Beyond the Classroom calls for new models of schooling that recognise that the future of young people is the responsibility of the whole community. These models should form the basis of a new social alliance across school systems enabling all young people to take an active—if not leading—role in that community, beyond the school gates.

Beyond the Classroom is based on the findings of research carried out by the Education Foundation (now in alliance with the Foundation for Young Australians). The message that emerges from the research is that tinkering around the edges of schooling will not provide solutions to the widening gaps in education that limit opportunities for many young Australians.

Rosalyn Black is the Senior Research Manager at the Foundation for Young Australians. She has many years of experience of teaching and leadership in government schools and higher education, and has worked with the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, informing state and national policy directions.
Beyond the classroom
Rosalyn Black

Beyond the classroom

Building new school networks

ACER Press
Foreword

Adam Smith

Today our classrooms are not characterised by four walls and a chalkboard.
   Today our classrooms have been redefined.
   Our classrooms are now characterised by a multitude of complex environments and learning spaces which embrace, support and inspire the learner. Communities around Australia continue to provide these spaces, and opportunities for learners are enabled by a fundamental commitment by schools and communities to collaborate for a common purpose.

   Further to this, communities themselves now transcend geographical definition and exist in many forms—both virtual and non virtual. This presents an educational imperative to allow learners to experience a vast array of environments, again because of a commitment to redefining the historic educational landscape.

   Networks exist in many and varied forms with a common mandate to drive impact that is greater than what can be achieved in isolation. Provision of different learning environments is one of many critical outcomes of greater ties between schools and communities. Schools best able to meet the often complex needs of students are certain to succeed when looking beyond the school ground for opportunities, ideas and resources.

   We find ourselves at a critical point in time when both formal and informal collaboration is essential to ensure every young Australian has the opportunity to access a rich curriculum, delivered across a range of environments, and which is measured by criteria that is personal, innovative and transferable.

   This book is an important exploration of what is working in Australia. It should be read as a call to action—to think, work and collaborate differently to ensure that our collective impact on Australia’s children and young people is more ambitious, successful and sustained.

   Adam Smith is the Chief Executive Officer of The Foundation for Young Australians
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The equity imperative</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is a network?</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joining up government</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to collaboration</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewpoint Carolyn Atkins</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Networks in place</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership plus</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leveraging partnership</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school as hub</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networks for social capital</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The power of the local</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewpoint Liz Suda</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Networks for students</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and wellbeing</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The early years</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The middle years</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building the capacity for collaboration</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading the networked school</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and the networked school</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic networks</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewpoint Sally Morgan</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 Connecting the sectors
   The community sector 52
   The role of philanthropy 55
   The role of business 58
   Networking the city 61
   Viewpoint  Jehan Loza 65

4 Young people driving networks  Julian Waters-Lynch 68
   Globalisation and education 68
   The connected society 70
   Young people and collaboration 71
   ruMAD? 71
   Down on the farm 72
   Regenerating the community 73
   Pushing the switch 74
   Viewpoint  Marion Webster 76

5 Systemic solutions for equity  Jack Keating 80
   System performance and equity 80
   The loss and discovery of equity 81
   Achieving equity 83
   Federal and state governments 84
   A place-based approach 85
   Viewpoint  Alan Reid 87

6 New work for networks  Peter Cole 91
   The network potential 91
   The need for improved networks 93
   What has been tried elsewhere? 99
   Moving ahead 100
   Viewpoint  Eric Sidoti 101

Conclusions 105
   New networks or better networks? 105
   A mandate for collaboration 106

References 109
Index 120
Preface

Ellen Koshland

We are seeking to make Australia an educated country, both to remain competitive in a global world and to address the inequalities dividing our social fabric. The reforms since the 1990s have not succeeded, and so we are redoubling our efforts by placing a central priority on literacy and numeracy, implementing tougher and more uniform measurements, and emphasising the core importance of quality teaching.

I believe there is an element missing in these discussions—the element of student motivation. Without it, we will not achieve the universal excellence we seek to achieve.

Once students feel a desire to learn, all else follows: improved literacy and numeracy, positive changes in problematic behaviour, increased self-organisation, and even willingness to tackle difficult subjects. A desire to learn can spring from many sources, but it is always informed by social as well as individual factors. It is in these social aspects that there is a role for strong vibrant networks for all schools.

As we know, students come to school from backgrounds which impact dramatically on their motivation to learn and succeed at school. This can show itself in:

- Identification with success. Some students hear regularly about success, while others never think about it as a realistic option for themselves. They rarely see or talk to successful figures from their school or their families.
- Exposure. Some students rarely travel beyond five kilometres from their home or school. Consequently, they lack access to the range of stimulating environments, experiences and settings that can give young people confidence in exploring the unknown.
- Educational capital. Some students come from homes where there is little first-hand evidence of the value of reading or education in general while other students experience reading as a regular activity from early on and are encouraged to learn at every point.

It is, of course, the task of the teacher and the school to kindle a desire to learn in every student, by paying attention and building on individual...
interests. The task is made much harder by a lack of reinforcement from other forces. This is evident in schools where teacher morale is low because of the poor motivation of the majority of students and where there is minimal back-up from the community. Teachers may seek more rewarding and easier teaching assignments elsewhere.

It is here that networks have a transformative role to play by positively changing students’ desire to learn, providing support for teachers and overcoming social disadvantage. Some examples of how networks and networked activity can improve student attitudes, application and achievement come from the programs conducted by the Education Foundation.

Through the ruMAD? program, students take on the challenge of real change in their communities. This may involve the rehabilitation of a local creek for environmental or cultural purposes, tackling issues of racism or bullying, reducing pollution or creating a new community amenity. Various as the projects are, the end results are common. Students see a new importance in their school learning. They have a new sense of their own capacity to make a contribution.

Back to School connects students to the past graduates of their school and gives many young people a possibility of success not previously envisaged. As one Year 10 student says:

I liked seeing real people who had gone to the same school as I go to. Knowing that they were once in the same place, learning the same things and now they are working in respected professions made me feel like you can do anything if you put your mind to it.

Through the City Centre and Worlds of Work programs, students relate to employees and executives in boardrooms and work places immersed in the global world. As one teacher commented:

By simply opening their doors to our students and welcoming them into their work spaces, the businesses who work with the City Centre are able to facilitate some very powerful learning in our students. Long after they may have forgotten the details of what was said to them in their visit, our students will remember the experience of being welcomed into a world otherwise unfamiliar to them, witnessing a business organisation in operation and contemplating the possibilities this might suggest for their own future career directions.

These examples give us a small glimpse into the vibrant centres schools could be. Schools could be places which are opportunity-rich, where students want to go because the people, the activities and the culture challenge and engage them. At the core would remain good teaching, high levels of literacy and numeracy, and problem solving capacities. But a focus on these alone will not drive the improvement we need.
It is worth noting that one reason high performing public schools and well resourced independent schools achieve their admired results is that they have rich networks invisibly in place. Many supportive factors surround the daily teaching task: students have role models and a culture of success, diverse opportunities and access to people and resources.

All schools need networks which can kindle and reinforce student motivation and skill development. Australian schools will continue to show differences in achievement until we make a commitment to ensure that quality networks are in place for all students and schools. Spearheaded by government, supported by incentives and coordinated among a wide range of outside agencies, the right kind of networks could see a marked change in the retention rates, achievement levels and creativity in this country.

The pleasure of learning remains a resource that young people can draw on for the rest of their lives. It is a gift we can give each of our young people, but it is also a requirement. The world unfolding around us will demand new learning again and again.

Ellen Koshland is the Founder of the Education Foundation
Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Education Foundation, I would like to acknowledge the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, which funded the research project that informed this book, *New School Ties: Networks for success*, as well as the members of the *New School Ties* Project Steering Group who contributed their knowledge and support: Sandra Mahar, Christine Warne, Stephanie Condon, Kim Wilson and Briony Grigg.

I would like to thank the contributing chapter authors—my colleagues Jack Keating and Julian Waters-Lynch as well as Peter Cole, who also has been an invaluable critical friend to the project—and the authors of the vibrant Viewpoints that add so much to this discussion: Carolyn Atkins, Jehan Loza, Sally Morgan, Alan Reid, Eric Sidoti, Liz Suda and Marion Webster.

My grateful thanks also go to the numerous people who participated in the interviews and forums that informed this book as well as to Tony Mackay for his expert facilitation of some of these forums.

Finally, I would like to express my warm admiration for Ellen Koshland and Adam Smith and their vision for Australian education, on which this book draws strongly, and for all of my colleagues at the Education Foundation and The Foundation for Young Australians who contribute so much to the lives and learning of young Australians.

*Rosalyn Black*
Introduction

The barriers to educational success for all young Australians are complex, entrenched and reinforced by our schooling system. To overcome them, Australia needs a collective response to children and young people’s educational needs. This should include collaboration between all schools in a locality, between school systems, between federal and state governments and between school education and the other sectors that support the learning and wellbeing of young people, especially those facing disadvantage. Without this, other strategies will not succeed.

In going forward, we have a choice between cooperation and shared responsibility for our children or fragmentation and division. Education Foundation Australia’s experience is that there are already many people and institutions who wish to work cooperatively for the benefit of all children rather than struggle with the divisions that currently prevail in Australian schooling.

(Koshland, 2006)

Background

The Education Foundation (also previously known as Education Foundation Australia) has been in operation since 1989. At time of writing, it has announced an alliance with The Foundation for Young Australians, consolidating an impressive scope of expertise and knowledge of the youth and education sectors. The Education Foundation’s proven track record in the development and delivery of education programs, community engagement and research has been brought together with the strengths of The Foundation for Young Australians in grant-making, indigenous programs, capacity building, scholarships and successful models of youth participation.
All references to the Education Foundation and The Foundation for Young Australians within this publication occur in a pre-alliance context. By the time of publication, the organisations will operate as one.

This book is informed by the findings of a research project carried out by the Education Foundation with funding from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *New School Ties: Networks for success*, and by the findings of previous Education Foundation research, in particular its *Thinking Community, Case for Change* and *Crossing the Bridge: Overcoming entrenched disadvantage through student-centred learning* projects. It also draws on the emerging proposals being developed by a new Education Foundation project, *Equity and Quality in Public Education*, which is being conducted in collaboration with The R E Ross Trust.

The common message that emerges from the Education Foundation’s research is that tinkering around the edges of schooling will not provide solutions to the widening gaps in education and life outcomes that limit opportunities for too many young Australians. Instead, we need new models of schooling that recognise the future of children and young people is the responsibility of the whole community, and which form the basis of a social alliance for all young people to take an active—if not a leading—role in their community.

The Foundation has proposed that a central plank of this alliance should be collaboration across Australia’s three school systems—government, Catholic and independent—so that schools from different sectors can work together at a local or district level to share resources, meet the learning needs of all students in the locality and build value for their communities. It has called for schools to be reconfigured as local hubs that offer education and a range of other services for the entire community. It has both advocated and modelled new partnerships between areas of government, business, philanthropy and the community sector to provide children and young people with powerful learning resources, improve their wellbeing and engage and support their families.

This book reinforces the messages of this previous research. It puts forward an argument for collaborative networks that can address the deep systemic barriers that are preventing educational success for too many young Australians. It argues for new ties among schools and school systems and between schools, their local communities and the business, philanthropic and community sectors that go beyond the classroom to create greater opportunities for children and young people.

At time of writing, an emerging national zeitgeist of collaboration is seeding significant new reforms in school education, whether through the Council of Australian Governments or through the efforts of individual states such as Victoria. As a key Victorian policy document observes:
The opportunity for reform and evolution has never been better. The new Commonwealth–State context provides the Department with unprecedented opportunities to align policy and funding and to establish workable partnerships to drive reform.

(Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008)

The Education Foundation fully endorses these policy directions. In their support, this book describes some of the networks that already exist on the ground in Australia and internationally as well as some of the policy settings that support it. It offers observations about how this practice can best be furthered in Australia. In particular, it considers a number of factors that make greater collaboration for school education both increasingly necessary and increasingly possible. These include:

- a growing inequity in educational outcomes linked to geographic location and exacerbated by current systemic structures
- greater knowledge about the need for a systematic approach to the planning, location and delivery of learning from early childhood through to adulthood
- the need for locality-wide responses to declining student numbers, student underachievement and school underperformance
- a growing agenda for a joined-up response to social issues and the centrality of school education in addressing these issues
- a greater awareness of the potential to reframe schools as centres of their communities
- the need to broaden the curriculum to respond to an increasingly diverse student cohort and to give students a genuine role and voice
- fresh attention to the impact of quality teaching and a search for ways to maximise teacher capacity
- a growing desire by other sectors to support the work of schools
- the rapid growth of electronic networking tools.

As co-chair Glyn Davis has explained, the Australia 2020 Summit identified a widely held desire to strengthen civil society by encouraging Australians to solve social problems outside the constraints and structures of government. This book proposes a central role for government in strengthening and expanding network structures to bring together the many groups that are working in support of children and young people’s futures, but it also argues that these networks must be informed and driven by the place-based knowledge and commitment of these groups.
The equity imperative

Providing a quality school education for all young Australians is increasingly challenging. Growing child poverty, entrenched geographic disadvantage, a deepening divide between the government, Catholic and independent school systems and a splintering of the public education system into selective and competitive schools heighten both the imperative and the task. There is a strong collective sense that the time has come to take up this challenge in a more systemic way.

This collective sense is reflected in statements by the former President of the Business Council of Australia, Michael Chaney. His outgoing speech called for business to both lead the way in ensuring that Australia’s economic growth is matched by growth in social prosperity as well as initiate policy approaches that align economic reform with social outcomes (Chaney, 2007). It is also reflected in a key statement by the Australian Industry Group in conjunction with the Dusseldorp Skills Forum (2007):

A decade of sustained economic growth and prosperity has provided the country with an unprecedented opportunity to make a major assault on educational exclusion and disadvantage, and to do so in ways that will not only deliver greater social equity but will set Australia up for continued growth and economic success into the future.

Persistent gaps in achievement among Australian students have been the subject of much recent local and international analysis (see Barber & Mourshed, 2007). These gaps are strongly related to social factors—70 per cent of the variation in outcomes between Australian schools can be attributed to the impact of social background—and this relationship is proving resistant to change over time (Dawkins, 2007).

The most affluent Australian students are on average three years of schooling ahead of the least affluent in reading literacy and the poorest 25 per cent of students are twice as likely to score badly in reading tests compared to their more wealthy peers (Bentley, 2006; McGaw, 2006a). Rising levels of disadvantage and widening socioeconomic gaps are worsening this situation. Australia has a comparatively high level of child poverty, ranking 18th out of 26 OECD nations (Daly, 2006).

These gaps in achievement show themselves most strongly when mapped against geographic location. For some years now, Australia has seen a growing concentration of educational failure in specific postcode areas and specific school systems (Teese, 2006; Teese & Polesel, 2003; Thomson, 2002). For example, an affluent student from an eastern Melbourne independent school now has almost 16 times the chance of getting into a medical course than a poorer student from a western Melbourne government school (Lamb, 2007).
The joint operation of a number of forces means that poor students with high educational needs are increasingly clustered in the schools that are least equipped to support them: government system schools with poor outcomes located in economically depressed areas with low educational profiles (Keating, 2008; Keating & Lamb, 2004; O’Loughlin et al., 2004). As the Education Foundation (2005) has previously noted:

*It is mainly in the low income regions and localities that students face limited educational options and potential ghettoisation into schools with poor educational outcomes. It is these regions and localities that have high rates of early school leaving and poor transition rates to tertiary education and employment.*

This creates a circular pattern of disadvantage. Within any given school, poorer students tend to show lower achievement and school completion than more affluent students. Students who attend schools with many poor students show lower achievement than students from schools with many affluent students (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2004; McGaw, 2006a; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005; Rothman, 2002).

These trends are well recognised. Most recent reports on Australian education identify inequity as an urgent area for action. The imperative to ensure success for all young people is enshrined in the purpose and principles of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, in the National Reform Agenda of the Council of Australian Governments and in policy statements from a number of state governments. A statement by the Victorian Government sums up the commitment of all Australian school systems:

*All school students are entitled to an excellent education and a genuine opportunity to succeed, irrespective of the school they attend, the place they live or their background.*

(Department of Education and Training, 2005a)

To note some other examples, a Senate inquiry into the quality of school education has expressed concern about ‘the presence of a long tail of underachievement’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007). A key statement on government collaboration has noted that:

*There is a clear challenge to improve educational outcomes, especially for disadvantaged students … A strong, inclusive education system is a critical part of our liberal democracy and social wellbeing.*

(O’Loughlin et al., 2004)

A seminal paper by the Council for the Australian Federation, *The Future of Schooling in Australia*, provides a detailed analysis of the forces driving
inequitable educational outcomes (Dawkins, 2007). Another paper by a senior policymaker identifies three ‘burning platforms’ for action including ‘the persistent patterns of inequity in Australian education despite our improving quality’ (Suggett, 2007).

These concerns have been raised by the Education Foundation over a number of years:

In both government and non-government sectors, those schools where students face the greatest difficulties are the ones with the least social and cultural capital to support them. As postcode and regional disadvantage grows, many schools can be more aptly defined by their location than their sector. And so entrenched disadvantage is re-entrenched. In fact given the continued evidence of strong links between socio-economic status and educational outcomes, it can be argued that Australian schooling in its current form is merely reproducing and reinforcing the patterns of privilege and disadvantage that already exist in families and communities. This lack of social mobility and access to equal opportunity does not accord with our aspirations of democracy.

(Koshland, 2006)

What is clear is that individual schools cannot by themselves provide the solution to educational inequity. The only strategy that can drive real change is a collective approach that should include:

- collaboration between all schools located in any given geographic area regardless of whether they are funded through the government, catholic or independent school system
- collaboration among school systems
- a new level of collaboration between federal and state governments
- collaboration between school education systems and the other sectors (community, business, local government and philanthropy) to support the learning and wellbeing of young people, especially those facing disadvantage.

Australian schools are increasingly engaged in partnerships with other organisations from across these sectors. With fresh support from policy and the emergence of new intermediary organisations to mobilise them, these partnerships represent an important social contribution to school education, especially public education. They bring needed resources into schools serving disadvantaged areas and direct support to improve outcomes for children and young people. Yet without more formal arrangements, there is the risk that too many of these partnerships will remain peripheral activities, isolated exercises in an environment where collaboration is still not the norm.
Systemic networks supported by policy could connect and sustain such partnerships while addressing the deeper barriers to educational participation that they are attempting to ameliorate. Various initiatives have been implemented by Australian school systems to encourage collaboration between schools and, at times, between schools and other organisations or agencies in order to build their capacity to provide an excellent education for their students. This book does not in any way underestimate the importance of these interventions. What it does note is that while other aspects of Australian public and private life are being strongly shaped by connectivity and connectedness, the same cannot always be said of the way that school education is designed or delivered.

What is a network?

There is a well-documented global trend by governments to improve policy development and service provision by moving away from a centralised approach based on ‘command, control, delivery and accountability’ and towards an approach that encourages ‘interdependence, collaborative practice, co-development, disciplined innovation, personalisation and shared narratives’ (Jackson & Payne, 2007, in Parker & Gallagher, 2007; Robinson & Keating, 2005a). This has given rise to a number of policy strategies including joined-up government, place-based policymaking and support for local partnerships and networks (Parker & Gallagher, 2007). Internationally, these strategies are being adopted across a wide range of government priority areas. Their language now permeates many policy statements by Australian governments.

Within education, networks are seen as one of the most promising levers for large-scale reform. This is partly due to the fact that, unlike most of the structures that traditionally drive educational delivery, they have the ability to create a shared purpose and commitment among people and organisations (Chapman & Aspin, 2005). They are associated with a number of potential and proven improvements including better achievement for a large number of students, greater school capacity for innovation, improved provision and services and a broader role for schools in their communities (Hadfield et al., 2005; Hargreaves, 2003a, 2003b; Hopkins, 2006; Istance, 2006; Jackson, 2006; Leadbeater, 2005). As one United Kingdom paper observes:

*If networks are successful they hold the possibility of changing the environment in which policy makers operate. They provide the opportunity for the environment and the system to become recultured in ways that are more cooperative, interconnected and multi-agency. They have a capacity for evolutionary transformation and renewal in changing aspirations, ways of working together and provision of learning opportunities.*

(Chapman & Aspin, 2005)
‘Network’ is one of a number of terms including ‘partnership’, ‘cluster’, ‘alliance’, ‘collaboration’, ‘collective’ and ‘joined-up approach’ that describe groups of organisations and sectors working together. This language is often used interchangeably to describe what is actually a multitude of different connections (Department for Victorian Communities, 2007; Edwards et al., 2000).

In school education, networks can take many forms, from informal, idiosyncratic and short-term arrangements between small groups of teachers to formal, permanent and widespread alliances that reach beyond the sector. They can also serve a range of purposes, from knowledge-sharing to meeting the educational needs of all children and young people in an area to the transformation of an entire education system. Networks can be formal or informal, fixed or fluid, extensive or intimate, short-term or long-term. They can have broad or narrow agendas. They can be expert or representative, centralised or decentralised, open or closed, local or cosmopolitan, geographical or virtual (Beare, 2006; Cole, 2007; Hannon, 2005; West-Burnham, Farrar & Otero, 2007).

While there is no single blueprint for operation, there is consistent agreement that an effective education network has the following features:

- It focuses on enhancing student outcomes and sets achievable goals in which students’ interests are paramount.
- It has the active involvement and advocacy of school leadership.
- It has the capacity to respond to local circumstances and to move from soft collaboration to rigorous work.
- It promotes innovative or ‘next’ practice.
- It is well organised, with clear operating procedures and mechanisms for ensuring maximum participation between its members.
- It reflects agreed and common values and purposes and fosters relationships of trust and respect based on equity and shared ownership.
- It has adequate resources to fulfil its purposes, particularly in terms of time, finance and human capital.

(Cole, 2001b; Hopkins, 2000; Jackson & Burns, 2005; Lasater, 2007)

There are numerous typologies of school education networks that illustrate the potential roles and application of effective networks.

One analysis for the United Kingdom’s National College for School Leadership (Church et al., 2006) identified seven key features of the impact of networking and collaboration:
• securing children’s attainment
• securing children’s achievement
• securing children’s wellbeing
• improving professional practice
• growing leaders of the future
• leading in and beyond the school
• effecting impact at a system level.

David Jackson and Maureen Burns (2005) provide a second typology based on existing school education networks in the United Kingdom:

• informal, idiosyncratic and casual networks created for mutual support or knowledge-sharing between individuals
• specialist teacher networks to advance a common professional interest—these may be permanent, but membership may change
• strategic, temporary networks of schools that come together for an agreed period of time for a specific purpose
• geographically based, relatively permanent networks of schools that work together for the long term to share responsibility for young people in their area.

David Hopkins (2000) provides a third typology that includes even more ambitious purposes:

1. At its most basic level a network could be regarded as simply groups of teachers joining together for a common curriculum purpose and for the sharing of good practice.
2. At a more ambitious level networks could involve groups of teachers and schools joining together for the purposes of school improvement with the explicit aim of not just sharing practice but of enhancing teaching and learning throughout a school or groups of schools.
3. Over and above this, networks could also not just serve the purpose of knowledge transfer and school improvement, but also involve groups of stakeholders joining together for the implementation of specific policies locally and possibly nationally.
4. A further extension of this way of working is found when groups of networks (within and outside education) link together for system improvement in terms of social justice and inclusion.
5. Finally, there is the possibility of groups of networks working together not just on a social justice agenda, but also to act explicitly as an agency for system renewal and transformation.

The greatest potential for meeting the challenge of educational inequity lies at the more ambitious ends of these spectra. Australia needs collaborative networks that:
Beyond the classroom: Building new school networks

- are formal, stable and structured
- are able to attract significant and sustained commitment from many players with the common purpose of improving educational outcomes in specific districts or local areas
- bring together the purposes of all schools and systems
- harness the resources of key sectors.

