



Forget the idea of getting out of teaching. For most teachers who pursue a professional life beyond the classroom, it's more a matter of what they get out of teaching that counts. As classroom practitioners, curriculum planners, social workers and organisational managers, it's fair to say that all teachers are likely to have more than one string to their bow. STEVE HOLDEN looks at five educators who have discovered the dynamic benefits of a professional life in and beyond the classroom.

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Two strings to their bow

Teachers really deserve medals, says Ralph Pirozzo, an education consultant and past teacher of Science and Gifted and Talented programs. 'Regardless of the difficulties,' he says, 'teachers underestimate their skills: planning, developing materials from a syllabus, and so on. Teaching is an art. Switching kids on is a very difficult art. Teachers have incredibly sophisticated skills.'

Pirozzo's progression to educational consultancy has been, he says, an energising experience that continues to drive him. 'I felt compelled to devote myself to helping teachers so that they can engage every child. You couldn't do what I do unless you have an unbelievable drive to turn our classrooms into the most challenging and nurturing environments.' The decision to devote himself to educational consultancy, and the loss of that fortnightly paypacket, was, he says, one of the best things he's ever done.

His workshops, 'Improving your children's learning outcomes,' explore how teachers can provide for the thinking skills and learning styles of their students. He looks at a forty-two-grid matrix which integrates Bloom's Taxonomy and Multiple Intelligences. He also works on ways of engaging and challenging students through various learning & teaching strategies including Mind Maps, Concept Maps, Learning Contracts, SWOT Analysis, X & Y Charts and Venn Diagrams. 'The approach,' he says, 'is to look at how we can motivate our children to think "outside" the box, to create new ideas and to have fun whilst learning by carrying out a number of hands-on activities.'

A consultant since 1997, Pirozzo is an educator on a fast burn whose impact in schools has been powerful. 'To say that this was one of the most practical workshops that I've attended in nearly twenty years of teaching would be no understatement,' says Ian Christie, Quality Schools Coordinator at Maryborough State High School, Queensland. The challenging and extending approach used by Pirozzo, say participants, is 'exciting and energising.' 'I have a practical understanding of the learner, the practical experience of what children need,' Pirozzo says. 'But my job now is to engage teachers. We're dealing with a population of older teachers in Australia, so what I'm looking for is to drive my bargain from the most practical point of view.' That means combining a theoretical body of knowledge with demonstrated practical applications that not only engage teachers, but also offer them a structured approach. 'I want every teacher to leave a workshop with ideas to use in their next lesson. I understand that teachers are extremely practical people. My role is to take the huge body of theoretical and research material and make it practical so that teachers are able to hook every child, to provide a menu that's so rich and deep that they have many possibilities to engage all their children. The challenge for us, as teachers,' he says, 'is to be engaging. If I don't see a passion in myself, my children won't see it either, and they'll switch off' and Pirozzo is nothing if not switched on.