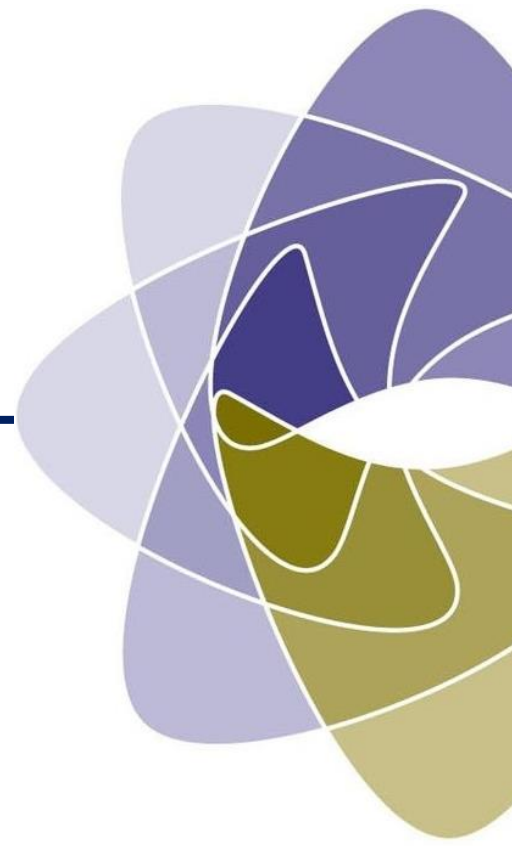


TASMANIAN
LEADERS



Education Thinkbank

Working Together to Skill Tasmania

November – December 2013

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Executive Summary

Tasmanian Leaders identifies and supports business and community leaders to reach their full potential. By valuing diversity and supporting the exchange of ideas in an apolitical framework, Tasmanian Leaders works tirelessly to make Tasmania a better place to live, work and do business.

In 2013 Tasmanian Leaders launched the Thinkbank initiative and convened a Thinkbank dedicated to the topic of education in Tasmania in November.

Thinkbank provides a forum for participatory conversations in which Tasmanian Leaders Program graduates apply theories and knowledge gained from the program in a practical context. It brings with it the opportunity for participants to share learnings, stimulating further conversation and involvement throughout the organisation's broader network.

Tasmanian Leaders chose to focus on education for its first Thinkbank reflective of the frequency with which challenges in this sector were identified as amenable to change, and its potential for significant impact. The twelve participating graduates brought with them their own experiences of education – as students, parents, employers and community members – in addition to undertaking a targeted independent investigation with educators, business and community leaders.

The Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians (December 2008) opens with an acknowledgement of the central role of education in building a democratic, equitable and just society. Thinkbank participants quickly discovered that the lived experience of education for many Tasmanians is not consistent with this.

Indeed, Tasmania's educational attainment and performance has historically lagged behind other states, which can be seen as both a cause and effect of the steeper socio-economic gradient present in the Tasmanian community relative to the rest of Australia. This has far-reaching implications for the state.

A fair society is one that doesn't let socio-economic status impact on participation in community life. The socio-economic gradient currently present in Tasmania leads to differences in educational opportunities and outcomes which are unnecessary, avoidable, unfair and unjust.

Thinkbank concluded that the challenge of addressing this situation – by increasing the recognition of the value of education and supporting participation across a range of life-long learning opportunities – is a whole of community responsibility. Research showed that increased financial investment does not always increase educational outcomes, while investigative studies highlighted the significant work that Tasmanian educators are already undertaking. Examples of achievement are showcased in the studies throughout this paper.

Three areas were identified as offering the greatest scope for action and change – they are:

- Community engagement and participation
- Innovation and collaboration, and
- The value of life-long learning.

This paper provides an overview of these themes, documents learnings from the process and represents a launching point for further discussion.

About Tasmanian Leaders

Tasmanian Leaders Inc. (TLI) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that facilitates leadership enhancement opportunities for aspiring, emerging and high potential leaders.

Our programs identify, promote and develop business and community leaders, creating significant future benefits for both them and Tasmania.

We are responsible for managing the Tasmanian Leaders Program, Skillsbank, Thinkbank and our Alumni while remaining committed to community leadership and Tasmanian leaders more generally.

