

2020 Premier’s First State Super Financial Literacy and Capability Scholarship

Providing a real-world context for the teaching of financial literacy and entrepreneurship

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# Introduction

It has been widely reported that young Australians have low financial literacy, leading to increased efforts to improve these levels. Despite significant investments by the Australian Government and the finance industry since the 2008 global financial crisis, 15-year-olds still report that their access to financial education at school varies (Thomson et al., 2020). Whilst financial literacy has been included in the Australian Curriculum there are calls for there to be better support of secondary school teachers to deliver finance-related curriculum and do this in an engaging and relevant way.

Research has shown that secondary students want finance-related lessons that connect with their present and are useful to their future. In turn, teachers want to be shown how to design and implement better programs and lessons that provide context and relevance. By applying knowledge and skills to solve real problems and engaging in meaningful experiences both in the classroom and beyond, students can demonstrate mastery in new ways, translate their learning to real life, and feel more prepared for the future.

There is valuable expertise that exists within key organisations, networks, schools, and universities within the education sector as well as industry that can provide support to teachers in bringing these opportunities to life. One emerging way that schools are approaching this practice of applied teaching of financial concepts and increasing student engagement is through entrepreneurial programs, often in partnership with external providers.

Developing an entrepreneurial mindset and innovative skills is increasingly vital for young people and formalising education around this by building activities into curriculum and upskilling teachers in embedding these practices into the classroom is important in moving forward.

Building teachers’ capabilities to deliver financial literacy and entrepreneurial pedagogy in the classroom, through professional development, and resource/program support, will only further develop opportunities for students and in turn, improve student outcomes.

# Focus of Study

With the above sentiments in mind, the focus of this study was to;

1. Identify key players/external providers of financial literacy and entrepreneurial education programs within Australia and examine how they work to support secondary schools.

2. Discuss the opportunities for educators to provide a real-world context for the teaching of financial literacy and entrepreneurial education

3. Provide an insight into the benefits of embedding effective financial literacy and entrepreneurial education

# Significant Learning

My research involved meeting and consulting with a large range of educators, academics, not-for-profit and for-purpose business founders and leaders, many of which work in partnership to deliver improved student outcomes within the financial and entrepreneurial education space.

### Using games, simulations and stories to teach financial literacy

There are a large number of opportunities to engage students with financial concepts within the Australian Curriculum v9, most notably in the Economics and Business Course and especially within the current NSW 7-10 Commerce and Stage 6 Business Studies syllabus. A popular approach used by educators in these subject areas is to implement game or simulation-based initiatives, challenges and storytelling to enhance the learning experience, often with the support of external providers.

According to the Financial Literacy of Young Australians report (2022), business students are typically far more informed than other students especially in relation to shares, insurance and superannuation, most likely due to the nature of the subject. They are also found to be more engaged when it comes to extra-curricular programs. For example, in their study, both urban and regional students referred to learning about shares through the ASX share market game. This popular game, often incorporated by educators when teaching the concept of Investing in Commerce, gives students an opportunity to learn about the share market and how it works. Students are given $50,000 in virtual cash to buy and sell shares in 300+ companies listed on ASX using live prices in simulating real share market conditions.

Some of the teachers I spoke with had successfully engaged with The Financial Basics Foundation (FBF) Suncorp Bank interactive ESSI Money game. FBF is a national financial literacy charity and its game supports students to explore the concepts of earning, saving, spending, and investing through a virtual world. Students achieve an understanding of how decisions made over a period can have both positive and negative impacts on their financial situation. The benefit of the game is that it allows students to practice real-life financial transactions and experience the consequences in a safe and challenging way. FBF also provides independent financial education resources including detailed teaching notes, learning outcomes and student activities, mapped to the Australian Curriculum.

The cessation of the school banking programs in 2021 has been supported in NSW by the development of the Treasurer’s Financial Literacy Challenge, with a focus on making informed decisions, setting goals, and managing money. A suite of activities for K-10 students were launched in Term 2, 2022 which included the real costs of cars and the real cost of pets. Both teachers and students reported in post-activity surveys that real-world applications of money are the most engaging ways to learn financial literacy, which supports much of the literature referred to in this report. Exposure to the challenge activities improved students’ understanding of money and how to manage their finances, such as planning a budget. Whilst two-thirds of participants so far are from primary schools, there is a real opportunity for Stage 4 Commerce teachers and students to engage with the offerings. Educators are currently using the resources predominantly as an in-class task to support their curriculum and are reporting that relatable, real-world examples of using money have had the most value to their students, expressing an interest too in utilising quick and easy-to-use resources that require very little preparation. The Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC) has partnered with the NSW Department of Education to provide financial subject matter expertise to inform resource development for this program. The student-facing interactive content was sourced in part from ASIC’s “Moneysmart” resource repository. The Moneysmart resources are well-known and widely used by teachers. It should be noted that ASIC has recently released a new suite of financial capability teacher lesson plans, which include calculating compound interest, different ways to pay, cost of cars, and how to spot a scam.

