Learning to Live With Complexity

(SOCIAL TRENDS AND THEIR IMPACT ON QUEENSLAND EDUCATION)

Abstract

This paper describes the new economic, social and political realities facing Australia and argues that education needs more than a vision of disaster as the driving force for change.

It also argues that children should be the starting point for any discussion about the future of schooling and their needs should inform the structures and processes of education at every level of the education system.
Hugh Mackay (1993) suggests that “we are all pioneers in the New Australia” and “must prepare our students for life in a discontinuous society”. Paul Kelly (1992) wrote of Australia’s last few decades as “The End of Certainty”. Mark Latham (1999), even more dramatically, quotes H.G. Wells as saying “human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe”.

This paper argues that education needs more than a vision of disaster as the driving force for change.

It also argues that children should be the starting point for any discussion about the future of schooling and their needs should inform
the structures and processes of education at every level of the education system.

There is no doubt that Australian society has been through some remarkable changes, or that we face further transformation as the global economy and the miracles of post-industrial technology affect our lives. But it is my view that -

(a) the fall-out from change is not as negative as some would have it;

(b) with a robust education system we can weather the storm; and

(c) we should welcome the chance to transform such key social institutions as the schools for the good of Australian society as a whole.

Perhaps the best summary of what our school system faces in the next few decades is

“Learning to live with complexity.”

This is the challenge facing every individual and social institution in Australia as we enter the new millennium and a new era where knowledge triumphs over information and technology transforms the nature of time and space. It is a challenge to become a learning society in which global forces will favour the adaptable and the key resource will be human and social capital rather than physical or economic resources.

Because human and social capital develop within families and through wider social networks, our schools must be re-conceptualised as just one part of the learning culture and become embedded in society in new ways.
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SECTION A : CONFRONTING THE ECONOMIC ARGUMENT

i. Structural Change in Australia’s Economy

No matter how we define the purposes of education, students leaving our schools all face the need to earn a living and lead a productive, meaningful life.


For this reason, all those concerned with the nature of education and our school system have to confront, not hide from, the new economic and political realities facing Australia as a nation. It affects our family life, the web of community relations and the individual identity of every citizen.

If we take a longer-term view of Australia’s development, the picture is one of growth and rising living standards. Life expectancy has risen 60 per cent since the 1880s (from 51 to 81 years for women, from 47 to 75 years for
men). Indeed the ageing of Australia’s population (not as steep a rise as in many other countries because of immigration), reflects improvements in sanitation, water, housing and nutrition which affected, first, infant mortality rates and, second, the age of death for the elderly. Australia’s GDP has increased fivefold in real terms this century, and has doubled since 1950. Income distribution became more equal between 1933 and 1969, hours of work were reduced, years of education increased and the status of women improved markedly. Overall, the quality of life improved for the majority of people.

However, it is no secret that things have changed. The increase in life expectancy levelled off in the 1960s because of the rise of ‘lifestyle diseases’, then improved, but has again dropped. Unemployment is now higher than at any time outside the great Depressions, largely because economic growth has been uncoupled from improved job opportunities. In fact, with each new round of industry restructuring, job shedding, technological change, unemployment ‘ratchets up’ to a higher level. Hours of work have increased for those in full-time jobs, decreased for those in part-time, casual and insecure positions. As a result, household incomes are now more unequal than at any previous period, with many families living below the poverty line. Travers & Richardson summed up the current change in their recent book Living Decently. “At the end of the 1980s, most Australians were indeed ‘living decently’, with high levels of affluence and relative equality. They attribute this positive picture to four factors: low unemployment, a ‘good enough’ social security system, very high levels of home ownership, and high quality government provision of specific goods and services such as health and education. They note that all these factors are under threat in the 1990s.” (Travers, P. & S. Richardson (1993), Living Decently: Material Well-being in Australia, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, cited in Eckersley, 1998, op. cit. p. 26)

