

# Bijlage VWO

# 2023

tijdvak 1

**Engels**

Tekstboekje

**Ga verder op de volgende pagina.**

### Boris should look to the satirists



Sir, As far back as 1680, the great English poet John Dryden commented, "But 'tis the talent of our English nation, still to be plotting some new reformation".

Boris Johnson and the Brexiteers would do well to study their great literary heritage... particularly the satirists. Indeed, Dryden may have had some of their kind in mind when he wrote in *Absalom and Achitophel*: "Great wits are to madness near allied. And thin partitions do their bounds divide".

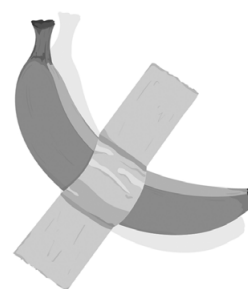
*Yours, etc,*  
**WILLIAM FLYNN**  
*Roscrea, Co Tipperary*

*The Irish Times, 2019*

Feedback:

### **This art is bananas**

- 1 Science and art are two separate cultures, said the novelist C.P. Snow, lamenting how few artists had ever heard of the laws of thermodynamics compared with how many scientists knew Shakespeare. He dreamed of a world where everybody took equal interest in both, which sounds great in principle, but terrible if you have standing tickets at London's Globe theatre for a 3-hour lecture on entropy. Things are marginally better today, if only because nobody in either culture has heard of C.P. Snow, and so this tiresome debate has quietly heat-deathed itself into oblivion.
- 2 A renewal of hostilities between the cultures recently caught Feedback's attention, however, and well and truly got our dander up. A few weeks ago, artist Maurizio Cattelan took the world by storm by taping a single banana to a wall at the Art Basel show in Miami Beach, Florida, and selling the resulting installation, called *Comedian*, for \$120,000. As art largely consists of communication by means other than speech, the resulting wall-to-banana-flavoured-wall coverage was undoubtedly a success.
- 3 To wit, the Twitter account of Imperial College London, an institution of higher learning devoted almost exclusively to science and engineering soon entered the debate. In a series of tweets 3, it posted pictures of bananas affixed to various on-campus surfaces with the message 'spot the art'.
- 4 Given that the original banana was able to defy the laws of gravity with the help of highly engineered material adhesives, we disagree with Imperial's assessment. If anything, the original work was science. Stick that in Magritte's pipe and smoke it.



adapted from *New Scientist*, 2020

### THE ETHICIST

**question from Jayn Line, Cincinnati,**

As a business owner, I sometimes take customers out to lunch. But as an ethical vegan, I don't want to subsidize the cruel meat and dairy industries. People seem to take my veganism as an affront to their lifestyle. Is there a way that I can, without losing customers, let them know I just can't underwrite killing animals?



**answer by Kwame Anthony Appiah**

First, let's consider a practical matter. The person picking up the tab ordinarily gets to choose the place to eat. If there are vegan restaurants in your area, you can take your customers there. 4-1

Second, let's consider the consequences of your lunch order. Your practice of eschewing animal products might have some impact on the number of animals that suffer, at least over the course of a lifetime, by reducing demand for those products. On the other hand, not paying for others to consume meat on a few occasions probably doesn't have any such effect. 4-2

Third, though, let's consider the nature of your commitments. You wonder that people take your veganism as "an affront to their lifestyle." Shouldn't they? Your guests would surely be right that you think they're in the wrong: It's what ethical veganism entails. Why aren't you interested in defending your veganism? No doubt you'll want to take into account the possibility that you'll lose business. But ethical veganism isn't a personal preference, and it isn't confined to a concern for your personal virtue; it aims to reduce harm to animals, even to challenge the idea that animals be treated as property. 4-3

adapted from *The New York Times Magazine*, 2019

### Style Guide

SIR — And I thought that The Economist followed its own "Style Guide". But Lexington set a new record for the number of sentences starting with conjunctions (November 7th). But only 12. And I suppose some people appreciate such puerile prose. But not I.

