time.

Prof. HATTIE — I think it comes back very much to the school principal convincing the parents that their job is to have at least a year's growth studentsfor a year's input; and here is the nature of the evidence that we are having greater than a year's impact. One of the reasons that could be related to that evidence of impact is the fact that the students do this homework. It is very difficult, other than a simple matter of time, to come up with a metric for parents, but I think it is a larger picture about convincing there is evidence. I go back to the earlier comment: if I can convince you, if you are one of the parents in my school, that your child is getting greater than that year's influence and I am not giving you 3 to 4 hours of homework, then my job is to convince you that we are doing more than an average and a better job; we are certainly doing our job. If you are getting that effect, then you have got to seriously ask not only about the homework but about the nature of what is happening in the school. I think it is a bigger picture. The problem is that time is the easiest variable. I would be trying to convince parents that it does not matter whether it is 5 minutes or 5 hours. I do not really care whether it is 30 minutes or an hour. It is what you do in that time that really matters.

Maybe we have to listen to the parents who want this, because they can be very demanding on the present environment, particularly the kind of parents that you were talking about. They see that as a measure of the quality of the school. Do not fight it, come up with the time, but then ask yourself, 'Let us make sure we maximise the value of that by looking at the impact, by looking at the students who do the homework and those who do not, and is it having an impact on what is happening in the classroom?', because it is our job as the professionals to make that difference, to modify what we do. I am not going to fight the parents on this.

I do not have any trouble with homework if it has an impact. As I said earlier, I think homework at the moment that does not have an impact has a double whammy. I think it is a waste of time and I think it is misleading, but I would not get rid of it. This is where a school policy can make sense — to stop that parent influence of saying, 'I get 3 hours at the school. You only get 1 hour. I must be better'. No, but look at the impact we are having. Look at the nature of it. Look at the effects it is having on our students. It is enough.

I would be encouraging parents to do other things with their students. The trouble with that argument is that often the parents allow the students to do things that are not productive to them as whole people — watching television and playing computer games. Wouldn't it be nice if they did other educational activities? Unfortunately that is not what happens. But most of us need regeneration. We know, for example, the power of sleep on learning. I am not suggesting that students go home and do absolutely nothing; I think there are opportunities to do other things than schoolwork. I am dedicated to saying, given

that Australia has one of the longest school years in school days, 'Why don't we get that perfectly right and minimise the impact of homework?'. Then we can appease the parents.

Mr BROOKS — What are you suggesting there? Longer school hours?

Prof. HATTIE — The contrary. I think we have one of the longest school years in school hours at the moment. I think we should optimise the power of what we do in that time. We should not need to have more, but I am terrified of going to the eastern system, where we encourage the parents to go to tutoring classes.

The CHAIR — What about disruptive behaviour in classrooms? Do you have evidence of the impact — that because teachers lose control of classes the default position is that everybody, whether they have behaved or not, equally needs to have that catch up through homework, and that obviously can have a snowballing effect.

Prof. HATTIE — Yes. The impact of disruptive students is a negative impact on all students in that class. Sometimes you have to wonder why those same disruptive students are not disruptive in other teachers' classrooms — what is going on here? The other side of it is that, again, if you look at — I think it is in the Australian book. Having a differential homework policy is not as good as having the same homework for the whole class — the same expectations of the students. I think there is a sense of fairness. Students are very aware of whether things are fair or unfair, so I would be very wary of promoting a policy where there is different homework for different students. It is an unnecessary extra. That is above and beyond, and I think the effects are lesser.

The CHAIR — We have gone over time. Thank you very much for your contribution, Professor Hattie.

Prof. HATTIE — Thank you for inviting me.

The CHAIR — It has been very stimulating, especially your opening remarks, I must say. We have all that recorded, so there is plenty for us to think about. Thank you very much for your contribution today.

Prof. HATTIE — Thanks very much.

Witness withdrew.