As for most other Western nations, advances in education and technology have driven a shift from productive work based largely on agriculture, mining and manufacturing to what are loosely called the service industries. The average rate of structural change has been higher for Australia during the 1980s than in the 1970s and higher, on average, than for other OECD countries, lower than for the leading Asian economies. Between 1981 and 1996, the employment share for the services sector increased in 109 of
Australia’s 113 regions, while that for agriculture declined in 88 regions. Employment in the services sector has grown from 2.6 million in 1966 to 6.0 million in 1996, while the broad ‘production’ industries have employed a static 2.3 million workers, a drop from 46 per cent to 28 per cent of those in the labour force.

Of these service sector jobs, 51 per cent are occupied by women, and 29 per cent are part-time, but this figure varies, with over 40 per cent part-time in hotels, restaurants and retail. Moreover, there are reduced opportunities for blue-collar workers (40.6% in 1986, down to 35.7% in 1995) and increased white-collar opportunities, with jobs requiring a greater level of skill than in previous decades. (Australian Social Trends, 1996, ABS Cat. 4102.0, p. 97)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fastest-growing Occupations, 1986/7-1995/6</th>
<th>Fastest-shrinking Occupations, 1986/7-1995/6</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal service workers</td>
<td>Miscellaneous clerks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business professionals</td>
<td>Construction &amp; mining labourers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical &amp; science technicians</td>
<td>Metal &amp; machine tradespersons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous professionals</td>
<td>Machine operators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social professionals</td>
<td>Farmers &amp; farm managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data processing &amp; business machine operators</td>
<td>Stenographers &amp; typists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other teachers &amp; instructors</td>
<td>Stationary plant operators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing supervisors</td>
<td>Engineering &amp; building technicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tellers, cashiers &amp; ticket salespersons</td>
<td>Printing tradespersons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other metal tradespersons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is significant also, is that regions with similar rates of structural change had markedly different employment outcomes, largely reflecting the wider range of alternative employment options in metropolitan regions and the higher dependence of many rural regions on one or two core industries.

As a result, the life chances of Australians now depend even more heavily on regional location, inequality in incomes reflects a complex interaction between
educational skill levels and geographic industry sector concentration, and the school system can no longer assume that one type of curriculum experience will fit all students as preparation for productive labour.

While it is easy to blame impersonal global forces for this undermining of the old order of certainty, we need to distinguish several related social changes which the schools have to take into account.

a. Technological advances in microelectronics, information and communication processes, biological technology, new materials technology, robotics and energy-related technology all change both the type of job skills needed and the number of jobs available. So too does the discovery of new mineral and power resources or the depletion of other resources and their degradation through, for example, soil erosion and salinity. Global market changes affect Australia through increasing specialisation and competition from other countries. The unrestricted movement of global capital across national borders to find cheaper labour and safer locations for capital investment also clearly affect the structure of the Australian economy.

b. But much structural change derives from our own policies and internal changes. For example, successive Labor and Coalition governments have moved away from policies of tariff protection and labour regulation towards an open market economy, floating the Australian dollar, liberalising trade and industrial regimes. They have also dramatically shifted the public sector towards a corporate, competitive model, privatised public utilities and services, driven infrastructure changes which promote improved productivity, competition and targeted outcomes. Labour market reforms have introduced enterprise bargaining and individual workplace agreements in place of blanket awards, as well as reforms to workers compensation, superannuation, occupational health and safety legislation and the rules of unfair dismissal. National Competition Policy now drives all tendering and regulatory processes, and taxation reforms aim at removing barriers to competitive industry development and broadening the tax base on which all government activities depend.

c. Structural change is also driven by changes in demography and lifestyle, affecting both demand and supply in the labour market. The most dramatic shift here is the increased labour force participation of women, especially married women. This is partly the result of increased costs of
living, with one male wage now being insufficient to support many families. But it is also the result of a remarkable improvement in levels of education for females, and a shift in community values about the rights of women to full participation in paid employment. Norris & Wooden (1996, p. 2, cited in Productivity Commission Report, *Aspects of Structural Change in Australia*, p. 52) describe this increase as so large ‘... as to render it one of the most significant labour developments during the last 25 years, and certainly one with profound economic and social effects.’ It has been assisted by demographic shifts such as the later age of marriage and child-bearing, declining family size and better provision of child care services, more flexible working arrangements via part-time and casual jobs and improved (though still not equal) female wage relativities.