MARC RIESE

Berne, Switzerland

*The Economist, 2009*

### Does the Age of Your Doctor Matter?

#### 1 To the Editor:

I agree with Dr. Haider Javed Warraich ("For Doctors, Age May Be More Than a Number," by Sunday Review, Jan. 7): young doctors have many good qualities that have nothing to do with age, for better or worse, but when he writes that "nothing is more reassuring to patients than seeing a silver-haired doctor walk up to their bedside," I have to disagree.

To the contrary, seeing a silver-haired doctor walk up to my bedside could give me plenty of concern about his experience with modern techniques and recent medical research.

FIONA BAYLY, NEW YORK

#### 2 To the Editor:

Haider Javed Warraich correctly identifies the worst of old-school medical practice: arrogant doctors who rely on anecdotal experience. As a psychiatrist and a medical school clinical faculty member for 30 years, I have learned a lot from my students. They are dedicated to social justice, attentive to language and more aware of policy, ethics and social determinants of health.

What they struggle with, however, and what remains an area poorly addressed in their training is the more nuanced interpersonal domain. If tradition blinds older doctors, ideology can blind younger ones.

Holding impeccable values does not help them engage authentically, with honest, insightful emotional awareness. Needing to understand an individual patient requires more than machine-learning, big data, political correctness or treatment algorithms.

Psychological depth may be the real new frontier of sound medical care. It can also reduce error, burnout and patient dissatisfaction.

SARAH HARTLEY, OAKLAND, CALIF.



*New York Times, 2018*

### Weight loss celebs

- 1 On April Fools' Day, let us reflect quickly on this century's biggest prank, the celebrity weight loss DVD. It was just after Scarlett Moffatt (of *Gogglebox* and *I'm a Celebrity* fame) had signed a six-figure contract to star in her first DVD, that a friend told me about one of its conditions. Not only was Moffatt contractually obliged to lose the usual literal wheelbarrow of weight (she went from a size 18 to a size 8 in a matter of months), but for a year after the DVD's release she had to keep the 3 stone off and endure regular weigh-ins, or pay back the cash. Though I was well aware of the dark machinations of the weight loss industry, I wasn't prepared for the starkness of the paperwork.
- 2 The sticky story of Moffatt's DVD is rumbling through the tabloids at the moment as a friend's (inverted commas) text messages confirm that, rather than losing weight simply through the exercise routines on the tape, she visited a Swiss bootcamp where she was made to train for six hours a day, eating a maximum of 700 calories. After she was branded 'fake' over claims the DVD showed an "unrealistic portrayal of how she lost weight" (a jarring accusation for a person whose career is based on her honesty and her humanness), a personal trainer came forward revealing similar stories about Moffatt's fellow reality stars, *Geordie Shore*'s Vicky Pattison and *Towie*'s Lauren Goodger, explaining that it's standard protocol for him to move in with the reality star for the duration of the project, cooking their food as well as keeping them fit. Both Pattison and Goodger received a lot of money for their DVDs (Pattison is rumoured to have been paid £160,000), and both also visited a series of secret fitness bootcamps, starting starvation diets before filming. All have offered regrets. All have since put on weight.
- 3 I interviewed Goodger about body image in 2012, having counted 546 *Mail Online* headlines about her yo-yoing body. We sat in a corner of Max Clifford's office, and she told me how odd it felt when scrutiny of your weight becomes your career, talking quietly about anorexia in her family, and the conflict she felt when her little sister complimented her on her weight loss. Against more *Mail Online* headlines (detailing her liposuction) she then went on to release her bestselling DVD. "I tried everything for years to lose weight but nothing worked. Now this system has done it for me." It hadn't.




