

Sitting on top of the world: Abbey Dusink braves 'The Edge' experience at Eureka Skydeck.



TEACHERS WHO TAKE LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

While the classroom is where most teachers spend their working day, they may also be found in a variety of education settings such as museums, zoos and art galleries.

Professional Practice interviewed registered teachers employed at Melbourne's Eureka Skydeck and the National Sports Museum, to gain an insight into the challenges and rewards offered by their unique workplaces.

Education with altitude at Melbourne's Eureka Skydeck

Abbey Dusink teaches in a 'classroom' that truly does take learning to a higher level.

As Education Coordinator at Eureka Skydeck, the highest public vantage point in the Southern Hemisphere, Abbey's job is challenging, exciting and different every day.

Abbey finished her diploma of education in 2007, after completing a science degree majoring in zoology.

Before moving into a more traditional teaching role, she wanted to experience working as an educator at a public attraction like the Melbourne Zoo or Aquarium to make the most of her science degree.

With competition fierce for such roles, Abbey didn't know how long she'd have to wait before achieving her ambition.

Professional PRACTICE

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NEWSLETTER

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But in a lucky break, she scored a short-term position as Education Coordinator at the Skydeck in February 2008.

Her temporary role eventually became permanent, and 18 months down the track Abbey is still loving her job.

Abbey works with students ranging from prep to tertiary level, in groups which vary in size from as small as 15 to as large as 60.

As well as the teaching side of her role, engaging students with a host of educational activities and interactive displays, Abbey is responsible for writing worksheets, marketing, budgets and even data analysis.

She says one of the most challenging aspects of the job, in the early stages, was having to adapt her teaching style to cater for widely different age groups.

"I trained as a secondary school teacher, so in the beginning I did find it quite difficult to teach primary school children," Abbey says.

"One little trick I picked up was to translate figures into more meaningful comparison points. For instance, rather than saying that the Eureka Tower weighs 200,000 tonnes, I would say it weighs 40,000 elephants. Instead of saying it used 110,000 tonnes of concrete, I'd say it used 44 swimming pools of concrete."

Abbey says working at the Skydeck has really helped build her confidence as a teacher, especially in relation to dealing with any behavioural issues that may arise. She also has the benefit of seeing how other teachers interact with their students.

The only negative she can identify is not having continuous contact with the students she teaches.

"I generally get to see them once only, for a relatively short period, so don't have the joy of watching them grow and develop, and getting to know them better."

Despite that small negative, Abbey says she's incredibly fortunate to be teaching in such a breathtaking location offering unique learning opportunities for students and teachers of all ages.

National Sports Museum an exciting education resource

Patrick Watt and Adriana Tarascio-Agosta believe learning beyond the classroom is a powerful way to engage students in meaningful curriculum.

It's just one of the reasons they are so enthusiastic about their teaching roles at the National Sports Museum (NSM). Located at the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground, the NSM is an educational resource not just for sports fans. "The museum provides exciting learning opportunities for primary and secondary students in an environment which highlights the importance of sport for many Australians," says Patrick, Manager of Education & Public Programs at the NSM.

Adriana, the NSM's Education Officer, says their education program focuses on the richness sport has brought to our history, culture, identity and lifestyle. "Our student activities emphasise interpersonal and disciplinary learning, and allow students to understand and appreciate the value and significance of sport in our society," Adriana says.

What your students will see and experience at the NSM

The museum showcases more than 3,500 objects related to the greatest moments in Australia's sporting history.

It houses the Australian Gallery of Sport and Olympic Museum, Sport Australia Hall of Fame, Australian Cricket Hall of Fame, Australian Football Hall of Fame and temporary exhibitions addressing the sporting issues and events of the day.

Among the many highlights are the suit Cathy Freeman raced in to win 400-metres gold at the Sydney 2000 Olympics, and the cauldron lit by runner Ron Clarke to kick-off the Melbourne 1956 Olympics.

Cricket and AFL football fans can thrill to presentations by spin-king Shane Warne and former Essendon champion James Hird, using hologram technology which gives the impression they are right there in front of you.

And for students who like to participate, the 'Game On' fully interactive gallery allows them to personally experience the buzz of taking part in a diverse range of sporting environments and activities.

Patrick Watt's story

With 27 years teaching experience under his belt, Patrick taught drama and English in Melton and North Fitzroy before moving to education roles at Sovereign Hill and then Scienceworks. He's been in his position at the NSM for nearly two years.