(Chapman & Aspin, 2005; OECD, 2003, in Robinson & Keating, 2005a)

Such networks have the potential to change the enterprise of school education in a way that would significantly improve outcomes for young Australians, particularly in communities where their educational needs are not being met. As Bill Mulford (2008) writes:

_Schools and their leaders will need to move from the bureaucratic and mechanistic to organic living systems, from thin to deep democracy, from mass education to personalisation through participation, and from hierarchies to networks._

Having said this, we should not overlook the need for multiple forms of networks including those that can change with the circumstances and meet specific needs as they arise. At their most productive, such informal networks are conducted in a stable climate of collaboration but without necessarily being controlled by the formal system (Kanter, 1994, in Mulford, 2007). Some of these informal networks may be created by electronic communications, bringing people together in ways that cannot and should not be constrained by formal processes.

Elsewhere in this book, Carolyn Atkins writes about the value of both formal and informal mechanisms for bringing together different sectors under a common purpose. It is important to note that within education, collaboration can actually be held back by formal structures and accountabilities ‘that encourage schools to think of themselves as autonomous, stand alone units’ (Leadbeater, 2005, in Mulford, 2007). As Peter Cole (2001b) notes:

_A large part of a network is invisible. It exists in the relationships and interactions between the participants … The network concept is an enabling mechanism, not a means for constraining schools._

Joining up government

Collaboration is required across government ‘when there are complex issues with complex causation [and] when knowledge and resources are required...’
from across many sectors’ (Blacher & Adams, in Parker & Gallagher, 2007). Disadvantage certainly qualifies as one of these issues. Its multiple and inter-related causes and effects have proven intractable to responses from any one area of government. For this reason, there is a widespread consensus that it can only be addressed through a joined-up approach that engages the various arms and levels of government (Rogan, 2002; Vinson, 2007). The United Kingdom established a Social Exclusion Unit almost a decade ago to tackle disadvantage using multiple, coordinated policy levers with a priority given to education. There is now a push for the introduction of a similar policy approach in the United States (Boushey et al., 2007).

In Australia, South Australia and Victoria have led the way in forming joined-up approaches to disadvantage. The South Australian Government launched its Social Inclusion Initiative in 2002 to address the state’s social issues in innovative ways. It included partnerships across government departments, between different sectors and between government and non-government organisations. Increased student retention in school is one of its key areas of focus. While it has not set up a specific entity to do the same work, the Victorian Government’s *Growing Victoria Together* (2005) and *A Fairer Victoria* (2006) strategies represent a whole-of-government policy action plan to address disadvantage—including educational inequity—through collaboration with non-government and local community agencies.

There is good reason to expect that these state-based strategies will now be strengthened by events on the national stage. The Australian Government’s appointment of the first Minister for Social Inclusion will require new relationships between federal and state governments. The Council for the Australian Federation and the National Reform Agenda are already seeding greater cooperation between states and territories to redress inequity (Dawkins, 2007) and the Australian Social Inclusion Board, which met for the first time at time of writing, will drive ‘new ways of governing’ and ‘rethink how policy and programs across portfolios and levels of government can work together to combat economic and social disadvantage’ (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008).

The next step must be to extend a joined-up approach to the culture and operation of school education. Australian educationalists like Pat Thomson have argued for years that education policy cannot be separated from other public policy and that all policy areas affect schools (Thomson, 2000, 2002). Statements by Tom Bentley (2006) reflect a similar view:

*Schooling systems will not overcome growing patterns of exclusion and marginalisation by incrementally improving their attainment scores. Teaching, resourcing, leadership all matter, but they cannot work in isolation from the wider context.*

For joined-up government to have its greatest impact on education and disadvantage, it must be supported by the other sectors that have an interest
in these issues. Victoria provides a good example of the widespread support that exists for a cross-sectoral approach to school education, especially in the context of disadvantage. Some of this support comes from local government, which has a potentially central role in improving educational provision and outcomes in disadvantaged communities. The Victorian Local Governance Association some years ago called for structures that enable local government to participate in education and for networks of public schools to be aligned with local government areas (Snelling, 2003). Some of this work has been done and the Victorian Government now recognises that ‘local councils have a major role in community development and can become key partners with schools’ (Department of Education and Training, 2005b). New policy in the state may see the development of local government planning that includes schools.

The Centre for Strategic Education has identified joint approaches to building social capital through education as one of the most ambitious and timely agendas for Victoria (Redman, 2007) and innovative attempts towards this are taking place. The recently concluded Agora Think Tank prompted cross-sectoral partnerships to support educational participation by disadvantaged young Victorians. The recently formed Victorian Health Inequalities Network proposes an integrated education policy framework (2007) based on inter-departmental and inter-agency collaboration to improve equity of access to learning.

One of the most complete descriptions of this kind of collaboration comes from the World Declaration on Education for All, which states that to serve the learning needs of all children:

> New and revitalized partnerships at all levels will be necessary: partnerships among all sub-sectors and forms of education … partnerships between education and other government departments, including planning, finance, labour, communications, and other social sectors; partnerships between government and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, local communities, religious groups, and families. (UNESCO, 1990)

The role of some of these other sectors is described elsewhere in this book, together with recommendations about how their contribution to the work of schools can be maximised.

**Barriers to collaboration**

While the creation of joined-up or collaborative approaches to education is not the sole responsibility of government, government must provide the structures and help to build the culture that will ensure they succeed:
The moral imperative to collaborate can be a powerful driver of change, but only when it is nurtured, supported and incentivised.

(Parker & Gallagher, 2007)

There are three significant and interrelated structural barriers to galvanising a collective response to educational inequity in Australia. These can only be overcome by bold policy change.

The first concerns the wider climate in which Australian school systems operate. Education is strongly associated, both in the research literature and in the general culture, with positive personal outcomes such as better quality of life, higher earnings and better health. If anything, the relationship between education and these private, positional benefits seems to be growing stronger. As a paper commissioned by the Education Foundation observes:

The effect of formal educational attainment on our individual chances in life is growing; the income returns to staying in education are larger than a generation ago. But by extension, the penalties for failure and non-completion are becoming harsher, as the ‘distribution of social risk’ changes around us … Competition for high status educational opportunities has intensified in many, if not all, countries.

(Bentley et al., 2004)

In a market-driven education system, the onus rests on parents to choose—if they can—the school that will ensure the greatest benefits for their own children. Perhaps as a reflection of this, Australian school education policy focuses strongly on individual educational outcomes. There is an evident policy consensus that collaboration is desirable and that schools should jointly ensure that all students in their area are participating in education (Robinson & Keating, 2005b), yet the public and policy dialogue about collective outcomes, public benefits, public good and common responsibility remains weak.

The second barrier is Australia’s federal system. The United Kingdom is driving almost unparalleled collaborative approaches to school education, driven by a policy consensus that collaboration represents the future of schooling. These are made possible because of its ability as a national system to inject enormous funding into these approaches. Our federal system is a hurdle to this kind of investment. It is also in its current form an almost insurmountable barrier to improved educational outcomes overall. This is recognised by the push by the Council for Australian Governments for new federalist arrangements to overcome this situation (Dawkins, 2007), arrangements that the Australian Government is beginning to explore with states and territories at time of writing.

As Jack Keating (2008) explains, the need for such change is clear:
Beyond the classroom: Building new school networks

The current arrangements are contributing to an educational underclass that is concentrated socially, economically and geographically. The intensity of this concentration in secondary schooling is growing, and without addressing patterns of participation and outcomes for these students the platform for the education and skills revolutions will not be available. This situation is a result of structures, policies and discourses that are making Australian schooling more hierarchical. The zero sum nature of this hierarchy has clear implications for educational, economic and social equity. It also creates an education and skills underclass that weakens the productivity capacity of the economy, and as international comparisons indicate it has a net impact of lowering educational standards and levels of participation in the country.

The third and related barrier is idiosyncratically Australian: the division of schools into three historically created sectors—government or public, independent and Catholic. Each of these sectors faces growing gaps in performance between students and between schools, but this is not acknowledged in the popular debate about school education. As Ellen Koshland notes (2006):

Contrary to the prevailing view shaped by the media, the quality of schooling does not delineate itself along the public–private divide … Our continued focus on the public–private divide in school education obscures the reality of this cross sectoral disparity in education and obstructs the combined efforts that are needed to overcome it.

The existence of the three systems and the market tensions between them do more to exacerbate fragmentation and duplication of activity and responsibility between schools than any other structure. While some schools do cross the system barrier to work together by co-locating or sharing facilities, creating shared senior secondary programs and establishing common student support services, these are still isolated examples and not well supported by policy (Cole, 2001b; Keating, 2006; McGaw, 2006a).

One of the most powerful interventions to improve student outcomes across Australia would be the creation of local networks of schools that share responsibility for the educational outcomes of all children and young people in their area, regardless of which system funds them (Black, 2007; Hopkins, 2006; McGaw in Zbar, 2006). This kind of collaboration would also do a lot to weaken the growing segregation of students by socioeconomic status, background and educational performance that is emerging as a result of school selectivity within each of the three systems. Both Alan Reid and Jack Keating discuss these issues in greater detail elsewhere in this book (see Chapter 5).

Other OECD countries such as New Zealand provide examples of a public education system that includes government and non-government schools. These schools subscribe to a set of public values that combine
the needs of individual students and their communities (Keating, 2006). A common set of principles for all publicly-funded schools in Australia would support educational access for all young people, educational equity to reverse the growing gap in outcomes between different regions and social groups and educational excellence to increase the overall level of achievement of all Australia’s school-age population (Education Foundation, 2005). It would create an education commons (Reid, 2003) that accepts responsibility for all children and young people.

This idea underpins a proposal being developed by the Education Foundation at time of writing that calls for new arrangements to:

- develop a shared sense of collective moral responsibility across school systems and other relevant agencies that goes beyond responsibility for the individual outcomes of the students that are enrolled in each school—that is beyond a client relationship
- investigate, propose and develop governance arrangements that will move public education in Australia towards a system that is designed to serve the public good with responsibility shared across government and non-government sectors, agencies and providers
- investigate, in partnerships between the federal government, state governments and other government agencies, the possibility of area based provision that is designed to maximise the quality and range of educational provision and associated services.

(Keating, 2008)

Viewpoint

Carolyn Atkins

It is now well established that quality, accessible public education is fundamental for an individual’s economic and social participation. It also promotes economic growth and breaks intergenerational cycles of disadvantage, and strengthens the capacity of communities. However currently there are significant barriers within the traditional schooling model that prevent many children and young people—particularly those who experience disadvantage—from being included in all aspects of community life. Because of their life experiences outside of the school environment, they do not have the access opportunities that lead to the experiences of creating, exploring and achieving.

We know that a child’s or young person’s learning does not occur in isolation from the other parts of his or her life. However the traditional school structure and approach is to respond as if this is the case.
The Victorian Council of Community Service (VCOSS) believes that the development of cross-sectoral, collaborative networks is a key way to overcome disadvantage. This is particularly so in the area of education: there are significant opportunities to improve learning outcomes by addressing the social factors that negatively impact on a child’s or young person’s ability to learn. The quality of the child’s environment as a whole is important to educational success and improved social outcomes.

Schools are the ideal entry point for the provision of additional support and creating linkages, as for many families, schools are the only formal institutions they engage with. However schools are focused primarily on the educational needs of children and young people. To address the social needs of children and young people, it is critical that schools are networked and integrated with a range of other community services and structures. Such new approaches are required for the improved integration of education and broader community organisations and structures.

One of the key values of collaborative networks is that by linking different sectors, they foster social inclusion and strengthen community involvement. Schools networked with a range of other community and social services are able to respond proactively to the increasing concentrations of disadvantage and they are in a better position to support the education and social needs of children and young people. Such steps help ensure that all students are provided with opportunities to have the experience of creating, exploring and achieving despite the level of disadvantage that some also experience.

There are a series of critical questions that need to be addressed in order to achieve a more collaborative-based system that actively supports the learning outcomes of all students, particularly those who experience disadvantage. Many of these questions are being addressed throughout this whole book. Two specific questions that relate to the community sector are:

- How do we assist in facilitating the new ways of working required by both schools and community sector organisations?
- How do we translate or upscale innovative practice into broad system-wide practice?

In addressing these questions there are a number of factors, four of which will be explored here.

First, there is the development of collaborative networks that are focused on the learning outcomes of all students, particularly those who experience disadvantage. The development of these networks requires two key steps:

1. Drawing together the full range of resources that affect the learning and development of children. This step is critical as the evidence highlights that the quality of a child’s or young person’s environment as a whole—
at home, in care, at school, in the community—is central to supporting their learning and development.

2 Ensuring the management of school resources and learning models are more flexible and include the capacity to be locally-driven so as to more effectively respond to the diversity of need.

For example, the deemed enrolment model developed in partnership by St Luke’s Anglicare, the regional office of the then Department of Education and Training and four local secondary colleges in the Victorian regional city of Bendigo focuses on supporting young people aged 12–15 who are at risk of becoming, or who have already, disengaged from the education system. The objective is to provide a bridge for young people to help them reengage with school or other mainstream educational and vocational-based programs. This is achieved by the development of an education plan, formation of a support team and the use of the available funding generated from the young person’s enrolment. Using this model a range of educational programs is then developed to meet the young person’s needs.

The second factor is the development of new ways of working that give privilege to innovation. This requires all stakeholders, including government, to accept that everything tried will not be successful, and that—importantly—there will be insights gained from these as well as the successful initiatives. For this to work effectively mechanisms need to be established so that case studies of what works and what hasn’t can be shared across the community, and education and government sectors.

The establishment of mechanisms to share what has been learnt across the community, education and government sectors is the third factor. The establishment of mechanisms at the state, regional and local level are required for intentional dialogue between the community sector, schools, other education and training organisations, local governments and the state government. Research and the work of VCOSS highlights the key value and importance of both formal and informal mechanisms and structures that bring a range of sectors together. There is a wide range of mechanisms that can be implemented, such as local, regional and statewide seminars to share what has been learnt from particular initiatives.

Finally, a central government policy framework that clearly articulates a broad direction and includes local flexibility and adaptability is the fourth factor. A central policy framework should provide a broad direction with minimum specifications, and should:

- clearly establish the direction of change with defined broad outcome goals
- establish targets and specify core evaluation requirements based around these broad outcome goals
• explicitly allow for innovation and experimentation with cause and effect
• set boundaries that cannot be crossed by any implementation strategy
• allocate resources, but without specifying how they should be used—resource use to be determined at the local level
• incorporate mechanisms to assist in the translation or upscaling of what has been learnt from innovative practice—both in terms of what worked well and what did not—more broadly across the system.

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Networks in place

Australian schools have a history of partnership with their local communities to improve outcomes for children and young people, but it is an uneven history. Existing partnerships could provide a platform for more sustainable networks that link local schools, their communities and the agencies that work for the good of those communities. These networks should respond to the particular circumstances of each school and the community it serves but they should also meet universal high standards, expectations and accountabilities.

_Schools need to be successful with their communities, not in spite of them._

(West-Burnham, Farrar & Otero, 2007)

Partnership plus

The local community provides the most immediate opportunity for schools to work in partnership with other groups and individuals to improve children and young people’s learning and wellbeing. These include parents, local business and industry, local government and community groups. These partnerships are particularly important for schools in disadvantaged areas. Internationally as well as in Australia, few schools combine high student poverty with high achievement. Those that do tend to have strong relationships with their community (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). School–community partnership can deliver many benefits: better engagement and learning outcomes for students, greater dynamism and capacity for the school and new solutions and resources for the community.

But how many partnerships are actually effective? Observations from the wider social sphere indicate that partnership for its own sake is no
guarantee of successful outcomes and that the performance of partnerships is patchy. As one United Kingdom report concludes: ‘Partnership working remains a good idea but is incredibly difficult in practice’ (Jupp, 2000). One of Australia’s most detailed studies of school–community partnership identifies 12 indicators of partnership maturity but suggests that very few partnerships meet these criteria (Johns et al., 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Kilpatrick et al., 2002; Kilpatrick, Johns & Mulford, 2003).

Perhaps the greatest weakness of most individual school–community partnerships is their lack of longevity. The Education Foundation’s experience of 19 years suggests that many schools may be able to build short-term relationships for a specific purpose but that many lack the capacity to set longer horizons. Interviews with school leaders as part of an earlier Education Foundation study (Black, 2004) indicate that this may partly be a natural outcome of a sector that characteristically operates within short timeframes like terms, semesters or single years and that it may reflect a need for observable outcomes in a field where teachers rarely see the products of their efforts. As one school principal noted:

Schools do not necessarily think in terms of long term partnerships or even long term programs. They do not necessarily envisage a sustained partnership with other organizations, although government policy is nudging them in this direction.

(Black, 2004)

This trend is exacerbated by the way in which opportunities for partnership are offered to schools. Not-for-profit, philanthropic, community and business organisations are increasingly targeting education as one of the most effective ways of addressing social and economic issues such as entrenched disadvantage or the skills shortage. This can represent a needed injection of private funds into the public education system, but it can also mean that schools—especially schools in disadvantaged areas—have to navigate a flood of uncoordinated offers that can lead to opportunity fatigue. Michael Fullan’s earlier analysis (2000) still holds true:

Schools need the outside to get the job done. These external forces, however, do not come in helpful packages; they are an amalgam of complex and uncoordinated phenomena. The work of the school is to figure out how to make its relationship with them a productive one.

Effective schools have the ability to choose, leverage and integrate new opportunities that come their way, but this skill is not supported by the way in which other sectors operate. The strong tendency of government and philanthropy to use short term, pilot or seed funding to drive school–community alliances makes it extremely difficult for schools to set long-term horizons for these partnerships. The extensive study mentioned
earlier recommended a number of policy initiatives for the better support of school–community partnership in Australia. At the top of the list was a change to partnership funding arrangements:

- **Seeding grants for the development of large-scale school–community partnerships should have a five-year lifecycle, in keeping with commercial business practice.**
- **Current levels of funding for the development, maintenance and sustainability of large-scale school–community partnerships should be reviewed, and increased levels of funding allocated (or redistributed from the ‘start-up’ stages) to allow for the maintenance and sustainability of school–community partnerships.**

(Kilpatrick, Johns & Mulford, 2003)

A second common failing of school–community partnerships is their lack of effective leadership. Successful partnerships require a shared, enabling or distributed leadership that encourages the participation of all players and builds collective responsibility across the school and community (Kilpatrick, Johns & Mulford, 2003). Many partnerships fail the maturity test on this basis. One reason may be the cultural tendency of schools to see themselves as the expert and the lead agency in any partnership with outside organisations. Shifting this perception may not be easy, but a more reciprocal partnership model would draw on knowledge and expertise from both within and outside the school:

*If our goal is to reduce gaps in outcomes among students due to the accidents of their birth, we need a broader frame than one that starts and ends with the idea that schools are the key point of leverage.*

(Levin, 2006)

Broadening this point of leverage would also overcome a third limitation of many school–community partnerships. Partnerships can be powerful tools for improving learning outcomes for a specific cohort of students, but most have limited impact beyond this cohort because they do not alter the school’s intrinsic operations, structures or culture. They rarely feature in the school’s central organisational vision, future planning, budget or staffing arrangements (Spierings, 2001). They do not and cannot tackle the bigger forces that shape educational outcomes for students (Mulford et al., 2007). As I observed some years ago:

*The landscape of school–community partnership is littered with discontinued or underutilised programs that leave little legacy except in the experience of individual students.*

(Black, 2004)
It is hard to say how much this picture is changing. Certainly, building partnerships remains a challenge for schools in high poverty areas, which have large numbers of students who require support in multiple ways (Bishop, 2004). These schools need the help of other public services such as health and welfare but find it difficult to create or maintain the necessary connections (Mulford et al., 2007). In the more recent words of another school principal:

*Partnerships with community are outside our experience and expertise. They take a lot of energy and there is no-one to do it all the time.*

(Black, 2007)

**Leveraging partnership**

Shifting the focus of partnership from the individual school to a network of local schools could leverage the benefits of partnership for a larger number of schools and make a difference to a larger number of young people. Instead of depending on their own overdrawn resources, schools could work together to jointly identify, engage, manage and measure those partnerships that offer the greatest collective benefit for their students and communities. If these networks harnessed the efforts and resources of the government, independent and Catholic systems, they would open the door to truly creative solutions for all young people in the area.

Local school networks could be funded by government in partnership with business or philanthropy to engage a partnership broker or manager who would help them establish the conditions for partnership success: a shared vision, collaborative working relationships, access to a model of good practice and a way of bridging the cultures of different sectors. A new initiative by the Tasmanian Government (Department of Education Tasmania, 2006) is trialling one version of this model by introducing school–community partnership officers who work with school leaders, businesses, parents and community organisations to develop partnerships that improve student outcomes.

As discussed elsewhere in this book, there is a growing number of brokers and intermediary organisations that work with schools to create meaningful partnerships with other agencies and the community. Without an overarching framework of local networks supported by central policy structures, however, this work will never have the systemic impact that it could have. As I noted some years ago:

*An independent organisation such as the (Education) Foundation has a powerful role to play in supporting school–community partnership. It models and brokers good partnerships, helps schools build the skills for partnership,*
Partnerships and networks can be powerful mechanisms for improving outcomes for children and young people, but they are not in themselves a panacea. For some schools operating in challenging circumstances, the task of engaging in a simple partnership with another school or with a local organisation requires skills and resources that may be in short supply as the school struggles to meet the more immediate needs of its students. It is essential that schools are supported in the development of the complex skills that are required to work collaboratively before they are expected to engage in either partnership or wider network activity.

There is also the question of whether people can be over-networked: the demands of participation in a network can overwhelm teachers and other professionals who are already juggling their time and energy. Any new network policy has to build in a response to these risk factors. As a participant in one Education Foundation forum has noted:

*There can be negative experiences for people in having networks thrust upon them.*

**The school as hub**

Collaboration among schools or between schools and other groups in the community can be prompted by the sharing, co-locating or joint use of physical facilities. Recent years have seen a number of policy initiatives that encourage this more concrete collaboration.

In Victoria, for example, policy support for shared infrastructure between schools and partners such as local government, community organisations and other education and training providers can mean that school information technology centres are opened up for community use or that libraries, sports and performing arts facilities are built as shared resources for the school and the community (Department of Education and Training, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b). These arrangements may now be extended to shared infrastructure between government and non-government schools and could see the education sector working with local government to develop local planning frameworks that include schools, kindergartens, sports facilities and libraries. At the national level, the Australian Government’s *Local Schools: Working Together* program will fund the construction of
shared facilities such as classrooms, sporting fields and libraries between
government and non-government schools in new growth areas.

These arrangements provide higher quality resources, financial savings
and stronger links for both schools and their communities. They also
go some way to changing the old paradigm of the moated school that is
physically walled off from the community that surrounds it (Black, 2004).

Other paradigm-breaking examples include the co-location of schools
with community and children’s services. For example, the recently
opened Pakenham Springs Primary School in Victoria is co-located
with a kindergarten, maternal and child health centre and occasional
childcare centre to provide what its principal calls a ‘one-shop’ community
resource for parents with young children. The co-location is the result of
collaboration between the school, local government and the Department of
Education and Early Childhood Development. Arrangements like this one
and other examples described elsewhere in this book can have a positive
impact on student and parent engagement as well as the school’s ability
to respond to student and family needs (Department of Education and
Training, 2006a).

A more ambitious model would put the school at the centre of a hub or
precinct that offers multiple services for the whole community, the kind of
model represented by the United Kingdom’s full-service Extended Schools
program. This is a more advanced version of the Full Service Schools
model developed in Australia. Some United Kingdom schools now offer
community childcare, parental and family support, referral to specialist
support services, access to information and communications technology,
sports and arts facilities and lifelong learning opportunities for the whole
community (Coleman, 2006). It is the United Kingdom government’s
intention that all schools will offer such extended services by 2010.