- 4 It's not so much the con of the thing that gets me — the customers investing in a fairytale of fitness, their relentless living room squats adding up to only a fraction of what they'd been promised — but the way these tiny scandals illuminate the terrible arc of the reality star. It begins with a person, like Moffatt, whose jolly transparency and way with a camp put-down resonates with an audience that appreciates their normalness — which includes, of course, their un-celebritied body. Their fame means they quickly grow out of the reality show that spawned them and graduate to *I'm a Celebrity* grade, get a cheery column in a weekly glossy, their own branded line of tanning milk. And then, when quietness threatens, inevitably, a weight loss DVD follows, a project with its own bookended narrative, its own terrible arc.
- 5 The tabloid's candid shots that come in September, following January's bestselling DVD release, of the star looking fat in leggings as she leaves a Costa carrying a very large latte, initially do nothing to undermine her story. In fact, they add texture to it, a handful more lovely struggles that help them appear more human, more like the jolly girl they were at the start of the series. But eventually there is no going back. The bus just goes in one direction. 10
- 6 It is a very modern downfall, so modern that it's mirrored in gentrification. It is mirrored in the way an unloved area of a growing city becomes popular due to its grit and liveliness, the way its affordable buildings home artists and immigrants, and people yet to be ground down by respectability or hate. And then, in time, the area being razed to the ground, its buildings no longer affordable, being rebuilt in glass, like ice sculptures commemorating what once stood there. The kernel of insolence, of creativity, real life, in hot oil, is quickly popped. It's popped for profit, if not just because this is what it's assumed people want.
- 7 Reality stars plan for eventual gentrification in their agents' offices, offices like Clifford's in which I met Lauren Goodger, who, used to endless interviews about losing weight, was thrown, in the end, by a question about 'why'. These women are both land and property developer in this grim exchange, selling off bits of themselves until that bidding auction becomes all that defines them. And then, with a scandal like Moffatt's, sold to *The Sun* with a friend's leaked texts, another chapter begins, and onwards the storyline unfolds towards its inevitably sad end.

*theguardian.com, 2018*

### Teaching 'grit' is bad for children, and bad for democracy

adapted from an article by Nicholas Tampio

- 1 According to the grit narrative, children in the United States are lazy, entitled and unprepared to compete in the global economy. Schools have contributed to the problem by neglecting socio-emotional skills. The solution, then, is for schools to impart the dispositions that enable American children to succeed in college and careers. According to this story, politicians, policymakers, corporate executives and parents agree that kids need more grit.
- 2 The person who has arguably done more than anyone else to elevate the concept of grit in academic conversations is Angela Duckworth, professor at the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania. In her new book, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, she explains the concept of grit and how people can cultivate it in themselves and others.
- 3 According to Duckworth, grit is the ability to overcome any obstacle in pursuit of a long-term project: 'To be gritty is to hold fast to an interesting and purposeful goal. To be gritty is to invest, day after week after year, in challenging practice. To be gritty is to fall down seven times and rise eight.' Duckworth names musicians, athletes, coaches, academics and business people who succeed because of grit. Her book will be 15 for policymakers who want schools to inculcate and measure grit. There is a time and place for grit. However, praising grit as such makes no sense because it can often lead to stupid or mean behaviour. Duckworth's book is filled with gritty people doing things that they perhaps shouldn't.
- 4 Take Martin Seligman, the founder of positive psychology and Duckworth's graduate school mentor. In a 1967 article, Seligman and his co-author describe a series of experiments on dogs. The first day, the dogs were placed in a harness and administered electrical shocks. One group could stop the shocks if they pressed their nose against a panel, and the other group could not. The next day, all of the dogs were placed in a shuttle box and again administered shocks that the dogs could stop by jumping over a barrier. Most of the dogs who could stop the shocks the first day jumped over the barrier, while most of the dogs who suffered inescapable shocks did not try, though a few did. Duckworth reflects upon this story and her own challenges in a college course in neurobiology. She

decides that she passed the course because she would 'be like the few dogs who, despite recent memories of uncontrollable pain, held fast to hope'. Duckworth would be like one of the dogs that got up and kept fighting.