It is also timely to be reminded that Australia’s ageing population is not yet a problem, in that between 1970 and 1997 the number of people aged 15 years and over increased from 9.3 million to 14.6 million, and this group’s share of the total population rose from 71 to 79 per cent. (Productivity Commission, 1998, p. 51). It is this shift, together with a slight increase in the overall labour force participation rate (a modest 4 per cent over the period) which has led to an increase in the number of job seekers and, by extension, the number of unemployed and under-employed. Population growth has fuelled growth in the labour force in each year since 1991-2.

At the same time, collapse of the full-time jobs market for young people (as much the result of government public service downsizing as of the demand for fewer and more highly skilled workers in private industry) has led to a decline in the labour force participation rate of young people (Kenyon & Wooden, 1996, p. 23, cited in Productivity Commission Report, p. 53); and increased retention rates in secondary and tertiary education. These trends, together with declining job opportunities for older males, have changed the social composition of the Australian workforce. (Borland, J. (1996, *Earnings Inequality in Australia: Changes and Causes*, Economics Dept., ANU, Canberra). Moreover, the quality of labour has improved, with the number of 15 to 64 year olds gaining post-school qualifications increasing from only 20 per cent in 1971 to 42 per cent in 1996.

Other lifestyle and behavioural changes drive shifts in the nature of work also. Prolonged education and delayed marriage alter family and community life. A large part of the growth in the services sector is replacement of work
traditionally done in the home (cooking, cleaning, gardening, etc.) by the parents themselves. Ruthven (VicHealth Healthy Workplace Conference, 1998) argues that this ‘outsourcing’ of household tasks will continue, providing jobs growth, but at the lower end of the income scale and in a casual/contract framework. Parents have to support young people longer, but many of them move out to live independently. As the number of single-person households has grown to over 20 per cent, so too has demand for small apartments, household goods, convenience food, leisure activities, healthy exercise equipment and entertainment outlets.

Job movement in Australia is high, with the equivalent of the entire labour force finding a new job every four to five years (Productivity Commission, Report, 1998, p. 64). Of an estimated 8.4 million people employed in February, 1998, 14 per cent (1.2 million people) had changed jobs during the last twelve months. Almost 2 million job holders (22%) at that time had been job-seekers in the previous year. (ABS Labour Mobility Survey, Productivity Commission Report, 1998, p. 64-66) Though most of this movement was within existing industry and occupational groups, there was sizeable movement between firms in different industries (462 400 or 40 per cent of job movers) and between occupational groups (393 800 or 34 per cent of job movers). Such figures call into question many assumptions about job tenure and the newness of ‘insecurity’, though there was still a strong core of stable workers in the Australian workforce (34% had been in their current job for less than 2 years, 25 per cent for between 2 to 5 years, and 41 per cent for more than 5 years).

It is likely that structural change in Australian industry will increase, not decrease in the next decades, so school students need to be prepared in ways that facilitate the transferability of skills, rather than acquiring skills that are industry-specific or linked to highly specialised technologies and industry practices. Kilpatrick (1994) suggests that the apparent decline in inter-industry mobility is at least partly attributable to a decline in the transferability of skills, something any education system must address seriously.