Examples of this kind of provision are beginning to emerge in
Australia. In Victoria, for example, a new learning and community facility
in the disadvantaged Neighbourhood Renewal area of Wendouree West
is dedicated to life-long learning for all residents. Yuille Park Community
College is part of a community hub that houses learning, health care, child
care, employment and recreation facilities for the entire local area. The
hub includes a Children’s Services Centre housing a kindergarten, child
care and maternal and child health services and a Community House that
offers adult and community learning programs as well as facilities that can
be used by the whole community.

Initiatives like this go a long way to implementing the call for schools
to be reconfigured as ‘focal points of community development’ (Feeney et
al., 2002), but they could go even further. As one policymaker observed at
an Education Foundation forum:

*We are not yet holistic enough in our thinking about networks for education.*
The most holistic vision would see schools operating as a central part of a networked learning system guided by a shared mandate to provide interlinked educational and other services for the entire community and for every stage of life. Tom Bentley provides one map of what this provision could look like.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family and individual</th>
<th>Core learning institution</th>
<th>Related services</th>
<th>Informal communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early years</td>
<td>Early play, music, emotional support</td>
<td>Nursery</td>
<td>Primary health, libraries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–14</td>
<td>Family learning, out-of-school activities</td>
<td>Extended primary school</td>
<td>Parks and neighbourhoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14–19</td>
<td>Personal adviser</td>
<td>School Federations</td>
<td>Learning for work, mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifelong learning</td>
<td>Work–life integration</td>
<td>Employer, university</td>
<td>Online providers, career support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Networks for social capital)

The idea of cross-sectoral networks is not new. It is at least a decade since a serious discourse began in Australia about boundary- or sector-crossing collaborations that combine the energies of the public, private and philanthropic sectors in new approaches to build social capital and alleviate entrenched social problems including educational inequity (see Edgar, 2001 and Marginson, 2001). Education and social capital are frequently twinned in this discourse and the policy agendas that have emerged from it, but their actual relationship is complex and still being explored (Burnheim, 2004; Field, 2006).

On one side of this relationship, social capital is a precondition for educational participation and alleviates the effect of disadvantage on educational achievement (Putnam, in Bentley et al., 2004). On the other side, education is instrumental in redressing exclusion and building the social capital that can protect against it (McClure, 2000; Putnam, 2004; Sparkes, 1999; Vinson, 2004, 2007). Building social capital is one of the accepted public purposes of Australian schooling (Mulford et al., 2007). As a paper prepared for the Education Foundation has observed:
Investing in school improvement without seeking to harness the forces of social capital and social geography is, in the medium term, self-defeating. The links between resilient communities and successful learners is there to be built on; the most dynamic educational interventions of the next generation will address both dimensions together.

(Bentley et al., 2004)

Tom Bentley concludes that ‘social capital is somehow both cause and effect’ in improving education systems:

The key issue is how a school, or a group of schools, or a school system, might be both equipped to draw upon, and then to contribute to and enrich, the endowment of social capital that surrounds the immediate organisation and population of the school.

(Bentley, 2007, in Redman, 2007)

Social capital is frequently broken down into three categories, each with its own distinct type of network:

- **Bonding social capital** strengthens ties between similar groups in ways that benefit their members.
- **Bridging social capital** builds ties between dissimilar groups in ways that have wider social benefits.
- **Linking social capital** builds connections between groups with different levels of power in society in ways that build social cohesion.

(Putnam, 2000, 2004)

Bonding social capital has important benefits for schooling: cooperation among teachers and school leaders builds bonding capital within the school which strengthens its capacity to respond creatively and collectively to the needs of its students (Hargreaves, 2001). It also has beneficial outcomes for students: their relationships with their teachers and their sense of belonging to the school can have a positive effect on their engagement, participation and achievement (Mulford, 2008).

On the other hand, many schools create bonding social capital among their own school communities because they bring people together on the basis of shared geography, religion, socioeconomic status or gender, but do not contribute to bridging or linking social capital (McGaw, 2006b). The greatest potential comes from models of schooling that build bridging social capital by connecting schools to one another through cooperative networks (Mulford, 2008), that build linking social capital by connecting schools and their communities (West-Burnham, Farrar & Otero, 2007) or that engage a wide range of players in the enterprise of schooling. As Jehan Loza and Sarah Ogilvie (2005) have argued:
Cross-sector partnerships are more likely to generate bridging, linking and bonding social capital while at the same time producing innovative outcomes that build stronger, more robust communities able to participate in the new economy.

Simon Marginson observed in 2001 that:

*Education is one of the principal social sites—perhaps the broadest of all social sites—where people meet each other and form new communities of interest, develop knowledge and skills together, and develop the skills of being and working together.*

However, the potential of school education to function in this way will only be realised if the necessary structures are in place.

The School of the 21st Century program incorporates childcare and family support services into schools to promote children's development from birth. Based at Yale University with support from the George Lucas Educational Foundation, the program links communities, families and schools in over 1300 schools across the United States.

The program creates a structured and potentially stable, long-term network between schools, early years and family support services. It is based on the idea of a school that:

- helps prepare children for school through full-day, year-round early care and education programs and partnerships with local childcare providers. Schools of the 21st Century provide childcare services for pre-school children at the school or at a school-linked site.
- offers safe and stimulating environments for school-age children when school is not in session. Schools of the 21st Century provide before-school, after-school and vacation programs.
- provides parents with information and support regarding a range of issues such as child development, homework, sibling rivalry and self-esteem. Schools of the 21st Century offer home visits, playgroups and workshops to parents of young children to educate them about cognitive, social, linguistic and motor development. They also provide information and referral services for families in collaboration with community agencies.
- promotes children’s wellbeing through preventive medical and dental services, mental health services, and improved nutrition and fitness. In collaboration with community-based health care providers, Schools of the 21st Century offer a range of services including physical health services, care for children with special needs, developmental
assessments, dental assessments and mental health services. They also provide networks and training for childcare providers.

Evaluation of the program shows a range of beneficial outcomes. Students are more prepared for kindergarten, show higher literacy and numeracy results and receive better diagnosis of special educational needs than students at other schools. Participating schools report less vandalism, increased parental involvement and a better community image. Parents also report less stress, fewer missed workdays and a more positive relationship with the school.

The power of the local

There is an international trend for governments to achieve their policy goals by devolving power to local agencies and communities. The local community is increasingly recognised as the place where cross-sectoral partnerships and networks can be most successful in tailoring solutions to needs (Agora Think Tank, 2007).

This is not new knowledge. The education and youth policy communities have argued for some time that collective local solutions must be found for local problems, that the future of young people is the shared responsibility of the whole community and that education systems should be built around cooperative, place-based networks of schools and other local organisations that work together for the benefit of all young people in the area (Cole, 2001b; Hargreaves, 2003a; Hopkins, 2006; Prime Minister’s Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce, 2001).

As Eric Sidoti states elsewhere in this book (see Chapter 6), schools are an integral part of their community. His argument, as well as those described above, recognise the strong two-way relationship between schools and their neighbourhoods, one that is especially pertinent for schools in communities where educational and social disadvantage are inextricably linked in the lives of children and young people. They also recognise that many schools in such neighbourhoods serve a purpose not met by any other agency. As a number of educationalists have noted:

*In many communities, especially in rural locations, religious, banking, sporting and other institutions have disappeared often leaving the school as the last remaining institution for the development of community social capital.*

(Mulford et al., 2007)
Schools in high poverty communities must work far more closely with parents and the broader community, not only on academic issues but on social and economic questions as well.

(Levin & Riffel, 2000)

School education may be, in fact, one of the few ways a society has available to do something about improving the situation of people living in areas of growing poverty.

(Mulford et al., 2007)

In many communities, schools, particularly primary schools, are among the few regular meeting places for parents and families. This gives an opportunity for a school to act increasingly as a focus for the community, supporting the development of a symbiotic and mutually dependent relationship between the school and the people it serves.

(Coleman, 2006)

Strategies to improve educational outcomes in these communities must be informed by what Pat Thomson (2000, 2002) calls ‘thisness’: the qualities of schools and their communities that are specific to their locale. She argues that schools will not make the needed difference to student learning unless education policy recognises the impact of these various ‘thisnesses’. In his earlier work on school networks, Peter Cole (2001b) highlighted the potential for this:

Educational opportunities for all students will be enhanced by a network of schools working together to improve local schooling and support service arrangements … A network is a place to make sense of a local context and to collectively share ideas and action on common problems or challenges.

The local government and not-for-profit sectors have a lot of knowledge about effective place-based solutions and practice. Many schools arguably know less. A lot would be gained if the knowledge of these other sectors were shared with school education systems to find the best approach to the specific local needs of young people. As one school principal observed at an Education Foundation forum:

The challenge is to make the future better for the young people we are working with in the particular context we operate in.

In creating a more locally responsive and place-based school system, the one danger that must be avoided is the loss or dilution of high universal expectations, standards and accountabilities. It is noted elsewhere in this
book that in disadvantaged contexts, welfare can take precedence over the provision of quality learning opportunities. Martin Haberman (1991) warns against the ‘pedagogy of poverty’ that reflects and sets low educational expectations for young people in impoverished communities. The provision of opportunities for young people is already strongly determined by the variable resources available to particular communities. It is essential that any new networks for Australian schools obviate this inequity instead of replicating it.

In California, the City Heights K–16 Educational Collaborative brings together the Price Charities philanthropic foundation, the San Diego State University School of Education, the San Diego Unified School District, the San Diego Education Association and three schools to improve student achievement in a disadvantaged community characterised by low academic achievement, inadequate resources, student transience and high teacher turnover.

It also aims to enhance the provision and capacity of the local schools, better prepare educators and other professionals to serve inner-city students and families and build a stronger future for the community. The Collaborative is one aspect of the bigger City Heights Initiative, which is working to revitalise this economically challenged community.

Price Charities launched the Collaborative in 1998 after identifying quality education as a key ingredient in creating a liveable City Heights community. The basis of the Collaborative is shared responsibility among the three schools—Rosa Parks Elementary School, Monroe Clark Middle School and Hoover High School—for the provision of K–16 education for more than 5000 local students.

The schools work together to identify and address the challenges of improving student learning in the area. As a result, the Collaborative has seen a marked improvement in student attendance and teacher retention and strong involvement of parents compared to similar schools. As well as this, each of the schools acts as a wider resource for the community, providing comprehensive health and social services to students and their families. Each school has on-site nurses and social workers. Parent Centres at each school conduct workshops on topics ranging from nutrition and anger management to getting into college.

The Collaborative also uses the community’s cultural resources to enrich educational opportunities for students. Its School in the Park program takes third, fourth and fifth grade students out of their inner city classrooms for nine weeks of the year and relocates them to San Diego’s famous Balboa Park, where they participate in educational programs at
ten key cultural institutions including the Museum of Art, the San Diego Historical Society and the San Diego Zoo.

The San Diego State University is a central partner in this cross-sectoral network. It takes administrative and operational responsibility for the three Collaborative schools, contributing its resources and expertise to support student learning. Each year, university students devote more than 150,000 hours of course work, fieldwork and research to Collaborative-related projects.

More than 100 students serve as tutors or do their teacher training placements at the schools. University staff also participate in Collaborative programs and contribute to curriculum and program design, implementation, teaching and direct support for the network.

**Viewpoint**

*Liz Suda*

The concept of ‘old school ties’ evokes community, networks, connectedness, support and the old cliché ‘it’s not what you know but who you know’. It is often used to describe the power, privilege and social capital by-products that accompany a non-public school education. It is not a concept which is generally associated with government schools and particularly not government schools in socially and economically disadvantaged areas. The concept of ‘new school ties’ opens the door to conversations about the relationship between social capital and success at school, and hopefully about how to redress the imbalance that exists between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ with respect to the acquisition of social capital.

During my three years with the Education Foundation, I helped it explore ways to overcome some of the challenges that schools face in taking learning beyond the classroom and into the community. Armed with a host of theoretical understandings about the concept of learning communities and the benefits of building school–community partnerships, I went into some of the most disadvantaged communities in the metropolitan area to support schools in making these connections. The irony of the preceding statement is intended as a note of caution and acknowledgement that schools have not really been set up or resourced to do this kind of work. There are significant challenges to address on a practical level and schools cannot do it without significant support.
The first real challenge facing schools is their isolation from the community, physically, socially and culturally. Schools are curious places in many respects, charged with educating the younger members of the community and keeping them safe, which has often meant ‘and out of the community’. Any interaction between the school and community requires a great deal of goodwill and flexibility on both parts. On the school’s part, it involves overcoming the tyranny of the timetable, the prescribed curriculum and duty of care issues. On the community's part, it involves gaining some insight into the way schools operate and the culture of learning that underpins the school's function. Generally, the wider community does not play a role in what happens in schools. Changing that culture requires a complex and sensitive process.

The second challenge for schools is the task of developing a curriculum that embeds the notion of community, partnerships and collaboration as a means to building powerful knowledge and skills for the future. Whatever schools do, it has to be a two-way process with community input. External input into the school curriculum is, however, a problematic concept and would require significant policy development to ensure quality educational provision.

There is a critical question to ask: is it the teacher’s role to take on this mammoth task? Teachers clearly need to be involved in the development of curriculum and processes but they do not have adequate time to develop and maintain community relationships alone. If schools are to make new ties with their community, they need to be adequately resourced and trained to do so. A dedicated person in the school or a cluster of schools, who works with teachers and builds connections within the community, is essential for any progress to be made. Changing a culture that has evolved since the advent of mass compulsory schooling requires a willingness to devote significant input of time and resources. Such an investment would be very effective in creating social capital.

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Networks for students

Collaborative networks could meet the interests of the whole child by providing support for both learning and wellbeing. They could enable a more seamless approach to the two key transition periods for the compulsory years of schooling: the early years and the middle years. They could also provide a framework for teacher collaboration both within and between schools to create the best teaching practice.

*Schools will not meet the complex needs of children and young people by working in isolation.*

(Hargreaves, 2001)

Learning and wellbeing

One of the greatest barriers to improving educational outcomes for all young Australians is the strong nexus that operates between education and disadvantage. It comes as no surprise that poverty and disadvantage have a strong negative impact on the wellbeing of children and young people. This in turn affects their engagement in school and their educational achievement (Fullarton, 2002; Taylor & Nelms, 2006). As Julian Fraillon (2004) explains:

*The relationship between student well-being and the other vital outcomes of schooling is unequivocal. Improved outcomes in all aspects of student well-being are positively associated with improved outcomes in all other aspects of schooling.*

The complex interrelationship between wellbeing, engagement and achievement is recognised by all Australian states and territories, which offer a range of support services to students, teachers and parents. It is also recognised
by a number of leading international education initiatives. For example, the national rollout of the United Kingdom’s personalised learning policy makes a strong connection between learning and wellbeing and prioritises support for young people’s wellbeing through pastoral care, guidance and community partnerships (Keamy et al., 2007). A recent European report identifies three key actions to engage young people in learning including direct support for their emotional, social and behavioural needs (National Foundation for Educational Research, 2007, in Keating, 2007). One of the clearest messages to come from these initiatives is that no single agency can hope to deliver improved educational outcomes alone.

What is particularly important is that support for wellbeing occurs in the context of support for learning; the danger is that in disadvantaged contexts, welfare support takes precedence over the provision of quality learning opportunities. Collaborative networks among schools and with other agencies can help deliver both of these goals, but they are most likely to be effective if their primary purpose is better learning (Earl et al., 2006; Hadfield et al., 2005; Lasater, 2007):

Collaboration is only as effective as the demonstrated improvements within each school in teaching and learning.

(Hauesler, 2003)

One of the most powerful contributions that new school education networks could make for Australia would be to strengthen the practice of personalised or student-centred learning in schools. Personalised learning offers a challenging curriculum connected to students’ lives and to their community, tailors learning and assessment to individual needs and develops students’ ability to take control over their own learning (Centre for Applied Educational Research, 2002; Hopkins, 2006). It is a characteristic of schools that combine high student poverty with high achievement (Kannapel & Clements, 2005) and is heavily predicated on collaboration both within and outside the school. It also underpins the Education Foundation’s education programs, some of which are described elsewhere in this book.

Personalised learning and school collaboration form the twin pillars of educational reform for the United Kingdom. They are also beginning to emerge together, although not always clearly linked, in Australian policy papers. The Future of Schooling in Australia (Dawkins, 2007) makes a commitment on behalf of all states and territories to ensuring that schools ‘have the capacity to tailor an education for the individual child’ and to building greater connections between schools and their communities. Calls are also coming from the business sector for personalised or student-centred learning tailored to individual student needs and for greater collaboration to improve educational outcomes (Australian Industry Group & Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2007; Business Council of Australia, 2007).
The Derwent District of Tasmania is an area of high educational need. Real Learning—Real Futures began in 2002 as a commitment by all ten secondary school principals in the District to work together to improve student participation, attendance and retention and to provide learning opportunities that would be impossible for the individual schools to generate alone.

The network involves Bothwell District High School, Bridgewater High School, Claremont High School, Cosgrove High School, Derwent Support Services, Glenora District School, New Norfolk High School, Oatlands District High School, Ouse District High, Rosetta High School and the Derwent District of the Tasmanian Department of Education.

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The network aims to extend the range of curriculum offerings and learning experiences available to all students in the area. One of its key strategies is the development of student-centred learning across the network schools to make the curriculum more relevant and engaging for Year 9 and 10 students.

Student-centred learning projects are based both in the schools and in the community. They include boat-building, emergency services training, school farm programs, aquaculture, marine adventure courses, multimedia, robotics and natural therapies. Most projects involve students from a number of the participating schools rather than single-school groups.

Provision of this range of learning experiences is financially feasible only because of cooperation between the schools. The network also maximises the use of limited school and District resources to meet the learning needs of students at risk of disengagement, building partnerships with other agencies and services to provide ‘an effective, seamless student support network’ (Holdsworth, 2003) and provide professional learning for teachers to support at-risk students.

A 2003 evaluation shows that the network builds on the strength of each participating school and enhances each school’s capacity to support its own students. It concludes that the network provides a strong model for a group of schools cooperating together, with a shared vision and trust: ‘all schools contribute to and gain from the Program. They share a common approach, adopt a cooperative framework and gain benefits greater than they would from their separate contributions’ (Holdsworth, 2003).

The network is also having a positive effect on student engagement and learning. Students and teachers testify to increased student commitment, better relationships between students and the development of new and valuable student skills.

The evaluation highlights the need for ongoing resourcing for this approach: ‘cooperation and collaboration is not a matter of cost-saving’
Beyond the classroom: Building new school networks
(Holdsworth, 2003). It highlights the role of the District, which has been instrumental in convening and coordinating the network, contributing new resources for its implementation and providing a District Youth Learning Officer who provides executive support for the network.

The early years

One of the most critical phases in the education of children and young people is the transition to primary school. An extensive review by the Centre for Community Child Health in partnership with The R E Ross Trust and in consultation with the Education Foundation explains that a significant proportion of Australian children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, begin school without being ready to learn. Participation in high quality early years services as kindergarten, child care and child health deliver many benefits, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, yet these children are the least likely to participate in such services.

This has a wide range of negative ongoing effects including poor educational achievement. For this reason, there is a strong consensus that the early years represent a critical opportunity to establish wellbeing and educational readiness as well as the most effective opportunity for detection, prevention and early intervention where children are at risk (Centre for Community Child Health, 2006):

*The strongest indicator for later success is whether a student begins school in a deficit position.*

(Bentley et al., 2004)

The review concludes that strategies for the early years are only effective when they ensure that all children begin school ready to learn and that all schools are ready to support children when they first attend. This requires ‘new ways of working and greater partnerships and collaboration between schools and early years services’ (Centre for Community Child Health, 2006). According to the review, these partnerships should engage with families in the years before children start school. They should be based on the belief that schools can offer the community more than their traditional education services. They should promote positive relationships among services, families, communities and schools. They should also be informed by local knowledge and responsive to local needs:
In situations where local communities (including schools) are the driving force in striving for improved child and family outcomes, there is a much greater chance of improved coordination and integration of services. The development of partnerships between different levels of government, between professional groups, between primary and secondary level services, and between parents and professionals will result in services that are flexible and responsive to the needs of the members of a community. This is also a shift away from single focus interventions to more integrated and collaborative service provision. Schools are increasingly being seen as the core or hub of these important initiatives.

(Centre for Community Child Health, 2006)

There is an established view that school education is a public good and a growing view that early childhood and care services should be seen in the same way (OECD, 2006). This provides a strong rationale for an integrated and collaborative system of early childhood and school education provision. A growing volume of high quality research indicates that this kind of integration can produce a sustained improvement in children’s health, education and welfare as well as improved program effectiveness and efficiency, increased satisfaction by clients, more efficient use of resources, improved access to a wide range of services ranging from prevention and treatment to support services and reduced service fragmentation and duplication (NSW Health, 2002).

There is evidence that groups that collaborate with each other are more effective at providing a complex array of services than the same organisations can be when operating independently (Fisher, Thomson & Valentine, 2006). There is also evidence that early intervention services have the greatest impact when they are capable of addressing a broad range of issues and are provided as part of a coordinated network (Government of South Australia, 2005). As Peter Cole observes:

Schools and sectors working in isolation will struggle to optimise the educational opportunities and outcomes for young people within a community. While sectors can continue to make staffing, program, program support and capital works decisions without reference to each others’ needs and aspirations, this seems a very short-sighted approach to the provision of educational services in a locality.

Australia is making important moves towards this kind of integration, with the need to link early years services and primary school recognised by key cross-governmental statements (Dawkins, 2007). At the state level, Victoria provides a strong example of an integrated approach. Its Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008) aims to create a high quality,
coordinated service system for all children from birth to eight years of age based on strengthened partnerships across state government departments and with local government and communities. At the federal level, the Australia 2020 Summit has prompted the announcement of universal Parent and Child Centres for all Australian children from birth to five years that combine maternal and child health, long day care and preschool. The pursuit of this proposal will require new partnerships between federal, state and local governments.

Ideally, all new policy initiatives will be strongly informed by work already being done at the local level. One example of this is an ambitious six-year project that has begun to link schools and early years services in three disadvantaged Victorian communities. The project creates two new levels of collaboration: lateral, cross-sectoral cooperation to create and manage the project and joined-up services on the ground.

The Linking Schools and Early Years Project is a collaborative cross-sectoral venture funded by a philanthropic trust, The R E Ross Trust, and run by the Centre for Community Child Health at the Royal Children's Hospital in Victoria. It brings together the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Victorian Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development and Human Services, the Catholic Education Office Melbourne, the Universities of Melbourne and New South Wales and the Education Foundation to bridge the gap between early years services and primary schooling and meet the needs of children entering school in communities where the need is greatest.

The project began in 2007. It aims to ensure that children and families make a smooth transition from early years services to school, that early years services and schools actively connect with families and that schools respond to the individual learning needs of all children. In particular, it helps schools engage with families that have not participated in formal early years services to overcome the barriers faced by vulnerable children when starting school. It takes note of the findings of previous research that overcoming barriers to learning and development is a complex task and that any solutions need to recognise the multiple sources of these barriers.

The project is being conducted in three disadvantaged communities: Footscray, Hastings and Corio Norlane. Its first round will be implemented in local early years services and in two or three schools in each area. These will form a local community partnership group to guide the project and help create a local action plan.

In this way, the project builds on the existing expertise and resources of both early years services and primary schools. The community partnership
The specific strategy at each site will be informed by this mapping as well as by consultation with key local stakeholders and an analysis of the particular demographics of each area. At Corio Norlane, for example, the program will link schools with early years services and parents before the start of the school year to develop tailored learning solutions that address the diversity in children’s experiences, backgrounds and learning styles. It will also build links between school staff and other specialist support services.

The middle years

Another critical phase in the education of young people facing disadvantage is the transition from primary to secondary school. The middle years of schooling (Years 5–9) are clustered around this transition and have a long history as a context for efforts to improve student outcomes (see Russell, Mackay & Jane, 2003 and Quinn, Prosser & Hattam, 2008). For many young people, these years are characterised by a decline in satisfaction with learning, passivity or cessation of effort, underachievement or lowered achievement, disruptive behaviour, poor attendance or leaving (Cole, 2006; Murray et al., 2004). All of these effects tend to be more pronounced in schools with many disadvantaged students.