- 5 At no point, however, does Duckworth express concern that many of the animals in Seligman's study died or became ill shortly thereafter. Duckworth acknowledges the possibility that there might be 'grit villains' but dismisses this concern because 'there are many more gritty heroes'. There is no reason to assume this, and it oversimplifies the moral universe to maintain that one has to be a 'grit villain' to thoughtlessly harm people.
- 6 A second grit paragon in Duckworth's book is Pete Carroll, the Super Bowl-winning coach of the Seattle Seahawks American football team. Carroll has created a culture of grit where assistant coaches chant: 'No whining. No complaining. No excuses.' She also commends Seahawk defensive back Earl Thomas for playing with 'marvellous intensity'. Duckworth has apparently not read any of the articles or seen any of the movies or television programmes detailing the long-term harm caused by playing professional football. President Barack Obama, among others, has said that he would not want a son, if he had one, to play football. Duckworth might have talked with football players who suffer from traumatic brain injuries.
- 7 Why don't these people ever stop to reflect on what they are doing? We should not celebrate the fact that 'paragons of grit don't swap compasses', as Duckworth puts it in her book. That might signal a moral failing on their part. The opposite of grit, often enough, is contemplating, wondering, asking questions, and refusing to push a boulder up a hill.
- 8 Right now, many Americans want the next generation to be gritty. 19, school districts in California are using modified versions of Duckworth's Grit Survey to hold schools and teachers accountable for how well children demonstrate 'self-management skills'. Duckworth herself opposes grading schools on grit because the measurement tools are unreliable. But that stance overlooks the larger problem of how a grit culture contributes to an authoritarian politics, one where leaders expect the masses to stay on task.
- 9 Democracy requires active citizens who reason for themselves and, often enough, challenge authority. Ordinary people who demand a say in how they are governed. Duckworth celebrates educational models that weed out people who don't obey orders. That is a disastrous model for education in a democracy. US schools ought to protect dreamers, inventors, rebels and entrepreneurs — not crush them in the name of grit.

*aeon.co, 2016*

### The Hipster effect

- 1 You've probably seen this effect — perhaps you are a victim of it. You feel alienated from mainstream culture and wish to make clear that you are not part of it. You think about wearing different clothes, experimenting with a new hairstyle, or even trying unconventional makeup and grooming products. And yet when you finally reveal your new look to the world, it turns out you are not alone — millions of others have made exactly the same choices. Indeed, you all look more or less identical, 22
- 2 This is the hipster effect — the counterintuitive phenomenon in which people who oppose mainstream culture all end up looking the same. Similar effects occur among investors and in other areas.
- 3 How does this kind of synchronization occur? Today we get some answers thanks to the work of Jonathan Touboul at Brandeis University in Massachusetts. Touboul is a mathematician who studies the way the transmission of information through society influences the behavior of people within it. He focuses in particular on a society composed of conformists who copy the majority and anti-conformists, or hipsters, who do the opposite. And his conclusion is that in a vast range of scenarios, the hipster population always undergoes a kind of phase transition in which members become synchronized with each other in opposing the mainstream. In other words, the hipster effect is the inevitable outcome of the behavior of large numbers of people.
- 4 Crucially, Touboul's model takes into account the time needed for each individual to detect changes in society and to react accordingly. This delay is important. People do not react instantly when a highly fashionable pair of shoes becomes available. Instead, the information spreads slowly via fashion websites, word of mouth, and so on. This propagation delay is different for individuals, some of whom may follow fashion blogs



religiously while others have no access to them and have to rely on word of mouth.

- 5 The question that Touboul investigates is under what circumstances hipsters become synchronized and how this varies as the propagation delay and the proportion of hipsters both change. He does this by creating a computer model that simulates how agents interact when some follow the majority and the rest oppose it. This simple model generates some fantastically complex behaviors. In general, Touboul says, the population of hipsters initially act randomly but then undergo a phase transition into a synchronized state. He finds that this happens for a wide range of parameters.
- 6 It can be objected that the synchronization stems from the simplicity of scenarios offering a binary choice. "For example, if a majority of individuals shave their beard, then most hipsters will want to grow a beard, and if this trend propagates to a majority of the population, it will lead to a new, synchronized, switch to shaving," says Touboul. It's easy to imagine a different outcome if there are more choices. If hipsters could grow a mustache, a square beard, or a goatee, for example, then perhaps this diversity of choice would prevent synchronization. But Touboul has found that when his model offers more than two choices, it still produces the synchronization effect.
- 7 Hipsters are an easy target for a bit of fun, but the results have much wider applicability. For example, they could be useful for understanding financial systems in which speculators attempt to make money by taking decisions that oppose the majority in a stock exchange. 27, there are many areas in which delays in the propagation of information play an important role. As Touboul puts it: "Beyond the choice of the best suit to wear this winter, this study may have important implications in understanding synchronization of nerve cells, investment strategies in finance, or emergent dynamics in social science."

