

Australian Education Review

Touching the Future: Building skills for life and work

Johanna Wyn

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Foreword



This book brings together two stories: one relating to the ways in which young people's worlds have changed radically over the last three or four decades; the other relating to the growing gap between the skills that we try to equip young people with, through processes of formal education, and those skills that they need to build a future for themselves. In advanced contemporary societies, education is simply no longer fit for purpose. Young people's lives have moved in ways which call into question some of the central principles on which post-war education was founded. Johanna Wyn's analysis is clearly built on the foundations of youth studies and applies the lessons of youth-focused research to modern education systems. Her work is deeply rooted in Australian studies, yet the lessons have a relevance that extend far beyond national boundaries.

Young people's worlds have changed in a variety of ways, many of which have a bearing on the sort of education and training that they demand. Young people have shown a greater willingness to engage with education; the numbers leaving school at the minimum age have fallen sharply, while expectations about patterns of participation have changed. Increasingly, we expect young people to remain in education until 20 and beyond, and tertiary education has been transformed from an elite to a mass experience. While there are persistent inequalities in patterns of participation, it is nevertheless true that groups of young people who once made mass exits from the education system at the minimum age are showing an increased willingness to engage in post-compulsory education. Of course, these changes do not necessarily reflect a transformation of attitudes: there are few opportunities for early leavers and the bond between educational qualifications and labour market outcomes has become tighter. Moreover, in Australia as well as in other advanced societies, the 'carrot' of job prospects has been supplemented with the 'stick' of a reduction in benefits available to those who have different ideas.

In the course of 30 years the labour market has undergone three transformations that have implications for young people. The first of these was a decline in manufacturing industry and the growth of the service sector, which removed many of the traditional opportunities for working class males, thereby impacting on the types of skills they required. Second, the growing service sector offered a greater range of opportunities for young women, and expectations regarding careers for women began to change as they postponed family formation. Third, and more recently, we have witnessed the growth of flexible and precarious forms of employment. Traditional securities are thereby undermined, skills need to be updated more frequently and young people have to become skilled at navigating a sea of uncertainty.

In the modern world, young people's transitions to employment not only take longer to achieve, but they are far more fragmented. They move between jobs more frequently, but may also return to education or training to pick up new skills. Moreover, young people are increasingly

likely to blend statuses: combining education with work, holding a number of part-time jobs or surviving unemployment by engaging in what MacDonald and Marsh (2005) have referred to as 'fiddly jobs'. In these contexts, the call for education has increased, but the demand is for flexible provision that fits with the complexity of young people's lives. As Wyn argues in her review, traditional institutions are frequently irrelevant to young people.

The changes that have taken place have had an impact on the core values, orientations and expectations of modern youth with contrasts being made between the contemporary Generation Y and their predecessors, Generation X. Modern youth have to negotiate new work-life balances, develop an ability to live with uncertainty and manage their careers in contexts where reliable signposts are rare. In such situations, the pay-off for participation in education and training becomes less certain and formal education loses credibility as young people discover that they can learn effectively in non-formal contexts. While Wyn reminds us that young people still value secure, well-paid and interesting jobs, she is also clear that an over-emphasis on credentials is unhealthy in economic circumstances characterised by precariousness and deregulation.

Despite the richness of research on contemporary youth in Australia, an awareness of the changing circumstances of youth and the implications for education systems seem not to have filtered down to educational policy-makers. Indeed, Wyn is right to argue that core aspects of the education system were designed to meet the needs of young people growing up in the 1950s. In that period, there was an emphasis on preparing young people for a relatively static occupational world in which their futures were clearly mapped out, and the skills required were well defined. This traditional model of education tends to privilege knowledge legitimised by the curriculum, over learning that takes place in the community or in other contexts. As many educational sociologists have observed, education is often organised in ways that facilitate control and prepare young people for a workforce in which conformity is valued over creativity.

Of course, to prepare young people effectively for the modern world, we must nurture creativity, entrepreneurship and self-reliance; we must prepare young people for a world in which they may have to revise their skills on a regular basis and learn to use information independently. While there are enlightened educationalists who are aware of the ways in which they must change their practices, national policies are outmoded and unable to deliver the flexible student-oriented provision demanded by young people today.

The main changes that have taken place in the education system have tended to be based on a 'more of the same' approach. In other words, preparation of young people for life in the 21st century is thought to require longer engagement with the educational worlds and, in particular, tertiary education. Yet both secondary and tertiary education have retained an emphasis on teaching 'hard', work-related skills, rather than promoting the development of 'soft' skills and preparation for citizenship. While there are certainly core skills that are central to the education of all young people, in areas such as literacy and numeracy, Wyn reminds us that not only do most young people fail to work in occupational areas linked to their training, but many do not even want to work in these fields.

The development of tertiary education as the new mass sector offered new opportunities to re-think the purpose and design of a field that not so long ago catered for a small minority of the population destined for professional occupations. Instead, the field has been stratified into academic and vocational streams, with the growth of vocational tertiary education leading to a strengthening of the idea of an education-work bond, while at the same time entrenching the reproduction of inequalities linked to social class and gender (Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). Rather than designing a modern, flexible system helping equip young people with the skills to navigate the complexities of life in late modernity, universities are often disempowering, inflexible and 'greedy' institutions (Edwards, 1993) that assume students prioritise their studies over all other activities.

While highlighting the many ways in which education is ill-suited to the needs and priorities of modern youth, Johanna Wyn also offers some well-grounded solutions based on her knowledge of youth research. Her suggestions for a new educational model, in which she identifies three themes which are worth reinforcing in this Foreword.

The first theme is that an effective education system must be a holistic one, nicely summarised as an education that promotes ‘intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and well-being’ (MCEECDYA, 2008). An effective modern education system needs to develop ways of preparing young people to make their lives successful, in contexts where levels of predictability may be low. Young people must be empowered to negotiate risk, reflexively construct identities and make choices; they have to learn to locate and sift information rather than expect that to be done for them by a third party such as a teacher.

For her second theme, Wyn argues that we need to move away from provision structured by age, to flexible approaches that enable young people to return to education at any point in their lives, with any degree of intensity and to tailor participation to their circumstances. There are times when a participant might want to engage on a full-time basis, but equally there are times that they might want to combine education with another activity. The idea that we insist on minimum levels of attendance, monitor activities and only allow people to begin their study at set times of the year is outmoded.

The third theme reasserts that social justice needs to be at the heart of an education system. Education has the power to transform lives, but equally it can be an effective mechanism through which inequalities are reproduced. Here Wyn writes about the need to find a ‘new settlement’ between stakeholders so as to address patterns of underachievement, and to create a more level playing field on which it is much harder for parents to purchase success for their offspring, either through hard cash or cultural capital. It is the task of education to prevent the exclusion of young people and to lay the foundations for a fairer society.

Through this timely review, policy-makers and practitioners are offered an opportunity to reflect on contemporary provision with a view to developing a more appropriate product. To achieve this, it is clear that a new approach to research is called for. Whereas educational research has tended to focus on institutions, curricula and pedagogy, a modern approach needs to be more firmly grounded in youth studies. From this perspective, the primary focus would be on young people’s needs and desires, with youth-centred research commissioned to explore the views and experiences of current and recent students. Such research can subsequently be used to help build a system that is clearly responsive to the priorities of young people, enhancing their opportunities in work and life.

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Introduction

Social and economic changes that have occurred over the last quarter of a century have far-reaching implications for education and learning. The pace of change has meant that new skills need to be learned, with an increasing frequency, adapting regularly to new circumstances. Digital technologies have enhanced our capacity to access information and have created the expectation that individuals will learn how to use successive waves of new applications and forms of new technologies in personal life and in work settings. New challenges to sustainable lives have been posed by climate and environmental change. At the same time, the widespread emergence of flexible and precarious employment has meant that individuals need to be able to regularly learn new skills and take up new work options in order to survive. This requirement for perpetual learning has meant that all stages of life require education and educating, and all areas of life are learning opportunities. The idea of a 'totally pedagogised society' (Bernstein, 2001) is taken for granted by many young people as they actively seek to learn from their experiences, regardless of the setting (Stokes & Wyn, 2007). Formal education is now only one site of learning in a repertoire of learning approaches and sites. This means that, in one sense, young people themselves have begun to transform the contemporary meaning and uses of formal education and its relation to informal learning.

Social change has posed particular challenges for educational policy. One of the distinctive features of 'late modernity', a term used to describe the shifts that occurred within many Western countries after 1970 (Beck & Lau, 2005), has been the trend for traditional institutions (for example, the family, religion and government) to become less relevant to people's lives, to fragment or to have changed in nature. Education as a formal institution is implicated in these changes. As the social and economic context of education changes, legitimate questions are being raised about the purpose of mass education and there have been increased calls for a transformation of education (e.g. OECD, 2007a).

The ACER Research Conference *Touching the Future: Building skills for life and work*, held in Brisbane in August 2008, brought together researchers, policy-makers, teachers and other stakeholders from around Australia. The conference addressed the future of education in Australia, focusing on the theme of the skills and dispositions that young people need to participate effectively in work and society and the role of schools, communities and educators in nurturing these skills and dispositions. Papers presented at the ACER conference illustrated both the divergence and convergence in thinking about this fundamental issue, and provide an excellent starting point for unpacking the different educational agendas and assumptions that currently inform the question of what skills and knowledge young people need, now and into the future.

This Australian Education Review (AER 55) is not a report on the ACER conference, but a research review paper in which the author draws on many contemporary sources within the literature as well as the ACER conference papers. The review will provide an expanded discussion of these issues, exploring the challenge of finding a new settlement among the many stakeholders in education, and identifying emerging new approaches that ‘touch the future’ of educational systems. Such systems should aim to be ones that are more integrated across school and post-compulsory systems and that can shift the patterns of school failure, under-performance and low rates of completion among Indigenous Australians, young people from low socio-economic areas and young people in rural communities, which have for the last three decades characterised Australia’s educational provision.

This review paper, prompted by the ACER Research Conference, offers a timely reflection on the role of education. It addresses the project of designing education systems that will equip young people to be successful in their life and work, in futures that are difficult to predict. Rosa (2005) argues that the increasing pace of change has made it more difficult to plan effectively for the future, because the acceleration of change outpaces our capacity to amass the kind of evidence base needed to make informed decisions. This is all the more reason for educationalists, parents and others interested in young people’s lives, to strive to understand the changing role and uses of learning in our society, and to contribute to debate about what young people need to learn and how.

Section 1 introduces perspectives and ideas that inform the discussion of education design and change and the issues that need to be taken into account in determining what and how young people need to learn. The first part of this section offers a perspective on the question of change, on the role of education in shaping individual as well as societal identity, and on the gap that emerges between educational goals and practices. The next part of the discussion introduces contemporary education policy directions and frameworks. It highlights Australia’s integration within global networks of educational policy and the challenge of transforming educational systems within a context of institutional (and economic) uncertainty. This is followed by a brief discussion of the key concepts and ideas that inform current educational debate about the shape and design of education in the future. Finally, Section 1 identifies some key questions that emerge about what young people need to learn and why.

Perspective and retrospective

One of the greatest challenges that faces educational leaders today is the legacy of the last educational transformation – the mass secondary education system that was designed to meet the needs of Australia in the 1950s (Wyn, 2009a; 2007a). Secondary schools that were built all over Australia in the 1950s still stand as a reminder of the thinking that informed educational design at that time. Although some have had a lick of paint, and others have had new wings and administration blocks added, their basic design reflects the past. More significantly, though less visible, the current organisation of learning also owes a huge debt to that formative time. Age-based organisation of learning, normative expectations and standardised measures, the separation of schools from communities and workplaces and the transmission of knowledge from teachers to students reveal strong lines of continuity with the organisation of learning in the 1950s.

As we reach for the future, we need to recognise how our present position depends on the past. In particular, it is relevant to note that the current process of educational transformation to mass tertiary education is at least as significant as was the 1950s transformation to mass secondary education. As educators and policy-makers engage with and shape this phase of the design of Australia’s education systems, it is important to reflect on how much has and has not changed.

Educational transformation in the 1950s

Australia's education systems last underwent a significant transformation in the early 1950s, with the institutionalisation of a mass secondary education system that was designed to serve the needs of an industrially based economy. In response to the need for workers who would take up jobs in an economy dominated by manufacturing, farming and business, schools prepared the majority of young people to leave school by the age of 15. Then, and through to the early 1970s, young women took on paid work only as a prelude to becoming married and being a parent. It is informative to read research about youth that was undertaken in 1952, as presented by Connell, Francis and Skilbeck from their study of young people in Sydney, published by the Australian Council for Educational Research in 1957.

In the first place, the majority leave school and go to work. Sydney schools in fact have very little holding power beyond the school leaving age of 15 years. Even the selective high schools in the city lose approximately half their pupils before the end of their five-year course while the private schools lose about a quarter. From the other public schools the exodus at fifteen is not unlike a flood of refugees fleeing from the restraints of one government to the beckoning independence of the other. This other sphere, the world of commerce and industry, provides a new set of companions, attractive financial rewards, and the opportunity, in the present time of full employment, to select and change occupations with reasonable facility.

(Connell et al., 1957, p. 87)

Four features of education from this period stand out:

- Education was mainly informed by the emerging discipline of psychological development.
- The role of family in shaping young people's development was seen to be secondary to the role of school.
- School was intended to prepare young people for success in life, work and civic engagement.
- There was a perception that changes to society presented a particular challenge for the education of the young.

These elements are highlighted because they continue to resonate in education today. They set the scene for a tension between educating for individual goals (in life and work) and for social goals (that is, in civic society), and also set the scene for a tension between individual and social measures of outcomes.

Although it is common to argue that our current era is one of unprecedented social change compared with the stability of social conditions for the previous generation (that is, those who grew up in the 1950s – the 'Baby-Boomer generation'), research from that time presents a different picture. The following quote from the 1952 study presents a description of a changing social and economic world that could just as well be describing the year 2009.

The technological revolution and the educational expansion of the last hundred years have together wrought, throughout the world, and not the least in Sydney, a series of impressive changes. The nature and direction of the changes effected, nevertheless, have not been entirely clear. Some movements, political, economic or scientific, have arisen and quickly faded; others have endured for such a time as to seem to many people to be of the very nature of things, only to collapse and give way to further changes. Institutions, beliefs and standards have all been subjected to the same processes of radical modification, so that, in all this quick-silver age, it is not possible to point, with security, the direction in which the changes are trending except to say that they are productive of further change. The Sydney adolescent of the present day, therefore, finds himself in a situation whose stability is suspect, and the duration is uncertain. To learn how to cope with the insecurity of the present and with the problematic future involves him in the difficult task of learning not only knowledge, principles of present value, but also, and probably more importantly, the means and techniques whereby knowledge appropriate to new situations is acquired, and principles are modified, jettisoned, or adhered to, in the light of changing circumstances. It is upon his ability to establish a workable measure of stability, which, as occasion requires, can be adjusted without catastrophe in his personal relations, his career, and his social standing, that his mental health in large measure depends.

(Connell et al., 1957, p. 207)

The idea that school prepared young people for life as well as for work, as intelligent and critical citizens in a rapidly changing world, was clearly espoused. Connell et al. saw education as making society, giving young people skills to ‘evaluate the emerging characteristics of this new city’ whose nature was ‘misty and unclear’ (1957, p. 8). With this in mind, the authors concluded that schools had four principal tasks that would prepare young people for life:

- 1 Success:** Education was to provide the knowledge and skills to enable young people to make ‘a material success’ of life. This was seen to require a command of the fundamental knowledge or of a basic skill relevant to ‘his future career’, in order to ‘provide a measure of security materially and mentally’ to achieve emotional stability, emphasising the ‘new’ requirement for adolescents to be more autonomous and self-reliant than their predecessors.
- 2 Craftsmanship:** This meant achieving success in a sphere whose value is appreciated – competence and ‘a readiness to see appropriate situations and a promptness to use his talent effectively when the occasion presents itself’. This was seen to be necessary in order to ‘produce a generation of adolescents more articulate, more productive and with more relish for life than the present group’.
- 3 Social skills:** School was seen as a key site for promoting social skills through a form of ‘induction’ into society. ‘As relevant data accumulates there should be opportunity for programmes to be worked out and methods of teaching devised which will raise the process of social induction from the level of semi-conscious imitation to one of intelligent and deliberate co-operation’.
- 4 Intelligent citizenship:** Young people need to understand and evaluate the culture which is to become the very fabric of their lives. School should help the young person to ‘discover many of the facts of the social processes that are going on around him, and can guide his reading and discussion of them; it can help to exercise and sharpen the intellectual tools at his disposal; and by constant practice and diligent application it can hope to build up within him a habit of assessment ... which will enable him to add his mite to the clarification of an urban culture whose understanding of itself is far from clear’.

(Adapted from Connell et al., 1957, pp. 209–10)

Although the language is old-fashioned, the goals seem very recognisable. It needs to be remembered that these were not policy goals, but ideas that educational experts held about the role that schools *should* play in the making of young lives. The apparent weight given to broader life skills may reflect the reality that women in the 1950s were not expected to have careers, but were expected to become wives and mothers, so that educational goals needed to strike a balance between vocational roles (for men) and social roles (for women). However, the emphasis on social skills, craftsmanship and intelligent citizenship reveals a desire to nurture a civically engaged, critical generation who would contribute to the shaping of a distinctive and positive Australian society.

Yet the organisation of learning within this new secondary education system did not fully support these goals. Learning was structured by age-based groupings, normative expectations of young people at each age level, a deficit notion of 'student' and the strict separation of school and learning from the community, families and workplaces. The treatment of young people was based on an approach that focused on institutional control and normative behavioural expectations, supported by the rise of expert knowledge and the emerging discipline of developmental psychology. Thus, even at the outset, disjunctures emerged between the goals of education and the processes that were put in place to achieve them. Nearly 20 years later, in their report on a follow-up study, Connell, Stroobant, Sinclair, Connell and Rogers found that schools focused on control and transmission of knowledge. The authors argued that the goal of this approach to learning was to teach young people how to work while 'governed by extrinsic standards, purposes and values' that were 'alien' to the person doing the work (Connell et al., 1975, p. 155). In other words, learning for work was the goal. The tone of the report for the follow-up study of young people in Sydney emphasises an education system that crushes young people's initiative, stifles creativity and ensures conformity, despite an overwhelming belief by young people and their parents in the value of education.

This brief excursion into history highlights challenges and tensions that we face today. The development of mass secondary education was informed by an understanding that education could shape the nature of our society, rather than being simply an instrumental tool that serves economic interests. The skills and knowledge that young people would gain from school were seen in the context of preparing young people for a rapidly changing world. Yet these lofty goals appear to have been lost in a system that resulted in an instrumental approach to learning (and to measuring skills and knowledge), and a narrower view of life.

Contemporary policy frameworks

Governments today have a significant stake in shaping education systems to ensure national competitiveness, in a context where knowledge is a crucial resource as well as a commodity and an industry. Indeed, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) refers to contemporary 'globalising knowledge economies' that are connected locally and globally (OECD, 2007a, p. 11). The OECD promotes the significance of higher education as the new mass education sector that will ensure economic development for nations, promote social cohesion and deliver prosperity to individuals (OECD, 2007b), putting pressure on governments to transform education systems so that they are effective in meeting the needs of 'knowledge economies' (OECD, 2007a). In Australia the completion of secondary education is normative as is the expectation that young people will participate in post-compulsory education. Tertiary education is the new mass education sector. This direction has been further developed by the introduction in 2009 of the federal government's policy statement on national partnerships, known as the *Learning or Earning* initiative. It further increases the pressure on young people to complete secondary education (Council of Australian Governments (COAG), 2009).

Responding to the changing nature of social, economic and political life in the post-industrial world, educational policies today are mainly focused on the production of young people who have the appropriate skills and dispositions to serve post-industrial economies. National investment in the education and training of young people is seen as a key to developing human and social

capital as a basis for sustaining economic growth and competitiveness (as well as for ensuring social inclusion and active citizenship). This transformation of education systems is based on the conviction that knowledge-based economies require workers with high levels of post-secondary, and increasingly tertiary, education, who will return regularly to formal education throughout their working lives in order to stay competitive within labour markets that continuously require new sets of skills. Social groups that do not use education effectively will be marginalised from participation in economic activity (OECD, 2007b).