One of the chief risk factors for students during these years is disengagement from school. It has been suggested that all middle years students are at risk of disengagement (Murray et al., 2004), but it is clear from the research that disadvantaged young people are most at risk (Cole, 2001a, 2006). Disengagement happens earlier for these students than for their more affluent counterparts and can become almost intractable by the time they start secondary school (Butler et al., 2005).

The strong research and policy response to the needs of middle years students since the early 1990s has seen the development of classroom-based interventions that are now commonly accepted as good educational practice. This includes student-centred or personalised learning, an integrated curriculum and collaborative teaching. Supported by extensive initiatives, a number of Australian schools have significantly changed their structures, timetables, professional learning systems and teaching approaches to better cater for the needs of middle years students.
Yet while the internal middle years landscape may have changed for some schools, not enough has changed in the way that most schools engage with other organisations to meet the wider needs of students and address disengagement. There is little evidence that the situation described by the Centre for Applied Educational Research in 2002 has significantly altered:

Many schools still have significantly more to learn in terms of establishing the pre-conditions for students to become literate, to become connected to school, to engage with learning and to become independent and thoughtful learners.

The pre-conditions for successful middle years learning for disadvantaged students include a raft of factors that stem from and can only be mediated outside the classroom. A number of schools in impoverished communities are attempting to work with welfare, community and local government organisations to support middle years students and their parents, but this can be difficult. Many of these arrangements depend on short-term funding. School principals participating in an Education Foundation study (Black, 2007) expressed these concerns:

There are organisations that support student welfare. It would be really great if I could have better access to these. We do get funding for a trained student welfare officer from among the staff, but that’s my assistant principal. When she is wearing her welfare hat, I lose her support in running the school.

We work with local health organisations to support student nutrition and health. The problem is we don’t have the staffing capacity to coordinate these links or keep them going. The responsibility falls back on over-loaded teachers.

Doing It Differently: Improving Young People’s Engagement with School is a collaborative Victorian project involving the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Anglicare and the Centre for Adolescent Health at the Royal Children’s Hospital. It works with seven schools—two secondary and five primary—in a disadvantaged community in outer-metropolitan Melbourne to improve students’ connectedness to school during the transition from primary to secondary school.

The project focuses on communities of greatest need, where student disengagement from school can often be exacerbated by lack of opportunity for community involvement, family poverty and low parental engagement with education. It recognises that disengagement is influenced by interaction between a young person, his or her parents or carers, teachers, and the school and community contexts in which he or she lives.
It also recognises that disengagement is best addressed by ‘multiple, integrated strategies involving students, schools, families, and other organizations within the community’ (Butler et al., 2005). One of its priorities is to assist families in the development of active partnerships between home and school to improve student engagement, learning, health and wellbeing, and to explore ways in which community organisations can support these partnerships.

Doing It Differently is not designed to create a universal solution but to help communities draw on what is already known to construct strategies that work for them. It starts with the recognition by research that disengagement from school is not just about school but responds to a complex range of factors both within and outside the school environment including personal and family issues, drug and alcohol issues and mental health issues. The project recognises that strategies to deal with such broad ranging issues require interconnected school–community planning and action.

As an early statement from the program explains: ‘such approaches steer us away from looking for the ‘magic bullet’ program and towards recognising the importance of paying attention to the conditions and contexts for successful reform, such as responding to local needs and demands for change, ensuring local advocates for as well as widespread ownership of the reform, adequate resources and ongoing support’ (Butler et al., 2005). For this reason, the project creates connections at several levels: with the local cluster of schools (through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s previous Innovations and Excellence Program), with teams of students, parents and staff in each school, and with community agencies.

The project also recognises that creating sustainable, positive change in the face of disadvantage takes time. For this reason, Doing It Differently is a three-year project and focuses on strengthening sustainable connections between schools, families and community organisations. None of the participating schools have previously worked together, but all share common challenges that affect their ability to meet students’ educational needs.

The network includes formal partnerships with other organisations working to improve student and community outcomes. These include local government, the Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development and Human Services, the School Focused Youth Service and the Red Cross. Initiatives developed for students to date include breakfast clubs in some schools and vegetable and herb gardens in each school, with links to various curriculum areas. Doing It Differently aims to create a support model that can be applied in other communities as well.
Building the capacity for collaboration

One of the strongest drivers of the education network movement is the failure of the school improvement agenda that dominated the Australian and other OECD education landscapes during the 1990s to meet its goals. One view is that this agenda was insufficiently guided by knowledge about how schools build the capacity to develop their own innovative responses to local circumstances and to meet the needs of their students (Hopkins, 2000; Jackson, 2006). The networked learning movement responds to this by making school collaboration the cornerstone of practice and innovation.

It is now widely accepted that effective school systems act as professional learning communities that share good practice, that effective schools have strong teacher collegiality and a cooperative culture and that improved learning—especially for disadvantaged children and young people—depends on the transference and uptake of knowledge and successful practice within the system (Earl et al., 2006; Fullan, 2000; Hargreaves, 2003a, 2003b; Hopkins, 2004, 2006). As other leading educationalists observe:

*If there is anything that the research community agrees on, it is this: the right kind of continuous, structured teacher collaboration improves the quality of teaching and pays big, often immediate, dividends in student learning and professional morale in virtually any setting.*

(Schmoker, 2004)

*Networks ... do not just facilitate innovation: they can also be an innovation in themselves by offering the possibility of new ways of working.*

(Istance, 2006)

A number of Australian school systems have a clear policy position regarding the importance of shared systemic learning and school collaboration. Some have launched extensive policy initiatives designed to build a culture of shared practice both within and across their schools. Yet while the intentional culture may be that of a shared enterprise, the prevailing culture for many schools remains a competitive one. As a participant in one Education Foundation forum has said:

*The shift from competition to collaboration is difficult.*

Some Australian schools in impoverished communities have a strong history of mutual cooperation, driven by a shared motivation to break the cycle of poverty and educational inequity in their communities (Thomson, 2002). Many of the schools with which the Education Foundation is associated fit this description. They have a strong track record of working with other schools, other agencies and their local community to improve outcomes for
their students (Black, 2004). Despite these examples, competition between schools remains a barrier to collaboration. As some teachers and principals have testified:

*Schools are still competitive for enrolments and there are few formal ways of sharing your learnings.*

*Even within the Catholic system, schools are competitive for students. It means we’re selective about how we work together.*

(Black, 2007)

This has to be better recognised and addressed by policy. The challenge is to resolve the tension that schools face between the push to share practice and the need to attract and keep enrolments in a tight education market. Findings from the United Kingdom warn against the impact of competition on any attempt to build a collaborative system:

*Effective collaboration relies on the absence of competition, real or perceived.*

(Hauesler, 2003)

*Collaborations … bring with them a range of challenges to be addressed. Foremost is the need to overcome existing inter-school competition.*

(Coleman, 2006)

Barriers to collaboration also operate within individual schools. One Education Foundation study examined schools in disadvantaged western Melbourne that have had unusual success in improving student outcomes (Black, 2007). It found that all of the schools have used the resources provided by their respective systems to foster a culture of internal collaboration. This includes creating permanent structures to develop teachers’ professional knowledge and spread good practice across the school. In most of these schools, teachers come together for at least one timetabled period a week to share ideas and act as coaches for one another. A number have ongoing relationships with academics and consultants who act as critical friends and mentors.

Yet even in these schools, developing true collaboration among teachers remains a challenge. Many of the schools have implemented shared or team teaching approaches and expect that teachers will work together in the classroom but a number are hampered by lack of teacher readiness to do this. Where some teachers have welcomed an end to the isolation of working alone in the classroom, others—at times half the teaching staff—have struggled with the change to their traditional practice. When asked what single factor would make the biggest difference to student outcomes, one school principal commented:
More teachers who consciously think about their pedagogy, who are active learners and conversant with the most current and powerful models for learning, who feel they can take professional risks with kids and work together as a team.

(Black, 2007)

As both Liz Suda and Sally Morgan point out elsewhere in this book (Chapters 1 & 2), the competencies and capacity for collaboration cannot be left to chance, or added to the already enormous expectations placed on teachers and schools. Adequate training and ongoing resources have to be invested in the development of cooperative teacher practice so that teachers have adequate time within the school day to learn and work together, as well as with external agents like mentors, coaches, consultants and critical friends. Currently, too many Australian schools would identify with the following statement by one principal:

*We spend an enormous amount of our budget on teacher learning, yet staff are still identifying it as a need. It is in our action plan, but the biggest issue is resourcing it.*

(Black, 2007)

Leading the networked school

The success of any network is dependent on effective leadership, but sharing leadership with agencies outside their walls is not a strong point for many schools. As I have discussed earlier, a moated or walled culture of schooling persists in numerous schools, creating a perception that they are aloof from their communities or that they see themselves as the keeper of special knowledge that other agencies lack. The leadership required for any new education networks must overcome this kind of sectoral isolation. It must be a genuinely shared or distributed leadership that generates real cooperation, trust, a common vision and deep participation by all players in the network:

*When they work well, networks are fundamental to building social capital through trust, commitment and interdependency ... What is essential to all networks is exchange and sharing.*

(West-Burnham, Farrar & Otero, 2007)

The leadership of education networks should encompass what Stoll and Fink (in Harris & Chapman, 2002) call invitational leadership: a form of leadership that aims to empower other people. This kind of leadership is particularly important for schools and networks operating in impoverished
Networks for students 45

areas. The Education Foundation’s study of Victorian schools performing well in challenging circumstances found that all of the schools had leaders who were committed to giving their teachers a licence to innovate and a high degree of autonomy (Black, 2007).

One study of effective leaders in schools facing challenging circumstances found that they ‘establish coherent communities within their schools as well as a sense of a responsible community beyond and around the school’ (Harris & Chapman, 2002). Other studies note that:

*The adoption of a more networked way of working by school leaders can help put schools at the heart of the local community to effect positive change for people in the locality.*

(Michalak & Jones, 2008)

*Successful leadership of high-performance schools in high-poverty communities \(\ldots\) include(s) moving beyond bureaucracy to communities of professional learners.*

(Mulford, 2008)

In the United Kingdom, the Innovation Unit and the National College for School Leadership have been exploring models of system leadership that open up community-wide approaches to learning. Originally called Leading Beyond a Single Institution, the Next Practice in System Leadership initiative has been running since 2005. It includes:

- leadership of institutions which deliver or provide access to multiple services
- leadership of programs which enable personalised and extended opportunities for students in the middle and later years of schooling
- leadership of ‘chains’, ‘franchises’, developed federations or formal networks of schools
- leadership of learning which takes place outside formal institutions.

Seventeen field trials of the system leadership model are now under way. In Knowsley, a metropolitan district with a low socioeconomic profile and poor educational standards, every school principal has agreed to work in a joint leadership role with the local authority under a partnership framework. All major decisions are now taken collectively, based on the best outcome for all children in the borough.

In Winsford, all 17 schools have come together to develop a town-wide plan for a 0–19 centre of education that will see the whole town acting like a single school. Staff will be employed and deployed centrally and schools will follow a common curriculum and timetable. In another challenging urban area, the Yewlands Family of Schools includes one secondary, one special and five primary schools working as a collaborative
organisation with shared staffing, joint leadership appointments and cross-curriculum projects.

These formal structures for shared leadership have not been established by Australian systems, but there are strong examples of collaboration between local school leaders that offer models for future action.

The Northern Adelaide State Secondary Schools Alliance (NASSSA) is a formal network of 11 government secondary schools created to improve educational outcomes for young people in high-poverty northern Adelaide. Its strategies include the implementation of innovative middle school pedagogies, provision of relevant and engaging senior school curriculum, seamless transition to further study or employment and strengthened community partnerships.

NASSSA is made up of three groups:

- the Northern Adelaide Secondary Schools Principals’ Network—this sets the vision and strategies of the alliance
- the NASSSA Board, which advocates for the Alliance and for public education, informs the strategic directions of the Alliance and supports its key partnerships
- the NASSSA schools: Smithfield Plains High School, Gawler High School, Craigmore High School, Salisbury High School, Fremont–Elizabeth City High School, Kaurna Aboriginal School, Paralowie R–12 School, Salisbury East High School, Para West High School, Para Hills High School and Parafield Gardens High School.

The network operates through multiple points of collaboration. Instead of competing with one another, schools aggregate their resources to offer a wide range of curriculum offerings to all students across the schools. They also operate a series of learning consortia based on broad industry-related themes. Each of the schools will eventually host a learning consortium or a key aspect of one. Together, these consortia represent a learning space that students from all 11 schools are able to draw on. Each consortium includes business, industry, community groups and higher or further education partners whose work is thematically linked to the consortium and who provide rich learning resources and expertise for the Alliance.

The NASSSA schools are also establishing a community of professional dialogue within which teachers collaboratively develop and implement authentic learning environments for students. Teachers from across the 11 schools have the opportunity to share their learning and practice with a wide range of colleagues. This provides an unprecedented level of professional support in schools where the challenge of engaging students
in learning is high and where teachers struggle to set and sustain high expectations for learning in the face of students’ own low expectations.

NASSSA hopes that its schools will be seen as exemplars of innovation for the whole school system rather than as sites that are simply addressing student disadvantage. The Principals’ Network which forms the backbone of the Alliance has a strong focus on research into innovative ways of improving student outcomes.

One of its key research initiatives is Redesigning Pedagogy in the North, an innovative project with the University of South Australia, the Australian Education Union, the South Australian Government Social Inclusion Unit and the South Australian Department of Education & Children’s Services that supports the schools in developing a personalised or student-centred approach that puts young people’s lives at the heart of the learning context.

Parents and the networked school

Parental engagement in the school is associated with better student achievement and retention and greater take-up of further and higher education. Its effect is particularly strong in disadvantaged communities. Engaging parents in these contexts has ‘a disproportionately positive effect’ on student learning and achievement, greater than that of engaging any other group (Harris & Goodall, 2007). One participant at an Education Foundation forum made this clear:

*We can do all we can to improve the quality of schooling, but if disadvantaged families are disengaged from their kids’ education, it all will come to naught. Until we can empower parents to fulfil their parenting role, we won’t get very far in addressing educational disadvantage.*

Yet forming links with parents remains difficult for many schools in such communities. Previous research by the Education Foundation (Black, 2007) shows that these schools want to engage parents. As their principals have testified:

*We could educate the children in so many different things if we had access to more resources that could compensate for the disadvantage these children face and that could engage and support their parents.*

*Our core business is teaching and learning, but if we’re going to do this successfully, we have to have parents who are engaged and informed.*
It also shows that the schools have tried various strategies to involve parents, but with little success. Again, their principals have explained:

> Our middle years reform has not yet filtered through to the parents. Their main concern is that their children are at school and without major problems: they are not concerned with what the school is actually doing.

> Because of the nature of the parent community, the process of engaging these parents takes a long time. Like student improvement, results are not necessarily observable for the first 12 months.

Other research shows that parental engagement is strongly associated with socioeconomic status as well as the parents’ own experience of education (Harris & Goodall, 2007). This is certainly borne out by the Foundation’s study, which found that some parents were too overwhelmed by the impact of family breakdown, long working hours and poverty to participate in the work of the school and that others with low educational levels or a negative school experience during their own childhood found the school too intimidating to approach.

Parental engagement is too often equated with parental involvement, but engagement implies a much higher level of relationship with the school and the schooling process. It implies that ‘parents are an essential part of the learning process, an extended part of the pedagogic process’ (Harris & Goodall, 2007). Research shows that improved student outcomes will only result if parents are both involved in schools and engaged in learning. A network of local schools offers one of the most promising opportunities for engaging parents at the most ambitious level. Especially in communities where schools are already under pressure, a network approach shifts the onus of responsibility to a group of schools. It also opens up the greatest possibilities for engagement by encouraging and enabling parents to form their own support networks, providing opportunities for parents to be learners themselves and engaging their vision for the school and for schooling:

> Schools need to place parental engagement at the centre rather than the periphery of all that they do. Parental engagement in children’s learning makes a difference—it is the most powerful school improvement lever that we have.

(Harris & Goodall, 2007)

**Electronic networks**

Electronic communications—especially since the advent of Web 2.0—create the possibility of virtual networks for learning and collaboration. Education systems are working to make use of this possibility. Australian schools use information and communications technology for a number of
linking purposes including teachers collaborating to improve their practice, students collaborating on educational projects and communication between students and the outside community (Ainley & Searle, 2005). Electronic means are also being used to link schools.

In Queensland, the Suncoast CyberSchools are creating a networked learning community in a fast growing area of the Sunshine Coast hinterland. In Victoria, the Learning for Leading network provides a virtual network for geographically isolated Gippsland schools. Also in Victoria, the Yarra Valley eLearning Community is a cluster of seven secondary schools that are creating a technology-rich learning environment for all young people in the Yarra Valley region. Supported by Victorian Government initiatives including the Leading Schools Fund and Broadband Innovation Fund, an electronic network links all seven schools so students and teachers can share learning and resources.

This raises the issue of how formal networks should encompass the many informal ones that electronic communications are constantly creating. An illustrative anecdote comes from one Australian state initiative which supports teacher-led innovation in schools. The project created a well-resourced formal networking site for participating teachers only to find that they preferred to use Facebook to communicate with each other instead.

It also raises the question of what electronic networks that stand outside the formal education system could do to change models of schooling within the system. In the United Kingdom, for example, Stephen Hepple and The Inclusion Trust run Notschool.net, a national virtual online learning community offering an alternative to traditional education for young people who have been excluded or disengaged from the formal school system. Not School provides personalised learning and a community of learners that includes rather than excludes.

In later chapters, Peter Cole (see Chapter 6) discusses the implications of Internet-based social networking tools for educational networks and Julian Waters-Lynch (Chapter 4) flags the central role of young people in driving the use of these tools.

**Viewpoint**

*Sally Morgan*

At their best, schools are well connected communities. As a secondary school teacher and a facilitator of the Education Foundation’s educational programs, I am very aware of the benefits and the difficulties in making sure schools have partnerships with their communities.
Beyond the classroom: Building new school networks

There is no doubt in my mind that when students are communicating with people outside the school walls and participating in real world projects, they engage with learning in ways that teachers long for. I’ve seen the pride that otherwise disengaged students feel when their work is taken beyond the confines of the school. I have seen them apply, assess and report on their organisational, communication, written literacy and presentation skills and heard them discuss the values and social perspectives they have developed. I have witnessed their heightened motivation, to the point where I’ve had to beg them to stop work when the bell rang!

Schools can and do become isolated from the rest of society. When they do, students can fail to experience and develop the behaviours and skills that are needed to be an active citizen in the wider community. This should profoundly bother more people more of the time. While students are in school, the problem is largely hidden behind the walls of the classroom, but when they leave school, having lost membership of what may be the only community group they belong to, the shortcomings of their educational journey become starkly obvious.

To turn this around, a major cultural transformation is needed. Such transformations need creative thinking from visionary and reliably long-term leadership, moral support, constant intra and inter-organisational communication, and solid financial and time resources for implementing good ideas. Systemic support looks like people talking at length in unhurried and well-hosted meetings. It sounds like engaged conversations and it requires the time for the range of stakeholders to create and take ownership of solutions together. Networks are relational and relationships of any kind take time. Unless the people who implement programs—teachers and community members—are engaged in the process, local knowledge and networks will not be formed.

What would a system look like if it were to enable strong community links for all schools? Networking skills would be taught in all teacher training programs. School timetables would allow significant time each week for inter-disciplinary action projects which have community partnerships as their intrinsic structure and which are authentically assessed. A leading teacher position in every school would be fully funded for every school. This would be a clearly defined role focused on:

- researching the local community and building positive relationships with individuals within other schools, local government, local business and service organisations
- liaising with the school leadership team, teachers and student leaders to develop joint ventures
- instigating and maintaining personalised reporting to, and celebrating with, community.
Networks in most schools, if they exist at all, are precariously balanced on the goodwill and overwork of exceptional teachers. Best practice is ad hoc and dependent on individual schools. To genuinely transform schools, there must be a substantial investment of support at a grassroots level, so that collaboration between schools and other community organisations expands the experience of learning for young people. Without this, the psychological walls around the classroom will remain.

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Connecting the sectors

New policy initiatives like the integration of early years services with schools are opening the door to a deeper relationship with the community sector, but the great resources of business and philanthropy remain under-utilised by Australian school systems. These sectors are increasingly seeking vehicles to invest in the future of young people, but the structures for this investment are limited. The knowledge and commitment of each of these sectors should be harnessed through networks that create rich opportunities for all young Australians.

Greater interdependence and a lack of resources have meant that no one sector can effectively respond, individually, to meeting social concerns and needs. More and more, therefore, partnerships between government, business and civil society organisations are being generated as an investment in social capital and to building more robust communities.

(Loza & Ogilvie, 2005)

The community sector

The role of the Australian community sector in education is both long standing and growing rapidly. Collectively, it provides a range of services for children and young people that naturally bring its work into the sphere of schools. These include child care, health and welfare services as well as a plethora of preventative and early intervention strategies for children and young people that are delivered through schools and community sites. New thinking within the sector clearly sees schools as key partners in meeting its social agenda:
Schools are ideally positioned to be central facilitators and partners in community building and engagement. Multiple types of community engagement and different collaborative arrangements with community organisations need to be encouraged to ensure that schools can respond to wider community needs and can partner in the delivery of specialist services such as child and family care and support services. Additional responsibilities need to be matched with adequate resources and capacity from Government.

(Victorian Health Inequalities Network, 2007)

The community sector is both currently and potentially the most engaged in the work of schools. It is also the place where the tremendous overlap, replication and gaps in provision between education and other services is most evident. The landscape includes a host of programs and interventions run in or with schools by not-for-profit organisations committed to improving opportunities for children and young people facing disadvantage or in other ways at risk. It is also populated by numerous state and federal government initiatives.

Some of the more large-scale programs represent powerful cross-sectoral networks in their own right. Some are conducted through joined-up arrangements between various government departments. All bring together a wide range of government, community and education sector agencies in the pursuit of better outcomes for children and young people in challenging circumstances. Collectively, they also represent a model of provision that is bewildering in its complexity, with a lot of replicated resources and expenditure. As one community sector leader said at an Education Foundation forum:

Tackling the silos is the hardest thing of all.

One Victorian community organisation tells an illustrative story about this. A workshop for its staff attempted to map the number of related services being offered by its sector. A cardboard image of a child was created and sticky labels attached to it, one for each service offered to support young people in the state. By the end of the workshop, the image of the child had completely disappeared under layers of sticky labels. The same story could be told in other states and territories.

This anecdote is not a sign that children and young people are being well looked after. The division of overlapping responsibilities between key government departments—education on the one hand and health and welfare on the other—means that support services for young people that are logically linked to education are often located in the community with limited links to the schools that are struggling to support these same young people. Principals leading schools in high need areas are very clear about their inability to support specific students without specialist help. These
comments come from principals interviewed for a previous Education Foundation study (Black, 2007):

If governments were serious about this, every school would have a dedicated welfare coordinator.

We could have a three-day-a-week counsellor in here and still not meet all of our students’ needs.

Collaboration between schools and community sector agencies is the single most important cross-sectoral relationship in improving outcomes for children and young people, yet it is fraught with cultural challenges. The training received by teachers is so different to that of community sector professionals that they can struggle to understand one another’s basic priorities, let alone agree on how to work together.

When collaboration does happen outside the large, formal programs described earlier, it tends to be driven by individual relationships between committed teachers or community agency staff rather than by organisational or system agreements. This presents a clear barrier to sustainability. Good partnership practice in schools is only sustainable when it is supported by the school culture and not reliant on the efforts of sole, innovative teachers (Black, 2004, 2007). A similar principle applies to the community sector.

The community sector along with local government has an unmatched understanding of how to create effective place-based solutions to young people’s needs. It also has a lot of knowledge about how to create effective partnerships. Not-for-profit organisations often work as partnership brokers between schools and other organisations, helping them to navigate the cultural and structural differences that would otherwise present an obstacle to collaboration (Lasater, 2007). This expertise would provide a strong base for collaborative local networks that combine the efforts of the education and community sectors.

