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The Courier Mail **'Outsider'** **teachers** **worth a try**

IT would be tempting to conclude that the Education Revolution, with too few internet-ready computers in schools and appalling NAPLAN test scores, has already stalled in Queensland. Parents here, as elsewhere, have been especially concerned by huge disparities in school performances, as revealed on the My School website, and by outbreaks of extreme schoolyard violence that culminated last week in the terrible death of 12-year-old Elliott Fletcher. Parents are right to feel a major overhaul of the Queensland school system is well overdue.

It's a reality Premier Anna Bligh acknowledged in late 2008 when she commissioned the Masters Review – a report spawning five key recommendations, all supported by the Government, on how to reverse what appears to be an inexorable decline in classroom standards.

Yet one idea not canvassed by Professor Masters is unfortunately set to divide the education community even before it is trialled. The "Teach For Australia" program, already under way in Victoria, is designed to bring fresh minds from outside the traditional pedagogical box to our troubled secondary classrooms. Based on the "Teach For America" program begun by Wendy Kopp in the United States in 1990, the idea is to bring new graduates and

established professionals from diverse vocational backgrounds into disadvantaged schools. Those with qualifications in science and mathematics will be especially welcomed to fill chronic shortages in these subject areas.

But some stakeholders are prematurely crying foul, with teacher unions describing the idea as "disrespectful to teachers" and little better than a "Band-Aid solution". It's true that new teaching recruits might find themselves in front of a high school class after as little as six weeks' pedagogical training. But to label these teachers "six-week wonders" is misleading; candidates will pursue two more years' part-time study before full teaching accreditation is granted. That said, parents and teacher unions are entitled to seek assurances that any beginning teacher, no matter how successful in their original field, is competently equipped not just in conceptual content but in managing classroom behaviour, too. Concerns over the issues of comparable pay and open career paths for these teachers must also be addressed.

But with these concerns acknowledged, the program should be at least considered as a way to meet two urgent needs. Apart from dire shortages in discipline-specific areas, there appears a chronic lack of self-motivation, no desire to learn and antisocial behaviour among secondary students in the state's most economically disadvantaged regions. It's an age-old problem with no long-term solution yet found. If for no other reason, this program should be tested so that successful young Australians might serve as role models for those who are yet to learn that education can be a ticket to a better way of life. And yet we need to keep an open mind. It's unlikely the "Teach For Australia" program will prove a magic bullet for all our schools' ills, but the idea should nonetheless be seen as assisting established teachers do a very difficult job, and not as a threat to the noble profession itself.