

LETTERS

EDUCATION

Expert should go back to school

I read with interest Professor John Hattie's take on what works in education ("Just shut up and listen, expert tells teachers", June 10). As a teacher for more than 40 years in a wide variety of schools and finally in a correctional centre, I am amazed he "wouldn't spend a penny on ... smaller classes".

The average class size normally works well but it is important to downsize classes in disadvantaged areas. And I am not talking about a cut of one or two students which is usually the case in studies carried out by researchers. I am talking a ratio of one teacher to eight students where a teacher has time to spend on individuals whose parents don't value education or just don't care.

Deirdree Wallwork Beecroft

Professor Hattie's views on the educational merits of listening rather than talking would not have been news to my late father, a teacher.

When I was a schoolchild, from time to time I thought I would exploit this in-house resource to get my homework done a bit quicker. Yet whenever I sought the short-cut answer, I usually received a similar response: "What do you think?"

I would offer a tentative view on the subject, which was usually met with a sympathetic silence. Gradually, I would then fill the gaps in this one-way conversation with my speculation on the possibilities



Insurance policy ... opponents of climate action are ignoring the odds.

posed by the question. Invariably, I found myself presenting him with my best answers to my own questions. Unless these were completely outrageous, they received his implicit tick of approval.

In spite of what might have been considered his non-response the first time, I continued to approach him whenever I thought I had imponderable questions to answer, valuing the process and his patience and wisdom in educating me, in the literal (Latin) sense of the word.

Greg Walsh Randwick

So John Hattie has "spent his life studying the studies". If he pro-

gresses to studying actual students in their schools, he may appreciate the truism "Don't teach your gran to suck eggs". He may even realise that one of the reasons teachers have fought for so long for smaller class sizes is so they are more able to do as he suggests.

While it is easier to lecture a crowd, be it a large class or a conference audience, teachers prefer to know each student's needs, abilities and learning style - which is only possible in a smaller class. Sharing learning (rather than teaching as Hattie suggests) is the basis of the tremendous job satisfaction that sustains teachers through years of

The burning question: why take the risk?

Carbon price

The opposition is crowing that no country has a policy in place of the scale being proposed by Labor's carbon tax and therefore the Productivity Commission report is "proof" that Australia should not take on such strong legislation ("Abbott sticks to his line but misses crucial point", June 10).

The Opposition Leader claims that the policies studied from major countries such as the US, Japan, China, Britain and Germany are so insignificant that we should not bother doing more until they do. The logic does not sit well with me and here's why:

The first person who stopped smoking for health reasons and lived a longer, healthy life had only benefit from being the first.

The first person to be saved by a seatbelt in a car and lived a longer life had only benefit from being the first.

The first person to be saved

from financial ruin by taking out fire insurance had only benefit from that decision.

The first person to be saved from financial ruin by taking out flood insurance had only benefit from that decision.

And so it will be that the first person to be saved from environmental degradation, flooding, storm, drought, sea level rise will have only benefit from the decision to drastically cut emissions and avoid the risk of dangerous climate change.

There is, by all scientific measures, a 10 per cent risk that the current emissions will result in dangerous climate change. There is radically less than a 1 per cent risk that your house will burn to the ground in the next 12 months and yet you are extremely unlikely to say no to fire insurance.

Just imagine how much financial ruin is in the offing for allowing that 10 per cent risk to run unchecked.

Simeon Glasson Bondi Beach

trite advice and reiteration of the bleeding obvious.

Janet Sutherland Hillsborough

"Just shut up and listen, expert tells teachers" could so easily be inverted to, "Just shut up and listen, teachers tell experts." Here is this week's expert, John Hattie, telling teachers what we have known for decades. In 1990 at UNSW I was taught in teacher training the work of Paulo Freire, who wrote in 1970 that students should not be seen as empty vessels waiting to be filled by the font of knowledge at the front of the room.

The vast majority of teachers

understand that a student's prior experience and perspective are vital in education and do not simply lecture at them. Perhaps these academic education experts should teach a few eight-period days to remind them what a fantastic job teachers do every day rather than lecture them from the sidelines while ignoring their years of experience.

David Whitcombe Maroubra

I would pay money to watch Professor Hattie apply his education theories to a sweaty, pimply set of 14-year-olds whose hormones are in overdrive.

Carol le Roux Wamberal