Linking to Learn & Learning to Link is a collaboration between the Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance at Griffith University and Mission Australia with the support of the Queensland Government. The project aims to create an integrated system of comprehensive support for children in Inala, an outer-fringe suburb that has been identified as the poorest urban area in Queensland. It is being conducted in six schools over a period of five years.

The project creates a culture of collaboration between schools and welfare agencies (which work together) and families to improve outcomes
for children. This strategy is based on the recognition that children’s home and school lives cannot be separated. Its first main strand is a school-based family support service. Family support workers from Mission Australia work with classroom teachers to meet and engage with parents. A family centre has also been created within each of the project schools to serve as a base from which workers can meet with parents, run parent groups and provide access to specific programs such as counselling and advocacy.

The project’s second main strand is professional development and support for teachers to engage parents as partners in enriching children’s education and to cater more effectively to the individual needs of children. Its beacon program, Circles of Care, puts the individual child at the centre of a network of educators, family support staff, family and community members who commit to work together in their support.

The role of philanthropy

There are an estimated 5000 philanthropic trusts and foundations in Australia that give up to an estimated $1 billion per annum for a range of social purposes including school education. Over the past decade, this sector has witnessed a significant rethinking of its role and a move away from the old style charitable good works that were once its primary activity. The focus on partnership and place-based solutions that has begun to change the way that government does business has also informed a more strategic philanthropy that strengthens structures at the community level to build capacity and bring about lasting change. This has seen philanthropy working in partnership with government, the corporate sector and local changemakers or social entrepreneurs.

These are a few examples of this kind of philanthropy at work in Australia. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list and a number of other organisations and alliances could also be named.

The Reichstein Foundation exemplifies the shift away from funding programs that provide direct support to the needy to funding activities with a likelihood of effecting wider change in an effective, efficient and sustainable way. Its grantmaking programs are designed to support long-term social change, in particular the more equitable distribution of resources and the elimination of barriers that prevent people from participating more fully in society.
The Macpherson Smith Community Alliance is a partnership between the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust and the Victorian State Government to support rural communities in Victoria. Established in 2004 at the instigation of the Trust as a two-year $1 million fund, it proved so successful that in 2007 the two funding partners agreed to a new $2 million partnership. The Alliance provides opportunities for rural and regional communities to explore new connections involving collaboration between business, organisations and government to achieve their community project goals.

Changemakers Australia encourages, educates and resources philanthropic organisations and individuals to work for significant, long-term change through partnership with the groups who are the potential recipients of their support. Its model is based on the belief that significant change to entrenched and intractable issues is more likely to succeed when there is a respectful partnership between donors, recipients and other groups concerned about the issue and when the underlying causes of the issue are addressed. This process may involve bringing together government, business and community sectors to reform policy and institutional processes. Among its other activities, Changemakers Australia develops partnerships and information sharing between philanthropic and community organisations and government departments working to improve opportunities for disadvantaged groups. The Education Foundation is a member of Changemakers Australia.

The work of these and other organisations is likely to be strengthened by the recognition that philanthropy has an unparalleled ability to create networks and coalitions across society in the name of the public good. A growing trend within the sector may see the development of more philanthropic foundations that place their emphasis on fostering relationships, partnerships and networks to bring together new thinking and practice, facilitate new approaches, cross established boundaries and combine otherwise separate worlds (Anheier & Leat, 2006a, 2006b):

At their best, foundations are risk-taking, innovative funders of causes that others either neglect or are unable to address.

(Anheier & Leat, 2006a)

According to Marion Webster and Trudy Wyse of the Melbourne Community Foundation, philanthropy is a good vehicle for collaboration because of its neutrality. When it works at its best, it can identify the barriers to change, be a spearhead for innovation and provide a space in which creative alliances can form to generate new solutions. It can also address needs that
Connecting the sectors

57
government cannot, although government must be ‘at the table from day one’. As Mary Crooks of the Victorian Women’s Trust has said:

*Philanthropy can be a free agent in a way that other sectors cannot aspire to. It has great freedom because it stands between government and the market place. Because of this, it can be a lubricant for unusual collaboration.*

The Education Foundation is itself an example of an organisation that creates a neutral space in which philanthropy can support the work of schools:

*The equitable and participatory cross-sectoral relationships created and facilitated by the Foundation are themselves models for a new social alliance between schools and other areas of the community. These philanthropic and corporate partnerships garner fresh support for public education from sectors that have not traditionally seen it as their domain. They build capacity in schools and, through them, communities by legitimising the efforts of schools, sharing knowledge around the sector, brokering entry points into an often closed culture and acting as a catalyst for change.*

(Black, 2004)

Collaborative philanthropy is still in its early days in Australia and the number of philanthropic foundations driving it remains small. What is interesting is that many of these have a priority focus on education, recognising its central role in improving other outcomes for children, young people and communities.

The Linking Schools and Early Years Project described in Chapter 2 and funded by The R E Ross Trust is a strong example of how philanthropic funds can span sectoral and systemic interests to develop fresh, collaborative solutions to children, and young people’s needs. Another example is provided by Melbourne Community Foundation. Established in 1997 as Australia’s first independent community foundation, the Foundation gives individuals, families, groups, corporations and charitable organisations a way to support social change. Since its inception, it has distributed over $7.5 million to a range of community organisations and activities.

Education is the largest area to which Melbourne Community Foundation donors contribute. The Foundation also conducts initiatives that support collaborative, cross-sectoral projects with education as a priority.

As part of its Youth at Risk Initiative, the Melbourne Community Foundation has created the Youth Collaboration, a broad coalition of not-for-profit, community sector, philanthropic and government organisations including the Education Foundation. The Collaboration has guided a project designed to
improve the way that young people, particularly those leaving school early, make the transition from school to work or further education and training.

With funding from three Victorian Government departments and two philanthropic foundations—Melbourne Community Foundation and the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust—the project trained and employed youth researchers between 15 and 19 years of age in three disadvantaged communities—Braybrook–Maidstone, Frankston and Shepparton—to investigate the experience of young people before and after they leave school. The first report concluded that collaborative approaches produce better outcomes for young people in education and training (Kellock, 2007) and advocated new government-wide and cross-sectoral responses to address the issues associated with the transition from school.

Another initiative is MacroMelbourne, which supports substantial projects to address disadvantage in Melbourne so that the city remains a liveable one for all its citizens as it grows over the next 25 years. The initiative recognises that while government authorities provide the planning and infrastructure for the city, philanthropic trusts, corporations, small businesses, universities and community organisations can all help to shape its future. All projects endorsed by MacroMelbourne involve cross-sectoral collaboration. They include the Education Foundation's Worlds of Work (WOW) program.

As Marion Webster explains elsewhere in this book (see Chapter 4), philanthropic involvement in school education will not reach its full potential without a more collaborative approach among philanthropic organisations and individual donors. It will also operate below its potential until Australia undertakes a re-examination of its current legislative structures with relation to philanthropy. Australian taxation legislation precludes direct philanthropic granting to schools. A change to this legislation would open the doors for philanthropic agencies to direct needed funding to creative and collaborative networks of schools and community organisations in a way that would meet the most ambitious changemaking vision.

The role of business

The scope and commitment of corporate social responsibility in Australia is growing, with local community initiatives now attracting more corporate support than any other social investment vehicle (Centre for Corporate Public Affairs, 2007). This means that companies are increasingly driving the social agenda, both at the wider society and at the local community level (Loza & Ogilvie, 2005). Increasingly, this agenda focuses on education:
There is a strong business case for corporate support of education. While there are many ways for companies to display their corporate social responsibility commitments, school–business partnerships that aim to support education can generate the most social capital and strengthen communities. In turn, this aids Australia as a nation to compete in the new knowledge economy.

(Social Compass, 2007)

One in five Chief Executive Officers of leading Australian corporations identify the quality of education as a high priority for action by the Federal Government (Business Council of Australia, 2004). This is driven by concern about Australia’s skills future. Compared to other OECD countries, Australia continues to have high numbers of young people not in education, training or employment. This represents a serious challenge to Australia’s ability to meet employers’ need for skilled workers and is generating a strong corporate interest in the nature and the future of schooling. Key sectoral agencies such as the Business Council of Australia (2007) clearly recognise that schools can no longer achieve their purpose by acting alone:

Schools of the future will need to be better connected with their local communities, more flexible and more responsive to local needs. Partnerships between schools (both government and non-government) and between schools and local businesses and community organisations will be keys to greater local responsiveness, alternative sources of funding, and greater sharing and more efficient use of human resources and physical facilities.

Another factor behind business’ emerging interest in schooling is the search for corporate social responsibility vehicles that work. Employee voluntarism is the most rapidly growing trend in corporate social responsibility (Centre for Corporate Public Affairs, 2007), attractive to companies because of its capacity to improve organisational effectiveness, provide a positive workplace culture, engage and retain quality employees and create a reputation as a good corporate citizen. Until recently, corporate social responsibility activity did not frequently extend to partnerships with schools in the public education system (Black, 2004).

As Jehan Loza describes elsewhere in this book (see Viewpoint at the end of this chapter), this landscape is clearly changing, with an increase in the number of businesses that seek partnerships with government schools. This is due in part to the advent of agencies like Melbourne Cares, a business-led network that connects companies, not-for-profit organisations and all levels of government in new collaborations that include schools in disadvantaged communities, and the Australian Business and Community Network, a network of national business leaders that works with schools that have areas of need.
Business Working with Education is an initiative of Melbourne Cares and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Based on the United Kingdom program Business in the Community, it creates an informal business–education network by brokering partnerships between Australian or Australian-based companies and schools in disadvantaged areas. The partnerships are designed to achieve outcomes through collaboration that could not be achieved by government or individual companies acting alone. These include building the capacity of school leadership, improving schools’ relationship with their local communities and creating new learning opportunities for students.

The companies that participate in Business Working with Education have a strong interest in the role that business can play in public education. They share the belief of Melbourne Cares that a robust public education system is the most important vehicle for tackling disadvantage. Participating schools are identified by Regional Directors of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. They are invited to join the program and matched with a business supporter.

Partners in Leadership is one of four programs currently operated by Business Working with Education. It connects senior business leaders with school principals to share leadership challenges and work together on school issues. An example of the program in action comes from the partnership between Cadbury-Schweppes and Newport Lakes Primary School in a disadvantaged area of western metropolitan Melbourne.

Melbourne Cares facilitated the first meeting between Stuart Donaldson, Finance Director from Cadbury-Schweppes and Bev Fegan, Principal of the school. This was a chance for them to build rapport and discuss their expectations and roles within the partnership. Stuart subsequently attended a number of school council meetings to gain a better appreciation of the school’s culture and governance as well as its strengths and challenges. These include low enrolments, low student literacy, students entering with low school readiness and the limited experiences of many students beyond the home.

By the fourth meeting, Bev and Stuart had agreed to use the partnership to promote the school to its local community to build its profile and increase enrolments. A team of marketing and promotions staff from the company worked with students and staff to develop a communications plan centred around an information night for the local parent community. Working together, the company and the school produced a School Promotion Kit including a DVD and brochure. This was used at the information night and distributed to local kindergartens. The school subsequently received 40 new enrolments for the following year’s intake of Prep students and has
significantly raised its community profile. The school and company have continued their partnership and are planning future joint projects.

The work of Melbourne Cares and the Australian Business and Community Network can provide many other success stories of brokered relationships between companies and schools in areas of need. One of the most significant ways to increase the benefit of these relationships would be to adopt a model where companies develop ambitious programs with a network of local schools. This would ensure that the benefits of business–school partnerships build opportunity for all young people in the locality. Peter Cole discusses in further detail this elsewhere in this book (see Chapter 6).

While the number of Australian-based companies interested in education is growing, there are few examples of companies working collectively for education reform. A report commissioned by Ernst & Young about corporate support for public education in the United States notes that the district level offers the greatest opportunities for companies to work with local stakeholders to improve educational outcomes for young people in the area. It has a strong message for Australia:

*Imagine the power of the nation’s leading scientific and engineering companies coming together to focus on improving science instruction and learning opportunities for students. Imagine the nation’s largest professional services firms coming together around the shared goal of developing strategic plans for urban school districts. Imagine the nation’s largest corporations partnering with leading private foundations such as Gates, Broad and Wallace to take collective action on a specific issue in education… More effective collaboration among corporations, and between corporations and other private educational funders, would leverage a much larger pool of resources and expertise to address some of the most pressing challenges facing our country’s public education system in more effective ways.*

*(Hills & Hirschhorn, 2007)*

**Networking the city**

Like other cities in Australia and around the world, Melbourne is experiencing unprecedented growth. At the same time, many young Melbournians are suffering more than ever from the narrowing effects of geographic disadvantage. It is generally acknowledged that distance from a capital city has an impact on educational achievement: in response to this, there are numerous initiatives that provide additional opportunities
for young people in remote and regional areas. There is also a growing concern about the impact of living on the urban fringes. Yet poverty and disadvantage also dramatically narrows the experience and opportunities of young people living in metropolitan areas, even those within sight of the central business district.

Young people who live in communities characterised by low levels of social capital have limited access to the networks and connections that can provide the opportunities for social and economic wellbeing (Tennant et al., 2005). They have few links and relationships to those who are employed, university educated or living outside the area (Pope, 2006). The Education Foundation’s study of schools in disadvantaged western Melbourne observed that the effect of family and community disadvantage was particularly evident in the constrained life experiences of young people:

*Students rarely leave the suburb in which they live. Their daily experience is severely limited by poverty and long parental working hours. Leisure activity is focused around television and, for older students, the local mall.*

(Black, 2007)

*Our students never cross the bridge out of this suburb.*

(principal, in Black, 2007)

This issue arises frequently in discussion with the schools with which the Foundation works. Its Worlds of Work (WOW) program aims to build the capacity of students from disadvantaged communities to effectively participate in the future world of work. To do this, it brings students into the Melbourne Central Business District for interaction with workplaces across the city. Over the course of a week, students interact with five different ‘worlds of work’, including government departments, non-government organisations, philanthropic trusts and major companies.

An independent evaluation of the program (Stokes & Turnbull, 2008) shows that the program expands young people’s sense of what is possible for them and enlarges their understanding of modern workplaces and career opportunities. As one student commented, ‘this experience has really made me feel there is much more to the world’. Yet one of the impediments to the program’s success is the difficulty experienced by some schools in persuading students to move beyond a five-kilometre radius of their neighbourhood. While a teacher in one participating school testifies to the impact of the program—‘our students now see themselves as part of the wider world, not just part of Broadmeadows’—another teacher observes that ‘a lot of the kids are really wary about leaving their comfort zone’.
Across the globe, cities are recognising that their social, cultural and economic futures are dependent on their ability to maximise education and learning. This has led to the development of learning cities guided by the following principles:

- Learning is both an individual and collective responsibility;
- Social harmony and economic prosperity are key over-arching goals in identifying collective learning goals and projects that will benefit the city residents;
- Learning is defined broadly, and is accomplished by working with a wide range of partners, both formal and informal;
- Innovation is embraced;
- Learning projects are identified and implemented through consultation and collaboration among the general public, community groups, educational institutions, unions, cultural organisations, advocacy groups and employers;
- Learning should be readily accessible regardless of financial circumstances or education.

(Faris, 2007)

The learning city offers a way of breaking down the impact of ghettoisation and creating new participation and social inclusion. It also offers an avenue to build genuine networks across sectors to share resources for young people’s learning:

Learning Cities embrace an understanding of learning as multi-dimensional and comprehensive; they devise ways of bringing learning and people together, in order to develop the social and economic fabric of the community.

(Canadian Council on Learning, 2007)

Education … is not a coherent system but a fragmented one and often competitive. The focus of the city is a useful one for collaboration and coordination.

(Henderson et al., 2000.

Local governments have been the strongest drivers of the learning city movement in their own areas. One example comes from the City of Hume.

Hume is located on the urban–rural fringe of Melbourne, 20 kilometres from the centre of the city, and has significantly lower levels of employment, education and training than the metropolitan average. The Hume City Council
beyond the classroom: Building new school networks

believes that learning is the key to personal, economic and community growth for the city. In 2003, it began what it considers to be one of its greatest initiatives: the Hume Global Learning Village, a collective attempt to improve learning in a local government area. The City Council established two flagship initiatives—the Hume Global Learning Centre and the Visy Cares Learning Centre—before initiating the establishment of the Village to develop a sustainable learning culture and opportunities for the community.

The Village is based on a series of collaborative partnerships. It has nearly 300 organisational members including 53 schools, TAFE colleges, universities, neighbourhood houses, learning centres, public libraries, leading corporations and local business, community groups, the Hume City Council, the Victorian Government and The Pratt Foundation. Membership is open to any person or organisation with an interest or role in lifelong learning for the community of Hume. Organisational members adopt the Hume Global Learning Village Statement of Understanding as an expression of shared vision and commitment. Members are known and promoted by the Council as partners in the Village.

The Village combines resources from across the city to provide formal and informal learning opportunities for all residents, reflecting the Council's belief that learning should extend beyond the classroom into the community and the workplace at every stage of life. Its activities include collective initiatives to identify learning gaps, issues and needs in the community and develop strategies to address them. There is also the Learning Together strategy, a wide-ranging group of community actions to motivate people to take up or continue learning for themselves and others, to recognise the level of learning that is already happening in their lives and around them, and to acknowledge those who encourage others to learn. The Village will be boosted by the Broadmeadows Schools Regeneration project, which aims to transform the educational landscape of the area.

The central business district provides a different opportunity for the creation of a learning city. Through its Learning Friendly City initiative, the Education Foundation is developing a model for a collaborative, cross-sectoral and cross-generational network based in the city. The model engages business, community, government, not-for-profit, further education and philanthropic organisations in the Melbourne Central Business District that share a commitment to improving learning and life opportunities for young Victorians, particularly the most socially and economically disadvantaged. While the initiative is being piloted in Melbourne, the intention is to create a model that can be easily replicated in local communities and in other cities around Australia.
I recently had an appointment with the principal at my local community school. Waiting outside her office, I had plenty of anxiety wondering how stern she might be, what she would have to say and whether I would be able to present my argument in a way that would gain her sympathy. I had rarely been so nervous. It felt like the time I had been up for detention thirty years earlier, but this time I was hoping to have the school interested in a business–community partnership.

In the end, we were both interested. With particular needs on both sides, the value of a partnership was most evident. At the same time, it was clear that there were huge gaps in our understanding of each other’s business. Acronyms abounded on both sides and the world of secondary education seemed as distant to me as the world of corporations seemed to the principal.

The Business Council of Australia (BCA) has recently reported that Australia is failing more than 300,000 young people aged between 15 and 24 in terms of employment and education outcomes (Business Council of Australia, 2007). The report suggests that for Australia to remain globally competitive, it must pursue policies that close and prevent gaps in educational quality. It claims that public–private partnerships can enhance the flexibility and diversity of education necessary for an education sector required in the current economy.

The BCA report reinforces the view that, in Australia, there exist alarming inequalities and gaps in student outcomes and economic participation. Research consistently highlights the strong correlation between socio-economic background and educational outcomes and, when compared to other high performing countries, Australia’s poor performing students do worse. At the same time there also exist major gaps in Australia’s education system with respect to its ability to meet Australia’s industry need.

In the past decade, there have been concerted efforts by diverse groups of reformers from different sectors working to improve the public education system. In the United States and Australia, for example, these efforts have resulted in a national dialogue about the role of the broader community in supporting and sustaining public education. These conversations continue and have instigated the emergence of strategic partnerships and community renewal as a focus for educational innovation and reform. The idea is that getting the community and its residents into school buildings is the first, and most pivotal, step in renewing and strengthening communities.
Beyond the classroom: Building new school networks and shaping a future generation able to participate fully. Within this context, business–school partnerships are increasing.

Indeed, there are some studies that have shown that business engagement in schools can lead to stronger and better communities. School–industry programs (Structured Work Placements) that are run in a spirited and proactive manner can result in positive community outcomes such as a decline in vandalism, shoplifting and graffiti in the community. Importantly, student interests in their studies have been shown to be reinvigorated. Employment opportunities in the community have increased, with local business becoming interested in employing local youth. These programs have been shown to increase trust and reciprocity by uniting the community in vision and commitment.

In terms of teaching and learning, school–business partnerships can assist schools to deliver educational services by providing community support and encouragements as well as resources (for example, volunteers, financial resources and equipment). Further partnerships can enhance learning by providing a wider range of contexts, learning styles and experiences through which students can acquire and apply their knowledge and skills. Partnerships can also address cross-curricular content areas like work, employment, difference and diversity, multiculturalism and literacy, and the school curriculum can be enhanced by:

- providing up-to-date specialist knowledge and skills (for example in technical and industry-related subjects)
- providing work-related case studies in school courses
- presenting career information
- assisting schools to maintain and raise their standards in specialised curriculum areas.

Importantly, at a time where resources have generally been scarce in the public education system, school–business partnerships can increase resources available to the school through the:

- provision of skilled volunteers for school based committees, for mentoring and for school programs and activities
- provision of opportunities to access state-of-the-art equipment and supplies for students and teachers
- provision of opportunities to access additional funds
- exploration of the development of innovative technology and processes where students and businesses work together.

Despite some critiques—for example, where corporate involvement in the school system is seen as a raid on the marketplace of free ideas—the trend
now towards business–school partnerships is evident and being embraced worldwide. There is no evidence that this trend will cease in the near future. For example, in the United States, the take-up of business–school partnerships rose from 35 to 70 per cent of all school districts between 1990 and 2000.

It is clear that the current and well-documented gaps in the public education system will not be closed by maintaining the status quo. However, part of the current status quo has been that while both sides of the partnership equation (schools and businesses) have been willing to come together, both have often found engagement challenging. This is partly because the education sector and the business sector have historically worked in silos, where previously they rarely wanted, let alone needed, to talk to each other.

However, the business case is strong for both sides now and, while there are a number of programs that promote increased understanding across sectors (for example, the Principal for A Day program), the future landscape will require a much more integrated approach. Such an approach will require state government facilitation where there are multiple points of contact between the two sectors across the school cycle and where each sector has an important stake in the other.

The 300 000 young people aged between 15 and 24 currently failing in terms of employment and education outcomes will require more than single schools partnering with single businesses. There will need to be a network of schools and local businesses working with local communities. There will need to be less anxiety and more understanding for students and adults alike, whether we are sitting outside the principal’s office or in the reception area of a large corporation.

*Dr Jehan Loza is Director Research at Social Compass Pty Ltd*
Young people driving networks

Julian Waters-Lynch

Young people can play a central role in driving networks, within both their school and their community. This chapter looks at three networks conceived, planned and implemented by students. All involve the development of important new relationships between schools, local government, businesses, community organisations, parents and community members. All transform the traditional, classroom-centred model of schooling into a networked system where young people learn through experience and reflection.

An ongoing challenge … is how to put young people at the centre of these new partnerships in a way that goes beyond tokenism. Genuine models of youth participation and changemaking are emerging from the wider youth welfare and philanthropic sectors. To be effective, [they] will need to also effect a cultural shift where youth voice becomes a recognised and integral part of education decision-making, not just at the local school level but at the systemic level as well.

(Black, 2004)

Globalisation and education

The last thirty years in Australia and many other countries has seen rapid acceleration in the development of communications technology and global economic integration. These factors have combined with increased international migration, study and tourism to result in continuous transnational flows of information and cultural exchange. Contemporary issues such as terrorism, climate change and pandemic disease all have global resonance. Consequently, Australian children growing up with today’s access and exposure to television, the Internet, international pop culture and travel opportunities experience vastly different lives to children growing up fifty years ago.
This has direct implications for the curriculum and the culture of schools. For example, a recognised need to broaden the educational perspective of school students in order to acknowledge the experiences of the ‘third world’ has been present in Australia since at least the 1950s. Figures such as Margaret Calder were persistent advocates for what was called ‘development education’, stressing the rising inequality between ‘north and south’. The African-American civil rights movement of the 1960s and consequent abolition of segregated schools in the USA posed new possibilities and challenges with respect to teaching in a culturally sensitive and an ethnically inclusive manner.