Several other studies have indicated that students want to learn about tax, especially how to undertake the process of paying for tax. Another opportunity to stimulate student engagement is through the Australian Tax Office (ATO) Tax Super and You website. It provides a plethora of real-world resources to help teens understand the ins and outs of tax, superannuation and managing their finances. The animated and interactive resources such as videos, engaging digital interactives, calculators and quizzes are designed to appeal to students and the site also includes tools such as templates, ready-made lesson plans and advice to teachers, all aligned to the Australian Curriculum and even the NSW Commerce syllabus. Students also are encouraged to make a creative project as part of the annual Tax, Super and You Competition and with a large uptake across schools, it supports the notion that challenges/competitions are a go to for teachers.

Another interesting insight from FBB’s research was that students who could recall financial concepts would often be recalling an experience when talking about it, indicating that stories may be effective in communicating financial concepts. During my study tour, I too observed this during the Ecstra’s Talk Money workshops. This free education campaign provides facilitator led workshops in financial literacy, in class or online for Years 5-10. The programs are evidence-based, curriculum-aligned and designed to help Australian school students learn money lessons for life, be confident talking about money and to make informed financial decisions. During the delivery of Workshop ‘Making Money Work’ the facilitator frequently used personal anecdotes and storytelling to spark the interest and discussion in the classroom. Students who had parents running a small business had more detailed knowledge about money and were willing to share their experiences. Students who were working often had an advantage over students who weren’t during the discussions, in that they were more familiar with receiving and managing money regularly. They were able to provide further insight when discussing payslips, taxation, and superannuation.

It was noted during my research that programs that involved guest speakers with expertise in finance were well received as they too rely on storytelling as a hook for student engagement. Students participating in the University of Newcastle’s Greater Finance Academy program, for instance, were most engaged with the content when hearing from the bank representative’s examples in relation to credit ratings and when the University ambassadors drew upon their own experiences as a young-person managing their own personal finances. They enjoyed the activities that were most relatable and realistic to their own context. Melbourne University has a similar program called Street Finance that involves finance students visiting secondary schools in Melbourne for the purpose of delivering three lessons on finance topics of interest and relevance to young people.

This brings me to my final point observation for this section, and one that is supported by other researchers; it is important to match the learning activities with what the students are experiencing and to use real-life scenarios such as mobile phone plans, overspending on food or managing savings goals such as cars or schoolies. Buy now, pay later products, rising interest rates and more responsible money management in the face of increased cost of living are focal points for young people too. Having age-appropriate and relevant activities will help students engage.

### Bridging the gap between school and work

Providing young people with mentorship and opportunities to apply financial understanding to future work can also be beneficial. The Australian Business and Community Network (ABCN) is a not-for-profit organisation that works with over 250 priority-funded public schools from low socio-economic communities and 40 leading businesses to deliver face-to-face and digital programs. They bring businesses and schools together to address educational disadvantage by connecting volunteers from their member companies with students to provide fun, workplace-based mentoring programs. The aim is to develop students’ confidence, skills, and aspirations vital for thriving in the workplace of the future. They provide key opportunities for students to engage with financial content and improve their financial capability, most notably through their ‘Goals’ and ‘Aspirations’ programs.

The Startup @ Schools Programs, offered by both the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and the University of Newcastle (UON) provide students with the opportunity to consider self-employment as a feasible option post-school. They provide short presentations to school groups, introducing entrepreneurship through talks by local start-up founders who give an insight into the life of an entrepreneur.

### E**ntrepreneurial schools in action**

A large number of schools across the country are doing great things in relation to entrepreneurial learning where students learn critical problem-solving and other transferable skills that can support them in both employment and later in life. There are too many to highlight here, however, those that are successfully engaging with entrepreneurial education are well-resourced, entrepreneurship skills are valued, and initiatives are embraced by school leadership.

The Entrepreneurial Learning Strategy from the South Australian Department of Education has aimed to encourage entrepreneurialism in high schools within the public system. The South Australian framework included five selected specialist entrepreneurial schools working within their alliances to help all other schools add value to their entrepreneurial learning (ELS SA 2018), providing networking, and offering new entrepreneurial-focused subjects. Each of these five schools received funding to recruit dedicated staff, build specialty spaces, and run professional development for their teachers to increase capacity. There has been a commitment from each of the schools to connect with industry and business and share developed resources and expertise with other schools across the state.