Increasing rates of participation in secondary education, combined with high levels of immigration, results in increased social diversity in school populations that include significant numbers of young adults (OECD, 2007b). Yet, despite widespread recognition of the extent of social change, secondary education has been more expanded than transformed. Older models and assumptions about the nature of learners and the form that education should take have been retained, and the new mass sector (tertiary education) has been simply attached to, rather than transforming, the secondary education system. In countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, where traditionally, leaving school was the major option for students after concluding their compulsory schooling at the age of 15, the expansion of tertiary education has mainly been characterised by an increase in participation by students older than 15 years, leaving inherited educational frameworks and assumptions intact.

The challenge of educating young people in this period of late modernity, and of constructing new education systems to meet their needs, is thrown into clearer focus when we look at the nature of contemporary social change and how this has impacted on young people's lives. What follows is a description of some of the key conceptual approaches that have contributed to an understanding of the impact of social change on both young people and education systems.

Conceptual approaches

While developmental psychological approaches continue to have a significant place in educational thinking (and in approaches to understanding youth) today, other conceptual frameworks that enable educationalists to understand the relationship between education and society, the formation of identities and the nature of youth have become more prominent. Writing by Beck and Lau (2005), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) and Bauman (2001) has provided a conceptual framework for considering the characteristics of late modernity and the impact of social change on society. These theorists argue that late modernity is characterised by the fragmentation of traditions and a weakening of social institutions, creating a situation where people's identity has become a task to be undertaken rather than a given. 'Needing to *become* what one *is*, is the hallmark of modern living', as the sources of collective identity that were characteristic of industrial societies have less relevance (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. xv). Despite the fact that social structures and processes that create inequality, marginalisation and risk continue to have an impact on people's lives, these processes are obscured by an emphasis on individual responsibility. These societal changes have had a particular impact on two key dimensions of youth. Young people's trajectories into adulthood, and thus its meaning to them, have become more complex.

Complexity of pathways

Changes in the nature of work have meant that young people must make their own routes through education and work in new economies (Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000) and negotiate new sets of risks in the form of 'personal' choices (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). The individualisation of the risks of changing skill requirements and the emergence of flexible and precarious labour markets means that young people feel the need to hold their options open, and to make decisions that enable them to balance being in the present but having an orientation to the future. In many countries a majority of young people are both workers and students, establishing a pattern in secondary school

that they will continue throughout life (Stokes & Wyn, 2007). The links between education and employment are also increasingly complex and unpredictable (Wyn, 2006).

A new adulthood

Adulthood is achieved incrementally and earlier than for previous generations. The relevance of age as a marker of transition to adulthood is therefore reduced and new patterns of adult life are forged relatively early, breaking down clear distinctions between youth and adulthood (Dwyer, Smith, Tyler & Wyn, 2005), as noted by youth researchers in many countries. For example, in Europe, Leccardi and Ruspini (2006) see a 'new' youth; in the United States of America, Arnett (2004) has identified 'emerging' adulthood and in the United Kingdom, Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Sharpe and Thomson (2007) explore the 'invention' of adulthood by young people. In all Western countries, youth researchers note the increased length of time that young people spend in education and the trend towards lifelong education.

The work of Bourdieu (1976), Giddens (1991) and Foucault (1988) has also been widely used to understand the relationship between young people and education in late modernity. These approaches have been influential in developing a perspective on the identity-making that is a necessary element in young people's negotiation of risk societies. Various authors, especially those researching school-aged youth, have drawn on Giddens' concept of 'autobiographical thinking' which identifies the capacity to create and narrate one's self-history as a central aspect of identity-making, and reflexivity is seen as a central characteristic of contemporary identities (Giddens, 1991, p. 54).

Bourdieu's (1976) concepts of cultural and sub-cultural capital have been especially influential in providing a framework for understanding the interaction between material structures (including class, race and gender) and individual subjectivities, in the production and reproduction of social divisions through schooling.

Foucault's work (1988) has been widely used as a framework for understanding the relationship between social conditions and the formation of dominant subjectivities, and the ways in which social processes and institutions frame, reward and control the possibilities for being and becoming. Understanding these processes has particular relevance for the design of education that will serve young people's needs in the future. In particular, these conceptual frameworks have signalled the importance of identity formation (or ways of being), the emergence of new inequalities and young people's role in shaping the future of learning.

Ways of being

In late modernity, some ways of being have become more effective and better rewarded than others. Successful transition into adulthood depends to some extent on being able to engage continuously in the processes of constructing one's self as choice-maker, on demonstrating that, regardless of age, one is resourceful and a 'reflexive enterprising subject', capable of taking individual responsibility (McLeod & Yates, 2006; Kelly, 2006). Young people are required to hold a strong future orientation and to be able to plan the process of becoming an adult. These subjectivities are an essential resource base for the successful negotiation of education and labour markets in new economies, as well as in other aspects of life.

Old inequalities

Research shows that there are distinct and long-term patterns in educational engagement. The *Melbourne Declaration*, much as did its predecessors, the *Adelaide* and *Hobart Declarations* (see MCEECDYA, 2008; 1999; and 1989) sums up the historical legacy of marginalisation from education for particular population groups, arguing that, for Australian schooling to promote equity and excellence:

... governments and all school sectors must improve educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians ... Educational outcomes for Indigenous children and young people are substantially behind those of other students in key areas of enrolment, attendance, participation, literacy, numeracy, retention and completion ... Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, those from remote areas, refugees, homeless young people, and students with disabilities often experience educational disadvantage. Australian governments must support all young Australians to achieve not only equality of opportunity but also more equitable outcomes.

(MCEECDYA, 2008, p. 15)

New inequalities

New forms of inequalities based on class and gender are emerging. There is evidence that the imperative to make and re-make oneself, to construct one's own biography, has been taken up more effectively by some groups of girls than boys (McLeod & Yates, 2006). In particular, young women from high socio-economic backgrounds appear to be the most responsive to the pressure to achieve academic and labour market success. By contrast, young men from low socio-economic backgrounds are the least likely to see the need to be open to change in new times. Currently they continue to rely on 'ways of being' that served men from their communities well under different economic conditions, and they are those most likely to be unemployed (White & Wyn, 2008; McLeod & Yates, 2006).

What and how young people need to learn

The research evidence reveals that young people may in many respects be ahead of institutional change in gaining from diverse sources the skills and knowledge they need in order to be successful. Educational institutions are no different from other institutions in late modernity in that they have suffered a lessening of legitimacy and a tendency towards fragmentation and divergence. Formal education systems cannot make strong claims for legitimacy because learning itself has become de-institutionalised and individuals have become their own experts. Neither can they offer guarantees about the nature of the return on the investment of money and time that young people (and their families) are required to make in education, although some groups are able to use education more effectively than others. Young people understand that gaining educational credentials will not guarantee them a job and that they must actively construct education and employment biographies that make them attractive in precarious and changing labour markets.

The requirement (and often desire) to be self-navigators, and the extent of mobility means that young people need to understand the nature of the social, economic and political world in which they are living and their relationships with others, locally and globally. Being good navigators requires a more conscious approach to personal development so that all young people have the capacity to see how their personal biography (past) has developed and how it may be constructed (in the present) to maximise their options (for the future).

While it is still the case that higher levels of education are almost universally associated with better pay and job security (OECD, 2007b), the ways in which well-educated individuals secure 'good jobs' are diverse and the links between education and employment are complex (Dwyer, et al., 2005). Even where young people graduate from a professional degree (for example, teaching or commerce), research shows that they often do not expect to take up employment in their field of training or that they intend to work in that field for a short period of time only, seeking options to re-train in order to enter different fields of work (Dwyer et al., 2005).

How young people learn in formal education settings has come to more closely approximate the way they learn outside of formal institutions, developing the capacities to understand what

is relevant, how to access information, how to learn and how to develop knowledge. While there has always been some degree of responsibility on individuals to make school–work connections and to determine what they should learn in order to live well, the scale of the shift towards dependence on individual resources in late modernity has made this responsibility a defining feature of young people’s transitions. Increasingly, responsibility for learning has shifted. This is a recipe for failure for some young people, as Section 2 will outline.

Concluding comments

Addressing the question of what young people need to learn, and what kinds of formal educational processes and curricula will prepare young people to live well in late modernity, requires the acknowledgement that institutionalised, predictable connections between formal education and post-educational outcomes are increasingly non-existent and have anyway become less relevant to many young people.

Many elements of education systems that are currently taken for granted are becoming outmoded. Section 1 has demonstrated ways in which educational systems have been slow to respond to the changes in young people’s learning needs and how some of the trends in contemporary educational approaches have further isolated education from broader social trends. Policies such as standardised testing programs and ranking of school performance have encouraged schools to adopt an inward-looking focus, rather than focusing on the relationship between schools and other educational institutions, to their communities, and to the diverse needs of those who participate in these institutions. Initiatives such as the ‘school improvement’ movement actively disavow the relationship between schools and their social and economic context and focus on universal notions of ‘quality of teaching’ based on normative expectations of a (disembodied) learner and a narrow notion of (academic) outcomes. New patterns of inequality of outcomes based on class, gender and geographic location are formed as some groups are more able to draw on cultural and economic resources than others to secure success.

Although educational policies have recognised the need for education to respond to social change, they still tend to rest on traditional assumptions about the preparation of young people to serve the economy. This focus has created a disjuncture between educational policies that continue to frame education within an industrial model (instrumental and vocationalist) and the requirements that young people themselves have for the capacity to be good navigators through new economies, to live well and to engage with complexity and diversity.

This review paper will draw on all these perspectives, through an analysis of the competing elements that will shape Australia’s future education system. The structure of the sections acknowledges the classic binaries that tend to frame educational debate: past versus future; school for work versus school for life; formal versus informal learning; and education as an individual or social good. Sections 2 and 3, which focus on education as a tool for economic or social development, suggest that this binary approach has tended to lead to a stalemate in thinking. Section 4 further explores this binary approach through a consideration of the way in which these binaries are reflected in technologies (of measurement and governance) and in debates about the kinds of skills and knowledge young people should learn. The focus of the review shifts in Section 5 to explore lines of convergence and synergy across all of these areas, indicating strategies which could result in a more effective approach being adopted in the future.

2

Education as a tool for economic development

This section of the review paper will take a closer look at the implications of linking school to work. The discussion traces, in turn, the development of policies that have framed the goals of education through a focus on school for work, the nature of work for which schools are preparing young people and, finally, the kind of learner and worker implied by current educational policies is outlined. Section 2 concludes that there is good reason to question older approaches to education for work for their instrumentalism and narrowness. When viewed against the nature of current labour markets, they appear outdated and limiting.

It makes sense for schools to prepare young people for work. In addition to the necessity of having a wage in order to live, being employed is one of the main ways in which young adults participate in civic society. Work can be integral for example to one's sense of identity and, for many young people, like most adults, having a job enables them to feel that they have value, make a contribution to society and feel connected to others. This section discusses the challenges and issues that preparing young people for work today presents to educational policy – and practice.

The section begins with a discussion of the evolution of policy frameworks affirming the responsiveness of educational goals to global economic changes in the 1980s, the role of education in the deregulated, global market economy that emerged in the 1990s, and the centrality of the school to work transition for educational policies in the 2000s. The section invites a closer consideration of the nature of the discourses underlying these policy directions. It explores the question 'what kind of workplaces and labour markets are we preparing young people for?'

The workplace

Research shows that labour markets are highly gendered (Campbell, 2000) and that men and women use their skills and educational qualifications in very different ways. Australians are working longer hours in more precarious labour markets than ever before (Campbell & Brosnan, 1999; Bittman & Rice, 2002). Australians have been gradually moving away from 'standard' trajectories in relation to the sequencing and role of study, work, family formation and accommodation (Martin, 2009). Perhaps most importantly, during this period, inequalities in student outcomes from education (Lamb & Mason, 2008) and in the labour market have become entrenched. This review posits that the question of the role of education in preparing young people to manage complex lives in the context of changing work practices is far from straightforward.

In the 1980s, Australian educational policies took a decisive turn and focused more directly on preparing young people for work in Australia's changing economy. This point was picked up in a number of the ACER conference presentations, in various ways. In her presentation, Seddon argued that 'reform since the mid-1980s has emphasised skills for work but forgotten to consider how people develop skills for citizenship', privileging skills for work over skills for citizenship, tailoring schooling to service the economy – rather than being 'a distinct skill-building enclave to support the young' (Seddon, 2008). She specifically commented on the dominance of this school-for-work approach within current education policy, and her claim is backed up by a number of the ACER conference papers that position schools as providing skills for the workplace. Robinson (2008) illustrated this in his discussion of how schools can provide young people with skills for work in order to maximise their economic opportunities and Sweet (2008) highlighted the failure of Australian schools to ensure that young people have adequate skills for the labour market.

The essential role of education to the nation's economic and social prosperity is acknowledged in the *Melbourne Declaration* (MCEECDYA, 2008). This document emphasises the role of education in preparing young people to 'compete in the global economy on knowledge and innovation'. To take up new jobs that require higher levels of educational credential and skill is also one of the agreed national goals of education for young Australians (MCEECDYA, 2008, p. 4).

Policies framing school for work

Australia's *Learning or Earning* policy compels young Australians to be in education, training or employment until the age of 20 years as a condition of receipt of income support (COAG, 2009). This policy initiative, with its national youth participation requirement, is the latest in a policy approach aligning the goals of education to the needs of the economy that can be traced back to the 1980s.

Young school leavers in the mid and late 1980s were about to enter a world that would be fundamentally different from that experienced by previous generations. During that decade two changes were especially significant: the youth labour market collapsed and primary production and manufacturing declined, opening up new labour markets in the service sector. These changes required higher levels of skill and more in the way of educational credentials from workers.

The collapse of the youth labour market meant that direct entry into the labour market, a pathway that had been favoured by young Australians who were not 'education-minded', became increasingly unviable. To enter the labour market without a school completion or vocational education certificate was to risk unemployment or precarious employment in low-skill, low-paid jobs (Lamb & Mason, 2008; Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2002). In this context, education policies were seen to be crucial as a tool for building human capital, as the key to creating a workforce with the skills and capabilities to support Australia's transformation from an industrial to a post-industrial economy, and to enable Australian workers to be competitive in emerging global markets.

The shift in educational policies occurred in the context of a wider change in the role of social policy generally. Keynesian-based policy approaches, which prevailed from the early 1950s to the late 1970s, were characterised by the assumption that government was responsible for ensuring the quality of civic life. This was managed through policies such as the expansion of free and secular secondary education, a system of negotiation or 'settlement' with workers through unions, a commitment to full employment and the expansion of welfare measures (Mizen, 2004, pp. 18–19). By the early 1980s, monetarist approaches dominated government policies, thrusting economic goals into the foreground and narrowing the fiscal responsibility of the state for civic society. Monetarist principles emphasised instead the role of market forces, distancing the government from meeting popular aspirations and placing responsibility onto individuals. This policy approach was translated into deregulatory and market-based policies for education and training (Roe, 2008). By the late 1980s, government policies were articulating

the urgency of matching Australia's workforce to changing global markets. A federal government policy statement on higher education, released in 1988 argued:

... our industry is increasingly faced with rapidly changing international markets in which success depends upon, among other things, conceptual, creative, and technical skills of the labour force, the ability to innovate and be entrepreneurial.

(Commonwealth of Australia, 1988, p. 105)

From this time, political pressure to increase educational participation grew, as revealed by the Blackburn report (Blackburn, 1985) and education policy in Australia has been increasingly circumscribed by the view that formal education has a responsibility for the production of young people who have the appropriate skills and dispositions to ensure economic development.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has been especially influential in spelling out this message. OECD reports point out that changing from a traditional industrial base into a knowledge-based economy requires workers with high levels of post-secondary and increasingly tertiary education who are willing to engage in re-skilling, returning regularly to formal education throughout their working lives in order to stay competitive within labour markets that continuously require new sets of skills (OECD, 1996). The OECD has positioned education as a fundamental tool for economic advancement and security. Indeed, it is argued that the concept of the 'knowledge economy' is an integral part of an emerging global education policy field, which has direct influence on national education policies (Rawolle & Lingard, 2008). Through the OECD, international studies such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) were set up with the specific goal of measuring the educational levels of young people in OECD countries, with a focus on types of knowledge that aligned as closely as possible with the needs of knowledge economies (OECD, 1996). This approach has two implications for education. One is the consequent need to increase levels of educational certification, to achieve universal completion of secondary education and to increase levels of participation in further education. The other consequence is that it will be necessary to identify the skills young workers will actually need.

The goal of increasing levels of participation in education has recently been strengthened in Australia by the *Learning or Earning* policy (COAG, 2009). This latest initiative involves a commitment by the government to provide education and training places for all young Australians, and a mandatory requirement to complete Year 10 and to be engaged in full-time education, training and or employment until the age of 20. This policy aims to achieve 90 per cent Year 12 or equivalent completion by young Australians by the year 2015 and makes education and training a precondition for obtaining the Youth Allowance. As commentators have pointed out, such a goal is ambitious, considering that the 2006 Census revealed that only 71 per cent of 19-year-old Australians had attained Year 12 or equivalent (Lamb & Mason, 2008).

The identification of the skills young people need for the workforce has also received attention from MCEECDYA. In 2003 it endorsed a set of eight employment-related skills (MCEECDYA, 2003), based to a large extent on a series of reports produced by employer groups (the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Business Council of Australia (BCA)). While the employer groups have had considerable influence on the setting of an employability skills framework, government reports had already recommended a broader approach, noting that work-related skills should be part of a broader set of generic skills that would equip young people for wider life experiences, including citizenship and family life (MCEECDYA, 1999). However, despite attempts to identify skills, research highlights an ongoing lack of clarity about this important dimension of education and labour market policies (Richardson & Teese, 2008; Eposto, 2008).

The review paper will revisit these issues through a brief consideration of how these national policy frameworks are translated into more localised educational frameworks, drawing on the example of education in Victoria, which reflects the process undertaken by all education jurisdictions in relation to this task.

Translating policy frameworks at the local level

The Victorian Department of Education and Training has taken its lead from OECD and national policy frameworks, focusing on 'remaking the Victorian education and training system so that it matches the new economic environment we face' (Department of Education and Training, 2002, p. 18). This policy direction emphasises the importance of all students acquiring 'knowledge and skills' for an 'innovation economy'. While the focus is on using education to serve the needs of the economy, this framework also notes the benefits of this approach for young people (referred to as 'workers'), because 'high levels of education make it easier for workers to move into new industries and new work' (Department of Education and Training 2002, p. 18). In other words, young workers are expected to be able to interpret how to use their skills when they get there.

A subsequent Victorian government report, *Maintaining the Advantage: Skilled Victorians* (Department of Education and Training, 2003a) outlines initiatives and funding to promote 'better skills and more of them, to better function in an economy increasingly driven by innovation' through vocationally oriented education. The Victorian Government's *Blueprint for Government Schools* (Department of Education and Training, 2003b) also acknowledged the dual role of education in fostering skills for economic prosperity and ensuring social health and cohesion, thus reflecting the OECD model.

The *Blueprint* described the processes for managing and administering a 'relentless focus on improving ... student learning' in Victorian public schools (Department of Education and Training, 2003b, p. 23). This document outlined the management principles which were intended to achieve the utilitarian goals of improving standards of literacy and numeracy, to increase the levels of participation in education to the completion of secondary school to 'near universal' levels, and to increase levels of adult education. The *Blueprint* set out a process of measurement and management processes, which set in place a culture of performance in schools, through which educational practices would be oriented towards a measurable end product. As many educators argue, this process thins out educational knowledge, through its emphasis on outcomes measures and accountabilities linked to standardised testing, competitiveness, choice and markets (Lingard, 2005).

The Victorian policy document, *Social Competence: A whole school approach to linking learning and wellbeing*, broadened the perspective to one of aiming for the development of social competencies which would support the:

... central goal that all students will leave school literate, numerate, socially competent and will progress to further education and employment.

(Department of Education and Training, 2002, back cover)

This policy document focused on the goal of building human and social capital through the development of eight social competencies. These competencies would, it was argued, ensure competent workers for the 21st century, through the individual development of students. These competencies involved self-management, responsible decision-making skills, flexible coping skills, social problem solving and conflict resolution, as well as a range of social perception and communication skills (Department of Education and Training, 2002, p. 11).