About Thinkbank

The Thinkbank initiative aims to provide a forum through which Tasmanian Leaders Program graduates, as community leaders, can be part of innovative solutions through participatory conversations. It operates in a creative and positive space that allows participants to hone their skills in critical thinking, analysis and communication, while advancing public discourse and key stakeholder involvement in significant issues. By exploring complex ideas, concepts and issues our graduates gain new insight and perspective, while contributing to a brighter future for Tasmania.

It brings with it the opportunity for participants to share learnings to stimulate further conversation and involvement throughout the organisation's broader network.

The Process for the Education Thinkbank

After selecting the topic Education, graduates of the program were invited to be part of the process. Twelve participants from diverse backgrounds, vocations, experiences and geographical locations volunteered for the task.

Over a period of one month, this dedicated group of Tasmanian Leaders Program graduates undertook four sessions and an investigative study, all of which built on each other to tease out the complexity of issues surrounding education (formal schooling) in Tasmania; to better understand the part education plays in the Tasmanian community; and to identify what changes might need to occur at a cultural and social level to improve educational outcomes.

Session 1:

A half-day session to set the scene was facilitated by Malcolm Elliott, Eleanor Ramsay and Michael Rowan, including presentation and discussion of Michael and Eleanor's paper [Learning to Change Tasmania](#), written specifically for this Thinkbank.

Investigative Study:

Over a period of three weeks, participants undertook some independent research to better understand the views of some of the Tasmanian education system's stakeholders including educators, school leaders, business and industry leaders and community leaders.

Session 2: Hearing from Stakeholders

This full day session was comprised of several parts including:

- i. Presentation and Q&A: Community Engagement**
An exploration of the relationship between community engagement and educational achievement.
- ii. Presentation and Q&A: The Devil's Advocate**
An economic perspective, examining the broader effects of reaching our educational goals. Is there such a thing as an over-educated society? What will be the effect on the economy as a whole if every Tasmanian can read and write?
- iii. A World Café of Burning Issues and Brilliant Ideas**
Expert guests from a variety of aspects of the education sector (literacy and numeracy, the Australian Education Union, migrant education and big picture economic possibilities) hosted world café discussions exploring the burning issues and possible solutions for catapulting Tasmania into a positive future.
- iv. A Panel Session**
Government agency leaders came together to open the channels of communication on an issue which underpins the departmental strategies and activities to achieve a more prosperous Tasmania.

Session 3: Debrief and Distillation

The group met over dinner to discuss the findings from their investigative studies and the learnings from Session 2, and reconcile these with the themes emerging from Session 1.

Session 4: Collaboration

A half-day session saw the group collaborating to draft this report which encapsulates the complexity of learnings from the process and the strategic recommendations the group have agreed are integral to future progress.

Presenters, facilitators and interviewees of the independent investigative studies are listed on pages 17 and 18.

Community engagement and participation

Effective engagement and participation in education by the wider community (those beyond the school gate) has emerged as a theme that proves to be critical in improving learning outcomes. Ongoing conversations within our communities about education and learning offer the potential to foster a shared understanding, a common purpose and a strong foundation for action. Listening and responding to ideas from the local community builds a sense of ownership, generates opportunities for participation and engenders responsibility. Over time, this heightened level of engagement and participation in setting the direction will bring about change.

The Thinkbank identified and consulted with a number of key stakeholders:

Business

Enabling and encouraging business to engage with schools and participate in the education of students, and recognising the benefits for both parties of fostering this relationship, has been a strong theme throughout the conversations. Giving students insights and experiences in a range of workplaces allows them to explore their passions, identify career objectives and set a direction. Promoting opportunities for business to share ideas, skills and knowledge through industry awareness sessions in high school, work placements and transition programs not only produces valuable outcomes for students, but also ensures prospective employees are equipped with the skills and knowledge required to progress business into the future.

Educators

Through discussions with key people across a wide range of education institutions, it became clear that educators require strong community support to facilitate innovation that produces improved educational outcomes. This includes supporting educators on all levels, from early years through to tertiary and VET educators, as well as specifically clarifying and recognising the key role of principals and the priorities and responsibilities that position carries, both as educators and community leaders.