"I manage education and public programs. In education I oversee the school booking and meeting process, develop education materials and programs, and deliver professional development presentations at teacher conferences. In public programs, I oversee and develop tours, holiday programs and events that add to the museum experience," Patrick says.

"The work never stops, the planning never ceases. There are always new ideas and better ways to do things. Like action researchers we analyse what we do and try to make it better."

Patrick says the only real drawback to his job is not being able to develop rapport with the students: "I don't experience the ongoing relationship and the highs and lows. I really miss the contact with students."

In terms of future goals, Patrick would love to see his team expand and be able to deliver personalised programs to every visiting school.

"I am always a teacher, so I think I will eventually want to teach teachers how best to use cultural institutions as legitimate learning centres that extend the school experience and are not separate from it," he says.

Adriana Tarascio-Agosta's story

Adriana has been a teacher for 32 years and since moving out of the classroom has held education coordinator roles at the Botanic Gardens, Museum Victoria, the Immigration Museum and the Design and Technology Teachers' Association Victoria. She's been in her current job for six months.

"I am responsible for meeting and greeting visiting groups; developing and delivering materials to support education, public programs and teacher professional learning; creating on-floor 'layered' education experiences and training NSM volunteers," Adriana says.

"My teaching skills enable me to effectively do my job. I love the way they almost automatically come into play to facilitate and support me, day in and day out. It's the reason I've been able to diversify my teaching portfolio and gain amazing experiences in extraordinary educational settings."

Adriana says she gains great satisfaction from being able to engage teachers and students with other voices and faces in a unique space that is filled with extraordinary stories, interesting objects and images of amazing sporting moments.

"As a teacher in a museum setting, my ultimate goal is to work more closely with the school sector to broaden the scope and horizon of learning by readily including cultural institutions," she says.



Memories of the Melbourne 1956 Olympics: Adriana Tarascio-Agosta and Patrick Watt pictured next to the cauldron lit by Ron Clarke.

Study reveals beginning teachers have differing career plans

Australia is facing retention difficulties in the teaching profession which will increase staffing and financial burdens on the educational and wider community, according to Monash University researchers.

Dr Paul Richardson and Dr Helen Watt from Monash's Faculty of Education are documenting the experiences of early career teachers to establish their levels of personal wellbeing and professional engagement.

They hope their Australian Research Council funded project will provide valuable evidence to assist government and education policy makers in supporting early career teachers and reducing attrition from the profession.

In the following article Drs Richardson and Watt discuss their research and reveal some interesting findings about the different planned career trajectories of beginning teachers.

Schooling contributes significantly to the preparation of young people for citizenship, and quality teachers are fundamental to an education revolution. But for too long, teacher educators and policy makers have assumed we already know why people choose teaching, persist, or leave.

Our Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (FIT-Choice) research program is discovering previous assumptions are inadequate. It is identifying why people choose to become teachers today, their hopes and fears, what sustains or depletes them in the profession and what impacts on their psychological and physical wellbeing.

The FIT-Choice study is the first to track a large sample of beginning teachers across a number of countries over a long period of time, to address problems of recruitment and retention in the current climate of teacher shortages.

In Australia, we are following 1,653 beginning teachers since their entry to teacher education in Victoria and NSW in 2002/3. The teachers in our study include high-school leavers as well as those who made a career switch into teaching; we are following all of their trajectories, whether they remain in teaching or move onto other careers.

This is the first study to empirically measure the motivations of those who enter the teaching profession, their feelings of preparedness when they graduate from teacher education programs, their experiences in particular school settings, and levels of career satisfaction and wellbeing.

In general, the strongest motivations for teaching are:

- personal interest in teaching
- belief in one's teaching abilities
- having had previous positive teaching and learning experiences
- desire to make positive contributions to society through working with youth.

Personal quality of life goals were also important, although less so. Social influences were quite weak. And choosing teaching as a 'fallback' career was definitely not the case for new teachers today.

People's motivations to teach were remarkably similar across the different country samples we have examined so far – from Australia, the United States, Germany, and Norway. We had really expected more differences.

This shows that, across the different cultural settings, there is something 'core' and robust about teachers' work and characteristics.

We also investigated factors which may deter people from a teaching career.

When commencing teacher education, participants tended to rate teaching as highly demanding but offering low rewards of salary and social status. They also stated others had tried to dissuade them from a teaching career.

It is worth emphasising these new teachers had still chosen teaching as their career – despite clearly recognising its high demand, low reward structures and social status.