Although the Australian social experience did not directly mirror the North American, Australian educators took note of these trends. The women’s rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s further encouraged revision of the previously unacknowledged institutional values and bias within education. The environmental awareness that developed in the 1970s and the recognition of the threat posed by industrialised development added a further angle from which to review education practices. Eventually the recognition of the pressing reality and potential benefits of multicultural societies, often inspired by the advocacy and pressure of marginalised groups, led progressive teachers and, at least in the Australian context, legislators to implement ‘multicultural’ education as a policy strategy.

The common thread that runs between these movements is that they all advocate social or institutional change. Whether through re-examining unconscious prejudice, or altering patterns of consumption, there is recognition among education advocates that something is not right with the status quo. The school as an institution—‘a curious mix of the factory, the asylum and the prison’ (Hargreaves, 1994)—was consolidated at a time before the emergence of these wider social trends. In order to accommodate them, school education must prepare students with new skills to meet the flexibility and uncertainty of the contemporary economic environment.

School education, like governance itself, has traditionally been conceived of as a top-down transfer of knowledge, the relationship between teacher and student often mirroring the attitude of state to citizen (Foucault, 1973, 1975). The framing of power was bound up in the very language used to describe the education process: a Minister for Public Instruction, Headmasters and Inspectors-General. Recent thinking has challenged both the efficacy and the ethics of this conceptual model of learning. The idea that knowledge is constructed by the individual through processes of experience and reflection provides a fundamental challenge to traditional models of education. Student-centred learning is becoming a core component of education policy (Black, 2007) and there is a renewed recognition that schools play a vital role in values and civic education and that young people have a role in shaping the direction of education policy. As Eric Sidoti (2007) observes:
Re-imagining education policy needs to be informed by young people’s own views.

The connected society

Alongside these changes in education thinking, the economic environment and work patterns have changed significantly, with the private sector increasingly requiring project management skills from employees. These include social and interpersonal skills and the ability to work independently, set goals and develop project ideas. Leaders in the private sector are also identifying the need to incorporate values and vision into the workplace.

On a broader socioeconomic scale, governments have moved towards a business model, with both major Australian political parties committed to running budget surpluses and reducing the large-scale public outlays of former times. As a counterpoint to this shift, businesses are increasingly exploring corporate social responsibility as a way to contribute to the public good beyond their core profit-orientated practices.

There has been an explosion of civil society organisations, which offer young people new terrain for employment locally, nationally and globally. Finally, traditional modes of community cohesion have shifted, and while there may be a decline in membership of local church groups, trade unions and sporting teams, the Internet and information technology brings new possibilities for community dialogue and social networking.

The past decades have seen some significant changes that affect the worlds that young people inhabit. Young people today are sometimes called digital natives, in the sense that they were born into a culture that makes use of digital technology every day. Education institutions such as schools used to play a vital role in providing access to information, but personal computers and widespread availability of the Internet have opened the flood gates of information access. The most important role schools and educators can now play is as mentors and guides to navigating the information explosion and translating information into meaningful ways of taking control of one’s life and contributing to one’s community.

Young people identify communication and interpersonal technology as among the most important elements of their lives (Powney & Lowden, 2002, in Tolman, Ford & Irby, 2003). While this will come as no surprise to most of us, their use of electronic communications has more relevance to learning than might be supposed: a recent study of young people’s use of social networking sites in the United States found that almost 60 per cent of online students talk about education-related topics and 50 per cent talk specifically about school work (National School Boards Association, 2007).

Information technology opens the possibility for reigniting a creative and entrepreneurial spirit. Young people are ideally placed to lead this
Young people driving networks

renewal. They have energy, creativity and are often in touch with grassroots issues of community concern. The democratic challenge is to move beyond venerating exceptional young individual leaders to a system that empowers many students to lead change in their schools and communities.

Young people and collaboration

What are the advantages of allowing young people to drive new collaborations as part of school learning? Young people are experts on the kinds of issues that affect their own wellbeing, but beyond youth matters, they have a valuable perspective on grassroots community issues that should be incorporated into community planning and development. Young people often attract media attention, and this can be used to their advantage when promoting issues they are passionate about. When young people take the time to approach businesses, community organisations, trusts and foundations, other schools and even tiers of government to pitch an idea, their freshness and energy is often rewarded.

School partnerships and networks will be successful when young people feel a sense of ownership in forming them. When young people drive partnerships, they begin to tap the rich learning resources of their own family and social networks and unlock the capacity of the wider community in which they live. Leading schools in high-poverty communities create opportunities for students to take a strong leadership role (Thomson & Harris, 2004, in Mulford et al., 2007).

What are the risks in allowing young people to drive new collaborations as part of school learning? It is often claimed that young people lack experience, are not responsible enough or don’t really understand what schools and communities need. Some claim that it costs too much time or money to involve young people in developing school learning strategies and that young people’s involvement will come at the cost of ‘real’ schoolwork.

The following examples of student-led initiatives conducted under the Education Foundation’s nation-wide ruMAD? program demonstrate that concerns over lack of experience can be overcome with the right support and guidance, that youth participation can generate social and economic wealth and, most importantly, that such opportunities result in some of the most significant and practical learning experiences for young people.

ruMAD?

The ruMAD? (are you Making A Difference?) program is a pedagogical framework developed for Australian primary and secondary school
students. It originated in the philanthropic sector, initiated in the late 1990s by the Stegley Foundation as a way to engage students in philanthropic and community projects. It is now conducted across Australia by the Education Foundation. Recent national and state government education policies have emphasised the need to teach for greater and deeper understanding and the incorporation of values education into the curriculum. The ruMAD? framework has served the purpose of linking values education with community driven projects for social change that are developed and implemented by young people.

The framework is divided into three phases. Initially students examine their own values, interests and vision for the community in which they would like to live. They analyse the needs of the community and develop a project to address a particular area of concern or create a new possibility. The second phase involves moving through a project management methodology to develop practical skills and harness resources to put the idea into practice. The final phase involves reflecting on what was learned from the experience, celebrating the achievements and sharing the outcomes with other schools and communities. The ruMAD? framework was employed in the following three examples to forge new ties and create real change in local communities.

The following projects have all emerged from areas of disadvantage. All of them demonstrate that with the right support, young people can create deep projects of real social and economic value in their communities. They can question both their individual and the wider cultural values and reinforce their beliefs through tangible, real world outcomes. They can create networks of common purpose within their schools and communities that frequently engage the wider community.

Down on the farm

Doveton North Primary School is located in the city of Casey, 30 kilometres south-east of Melbourne’s central business district. Doveton–Eumemmerring is a designated Neighbourhood Renewal site, with 13 per cent of residents in public housing. It is a common destination for new migrants including many recent refugees from the Horn of Africa. Some of these families experience significant challenges to educational participation including little experience with schools, suspicion towards public institutions and psychological trauma stemming from violent experiences in war zones.

Doveton North Primary School is using the ruMAD? curriculum as a vehicle for students to take ownership of the challenges facing their community. Down the road from the school lies Myuna Farm, a public community farm geared towards children and families. The farm has a
relationship with the school and students have spent time there. In 2007, the school took up a focus on sustainability and healthy eating, issues that are strongly promoted by the Farm. Through ruMAD?, students in Years 3 and 4 decided to build on this relationship. With assistance from their teacher, they submitted a request to the Farm to establish their own garden plot. This was granted and students began weekly visits to the Farm, watching people work in the community garden, learning the details of recycling, composting and preparing soil and planting their own seeds and seedlings.

The Children’s Community Garden is now a fully-fledged initiative. It has received widespread recognition as an example of students learning about horticulture and sustainability through practice. It has also acted as a community hub for parents, providing a non-threatening point of contact with the school, a community organisation and other parents. The Victorian Government’s Neighbourhood Renewal office has recognised the benefit of the project and provided funding for it to continue. The school is now building on the success of the Community Garden by starting a second garden within the school grounds. This will retain the involvement of the current Years 3 and 4 students as they move into secondary school by engaging them as gardening mentors to new primary school students. In this sense, the garden symbolises a commitment to nurturing a supportive environment for young people.

The students themselves are very proud of what they have achieved. They presented their project to 300 other young people at the Education Foundation’s 2007 Youth Ambassadors Conference. The project is frequently cited as an example of young students leading change in their community, but within a context of supportive relationships and organisations. As one teacher says:

*What is really nice about the ruMAD? philosophy is that the project ideas are generated by the kids. It’s the kids getting into it, it’s the kids going through the process, it’s the children who are generating the ideas and the teachers are there as a guide.*

Regenerating the community

Whitfield District Primary School serves an agricultural township in the King River Valley north-east of Melbourne. Jessie’s Creek, which runs through the town and alongside the school, had become an eyesore. It was overgrown with exotic weeds and used as a dump for rubbish. The community had abandoned attempts to regenerate it.

In 2002, using the ruMAD? framework, students at the school took up the challenge. They started by trying to clear and revegetate the creek, but
Beyond the classroom: Building new school networks

Soon recognised that the task was too big to tackle alone and began to raise community awareness about the issue. After carrying out a biodiversity study to analyse the environmental values of the creek, students surveyed community attitudes and produced a brochure promoting the challenges and future potential of the site. They issued a press release, shared their findings with the Wilderness Society, Greening Australia and the local government council and made presentations to groups like the King Basin Landcare group and the North East Catchment Management Authority. The Authority responded by conducting a comprehensive assessment of the work required to bring about change. With the assistance of the Authority and its Water Watch program, students helped to trial the effects of regeneration activities including extensive replanting.

The students’ campaign attracted funding of $26,000 from the Commonwealth Environmental Fund and Australian Geographic and this has been used to transform the creek. It also attracted the interest of the Governor of Victoria, John Landy, as he said after his visit:

*While the results speak for themselves, the intangible benefits from such a project are equally valuable. In particular, the sense of pride and ownership which the students now feel towards the area—their local environment—will ensure that the creek environment is valued for years to come.*

After a number of other local organisations came on board, what began as a small, student endeavour became the focus of a large, formal and sustainable community collaboration. Work is ongoing and the students have continued to be key partners in a project that delivers rich learning as well as community and environmental outcomes. Students participate in the project steering group, contribute to community newsletters and have a continuing role in the maintenance of the creek. As one student said:

*You have to believe in what you are doing and make a fuss to get things moving. People were surprised that kids could do this stuff.*

The project won the 2005 Westpac Landcare Education Award and was nominated for the 2006 Award.

Pushing the switch

Colac–Otway Shire is located in south-west Victoria, about 160 kilometres from Melbourne. Colac was recently ranked among the 18 most disadvantaged Victorian postcodes, with 40 per cent of its residents living in Neighbourhood Renewal areas. The Shire has a youth council, a group of young people aged between 13 and 17 who are drawn from each of the five local schools.
One of the concerns of the youth councillors has been the negative portrayal of young people in the local media that associates youth with binge drinking, drugs and vandalism. While frustrated by such stereotyping, the youth councillors do acknowledge that many young people in the community engage in destructive behaviour. In the words of their mentor:

*It was decided that kids didn’t have any idea what there was to do here that was healthy and fun and a better choice for their leisure time and their leisure dollar.*

The youth council’s mentor engaged ruMAD? to work with the youth councillors on a project to change the community’s perception of young people. Through the ruMAD? framework, the councillors came up with the project title ‘Ctrl-Alt-Delete: It’s Time for Youth to Push the Switch’. The title is a play on words. It stands for *controlling* community issues, *altering* youth perceptions, and *deleting* negative images. As one student commented:

*Pushing the switch is about supporting young people to make healthy, fun life choices, switching away from inappropriate activities.*

Because the youth council wanted to promulgate this message to younger children, they selected primary school students as the audience for the project.

The main product of Ctrl-Alt-Delete is a community Youth Expo to inform children about the range of options for healthy activities in the local area and to generate positive media stories about local young people. The youth council secured the local sports stadium, engaged the support of all local school principals and enlisted local sponsors including the Southwest Local Learning Employment Network. It also gained the support of local radio and newspapers and worked closely with the Colac Otway Police Youth Liaison Team to plan the event. This process was not always easy. While the schools were supportive, the local business community had to be convinced of the value of the Expo. The students acknowledge that getting the exhibitors to invest time and energy in the event was the hardest part of the project: ‘it took a while for them [the business community] to warm up to our idea. They were surprised and a bit sceptical that young people could do this. Initially they didn’t understand what was in it for them’.

They took no convincing after the event. The Youth Expo was an outstanding success. Over 800 people attended, including 600 students from across the local schools. More than 60 interactive displays showcased local sports, leisure, recreation, drama, dancing, arts and crafts, hobbies and youth support agencies. The local radio station broadcast live to air from the Expo on the day and the youth council was inundated with letters of support and appreciation from schools, community members
and participating organisations. The councillors particularly noted the favourable response from older people in the community, but most important to them was the sense of empowerment through successful civic engagement, which comes through in this statement by one student:

I’m more outspoken and I’m not scared to have my say. I think I’ve got that from being part of this group. Before I was in the council I didn’t know about this stuff, but now I know we can make a difference … I learnt that it’s just as satisfying to change something in your own backyard as it is to change something in the world … As a young person doing this, I’ve realised I can have a lot of input into my community. I never thought I had that much power to be able to do these things.

Julian Waters-Lynch is a Project Officer with The Foundation for Young Australians. He was previously the Initiatives Manager with the Education Foundation.

Viewpoint

Marion Webster

I started out as a social worker, working with children who were statutory clients and their families who lived across metropolitan Melbourne. I then worked in the north-western suburbs and finally with migrant and refugee families in the inner suburbs. My training and experience working in these areas reinforced what I instinctively knew—that if we were to achieve a satisfactory outcome for the families and children we worked with I needed to make every effort, no matter what their background, history or circumstances, to build a respectful relationship and ultimately a trusting one with them.

Very early on I also understood that due to the complex and often entrenched nature of the problems faced by these families and individuals, they could not be resolved by the limited skills I brought to the relationship. It required a carefully planned, team-based approach, including the involvement of schools, foster families, government agencies, psychiatric services and other support services. Most importantly it required an acknowledgement that the clients themselves were integral to the solutions of their own problems. After all, they were the ones living them.

Inevitably, working with individuals and families experiencing real disadvantage raised a whole range of issues for me about social justice—or the lack of it—and inequality and the lack of it. It also confirmed my view that we must, wherever possible, work to ensure that families and those
experiencing disadvantage are given the physical and emotional resources, and support networks, to deal with the challenges they face. At times this will mean tackling the root causes of problems and advocating for social or structural change, rather than just dealing with short-term solutions.

It was this framework and experience that I brought to philanthropy; some understanding of the complex issues that very disadvantaged and marginalised people face, as well as a commitment at an individual, organisational and structural level to try and tackle the issues head on. And for the first time I had the opportunity to work with foundations and trustees who could, by bringing their experience and funding to these situations, work in partnership with service delivery agencies to make a real and lasting difference.

I therefore found it extraordinary when I started working in philanthropy in the late 1980s to find that many in the sector didn’t see the world quite the same way that I did. At that time, there was little evidence of foundations working collaboratively with each other, let alone with charitable organisations seeking funding to carry out their activities.

The sector at that time, both in Australia and internationally, was characterised by independence and diversity. Foundations can, and still do, choose either to take a short-term approach—in which they operate independently of each other and those they support—or they can be a vehicle by which individuals, families and corporations seek, by working together and making a commitment over time, to influence social policy through private means and solutions—rather than through public discourse and public goods.

So when I started my career in philanthropy there were two immutable things to which I was committed. First, I was convinced that to bring about long-term and sustained positive change in the lives of those experiencing disadvantage, we needed to work together to tackle the complex and entrenched issues they faced. And second, that the contribution of the sector should be more than simple short-term funding support to disadvantaged groups.

What has been very exciting and gratifying is that over the last twenty years, in Australia and overseas, there has been an increasing recognition of the benefits of taking this approach to philanthropic funding. The approach is about working in partnership to develop genuine and respectful partnerships between funder and grant recipient. This includes ensuring that the organisations funded drive the search for and delivery of solutions; making financial commitments to projects that reflect the nature of the task and the desired outcomes; ensuring there are sustainable outcomes for individuals and the underlying causes of discrimination and disadvantage are addressed.
As Chair of Melbourne Community Foundation (MCF), I have been closely involved with encouraging this approach to philanthropic funding. MCF is a public foundation that manages over 120 donor funds. Over the ten years of its operation it has built a community of donors, many of whom work together, as well as with other trusts and foundations, to address disadvantage in the community through the support of projects that will lead to significant change in policies and the way services are delivered.

Independent of any factional interests, MCF is in a perfect position to act as a community convenor bringing people together—people from government, academia, the corporate sector and the philanthropic sector who have ideas, experience and funding and the desire to tackle community issues. MCF's Youth at Risk Initiative is an excellent example of how cross-sectoral collaboration and sustained effort over time can lead to significant change to the way services are delivered to young people in schools who are transitioning from the education system to work.

While the funding that was brought to the table around this Initiative was of paramount importance, what was of equal, if not more, value was the process. For the first time a group of respected organisations working with young people came together with funders and academics to identify the greatest gaps in the provision of youth services. In this case, the funders and potential recipients had never sat around a table before to bring together their collective wisdom, nor had the youth organisations themselves. Putting funding needs and other agendas aside, the group very quickly identified that there was a critical gap in services for young people at risk, that is, school to work transition. If the needs and issues of young people at risk were not picked up at this point, then many would fail to make the transition to paid employment successfully.

In addition, during the process, a forum was held to hear from young people so they could identify for themselves and their fellow students their needs at this critical period and suggest how some of these needs could be addressed.

What followed was the establishment of a project funded collaboratively by government and the philanthropic sector that is piloting a completely new approach to keeping young people engaged in school, and supporting those who don’t remain engaged to make successful transitions into other options. The pilot model will be evaluated and outcomes documented. What is learnt will be broadly disseminated and if successful replicated in other settings or become part of future policy. For students at any stage of their schooling, using this model of collaborative philanthropy to strengthen public education can only lead to positive change, either by providing opportunities for young people that otherwise they might not have or by tackling the disadvantage faced by students in schools.
Very few of us any longer want to practise within that more traditional charity model, of providing handouts to the powerless poor. The relationship has changed from one of patronage and gratitude, to one in which both grantmaker and recipient are seen as partners—each having a constructive voice and a role in the process as well as the outcome.

*Marian Webster OAM is Chair of the Melbourne Community Foundation and a Patron of the Education Foundation*
Systemic solutions for equity

Jack Keating

One of the most obvious and immediate policy solutions to address the issue of educational inequality in Australia is the creation of new school ties between schools and a wider set of agencies and organisations. These entities working together to meet the educational needs of local communities would provide the foundation for a real education revolution.

*The ambitious scale of reform, the changing role of schools and the complex needs of children and families means that no one organization can achieve its aims alone.*

(West-Burnham, Farrar & Otero, 2007)

System performance and equity

There has been a broad trend for the social, economic and political pressures upon schools to increase over the past half century. Schools have always carried family and societal expectations that they would provide an educational foundation of basic skills and knowledge as well as the socialisation for students in their role as community members.

In the post–Second World War era, the role of schooling in securing social and economic advantage began to increase. As such the pressures on schools to gain strong results in student examinations began to grow, and by the 1980s had reached levels that have firmly embedded the Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) as an instrumental and status icon in Australian schooling. Into this decade schools were also asked to assume another responsibility. The collapse of the youth labour market meant that schools had to keep most students on until the end of Year 12 and assist them in their transition to employment.
The past decade has seen an intensification of the demands on schools. Apart from the pressures for civics and life skills education, schools are also being seen as the key institutions that will provide the foundations for the ‘human capital’ that will underpin Australia’s economic future. Furthermore, there is recognition that this objective places demands on all stages of schooling: the early, middle and latter years.

The combination of these pressures and expectations from parents, governments and systems has intensified the competitive pressures on schools in Australia. It is not surprising, therefore, that schools are now subject to a wider range of performance measures. Year 12 results, retention rates and school stage testing plus various qualitative measures are indicators that school leaders cannot ignore.

Of course, most of these indicators are relative measures. This means that they are zero sum measures, so that one school’s strong performance can only be achieved at the cost of another’s poor performance. The use of these measures has also grown during a period when schools were encouraged to take a more market oriented and competitive approach towards their operations. They have been encouraged to compete for the student market by raising their quality and by investing in innovation.

These pressures have challenged the historical idea of the neighbourhood school: the school that provided a quality and general education for the students in its neighbourhood. As a consequence schools, especially at the secondary level, have increasingly looked towards a wider market to gain enrolments. Broadly, school systems have moved towards a more market-based approach where the principle of educational choice is a prominent element of their policy regimes.

The loss and discovery of equity

The impact of these developments has been relatively predictable. Students from better-off families are in a position to exercise choice. Their parents have the income to finance private school fees, and there is a greater capacity to travel to schools outside their local school zones. Their parents are more able to move to the areas of schools with strong reputations, and they themselves are more likely to get high test scores that make them attractive to these high performing schools.

Across a number of countries including Australia, there has been an increasing trend for students from better off families to attend schools that are outside their neighbourhood. The trend is especially high in the large cities (Perry, 2007). The greater movement of students, especially in a context of a relative (to overall population) decline in student numbers,
Beyond the classroom: Building new school networks

has seen a number of schools face major problems in falling enrolments and poor educational outcomes.

As a consequence the issue of school performance and effectiveness has received a considerable amount of attention through research and in education policy. The school effectiveness literature is quite large and it has also been associated with the questions of school teacher and leadership effectiveness.

The current federal government has declared education as among its major priorities (Rudd & Smith, 2007). There are some contrasts between the nature of the current policy discourses on schools with those that were prevalent following the coming to office of the last federal government that also regarded education as a priority. The Whitlam Government and its Schools Commission identified equity in education as a major policy priority and subsequently supported it through a range of programs.

Three decades on and as noted in the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) statement on the future of Australian schooling (Dawkins, 2007), there has been no gain in the level of equity in Australian schooling. This may be due to widening economic inequity and especially to a growing concentration of poverty among families with school-age students in Australia over this period (Senate Community Affairs Reference Group, 2004). However, at the same time there has been a relative decline in the level of policy and program activity in the area of educational equity. The amount of extra resources provided to schools with high concentrations of students from low income households is minimal and the policy approach to addressing the issue of poor outcomes of schools located in poor neighbourhoods has mostly been restricted to discussions about the quality of teachers and school leaders.1

There is perhaps some irony in the fact that equity in schooling has been rediscovered through a testing program. The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and its three sets of survey-based international comparisons have resulted in a considerable amount of reportage of Australia’s comparative ranking as ‘high performance’ and ‘low equity’ (see Dawkins, 2007). While some other organisations such as the Education Foundation (2005) have been addressing equity, it does appear that for the first time in almost two decades this issue is now getting major policy attention in Australia.

Equity in schooling is important for several reasons. Apart from the moral imperative, greater equity will be needed in outcomes in the middle and early years of schooling if higher levels of Year 12 retention and post school education and training are to be achieved. There is also evidence that more equitable school systems provide a better foundation for high levels of social cohesion (Green, Preston & Sabates, 2003).
Achieving equity

Rediscovering equity in schooling is one thing, and doing something about it is another. It will not be possible to turn around the patterns of school choice and associated patterns of social segregation that exist in Australian schooling. The principle of educational choice is firmly embedded in education policy in Australia and schooling cannot reverse patterns of economic and social inequality. Funding regimes will be important, but in the short term it will not be possible for Australian governments to deliver the intense level of resources that can make a difference on a wide scale.

The Education Foundation has argued for some time that individual schools cannot address the question of educational quality and equity alone. The burden upon schools of carrying increased scholastic expectation and social responsibilities has grown over recent decades. Apart from the demand for increased educational standards and improved student transitions within and from schooling, the role of schools as social support agencies has also risen.

