



DEAR DR HARTMAN

Fruit Salad and Muesli

Hello patients,
Let's spare a thought this month for the teachers of Australia. They are in a shocking state of psycho-sexual collapse and they are absolutely obsessed about their level of pay. And, quite frankly, when it comes to status they're in quite a bit of trouble.

If you believed everything you read in the newspapers about teachers' status, then teachers would be rated slightly below used-car salesmen and cockroaches. However, one of my teacher patients is always pointing out that the media reports can be quite contradictory. On the one hand, teachers are responsible for the decline of Western civilisation as we know it, but on the other hand the role of teachers has got bigger and bigger.

Teachers these days are expected to teach kids all about sex; to prevent Aids; to stop juvenile crime; to report child abuse; to promote a multicultural society; and to mop up after the breakdown of the family. They are ex-

pected to do all this, and still find time for that most important job of all—making sure that all the papers are picked up in the playground after lunch. And they've got to do all this with no chalk, precious few text books and no paper for the photocopying machine!

While we're on the topic of photocopyers, I understand that the last time someone put toner in a school photocopier was in 1973—just after Whitlam got in.

Quite simply, teaching is a pressured job! Is it any wonder that some teachers snap, and start hoarding resources for their own personal use? Take chalk, for example. You see teachers hiding it up the back of their desks. Then they start to hide it upon their person, like drug smugglers.

I had a teacher lassie in clinic the other day, who had become so anxious about having enough chalk for her lessons, that she'd started putting pieces of chalk into little bags and strapping them under her clothes around her waist, like a money belt on a nervous traveller. When she started concealing it in various body cavities, the principal brought her to one of my clinics.

But it's the teachers who work in disadvantaged schools that I really worry about. These are schools where most of the students are miserably poor and come from a fruit salad of cultures.

I had a teacher from one of these schools come into clinic the other day who had completely lost the plot. She told me how she was completely dedicated to the efforts over the years to improve the education of the students. She planted trees in her concrete jungle of a playground and cooked breakfast for her stu-

dents before school. Somehow eating muesli and drinking milk was going to help them win in the race of life.

She tried desperately to be "relevant and meaningful". Every second day there was an excursion. Every book she used was written by the students themselves (which was interesting because they couldn't read). And every weekend in winter she took all the Koori kids skiing.

By the late 80s my patient teacher was beginning to show signs of stress. When Canberra sent down the word 'empowerment' she began to dry retch during the morning break. Somehow 'empowerment' always sounded a little too American and she didn't really know what it meant. She was frankly glad to see it go.

And now in the 90s it's 'equality of outcome'. As soon as she heard the latest words she swung into gear and organised a steering committee, a conference and an in-service. She was just about to arrange for the parents' consultations when she snapped.

She had been struck down by this simple question: is it possible to ever really overcome the fact that a kid from Double Bay, who gets driven to school in an air-conditioned Mercedes and who goes to European art galleries for his holidays—is it ever really possible to overcome the fact that a kid like that has had one big leg-up in life that's pretty hard to beat, no matter how hard the teachers try to get their policy right?

*Send your problems to Dr
Hartman's secretary, Julie
McCrossin, care of ALR.*