It may seem obvious there would be different types of beginning teachers, although this has not previously been examined. We have identified three main types who have different career plans and goals. We call them the 'highly engaged persisters' (45%), 'highly engaged switchers' (27%), and 'lower engaged desisters' (28%).

Highly engaged persisters mostly intend to spend their entire career in teaching, and score highly in terms of their planned effort, personal development and leadership aspirations.

Highly engaged switchers are more likely to indicate future career goals other than teaching. Nevertheless, their scores for planned effort, personal development and leadership aspirations are similar to those of the highly engaged persisters.

Lower engaged desisters are the least likely to intend to persist with a career in teaching and have the lowest scores on the planned effort, personal development and leadership dimensions.

Teacher education and employing authorities need to take seriously the different planned career trajectories of people who come into their programs. They need to go beyond the assumption that a person coming into teacher education holds a traditional lifetime career model of job security founded on incremental age-related advancement and loyalty to the profession.

Greater attention needs to be paid to teachers' wellbeing so they do not suffer burnout, become disgruntled less effective teachers, or leave the profession.

Effective teaching is an intensely interpersonal profession, requiring complex social and cognitive skills – these are not typically the focus of teacher education programs, which emphasise curriculum content and pedagogical knowledge.



'Teacher education and employing authorities need to take seriously the different planned career trajectories of people who come into their programs.'

It is critical we better understand the links between individual motivations, perceived abilities, professional engagement, and the support networks and strategies needed to sustain teachers – particularly in difficult to staff regions, districts and schools.

In our ongoing study we now have data that will allow us to examine the environmental and organisational components of schools that have the potential to impact negatively on teachers' job demands, perceived stress, and levels of psychological and physical health.

We aim to shed light on the current early career demands associated with the teaching profession, the persistence plans of early career teachers and their general health and wellbeing, and provide a more accurate picture of why people remain in or leave the teaching profession.

The success of our project depends on maintaining contact with participants in the study over the long term. If you were involved in the FIT-Choice program but have lost touch with us, please email your name and contact details to <fitchoice@education.monash.edu>.

Further information on our research project is available at <www.fitchoice.org>.

Authors

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When touching is okay and when it's not okay

The first issue of *Professional Practice* ran a story on the conduct of disciplinary hearings at the Institute. All hearing decisions are published on the Institute website.

A recent decision explores the boundaries of a teacher's physical contact with students and distinguishes between appropriate and inappropriate contact. The complexity of this issue for teachers cannot be over-stated.

We publish here extracts of the decision in the hope that teachers will find the advice helpful. Your school community may choose to discuss the extracts in a staff meeting perhaps in conjunction with your own, or the *Victorian Teaching Profession Code of Conduct*.

"When discussing a teacher's physical contact with students, it is essential to draw a distinction between touching which has a sexual, intimate or overly familiar element to it, and supportive, appropriate and essential physical contact."

"The substantiated physical contact in the matter before the Panel was about highly inappropriate touching."

"... supportive physical contact or touching, which might involve an encouraging pat on the shoulder on the sporting field, or the need to help a student who has been injured off the ground and to a safe place, or physical contact during a drama or dance class which has been explained prior to the physical contact taking place, or using a child's hand when it comes to demonstrating how to hold a pencil or dealing with children in special education settings, can be normal and appropriate contact by a teacher.

"Here the student gives implicit or direct consent, and accordingly the physical contact will be appropriate provided that it is necessary and/or curriculum related, and does not have a sexual, intimate or overly familiar quality to it.

"The teacher should always consider whether the physical contact might cause discomfort or embarrassment to the student, and if so, desist."

"Accordingly, whilst teachers may engage in supportive physical contact, they must be particularly sensitive and astute to the student's level of comfort at the time, whilst simultaneously ensuring that the physical contact falls within professional boundaries and is on top of clothing, and/or is essential for the safety of the student or others.

"Simplistic blanket approaches, cynicism and scare mongering about 'absolutely all' physical contact being banned and inappropriate, fall short of the common sense, professional discretion and the pedagogical maturity that the community rightly expects to come to the fore when educating and supporting our young people."

Minister lobbying successful: Hulls reply to Pike

Professional Practice reported in July that Education Minister Bronwyn Pike had written to Attorney-General Rob Hulls asking that he amend the list of persons authorised to witness statutory declarations under section 107A of the *Evidence Act 1958*.

The Act currently authorises government school principals for this purpose, but not non-government school principals. Institute policy in relation to the certification of original documents has been shaped by this section of the Act.

Minister Pike was responding to a request from the Institute representing the views of non-government schools that their principals should also be authorised as persons who can certify true copies of original documents.