These demands have not fallen upon schools equally. The impact of educational choice when superimposed on patterns of social geography have meant that some schools have been required to bear disproportionate responsibility for the educational and social needs of the community. Across Australia, and especially at the secondary level, there are a large number of schools located in low socioeconomic status areas whose student populations represent intense levels of social disadvantage and that correspondingly have weak patterns of educational outcomes (Lamb, 2007; Perry, 2007; Edwards, 2006). These schools certainly cannot do it alone.

There are possibly three barriers to helping these schools. One is the long standing division between government and non-government schools in Australia. A second is the culture of school competition for enrolments and the associated regime of advertising of test schools and exam results, and a third is the tradition of schools as isolated fortresses. To address these barriers, a number of steps are needed.

First, the Education Foundation (2005) has proposed that a different concept of and approach towards public education is needed in Australia. It has noted that large elements of the non-government school sector share most, if not all, of the key features and principles of the government school sector: principles of social justice and social cohesion, shared social values, a shared or common curriculum, relatively open enrolments and low fees. These elements could and should provide the basis of a new public education settlement in Australia that would be similar to those that incorporate most faith schools and were achieved in Europe early in the twentieth century.
Second, a critical foundation is for those school sectors that share common social principles and purposes to not regard each other as simply market competitors. There is an opportunity to do this at national and state levels through the COAG processes and through statements that will follow such documents as Queensland 2010 (Education Queensland, 2000) and Victoria’s Blueprint documents.

A third step would be to work towards a common regulatory platform. There are arguments for and against schools competing with each other. However, all proper markets should have common regulatory platforms. Regulations are designed to serve the public interest and there is a case to be made that the current set of school regulations across Australia do not do this because they are designed to serve school sector interests. Ideally, a regulatory frame should be implemented that equally applies a responsibility upon all publicly funded schools to serve community needs. This solution is not currently tenable within the context of Australian federalism and the associated polity. However, it should remain a goal that can be worked towards over the longer term.

All of these initiatives will face political, logistical and bureaucratic barriers in the short term. Therefore, there is a need for initiatives that can have a more immediate impact.

The idea of schools working together to meet the educational needs of local communities has several attributes. A community will essentially, if loosely, be regarded as geographic and thus will have a diversity of members and educational needs. As such, it will best be served by a variety of schools as well as other providers and services. It provides a basis for linking enrolments and enrolment practices to public funding. In this regard it has a more immediate applicability to low income communities in which parents typically are more likely to send their children to local schools. Thus local schools supported by other agencies working together across sectors to best serve local communities is an obvious and immediate policy agenda to address the issue of educational inequality in Australia. New school ties with each other and a wider set of agencies and organisations if sufficiently widespread would contribute to and provide foundations for an education revolution in Australia.

Federal and state governments

These initiatives would require some major policy rethinking in Australia. Australia is unique among OECD countries in having two publicly funded school systems that are funded by different levels of government and are effectively competing against each other. All other OECD countries fund their government and private schools through more consistent
and integrated platforms (Eurydice, 2007). In Germany, for example, government and church schools are both funded by the state (Länder) level of government and the federal government decided to withdraw from school funding in 2007.

During the periods up until the 1980s in Australia when the school systems were struggling to keep up with student demand, the impact of this ‘dual system’ of schooling was not felt. However, since that time with a continued growth in non-government school numbers and demographic changes, schools have felt pressure to compete for students. So we now have the absurd situation of a government school system funded mostly by state governments and with governance arrangements directed by these governments competing with a non-government system that is mostly funded by the federal government.

The problem is that both levels of government are locked into this situation: they have to provide the resources their schools need to compete. Of course individual schools don’t compete with systems, but with each other. Nor does it matter which schools they compete with or whether these schools are government or non-government. All they are concerned about is maintaining sufficient student enrolments to ensure they remain viable and successful schools.

This has created the familiar pattern of winner and loser schools: the schools with more enrolment requests than they can handle and the ability, if they wish, to be a bit selective about who they let in and who they encourage to lead, and the schools who must take all students no matter what their background and level of need.

Neither level of government thinks it can do much about this. The federal government feels locked into its current funding patterns for non-government schools and the state governments feel they must maintain and protect their successful schools as they can continue to attract the higher performing students and protect the academic reputation of government schooling.

A place-based approach

We have seen how the principle of equity has been corroded through the institutional arrangements of Australian schooling. The end result has been that students with the greatest educational need are frequently located in school contexts that are least conducive to learning due to the high concentration of students with acute educational needs and the associated patterns of low expectations and low morale. These institutional arrangements have also contributed to a situation where these students are delivered fewer educational resources than those available for students with fewer educational needs.
The idea of locating educational resources at a geographic or community level has an obvious advantage in this context. Area or place-based approaches have a number of potential advantages. High concentrations of educational need can be met with appropriate concentrations of resourcing through programs designed to meet these needs. As Rosalyn Black has pointed out elsewhere in this book, a community focus also offers the opportunity to broaden the social mix for students and their schools, and thus reduce the tendency towards low expectations and perceptions of educational ghettos.

A place-based approach offers potential advantages, especially at the secondary level. In countries such as Sweden, Norway and Denmark, the management of schooling has been devolved to the municipal or local government level (Vandenberghe, 1999). Local government is responsible for ensuring that all students are offered a comprehensive range of programs at the upper secondary level. In these countries parents are less inclined to send their children to schools other than their neighbourhood schools, compared to the patterns of student movement in Australia.

In response to issues of the limited capacity of schools to offer a full range of programs, the Welsh Government has organised all of its secondary schools into networks that include the local Further Education (equivalent to Australian Technical and Further Education, TAFE, institutes). These networks are built around the municipal governments and are developing integrated timetables for senior secondary provision. They are based upon some similar and larger initiatives in England such as the Wolverhampton 14–19 Learning Strategy (Beresford, 2006) and the Cumbria.

These initiatives have potential lessons for Australia. We have a diverse range of providers: government schools, Catholic schools and independent schools, TAFE institutes, adult providers and others. There is a wide range of services that can also link with schools in mutually beneficial ways. There are also a range of non-government organisations (NGOs) that are involved in education and support for school-age students.

A feature of students from low income households is that they are more likely to be attached to place than students from higher income backgrounds. They can develop a close affinity with their immediate community and their networks tend to be more localised. There are two broad options in meeting the educational needs of these students.

The first is to allow market forces to continue to work. Under this option, the more mobile students, who typically are better off and have stronger scholastic results, will leave the weaker schools, and the less mobile students who typically are from less wealthy households will stay. Their schools will have declining numbers and falling results. The remaining students will have weaker educational provision, narrower networks and face the prospect of weak educational outcomes and early school leaving.
In secondary education in many parts of Australia, this is the default option and the current experience of many students.

The second is to try to combine the assets and resources of schools, government and non-government, on an area basis. This can strengthen the capacity of all schools to offer a broad range of programs and widen the experiences and networks of the students. These wider ties can include non-school providers, including TAFE and other training organisations.

The natural focus for such initiatives is local government. Apart from an organisational framework, it can facilitate the use of other community resources and the development of wider networks with local business, NGOs and other government services.

Schools in Australia are not going to return to a situation where students are restricted to attending a neighbourhood school. Educational choice is firmly embedded as a principle in Australian schooling. It has obvious benefits for many parents and students. However, in the absence of any other actions it is proving to be a vehicle for the acceleration of educational equality.

The structural arrangements for schooling in Australia and the characteristics of the polity at the federal and state levels have severely hampered the types of government interventions that are available. Therefore schools and their communities need to look sideways. They need to form alliances with their neighbourhood schools and the wider educational and non-educational organisations and agencies across their local regions. In this way equity—the needs of all students—can be placed upon the agenda. Government might also then respond with some resources, and maybe even reflect upon policies such as increased selectivity in secondary schooling that can only exacerbate educational inequality in Australia.

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Viewpoint

Alan Reid

Elsewhere in this book (see Chapter 2), Rosalyn Black has described an example of a collaborative network of secondary schools in the northern suburbs of Adelaide, called the Northern Adelaide State Secondary Schools Alliance (NASSSA). In 2006 and 2007 I was privileged to be the Chair of the NASSSA Board—the main advisory body of the alliance, comprising a number of community members. In this contribution I want to draw on my experience with NASSSA in order to make some general reflective remarks.
about one of the important outcomes of collaboration between schools. In order to do this, I need to provide some background.

The past decade in Australian education has been dominated by a neo-liberal policy regime largely constructed around the notion of choice. From this perspective, parents and students are understood as ‘consumers’ in an education market place, deciding on which school best suits their particular educational needs. The argument is that since choice will keep every school on its toes through competition for ‘custom’, only the most efficient will survive and this, in turn, will drive up educational standards. Of course in an education market, consumers need market information and this has motivated some governments to introduce mechanisms, such as standardised tests, that will enable schools to be ranked on league tables.

In Australia, this hardline market-based approach is softened by the fact that in the public education systems in some states, such as South Australia, school zoning is still in operation. In general terms this means that state school students must attend a public school in their local community. However, the increase in federal funding, especially to low fee ‘private’ schools, has expanded the education market by opening up competition between public and private schools. And over the past decade, some state governments have relaxed some of the zoning regulations and promoted ‘self-managing’ schools—a strategy which has generated competition between state schools.

There are some well-documented problems with an emphasis on individual choice. Not surprisingly, as the market promotes competition so schools begin to spend precious resources on marketing, often emphasising style at the expense of substance. This means that there are fewer resources for the core business of teaching and learning.

But more than this, education markets tend to increase inequalities. The fact is consumers don’t operate on a level playing field. Wherever an education market functions, those who start with the largest helpings of financial and cultural resources invariably have the widest range of choices. They tend to congregate in like schools, and it is not long before hierarchies of schools appear with schools at the top of the league tables being well resourced and those at the bottom struggling for resources and labelled as ‘failing’. Ironically, diversity diminishes as schools try to emulate the market ‘leaders’.

Not surprisingly, educational ‘success’ becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Invariably, the market turns in on itself. Rather than consumers choosing schools, schools start to choose students as they seek to consolidate their market advantage. For example, a recent report in England claims that the pressure to succeed in league tables has caused primary...
schools to stack their intake with bright students from wealthy backgrounds. They do this by making the cost of uniforms and other charges for extra curricular activities beyond the reach of those from poor backgrounds.

However, opposition to the market-driven version of choice does not mean abandoning the idea of choice itself. In my view the challenge is to think differently about the concept of choice itself. A more powerful understanding of choice could be based on collaboration rather than competition. This would promote a policy approach that emphasises the public benefits of public education, rather than causes public schools to become more private. For me, this is a powerful rationale for school networks.

From this policy perspective, rather than the focal unit being an individual school, the unit is a community, perhaps regionally based, with a number of schools. The education resources of the region are pooled in order to broaden the range of possibilities from which students can choose, with different schools emphasising different aspects to broaden the choice. This view of choice starts with the conviction that the conditions for choice are best fostered through collaboration rather than competition.

This is the form of collaboration being practised in the NASSSA schools in South Australia. Over the past few years, the 11 schools in the northern region of Adelaide have been working together to develop a curriculum offering that is as rich and diverse as any in the country. When the model is fully operational, pairs of schools will offer a comprehensive curriculum, supplemented by a special focus (for example, the arts and creative industries; science and technology; human services) that is well resourced and supported by local industry and employers.

As students begin to specialise in their studies they will be able to choose between a range of industry, vocational and academic pathways that are offered across the region. Students are supported to travel the short distances to a neighbouring school to study their chosen focus. And staff across the 11 schools are engaged in collaborative curriculum design and professional development activities, sharing expertise and resources.

Models such as NASSSA create genuine choices for students as diversity flourishes. It is a version of choice that does not rely on spending vast amounts in resources to destroy the competition. Nor does it result in winners and losers organised around wealth and privilege. Importantly, it retains the importance of community as students continue to learn in, and contribute to, their local communities.

With the advent of the Rudd Labor Government, educators must point to the destructive effects of market-based choice organised around competition between schools. But in so doing, they need not contest
the idea of choice. Rather, they can argue that choice in education is too important a concept to be squandered in an unequal education market. Fostering cooperation between schools is a much more powerful policy direction because it is far more likely to result in genuine choice and a fairer system of education.

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**Notes**

1 The observation is based upon data drawn from two of the major school systems in Australia and the advice of senior officials from other mainland states.
New work for networks

Peter Cole

The potential for improving student outcomes is being only partially realised in most Australian school networking arrangements. If they are to contribute to breakthroughs in this area, we need school networks that are formalised, stable, place-based, inclusive, collaborative, reform focused and accountable.

* A school that is collaboratively networked with other schools and with other agencies and organisations can achieve more than a school operating alone.  
(Cole, 2001b)

The network potential

Networks in education are not a new phenomenon. Networks have been a key strategy for facilitating communication between groups of educators with similar needs and shared interests. They have taken a great variety of forms and pre-date everybody currently working in the education sector.

Networks enable classroom teachers to share ideas, plan joint activities and learn from the work of other teachers, they provide a framework for discussions about local facilities and curriculum provision, and they provide a forum within which leaders, support staff and teachers with specialist roles (for example, careers teachers, welfare coordinators and professional learning coordinators) can explore issues related to their specialist roles.

While early versions of networks were often a means for groups such as teachers and school leaders in rural areas to overcome their isolation, and special interest groups to share resources, networks are now ubiquitous as the opportunity to meet with other educators to discuss issues of common interest is widely valued within the profession.
However, the potential that exists within a network structure for lifting student outcome levels and closing the achievement gap between schools is being only partially realised in most current networking arrangements. Also, the potential of electronic social networking tools to take educational networks to another level is only at the emergent stage.

It is clear, however, that some networks will need to become more formalised, stable, place-based, inclusive, collaborative, reform focused and accountable if they are to contribute to breakthroughs in student learning outcomes. That is, while voluntary participation leading to ad hoc membership, attendance, agendas, agreements and outcomes might be suited for collaboration based on ‘self help’ or the strength of ‘mutual interest’, this model is not suitable when the network’s primary purpose is to ‘lift the bar and close the gap’ in performance.

Using networks to promote greater equity between schools and to lift student performance requires network arrangements to embrace all schools in a locality, and for the work of network participants to be systematic, strategic, informed by data and reform oriented. This might mean at their most developed form networks will need to become a formal structure in governance and resourcing of schools.

Earlier in this book, Rosalyn Black identified three significant, interrelated structural barriers to greater collaboration between schools. First, within public discourse the dominant view is that education is a private good and that inequalities within education are best left to the market to sort out. The view that all students should be guaranteed a quality education also has wide support, but there is weaker support for this priority driving decisions about the allocation of public and private resources and the focus of community effort.

Second, the federal system with its different education systems fragments efforts to improve schooling nationally and third, the division of schools into different sectors—government, independent and Catholic—and the tendency for the sectors to operate independently also fragments efforts to improve schooling within a local community.

Notwithstanding these barriers to greater collaboration between schools, there are numerous examples of networks that illustrate that formal and informal linkages between teachers and schools can be sustained when the collaboration produces mutual benefits. An emerging impetus for improving networking, including improving the collaboration between sectors, is evident at the system and local school levels. Indeed, many of the factors (for example, self management, increased accountability and declining student numbers) that heightened competition between schools and an antipathy towards collaboration now tend to be factors helping to heighten awareness of the need for improved networks and networking.
The need for improved networks

This chapter considers a number of factors that are likely to make greater collaboration across school sectors and types and between schools and youth and community agencies an increasingly common occurrence.

**Rapidity of curriculum renewal**

Systemic curriculum reviews generally occur when governments consider that it is time to ‘modernise’ the curriculum or when the current curriculum does not appear to be producing the kind of learning it was intended to. The curriculum of the 1970s usually survived for 15 to 20 years before a major review was initiated. Major reviews appear to be happening after a far shorter interval since the 1990s and nowadays most curriculum frameworks are considered to be ‘works in progress’ that are regularly being amended and improved. Maintaining currency with changing curriculum and assessment requirements and with other school reform initiatives requires schools to be continually adjusting their programs and processes. Networks are one means for lightening the workload associated with developing and implementing new practices as they facilitate schools sharing ideas and implementation strategies.

A cross sectoral professional learning network for teachers of English, Mathematics and Science has been established in the Gippsland region of Victoria by the local regional office of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and supported by the relevant subject associations. The goals of the professional learning network are to improve the working knowledge of Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) study design and assessment approaches; encourage professional interaction across the region and improve regional teachers’ access to authoritative and high quality professional learning. All schools in the region with VCE classes regardless of the sector they were from were invited to participate in the network. The participating teachers are from government schools, Catholic schools, independent Christian schools and a TAFE college.

**A strengthened national curriculum and testing agenda**

Each of the Australian states and territories has initiated curriculum reforms in recent years and the result has been an increasing divergence in approaches. Within each of the states and territories the curriculum below
the senior secondary years has not been common between providers in the government, private and Catholic sectors. This diversity of approaches to curriculum has been a barrier to inter-sectoral networking around curriculum matters and to cross-border collaboration. However, with the imminent development of a national approach to curriculum and the introduction of a national testing regime it is likely that the curriculum in schools across the nation will exhibit more common features than is currently the case. Consequently, this development should help to establish an environment where networking across sectors can be of mutual benefit to all schools in a locality regardless of what sector they are from.

In 2007 all Australian education ministers agreed to replace literacy and numeracy tests administered by state and territory authorities with national tests. Under this agreement students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 from more than 9000 schools across Australia will have sat the first national tests in literacy and numeracy in May 2008. The test results will provide information about how all state and non-state school students are performing in literacy and numeracy against national benchmarks.

The National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy assesses reading, writing, language conventions (including spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy. Results from the tests will be used for reporting to parents, school reporting to their communities, and reporting by states and territories to form a national overview. National testing of student performance is likely to contribute to greater commonality in the teaching of literacy and numeracy across the nation.

Responding to changing demographics, under-performance and the need to broaden provision options

In the late 1980s schools in the inner suburbs of major cities started to experience declining student numbers as inner city families aged and house prices prohibited new home owners with young families moving into the city. Many government and Catholic inner city schools that were established to accommodate the postwar baby boomer generations could no longer attract sufficient numbers to remain viable. In the rural areas, student numbers in small towns that were close to large provincial centres also declined as families moved into the larger centres or chose to bypass the local school in favour of larger city schools.

As a consequence of these changing demographics many schools were closed, merged and/or reconfigured into junior and senior campus in an attempt to re-establish their ongoing viability. Decisions about the fate of schools with declining numbers in an area were made independently by sector authorities. The possibility of combining resources and developing cross-sectoral plans for local school provision was not explored.
At the same time that schools were being closed in one area, other schools were being built in new housing estates in the cities’ burgeoning growth corridors and satellite townships. More recently, with the regeneration of inner city areas, the demand for new schools is no longer confined to newly established, outer suburbs but also extends to inner city locations. With each successive change in demographics in an area, the same ‘go it alone’ approach to resolving how schools should be configured in the face of declining or increasing student numbers has largely persisted.

An example of cross sectoral collaboration is provided by the senior secondary schools in Myrtleford, Victoria. Myrtleford Secondary College and Marian (Catholic) College have had an arrangement for the shared delivery of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) since the late 1970s. Common timetables are established, a joint VCE handbook is issued and students can select units on offer at either school site to construct their VCE course. The schools are located close to each so that any disruptions created by students moving from one campus to another are minimised.

The arrangement is one of mutual benefit. Both schools are relatively small and neither could offer a breadth of subjects at the VCE level without the sharing arrangement. Indeed, if such an arrangement was not in place the town could lose many of its young people to schools in the nearby provincial cities of Wangaratta and Wodonga.

Changing demographics can also lead to increased competition between schools in a community and undermine informal collaborative arrangements that might exist between the schools. For example, a long standing shared VCE arrangement between three secondary schools—one in the private sector—in a rural Victorian town was terminated when one of the schools started to attract a larger proportion of students than the others and thereby threatened their viability. All schools in the town were worse off in terms of the breadth of VCE subjects they could offer students after the sharing arrangement was terminated.

Most recently, the desire to regenerate schooling in localities where inequities in schooling outcomes have been perpetuated over many years has meant a total rethinking of the kinds of interventions that will be necessary to improve school performance. In some instances local primary and secondary schools have been involved in devising an education renewal plan for their locality that has resulted in the closure of school sites, the relocation of schools and the construction of ‘state-of-the-art’ schools. Collaboration between the schools has been an essential feature of these renewal initiatives and the expectation that collaboration will continue
once the new arrangements are in place is built into the design of the new schooling arrangements.

The Broadmeadows regeneration plan was announced in May 2007 by the Victorian Government. It was one of the projects in the government’s $93 million budget allocation to fund the regeneration of schools in selected local communities. Local communities must develop plans for a new curriculum and facilities to transform education options for their students to be eligible for regeneration funding. Under the Broadmeadows regeneration project 17 Broadmeadows schools will be merged or closed and relocated to become four large schools housed in brand new ‘state of the art’ facilities.

**Greater diversity in the student cohort**

Several state governments have set school retention targets that schools will be expected to meet. Increased retention can often only be achieved by offering greater breadth and special programs in the senior years. When retention rates are already fairly high the challenge for schools is to hold those students who may not be focused on a university pathway and who are looking for the opportunity to undertake work-related applied learning courses.

Vocational courses often require high cost facilities and equipment that many schools have difficulty providing. Through necessity, arrangements for these students often need to be negotiated with providers in the TAFE and Adult Education sectors. The recognition that schools working in isolation will find it increasingly difficult to cater for the broad range of talents and interests of students in the senior years is resulting in more and more schools exploring formal and informal arrangements for sharing teachers, facilities and programs across schools and between schools and other providers.

**A growing desire by other agencies in the community to offer assistance to schools**

Schools are already drawing on the goodwill of local industries and businesses so students can gain work experience and work placements. Local arrangements between schools and industry are also resulting in the corporate sector contributing to a variety of program initiatives (for example facilities and grounds improvements and the provision of in-kind expertise to assist schools with their planning, training or other matters).
Many philanthropic and community service organisations have charters that require them to direct their efforts and resources to assisting those in need and often schools are seen to be a good conduit for funding initiatives that assist young people with special needs.

As Rosalyn Black has outlined earlier, educational authorities at their various levels and many individual and groups of schools have established relationships and arrangements with external agencies and individuals that are producing benefits for schools. However the potential for growing mutually beneficial arrangements between schools and the corporate and philanthropic sectors has barely been tapped.

This is partly because external agencies have difficulty identifying which requests for assistance to respond to (for example local industry may want to assist but does not want to be seen as playing favourites by supporting some local schools but not others that are equally in need) and determining what support is going to generate the best outcomes for the school and students (agencies want to see some positive results from their social investment). Furthermore schools are generally unsophisticated when it comes to dealing with possible benefactors and have limited resources to devote to attracting them and sustaining a relationship over time. It is not part of the government school culture to establish strong former student networks and to benefit from endowments that flow from an ongoing concern for and loyalty to the school.

It seems highly likely that inequities in corporate, philanthropic and individual support are likely to arise when the individual school becomes the focus for external support. Often agreements between a school and an external funding agency are arranged on the basis of a personal link between the school and the agency (for example, a parent works in or knows the right person to contact in the company, a company executive attended the school or met someone from the school at a social gathering) or some other serendipitous factor such as the enterprise and persistency of a particular staff member. While relationship building is a critical factor in cementing linkages between schools and external agencies, the ability to establish such relationships is not equal.

The fact that wealthier schools generally are able to attract greater financial and other support than poorer schools suggests that equity would be better served if a properly constituted and formalised local school network rather than the individual school became responsible for managing relationships with external support agencies. Not only are networks of schools more likely to provide diverse opportunities for community agency involvement, to be strategic in the distribution of support (as network data can assist with a needs analysis) and to hold schools accountable for the use of additional resources, they are also more likely to have the resources to
devote to nurturing good relationships between the network and agencies in the community and to support the replication of successful programs in other network settings.

The emergence and rapid growth of Internet-based social networking tools

Most visions of learning for the future suggest that schools will be using new technologies to engage students in ways not previously possible, creating new learning and teaching possibilities, enhancing achievement and extending interactions with local and global communities. New and current technologies will also enable teachers to deepen their networks.