We need to be careful too in assuming that the future lies simply in the services sector. Australia is still a resource-rich nation, and mining and related industries, plus value-added agriculture and other primary industries will require newly-skilled employees. One consequence of the ageing population is that the skills base of many firms is nearing its use-by date very rapidly; if
they all retire together and there are no young people trained and mentored in the same skills, viable firms with products still in demand will not survive. The new Age of Information does not mean that trade skills, production skills of the old kind, will not still be needed. Moreover, the implication for schools is that better cross-linking with workplaces, work experience better integrated as part of the school curriculum and mentoring by the experienced older workers must become more widespread.

Manufacturing reflects Australia’s strength as a natural resource-based economy, and in every sector there is wide variability in rates of structural change. Jobs (and thus educational/training needs) are not uniformly under threat or in high demand. For example, between 1970 and 1990, industries such as Food, beverages and tobacco; Paper, paper products and printing; Chemicals, petroleum, rubber and plastics; and Basic metal products increased in size relative to other manufacturing. But Fabricated metal products and Textiles, clothing and footwear declined.

Similar variation exists in the services sector. Whereas finance, insurance and business services have grown rapidly since financial deregulation in the early 1980s, and community, leisure and personal services also increased, construction services declined rapidly, as did the wholesale and retail trade industries. In metropolitan regions, services employment grew by almost 1.2 million, but there is no necessary relationship between the rate of structural change and actual job opportunities.

The Productivity Commission highlights this dilemma by grouping Australia’s regions into Hi/Lo Structural Change and Hi/Lo Employment Growth categories. Those regions that have experienced high structural change without employment growth are typically reliant on single industries such as mining, with fewer services sector jobs. The high structural change areas with good employment growth are those with the greatest diversity of industry, particularly a high share of services jobs. Examples are Queensland’s Moreton region, Cairns and the Outer Adelaide region in South Australia. Household incomes in such regions grew more rapidly than elsewhere, indicating that the spectre of structural change in industry and a shortage of jobs available is not necessarily to be feared.

Some regions have experienced little structural change yet have enjoyed high employment growth (such as Bathurst-Orange because of its strong regional
service activity, and Queensland’s Sunshine Coast because of tourism); while others (because of their reliance on agriculture and small service sector jobs) combine low change with low employment growth.

This variability indicates how important it is for governments to consider the integration of education, training and other planning activities. Regions vary on a whole range of factors other than their key industry base. The nature of their climate, geographical proximity to transport and markets, their skills base, the quality of lifestyle they can offer employees with the right skills, the economic and community infrastructure within the region that may induce businesses to stay or set up there, their links with complementary activities in adjoining regions are all relevant.

Schools, TAFE and other training institutions, family and community services, local government and private business need to act in concert to generate growth across a region. Peter Brain’s (1999) concept of the ‘global city’ and ‘new growth theory’ could be extended to the integration of services within any region. This approach ‘stresses the strong spin-offs from capital investment, research and development, and education and training … demonstrates quite clearly that growth rates can be increased by applying strong, wide-ranging government policies and establishing collaborative, co-operative networks between businesses’. (Brain, P. (1999), Beyond Meltdown: The Global Battle for Sustained Growth, Scribe Publications, Melbourne, p. 63)

ii. Income Inequality

As a result of these structural shifts in the nature of work, what was a relatively egalitarian nation in terms of family income has become more divided. Economic researchers differ on the extent of this change, but the crucial point is that income relativity has relied heavily on government income transfers and benefits seen as part of the ‘social wage’; if these are wound back, the gap will continue to widen.

While real income in Australia was 60 per cent higher in 1995 than in the mid-1960s, most of that growth happened before 1975. Since then, there has been only 10 per cent growth, and men in the lowest third pay bracket had lower real wages in 1995 than in 1975. (Richardson, 1998,op. cit., p. 213). The
work-rich versus the work-poor divide translates into the income-rich versus the income-poor. Between 1984 and 1994 the gap widened, with the top 40 per cent of households receiving 40 per cent of total household disposable income (an average of $1205 per week) and the bottom 20 per cent receiving only a 6 per cent share (an average of $175 per week). Harding expresses this in terms of the Gini Coefficient of household inequality, which shows a rise for wage and salary earners from 0.500 in 1982 to 0.537 in 1993. (Harding, A. (1996), ‘Emerging trends in income inequality in Australia: 1982-1993/4’, paper to Australian Population Association Eighth National Conference). In general, one-person households (the elderly and younger singles) have lower incomes, whereas the proportion of two-income households has increased. (ABS, Australian Social Trends, 1997, Cat. 4102.0, p. 115)