In practice, the wider policy framework has circumscribed the possibilities for educational practice. Although many innovations and creative practices occur in schools and classrooms, these tend to be driven by dedicated teachers and non-government organisations, drawing on small-scale, short-term funding, and they occur against the grain of the broader policy frameworks (Stokes & Turnbull, 2008).

Quality assurance is central to the Victorian approach to managing the alignment between education and the economy. This involves a two-fold policy strategy. One element of this strategy involves schools documenting young people's progress through standard educational and employment trajectories tests and surveys. The survey instrument *On Track* (available on <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/ontrack>) collects data on study and employment outcomes for two years after students leave secondary school. Standard trajectories involve completion of Year 12 certification, or the equivalent through vocational education and training, and engagement in further education or employment. This data may enable policy-makers to develop and enact measures which may lead to higher rates of compliance than standard trajectories.

Another element of the strategy is use of assessment technologies that provide policy-makers with national assessment data (through the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and the national sample assessment programs in science, civics and citizenship and ICT, and global comparative data (e.g. PISA). These technologies provide universal measures of discipline-based knowledge by the testing of basic and other knowledge and skills. This enables policy-makers to move towards standard national curricula, improving the capacity to do comparative analysis of outcomes.

Many issues are raised by educators about the effects of educational approaches that assume that more education (for example, universal completion of Year 12) and providing a more standard education (which assumes all students receive the same curriculum) will achieve better learning outcomes for all Australian students. As recent reports indicate, the longstanding policy objective of increasing school retention rates has failed to be matched with significant increases in student participation (Lamb & Mason, 2008). These issues will be taken up in the rest of Section 2, starting with an analytical perspective on the nature of the labour market for which young people are being prepared.

The nature of the labour market

The emphasis in the policy papers on preparing young Australians for work raises two key questions:

- What kind of workplaces and labour markets are young people entering?
- What is the nature of the skills and capacities that they need to succeed?

A brief analysis of the changes occurring in the labour market, beginning in the 1980s, is revealing. During the last 25 years there have been significant shifts in the kinds of skills required and in the occupations available. This has occurred as Australia moved from having an economy based mainly on industry and manufacturing to a 'new' economy based on service work and higher level jobs that add value to production (OECD, 2008). However, the use of the term 'knowledge economy', which emphasises these shifts in the nature of occupations, can be misleading. A more appropriate descriptive term, from young people's point of view, would be the 'do it yourself' or 'DIY' economy. One of the most distinctive changed features of the labour market is not that work has been transformed into knowledge work (with new occupational fields), but that as a result of the changed *nature* of work young people have become increasingly required to navigate unstable economies and forge their own pathways through study and into work.

The 1980s and 1990s

From the early 1980s the slow processes, which culminated in the labour market deregulation measures of the 1990s, began. The early 1980s set the scene for important changes to workplaces, starting with the dismantling of the Award system that had guaranteed employment conditions. This occurred in a context of:

... volatile movements in employment and unemployment, concerns about balance of payments difficulties, stagnant private sector investment and lagging productivity growth, initiatives to deregulate financial and product markets, changes in the forms and intensity of competition, changing employer strategies, a shrinking and strategically inept trade union movement, and fierce competition between the major political parties over which was best placed to deliver the 'microeconomic reform' increasingly demanded by large, private sector businesses.

(Campbell & Brosnan, 1999, p. 357)

Significant increases in casual employment – much of which was weighted towards young people – occurred during this period. During the period from 1982 to 1990 full-time casual employment increased by 90 per cent and part-time casual employment increased by 82 per cent (Campbell & Brosnan, 1999, p. 362). Further changes occurred during the 1990s, following calls by the Business Council of Australia for full labour market deregulation in order to overcome 'restrictive work practices' (Business Council of Australia, 1987).

Two important reforms were enacted in Australia in the 1990s. The *Industrial Relations Reform Act* (1993) and the *Workplace Relations Act* (1997) had a significant impact on the nature of work. In particular, they led to a consolidation of the increase in casual employment (from 19.4 per cent in 1990 to 25.8 per cent in 1997), a growth in precarious employment and a fragmentation of working-time conditions (Campbell & Brosnan, 1999, p. 374). The capacity of managers to schedule workers' hours within a widened span, without incurring penalty rates for work outside of average working hours, meant that the average weekly hours of full-time workers increased (Bittman & Rice, 2002). Other researchers have pointed out that the employment growth during the 1990s was in the bottom quintile of male full-time earnings – and also to some extent in the top quintile, a process often referred to as the 'disappearing middle' of jobs (Gregory, 1993). These changes had a very significant impact on young people's work, but they were obscured by the focus on the knowledge economy and the information society (Campbell, 2000).

While it is common to point out that the labour market requires innovative, creative, flexible and well-educated workers, there has been very little focus on the nature of this work. However, as Roe commented in his conference presentation:

In Australia you can be employed as a temporary or casual worker without protection from unfair dismissal and without leave and other entitlements in the same job for 20 years.

(Roe, 2008)

Trends in young people's labour market experiences

The impact of precarious work and poor working conditions on Australians has been highlighted in recent work by Andres and Wyn (forthcoming). This work compares the data from two longitudinal studies of young people from British Columbia, Canada and Victoria, Australia, over a period of 15 years, from the early 1990s into the 2000s. The Canadian study is called *Paths on Life's Way* (<http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/paths/paths.htm>) and the Australian study is called *Life-Patterns* (http://www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/ycr/life_patterns/index.html), and they trace the trajectories of a representative sample of young people from the time that they left secondary school. Using surveys and interviews conducted with a sub-sample of the full cohort, Andres and Wyn were able to document young people's experiences of education, work, personal relationships, family, and health and well-being.

British Columbia and Victoria had similar labour market policy goals during the 1990s, and educational policies played a very important role in both countries in producing a new generation of young people who had the educational credentials to participate in new and emerging

industries. Labour market policies created a more 'flexible' environment for employers, with the goal of promoting economic development. The comparative analysis undertaken by Andres and Wyn documents how the young people in their studies fared in this changing environment.

Although the overall policy directions were very similar in the two locations, there were some important differences, especially related to the extent of workplace reform. While both countries enacted reforms that increased labour market 'flexibility', the extent of reform was far greater in Australia. The 1997 *Workplace Relations Act* in Australia withdrew many conditions that had been negotiated under previous industrial relations awards to ensure minimum standards for all workers (Todd, 2004). This created a work environment that left Australian workers more vulnerable than their Canadian counterparts.

The comparative analysis undertaken by Andres and Wyn reveals the impact, over 15 years, of precarious work conditions on the lives of the Canadian and Australian young people. Australians found it more difficult than their Canadian counterparts to find job security and reported greater difficulty managing to balance the long working hours they were required to fulfil, with their personal lives, including relationships, leisure and well-being. This is reflected starkly in their patterns of family formation. In 2003–4, approximately 15 years after leaving secondary school, 64 per cent of the Canadians had married compared with 49 per cent of the Australians, and just over half of the Canadian sample were parents (52%) compared to only 22 per cent of the Australians. Drawing on the comments by research participants, the authors conclude that the lower rate of marriage and parenthood for the Australians is a direct reflection of a more casualised labour market and experiencing a less secure employment environment (than that of their Canadian counterparts).

The Andres and Wyn study found labour market conditions also impact on young adults' health and sense of well-being. Here too, the comparison between the young Canadians and Australians revealed a difference between the two groups. Only 19 per cent of the young Australians aged 28, said that they were 'very healthy' in terms of mental health, compared with 32 per cent of the Canadians at the same age. More importantly, 15 per cent of the young Australians at this age said that they were 'mentally unhealthy' compared with only 9 per cent of young Canadians. The study found similar differences in their reporting of their physical health. These findings suggest that it is important to understand the impact of changing economic and social conditions on young people's lives, and to consider the role that education might play in preparing young people for their future.

Research also shows that there has been a steady increase in the development of non-standard trajectories. A recent analysis by Martin shows that, starting in the 1980s through to the early 2000s, 'connections between life events have become less structured' (Martin, 2009, p. 297). In particular, he points to the increasing diversity of men's and women's labour force status. Martin's analysis shows how paid work has become less (not more) significant to men in later life, and although it has become more significant to women, their workforce participation almost inevitably follows non-standard trajectories (compared to patterns of male workforce participation) because of their engagement in family-related responsibilities. He predicts that the proportion of people not in a conventional life-course model (that is somewhere on the continuum of school, work, establishment of independent living, marriage and retirement) will increase. He notes in particular the decline of men aged 35–49 in full-time work, and to the expansion in the proportion of part-time students who are single parents and of people over 29 years old undertaking post-secondary education for the first time. Other research highlights the expansion of the category of young worker (aged 15–25). Young workers in this bracket now make up 20 per cent of the labour force and 60 per cent of young people aged 15–25 are employed (ABS, 2004). These changing patterns of educational and employment trajectories need to be reflected in educational policy through the development of more flexible pathways and the abandonment of outdated notions of school and work transitions.

Thirdly, inequalities have become entrenched during this time. The focus on individual choice within educational and labour markets places the onus on young people to draw on their own and their family's resources to reach their goals, further exacerbating already existing

inequalities in communities. While there is considerable debate about how to measure inequality in Australia, there is strong evidence of enduring poverty. Mission Australia has calculated that disposable household income of the lowest 20 per cent fell from 8.3 per cent to 7.7 per cent as a proportion of total household income in Australia between 1996–7 and 2002–3. In the same period, the disposable proportion of those in the highest quintile rose from 37.1 per cent to 38.3 per cent, while the disposable proportion of middle-income earners held steady (Mission Australia, 2005). This study found that significant numbers (145,000) of Australians aged 15–24 were living in poverty. Additionally, young people from lower socio-economic groups were the least likely to be involved in paid work (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005), and they consistently have had the poorest educational outcomes.

Persistent disparities in achievement and educational outcomes based on socio-economic status are seen as one of the elements indicating that ‘the state of post-compulsory education and training is problematic’ (Teese, 2000, p. 55). In addition, access to higher education is far from equitable. Australians from lower socio-economic backgrounds are still half as likely to participate in higher education as those from medium and high socio-economic backgrounds (James, 2002). A study of young people’s higher education choices found that on a per capita basis, for every ten people from urban locations who go to university, only six people from rural or isolated Australia do so (James, Wyn, Baldwin, Hepworth, McInnis & Stephanou, 1999). Since that time, there has been little change in these patterns of inequity (Daly, 2006).

Furthermore, young Indigenous Australians continue to be the most disadvantaged group across all areas of life. The most recent ABS figures show that Indigenous Australians are disadvantaged according to almost all measures, including health, education and training, employment, housing, justice, leisure and family and community (ABS, 2005, p. vi).

All these findings raise important questions for ways in which the nexus between education and work should be constructed. They suggest that if the goal of education is to prepare young people for work, the frame needs to be broadened substantially to acknowledge both the precariousness of the labour market and also the diversity of life patterns that are emerging. In particular, it is important to reflect on the kinds of workers anticipated by current educational policies. The following sub-section of the review will briefly explore the assumptions about youth that are contained in these policies.

Framing youth

The focus now shifts to an exploration of the kind of person implied in these policies. There are many insightful Australian studies that explore the role of schools in enabling young people to engage in the project of shaping their identities, or ‘becoming somebody’. McLeod and Yates’ study of young people’s trajectories through education in three distinctly different secondary schools shows the impact that school culture has on the ways in which young people see themselves (McLeod & Yates, 2006). Other Australian researchers have explored the ways in which some groups of young people come to be marginalised by school processes, and ‘become somebody’ without education (Smyth & Hattam, 2004). This exploration considers the kinds of identities that the school-to-work policy frameworks promote, exploring the paradoxes and contradictions that emerge. It raises the broader question, which will be taken up in subsequent sections, of the subjectivities and identities that Australian education systems should produce in the second half of the 21st century.

The educational policies discussed earlier can be analysed in terms of discourses which include the concepts, assumptions and interrelated ideas about youth. Prioritising the production of human capital results in three subject positions for young people.

Youth as student

The subjects of these education policies are ‘students’ – subjects who are defined through their status within educational institutions. This is in part because of the significance of increasing

the proportions of young people who will complete secondary education within a standard trajectory and time frame. This has the effect of limiting the perspective on young people to that of their role in formal learning (excluding all other forms of learning) and positioning them as the recipients of knowledge (rather than as co-participants). This approach explicitly omits the out-of-school learning experiences that young people have, especially in workplaces, and it promotes a deficit approach to young people.

Youth as consumer

Within the increasingly market-based approach to education, students are positioned as consumers of educational products. This instrumental approach to educational policy attempts to align education closely to economic outcomes, and positions young people and their families as making choices about educational investment from a range of educational providers, on the assumption that this investment will be rewarded in the labour market.

Youth as future 'flexible' worker

Thirdly, young people are seen as workers of the future, although their role as workers in the present is generally not well recognised in schools (Stokes & Wyn, 2007). They need to be 'flexible' workers who will bear the risks of the deregulated labour market. The focus on academic credentials instils in young people a sense that employment outcomes are based on merit, and failure to find secure, rewarding employment is their failure, not the consequence of a precarious labour market.

However, there a number of ways in which the compartmentalisation is less neat in reality than it appears in the language of the discourses adopted by most policy-makers. The realities of young people's experiences of learning and work suggest that current policy frameworks are lagging behind in terms of the assumptions they make about the nature of work and life. For example, it is increasingly unrealistic to frame young people solely in terms of their school-based status. Young people are also workers (Bailey et al., 2007) and they have knowledge and skills that can be beneficial to their school-based learning environment (Stokes & Wyn, 2007). It is also the case that non-standard life-course trajectories require a more flexible approach to educational policy – and a broader conception of youth within policy (Martin, 2009; Wyn, 2009b). The assumption that young people are simply consumers in educational and employment markets is also difficult to reconcile with the reality. Young people and their family are forced to make choices of course, but it is the returns on an investment in education that are far from clear or certain. If anything, the relationship between educational credentials and labour market outcomes is less certain than ever. While the evidence shows that the possession of educational credentials correlates positively with job security and income levels, how this operates and the actual relationship between education and employment is complex and can be an extended and unpredictable process (Dwyer et al., 2005). It is also important to acknowledge the impact of the deregulated labour market on young people's experiences of work and, in particular, to recognise the existence of a labour market segmented by gender and educational qualification. Young people are one of the most vulnerable groups in this context, and education has a responsibility to equip them to see the bigger picture, as well as to give them the skills to be individually competitive.

Young people's priorities, hopes and goals

Given the strong focus on preparing young people for employment, it is surprising that there is only scant information about what young people think. From the available research, it seems that young people share agreement with the key elements and direction, and even the ambitions of the described policies. Work matters. A survey of research on young people's priorities reveals that they place a particularly high priority on being able to get secure, reasonably paid and interesting work (Wyn, Smith, Stokes, Tyler & Woodman, 2008; Eckersley, Cahill, Wierenga

& Wyn, 2007). In the previously mentioned cross-national analytical work by Andres and Wyn (forthcoming) there is evidence that this focus on work is particularly strong in Australia.

In 1998, when they were aged about 24, some Australian participants in the *Life-Patterns* longitudinal study were asked about their hopes, dreams and aspirations for the future (Dwyer et al., 2005). Half of them said they hoped to live in modest material comfort with personal and financial security, and nearly a third viewed their employment situation as the key to their aspirations for the future, which included a range of goals. The majority saw work as a strategy for achieving security and financial independence. Some wanted to achieve financial security to take care of their parents and others wanted to be successful in order to make their parents proud of them. The work-focused responses were slightly weighted towards young women, indicating that these attitudes should not be interpreted simply as an expression of traditional gendered approaches to life. On the contrary, the emphasis on work was a direct outcome of the opportunities for independence and autonomy that educated young women saw existed for them.

Andres' and Wyn's analysis assessed the extent to which these young people had been able to achieve their mainly modest hopes, 15 years after leaving secondary school. In the main they had been successful in the job market, although as would be expected, those who had a university education fared the best and those who did not complete secondary school fared the worst in the precarious labour market of the 1990s and 2000s. But the most significant finding of this study, and other related studies, has been the centrality of the struggle to achieve a satisfactory work–life balance (Andres & Wyn, forthcoming; Wyn & Woodman, 2006). A significant minority did not manage this at all and felt a high level of concern about their mental health. Researchers concluded that young people's achievement of educational and employment goals, in the labour market, had been at the expense of their personal relationships and well-being.

Concluding comments

While it makes sense to focus on skills and dispositions for work, this review of research has suggested that policy approaches over the last decade have been too narrow. While the rhetoric of state policy in Australia emphasises 'new', post-industrial economies and social change, in practice, policies tend to be based on conceptions of youth that are more suited to an 'industrial' age. The strongly vocational emphasis of educational policies, and the move to frame education as a private investment and a choice that individuals make from a range of educational providers, assumes that the investment will be rewarded in the labour market. Yet, if anything, the current relationship between educational credentials and labour market outcomes is even less of a certainty than in previous decades. While overall the evidence shows that in the long run, for the majority of young people, having educational credentials correlates positively with job security and income levels, but the actual relationship between education and employment is uncertain, especially at the level of the individual.

Section 2 has acknowledged that the focus on education as a tool for economic development has enormous surface validity. Young people need to get jobs and they place getting a good, secure job as their number one priority. However, the connections between young people's educational experiences and qualifications and their labour market experiences are complex. Aligning education too narrowly to economic needs reflects a return to Fordist ideas about the relationship between education and society and this section has highlighted the plight of young people in a precarious labour market and the need for them to be proactive, flexible, and having entrepreneurial skills in such workplaces. In doing so, this section has identified new challenges for the development of educational approaches that prepare young people for work, and these considerations will again be taken up in Section 3, with its focus on preparing young people for life, not just work.

3

Education as a tool for social inclusion

As a parallel to the examination in Section 2 of the work-related goals of education, this section will explore the ideas and policy frameworks that have shaped the social goals of education. Macintyre commented in his keynote address at the ACER conference that ‘school has always been more than a training institution for the labour market’ (2008). The social goals of education relate to its civic and social functions, and are:

- to ameliorate social inequalities through a commitment to social justice
- to produce citizens who have the skills and dispositions to participate in a democratic society, who share ethical values and are capable of engaging in lifelong learning that will improve their lives and contribute to a socially cohesive and diverse society.

(Adapted from MCEECDYA, 2008)

These goals of education for Australians, identified in the *Melbourne Declaration*, speak to an explicitly broader social policy framework, in which schools share collective responsibility for education with ‘students, parents, carers, families, the community, business and other education and training providers’ (MCEECDYA, 2008, p. 4). The declaration takes a holistic approach to the learner whom, in a diverse and complex society, requires an education that will promote ‘intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing’ (MCEECDYA, 2008, p. 4). Perhaps most importantly, the declaration puts reconciliation between Australia’s Indigenous and non-Indigenous people on the agenda, through a commitment to valuing Australia’s Indigenous cultures, not simply as part of Australia’s history, but as part of its present and future.

By describing how these goals build on previous policies, Section 3 will trace the development of concerns about education and equality and equity in the 1980s and 1990s, through to the more recent concept of social inclusion in the 2000s. It will describe how these approaches to the social goals of education have been implemented through three key areas: civics and citizenship, youth participation and well-being.

This analysis will further reveal the constraining influence of the dominant discourse of education for economic development and expose contradictions about the depth and breadth of learning for life. At one end of a descriptive continuum, learning is seen to involve active, engaged, critical and socially connected young people, who experience a learning environment in which they are included, and who have a say in decisions that affect them and that contribute to their well-being and that of their community. At the other end of the continuum, the approach is

to teach young people about their future rights and responsibilities as adult citizens, abstracted from young people's everyday life, through curricula over which they or their parents have little say. These considerations raise questions about what kind of citizen education might aim to produce, especially given the increasing cultural diversity of Australia's population, and also considering the evidence of the widening gap between rich and poor in Australia (Saunders, Hill & Bradbury, 2008). It seems, now more than ever, there is a role for education in shaping critical citizenship and in contributing to the processes that can accommodate diversity as well as inclusion.

Finally, Section 3 will explore the implications of taking seriously the social goals of education.