adapted from *technologyreview.com*, 2019

### The future of diversity

adapted from an article by Andray Domise

#### Andray Domise



- 1 LAST SUMMER, a friend of mine, a personal trainer whose success on Instagram has landed him magazine coverage, stopped by a juice bar in a leafy midtown Toronto neighbourhood. An ardent vegan, he'd gone there before to sample its wide selection of cold-pressed, organic juices. When he stepped through the doors, though, the woman who worked there greeted him with "you are the delivery man from Uber Eats?" My friend doesn't believe she was intentional in her racism; he didn't take his story to social media or demand an apology from the shop's management. But he did mention his experience where he knew he would be understood: his Black social circles.
- 2 In our polarized times, openly sharing our own lived realities often triggers a backlash from those who would rather shout us into silence than listen. Wading into the grey areas of race and racism can easily harm us. And in the face of white people's profound desire not to be seen as they are, there is no future for a truly collective 'dialogue on race.' We have the dialogue within Black communities, and we often do with other communities of colour as well. But when it comes to white folks, 29
- 3 Consider recent instances when Black people in public positions have called out racism and have themselves become targets for condemnation, shifting focus away from the behaviour they've pointed out. After CTV host Marci Ien published an article in *The Globe and Mail* about her repeated traffic stops by Toronto police (a phenomenon sometimes known as 'driving while Black'), Staff Superintendent Mario Di Tommaso tweeted that Ien's race "was not visible" on a video of one of the stops. Several high-ranking current and former officers called Ien's credibility into question; one even brought up a 2005 interview in which she confessed

she "likes speed sometimes." This came from a group of public-service employees who've remained mostly quiet about a member of the force who allegedly beat a Black youth so severely his left eye needed to be removed and another who allegedly interfered with the investigation of that beating. It was odd to see them suddenly find a voice unanimous and strong enough to teach a Black woman a lesson on the propriety of publicly discussing institutional racism.

- 4 This is also a lesson that Conservative MP Maxime Bernier attempted to teach two Black MPs, after the 2018 federal budget was announced. Immigration minister Ahmed Hussen said the budget (which includes \$19 million in funding to support programs for Black youth) was historic for 'racialized Canadians,' to which Bernier replied, "I thought the ultimate goal of fighting discrimination was to create a colour-blind society.... What's the purpose of this awful jargon?" A Liberal parliamentary secretary, Celina Caesar-Chavannes, chimed in, circulating an article explaining the soft bigotry of the 'colour-blind' ideal, and further suggested Bernier check his privilege and "be quiet." Bernier rejected her subsequent apology for her tone and sent an email blast to supporters, saying that granting "different rights and privileges to different groups" would only serve to "balkanize society." Two prominent Black Canadians, who have had far more lived experience than Bernier with the ugly realities of racism, needed to be taught a public lesson.
- 5 It's in these quotidian events, when racialized people who speak up about racism will most often be punished for pointing it out while the original infraction goes unresolved, that the 'dialogue' on race with white people terminates. Because engaging in that conversation too often demands we believe that racism is present in a neo-Nazi rally but absent when a white member of Parliament lectures two Black members on the linguistics of race.
- 6 And it's why my friend didn't respond to the indignity of being treated as the help when he went to the juice bar but then told his Black friends about it. The risk of triggering white racial anxiety — the kind that's likely to see him punished for speaking up — can be hardly worth the effort. 34 white folks are prepared to sit in the uncomfortable awareness of their prejudices, nothing will change. The dialogue is happening, but its future cannot depend on those who aren't ready or willing to participate.

*thewalrus.ca, 2019*

*The following text is the beginning of Darke, a novel written by Rick Gekoski and first published in 2017.*

I wasn't sure of the right word. Builder? Odd-job man? Repairman? Or perhaps I needed to see a specialist? Carpenter? Joiner? Woodworker?

5 I looked at the keyboard intently, as if the letters could Ouija themselves up, and reveal the answer.

Handyman? I typed it into Google and added my postcode, hope congealing in my  
10 heart. Most builders, handy or otherwise, are incompetent, indolent and venal.