Using the Henderson Poverty Line to compare income units between 1972-1990 (Saunders, P. (1996), ‘The role of indicators of income poverty in the measurement of national progress’, in Eckersley, op. cit., pp. 223-238) provides the following table (reduced here to %):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Australian Income Units in Poverty:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income Unit type</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sole parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- one child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 2+ children</td>
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<tr>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- no children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 1 child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 2 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 3+ children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>19.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>All couples + chn</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>All income units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other writers (Johnson, D., I. Manning & O. Hellwig (1998), ‘Trends in the
distribution of income in Australia’, Australian Journal of Labour
Economics, 2, (1), 1-27) argue that the gap between income units has been
kept relatively small because of the careful targeting of income security,
family allowance payments and other benefits to low income families. Their
assessment of inequality in Australia is not so negative, but they are clear in
their assessment that government policies aimed at income redistribution are
crucial.

Current controversy over the regressive impact of a GST on food and other
necessities, the inequity of bigger tax cuts for high income earners than for
the less well off, the need for a broader tax base to sustain government-
funded services, is a timely reminder that the future could easily see the
demise of the nation of the ‘fair go’.

Not only is unemployment rising, but so too is long-term unemployment.
In the 1970s, only a few thousand people were out of work for more than 52
weeks. By 1996, 150 000 had been unemployed continuously for over two
years and tens of thousands had been unemployed for between one to two
years. Interestingly, the employment-to-population ratio has been steady for
20 years, at 58.8 in both 1975 and 1996. (Richardson, 1998, op. cit., p. 207);
that is, the economy provides the same proportion of jobs for the population
as it grows. But that ratio has dropped for men, improved for women, largely
because Australia has an unusually large percentage in part-time jobs, and it
varies widely for different groups in the community. The number of men in
part-time employment has risen by 324 000 since 1978; for women it has
risen by 843 000. Average hours worked by women have increased from 14
to 16; for men they have dropped from 34 to 30. The workforce participation
rate for women has increased from 44% in 1978 to 54% in 1995; for men it
has dropped from 80% to 74%.

**iii. Changes in the Work-Family Nexus**

Such economic changes are the bare facts behind dramatic social shifts in the
structure and processes of Australian family life. The husband-as-
breadwinner model of family life cannot be sustained for many couples and
many men take more than one part-time job in order to sustain their status and self-respect. Many others cannot earn an income at all, with consequences for their partner’s workforce participation and role in the household. Since part-time work usually has lower pay, they contribute less to family income but demand more hours overall. Because there has been no growth over the last decade in full-time jobs for labourers, machine and plant operators, and tradespeople (typically male jobs), and only small growth for managers, the picture is bleaker for males than for females.

Hours worked is a good indicator of how much time parents will have for family responsibilities, leisure pursuits, and their own quality of life. In the last 20 years, total paid hours have increased from 221 million to 276 million hours per week (up 23%). Two fifths of that increase is due to women’s paid work, and a quarter of it represents increased hours of part-time work. Though the average hours per person of working age have dropped by one hour since 1978, the hours worked are unevenly distributed, to say the least. Richardson (1998, p. 213) reports on research which shows the number working 49 hours per week is up by 225%; those working 45-47 hours is up by 176%; and those working only 30-34 hours per week have halved. 60 per cent of these extra hours are not paid overtime. One-third of professional workers say they would prefer shorter hours (Buchanan, J. & S. Bearfield (1997), Reforming Working Time, Brotherhood of St. Laurence, Melbourne). However, Richardson reminds us that hours of work are on average shorter than in countries such as the USA, UK, Japan, Germany, France, Sweden and New Zealand, reflecting the higher incidence of part-time work in Australia and perhaps different work norms as well.

