

Education Reporting in Australia

Greg Ashman recommends four education reporters to follow.

We all know that education reporting is often quite poor. Straightened media outlets have ditched their dedicated education sections and reports often read as little more than the press release that prompted them. At worst, we read a breathless account of how Arcadia High School has introduced Cyborgs into History lessons and why everyone thinks this is marvellous.

However, there are signs of change in Australia. The Sydney Morning Herald has decided to devote a [page](#) to education every Monday. And I perceive the increasing clout of some great journalists who do investigative work and ask the difficult questions that the press releases don't address. Here are four to follow (in no particular order):

1. Rebecca Urban, The Australian (@RurbsOz)

Urban has recently been looking into the links between the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and wacky American 21st century skills guru, Charles Fadel, prompting the federal education minister, Dan Tehan, into a [response](#). Urban has also worked hard to unpack the related issues with the recent Gonski 2.0 review.

The Australian is paywalled, making access to Urban's articles tricky. I have no objection to newspapers seeking payment for their journalism but I do

think the option of paying per article (e.g. \$1.00) should be available, particularly as many teachers will only be interested in reading the education stories.

2. Henrietta Cook, The Age (@henriettacook)

Cook's journalism is strong in two key elements. She is critical, challenging rather than simply accepting established positions, and she brings debates from within the education community to the general public in a way that parents and other non-specialists can understand. Her piece (and the one that prompted me to write this article) published on September 29, 2018 titled, [Dull, predictable: The problem with books for prep students](#), is an excellent exploration of the issue of decodable versus predictable early readers. It might sound dry, but by personalising the issue, Cook manages to convey its importance.

3. Jordan Baker, The Sydney Morning Herald (@JordsBaker)

Baker is from the same Fairfax stable as Cook and has a similar style. In her article, [Hard facts v soft skills: a new front in the education wars](#) published on September 1, 2018, Baker gives a good airing to the sceptical view of 21st century skills, something that is rare outside of Urban and The Australian. It was especially important, in my opinion, for the views of Alan Finkel, Australia's Chief Scientist, to be given space. 21st century skills have been given a big push from the Gonski 2.0 review and so it is critical for the public to know what is at stake.

4. Natasha Robinson, The ABC (@NC_Robinson)

Robinson is highly visible in the education community, having recently chaired the excellent [phonics debate](#) put together by the Australian College of Educators and the Centre for Independent Studies.

Robinson is also the go-to person on the continuing saga of [school funding](#). Funding is not my area of expertise but it is important and Robinson does a good job of explaining the issues.



This is an edited version of a piece that was originally published on September 29, 2018 on Greg Ashman's blog [Filling the Pail](#), which can be found at <https://gregashman.wordpress.com>. The original, with links to the articles referred to, can be found there and is highly recommended.

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