When it comes to networking in the future it is predicted that social networking software will become an important means for teachers to establish and sustain networks with educators locally and globally. Wikipedia advises that web-based, social network services (for example, MySpace and Facebook) provide a variety of ways for users to interact (for example, chat, messaging, email, video, voice chat, file sharing, blogging, discussion groups) and contends that:

> Social networking has revolutionised the way we communicate and share information with one another in today’s society. Various social networking websites are being used by millions of people every day on a regular basis and it now seems that social networking is a part of everyday life.¹

While social networking software such as blogs and wikis² are currently very much a part of young people’s networking tools, they do not as yet feature strongly as a means for teachers to network with each other or those in the wider community. However, the potential of the digital tools for extending networking is enormous.

Most of the factors discussed above are being experienced to a greater or lesser extent in schools regardless of what sector they belong to. However, systemic schools are more likely to be caught up in discussions about school rationalisation and to be part of regeneration efforts. Indeed, as systemic schools are facing similar issues in local areas, the recent announcement that opportunities for greater collaboration between Catholic and government schools at the systemic and local levels are being explored comes as no surprise. In Victoria, for example, the recent inclusion of the early childhood sector in the education portfolio will also generate new collaborative arrangements between agencies and providers in these sectors. These cross-sector developments cannot be advanced through ad hoc local arrangements. To be effective they will need to be underpinned by systemic policies and agreements and supported through formalised regional and network arrangements and practices.
What has been tried elsewhere?

Research on the impact of education networks is unfortunately limited and moreover the findings are inconclusive. Nevertheless, the overall impression is that benefits can flow from schools working in various types of networks.

Jackson (2006) outlines a series of policies that have been adopted over the past 20 years in the United Kingdom to stimulate collaboration between schools. These include the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative, Education Action Zones, Leading Edge Partnerships, Specialist Schools and Excellence in Cities. He concluded that these initiatives ‘have tended not to be models designed either to be sustained or scaled’ and in his role as Director of the National College for School Leadership in the United Kingdom he sought to establish a network of schools engaged in ‘orchestrated and disciplined network learning’.

The Networked Learning Communities (NCL) program was a large-scale initiative designed to generate evidence about how networks can make a contribution to raising student achievement and attainment, about the leadership practices needed for collaborative learning and about network relationships with local authorities and community partners. It ran from 2001 to 2006. NCLs were fundamentally concerned with promoting learning: learning for students, teachers and leaders and between schools and networks. While this program was considered to be successful (for example networks raised student achievement, changed practices in schools, fostered rigorous and challenging joint work and provided substantial learning about networks), the program evaluators observed that:

> Although networking schools can create the conditions for influencing how teachers and leaders think and act, it is not guaranteed.

(Earl & Katz, 2006)

They suggested that ‘networks of schools should be places of learning, not delivery mechanisms’ and highlighted the following implications for policy and practice. Policy makers need to:

- ensure that the enhancement of student learning drives the work of the network
- ensure that joint work that is rigorous and challenging is at the heart of network relations and activities
- motivate and support leaders to be involved in network activities
- assist network people to develop the skills for collaborative enquiry (that is, problem identification, considering evidence and testing of practice).

Another perspective on networks in the United Kingdom is provided by Hannon (2005) who observes that the networking landscape in United
Kingdom schools ‘is at best confusing’. Funded school-to-school network programs Hannon refers to include Excellence in Cities, Leadership Incentive Grant, Networked Learning Communities, Federations and Specialist Schools, Leading Edge Partnerships, Primary Strategy Learning Networks and Education Improvement Networks. She contends that the latter three network arrangements ‘have the potential to bring networking between schools to scale’ and identifies the following three purposes of networks:

- enhancing the curriculum on offer to students
- accelerating improvement and stimulating innovation
- creating new units of service delivery.

In contrast with the evaluators of the Networked Learning Communities, who see learning and not service delivery as the focus for networks, Hannon advocates the expansion of networks that create new units of service delivery and advises that Local Education Authorities (LEAs) that previously were responsible for delivering and coordinating policy initiatives are being replaced by Children’s Services Authorities (CSAs). CSAs aim to improve the coordination of education and health and social services that affect children and young people. Their responsibilities include supporting schools in raising educational standards, keeping children safe, looking after children in care and coordinating and developing help for children with special needs. Through the various network initiatives and models, most schools in the United Kingdom are in at least one formal network and many are in two or more networks.

One overriding conclusion that we can draw from this research overview is that schools are positive about their involvement in networks. Over time, they become more sophisticated in their networking behaviour, leveraging greater benefits from partnerships and improving their capacity to engage with diverse groups and stakeholders in the wider community.

Moving ahead

The test of the success of a network is the extent to which it improves opportunities and outcomes for students. The argument advanced here is that school networks extend the capacity and flexibility of individual schools to meet the learning and social needs of their students. They are also a means for maximising the education, training and employment opportunities for young people in the network area.

Most current informal network arrangements facilitate the sharing of ideas and serve this purpose well for those who choose to participate. However, when network participation is voluntary and only founded on sharing with colleagues the benefits tend to be micro (confined to the
individual and his or her students) rather than macro (have an impact across the participant’s school or across the network). Self-help networks serve an important function in facilitating communication and sharing between teachers and others in schools, but in order to have a macro impact networks need to have broader purposes. They must have a strong commitment to taking collaborative action to improve the opportunities and outcomes of network students and be held accountable for the actions they take. This means that the current array of ad hoc and informal networks will need to be extended to include a formalised network structure that becomes another layer in the management and support of schools.

Education authorities will need to play a lead role in facilitating and resourcing these networks: in training and supporting network leaders, in using networks as a conduit through which specialist services will be shared, and in establishing network administrative, monitoring and accountability systems. While the network should not replace the school as the key unit of accountability, if networks are to become a means for collectively improving the learning opportunities and outcomes of students within the network, some network accountabilities will also need to be established.

Formalised and locality-based networks, with systemic support, would need to demonstrate a commitment to collaboration and cooperation. New accountabilities for these networks might include the support or delivery of:

- effective network governance (for example, clarity of purpose and vision, strategic directions established, action plans being implemented, milestones being achieved and effectiveness being monitored)
- efficient facilities usage across the network (for example, by other network schools and community groups and at weekends, after school and holiday times).

Peter Cole is Director of PTR Consulting

**Viewpoint**

**Eric Sidoti**

I live in the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney. ‘The Mountains’ is made up of 26 townships in a local government area of 1433 square kilometres, stretching from 50 to 120 kilometres west of Sydney. Our city is nestled within 1000 square kilometres of World Heritage listed national park. The total population is a tad over the 76,000 mark. Mountains families have the full menu of schooling options on offer: government, Catholic parish schools and a systemic high school, low-fee Christian schools, Steiner variations, and the independent grammar schools (primary and secondary).
The experience of watching my own kids grow up in this environment has led me to question many of the presumptions we make about contemporary schooling.

How often, for example, have we heard our political leaders, educators and commentators of various ilk talk about ‘school and community’? The premise often is that schools are islands isolated from what is going on around them, that education must move ‘beyond the classroom’ and that new connections need to be developed to bring the community into the school and to take the school into the community through industry partnerships or service learning, for example.

I have been one of them.

It strikes me these days that we may actually need to re-visit the way in which we conceptualise these relationships.

It may be more productive and is, in my view, more accurate to start with the premise that our schools are an integral part of our community and not something separate from it. The degree of parental involvement; the presence of local elders, business, religious, political and community members in the school; the presence of students in workplaces, neighbourhood centres, community service centres and at local sporting and entertainment facilities—these are as much indicators of the community's health as they are of a particular school's quality.

A critical difference in this fledgling conceptual framework though is that it throws the light not just on the relationship a given school might have with ‘the community’, but also on the way schools within a region relate to each other and how they collectively operate as part of their community.

These thoughts wandered aimlessly through my mind over the years as I stood by the touchline as hundreds of kids from schools all over the Mountains competed in the annual touch football competition organised by the little parish school, St Canice’s, or as I sat in the packed auditorium at Katoomba Public School to hear the combined choir of the upper Mountains primary schools. There was a time when the independent school’s sports department organised inter-school netball, basketball and indoor soccer competitions at its top-notch indoor stadium. It always seemed a shame that these cooperative endeavours were limited and then diminished further in the secondary years.

Many young people themselves have continued to forge relationships across the boundaries of their particular school. This is especially true for those involved in district sport, performance, religious groups and of course those working locally.

I am sure every community has its own examples.

Yet these remain but hints of possibility rather than illustrations of the defining characteristics of our current educational arrangements.
If we were to recognise that schools are—individually and collectively—an integral part of their community, if we were to develop policies based on such a premise and to act accordingly then I would venture the view that the educational environment would be significantly, perhaps radically, different.

In the short space available, let me simply sketch a few of the potential implications.

First, we would need to explicitly recognise in policy and practice that the community, and by extension all schools within a community, share responsibility for the education and wellbeing of children and young people.

In this construction, each school has a particular responsibility for its own students but retains a broader responsibility for all children in that community. This would mean, for example, schools consciously working together to ensure every child has access to education that is relevant, of good quality and that meets his or her individual needs.

Second, it would require active measures to give effect to these responsibilities.

Every school would be expected as a minimum to encourage its students to know and seek to understand their peers within the community. This implies more than rhetoric and good-intentioned statements; it necessitates opportunities of a practical nature. Shared courses and facilities; coordinated excursions; collective endeavours (sport, music, community service) for students across the public–private, religious–secular and comprehensive–selective divides would be givens.

This in turn implies a need for some degree of common planning and the possibility of common staff days and professional development opportunities.

Priority would be given to cooperative arrangements reflected in incentives and structures as well as in the funding provisions.

Third, it would require an end to the demarcations between schools that militate against young people’s or the community’s benefit. Every school has its own character and that can be and should be a good thing but it is time perhaps for us to question any school’s or even group of schools’ educational segregation.

Finally, I would suggest, that conceiving of our schools as integral parts of their community ultimately compels us to re-visit long-standing notions of public education.

To a greater or lesser extent almost all education is public education: two reasons for this are that almost all education is a public good and should be recognised and valued as such; almost all education is publicly funded and supported to some degree.
If this is so, then perhaps we need to separate out, for example, ‘public education’ and ‘public schools’ in our policy considerations and development.

In all this there are two tenets that would resume a higher place in Australian education: the best interests of each child as a primary consideration in policy and provision; and schools as social and socialising environments.

None of this is easy. For many it may be contentious. But then again education should be challenging, encouraging of debate and open to new ways of looking at the world.

*Eric Sidoti is Director of the Whitlam Institute within the University of Western Sydney*

### Notes

2. [http://en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)—A blog is a website, usually maintained by an individual, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. As of December 2007, the blog search engine Technorati was tracking more than 112 million blogs. A wiki is a collection of web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content. It enables documents to be written collaboratively. Wikis are often used to create collaborative websites and to power community websites.
3. For example, the Leading Edge Partnership program involves over 200 lead schools working with some 800 partners to raise school achievement—this is around a third of United Kingdom secondary schools.
Conclusions

New networks or better networks?

This book proposes that Australia needs effective education networks that can serve a number of purposes. These include:

- reducing the educational inequity that arises from a divided and competitive school system
- supporting collective strategies between local schools regardless of the system to which they belong
- encouraging a seamless learning experience for children and young people
- enabling shared professional learning for teachers
- engaging parents in their children’s learning
- giving children and young people a genuine voice in their community
- sharing important resources between schools and their communities
- maximising the impact of services conducted by the community sector
- universalising the contributions of business and philanthropy to school education.

There are already numerous formal and informal networks in Australia that are operated by, with or for schools. These networks represent a wide range of purposes and applications with broad scope and membership, which makes it difficult to identify their common characteristics. On the one hand, this diversity represents a risk to the development of future networks because it leaves us without clear models of effective practice. On the other hand, it represents an important ability for schools and other agencies to direct their responses to meet the specific needs of children, young people and communities.
It may be that Australia does not need more education networks: in fact, it may be that some existing networks should be refined or rationalised to provide better, less overlapping and less confusing services. What it does need is a clear mandate under which all networks can operate.

A mandate of this kind would recognise that joined-up or collaborative arrangements within and between schools and among schools and other agencies cannot operate solely on the goodwill and voluntary participation of committed individuals and organisations. That is a certain recipe for burnout. Instead, a mandate would act as a social contract to enshrine our collective responsibility for the learning and life outcomes of all children and young people. It would provide a framework for Australian school education that breaks down the barriers of sectors and systems, encourages new forms of leadership, governance and funding and harnesses significant new resources for the work of schools.

Elsewhere, similar government mandates—Every Child Matters in the United Kingdom and No Child Left Behind in the United States—provide a powerful government framework for joined-up services for children and young people including education. A similar legislative framework or set of frameworks for Australia could create a significant and needed opportunity to rethink some of the premises that currently underpin school education in this country.

A mandate for collaboration

A mandate for the learning and wellbeing of all young Australians should do the following:

1. reflect our highest aspirations for children and young people
2. ensure that children and young people are both benefactors and leaders
3. connect the top-down to the bottom-up
4. combine place-based solutions with high universal standards
5. build capacity for collaboration
6. provide a conduit for shared resourcing
7. rethink educational success.

Reflecting our highest aspirations

Australian school education should be unambiguous in its aspirations for children and young people. A mandate for the learning and wellbeing of all young Australians should create a bigger picture, a common language
and an authorising environment to which all parts of society can sign up to improve outcomes for children and young people. It should aim for the most ambitious end of the network spectrum to imagine a new kind of opportunity-rich school that meets the needs of all children, all young people and the whole community.

**Ensuring that children and young people are both benefactors and leaders**

All strategies for school education should have an unwavering focus on producing the best possible outcomes for children and young people. This means that collaborative partnerships and networks should not be allowed to degenerate into bureaucratic exercises. Instead, they should be genuine conduits for improvement in the way that Australia delivers educational opportunities and supports the wellbeing of children and young people. They should also recognise and reward the role that young people can play in leading collaborative partnerships and networks that widen their own opportunities and build social capital in their communities. Young people’s civic engagement and leadership should be supported and reflected by the formal school curriculum and assessment mechanisms.

**Connecting the top-down to the bottom-up**

Any vision for Australian school education has to be built on a firm foundation. The Australian school education landscape is filled with initiatives driven from the grassroots or delivered by government without any mechanism to connect or navigate them. The new relationships being navigated by state and federal governments should reduce the complexity of education and other service provision for children and young people. They should also provide the means to coordinate and strengthen the multitude of locally developed education networks across the country that are attempting to meet similar needs.

**Combining place-based solutions with high universal standards**

While school education partnerships and networks should be responsive to local conditions, it is essential that they do not fuel the discrepancies between local areas. If networks in disadvantaged communities can draw only on the resources and capabilities of those communities, they are likely to reinforce the inequitable outcomes that they are created to address. Place-based approaches must be supported by policy to ensure the application of universally high standards and accountabilities across all localities.
Building capacity for collaboration

The success of any network depends on the capacity of the people who participate in it. If Australian schools are to work together and with other agencies without placing stress on already scarce resources, professional training and support is needed. School leaders need training in effective network leadership, teachers need professional learning about how to work cooperatively both within and between schools, and school and community sector staff need training in how to work together in the most mutually supportive way. As well as skilling the existing workforce, new roles should be funded to support and strengthen collaboration. These could include partnership brokers, network coaches, cross-sectoral liaison staff and parent liaison staff.

Providing a conduit for shared resourcing

School education partnerships and networks cannot be the sole responsibility of government. Local, place-based networks in particular represent an opportunity for government, business and philanthropy to fund joint initiatives in communities of need or to resource some of the new workforce roles described above. They also represent an opportunity for government and philanthropy in particular to rethink their traditional emphasis on new or pilot practice and to fund existing collaborations to become stronger and more sustainable. This should include funding research into the impact of collaborative partnerships and networks and what they require to succeed.

Rethinking educational success

A school education system built on collaboration offers an important opportunity to rethink how we view educational success and how we assess it. In a collaborative system, schools should be measured by the degree to which they work with one another and with other agencies, the extent to which they engage their local community and the value that they add to student achievement in the face of disadvantage. Students should be recognised for the work they do to build connections across their schools and local communities.
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Index

A
Agora Think Tank (Vic) 12
alliances 8, 20, 56–7, 87
Australia 2020 Summit 3, 38
Australian Business and Community
Network 59, 61
Australian Social Inclusion Board 11

B
Blue Mountains (NSW) 101–2
Blueprint for Early Childhood
Development and School
Reform 37
bottom-up learning 106–7
Broadmeadows Schools Regeneration
Project 63, 96
brokers, partnership 22, 54
business 58–61
Business Council of Australia (BCA)
59, 65
business–school partnerships 59, 61,
66–7
Business Working with Education 60–1

C
Central Business District (Melbourne)
62, 64
Centre for Community Child Health
36–8
Centre for Strategic Education (Vic) 12
Chaney, Michael 4
Changemakers Australia 56
child poverty 4
Children’s Community Garden (Doveton)
73
choice, educational 81, 83, 87–90
City Heights K–16 Educational
Collaborative (USA) 30–1
clusters 8, 32, 41, 49
Colac–Otway Shire 74–5
collaboration 6
barriers to 12–15, 43–4, 83, 92
between school systems 1–2, 6, 42
cross-sectoral 12, 16, 38, 54, 57–8,
84, 95, 98
in local areas 2, 17, 98
mandate for 106–7
place-based 28–9, 54–5, 106–8
shared infrastructure in 23–4
vs. competition 42–3, 81, 83, 85,
88–9
young people 71–6
collaborative curriculum 89
collaborative philanthropy 57–8, 78
collectives 8
councils crossesectoral collaboration 12, 16, 38,
54, 57–8, 84, 95, 98
cross-sectoral networks 25, 31, 53, 63–4,
94
cross-sectoral partnerships 12, 23,
27–8
Ctrl-Alt-Delete 75
curriculum 31–2, 45–6, 89–90
collaborative 89
national 93–4
reforms 92–4
D
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 41, 60
Derwent District (Tas) 35
digital technology 70, 98
disadvantaged communities 12, 19–20, 39–40, 60
disadvantaged students 5, 39–40
disengagement of students 35, 39–41
Doing It Differently project 40–1
Doveton North Primary School 72

E
early intervention 36–7
eyears (ages 0–5) 25, 36–9
Education Foundation 1–2
educational choice 81, 83, 87–90
educational equity 4–7, 80–3
educational inequities 3, 5–6, 9, 11, 42, 84, 87–8, 92, 105
educational sectors 14–15, 44, 86, 92
educational success 1–2, 106, 108
electronic networks 10, 48–9, 92, 98
equity, educational 4–7, 80–3
Extended Schools program (UK) 24

F
Foundation for Young Australians 1–2
formal networks 45–6, 49, 92, 97, 101, 105
funding 20–1, 55–6, 58–9, 77–8, 83–5, 96–7
federal vs. state 13–14, 84–5
future of partnerships 20–1
Future of Schooling in Australia 5, 34

G
globalisation 68–70

H
Helen Macpherson Smith Trust 56, 58
hubs, community 23–5, 73
Hume Global Learning Centre 63–4

I
inequities, educational 3, 5–6, 9, 11, 42, 84, 87–8, 92, 105
informal networks 10, 100–1, 105

J
Jessie’s Creek 73–4
joined-up approach 7–8, 11–12, 53, 106
in government 10–11

K
Knowsley (UK) 45

L
leadership 21, 44–6, 50, 60, 107
Leading Edge Partnerships 99–100, 104
league tables 88
learning cities 63–4
Linking Schools and Early Years Project 38–9, 57
Linking to Learn & Learning to Link 54–5
literacy 94
Local Governance Association (Vic) 12
local networks 14, 22, 54, 84
local partnerships 7, 19–30

M
Macpherson Smith Community Alliance 56
MacroMelbourne 58
mandate for collaboration 106–7
market-based school systems 13, 81, 86
Melbourne Cares 59–61
Melbourne Central Business District 62, 64
Melbourne Community Foundation (MCF) 56–8, 78–9
mentors 25, 43–4, 75
middle years (years 5–9) 39–40
Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 5
Mission Australia 54–5
multiculturalism 66, 69
Myrtleford 95
Myuna Farm 72–3

N
National Assessment Program 94
National College for School Leadership (UK) 8, 45, 99
national curriculum 93–4
National Reform Agenda (COAG) 5, 11
national testing 94
Neighbourhood Renewal areas (Vic) 24, 72–4
networked learning 25, 42, 49
Networked Learning Communities (NCL) 99–100
networks 7–8, 91–2
advantages of 100
cross-sectoral 25, 31, 53, 63–4, 94
electronic 10, 48–9, 92, 98
formal 45–6, 49, 92, 97, 101, 105
informal 10, 100–1, 105
limitations of 100–1
local 14, 22, 54, 101
purposes of 100
reform of 92–6
research on 99–100
social 70–1, 98
systemic 7, 98, 101
typologies of 8–10
Northern Adelaide State Secondary Schools Alliance (NASSSA) 46–7, 87, 89
Notschool.net 49
numeracy 94

O
outcomes, social 4, 16

P
Pakenham Springs Primary School 24
parents 27–30, 39–41, 47–8, 55, 73, 81
partnerships 8
brokers 22, 54
business–school 59, 61, 66–7
cross-sectoral 12, 23, 27–8
funding of 20–1
local 7, 19–30
school–business 59, 61, 66–7
school–community 19–22, 31, 41
pattern of disadvantage 5, 6, 85
performance measures 80–2, 92, 94
personalised learning 34–5, 39, 47, 49, 50
philanthropic sector 55–8, 72, 77–8, 97
place-based collaboration 28–9, 54–5, 85–6, 106–8
Price Charities 30
Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 82
public funding of school systems 84

R
R E Ross Trust 38, 57
Reichstein Foundation 55
retention rates 81–2, 96
ruMAD (are you Making A Difference?) 71–5

S
San Diego State University 31
school–business partnerships 59, 61, 66–7
school–community partnerships 19–22, 31, 41
School of the 21st Century program (USA) 27–8
school systems 4, 13, 42
collaboration between 1–2, 6, 42
market-based 13, 81, 86
public funding of 84
school zoning 81, 88
schools as hubs 2, 23–5, 73
sectors, educational 14–15, 44, 86, 92
shared infrastructure in collaboration 23–4
social capital 25–8, 31–2
Social Exclusion Unit (UK) 11
Social Inclusion Initiative (SA) 11, 47
social networks 70–1, 98
social outcomes 4, 16
social responsibility 58–9
socioeconomic background 4, 14, 36, 48, 65, 83, 85–6, 89
student-centred learning 34–5, 39, 47, 49, 50
student disengagement 35, 39–41
student initiatives 71–6
student welfare 40
students, disadvantaged 5, 39–40
success, educational 1–2, 106, 108
support services 27, 53
systemic networks 7, 98, 101

T
TAFE institutes 86–7
Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) 80
testing, national 94
top-down learning 69, 106–7

V
Victorian Council of Community Service (VCOSS) 16–18
Victorian Health Inequalities Network 12
vocational courses 96

W
welfare, student 40
Whitfield District Primary School 73–4
Winsford (UK) 45

World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO) 12
Worlds of Work (WOW) 62

Y
Yarra Valley eLearning Community 49
Yewlands Family of Schools (UK) 45–6
young people 68–78
    collaboration 71–6
Youth at Risk initiative 57–8, 78
Youth Expo 75

Z
zoning 81, 88
Beyond the Classroom calls for new models of schooling that recognise that the future of young people is the responsibility of the whole community. These models should form the basis of a new social alliance across school systems enabling all young people to take an active—if not leading—role in that community, beyond the school gates.

Beyond the Classroom is based on the findings of research carried out by the Education Foundation (now in alliance with the Foundation for Young Australians). The message that emerges from the research is that tinkering around the edges of schooling will not provide solutions to the widening gaps in education that limit opportunities for many young Australians.

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