Through my discussions with Tom Griffith and Principal Richard Abell from Seaton High School and Luke Northcote from Heathfield High School, two Entrepreneurial Specialist Schools, I was impressed by their refreshing approaches to embedding authentic, student-centred learning. Both schools have become hubs for entrepreneurial learning where students enjoy richer experiences, tailored learning pathways and a more world-relevant curriculum. They are focused on embedding career education with the integration of industry within the curriculum design process. Their diverse range of SACE packages has enabled students to identify local challenges, engage with experts, explore innovative ways of thinking and problem-solving, finding new ways to test and demonstrate their learned skills and knowledge. Overall, both schools have experienced increased levels of engagement and wellbeing because of their innovative approach to curriculum.

One of the main takeaways from my research into entrepreneurial education in secondary schools is the importance of collaboration. The E3 National Conference is a good example of this. It was delivered in partnership between Seaton High School, Heathfield High School, and Young Change Agents to bring together educators from across Australia to share practice and strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem with a vision for the future. The recent release of the ‘Entrepreneurial Education Exchange's whitepaper: Let's codesign this: a collective vision for entrepreneurial education in Australia’ (2023) is the outcome of the conference and provides examples of how collectively we can introduce and embed entrepreneurial education for all Australian children to access.

At Haileybury College, Victoria, according to the Head of School, Derek Scott, “entrepreneurship is part of the school’s DNA”. Innovation is encouraged through entrepreneurial programs across the Middle and Senior schools and led by Head of Entrepreneurship and Learning Partnerships, Damien Meunier. In Years 5 to 7, across four campuses, students take part in The Young Change Agent’s popular $20 Boss Program.

In Year 9 the program is aligned with the school’s pillars of Enterprise and Entrepreneurship and Social Justice. I had the privilege of attending the 2023 Year 9 Haileybury Incubator Project ‘HIP fo Good’ (HIP) Day at Kingston City Hall, Melbourne, where students were inspired to develop their own social enterprises through listening to guest speakers and undertaking a series of workshops exploring Global Challenges, Indigenous Understandings, Diversity, Artificial Intelligence, Inclusivity, and Sustainability and the Environment. HIP23 empowered students to action change in their focused area of social justice, drawing on individual passions. Guest keynote speaker, Daniel Flynn from Thankyou was the highlight for most with his inspiring messages about purpose, persistence and resilience. In Years 10 and 11, the Haileybury Enterprise Academy sees the school partner with HEX, which supports early-stage business founders with a start-up business idea, in a select-entry program for students who’ve displayed an affinity for entrepreneurial thinking.

I had the pleasure of meeting with the co-founders of Ed-Tech, HEX, Jeanette Cheah and Chris Hoffmann who spoke passionately about their offerings such as virtual internships, challenges, and cohort-based programs. After working in the higher education sector since 2017, HEX has not only transitioned their immersive, transformational programs to a highly engaging digital program, but they have also created it to work in high schools. HEX Ed is the new digital platform and content can be modularised and plugged into the curriculum to ensure learning is relevant, dynamic, and impactful. Students can get ahead with potential university credits attached to HEX programs as essentially, they will attain 4-mini degrees throughout their high school journey, from Innovation, Money, Tech & Future units. The program offers ‘real-world’ context and is facilitated by role models who are industry mentors, start-up founders, technologists, and social impact leaders.

### **Supporting teachers to incorporate financial literacy and entrepreneurial education**

According to Deakin University’s Research Report ‘Economics + Maths = Financial Capability (2022), students struggle to identify a reason to learn about finance because teachers often lack the knowledge and confidence to present it to them in an authentic way. Recommendations from this report included a focus on ensuring that teacher professional learning and resource development is current and ongoing to reflect the dynamically changing financial landscape. The Economics + Maths = Financial Capability course delivered in 2021/22 was a unique professional learning opportunity designed to help teachers make connections between economic and mathematical content and concepts with contemporary financial contexts. However, outside of this offering, there are currently limited teacher professional learning options for teachers to help lift financial capability.

Entrepreneurial education is also not sufficiently prioritised in the training of teachers or within the curriculum. There are also some barriers for educators to connect to industry to assist in providing real-world application including, time, workload, an already crowded curriculum and a lack of understanding of how to connect and maintain ongoing relationships with industry partners. There are, however, an array of opportunities for educators seeking professional development or support in the space, especially with the flux of emerging external providers.

Young Change Agents (YCA) provide teacher capacity and support through their offerings. YCA actively values entrepreneurial education by developing and managing technology platforms to empower educators to embed entrepreneurial education in their schools. Along with delivering in-school programs that help build an entrepreneurial mindset, modelling best practice, they provide a range of social enterprise and design thinking challenges, such as the recently run, Financial Design Challenge. The free-to-access $20 Boss program (for schools with an ICSEA score below 1,100) is a popular choice for educators, especially those wanting to support students to learn to solve a real problem as well as help them better understand their relationship with money. A toolkit of resources, a community of practice and specific professional development opportunities are provided to educators involved.