Marginalised Community Groups

Harnessing the unique contribution education can make to enriching our society by celebrating diversity in our community is a pivotal opportunity. The power of storytelling as a means of improving understanding, removing barriers, building relationships and strengthening community fabric has struck a chord with the Thinkbank participants. Unfortunately, there are still many grounds on which people may feel 'different' from the mainstream, with support for programs that promote inclusion and cultural exchange therefore representing a mechanism for fostering understanding and change.

Parents

Parents and carers are children's first and most consistent educators and the value of providing support to increase their participation in the education of their children is infinite. Tasmania has invested heavily in programs targeting the early years (0 – 4) and the importance of providing a language rich environment for children, through reading and conversation, throughout this key developmental time has been clearly demonstrated.

Students

The need to recognise the diversity and individuality of students and develop mechanisms to respond to their differing needs, whilst not a surprising finding, has certainly been reinforced throughout the Thinkbank process. We must continue to develop responsive strategies to enable all students to remain actively engaged in education.

Innovation and Collaboration

The Thinkbank identified significant innovation and collaboration taking place within and among schools, businesses and communities across Tasmania. These efforts show a consideration of local needs, individual circumstances and available resources. These initiatives are achieving positive results for educational attainment, participation and engagement.

Celebrating these successful projects and the innovation, collaboration, leadership and commitment of individuals and local communities, offers the potential to leverage these activities further, through wider acknowledgement and understanding of the initiatives currently in place.

With that in mind, the following case studies stimulated discussion throughout the Thinkbank and serve to launch future conversations among interested stakeholders who want to contribute to a positive future for Tasmania. They provide an indication of the scope, creativity and range of ideas and initiatives discovered through this Thinkbank investigation.

The studies have been categorised as themes:

- New stories: Sharing Knowledge
- New games /new friends: Research and Development
- New ideas: Playful Exploration
- New rules: Adoption of System Improvement

New stories

Sharing knowledge is the fundamental objective of education. Thinkbank participants discovered many examples of educators using innovative approaches to generate conversations between their peers, with one success story potentially serving as a catalyst for another.

Re-engaging adults in learning: Creative Expressions

[Creative Expressions](#) is a program that uses art and craft to unlock people's writing ability. It's been run at Neighbourhood Centres by trained community members. The course reengages adults in learning and brings together a cohesive, supportive group of people who are keen to learn and continue learning. Before taking part in the course participants lacked confidence in writing and most had lost their enjoyment of learning. The results are higher literacy levels, improved confidence, reduction in social isolation, and broader community reach.

"Education breeds confidence. Confidence breeds hope. Hope breeds peace."

— Confucius

Industry Link's Charcuterie Intensive

[Industry Link](#) has developed a 'recipe' for introducing gourmet pork products to some of our best restaurants. The program involves bringing together some of Tasmania's best chefs and training them on how to cut up a pig and make a smorgasbord of gourmet delights. The program includes the chefs taking the products back to their own restaurants to try out what they have learnt. Chefs are then brought back together to see how they are applying it in their own restaurants. The program is introducing a range of new eating experiences to palates.

The success of the initial course has been such that there are now plans to expand the program to a wider range of interested clients.

RADAR

RADAR is a re-engagement program run through Learning Services North (DoE). Most of the students at RADAR are either unwilling or unable to function successfully in mainstream education. RADAR aims to support students so they are able to live happy and balanced lives and engage through education. RADAR does this by providing a calm, safe, predictable environment where students can develop connection and belonging, experience trust and respect, and have some control over their learning.

We believe that every student wants to learn but for disengaged students there are significant "roadblocks" that get in the way. It is predominantly social-emotional issues that prevent them from building a connection to a learning environment. However, when these issues are addressed these young people can not only re-engage with a learning environment but they are also able to reconnect with their community.

New games, new friends

Research and development enables organisations to pioneer new models, practices, applications and services, underpinned by a strong evidence base, and to share these with others.

One hour a week, that's all it takes

[26TEN](#) is a network of organisations and individuals working together to improve adult literacy and numeracy in Tasmania. It involves business supporting workers to gain access to adult literacy programs run through TasTAFE, LINC, and others. The program has been a success through assisting workers to gain access to formal development training, helping them to fill in forms, read manuals, and keep records. It also helps with everyday life, including accessing online shopping and reading to their children. The program gives workers the confidence to be open about their needs.