The Attorney-General has now replied, stating his agreement with the proposition put by the Institute. He will respond to the issue by amendment of the 1958 Act.

Once proclaimed, the Institute will include non-government school principals in its list of persons authorised to certify original documents.

This is a pleasing outcome and corrects an anomaly that over time has caused a degree of frustration for principals and also for those seeking to have their documents certified.

MiPdi is your Pdi

An individual teacher portal for keeping track of professional development activities – MiPdi – is currently being developed by the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

Accessible from the Institute's Pdi home page, MiPdi is a practical step to help teachers meet requirements for renewal of registration by providing a central place to store professional development (PD) records, documents and reflections.

More information on the full range of MiPdi features will be communicated shortly to help you plan for 2010.

Meanwhile, website statistics show increasing numbers of teachers are using Pdi as their preferred search facility to find high quality activities that support professional learning needs.

Keep informed by visiting <http://pdi.vic.edu.au/> today.

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LATEST UPDATES

World Teachers' Day celebrations

Schools across Victoria celebrated World Teachers' Day on Friday 30 October, with a morning tea or lunch for teachers and other special events marking the day.

Institute staff held a morning tea and screening of the top 10 films made by Victorian students as part of our World Teachers' Day competition. Students were invited to submit a three-minute film exploring the question 'What makes a great teacher?' Winning entries in the P-6 and 7-12 categories were announced by Chairperson Susan Halliday on 30 October. You can see these films and the eight short-listed entries on our website <www.vit.vic.edu.au>.

Many thanks to the teachers and students who took part in our film competition. We would also like to acknowledge teachers and students from Camberwell High School and Canterbury Primary School who helped make the sample film.

World Teachers' Day was widely promoted by the Institute to Victorian members of parliament, local government, education stakeholders and school councils and boards. In his response, published on our website, Melbourne's Lord Mayor Robert Doyle encouraged teachers to enjoy their free entry to the Eureka Skydeck from 30 October to 1 November.

What do teachers think?

The Institute commissioned Ipsos Eureka Social Research Institute to conduct an online survey of registered teachers in June 2008 and again in June 2009.

The surveys aimed to measure teacher awareness and satisfaction with a range of communications and professional development products and services. They also explored teacher awareness of and attitudes towards the Institute's regulatory role. The same questions were asked in 2008 and 2009, so changes in teacher perceptions could be measured.

We would like to thank the 2,689 registered teachers who completed the 2009 survey, which revealed significant improvements in key measures since 2008. The findings will be reported in the Institute's annual report which will be published on the website, following its tabling in the Victorian Parliament on 15 October 2009.

Supporting provisionally registered teachers program

The Mentor Support Program for teachers mentoring provisionally registered teachers (PRTs) for the first time is due to begin in February 2010. Information sessions for PRTs applying for full registration will begin in March 2010. Dates, venues and registration details for both programs will be published on the Institute website under 'Registered Teachers'.

Field Officer's note

How private is Facebook? Is there any reason you might give your personal mobile number or your email address to a student? When, if ever, is it appropriate for a teacher to touch a student? What does mandatory reporting actually mean?

These are a small sample of questions that can arise during discussions about the *Victorian Teaching Profession Code of Conduct*. The Institute's Field Officers are experienced at facilitating staff discussions about the code. Contact Mary Walker on 03 8601 5845 or <mary.walker@vit.vic.edu.au> to organise a visit at a time to suit your school.

New kit to support teachers of students with a disability

Each Victorian school has been sent a copy of the Bar None Community Awareness Kit for Schools. Designed to support teachers in creating more inclusive and welcoming environments for the 55,000 school children with a disability, the kit aims to help all students better understand disability. Teachers can visit <www.officefordisability.vic.gov.au> to download and print further copies.

e-delivery of Professional Practice Online

About 25,000 teachers have opted for electronic delivery of *Professional Practice* as *Professional Practice Online*. The offer to choose electronic delivery remains open. Teachers who wish to take up this option should call 1300 888 067 or email <vit@vit.vic.edu.au>.

Teachers who have not opted for electronic delivery of the Institute newsletter continue to receive *Professional Practice* in the mail. However the September issue of *Professional Practice Online* was mistakenly sent to a number of teachers who had not chosen electronic delivery. A contractor of the Institute, CMI email distribution service, was responsible for the error and apologises to any teachers who were inconvenienced.

Summer break office hours

The Institute will be closed for business on Friday 25 December through until Friday 1 January, reopening on Monday 4 January.

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