For NSW public school teachers there is the newly introduced Teacher’s Innovation Challenge which aims to foster innovation through a game-like approach and assist teachers to improve student outcomes and reveal their entrepreneurial mindset. Teachers who successfully applied will be expected to generate ideas for creating new or improving teaching pedagogy and student experience. Participating teachers are expected to engage in the MyPL iEntrepreneur e-learning modules that have been developed by a team of NSW teachers (including myself), project a plan to deliver the resource to the teacher’s school community and implement an innovative project. This initiative once again highlights the importance of sharing expertise and building teacher capacity.

Future Anything and BOP Industries are also advocates for student voice and student-centred learning. Both are located in Queensland and provide fully resourced, and curriculum-aligned programs that support educators to use entrepreneurship as a vehicle to empower young people.

When speaking to Future Anything founder, Nicole Dyson, it was obvious that she knows schools and what they need. Future Anything is different to some of the other external providers in the space as they are educator founded and all the team are educators. They work alongside teachers to develop their understanding of why entrepreneurial education is important and provide a practical framework that supports the ‘how’ of delivering entrepreneurial pedagogy in the classroom. They provide three flagship professional learning programs for teachers, however, are also known for their engaging student workshops, most notably, Activate, which helps build student capacity, is contextualised, and is focused on taking student ideas out of the classroom and into the real world.

BOP Industries, founded by Scott Millar, has a focus on delivering future-focused learning experiences through school incursions including incubator workshops and challenges, professional development and curriculum design support. According to their Program Manager, Maddie Panther, BOP are able to authentically deliver real and relevant learning as they are a team of Gen Zs who can verbalise their understanding of the real-world that students can relate to. They too have a focus on user-centred design and bespoke programming, tailoring to the needs of each school and its context. Their Young Entrepreneurs Hub, hosted by the WeWork Co-Working Space in Brisbane during school holidays, is particularly popular as it is designed to help school students build, launch, and grow their own small businesses while they’re still in school.

The Wade Institute, situated at the beautiful Ormond College at the University of Melbourne, delivers programs designed to accelerate entrepreneurial learning. Andrew Middleton, The Wade Institute’s Program Director, explained that most notably for teachers who are already experimenting in the space, their UpSchool program provides opportunities for educators to develop the skills, experience, and confidence to embed entrepreneurial practices in their classrooms. This is done through an immersive 3-day program where educators experience, as a student, the methods and processes involved in building a sustainable business, before jumping back into the shoes of a teacher to gain actionable implementation strategies for incorporating thinking and practices into their own curriculum.

# Conclusion

There are concerns from education professionals and teachers that the current approach to financial education at school is failing to prepare young people for an increasingly complex and digitalised financial world. Providing context for students when communicating financial concepts, especially using real-life scenarios can often engage students with content that can sometimes be perceived as a hard sell.

The development of student-facing, interactive resources that engage with financial literacy topics is well received by teachers and is seen as a means to save time. The provision of game-style challenges and simulations are popular and a starting point for making learning ‘real’ for students, however, are only successful in achieving a deep understanding of financial concepts when supported with resources and curriculum-aligned programs to assist teachers in facilitating their implementation and increase the likelihood of future exploration. The use of storytelling to provide contemporary financial contexts for students is beneficial. Real-world problems require real-world solutions, led by people who have lived experience of these solutions. This highlights the power of tapping into external expertise to further engage students when teaching financial and economic concepts.

Using the plethora of offerings from government, universities, not-for-profit and education providers mentioned in this report – as well as building strong connections with industry – will support educators in bridging the gap for students between school and work. Students are faced with many uncertainties, especially in relation to the future of work. What we do know is “63% of all jobs will be enterprise skill intensive by 2030” (Deloitte Access Economics, Soft skills for Business 2017). Research from the Foundation of Young Australians (2017) tells us that youth who develop enterprising skills – such as critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, collaboration, cross-cultural competency, global citizenship, and communication – are 17 months ahead of their peers. There are therefore many benefits to embedding entrepreneurial thinking and practices in the classroom, most critically, increasing a student’s financial literacy, helping them to strive in the future workforce and setting them up for success.

For this new approach to education to be successful, teachers must be supported and developed to help determine when and how to deploy high-quality applied learning tools and build the necessary skills in their students. Ongoing, purposeful professional development is essential to build capacity for teachers to implement innovative, student-centred programs that teach essential financial and enterprising skills in a crowded curriculum.

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