Educational policies and social outcomes

The idea that education might serve broad social goals had become increasingly marginalised by the early 1970s. But even as the economic role of education was being consolidated, the role of education in contributing to a more equal society and to the production of engaged, active citizens who themselves might contribute to the quality of civic life, continued to have a place in educational policy documents. This element of the literature acknowledged, in a small way, that supplying workers for the labour market was not the only purpose of schooling, and that the quality of young people's social relationships, the strength of communities and the capacity to engage in civic life were also educational goals. Policy developments over the last 30 years reveal two distinctive approaches to these goals, firstly through the language of equality and later through the idea of social inclusion.

Equality and equity

The relationship between education and social equality has been one of ambivalence. The report *Girls, School and Society* (Schools Commission, 1975) set out a clear agenda for education to create a more equal society, recognising the role that education should play in lessening the social divisions of class and gender. However, during the late 1970s and 1980s policies revealed:

... continuing confusion over the significance of education as a means for producing greater equality in the society. On the one hand there have been proponents for the view that education should not contribute to perpetuating inequality and that it should allow all students to have 'an even break' in entering society; on the other hand it has been held that education should help put an end to social divisions, assisting the development of equal material and cultural rights.

(Wilson & Wyn, 1987, p. 75)

Arguably the most significant policy development that was based on a commitment to creating social equality through education was the *Participation and Equity Program* (PEP) which was introduced by a Labor government into Australian schools in the 1980s. The PEP explicitly recognised the role of education in addressing disadvantaged groups. Drawing on socio-economic data, this program concentrated funding in schools that were designated as most in need. The program identified a number of groups who were disadvantaged in terms of their economic and social participation in society (for example, students from low socio-economic and non-English-speaking backgrounds, girls, Indigenous students and students with learning difficulties). It was distinctive because it gave communities a significant measure of control over how disadvantage would be addressed through education at the local level. It gave those most directly affected – parents, teachers and students – a role in decision making about the implementation of projects at the school level:

... addressing the complexities of social division as they were manifested in the experiences of students in their schools.

(Wilson & Wyn, 1987, p. 53)

The PEP focused initiatives on the final years of school, based on the assumption that educational participation would be achieved not by coercion but through the development of locally relevant curricula that would make school an inherently worthwhile experience for all students, and for marginalised groups in particular. Tensions between state governments and the Commonwealth, as well as inevitable differences in the way the program was implemented, made it difficult to sustain this national program. A number of reviews (e.g. Pettit, 1984) as well as state government inquiries into curricula in the senior years of schooling (for example, Swan-McKinnon Report, 1984; Blackburn Report, 1985; and the Steinle Report, 1973) resulted in reforms that weakened the emphasis on addressing disadvantage and social inequality, and focused instead on educational participation and achievement.

These reviews, conducted in the mid and late 1980s began to articulate emerging neo-liberal political discourses on educational reform, shifting the way policy-makers thought about the relationship between the individual and the community. The systematic nature of poverty and disadvantage became less important than the idea of choice of school and the measurement of individual characteristics. As Taylor and Henry (2000) have pointed out, the language of educational outcomes, from a neo-liberal approach, ignores the deep-seated structural inequalities of late capitalism, to focus instead on social exclusion and individual employability.

Although the social outcomes of education continued as a minor refrain in educational policies throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the idea of equality disappeared, and measures to address disadvantage were articulated through the language of social cohesion. The OECD played an important role in focusing on lifelong learning as a force for social cohesion in societies experiencing rapid social and economic change (OECD, 1996). The report *Lifelong Learning in Australia* (Watson, 2003) also embraced the idea that individuals who were not lifelong learners would suffer economic and social exclusion, as would nations that failed to be learning societies. This was echoed in *Higher Education at the Crossroads* (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002) which acknowledged the benefits of individual learning for the economy, particularly with respect to the goal of enabling 'individuals to adapt and learn, consistent with the needs of an adaptable knowledge-based economy', but also noted the contribution that higher education and lifelong learning make to promoting 'a democratic, civilized society' and 'tolerance' (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002, p. 2). In practice, these policy goals were taken up under the rhetoric of social inclusion and exclusion.

The rise of the policy of social inclusion

The change of government in 2007 brought about a minor widening of educational policy parameters, drawing on the concepts of social inclusion and exclusion that had been developed by the Blair Labour Government in the United Kingdom. Social inclusion became a central element in re-thinking how policy and programs across jurisdictions and government departments (including education) could work together to address disadvantage, and to promote civic participation within an increasingly diverse community. This approach had already been picked up in South Australia with the establishment of a Social Inclusion Board and Social Inclusion Commissioner in 2002. In Victoria, the Labor Government drew on the idea of social inclusion as a framework for addressing social disadvantage in its 2005 policy, *A Fairer Victoria* (State Government of Victoria, 2005).

The Rudd Government established a Social Inclusion Board in 2008 (www.socialinclusion.gov.au/AusGov/Board/default.aspx). This Board's remit is to focus on the development of policies and programs that would improve economic well-being and social participation for highly disadvantaged groups. These include reducing homelessness, improving educational and health outcomes for Indigenous Australians, increasing employment for people with a disability

or mental illness, and place-based initiatives that ensure the right combination of services and programs reach communities with the greatest need and ensure that people have the skills to achieve both economic and social well-being. The social inclusion agenda has tended to operate as a framework for bringing about more integrated social and economic policies:

... recognising that problems such as poverty, lack of education and skills, unemployment, homelessness and poor health are linked and require 'joined-up' solutions.

(Ferrier & North, 2009, p. 49)

Although many of these goals have implications for education, in general the idea of social inclusion has not had much traction in educational policy or practice. This may change following the publication of the Rudd Government's Bradley Review (Bradley, 2008). This report on the future of Australia higher education has reiterated the goals of attending to the recruitment and support of disadvantaged students in higher education, with particular emphasis on Indigenous students, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, students from regional or remote areas and those with disabilities. However, as Macintyre noted in his address, the Bradley Review is not very forthcoming about how this might translate into policy or practice.

By far the most visible way in which social inclusion has been addressed is through civics and citizenship education, but over the last 20 years youth participation has received increasing attention and, in more recent times, well-being has become a key area of policy and program development. Each of these areas plays a role in making education more inclusive.

Civics and citizenship

The language of civics and citizenship has provided an important policy framework for considering social inclusion and cohesion. Mellor's contribution to the conference provided a useful chronology of the introduction of civics and citizenship education into Australian schools (Mellor, 2008). Although a Senate Standing Committee into Civics and Citizenship was established in the 1980s, it was not until 1994 that the issue of young Australians' knowledge of civic rights and responsibilities was raised through the publication of the Civics Expert Group *Whereas the People ... Civics and Citizenship Education* (Commonwealth of Australia, 1994). This report observed that:

Our system of government relies for its efficacy and legitimacy on an informed citizenry; without active, knowledgeable citizens the forms of democratic representation remain empty; without vigilant, informed citizens there is no check on potential tyranny ... our democratic values require that every citizen has equal opportunity to participate in the exercise of these rights and responsibilities. Without civic education that democratic ideal is not maintained.

(Commonwealth of Australia, 1994, pp. 15–16)

Subsequently, in 1999, Australia participated in the IEA CivEd project (Mellor, Kennedy & Greenwood, 2002). This study found that 14-year-old Australians were generally not very well informed about civic matters, though their achievement fell in the mid-range of the international cohort of students. For example, only half had a grasp of the essential preconditions for democracy and few had a strong understanding of the impact of economic issues on the functioning of the democratic system. Most young people did not regard conventional forms of civic participation as important. Only one-third had participated in a school council or parliament. These findings contributed to a view that young Australians were suffering from a 'civics deficit', a national program of resourcing civics and citizenship education, called *Discovering Democracy*, was launched in 1997, and the *Adelaide Declaration* of 1999 affirmed the importance of civics and citizenship education.

Young Australians' knowledge and experience of civics and citizenship is being measured as part of the National Assessment Program (NAP-CC) from 2004 every three years. The report on Year 6 and Year 10 students' civics and citizenship literacy in 2007 found that only small gains in levels of performance from the 2004 cycle of assessments had been made. It found that many students are only able to offer a generalised or literal understanding of simple civics and citizenship concepts and are unable to provide more complex or nuanced understandings. It concluded that students need to be provided with more opportunities to learn about the development of international agreements and how a nation's identity is re-shaped over time. It found that young people whose parents were in higher socio-economic groups and who lived in metropolitan areas tended to do better than their lower socio-economic peers and those in rural and regional areas. Young Indigenous people also performed less well on civics and citizenship tests than their non-Indigenous peers (MCEECDYA, 2009).

The *Melbourne Declaration*, 2008, reaffirmed the national educational goals for young Australians, stating that young people should be 'active and informed citizens' who are 'committed to national values of democracy, equity and justice, and participate in Australia's civic life' (MCEECDYA, 2008, p. 8). Mellor pointed out that this broad conception of civic participation was not much taken up in the *Discovering Democracy* resources, which focused mainly on transmitting knowledge about formal governance institutions and civics.

The more rounded understanding of civics and citizenship was taken up in Seddon's conference presentation. She argued that:

An identity as citizen is as important as an identity as worker in forming sustainable, imagined communities that can transcend and ameliorate socio-cultural divisions and conflicts. Yet being a citizen means more than simply belonging to a community. It means using power responsibly to further community (collective) action in pursuit of preferred goals.

(Seddon, 2008)

Seddon suggested that the civics and citizenship deficit lies not in young people, but in the curriculum itself. She argued that it is important to move beyond a conception of worker-citizens to embrace a broader concept of citizenship through education, and that developing citizenship skills is a critical dimension in the formation of sustainable communities. Citizen action, according to Seddon, has become less visible in schools through the disciplining of teachers' work and the imposition of managerialist practices which erode legitimate contestation in schools, workplaces and communities. Hierarchies of power have been consolidated at the expense of horizontal relations of power within citizen communities. Opportunities to learn are not provided to students.

Both Seddon and Mellor allude to the fact that citizenship education can be framed in different ways. It is important to acknowledge that the approach taken to civics and citizenship education (CCE) has implications for the extent to which students are expected to experience democratic processes, as opposed to simply learning about them. For example, a 'minimalist' approach (Evans, 1995) is built on the assumption that young people will one day be able to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and therefore need to learn what this will involve for their adult lives. Another approach, sometimes referred to as 'maximalist' (Evans, 1995), assumes that young people are able to participate in civic society from an early age and that the best way to understand about citizenship is to practise it. Another conference presentation discussed the assessment domain for the International Civics and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) and demonstrated how it references the latter, richer conceptualisation, in drawing on the distinction between cognitive and affective behavioural domains (Schulz & Fraillon, 2008). In this it resembles the NAP-CC, with both assessments seeking data on civic-related learning outcomes as well as indicators of civic engagement. Some CCE programs expand the concept to include global citizenship, involving opportunities for young people to connect across different countries to learn about the local relevance of global issues (Wierenga et al., 2008).

Student participation

The goal of having young people actively participate in decisions that affect their lives and learning is often addressed through programs described as ‘student participation’ in order to highlight the importance of action in the present, rather than passive knowledge of responsibilities that may be carried out in the future (Holdsworth, 2000). This approach avoids more specific distinctions made between civics and citizenship, where the argument is that in order to be able to be fully active as a citizen one must have first obtained some knowledge of civic processes. In the language of the NAP–CC report there is a distinction between ‘civic activities’ and ‘governance activities’ (MCEECDYA, 2009) and both can be provided by schools. In teaching participative decision making, the provision of opportunities for relatively small acts of decision making that enable students to be actively involved in decisions about their learning or school processes, are entirely appropriate. Such opportunities provide validation of the students as actors in their present. Regardless of the locus of the decision making, knowing the rules of the decision-making processes in which one is about to engage is an essential prerequisite for effective participation. According to the COAG Declarations, it is the duty of schools to provide students with opportunities for civic and governance participation.

Student participation is today relevant to a broader youth participation policy framework that spans youth and education policy and local, state and national government. The term ‘student participation’ encompasses the idea of young people’s involvement in decision making about their learning, school and community, and is associated with processes that enable young people to exercise some control, to belong and to engage in meaningful learning, to participate in their local environment, and to understand their connection to global matters. It is differentiated from the term ‘educational participation’ which refers to young people’s attendance at schools and presence in classrooms.

A range of ideas are associated with the idea of student participation including ‘student voice’ (Angus, 2006); citizenship (Vromen, 2003; Harris, Wyn & Younes, 2008); and political action (Fyfe & Wyn, 2007). The value of young people’s participation is highly contested because it can become tokenistic (young people’s views are gathered but they do not have any impact on decisions) and elitist (a select few articulate and usually middle-class students are chosen to represent all students). Others have argued that student voice, rather than empowering young people, is a mechanism for co-opting young people, giving them the impression that they have made decisions when the outcomes were predetermined by adults. For example, in many schools students are involved (through election or selection) in representative councils. This can be empowering when students genuinely get to contribute to decisions about things that matter to them and they can see tangible outcomes, but very disempowering when students feel that teachers are making the decisions for them or do not act on young people’s decisions (Armstrong, 2004).

Programming to support student participation

Schools devalue young people when policies and programs, developed in young people’s interests, have no authentic connection to what young people think, say they need and would benefit from. However, involving young people does not mean that their views are accepted at face value or taken uncritically. Carefully constructed processes for youth participation provide a structured process for engaging young people in decision making (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2004; Holdsworth, Stokes, Blanchard & Mohammed, 2008). As Smyth, Angus, Down & McInerney (2008) argue, creating the conditions for critical democratic engagement means constructing spaces in which teachers, students, parents and community organisers can recognise how power works and for whom, and can create learning environments that contribute to social justice.

A prime example of learning communities co-working to such educational and life affirming ends is provided by the Student Action Teams initiative that has been supported in primary and secondary schools in Victoria since 1999. Student Action Teams were developed in direct response to the need to address the well-being of students aged approximately 12–15. The program was developed as a collaboration of the Victorian Department of Education and

Training, the Victorian Department of Crime and Justice and the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. An evaluation conducted in 2001–2 found that although there was considerable diversity in how the program was implemented across the 36 pilot schools, all programs illustrated ways in which young people can be involved as partners in designing and implementing learning (Holdsworth, Cahill & Smith, 2003). The diversity of projects reflected the local issues that were relevant to young people. For example, they included building an environmental walk and running track for student and community use; peer education drug education, involving the training of students to lead activities and discussions with younger students in the school; surveying local traffic conditions and petitioning the local council to provide a traffic roundabout near the school to improve safety; and research on bullying within the school, reporting on the results and making recommendations for action (Holdsworth et al., 2003). The evaluation found that three dimensions of the programs were common: having a sense of purpose; having a sense of control and having a sense of belonging.

There are many other ways in which schools can create spaces for young people to have greater responsibility, to have their views, opinions and experiences valued, and to experience a sense of belonging. The use of interactive learning tools that position both students and teachers as co-learners for particular purposes, can involve using dramaturgical interactive tools to provide spaces within which young people are able to develop problem-solving skills in relation to harm minimisation practices (such as regarding alcohol or drugs). Learning partnerships can be used in teaching settings in which young people teach adults how to work with young people (Cahill, 2006).

Participatory practices, like any processes used with young people, need to be relevant to the specific circumstances and cultural context of the young people involved. While some common principles have emerged in particular settings, participatory processes are only effective if they are developed to meet the needs of specific groups of young people, in partnership with those young people. Couch (2007) argues that trends to standardise participatory processes and to place control in the hands of ‘experts’ can have a negative impact. She illustrates this with the example of refugee young people, arguing that tension between young people and their families can be exacerbated by the enhancement of young people’s autonomy, because for adults in some communities, the idea that their young people would act autonomously or independently carries with it an implicit threat of further fragmentation and possible loss of the young in their community. Couch argues that in the case of refugee young people, participatory practices are most effective when they include the young person and their family, cautioning that the way in which young refugee people’s participation is developed through programs must take into account the culturally specific meanings that participation has in their community. The same argument is also relevant to participation processes in relation to young Indigenous people. In many Indigenous communities it is not appropriate to focus on young people’s participation apart from their relationships with their families and their community. Supporting student participation needs to involve recognition of the relationships that young people have with their community and may involve working in partnership with the community.

Student well-being

Well-being is the third and most recent strand within educational policy associated with social inclusion. Over the last decades, research has been mounting to reveal the links between students’ achievement levels and their sense of well-being (including their freedom from racism or sexism) and an acknowledgement that learning cannot be separated from personal, social, emotional and physical development and well-being (Tett, Crowther & O’Hara, 2003; Wyn, 2009b). Many departments of education have well-being units or divisions, and policies on student well-being (social and emotional) are included in national and state policy documents and frameworks.

There is, however, a divergence of opinion within education on what might be meant by well-being in practice. In her exploration of social and emotional well-being in educational contexts, Vincent (2005) argues that social and emotional well-being encompasses:

- capacities (for positive personal development, positive relationships and setting realistic goals)
- abilities (problem-solving and managing one's emotions)
- skills (assertiveness, empathy and negotiation).

This approach is consistent with that taken in most education policy documents. It defines well-being as a property of individual students, rather than as a function of social processes (such as school ethos, community environment and classroom practices). Even so, many educational policies recognise the need for student well-being to be embedded within a wider framework of teacher practices and school climate.

Programming to support student well-being

Student well-being has become a stimulus for new strategies, including cross-sectoral partnerships and new approaches to teacher professional development. One example of such a partnership, *The Schools as Core Social Centres Project* involving the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation and the Department of Education, has informed learning and credentialling strategies, provided an evidence base through research partnerships, and embedded new initiatives (Catholic Education Office, 2007). Such partnerships begin to build models of inter-sectoral collaboration, having as their explicit purpose the promotion of student well-being. Another example is the placement of nurses in secondary schools and the integration of local health centre services with schools. Within the Victorian Catholic system, a teacher professional development strategy has been implemented to promote a preventative whole school approach to student welfare, which focuses on school improvement and incorporates the well-being of all students (Cahill, Shaw, Wyn & Smith, 2004).

Strategies and programs that aim to promote student well-being involve an understanding of the heterogeneity of the student population and often require schools to manage the different levels of response (or programming) that this entails. The Health Promoting Schools approach for example, addresses the need to distinguish between programs that seek to enhance general well-being and those that target specific health problems (for example, bullying) or specific conditions (for example, anxiety disorders) or groups (for example, young homeless) (Rowling, Martin & Walker, 2002). Programs designed to promote young people's health routinely recognise the importance of identifying and responding to young people who have specific problems (for example, mental health problems), particularly through early identification and referral to the appropriate professional health service. Well-being strategies also incorporate the broader task of responding to the different learning needs of young people. This approach recognises that being able to learn is itself health promoting. Indeed, the capacity to recognise and respond to the diversity of young people's learning needs is one of the most significant challenges facing contemporary schools, as well as being a significant element in promoting young people's well-being.

Drawing on the findings of the *Australian Temperament Project*, a longitudinal study which is in its 25th year (Prior, Sanson, Smart & Oberklaid, 2000), Smart's presentation at the conference underlines the relevance of well-being if the focus is on education for life. She reported that at the age of 23–24 years, 'a substantial number of the cohort were experiencing mental health problems or were involved in risk taking' (Smart, 2008). Her research confirms that alcohol abuse is increasing and that the heaviest drinkers in adolescence remained the heaviest drinkers in young adulthood. Smart's paper also confirms the importance of families in contributing to young people's well-being – particularly relationships with parents. Another contribution to the conference (Rothman & Hillman, 2008) also addressed an aspect of well-being through a consideration of young people's satisfaction with life after they had graduated from secondary school. This paper drew on the *Longitudinal Studies of Australian Youth* (LSAY) project (Hillman & McMillan, 2005) and reported a positive association between satisfaction and participation in education and training and participation in the labour force. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) also notes this association, but draws attention to the fact that young people with mental health problems are more likely than their mentally healthy peers to

be disengaged from school and to be unemployed (AIHW, 2007). Both of these contributions provide support for the view that schools have a role in promoting young people's well-being and should play an active part in supporting processes of early intervention.

What kind of citizen, for what kind of society?