I will not pay unless the job is done perfectly, on time and within estimate. I do not provide endless cups of PG Tips with  
15 three sugars, ta, nor do I engage in talk, small or large. Preferably no visits to my WC, though a builder who does not pee is rare.

Tea makes pee. But if that is necessary, only in the downstairs cloakroom. Afterwards there will be piss under the loo.

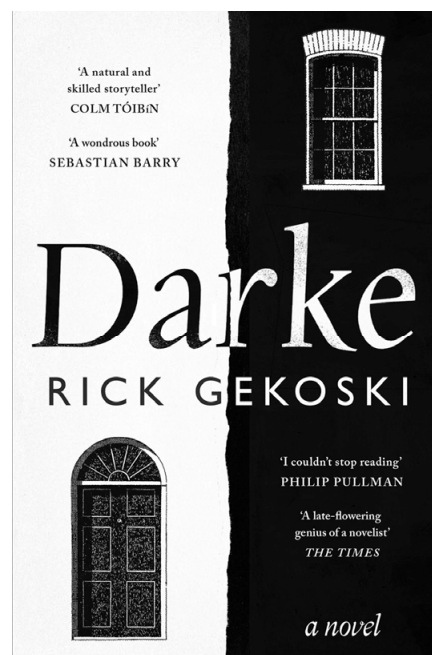
20 I also wanted one who is taciturn. I loathe the inane chatter of workmen hoping to ingratiate themselves while simultaneously padding their bills. A handyman who cannot talk? Bliss. Somebody should set up a company that supplies them. Tear out their tongues or sew up their lips, that'd do it.

25 I added taciturn to my search options, but unsurprisingly nothing turned up, though one chap described himself as 'tactile' which gave me the creeps. I tried various alternatives: Quiet? Nothing. Unobtrusive? Chance would be a fine thing. I eventually opted for Thoughtful, which provided two alternatives: one pictured in a string vest, who I suspect  
30 offers a variety of distinctly odd jobs, the other with a few recommendations affixed to his entry, which lauded reliable service.

Mr Cooper, he is called, but I did not ring him, as that would provide evidence that I can hear, whereas I intended to feign almost total deafness. I emailed him, enquiring if he might be available next week. He  
35 responded immediately, which is a bad sign: shouldn't he be out handy-manning his way around town?

Yes, he replied, he was free next Wednesday and Thursday. What can he do for me?

My requirements for Mr Cooper concern the entry to my house, which  
40 has a handsome Georgian door, which will need to be removed and 'amended' — I believe this might be the right term — in five ways:



- (1) Remove the brass letter box, then fill in the resultant hole, prep and paint in Farrow and Ball Pitch Black gloss. (There are a variety of blacks, some of them greatly preferable to others, and black is one of the few  
45 colours (or absence of colours) in which doors should properly be painted. One of our neighbours, a recently arrived Indian family, decorated theirs in a Hindu orange so offensive, so out of keeping with the tone of the rest of the street that a petition was discreetly and anonymously raised by 'Your Neighbours' (guilty as charged) asking him and his wife to  
50 reconsider. They did, and repainted it bright turquoise.)
- (2) Install a doorbell that rings once only, no matter how many times you press it, and which issues a melodious, inoffensive tone which can be heard clearly inside the house, but not outside the door.
- (3) Install a Dia16mm-x-200-Degree-Brass-Door-Viewer-Peephole-with-  
55 Cover-and-Glass-Lens, which I will provide.
- (4) Install a new keyhole and change lock.
- (5) Remove the brass door-knocker, and make good.

The jobs I have outlined will take a day and a half, according to Mr Cooper, 'unless something goes wrong', plus an extra visit to put on  
60 a second coat of gloss. Mr Cooper's hourly charge is £35, plus materials, which, when I compare it to others offering similar services (though without the extra thoughtfulness), is pretty much standard.

### Searching for answers

SIR – The fact that 'competition is only a click away' is the case in many businesses. People can switch seamlessly from Coke to Pepsi (competition is one wrist-twist away), from Nike to Reebok (competition is one step away) or from Delta to American (competition is, really, one click away). What matters is that, when it comes to Google, consumers actually do not make that click.

