

# Talking Up Teaching

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by WILSON McCASKILL

I have on many occasions over the years asked teachers attending a Play Is The Way workshop if they would or have recommended a career in teaching to their own children.

Although the majority of those in attendance have children, it is only ever a small minority that would recommend their own profession to their nearest and dearest.

Recognising the poor standing teaching holds in their own eyes and those of their colleagues can be quite a sobering moment for the 30-50 educators participating in a workshop. Irrespective of the state in which the workshop is held or the age range of the participants, the response to the question is invariably the same. In fact, I have on several occasions had an entire group respond negatively to the question.

What is it that diminishes the experience of teaching to the point that those who do it are so disillusioned or disgruntled they simply can't recommend it as a fulfilling career path.

Perhaps the following statistics revealed at the 2009 Positive Schools Conference in WA by David Price, then the Assistant Director of Student Services, sheds some light on the problem.

He informed the 400 educators assembled that 66% of teachers in WA felt overwhelmed by work and that 60% felt they could not maintain their workload for much longer. 42% of teachers had been diagnosed with a medical condition exacerbated by teaching.

Mr Price went on to say that, "We can't address the mental health and wellbeing of students without addressing the mental health and wellbeing of teachers. There needs to be a mental health and wellbeing pay-off if teachers are going to buy into teaching."

I agree with Mr Price but I'm unable to quote just how he proposed to create the mental health and wellbeing "pay-off" he accurately stated as necessary.

There appears to be no state in Australia with an abundance of people wanting to train for a profession that seems to have lost its once lofty and respected position on a young person's wish list of possible careers.

I find it hard to believe that the situation will change significantly and with any permanence until teachers themselves see reason to talk up and recommend their own profession.

In advertising, nothing beats a word of mouth recommendation. When it comes to recommending teaching as a profession, the profession has its mouth firmly shut.

What can be done to get teachers talking up teaching?

It's a complex question with a multitude of possible answers, but until it is answered we will struggle to attract and hold quality people for a still noble profession.

Fail to answer the question and I suspect that World Teacher's Day will be celebrated in Australia by more who wonder why they are continuing to teach than those who are deeply proud and satisfied to be doing so.