New ideas

Playful exploration of new ideas enables educators, principals and communities to capitalise on schools as community assets, to achieve outcomes that were previously thought unobtainable.

The 'Living in Between' Program



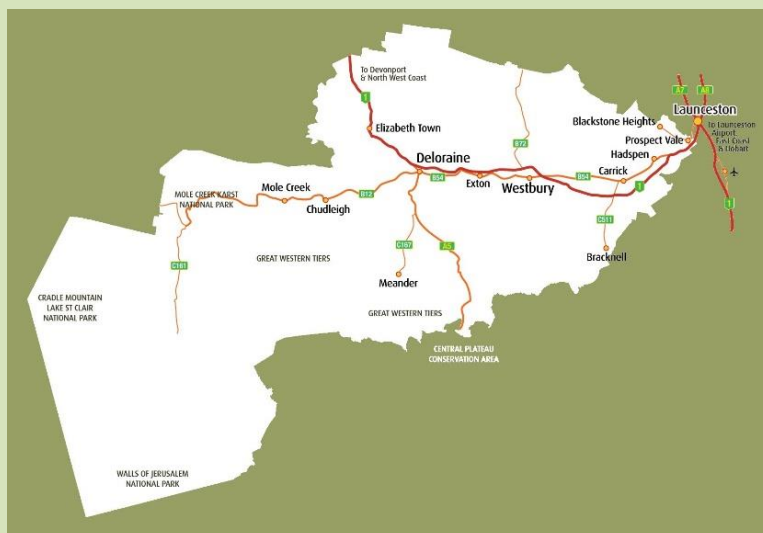
'Living In Between' aims to help young Tasmanians understand the lived experiences of young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers living in our community through story telling. It offers some insight into the difficulties young people faced in their homelands and provides better understanding of the need to migrate. For the storytellers, participation in the program builds confidence, lowers social barriers and unlocks rich parts of other cultures, such as dance and song. 'Living in Between' is flexibly delivered as a program to schools and workplaces. Presentations range from fifteen minutes in a story sharing format, through to ninety minutes with story sharing supported by activities that encourage participants to engage in discussion around culture, diversity and the reasons why people choose to settle in Australia.

Prejudices, it is well known, are most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilised by education: they grow there, firm as weeds among stones."

— Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

Quamby College

Quamby College is a concept for education that is built around engaging with local communities to improve learning outcomes. It provides an opportunity for the Meander Valley community and their schools to work collaboratively to better utilise resources. It is a way in which leaders can listen to and work together with communities by asking them how they want to learn. It is where ideas generated by the community through conversation can be explored and shared. Quamby College can take what has proven successful in other communities and consider how these ideas can be applied in the Valley. It gives the community the ability to gain knowledge and skills locally.



New rules

Sometimes, lifting performance is not about new people, skills or resources – it can be as simple as new ‘rules’ through which we interact.

Professional Learning Community – Taroona High School

All teachers at Taroona High are in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) that increases the professional knowledge and enhances student learning. There are three big ideas behind the philosophy:

- What do we want children to learn?
- How can we collaborate to make this happen?
- Measure the results and follow up with students who haven’t learnt.

PLCs value teacher leadership and involvement as a key strategy. They recognise that improving classroom instruction is significant in raising student achievement and they focus on learning, rather than teaching, and make decisions based on evidence.

Chatter Matters Tasmania – The Beginning...

Chatter Matters Tasmania (CMT) is a not-for-profit association whose broad objective is to fill the gaps in service to children and their families for language and literacy development. CMT uses innovative intervention systems and provides education about the foundational role of communication and language development in obtaining positive outcomes for health, mental health and education.



CMT arose from collaboration across disciplines: a speech pathologist, psychologist and teacher exploring the possibilities around working more effectively with children with literacy acquisition disorders and a desire to become proactive in better addressing the ‘causes of the causes’ of these problems in the first instance.