Apart from hours of work and income earned, the degree of security people enjoy in their job has a major impact on family life and social participation. Whereas in 1989, some 73% thought their job was secure, by 1994, only 57% thought so. In 1995, 38% of men and 31% of women who left a job did so involuntarily, with two-thirds of the men being fired. The last decade has seen the number of men employed as casuals double, and a third of employed women are in casual positions. (Richardson, 1998, p.215)

Section B of this paper develops in more detail the extent and nature of change in the lives of children, their family and community environment, and their implications for how schools will need to operate in the future.
iv. Education and Training

It should be noted that one of the major trends in Australian society has been that of prolonged education and improved training of the workforce. Despite the current shortage of skills in areas such as computer software and the sciences, Australians now stay at school longer than ever before (and not just because of job shortages for youth) and they do gain higher qualifications than previous generations.

Whereas in 1986, only 48.7% of school students were retained until Year 12, by 1996, that figure had risen to 71.3% (Queensland had the highest Year 12 retention rate, at 76.5%, apart from the ACT at 91.3%). Those participating in TAFE programs rose slightly over the decade from 8.4% to 9.6%; but those participating in higher education increased from 8.0% in 1986 to 15.5% in 1996. For people aged 15-64 in 1996, 12.8% had gained a degree or higher, 14.1% had a skilled vocational qualification, and 8.8% had an undergraduate or associate diploma.

In 1997, approximately 5.3 million persons aged 15-64 years participated in some form of education or training. Of tertiary students, 69% were in Vocational Education and Training (VET) and 31% in Higher Education. Some 37% of school-aged students aged 15 years and over were in the labour force in 1997, 79% of them employed part-time. VET programs for 1.5 million clients were provided by 101 TAFE and other government institutions in 1 000 provider locations, 599 community centres, and by 1410 other registered providers. In 1996, 18% of employers also provided structured training to their employees and 62% of schools provided access to school-industry programs, though the majority of these had less than 20 days in the workplace. This is an area in need of urgent attention in the future. (ABS (1998), Education and Training in Australia, Cat. 4224.0)

Perhaps more importantly, given the increased importance of high levels of literacy and numeracy in the global economy, is that people aged under 45 years performed better than older people. Despite the alarming fact that almost 44% of 15-64 year olds had poor to very poor prose skills In English (reflecting Australia’s high NESB immigration), more of those aged 20-44 had good to very good skills (Levels 4/5 on the International Survey of
Aspects of Literacy, which included prose, documentary and quantitative literacy). 86% of such persons were in the labour force, compared with only 6)% of those with very poor prose skills.

The literacy scores for those employed in education (teachers, academics and tutors) are better than for the rest of the population (as they should be), yet only 50% of them had good or very good Prose skills. Some 69% of indigenous persons had poor to very poor prose skills and 62% did not complete the highest level of secondary school available.

As elsewhere, the general pattern was for females to have better prose skills than males, and males to have slightly better quantitative skills. Australian skills on this international survey of literacy were ‘middling’ compared to people of other countries, comparable to those of Canadians and the United States, lower than for Sweden and well above the poorest countries such as Poland. However, Australia’s females had one of the lowest proportions (15%) on the two highest levels of the quantitative scale.

The school student/teacher ratio had stayed around 15.3 across the decade, and government expenditure on education as a % of GDP had varied but was the same in 1996 as in 1986 (5.4%). The number of government schools had declined from 7589 in 1986 to 7088 in 1996, while the number of non-government schools had risen from 2496 to 2542 (a 3% growth in schools, with a 17% growth in student numbers). The median age of teachers increased significantly during the decade, with 48% aged 35 years or more in 1986, rising to 69% by 1996, with the median age increasing from 33 to 40 years.