Just as instrumental approaches to education assume a particular kind of 'subject', so do the social approaches. However, as Macintyre comments, approaches to education which address 'skills for life' tend to be far less certain and are less developed than the more instrumental approach in their vision of the kind of person they aim to create. It is not in the scope of this discussion to revisit the 'culture wars' of the early 2000s, but this episode was the closest we have come to having serious debate about the meaning of citizenship in Australia and how this might be achieved through education. During the 'culture wars', the Howard Government gave strong messages about the kinds of 'subjects' school should produce, through the prescription of knowledge about Australian history and the reduction of all elements of education to an instrument for economic development. The citizens envisaged by the Howard Government were culturally and socially homogeneous, shared limited social values, held individualised and entrepreneurial dispositions which would enable them to make the most of their lives, and were to be ruled by an elite of successful citizens whose merits were proven through their economic prowess.

Although the Rudd Government has distanced itself from this position, the kind of citizens education might produce is still not particularly in focus in its Education Revolution. Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard's opening speech at the ACER Research Conference (see conference website) placed greater emphasis on the role that education plays in preparing young people for work than on the role of education in equipping young people as citizens.

Referring to the high levels of 15–24-year-olds neither in work nor at school, she said:

Every year ... another 45,000 to 50,000 early school leavers who should be on the path to becoming skilled tradespeople, para-professionals and professionals ... are ending up drifting through casual jobs, often unable to attract a partner or have a supportive network of friends. Certainly, these young people will not be in a position to buy a home. We know that this work and personal insecurity contributes to homelessness, substance abuse and other tragedies for the individuals involved. Our society is the loser.

The imperative for getting this right is moral and economic. It has been estimated that the failure of young people to make a smooth transition to the world of work is costing our economy some \$1.3 billion per year. And the cost of failure is only going to increase. In the modern economy we simply can't afford to have around one-in-five young people not contributing.

(Gillard, 2008)

A National Curriculum Board, established by the federal government in 2008, has begun to establish the form of a national curriculum, and has established a consultation process which will generate a detailed statement of the national curriculum. In its document *The Shape of the National Curriculum: A proposal for discussion*, the Board recognises that this curriculum will form 'the young people who will take responsibility for Australia in the future' and that this is occurring 'in circumstances that are changing our national conception of the goals of education' (National Curriculum Board, 2008). However, there is still a long way to go before these goals are clear.

Building skills for *life* as well as work requires an understanding of how young people themselves can build their lives, in real space and time, starting from where they are standing. It means developing educational approaches that will equip all young people – the full diversity of young Australians – to establish themselves in relationships, communities and in jobs, and to

do so with a sense of engagement, control and of belonging. For many young people, especially those who are from middle and high socio-economic families, this is not especially problematic. They and their families are the most likely to be able to use education to enhance their skills for life and for work. As Teese (2000) reveals in his analysis of the relationship between the school curricula and social class, curriculum is a cultural system that relies on the qualities (or cultural capital) that the learner brings to the classroom.

However, the history of Australian education is that inequalities are reproduced through education. Wave upon wave of research reveals that low socio-economic groups, young Indigenous people and young people in rural and remote areas of Australia are less well-served by our education system than others (Teese & Lamb, 2003). Recent initiatives to increase rates of educational participation are motivated by a desire to see that all students have the benefits of an education. But in our socially and economically divided society, simply pressuring young people into spending time in institutions that they do not relate to is not likely to create the desired improvements.

Connecting young people who are disengaged from education to formal learning often confronts what Massey (2005) calls 'the facts of difference'. By this, she means the tangible ways in which schools fail to acknowledge historical legacies of disadvantage (for example, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians). However, there are many examples of school practices and programs that make schools more relevant to young people who have been marginalised from education.

An example is found in two case studies provided by Smyth et al. (2008) in their book on critically engaged learning. Smyth and his colleagues argue that in order to increase educational participation, teachers need to 'recognise' the learners in their classroom. This means acknowledging their local connections, families and histories, because 'in contexts of disadvantage there is a crucial set of interconnections between students, schools and their communities' (Smyth et al., 2008, p. 6). The case studies describe the experiences of students, parents, teachers and community members as they all engage with issues of disadvantage, social exclusion, marginalisation and social justice. For example, one school embraced a process of community renewal, and the community saw its long-term sustainability as dependent on the quality of its local schools. The majority of the students at the local high school received some form of government assistance and a significant proportion of the students had learning difficulties or disabilities. The authors observed:

Few children have experience of pre-schooling and attrition rates are well above the state average, with a high proportion of students failing to complete formal schooling requirements. Many parents are concerned that their children are unable to handle transition points in their schooling either into elementary school or from elementary school to high school.

(Smyth et al., 2008, p. 11)

Smyth et al. reported that improvements in school completion were largely focused on an alternative education program called *Connexions*. The key to engaging students in this program was twofold: the explicit acknowledgement of the role of education in community renewal so it was connected to young people's context, and also the de-institutionalisation of relationships between students and teachers to give parents and students greater control over learning in order to make it more meaningful.

It is an approach that focuses on the assets that communities (even disadvantaged ones) possess rather than focusing on deficits. It is also an approach that explicitly recognises the intersecting challenges of social inclusion (opening up opportunities) and income poverty in raising levels of educational participation.

In programs such as these, civics, citizenship and democratic education, youth participation and student well-being are interwoven as integral elements in the design of curricula and in the school's processes. In a pattern that echoes the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP) of the 1980s, communities – not just schools – are the essential setting for socially inclusive

practices. Like the DSP, these programs are not standardised, and although there is emerging research evidence about ‘what works and why’, this evidence is developed from practices that have generally developed organically rather than institutionally, to meet the needs of young people in real place and time.

Muir’s conference presentation (2008) made a similar point in his emphasis that the achievement of improved outcomes for Indigenous people is a responsibility shared by all stakeholders, and he argued that the role of educator belongs to parents, families and communities, as well as to teachers and administrators. His discussion of an initiative in the Grampians region (Grampians Regional Koorie Education Committee, 2007) illustrated the importance of developing locally embedded and locally relevant educational programs, recognising local issues (present and historical) with openness and honesty, which enable young people and their families to have ownership of the curriculum and which are informed by evidence. Muir identified the importance of partnerships, honesty, ownership and being evidence-based in his discussion of the program. A fifth characteristic might also usefully be added: that of sustainability. Muir notes that the Grampians initiative was successful in gaining funding for an Indigenous Pathways Coordinator ‘for another year’ (Muir, 2008). Funding provided on such a basis compromises long-term planning and continuity of staff, and programs are marginalised and undermined.

Concluding comments

This section has traced the development of educational policies and ideas that extend the goals of education beyond ‘school for work’ to ‘school for life’. An analysis of these policies and debates reveals that ‘education for life’ raises questions about the nature of Australian society, the way history is taught, the relationship between stakeholders and their vision of the social relations in the future. If schools are to be the collective responsibility of ‘students, parents, carers, families, the community, business and other education and training providers’ (MCEECDYA, 2008), then these are some of the issues that will need to be confronted.

Most importantly, education for life (as well as work) involves the recognition that the two great gaps – achievement and school participation – that contribute to social division in Australia cannot be addressed through coercive measures alone. There is considerable power in national assessments and others that enable international comparisons. However, there is a need to balance this evidence with a better understanding of the rich educational experiences that are provided in non-standard settings, which can empower those who are traditionally disadvantaged so they can belong in their schools and have a sense of control over their learning. To adopt this perspective is to recognise the power relations involved in education and how they impact on learning (Teese, 2000).

This section has begun to explore the question of how an institution and system such as education can operate in an era when it is apparent that institutions are experiencing fragmentation and loss of authority. The difficulty of finding a space where the wider implications of education can be debated and agreed on, speaks to the challenges facing all societies today. The review paper will continue the analysis in terms of other questions requiring attention. What kind of evidence do we need about learning and for what purposes? What kinds of governance structures and processes will ensure that educational leaders can contribute effectively? These issues are taken up in Section 4.

Knowing and measuring for life and work

4

The policy frameworks discussed in the previous sections provide an illustration of how the policy emphasis shifted to supporting Australia's economic development, and reveal the tension this creates for a more expansive framing of education for life and as a tool for developing a socially just, egalitarian and democratic society. Section 4 examines two key areas through which these tensions are manifested: knowing and measuring. It reveals significant differences in emphasis on and approach to the kinds of knowledge young people require and the sets of skills and subject areas that should shape such a curriculum. The different positions on the skills and knowledge that young people need can be summarised as involving two views of curriculum that are not mutually exclusive, but that are often, in practice, poorly integrated. One position is an understanding of curriculum as subject matter: that the learner must acquire and focus on learning for work. The other is a view of curriculum as a structured process that facilitates relevant learning and tends to focus on learning for life. In the first, the learner is positioned as human capital, in a deficit state that requires development, and in the second, the learner is positioned as an active participant in education, bringing with them cultural and social resources and needs.

Interestingly, although we have in place a powerful system of monitoring, assessing and examining student, teacher and school performance in Australia, there is relatively little agreement about what should be measured and there is divergence of opinion on how educational data should be interpreted. Drawing on examples from several of the ACER conference presentations, as well as the wider national and international literature, this section will firstly address the question of educational knowledge.

The second part of the section will consider the related issue of measurement, drawing on ACER conference contributions as well as on wider international literature. This discussion raises some fundamental questions about the ways in which assessment is also a cultural and political process. While assessment is an essential tool for all aspects of curriculum and learning, there is little agreement about what should be assessed, how and for what purpose. This point is made through the example of the chronic and to date intransigent achievement gap between different groups of young Australians based on race, geographic location and socio-economic status.

Knowing

In his introductory address, Masters argued that there is a set of foundational skills which all students should develop (2008). These foundational skills and understandings are those that are 'essential to functioning as an adult member of Australian society and the workforce' (Masters, 2008). He argued that students should be assessed to meet minimum standards of these skills and understandings. Similarly, the Matters and Curtis (2008) presentation advocated for the determination of a set of generic skills, for employment and for life, that would be assessed for all students. Masters confirmed that, notwithstanding moves towards the development of a national curriculum, an underlying difficulty persists.

The problem is that there is no nationally agreed statement of what every child should know and be able to do as a result of 13 years of school and even less agreement about how to define these skills so that they can be assessed.

(Masters, 2008)

The framework structure and rhetorical language of Australian education policy documents to some extent conceals this problem. One of the reasons for this is that knowledge, which is at the core of all educational enterprise, is both cultural and political.

What is taught, what is examined and how, is currently strongly influenced by the two institutions that young people flood into after completing school: higher education and the workforce. Section 2 has referred to the contribution that employer and industry groups have made to the development of an instrumental approach to the knowledge and skills that young people should gain from education and this is also picked up by ACER conference participants (Matters & Curtis, 2008; Burke, 2008). Universities have also, perhaps ironically, contributed to a narrowing of the secondary school curriculum through the weighting given to subjects examined for school completion certification (Teese, 2000). Keating refers to:

... the shadows of the mainstream academic programs that produce the tertiary entrance rank in its various forms across the states and territories.

(Keating, 2009, p. 39)

These shadows, he argued, represent a significant constraint on post-compulsory education.

Identifying knowledge and skills

The traditional limits of the curriculum, enshrined in examination systems and reinforced by powerful economic interests, represent struggles over whose knowledge will be taught and assessed. Yet, there is today a divergence of expert opinion on what young people need to know and what skills they need. The ACER conference has made an important contribution to opening up debate about this important issue. For example, while Masters advocated for the skills proposed by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and of the Business Council of Australia – skills in planning and organising, teamwork, initiative and enterprise and self-management and learning – Roe, in his paper, questioned this position, arguing that these skills do not specifically make a contribution to young people's integration into the workforce. Instead, he emphasises the need for systemic changes to the labour market (that is, that it should be more integrated with schooling) and to industry and training policies (that is, that they should be of higher quality). He advocated for 'broad-based' skills education for young people, coupled with an 'appropriate labour market and industry policy' that is not based on a market-based approach to training (Roe, 2008). Roe illustrated his approach to broad-based education within VET, through the example of training carpenters and plasterers with the full suite of skills and knowledge, including the skill to repair old plaster or to make cornices, versus training people to simply install formwork or plasterboard.

Seddon also offered a perspective on the kinds of knowledge that young people in VET gain from their education. She drew attention to the social practices that students learn in situation-based learning (for example, in a café), which includes norms and relationships, and to perform the 'bonhomie, the emotional and symbolic work' of serving food. She argued that the credential students gain from this learning:

... seems insignificant compared to other pastoral, emotional, rehabilitative and relational learning that is going on ... The emphasis is more on learning to be (and be in a relationship) than to know.

(Seddon, 2008)

Workers in service industries increasingly need to demonstrate the capacity to interact with ease across social difference. They occupy a world in which the server must offer the served the illusion of shared understandings. As mentioned in Section 2, Seddon expresses concern that in such experiences, despite their richness, students:

... learn to be part of a community, to live with others, but not to engage in citizen action ... They learn to take up the restricted form of citizenship on offer within lifelong learning regimes.

(Seddon, 2008)

These kinds of considerations reveal some of the reasons for the difficulty in determining the nature of generic skills, despite attempts by the OECD to identify such skills and to pin them down sufficiently to be able to measure them (Matters & Curtis, 2008).

New knowledge and skills

Many other conference presentations also acknowledged that we are in a new era in which social, economic and environmental change needs to be taken into account in determining what young people need to know. These changes have brought new challenges to individuals (for example, precarious employment and a greater emphasis on personal responsibility for well-being) and to society (for example, environment change, environmental and economic sustainability, and social cohesion) that require new ways of thinking and working.

This position was reinforced by Robinson, who argued in his presentation that climate change and the finite nature of carbon-based fuel reserves means the virtual elimination of dependence on carbon-based fuels and energy sources over the next 50 years (Robinson, 2008). He suggested that this alone means that young people need to have 'more scientific literacy' and a more sophisticated understanding of global events. Robinson also referred to other changes, including digital communications and global youth culture that will create a more diverse and sophisticated young population. His point was that these changes mean that school has an even more important role now in the spiritual, moral, cultural and physical development of young people, rather than focusing simply on sets of knowledge that all students should attain to a minimum level.

Robinson's paper emphasised education as a process, highlighting another of the lines of tension in determining what young people need to know. Robinson's approach carries the implicit message that education is at least as much about what young people can do and be, as about what they know. For example, he advocates an approach that is student-centred (rather than subject-based). While he mentions student aspiration, capability and interest as driving this approach, it could just as well also be driven by community approaches such as those identified in Section 3 (Smyth et al., 2008). His vision is of students who are choice-makers, whose education provides them with the information and mentoring they need to make informed career and life choices. This, he suggests, would be supported by more flexible educational approaches, for example including virtual classrooms offering fuller choices to students regardless of their physical location, a breaking down of the age-based system of learning through increased options

to commence tertiary education before completing secondary school, and the transformation of VET to offer a full choice of higher level VET to school students.

The importance of creating students with the 'power to act' is emphasised by Seddon (2008) and Mellor (2008). Both identify full awareness of democratic rights and responsibilities as a goal of education. Mellor concludes that young people are currently being denied the possibility of being 'civically competent and well disposed to actively engage in political and civic life' by civics and citizenship education programs that are not as effective as MCCECDYA seeks (Mellor, 2008). This point is also reinforced by the findings of the 2007 cycle of the National Assessment Program in civics and citizenship (MCEECDYA, 2009).

Shared responsibility for school education

Wider interests also need to be taken into account in determining what young people need to know and how they should learn. This much has long been acknowledged in policy documents such as the *Hobart*, *Adelaide* and *Melbourne* declarations. Each has expressed COAG's view that school education is a collective responsibility shared with students, parents, carers and the community, as well as industry and other education and training providers. At this stage there has been very little public discussion of how collective responsibility for school education should be practised. There are a number of constraints on achieving this that derive from the role education has consistently played in the past in ensuring the advantage of some groups over others. And there are further challenges too, as schools become one of the few educational institution sites that community members can relate to. This creates added pressure on school principals, especially in locations of disadvantage, which tends to result in schools being seen as a site for the promotion of a wide range of educational 'packages' and programs produced by interest groups.

Teese's argument that the traditional academic curriculum favours higher socio-economic groups is supported by the second NAP-CC report findings described in Section 3. It is evidence about those groups whose cultural capital resonates pleasantly with the cultures of academic curricula and examination systems, which speaks to the question of whose interests are served by the knowledge that is currently taught and assessed in schools. Teese's research demonstrates how school subjects are:

... codified, authoritative systems of cognitive and cultural demands [which] weigh more or less heavily on families depending on their historical experience of academic schooling and the extent to which formal education infuses their lifestyle and values.

(Teese, 2000, p. 3)

Other research (for example, Ball, 2003; McLeod & Yates, 2006) demonstrates how middle-class parents actively use the structural inequalities entrenched in education systems to advantage their children.

But still the way forward is not clear. Attempts to make subject content relevant to marginalised groups and communities is seen as 'dumbing down' the curriculum. Many educationalists make the valid point that it does not advantage marginalised young people to have little or no access to 'high value' subjects such as Chemistry, Mathematics and English. The challenge may be to understand more effectively how to get to the same place by a different route. Can Chemistry be taught in more culturally and socially relevant ways? *Australian Education Review 51* (Tytler, 2007), published following the 2006 ACER Research Conference, addressed this very question and argued 'yes'. Many teachers and educational researchers agree, and this review paper and many of the 2008 conference papers adopt a similar stance.

While there is a strong case for breadth, and the list of learning areas proposed by the *Melbourne Declaration* is quite expansive, the curriculum is often depicted by educational commentators as 'crowded'. Various interest groups regularly claim schools as a site for learning about an ever-expanding circle of subjects and topics, including mental health, anti-bullying, sexuality, legal education, traffic education and many others.

In making decisions about how to manage the learning needs of their students, school principals and teachers also increasingly face challenges. A study of the needs of principals of Catholic schools in Victoria found that in their work, and that of many of their teachers, they felt the pressure of having to manage the implications of wider social and economic matters, including family breakdown, student and family mental health problems and disorders, poverty, learning difficulties and stress (Cahill, Wyn & Smith, 2004). This report raised the question of the kinds of structures and processes that are required in order to enable schools to focus on their core business.

While current policy documents identify young people as one of the groups that would have shared responsibility for education, there is a poor understanding and almost no discussion of what shared decision-making might look like. Yet young people are a significant force for educational change through their decisions. Young people from all areas of life bring important perspectives to the question of what knowledge and skills are required to work and live well. While they do not have the benefit of long-term experience of the past as adult teachers and policy-makers do, they offer perspectives based on their engagement with the realities of their lives in the present. The extent of this engagement is commonly overlooked in educational discussions, to the detriment of policy outcomes. Although young Australians of school age make a significant contribution to the labour market, their contribution and experience is ignored (Stokes & Wyn, 2007). Moreover, the depth and breadth of their learning through leisure, digital communication and informal learning sites is little understood and rarely incorporated into policy discussion or formulations.

Yet, young people vote with their feet. For example, it has become increasingly popular for young people to take up part-time school education in the senior years, giving them the flexibility that many desire and opening up choices. Young people also make choices within the curriculum. Athanasou's conference paper (2008) began to open up this issue through a consideration of young people's interests, reporting that the interests and preferences of young Australians were not satisfied by the curriculum offered to them or by the structure of work opportunities. The study reported that student's interests were highest for the categories of Business and People Contact activities, but enrolments in school were dominated by Mathematics and Science courses. He concluded that:

... courses in senior secondary schooling have a trajectory of their own, that diverges from the career preferences and latent abilities of students and is independent of the world of work ...

(Athanasou, 2008)

These findings suggest that young people are to some extent caught in a system of education that does not align well with the skills and knowledge that they want but which places a priority on particular forms of academic knowledge, as a hurdle requirement for entry into the next stage of education.

Evidence from many sources suggests that the question of what young people need to know, to do and to be, in order to work and live well, requires new approaches. The evidence discussed in this review leads to the view that making learning more relevant to the challenges facing young people and our wider society cannot be achieved by simply adding more dimensions to an already overloaded curriculum. It is timely to consider the role of schools in shaping the knowledge and skills of young people, in light of the kind of society that we want to have.