Calculus for Kids

This began as a research project exploring the potential of interactive computer software to teach primary school children calculus. Carried out in 2011 by the University of Tasmania’s Faculty of Education, the project saw nine Year 5 and 6 students from Mayfield Primary School given an introduction to integral calculus and accompanying computer software over 12 lessons before they sat a university-level integral calculus exam. Mayfield Primary teacher Lauren Shephard said that the students’ scores topped the nation and the school’s average score was 88 per cent – the equivalent of a high distinction – with every pupil passing the test. “They did well because they loved it so much. I know that quite a few of them are disappointed it’s over and you don’t often hear about kids yearning for calculus!” Ms Shephard said. An expansion of the *Calculus for Kids* project has been funded by the Australian Research Council to work in a further 29 schools over the next three years.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning can be broadly defined as learning that is pursued throughout life. Lifelong learning crosses sectors, extending beyond traditional schooling and throughout adult life. In a time of unprecedented change, equipping young people with the skills to pursue and the desire for lifelong learning is critical, given its significant effects on the health and wellbeing of our families, our communities and our society.

The Thinkbank was exposed to many examples of innovative and effective practice in this domain and has identified four key areas for further discussion:

- Fostering a lifelong learning attitude and an understanding of the benefits of work
- Identifying and supporting the pursuit of pathways to further learning or work
- Support at times of transition and
- Increasing the use of school infrastructure by communities.

Learning as a driver of cultural change – Tassal

Tassal developed the 'Impact Leadership Program' supported by [Skills Tasmania](#) and delivered through a Certificate IV in OH&S. The aim of this program was to train employees with the necessary leadership skills to provide significant cultural change in regards to safety. This was driven by a desire to change the focus of employees from 'getting the job done' to 'getting the job done safely'.

The program develops skills in the areas of communication, relationships, teams, process, culture, have been overwhelmingly positive, particularly from a culture change perspective. The company says, "Our leaders now have the right focus and skills on safety".

For further details on these and other good news stories of innovation, collaboration and life-long learning, visit the [Skills Tasmania](#) website.

Key Messages:

Innovation:

If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got. Fostering and supporting innovation and creative thinking will generate the change that is needed.

Collaboration:

The factors influencing the outcomes of Tasmania's education endeavour are complex, correlative and cultural: as such there is no silver bullet. To develop a solution a collaborative effort is needed involving all key stakeholders. Innovative ways of first engaging and then connecting business, educators and communities is critical to our future.

Equity:

Social determinants play a large and often negative role in Tasmanian educational outcomes. As such, we believe that all students should have available to them equitable pathways through our education system.

Successes:

Despite poor statistical outcomes of the Tasmanian educational system, there is no shortage of effort in trying to reverse the current trend. Hence, strategies needed to improve educational outcomes should build on these efforts making the overall community aware of the work being done and how they might positively influence it.

Lifelong Learning:

An important message from the Thinkbank process is the importance of lifelong learning. Setting a solid foundation in early education during the development of a child's vocabulary has ongoing effects throughout the child's life. However, addressing the cultural norms developed in Tasmania so a child feels supported to continue their education if they choose is a formidable challenge.

Ongoing Conversation:

Effective engagement, which allows the community beyond the school gate to participate in education, has emerged as a theme that proves to be critical in improving learning outcomes. Ongoing conversations within our communities about education and learning offer the potential to foster a shared understanding, a common purpose and a strong foundation for action.

"It takes a village to raise a child."

- African Proverb

Actions:

- Circulate the findings of the Thinkbank (this document) to the Tasmanian Leaders network, including all those who contributed to this Thinkbank, in recognition of their interest, influence and enthusiasm for driving positive change in Tasmania's educational system.
- Follow up with all Thinkbank participants in six months' time to assess the impact of the report and related activities.
- Develop a positive Tasmanian educational article monthly to be shared via the TLI distribution network.
- Identify key stakeholders in the Tasmanian education system and present them with the findings of the Thinkbank report.
- Explore ways TLP Alumni can support the Tasmanian educational system via Skillsbank (another Tasmanian Leaders community initiative which facilitates high level volunteering opportunities for TLP graduates).
- A component of the TLP is for participants to work in smaller groups to plan, implement, complete and evaluate a community project. We will encourage and support current TLP participants to actively seek projects that result in improved educational outcomes for Tasmanians.

Contributors

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Thinkbank participants would like to thank all the educators and business and community leaders who supported and assisted this process through sharing of ideas in interviews and conversations.

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