While unemployment rates did reflect the value of improved educational attainment, the link was becoming more tenuous. For example, in Queensland, 1996, unemployment for those with a degree or higher was only 2.6%; 6.6% for those with a skilled vocational qualification; 5.0% for an undergraduate or associate diploma; rising to 11.8% for those without post-school qualifications, and 13.9% for those with basic vocational qualifications.

But a disturbing trend is that school leavers are no longer guaranteed a secure job, or a job at all.
Richardson (1998), p.210, Source: ABS Cat. no. 6101.0

In Queensland itself, QCOSS has documented the growing disadvantage of large numbers of families. Their 1995 study, published as People and Places: a profile of growing disadvantage in Queensland (1995), found 18 per cent of Queenslanders were living below the Henderson Poverty Line, including a quarter of Queensland’s children. This rate exceeded the poverty rate for Australia consistently from 1981-2 to 1995-6. Singles under age 25 had experienced a rapid rise in poverty, as had singles aged 25-44, with poverty ‘marbled’ across the State in regions such as Mackay, Fitzroy and central West. Most at risk were sole parents, with the number of children per family increasing their incidence of poverty (31.7% with one child, 55.4% with 3+ children). The ‘top end’ of Queensland is the most disadvantaged, having a high proportion of indigenous people. Clusters of poverty were identified in the Wide Bay-Burnett region (high unemployment and DSS dependency); in the urban conurbation stretching from Caboolture to Coolangatta (with signs of inter-generational poverty increasing); and in rural remote areas such as Croydon in the north-west and Paroo in the south-west.

As the report notes ( p. 22), “place is a key factor in socio-economic disadvantage and is part of a growing social divide which is emerging in Queensland”. A Centre for Labour Research study in 1988 found that of the 40 LGAs with the highest unemployment in Australia, 20 were located in Queensland.
In sum, the nature of work itself has changed, requiring higher education and skill levels, with an increasing reliance on computer-based technology. The structure of work has changed, with fewer full-time jobs demanding longer hours, and increased part-time and casual jobs. The supply of available labour has increased with women’s increased labour force participation, with consequent impacts on access to reliable work for young people.

v. Changes in the Processes of Work

But beyond these shifts, the processes of work are also changing rapidly, with a decline in routine, repetitive labour of the old assembly-line kind, an increased reliance on project teams to complete ‘just-in-time’ projects on a contract basis, and an increased value placed on what are called ‘knowledge workers’, those with the highest skills, plus experience, plus adaptability and problem-solving skills. In the new ‘learning organisation’, rigidity of attitude and authoritarian hierarchy in the workplace are the enemies of innovation and competitive edge. The security of one job for life has been replaced by the ‘footloose worker’, at these higher levels at least, moving freely between companies and projects in the global market. Telecommuting and home-based work will be more common, with the ‘road warriors’ carrying a portable office in the form of computer notebooks, ‘hot-desking’ providing a temporary base for several workers, Internet meetings taking the place of being in the office full-time every day.

Some writers believe this loose configuration of work patterns will destroy company loyalty, indeed lead to the ‘moral corrosion’ of society, because people need time and repeated interaction to develop loyalty, commitment and a shared sense of values (Sennett, 1998). Flexible teams are, in this view, demoralising and ineffective, hiding real power beneath a veneer of democratic decision-making, offering no sense of direction or fulfilment.

In contrast to this view, others argue that we must educate people to understand that they will “no longer have jobs, they will simply do work” (Matathia & Salzman, 1998, p. 240), and that entrepreneurial skills will be essential for each individual marketing themselves in the open marketplace.
(Letcher, 1997). While Rivkin (1995) believes the shift from ‘mass labour’ to highly skilled ‘elite labour’ will destroy the life chances of many people, there is no necessary logic in this unless we accept that only a few people are capable of being active in the construction of their own work life. Simply because in the past, the structures of work, organised labour, government regulation and public service employment provision have been based on hiring the masses to work in an industrial, bureaucratic system, does not mean we cannot or should not educate children for a different future.