Educational debates on these topics rarely acknowledge that one of the most significant changes occurring through the de-standardisation of education and work pathways (Martin, 2009) and the use of digital communication (Merchant, 2005) is the exponential increase in the variety of avenues of informal learning. Young people take what they need from a wide variety of sources, of which formal education is only one element. Formal education is only one part of young people's learning repertoire, and if it remains in its current form, it may become increasingly marginal to *learning* and ossify as a *credentialling mechanism* for university, further education and employment.

Determining what young people need to gain from school knowledge involves gaining a grasp of the challenges to institutions in times when institutional authority is waning (Beck & Lau, 2005). New governance approaches are required in order to manage the development of 'sharing responsibility' for education with a wider constituency and in order to address the ways in which responsibilities will be taken up. For example, a number of the ACER conference contributions mentioned the responsibility of commerce and industry for the training of young people (for example, Roe, 2008; Seddon, 2008 and both of the discussion sessions). Having more 'permeable boundaries' between schools and other sites of learning requires defining more closely what is core business for school education and what is the business of other sites of learning (such as workplaces).

A related question concerns the levels of responsibility that schools have for broader issues. This raises the important question of the kinds of professional skills required by teachers and by other professional groups. What is the role of other professionals whose skills are increasingly being acknowledged as crucial to educating for life as well as work? Social workers, youth workers, nurses, psychologists, counsellors, careers advisers, parents, community, business and industry are all groups that have been identified as having a significant role in educating young people. Currently however, their relationship with schooling is not well articulated, and teachers and school principals are often placed in an ambiguous position with regard to the limits of their professional knowledge and responsibilities (Cahill et al., 2004). Educational jurisdictions do not currently fund these professionals in schools at a level where they can have a significant impact on most schools.

Measuring

Knowing and measuring go hand in hand. Assessing what is being learned, and the role a particular learning environment plays in learning allows an understanding of how what is being learned is related to what is being taught. These data are all crucial to improving educational outcomes. Students who can assess their own learning are likely to make good educational decisions and to become lifelong learners. Teaching requires an evidence base of practice that works, and to acquire this evidence base teachers need to be able to assess the impact of their practices on student learning. The administration of schools depends on valid evidence about all of the above and parents have a stake in their children's performance as well as the school's performance.

Arguably, measurement is the area which has most expanded its scope and power in education over the last 20 years. Systematic national databases, such as the National Assessment Program has assembled for Australian schools, have delivered significant advances in knowledge about young people's achievements that can be used to improve educational programs. The assessment of civics and citizenship knowledge and experiences of Year 6 and Year 10 students provides a good example. Technologies of measurement have expanded to the point that we have unprecedented evidence about the outcomes of teaching and learning. Teachers and parents can access data about student satisfaction, teacher satisfaction, learning outcomes, school climate, academic achievement, post-school destinations and many other things.

Measurement has gone global, most notably through the OECD's international education measurement study, PISA, which is an international database that measures educational outcomes in mathematics, science and reading for 15-year-olds in OECD countries. The data from this study has become increasingly influential in national education policies, aligning national policies increasingly to international agendas. The latest PISA data, from 2006, shows that Australian 15-year-olds compare relatively well with only some of their international peers (that is, Canada, Ireland and New Zealand), and that scores for reading have been going down since 2000 (Keating, 2009).

The interpretation of these results remains a subject of debate because of differences of view on the extent to which test results are related to in-school factors such as teacher quality, or social context, including socio-economic status. This is a contentious issue because these different views have opposing implications for policy. If poor test results are primarily a reflection of poor teaching, the solution lies simply in improving the quality of teaching. However, if poor test results are a reflection of differing patterns of cultural life and social knowledge, then another solution must be located; possibly in both improving the quality of teaching and in addressing patterns of inequality. This review paper argues the latter is the case.

Limitations to teacher and school effectiveness

The distribution of outcomes and their reflection in the socio-economic background of students has tended to be interpreted as a function mainly of school variables, and particularly of teacher quality. Indeed, this is one of the main assumptions behind the 'school effectiveness movement', which rests on the idea that educational outcomes can be significantly improved through a focus on the quality of teaching and through a focus on individual students' performance (Fraser & Petch, 2007). This involves the use of an accountability regime that enables the measurement of the performance of school systems against student achievement (measured through large-scale standardised tests). As Keating (2009) comments, education systems have been 'eager' to identify the factors within school systems that influence student outcomes. From a policy point of view, achieving more 'effective' schooling through an intensification of control over teachers makes common sense, and its simplicity makes this an attractive policy direction to promote, but it is a shallow response.

Other interpretations of the measures of student outcomes suggest that the issue is more complex. Researchers who are immersed in the issue of student marginalisation and inequalities in outcomes have produced a raft of sound reasons for not taking the panacea of teacher improvement too seriously. For example, Keating argues that the mantra of teacher quality has left us with unresolved policy issues.

It needs to contend with disagreement about the extent of its impact in the school context (Fullan, 2003); a lack of agreement about the criteria for teacher quality and the measures for its impact (Wayne & Youngs, 2003); the need for greater clarity over the type and capacity of interventions to influence teacher effectiveness; parallel policies to optimise the conditions for effective teaching; and means of distributing teachers both across and within systems in a manner that locates the most effective teachers where they are most needed.

(Keating, 2009, p. 13)

His point, that putting the focus on the relationship between the teacher and the student is flawed policy, is picked up by other critics. Smyth et al. (2008) argue that the 'school effectiveness' mentality, with its focus on the relationship between individual student and teacher, mitigates against the processes that are necessary to make schooling more relevant to young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This is because it does not take account of the cultural and political context in which learners are embedded and in which teachers, parents and others work to create the best educational outcomes they can.

However, in order for teachers to respond to local needs, and to build locally relevant, but internationally oriented curricula that can address the needs of communities in poverty, teachers need to be supported, as professionals with autonomy, to exercise their professional judgement, and not be seen simply as technicians (or clinicians) who implement centrally mandated curricula and tests. Their power as models, decision-makers, critical thinkers and managers of change, within the school governance structures, is just the beginning of their usefulness to their students.

Action on disadvantaged learners

There is little disagreement that the same groups of young people over time continue to experience poor educational outcomes: young people from low socio-economic backgrounds, young people from rural and regional areas and young Indigenous people. Rates of school completion vary across population groups. For Indigenous Australians, the rate of school completion is as low as 35 per cent, and the rate for children from poor backgrounds is about 55 per cent (Lamb & Mason, 2008; Purdie, 2009). Disagreement focuses on whether the causes of these differences are located in the relationship between teacher and student, or in the cultural politics of educational systems and communities. However, the evidence is that the trends in inequity in outcomes in Australia's educational performance indicate patterns of socio-economic status and of cultural difference. Despite improvements in school 'effectiveness' over the last 20 years, the evidence from a wide variety of sources shows that gains in literacy, numeracy and school completion tend to reflect socio-economic status and that those who are less privileged are faring worse over time (Lamb & Mason, 2008; Teese, 2007; McGaw, 2008).

Keating argues that a comparison of PISA data with the Victorian AIM data reveals a more consistent relationship between school population characteristics and educational outcomes than between individual student characteristics and outcomes. These types of analyses consistently produce evidence of gaps between the educational outcomes of particular populations, in terms of achievement, performance and participation, and 'closing the gap for Indigenous Australians' is a priority of the Australian Government (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008; MCEECDYA, 2008). Teese and Polesel (2003) call for measures that would close 'performance gaps' between rich and poor schools. The main strategy for closing these gaps has been through special projects, supported by short-term funding, which aims to bring those in deficit up to the standard set by those who are achieving. Recently however, the nature of these gaps, and the processes identified to close them, have been subjected to scrutiny and new responses to unequal educational outcomes have been proposed.

The idea of education debt

A critical perspective on the achievement gap between student populations is offered by Ladson-Billings (2006). Focusing on the implications of the achievement gap between black and white Americans, Ladson-Billings argues that a more effective way of understanding historical and intransigent differences in educational participation and outcomes between population groups is to replace the metaphor of a 'gap' with the metaphor of a 'debt'. Her re-framing of the problem of addressing chronic differences in educational performance between groups resonates with the situation in Australia, as educators struggle to have a positive impact on differential educational achievement. Ladson-Billings begins by pointing out the difference between debt and deficit in fiscal terms:

A deficit is the amount by which a government's, company's, or individual's spending exceeds income over a particular period of time. Thus, for each budget cycle, the government must determine whether it has a balanced budget, a budget surplus, or a deficit. The debt, however is the sum of all previously incurred annual federal deficits. Since the deficits are financed by government borrowing, national debt is equal to all government debt.

(Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 4)

She then argues that what is called an achievement 'gap' between student populations is actually a measure of an education 'debt', incurred through past deficits that have been historically and systematically incurred through social exclusion and poverty. Ladson-Billings points out that measures of educational achievement and participation provide a snapshot of how individual students perform on a set of achievement measures, but that looking at these figures from one year to the next is misleading. Instead, she argues that differences in educational achievement can better be understood as being created through systematic, historical, social processes that, over time, have limited the capacity of populations to engage 'on a level playing field' in the

cultural politics of education. Like many others who argue for the need for fundamental change to education systems (Keating, 2009), she identifies structural and systemic inequalities as being the problem. From this standpoint, the 'gap' in achievement is not associated with individual deficit, but with historical, economic, socio-political and moral debts that have been incurred over time.

Historical debt

The figures on poor educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians reveal a history of assimilation and blame, as opposed to one of recognition and valuing. This history has mainly served to marginalise young Indigenous people from non-Indigenous education. For many Indigenous Australians, formal education has either been absent or has involved an emptying out of their own cultural heritage, an experience of loss and division rather than of growth. This is a heavy debt, and because it is so, it is important to recognise the many ways in which Indigenous communities and individuals have established successful educational programs that make a difference to young people and to their communities (Schwab, 2001; Muir, 2008; Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). Many researchers have also identified the historical nature of the association of poor educational outcomes with low socio-economic status (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; Wilson & Wyn, 1987; Connell, 1994; Teese & Lamb, 2003) and the ways in which this disadvantages young people in poor communities.

Economic debt

The economic debt is evidenced in the history of differential funding levels for schools, resulting in entrenched differences in the learning environments on offer to young people. Given that government schools have the highest proportion of students in the lowest percentile of socio-economic status of any school system (Keating, 2009), differentials in funding can only serve to exacerbate inequalities. It has been estimated that in 2006, average student expenditure on capital improvements was \$659 for government schools and \$1,687 for private schools (Vinson, 2009). Discrepancies in the assets and resources made available to schools over time create an economic debt. Teese's graphic description of the differences in the material environment of two schools reminds us of the impact of such policies.

In the outer reaches of Melbourne, on the great basalt plains to the west, extending from the old quarter of noxious riverside industry to the empty shells of 1940s and 1950s factories and the silent railway yards, from the Ascot Vale and Kensington that were English working-class to the outer suburbs populated by Italians, Greeks, Croatians, Turks, Lebanese, Vietnamese, displaced and displacing, mortality at school rises to extremes and ravages this vast treeless expanse like the scorching summer. Here the English exams find casualties abundant to counterbalance the bloodless action in the leafy east. Regularly, half or more of all boys fail – forty-two in a hundred at one school, forty-seven in a hundred at another, forty-nine, fifty-two, sixty-five, seventy-one, seventy-eight in a hundred elsewhere.

But away from these unfortified sites, with the squalid and dilapidated exteriors, things are otherwise. Commanding the city from the hills, in a salubrity both chemical and cultural, are the academic forts. Built to keep out as much as to keep in, these strongholds preserve their vestigial seigneurial rights, but are the foundations of the modern state, not feudal throwbacks. The Great Hall of Haileybury College (1982) – with its auditorium for 1200 guests, its several drama studios, which double for debating and public speaking, its rehearsal rooms, percussion room, eight tutorial rooms and so on – the College Chapel (1987) approached through the lichgate, colonnade and entablature, with its peal of bells, exceptional height, its Romanesque forms and its castle keep – for all their medieval yearnings, the one the 'heart', the other the 'soul', are but the armature of a modern business enterprise, state subsidised, to secure its capital base and limit its exposure on the market. In such private academic compounds, failure comes in decimal points.

(Teese, 2000, pp. 208–9)

Teese's vivid description of the long-term effects of economic education debt is backed up by figures that show the discrepancies in funding across different spatial and social locations in Australia (Keating, 2009). His research shows that:

... it is possible and frequent for non-government schools to receive a quantum of government and private funding that is greater than the average level of government school funding, which conflicts with the need-based principle.

(Keating, 2009, p. 29)

He adds that the result of this inequity is the sectoral segregation of schooling, false perceptions by employers and parents that private education is 'better' and a movement of high socio-economic students into the non-government sector. The movement to segregation is also reflected in patterns of early school leaving, because some schools have high concentrations of disadvantaged (poor) students. As Lamb (2009) comments, addressing the problem of disengagement and early leaving will fall most heavily on these schools, because these are the groups that depend most on schools to provide opportunities for a better future for their children.

Socio-political debt

This debt, Ladson-Billings argues, represents the extent to which groups have been excluded from the civic process. The fact that Indigenous Australians were accorded the vote only in the 1967 referendum represents a significant legacy of alienation from civic processes. Whose interests are represented by the current system of education? What kinds of processes can ensure that the socio-political debt is made up, by ensuring full democratic participation by different groups on decision making about education? That this debt can be rapidly acquitted is revealed by the centrality of ownership over educational processes and of partnership in decision making to educational programs that improve the educational engagement and participation for traditionally low performing groups (Muir, 2008; Smyth et al., 2008). This point is also made in *Australian Education Review* 53, which addresses the challenge of leadership in schools. That review makes the point that school leaders need to take account of the context of the school, especially for schools in communities of high poverty (Mulford, 2008).

Moral debt

A moral debt is the disparity between what we know is right and what we do (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Australia's moral debt to Indigenous Australians was acknowledged in Prime Minister Rudd's apology to Indigenous people in February 2008. Ladson-Billings argues that:

... the real danger of our discussions about morality is that they reside solely in the realm of the individual. However, in democratic nations, that personal responsibility must be coupled with social responsibility. What is it that we might owe to citizens who historically have been excluded from social benefits and opportunities?

(Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 8)

As Teese (2000) comments, there is a striking parallel between workers denied work but kept in the workforce, with students denied opportunities to achieve but kept in schools. To the extent that schools have historically not served poor communities well, they have incurred a moral debt.

The perspective offered by Ladson-Billings enriches our understanding of the complexities of measuring. Her critique of the idea of the 'achievement gap' that appears in educational statistics serves as a reminder that measurements can be part of the problem as well as the solution. This view has been reiterated by Thomson, who draws attention to the fact that standard tests tend to homogenise curricula, reducing the capacity of teachers and school leaders to respond to local needs (Thomson & Russell, 2009; Thomson & Harris, 2004).

The idea of an education debt, with its historical, socio-political, economic and moral dimensions, provides a much-needed context within which measures of unequal educational outcomes can be understood. As Ladson-Billings points out, taking the idea of an education

debt has the potential to make a difference to the outcomes of disadvantaged groups because it offers a compelling new way of thinking about 'disadvantage' it breaks with the notion that populations that do not achieve at the standards set by culturally and socio-economically advantaged groups have to be brought into line. Ladson-Billings' concept of an education debt enables a richer and more nuanced understanding of past educational research on the patterns of achievement for population groups, and on the circumstances and processes that have caused the appearance of an 'achievement gap'. Ladson-Billings comments that it is likely that without fundamental change, the problems of poor patterns of educational achievement for some population groups in the United States of America will continue. The same is true for Australia. Addressing the structural, social and political elements of unequal educational outcomes offers a way towards better educational futures.

Concluding comments

This section has explored two key dimensions of education: the question of what knowledge and skills young people need now and will need in the future, and the question of what is measured and how it has been interpreted. It reveals the complexity of determining the answers to these questions. The *Melbourne Declaration* has established national agreement on the key learning areas that should be taught in schools, in addition to the cornerstone areas of numeracy and literacy. However, the research literature reveals very different positions about what is the right emphasis. In practice, the emphasis on learning areas, the modes of teaching and the ways in which learning is assessed often depend on the nature of the partnerships that schools have with their community and the extent to which they are able to respond to local needs.

Section 4 has suggested that in determining what young people need to know and what skills they require for their lives will require moving beyond the old thinking, in which work and life are kept as firmly separated dimensions. Although school, work and all the spaces in between these institutions that young people inhabit (including family and personal life, leisure, informal learning sites) appear to be distinctive, even geographically separate spheres of life, they are not. (And no more for young people, of course, than for many adults.) It does not really make sense to distinguish these areas in terms of the knowledge, skills and capabilities that young people need to succeed. Indeed, given the multiple meanings of work within young people's lives and across the lifespan, it makes sense to simply talk about preparing young people for life – one that includes work, paid and unpaid.

Measurement exerts a powerful influence on teaching practices and on educational policy. This section has made a case for greater diversity in measuring individual and population levels of performance. In addition to monitoring the in-school factors that impact on students' learning, such as teacher quality, there is a compelling argument that this information alone is not sufficient to understand the processes that underpin chronic patterns of inequality of educational outcomes. Ladson-Billings' analysis constitutes an 'interruption' to the 'taken for granted' discourse of the 'achievement gap' that so pervades the educational literature and policy, and it provides an alternative approach to understanding (and measuring) student achievement. Her approach would involve the inclusion of a broader set of statistics, collected over a longer period of time, and other data (perhaps local histories) against which to measure educational progress. The analysis of data is also open to different interpretation, depending on the frame through which the data are viewed. While it involves greater complexity, it also offers a way out of the impasse created by the simpler interpretation of the statistics; that the inequality of educational outcomes are the result of individual inadequacies.

Section 5 will provide some reflections on the metaphor of 'touching the future', suggesting how we might reach out, beyond the limitations and imperfections of the present, to create something new.

Touching the future

The discussion in the previous sections has highlighted some of the disjunctures, conflicts and false binaries in policies that have evolved with Australia's education systems over the last 50 years. It has identified the trend in educational policies, from the 1980s onwards, to emphasise education as a tool for economic development. Today however, there is an increasing convergence of thinking that educational policies need to consider wider priorities. These priorities include meeting new global challenges associated with the pace of social, technological and environmental change, in which Australia has aspirations to be a leader. In the face of evidence that inequalities in educational outcomes have not significantly improved over the last 20 years, education will, in the future, need to play a more proactive role in addressing social disadvantage. Changing expectations of youth will increase the expectation that education plays a greater role in creating actively engaged, critical citizens who are well informed about civic life. These aims transcend the binary of educating for life and/or work.

Yet there is an emerging consensus that these goals cannot be achieved through current approaches to the role and organisation of schools. Current arrangements and thinking have evolved substantially since mass secondary education was established in the 1950s, but this evolution has produced educational change by default: the outcome of political settlements, minor reforms and interest group lobbying, creating incremental change, but also often maintaining privilege and exacerbating inequalities. This section discusses the implications of this stalemate for Australian education. In doing so, it argues that a number of the 'large' issues in Australian educational policy will need consideration.

Section 5 will discuss the ways in which current thinking and practice foreshadows the educational reforms and transformations needed to meet the challenges that are identified in this review. It returns to the identification of priorities and goals, discusses the central issue of changing approaches to governance, revisits the question of who is the learner, and finally offers conclusions and suggestions for new directions in policy and practice.

Priorities and goals

One of the main implications drawn from discussion in the preceding sections is that there are many goals for education on which there is agreement or on which there can be accommodation. One example of a false binary is the framing of education as either a private good or a common good. Education can meet the rights of all individuals to have a high-quality education and also ensure that schools contribute to a cohesive and inclusive society. But there is overwhelming

evidence that currently it does not do this and that differences in educational achievement between groups have become entrenched, contributing to processes of social exclusion and marginalisation. Education must accommodate individual *and* social goals.

The discussion in this review paper has moved well beyond the framing of the ACER conference in terms of the skills and dispositions that students need for life and work. Focusing on individual students' needs alone can obscure the ways in which school systems and social conditions impact on individual outcomes. A focus on individual students also tends to minimise the impact of historical processes on population groups – especially on disadvantaged students and communities. Exploring the skills and dispositions that students will need in the future has inevitably raised the fundamental question of what kind of society schools prepare young people for. Issues of social cohesion, equity and equality of outcomes are inherent in the need to address them.