By Adrien Giraud

*The Economist, 2014*

"Who that benefits is of no interest to me" (Robert Jenrick says he regrets dining with donor before planning decision, 22 July). It is deeply depressing, though not in the least surprising, that a Conservative housing minister would see a decision whether money should go to a millionaire developer and Tory donor, or to one of the most deprived communities in the country, as 39. It speaks volumes of the ethos of the modern Conservative party and why they are unfit to govern.

**Jeremy Cushing**

Exeter

*theguardian.com, 2020*

*Lees eerst de opgave voordat je naar de tekst gaat.*

### Education in Australia: a race to the Finnish

LETTERS

Only two countries in the world, Chile and Belgium, spend as much government money on private schools as we do. Finnish professor Pasi Sahlberg of Harvard University and former Director-General of CIMO (Centre for International Mobility and Cooperation) at Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture has repeatedly explained Finland's success at going from one of the world's poorer performing countries to the Western world's best. He says they focused on the neediest schools and didn't worry about the best. And, they have no private funding of schools. This is almost exactly the opposite of what Australia does.

**Brenton White** Mosman

How refreshing to read William Doyle's article ("Why Finland has the best schools" March 26) where "Educators are the ultimate authorities on education, not bureaucrats, and not technology vendors". Doyle, a Fulbright scholar and university lecturer, says: "Finland has a history of producing the highest global test scores in the Western world ... including the most literate nation".

It's about time that our politicians stopped blaming young teachers who are "not up to scratch" for our falling standards. Like Finland we do have highly trained teachers with Master's degrees but they are not valued, financially or professionally.

Where is the funding for improved teacher qualifications, ongoing professional development, classroom support for special education needs and playground monitors? The rest of the world knows that you don't need a Master's degree to supervise the playground but it's helpful to be an effective teacher. The classrooms of the top performers according to your story "Marked Down: the education system that's failing us" (March 26) – Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong – differ greatly from our multicultural classes where we cater for individual differences without adequate support. Where is the research to explain what is needed to bring us up to the Finnish model?

**Anne Morrison** Paddington

Twelve paragraphs into the latest mawkish paean to Finland's education system, we finally reach the nub of the matter. In an aside, we are informed that class sizes in Finland are "manageable". In fact, class sizes in Finland are capped at far lower levels than that of most other developed countries, a crucial factor which is routinely ignored or downplayed in depictions of Finland as an educational paradise. Perhaps

the legions of education academics who airily dismiss the importance of class sizes, while making a fetish of the rest of the Finland "recipe", might take note.

**Michael Salter** Baulkham Hills

If teacher quality is really the main factor in raising educational standards, there is no mystery about what has happened to education in Australia. Starting in the 1980s, I noticed that I was increasingly teaching next to graduate teachers whose blackboard grammar, spelling and punctuation was downright embarrassing. Sometimes I used to pop next door and correct the worst errors during recess. The policy, beloved of both sides of politics, of recruiting teachers with low HSC results has come home to roost; many will be in the system for another 20 years. Until we value teaching and reward it commensurately we will continue to see standards stagnate or fall.

**Chris McGregor** Cabarita

Quentin Dempster's excellent summary of just how bad our vocational education system has become made for chilling reading. His mention of the difficulties (and disinclination) among private providers to "fail" students who have just paid many thousands of dollars for their certification was particularly alarming, but VET<sup>1)</sup> assessment methods have even deeper flaws that were there before the rise of the private provider sector.

By the mid '90s all vocational courses, TAFE<sup>2)</sup> and private, had abolished marks, percentages and grades (eg, pass, credit, distinction) in favour of an ideologically based and government imposed "competence" assessment system. Students were classified as "competent" or "not yet competent" (attitudes ceased to be assessed). If "not yet competent" they could resit the tests repeatedly until they satisfied the criteria for competence. The method allowed teachers who were reluctant to fail students ample opportunity to "coach to competence". It also turned employers' selection of apprentices into a raffle due to the lack of any qualitative information on a trainee's level of performance. It's more than funding that needs fixing.

**Peter Russell** Coogee

*The Sydney Morning Herald, 2016*

noot 1 Vocational Education and Training

noot 2 Technical and Further Education