First: congratulations, new graduates and diplomates! Today we honour what you have achieved. We also honour those who have helped to make your achievements possible – especially family, friends and teachers. Well done!

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As teachers, your task is always to educate your students, not just to give them schooling. By ‘schooling’ I mean the functional apparatus of schools, textbooks, lesson plans, units of work, assessment. Education is more than that. It is what changes lives. Your job is changing lives.

The job of changing lives is not bounded by the walls of your classroom, or the fences of the school or TAFE institute. It is not limited to the lives of the students who pass through your classes. What your students learn in your classrooms has effects that cascade down through their lives and out into the lives of their families, their communities, and the society we all share. As a teacher, your influence is one among many that shapes the way we live together on the planet – how business is done, how democratic life will be conducted, how land and water are used, how entertainment of various kinds will be regarded, how sport is played, how conflicts are resolved, what people think and talk about, and what they stand up for. In these kinds of ways, education shapes not only individuals but also the societies we live in.

Education changes our shared fate on this planet, through the ways our own histories unfold, alongside the lives of others, and the collective life of our communities, our nation, our world. Each of us, as a teacher, makes a small contribution to changing the fate we all share – changing the way people live together in the world.

So: as a teacher, you must find times and ways to take your eyes off the details of the national curriculum, the official tests and assessments, the NAPLAN results, the My School data, the ways of teaching the experts recommend. Your educational job is always concerned with the lives of your students (not just their grades), and with the fates we share in our communities. Your most important task is to work out how best to work with your students, and how best to work to support and develop your community and our society. This task will sometimes bring you into conflict with the powers that be – when you value the lives of your students and their contribution to the lives and fate of their communities over what the curriculum suggests or the VET training package requires.

There is a day-to-day struggle between education and schooling. Teachers lead busy lives in which they confront a range of conflicting demands placed upon them – curriculum demands, assessment demands, employers’ demands, professional demands. As you stand in that class, it is all too easy to listen to the army of advisors and supervisors insistently murmuring their advice and expectations over your shoulder. Sometimes their murmur rises to a roar loud enough to drown out the voices of the students in front of you.
In your working life as teachers, then, you will often face – maybe you have already faced – a choice: a choice between doing what those supervisors and advisers expect, on the one hand, and, on the other, connecting with the students and communities for whom you have an educational responsibility. When you face that choice, I urge you to give priority to your educational responsibility to connect with them, to communicate with them, and to contribute to their lives, both individually and collectively. Do what must be done in the name of schooling, but do your very best for education.

Mark Twain, American humorist and author of *Huckleberry Finn*, is reputed to have said “Don’t let your son’s schooling interfere too much with his education.” As a teacher, don’t let the schooling of your students interfere too much with the task of educating them.

Education has been going on for millennia. It was going on long before we meet it in written sources, like the education of rich young aristocrats going on in Aristotle’s Lyceum in ancient Athens, for example, three hundred and fifty years before the birth of Christ.

Schooling as we know it today is much, much younger. I mean especially the multi-teacher, multi-classroom school which we find almost everywhere around the globe – except in remote areas where one-teacher schools are still to be found. The multi-teacher, multi-classroom school came into existence around 1730 in Scotland, and was widespread in Europe by about 1830. Since then it has spread like a cancer throughout the world. It solves the child care problem for workers in industrial and post-industrial societies.

But schooling also spread so quickly because it expressed a profound human hope – the hope for progress through education and enterprise, the hope for improved and more enlightened lives for individuals and communities, and the hope for better material conditions for everyone. Schooling embodies the hope for education, but it also challenges the realisation of that hope.

Especially since the rise of mass schooling in many parts of the world in the middle and late nineteenth centuries – after about 1850 – schools needed to be managed in increasingly detailed ways. Curricula were created and evolved into more and more detailed sets of specifications in an increasingly wide range of school subjects. Assessments were developed and multiplied across subjects and levels, and became increasingly standardised at the level of states and nations. Forms of teaching were also developed in more elaborate ways, and especially in terms of the increasing diversity of techniques for teaching in different subjects and at different levels. Schooling has become more specialised, more specified, and more standardised.

When I visit schools in Sweden or Canada or the USA or Argentina or Britain or Australia am I seeing different schools, or am I seeing the one basic model of schooling, played out with minor variations in diverse cultures and climates? I think it is the one school – or maybe two: the primary school and the high school.

And life in those schools is increasingly public. The classroom door may still swing closed, but the work that goes on there is more standardised and specified by detailed curricula, assessments and recommended teaching techniques. In Australia, following the practice in the United Kingdom, NAPLAN results have now become public across the nation. The work of schools is open to scrutiny in ways the work of medical doctors or lawyers or electricians or car mechanics will never be.

Politicians call this ‘transparency’ but its right name is ‘scrutiny.’ This scrutiny will make the teaching profession very cautious, and make some teachers much more timid.

Too much caution makes the task of education very difficult. It is all too easy to listen to all those supervisors murmuring over your shoulder and to stop listening to the students and communities in
front of you. But to do only what those supervisors and advisers say is to give up on education and settling for schooling.

I urge you not to give up on education. Hold fast to your educational mission. Continue to connect with, communicate with and contribute to the students in front of you and the communities they live in. You will find the human rewards of teaching in their lives and your contribution to them. Reach out to the students and the community first, where possible through the national curriculum, the state-wide assessments, and the increasingly elaborate requirements for accrediting new teachers.

As it has always been, the best rewards for teachers are to be found in the lives of your students and the lives of their communities. Those are the rewards I hope you will reap in a long career in education.

Thank you.

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**Stephen Kemmis**

Stephen Kemmis is Professor of Education at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, and a member of CSU’s Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education. He has worked in universities in Australia, the USA and the United Kingdom. He has been a visiting professor in universities in North America, South America, Europe and Asia as well as Australia.

He has published on topics including the nature and development of professional practice in education, educational action research, Education for Sustainability, education in disadvantaged schools, and Indigenous education.

In May, 2009, the University of Jyväskylä in Finland awarded him the honorary degree of Doctor of Education, and in September the University of Gothenburg in Sweden awarded him the honorary degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

He is committed to fostering forms of education that embrace the double task of helping people to live well, and to build a world worth living in.

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