Developments over the last decade, informed by studies such as PISA, reveal that overall Australia's education system compares well with those of other developed countries. Student performance in reading and mathematics place Australia within the top band of OECD countries (OECD, 2008). However, on measures of equity, Australia is relatively weak, and over the last six years Australia's performance has been weakening, not strengthening, on OECD measures (OECD, 2007b). Indeed, McGaw argues that 'probably the most important message from PISA 2000 is that high quality and high equity can be achieved together' (McGaw, 2008, p. 234). He adds that, although high-quality average results on the PISA tests are obtained by Australian students, there is low equity revealed in the strong relationship between the social backgrounds of the students and their literacy levels.

During this period Australia has also experienced an increase in wealth inequality (Saunders et al., 2008) and an increase in the diversity of the population (Smolicz & Sercombe, 2005). When combined, these developments create a context in which addressing social cohesion and focusing on changing patterns of poor educational achievement should be given a higher priority. At a basic level, as the first decade of the 21st century comes to a close, individuals and populations are doomed to repeat and perhaps deepen the patterns of poor performance in education. The historical and entrenched nature of marginalisation from education requires more than 'targeted programs' if education is to ensure that all young Australians are able to achieve the goals held up as being provided by education. As Keating comments:

... schooling needs to look to the future, but in doing so, it depends on the past. It has a role in advancing the economic future of society, but it cannot do this unless it also underpins the social fabric of the society.

(Keating, 2009, p. 4)

In setting the foundations of educational provision for the future, therefore, social inclusion is, and must remain, the top priority. However, this cannot be achieved without addressing tensions between different groups about the purposes of education, and the structural arrangements for ensuring that these purposes are met. The shift towards a greater federal engagement in education, demonstrated by the *Melbourne Declaration* (COAG, 2009) and through the establishment of a national curriculum board proposal, raises pivotal and crucial questions of reforming structural arrangements and questions of governance.

Governance, systems and change

Without addressing governance, measures to address the priority of social inclusion will amount to no more than a tinkering around the edges of an increasingly outmoded system. A challenge to reform the governance of Australian education has been recently issued by the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA). This report, *A New Federalism in Australian Education* (Keating, 2009) gives an account of Australia's unique education system and identifies some 'elephants in the room' that need to be confronted. As well as highlighting the failure to address systematic patterns of unequal outcomes, the report acknowledges that progress will not be made until

there is a 'settlement' about accountability for the use of public funds by 'private' institutions and about the actual limits of 'parental choice'.

The report suggests there needs to be greater clarity (and agreement) about the purposes of schooling, including the role that schools play in addressing longstanding inequalities in outcomes. Areas for consideration are minimum and common regulatory conditions for schooling, especially in relation to the use of government funds for education in non-government schools; details of what governments should pay for, with efficient distribution and effective use, and accountability for their use; and the determination of appropriate roles for levels of government in terms of state and federal responsibilities. Keating emphasises the role of education as a public good that serves broad social objectives. He argues for an expanded role that goes beyond simply attending to the needs of individual students. He makes a strong case for ensuring that all schools that receive government funding should be accountable for their use of these funds.

There are many reasons for the development of a simpler, more effective and accountable approach to expending funds on education. Many of these have been argued earlier in this review paper. Others pertaining to the shape of the new federalism in education and the potential that this offers to move beyond the rigidities of the public/private education system, to initiate significant program reform around early childhood, and the middle years and youth transitions, are contained in detail in the FYA report (Keating, 2009). But there are further considerations that lead to the imperative to create better governance.

Education, like all institutions today, faces fragmentation and loss of authority. This is because of the fragmentation of institutions, traditional processes and collective identifications, all of which are a distinctive features of the processes of social change in late modernity (Beck & Lau, 2005). These changes have significant implications for education. Although gaining educational credentials has never been more important, technological change has enabled individuals to have a greater degree of autonomy and control over what they learn, where and when. This means that schools are only one site of learning out of an increasingly wide range of settings available to young people. The erosion of traditional collective identifications and the rise of program individualisation means that it is increasingly difficult to reach a consensus between different interest groups about the role of education. This seriously reduces the claims that educators, from one institution or collectively, can make to young people about the value of investing in education.

These developments mean that the nature and meaning of education and learning are changing, along with other social and economic changes that have occurred in Western countries over the last three decades. The interconnections between a number of these were mentioned in Section 1, including the implications of digital communication technologies, the pace of change and the emergence of precarious employment. The argument was put for why older conceptions of learning and education are unlikely to be able to provide a template for going forward. The nature of the learner and the world for which they are being prepared has already changed significantly, and is likely to change even more rapidly and with greater substantive insistence in the future. The pace of social change alone represents a challenge to formal education (Rosa, 2005). If educational arrangements and processes are not able to keep pace with change, existing inequalities will be exacerbated and the trend for important learning (about life and work) to occur in informal settings will strengthen.

As new practices emerge in schools (with, for example, inter-sectoral collaboration and partnerships), new approaches to governance are and will be required to fully realise the commitment to defining the roles of teachers and the roles of other participants in the enterprise of learning. There are many existing examples of partnerships with students, parents, and other professionals and community groups. It is time for greater recognition to be given to these practices at a policy level, so that the strengths and weaknesses of different models of partnership and inter-sectoral collaboration are better understood and the responsibilities and roles of the participants are clarified. This includes understanding what is core educational

business and what is the role of partners and how they relate to each other. One cannot expect practitioners and schools to undertake this role.

Core business

The work of teachers is something of an ‘elephant in the room’ in this discussion. It is relatively common to refer to teacher quality, to the need for teacher professional development and to leadership as a means to improving student outcomes. However, a more fundamental question is raised by the nature of teachers’ core work in schools, now and in the future. The question of role and expertise must include a recognition that teaching and learning happens within social, cultural and economic contexts and cannot be separated from these. Indeed, as other institutional and collective sources of support and affiliation have become reduced, and as communities have become more diverse and employment more precarious, schools have taken on a new significance in many communities.

The impact on teachers’ work is illustrated in the study undertaken by Cahill and colleagues (2004) and mentioned in Section 2. This study, *The Welfare Needs of Victorian Catholic Schools*, found that principals and teachers were expending increasing amounts of energy, time and resources on responding to students (and often their families) who required additional welfare support from the school. The report identified five priority areas across all Catholic primary and secondary schools in Victoria:

- 1 Learning problems**, particularly literacy and numeracy problems, were identified as having a significant impact on student well-being. Principals, particularly in secondary schools, identified a significant concern with the *lack of alternative settings* for troubled students and the *lack of pathways* for less academic students.
- 2 Student mental health problems** were rated as generating high levels of concern by the principals, particularly the impact of the *affective disorders* of depression and anxiety and the *conduct related mental health disorders* including ADHD, Autism, Asperger Syndrome, and other conduct disorders.
- 3 Family problems**, particularly *family break-up*, and *family mental health problems* including mental illnesses, suicide, gambling, violence and drug and alcohol problems were ranked as being of high concern.
- 4 Social health** was a further area of high concern, particularly the prevalence of *bullying* and the impact of *negative or defiant classroom behaviours*. An accompanying need for high-level *classroom management skills* was distinguished.
- 5 Staff well-being issues** also rated at a high level of concern. Principals identified *staff mental health* and *staff burnout*, as well as *poor class management skills* and *poor relationship skills* to be of significant concern in relation to potential impact on the students.

(Adapted from Cahill et al., 2004, p. 2)

The first area, that of learning problems, is clearly ‘core business’ for teachers. But even here, most classroom teachers are not well-equipped with the latest knowledge about learning difficulties across the wide span of possibilities. The fifth area is also core business for the school principal and leading teachers, although the extent to which these groups are supported to manage staff well-being is not clear. The other areas all relate to social issues that do *not* relate to teachers’ core work, but which impact directly on school governance and classroom practices. This report offers a vivid picture of the challenges facing school personnel, and especially school principals and teachers in addressing the fall-out from communities (even in those that are not especially disadvantaged), from families that experience multiple social problems, and from students who are not able to learn optimally.

At the school and classroom level, broader issues of social and economic disadvantage can become compounded. This is the place where they are often manifested and also re-experienced,

because schools are one of the few institutions with which all young people and their families engage regularly. This occurs in the context of a diminishing circle of care around families at a community level. Indeed, many principals commented on the tendency for parents who were in need to contact the school principal because she was the person they most trusted in the community, or was the only official person with whom they had personal contact.

The report, published in 2004, argued that the time had come for debate and planning to occur to equip schools for an augmented role as they confronted implications of social change. It suggested that equipping schools for the augmented role should be accomplished through a 'whole-of-government approach' which would support the work of all schools, through co-location of services, or through the inter-sectoral funding of health services, within educational settings.

The findings of this report raise questions, still unanswered, about the core business of teachers and principals and about how the multitude of issues that tend to arise in school settings can be addressed by relevant professionals. As the report argued, systematic and long-term professional development can make a significant contribution to equipping teachers to work more proactively in the area of student welfare, especially in relation to the introduction of basic counselling skills (Freeman, Strong, Cahill, Wyn & Shaw, 2003). Teachers equipped with such skills nonetheless identify time as a key constraint moderating their capacity to engage in pastoral conversations with students. Little (1993) has argued that training will not on its own enable us to build school reform, as real reform is systematic and collective, whereas professional development tends to be highly individualistic. Little also argues that the dominant training model of teacher professional development is no longer relevant to the task of driving reform and change agendas in education. More systematic, in-depth and long-term professional development is needed to support the work of teachers as they implement new approaches and programs.

Cahill and her colleagues (2004) argued that two of the top three 'priority' areas identified in the study (that is, family problems and student mental health problems) should rightfully be funded through the health dollar and the expertise of health workers. Although the school may be an ideal *setting* at which to intervene, these issues would more adequately be addressed through the co-location of appropriate services or through intersectoral funding of health services, possibly being delivered, in part perhaps, through education settings. In the absence of adequate inter-sectoral collaboration, schools witness the impact of social problems. Inter-sectoral collaboration, however, requires effective governance, including greater capacity to exercise leadership and clear direction, administration and the reallocation of resources.

Partnerships in responsibility

The *Melbourne Declaration* indicates that one of the ways forward is for schools to enter into partnerships with students, parents and carers, business, other schools and the broader community. In order for partnerships to be possible, meaningful and effective, better arrangements for including these groups in school and government policy decision making need to be developed. There are already many examples of the crucial role that partnerships between schools, students and local community members can play in creating the possibilities for marginalised students to engage successfully with school (Muir, 2008; Smyth et al., 2008). Models already exist for appropriate adoption and personalisation, both in Australia and overseas.

Stepping outside of the Australian context, a model is found in the Scottish Government's commitment to support educational partnerships through new governance arrangements. Fundamental changes to how government works with its partners in local government (and beyond) resulted in a new approach to policy and services (including education) for young people in Scotland. A Concordat was agreed in 2007 which set out the terms of a new relationship between the Scottish Government and local government. Education was a central element in this new arrangement which modelled a co-ordinated approach, and included the development of an Early Years framework, a program which tackled poverty and income inequalities, and a new approach to preventing offending by young people.

The education approach is described in the separate policy documents called *More Choices, More Chances* (Scottish Government, 2008) and *16+ Learning Choices Program* (Scottish Government, 2006). The partners, which spanned a wide range of national and local organisations, agreed on four common principles that would drive their work or services. These principles are as follows:

- *Deliver services that reflect the reality of young people's lives – supporting them through key life transitions, ensuring they are informed and boosting their aspirations.*
- *Work with local partners to address barriers and gaps – so that young people are not excluded from opportunities, or have their capacity to achieve their potential limited.*
- *Recognise and promote young people's positive contribution to their communities and as national and global citizens*
- *Involve young people at an early age, along with the voluntary sector and other relevant partners, in developing services and opportunities in the context of community priorities.*

(Scottish Government, 2009, p. 16)

The implementation of these principles is described in a document called *Bridging the Gap: Improving outcomes for Scotland's young people through school and youth work partnerships*. In this document a series of six snapshots provides examples of how these partnerships have evolved in different Scottish communities, in response to local need and interest. They cover the areas of transition, improving health and well-being, developing literacy and numeracy, promoting achievement, learning in the community and promoting citizenship. The health and well-being initiative involved a partnership between a secondary school, the local YMCA and the local council, to deliver a peer education program designed to prevent smoking. Students were especially responsive to taking on a peer education role, which enabled their contribution to be recognised by both the school and the community. Another example of promoting health and well-being involved a partnership between the Health Services and local authority youth services to fund qualified health professionals to visit local schools at lunchtimes to provide young people with information and advice on a wide range of health issues. Providing this service through a 'health bus' means that students had access to expert advice that was in a 'non-school' setting.

An element fundamental to this innovative program was the involvement of youth workers based in schools, as well as supporting young people through community-based youth work. The partnership between schools and youth workers enabled teachers to get on with their 'core business' and youth workers to provide continuity of support across school and non-school settings.

The Scottish Government monitors all aspects of school programs, including the quality of partnerships between schools and communities. The report *Improving Scottish Education: A Report by HMIE on Inspection and Review 2005–2008* (Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education, 2009) provides a detailed assessment of the outcomes (in terms of learning) and of the quality of the initiatives. For example, partnerships are evaluated in terms of the use of strategic and operational planning, the extent to which partner needs are taken into account and the extent to which partnerships support local and national government priorities. These results are provided for each of the sectors of pre-school, primary, secondary and special schools. While the quality of partnerships was mostly 'very good' and some were 'excellent', the report suggests that staff in most sectors need more training together with those from other sectors to improve interagency working, and to make the most of opportunities that exist at the local level to support students.

Involving students as partners in responsibility for education, as in the Scottish Government example, raises some interesting and potentially innovative opportunities. This is an underdeveloped area of partnership, but one that may offer significant benefits in engaging children and young people in school. Partnerships with young people also offer opportunities for educators to learn more about what young people's needs are and how best to meet them. (Section 3 included some other examples of involving students in learning through student action teams and interactive

learning processes.) Involving young people in partnerships in their education addresses one of the key issues underlying the debates that have run through this review paper.

The involvement of parents is also an underdeveloped area of partnership. Although the *Melbourne Declaration* mentions parents as one of the partner groups with responsibility for education, processes are yet to be put in place to make this important goal a reality. Here too, impatience is evident. The National Federation of Parents, Carers and Families has heard the invitation to participate, but is unable to do so without more fundamental changes in organisational arrangements. Holding forums in Sydney and Melbourne in 2009, the Federation says:

Refurbishing school halls and gymnasias are the least important priorities for parents and educators in improving our schools and education systems. Renovating our school cultures by tailoring education to individual student needs and parent expectations is far more important. The inability of federal and state governments to look beyond bricks and mortar in thinking about education is a bi-partisan political tradition in Australia which serves our children and young people poorly. It is particularly disappointing that the Commonwealth Government, having promised an education revolution in 2007, seems intent on delivering little more than renovations to buildings.

(Centre for Civil Society, flyer, 2009)

Broadening the goals of education requires a recognition that education plays a role in both ensuring that young people have access to knowledge in agreed learning areas and in ensuring social cohesion. Educational reform outcomes need to be achieved by design, not default, and include attention to more effective modes of organisation and governance. This review paper has provided evidence demonstrating there is an urgent need to continue to press for serious acknowledgement by education bureaucracies and their decision-makers that such outcomes are not being met, and consequently, there is a need for explicit planning and resourcing at a school level, in order to allow for real achievements.

Since young people should remain the prime focus of educational reform, the review now returns to an examination of their needs as education's core business.

What do young people need to become?

The fact that young people are learning about 'becoming' tends to be implicit within educational literature. Questions of identity construction, identity work and learner identities are quite central to the project of creating educational processes that will equip them for life. And yet it is rare for these processes to be explicitly addressed in planning or practice.

Identity and school

Identity work is increasingly acknowledged as central to education. It is often hidden work done by students, but not acknowledged by their teachers. McLeod and Yates (2006), in their study *Making Modern Lives*, provided evidence about the possibilities and limits on student identity formation in different schools in Victoria. Smyth and his colleagues have made a significant contribution to understanding the work that students do in school and out of school, to 'become somebody' (Smyth & Hattam, 2004), and the ways in which school engagement is inextricably tied up with an understanding of student identities (Smyth et al., 2008; Smyth & McInerney, 2007).

The role of identity work in learning for life is an important consideration because it addresses the way in which all the other partners in education see young people and *their* role. If young people are to be seen as partners in learning, it is important to provide them with opportunities to be active partners and so to shape identities that are premised on belonging, making decisions and having the capacity to influence their own learning. The issue of identity tends to be overlooked in discussions about the skills and capacities that young people need in order to

live well and successfully. Possibly this is because identity making is sometimes understood to be what happens in families, but not in schools. Families provide resources, often referred to as 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1976), such as understood ways of being, doing and thinking about the self, about the world and about one's relationship with learning. But these are also important elements of learning that occur in schools, classrooms and playgrounds. Here too, students learn about 'who I am' and develop dispositions, ways of relating, and understandings of how they fit into the wider scheme of things. For these reasons, schools today also need to provide students with the opportunity to develop 'cultural capital' as part of the skills they acquire through their education.

For some young people, taken-for-granted ways of thinking and being are especially well aligned with school practices (e.g. see Teese, 2000; Ball, 2003; McLeod & Yates, 2006) and for others they are not (e.g. Smyth & Hattam, 2004). Perhaps now, more than ever, schools need to acknowledge the integral relationship between identity and learning and to acknowledge that schools too have a significant role to play in supporting students to do the identity work that they require in order to be successful. This involves having a sense of one's self as a successful learner, knowing how to balance being in the present with preparing for an uncertain future, and gaining confidence in making decisions about the options before them in a context of uncertainty. New patterns of inequality of outcomes based on class, gender and geographic location are formed as some groups are more able to draw on cultural and economic resources than others to secure success (Wyn, 2007b). This is perhaps the most important point to draw from the discussion of education and identity. If schools are to contribute to greater equality of outcomes, the work of identity development needs to be explicitly acknowledged, and opportunities for young people to practise successful, engaged and critical identities need to be provided.

There is an emerging consensus that identity has increasingly become a project that individuals do and need to actively engage in. Social change theorists point to the fragmentation of traditional institutions like the family, and work as a lifelong occupation, as defining characteristics of the 21st century, or late modernity (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). For young people, the implications of this fragmentation of institutions and the uncertainty that is attached to change are especially significant. For example, the trend towards holding many jobs, and even occupations, over a lifetime, the shift to precarious employment and changes in the nature of work, mean that clear-cut (or traditional) pathways into secure employment have reduced. In many countries, including Australia, a majority of young people are both workers and students, establishing a pattern in secondary school that they will continue throughout life (Stokes & Wyn, 2007). Individuals have no choice but to take personal responsibility for managing uncertainties and risks that derive from this situation. One of the ways in which individuals manage this is through an intense focus on 'becoming': watching, practising and learning the mix of social skills, knowledge and practical skills that are required to achieve success. They can be supported in this endeavour in school. Indeed, identity work should be actively supported in schools, with acknowledgement given to the way in which learning and identity are intertwined.

Mismatches between institutional arrangements and identities

These social and economic changes mean that many elements of education systems that are currently taken for granted need to be reassessed. There are many examples including the following: age-based learning; the idea of a mainstream; positioning young people as being in deficit; and valuing them only as decision-makers of the future, but not in the present; and the separation of learning institutions from communities.

The reliance on age as an organising principle of formal learning for example, reinforces a normative approach to learning and disconnects that learning from the context and circumstances of individuals and communities (and their diverse needs). This is especially the case with the senior years of secondary school, closing off options for young people and creating artificial barriers to learning. The concept of the mainstream is still widely used within schools, even though it obscures the academic, cultural, economic and social diversity that exists in every

school. Positioning young people in deficit (that is, as recipients of knowledge they currently lack) undervalues what they already know, fails to engage young people as active participants in decision making, and limits their opportunities to practise important civic and social skills. The separation of schools from communities limits opportunities to make learning relevant, locally as well as globally, and reinforces a view that ‘disadvantaged communities’ have nothing positive to offer education.

There is widespread agreement that the current rates of early school leaving are not acceptable (Lamb & Mason, 2008) and that there has been little change to this picture over the last two decades. However, it is important to acknowledge that our age-based system of education means that it is very difficult for early school leavers to find their way back into formal education, because very few schools offer a ‘second chance’ once the normative, education-age nexus is broken. The organisational reliance on age, despite its administrative convenience, is appearing increasingly outmoded in an era of lifelong learning, and it creates barriers to learning rather than keeping options open.

A further mismatch is found in regard to student participation where, despite rhetoric, most students have limited opportunities to exercise (real) decision making. Even though schools contain increasing proportions of young adults, the assumption is that they are all being prepared to be future citizens and decision-makers (rather than being realised as currently having those qualities and responsibilities). The paucity of opportunities for participation in decision making by young people in formal education reflects a view that young people are recipients of education, not participants in learning. The 2007 National Assessment of Civics and Citizenship in Years 6 and 10 found that there were very slight increases in proficiency in civics and citizenship, and that the greatest gains were made in schools in which students had the opportunity to actually participate in civic activities, including voting and decision making (MCEECDYA, 2009). Positioning young people in a passive role with regard to learning, work and life, does not make for a good fit with the demands of living in late modernity, and it impacts on a range of ‘debts’ that are accumulated by disadvantaged populations. The message from the National Assessment Program is clear – students learn about being active citizens by having opportunities to act in a civic role in schools (and in the community). Schools already have access to many processes that enable student participation through representative councils, student-centred pedagogies and involvement of students as partners in learning. More widespread use of these processes would contribute to a better fit between what schools offer and what young people need in order to be successful in work and life.

Creating self-navigators

Addressing the question of what young people need to learn and what kinds of formal educational processes and curricula will prepare young people to live well requires the acknowledgement that institutionalised, predictable connections between formal education and post-educational outcomes are not possible, and that being ‘self-navigators’ is increasingly necessary. This understanding makes evident the absolute necessity of adopting new approaches in which students learn to be proactive, well-informed decision-makers.

As outlined in Section 1, to become effective self-navigators, young people need to understand the nature of the social, economic and political world in which they are living and their relationships with others, locally and globally. Being good navigators requires a more conscious approach to personal development so that all young people have the capacity to view the development of their personal biography and how it may be constructed as critical to their options for the future.

While young people believe credentials do matter, some also understand that gaining educational credentials will not guarantee them a job. They realise that they must draw on both formal and informal learning to actively construct education and employment biographies that make them attractive to labour markets. But many do not make that connection, neither intellectually nor in practice. Increasing individual responsibility for creating effective pathways through education and work has heightened the relevance of identity and the task of actively

constructing one's biography. For these reasons, identity work should be a significant dimension of learning in late modernity. Such provision is most especially important for those whose identity is constrained by their place in society.

Enabling young people to be more effective navigators of their destinies has the potential to address the educational needs of those who are currently most disadvantaged within education: young people from low socio-economic backgrounds, young Indigenous people and young people from rural areas. There are already many programs that link learning to place (locally and globally). They enable young people to engage with learning that acknowledges their context (for example, by developing local histories, linking local stories and experiences across different places and recognising the skills that parents and community members can offer schools) and opens up possibilities for creating better futures. The descriptions of programs contained in Smyth et al. (2008) have been mentioned previously in this review. Other examples of practices that link local and global understandings of citizenship for young people can be found in Wierenga et al. (2008). However, Thomson and Russell (2009) point out that there is very little systematic monitoring of programs that are explicitly doing this work. Although their critique is based on the situation in the United Kingdom, their point is also relevant to the Australian situation. Until there is greater 'ownership' of non-mainstream programs that address more creative ways of learning, the gains made by small, responsive and relevant locally based educational innovations will remain invisible and therefore undervalued.

While there has always been some degree of responsibility on individuals to make school work connections and to determine what they should learn in order to live well, the scale of the shift towards dependence on individual resources in late modernity has become a defining feature of young people's transitions. Increasingly, responsibility for learning has shifted from the educator to the educated. How young people learn in formal education settings should more closely approximate the way they learn outside of formal institutions, developing the capacities to understand what is relevant, how to access information, how to learn and how to develop knowledge. Teachers urgently require new skills that will enable them, through partnership, to support young people's learning.

Education systems have been very slow to respond to these changes in young people's learning needs. And some of the trends in contemporary educational approaches have further isolated education from broader social trends, through an increased inward focus that separates schools and classrooms from their social and economic context (for example, standardised testing and the ranking of school performance). There are very few examples of system-wide acknowledgement of innovations in education that address the need for more contextualised education provision, and of jurisdictional (or school) responsibility in this domain. Rather than developing a focus on the relationship between schools and other educational institutions to their communities and to the diverse needs of those who participate in these institutions, some initiatives, by their very structure, actively disavow the relationship between schools and their social and economic context. They focus instead on universal notions of 'quality of teaching' based on normative expectations of a (disembodied) learner and a narrow notion of (academic) outcomes. There are many 'elephants' to be confronted.

Policy implications

Addressing the question of educating for life and work has foregrounded and opened up significant issues for Australian education today. The ACER Research Conference was timely in bringing together a range of professionals whose views would contribute to debate about the questions of what young people need to know, how this should be taught and measured, and which institutional arrangements are best suited to delivering the high goals that Australians have for education. This review paper has acknowledged that, while Australian education is strong, there are serious structural weaknesses that must be addressed. There is also a wider sense that education has never mattered more than now, and that without change, education will not deliver on the agreed goals in the *Melbourne Declaration*, nor will Australia's educational

systems develop in such a way as to meet future needs for individual well-being, social cohesion and economic development.

Common sense can be seductive, as Kumashiro (2008) has pointed out. The sense in aligning educational goals to economic needs is understood by those who want to ensure that Australian young people are equipped with the skills that they need to get good jobs. It also makes sense to ensure that Australian education is producing the sets of skills and dispositions that will enable the Australian economy to prosper in a globally competitive and rapidly changing world. The simplicity of this equation, however, which contributes to its value as common sense, is also what is wrong with it.

The possibilities of convergence

The goal of educating for work and life involves addressing broad social issues as well as questions of young people's identities. As Slaughter's paper at the ACER conference highlighted, orienting to the future requires new thinking that transcends old boundaries (Slaughter, 2008). The relationship between education and employment is complex, and even where statistically the transition from education into employment appears to have a smooth texture, in reality the process is likely to involve considerable effort and complexity, tensions and failures. To be successful, it will need wider support. In reality, the skills required from school education to manage work and life are not all that different from each other, and it is a false binary to separate them from each other as educational goals. Even within vocational education, social and communication skills, identity construction work, and a capacity to understand the organisation of workplaces and their relationship to wider social and economic issues, are all important. Students preparing for life and work could do no better than to have the opportunity of working, within the structure of school, as a precursor to other work-based structures, such as they will later experience.

The discussion of the policy frameworks that have dominated the goals of Australian education in recent times has revealed the extent to which divisions have been forged between instrumental approaches to education and broader social goals, especially during the 1990s and early 2000s. During this time, inequalities in wealth distribution have worsened and schools have failed in their goal of improving educational participation and school completion for young Indigenous Australians, young people from low socio-economic neighbourhoods and young people from rural and remote areas.

At the same time, approaches to school outcomes and performance that focus on in-school factors have become prominent. It is now evident that, while teacher quality, school performance, leadership and teacher professional development are important, these in-school factors alone are not enough to account for these persistent differences across the student population. Schools cannot be 'improved' or made more 'effective' without taking account of their historical, social, cultural and economic context. This review paper has made this point abundantly clear through the analysis of Ladson-Billings' concept of an education debt.

Partnerships

Significant developments have in fact been occurring over the last decade or more, which model different ways in which local ownership of high educational aspirations and partnerships across local and national levels can provide significant shifts in educational participation and success, especially for the disadvantaged and the disengaged. The partnerships created simply mirror the existing, but largely invisible, synergies that operate for more privileged young people and their families in relation to existing educational arrangements. Feeling that one belongs, can have a say and that the learning on offer is relevant to one's life are all fundamental prerequisites for successful education. For so many students, such synergies do not exist, and they should. This research review has indicated just how and where provision of such learning can and should occur.

One of the challenges of these successful models is that they are, by definition, not standard. Although there are many elements in common across successful inter-sectoral initiatives and partnerships, it is difficult to gain large-scale measures of those processes which work. Additionally, the gains for the individual are often initially modest. It takes time to repay an educational debt to a community and the return on the payment can, like the first momentous repayments on a mortgage, seem trivial.

Given that technologies of measurement can also be part of the problem, it is appropriate to consider the ways in which educationalists and policy-makers can learn from both large-scale (national and international) and small-scale evidence to inform policy and program directions and decisions about funding. Any data about any outcomes that can help us know more about student progress and how it happens is worth consideration. For example, this review has shown how the NAP programs can reveal much more than just achievement data. The insights from such programs should be used creatively to develop programs at the individual and school level. Such developments will need resourcing and other support.

Concluding comments

Section 5 has drawn together the threads of this review through a consideration of the challenges faced in determining the priorities and goals for young Australians' education, now and into the future. It has suggested that there are several points where we are 'touching the future' – where thinking and developments are foreshadowing the new shape of Australian education. This is especially evident in the appetite for structural change to educational systems that no longer serve the needs of all Australian students. Expressed as an underlying theme in some of the presentations at the ACER conference (e.g. Roe, 2008; Seddon, 2008), and given explicit expression in the recent FYA report (Keating, 2009), there is an emerging view that more effective governance and organisational approaches need to be determined. There is increasingly widespread recognition of developments in schools and in policy documents such as the *Melbourne Declaration*, that place-based education involving partnerships with educational stakeholders offers a proven strategy for a more inclusive curriculum, but that rigidities in funding and in measurement limit the possibilities for these approaches. An internationally oriented curriculum that is locally based offers new hope for schools that respond to the challenge of increasing the educational participation of marginalised populations. The need to achieve far greater active participation by young people in their learning has also been a consistent theme in the discussions in this review.

In order to address and achieve such goals, new approaches to measuring educational outcomes and assessing student achievement need to be implemented, and broader outcomes need to be included within these measures, such as improvements in the knowledge and capacity to act, young people's well-being and the quality of partnerships between schools and their stakeholders.

In tackling these issues, decision-makers will need to confront and deal with a number of 'elephants in the room'. They include:

- the unsustainability of the current division between 'private' (but publicly funded) schools and state schools that are contributing to growing social segregation
- the long-term ineffectiveness of current approaches in providing educational programs for young people from low socio-economic backgrounds, young Indigenous people and young people in rural areas
- the role of teachers as change-makers and their needs for effective professional development
- the real challenges of creating sustainable partnerships between schools and communities.

Recommendations

The review recommends that the following set of interrelated issues need to be addressed in order to ensure that all young Australians are served well by an education system and curriculum that is attuned to changing times.

Governance

The move towards a new federalism in the governance of education by the Commonwealth government signals an important way forward. The Foundation for Young Australians has recently built on this possibility in suggesting new organisational arrangements between the states and territories, in which the Commonwealth government would have greater responsibility for setting the directions of education and the measurement of outcomes, and for funding and accountability (Keating, 2009). This report directly tackles the problem of differential funding arrangements, lack of accountability and rigidities in the governance of schools that currently create an unacceptable, and internationally unique, division between wealthy and poor schools.

New governance approaches are required to pay off the educational debt that has been acquired over many years of neglect of the needs of Indigenous students and communities, and also of poor and rural communities. The evidence shows that continuing to do 'business as usual' will only compound this debt, which has historical, moral, socio-political and economic components, and will not be addressed through simplistic notions of achievement 'gaps' or through investment in school-level factors, such as teacher quality alone. As Keating (2009) concludes, cross-sectoral and locally based national projects that focus on key areas of curriculum need to be implemented and supported, through funding models that enable programs that address inequity of outcomes to be properly implemented, sustained, monitored and evaluated.

Partnerships and inter-sectoral collaboration

There is an emerging view that the partnerships in education, especially those involving schools and their communities, offer a way forward and should be funded to enable sustainability (Keating, 2009). There are many examples of place-based educational programs in Australia, but as Thomson and Russell have pointed out in the UK context, these tend to be under-researched, and there is a lack of co-ordinated data about which programs exist, the nature of partnerships, the kinds of curricula that are used, who attends the programs, what their outcomes are and the nature and extent of funding sources (Thomson & Russell, 2009). This lack of co-ordinated data means that despite the development of excellent programs and of new areas of teacher (and community) expertise, the impact of these programs remain private and thus marginal. There is an urgent need to develop a strong and systematic evidence base as a basis for expanding the funding that goes to these initiatives.

Developing place-based educational programs and curricula means giving greater definition to the roles and responsibilities of the partners, locally and nationally. This review highlighted the development by the Scottish Government of an approach to measuring the nature and quality of school–community partnerships, including the strength of protocols, clarity of roles and the extent of fit with local and national policy directions. Australia needs to do the same. There is a risk that, without more effective policy frameworks and governance arrangements, partnerships and collaboration will simply provide a mechanism for an ever-increasing range of interventions and programs to be placed in schools, taxing the resources of teachers and school principals. Partnerships between schools and other services are essential to support schools in managing learning difficulties, social issues and mental health problems. Currently, schools have very permeable boundaries when it comes to the impact of wider social issues on teachers' work, but very rigid boundaries when it comes to bringing the right professional expertise to bear on these matters, so that teachers can fulfil their 'core' responsibilities.

Greater recognition needs to be given to the international possibilities of place-based education, because social context matters. Through gaining an understanding of the impact of global and international processes on their local environment, students are able to gain knowledge about complex processes of social and economic change and to understand the circumstances

that have created their current situation, what needs to be done to change it and what their role might be. Place-based education creates possibilities for linking learning across national and international settings that enable students to understand their own circumstances and those of others (e.g. Wierenga et al., 2008). But in order for this approach to curriculum to work, greater attention needs to be paid to the role that schools have in brokering partnerships, the responsibilities of partner organisations and individuals, and the 'core business' of teachers in relation to their partners.

Active engagement of children and young people

The discussion of citizenship has highlighted the poverty of educational approaches that position children and young people as passive recipients of knowledge. Transmission approaches to learning are relatively ineffective and have a poor fit with the ways in which young people today need to learn in and out of school. Social conditions, including precarious employment, rapid social change and the fragmentation of traditional institutions mean that young people need to be capable of exercising choice, making decisions and navigating their own learning from an early age.

As part of a suite of new approaches, conceptual change within education is required, at all levels, to recognise the diversity of young Australians, their need for an active say in their education, and to have opportunities to make real decisions about their education. Conceptual change is also required to shift the prevailing view that gaps in achievement are related only to deficits, and to focus instead on the positives and strengths (as well as the learning needs) that young people and their communities in disadvantaged circumstances have to offer. Understanding all young people as having the capacity to engage in decision making about their learning also requires a shift away from the traditional view of young people as passive recipients of knowledge.

Student representative councils currently offer opportunities for young people to have a say in their schools. Although these opportunities tend to be used in minimal and sometimes tokenistic ways, *Connect*, a bi-monthly newsletter produced through the Youth Research Centre at the University of Melbourne, provides over 20 years of documentation of student participation in these councils and in a wide range of curriculum activities. However, teachers tend to have underdeveloped skills in facilitating student decision making, particularly in scaffolding and supporting the processes whereby democratic processes can be enacted in classrooms.

New professional learning

Change is not effective without in-depth professional development (Little, 1993; Scottish Government, 2009). Current approaches to teacher professional development in Australia are pitifully fragmented and often superficial. In-depth learning that can support innovation and change (for example, through undertaking higher degrees) is not recognised in teachers' salary scales or other working conditions. While learning for 'leadership' tends to be supported, the skill in learning to manage change, partnerships and inter-sectoral working is largely unrecognised.

Teacher learning requires change to meet the current and future needs of education. At the pre-service level, this includes learning about the impact of socio-economic factors on student outcomes, acquiring skills in the development of partnerships and inter-sectoral collaboration, and learning about how to facilitate more active engagement by students in their learning, through interactive teaching techniques and democratic practices in schools and classrooms. At the post-service level, recognition of further study through salary or other conditions, and the implementation of more in-depth professional development opportunities, especially focused on the building of effective place-based educational programs and increasing understandings about how to work across sectors to create effective partnerships, are needed.

Measurement

We may not be measuring all the right things. Studies such as PISA and the NAP have the capacity to tell us a huge amount about Australian educational achievement levels and how

they compare across jurisdictions and with other countries. However, McGaw (2008) cautions against expecting too much from the PISA study. He argues that it is important, in addition to participating in international data programs, for education systems to develop measures that reflect their goals. This is reiterated by Thomson and Russell (2009) who argue that we are drowning in data about education, yet we lack measures for monitoring and ensuring the entitlement to education and training of the most marginalised. We need to address the learning needs of the most disadvantaged groups.

What we measure in education depends on the outcome of ongoing debates, such as those identified in this review, about the kinds of knowledge and skills young people need. This review does not provide the answers to this question, but it does signal the possibility that we need to change what counts as important knowledge. In addition to the basics of literacy and numeracy, and the academic disciplines identified in the *Melbourne Declaration*, there is an emerging consensus that learning for life and work involves more attention being paid to situated identity construction work, and to curricula that address the material realities that shape individual lives, schools and communities. New approaches to measuring student outcomes will be required to assess curricula that purport to produce an understanding of the processes that promote healthy and natural social systems, systems in which sustainable, equitable lives can be fulfilled.

Currently, schools emphasise academic and vocational skills and knowledge in the measures of student outcomes. If schools are to contribute more fully to preparing young people for life and work, they will also need to teach (or provide for) and measure how well students are mentally and physically. Measures will also need to allow for diversity in educational practices and to re-connect outcomes to context. This will require a more flexible approach than the current standardised, homogenising, de-contexting measures of individual student performance.

Calls for reform and redesign point to more fundamental change than can be achieved through teacher development, assessment or within-school strategies. As the analysis and research review provided in the earlier sections identified, structural reforms are required if Australian education systems are going to meet the ambitious goals set out in documents such as the *Melbourne Declaration*.

Throughout the discussion, attention has been focused on young people, whose skills and dispositions are to be developed. Perhaps more than any other stakeholders in education today, they are 'touching the future'. Their active engagement in the collective task of building skills and knowledge for life and work is perhaps the most important element to be harnessed.

List of 2008 ACER Research Conference papers

At the conference, four keynote papers, 12 concurrent papers, two discussions and three poster sessions were presented. Julia Gillard, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and for Social Inclusion provided a Special Address (available at the conference web site http://www.acer.edu.au/research_conferences/2008.html). Synopses of the presentations and some PowerPoint presentations are also available for downloading on the conference web site.

Keynote papers

Masters, G. *Specifying and assessing knowledge and skills for life.*

Macintyre, S. *Participation in the classroom, productivity in the workforce: Unfulfilled expectations.*

Sweet, R. *Round and round or fully rounded? How can we improve youth transitions.*

Concurrent papers

Slaughter, R. *Beyond 'the future of ...' Responding to the civilisational challenge.*

Roe, J. *Quality education and quality work.*

Mellor, S. *The National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship: Reflections on practices in primary and secondary schools.*

Robinson, C. *Some reforms to better equip young people for tomorrow's world.*

Seddon, T. *Young people and social inclusion: Challenges for teachers.*

Rothman, S., & Hillman, K. *X and Y: Three decades of education, employment and social outcomes of Australian youth.*

Muir, W. *Indigenous education: Imaging the future, the role of educators.*

Athanasou, J. A. *The intersection of adolescents' interests and national needs: Implications for educators.*

Smart, D. *Pathways to social and emotional wellbeing: Lessons from a 24-year longitudinal study.*

Matters, G., & Curtis, D. D. *Assessing and reporting of employability skills of senior secondary students.*

Schultz, W. & Fraillon, J. *An international perspective on civic and citizenship education: Exploring the learning context for lower secondary students.*

Burke, G. *Assessing education and training requirements against uncertain labour force trends.*

Symposia

Black, R., King, M., Wood, J., & Celata, E. *Taking care of business: Is business taking care of young people's aspirations?*

Sweet, R., Slaughter, R., & Roe, J. *'The ideas bag': Distilling the essence of the ideas of the conference*

Posters

Elliott, K., Sweeney, K., & Irving, H. *Enhancing the inquiry skills of bioscience students.*

Reeves, H. *Regional youth commitment.*

Darvall, L. *Identifying students at risk of early leaving and effective intervention strategies for students to complete schooling.*



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