Most companies in the future are likely to have a blend of ‘core’, permanent employees, hiring in freelance help or contracting out to specialised and changing teams as the workload requires. Those core workers will be held tightly by companies, given a range of benefits (such as child and elder care, health and personal advisory services) tied to a ‘corporate campus’; indeed we may see a return to the ‘company town’, as linked businesses lure workers to subsidised housing wired to the workplace. And those not in permanent jobs will not necessarily be disadvantaged if they have skills to sell.

In contrast to the notion that technology and elite selection into a few jobs will be alienating, Matathia & Salzman (1998) believe the new work flexibility will make face-to-face contact more important, not less. People working in teams with different personnel depending on the contract or project will require good inter-personal skills and can potentially gain a high level of job satisfaction from completing a task in effective cooperation with others. Indeed, we can already see that many ‘outsourced’ jobs are being contracted to smaller groups which become, in effect, expert teams offering their services in competition based on performance. The outcome is not alienation, but intense work satisfaction. Witness the improvements, both in morale and profit, arising from Finland’s Nokia reconstruction in 1995 based on democratic planning.

As well, some of the current difficulty workers experience in juggling their family and workplace responsibilities may be overcome by greater flexibility in working time and place. We are seeing a reaction against the stress of long work hours and a refusal on the part of employers to see that presence in the office is not coterminous with effective job performance.
A 1997 Coopers & Lybrand survey of 1200 business students in 12 countries found that 45% say achieving a balanced lifestyle and having a rewarding life outside work is among their top three career goals. The most common reasons for turning down overseas appointments are family considerations (81%), spouse’s career (53%) and location (39%). (A. Carey & B. Laird, USA Today, Nov. 1997). And a survey of US executives which indicated the need to maintain a competitive edge was outpacing many of their workers, found the key skills lacking were having a foreign language (31% of men, 27% of women) and inter-personal skills (lacking in 14% of men, 7% of women) (A. Carey & M. Mullins, USA Today, Feb. 1998).

In other words, the global marketplace will require more, not less, of employees in terms of their ability to relate well to diverse people, build partnerships with them, work in cooperative teams with them, and lead lives which give them personal satisfaction. Technical skills are certainly essential, but it may be a mistake to assume that school students need only focus on skills credentialling in order to guarantee themselves a job in the future. A more holistic approach to productive living is emerging and the technology is finally making such flexibility and satisfaction possible, compared with the alienation of the industrial assembly line or the bureaucratic hierarchy.

vi. The Significance of Small Business and Entrepreneurial Skills

One final area of our economy needs to be highlighted here, because it has been much neglected in the work of educators. That is, the significance of small business to the economy and to the nature of social interaction in our communities.

Of the 1 052 000 Australian businesses operating in 1996-7, only 0.5% were classified as public sector organisations. Since they include schools, hospitals, etc., they do make up 18% of total employment. But private sector businesses totalled almost 1 047 000 (99.5%) and they employed an estimated 6.8 million people or 82% of total employment. The ABS estimates that there were just over 1 000 000 small private sector businesses in Australia, employing some 3.5 million people. Small business is defined as non-manufacturing businesses employing less than 20 employees, or manufacturing businesses employing less than 100 employees. So small businesses account for 97% of all private sector businesses and more than
50% of all private sector employment. (ABS, Small Business in Australia 1997, Cat. 1321.0). Some 29% are employers or own account workers in their own small business, and the other 71% (a total of 3.2 million people) are employed in small businesses. In 1996-97, there were 751,500 micro-businesses (i.e. employing less than 5 people), totalling 1.6 million or 25% of all employment in Australia. Some 73% of all small businesses are service-providing businesses, such as retail, construction, property and business services.

Clearly, the spectre of large-scale global corporations does not apply to these, since even with amalgamations and takeovers by big business, small-scale operators are most likely to be sub-contractors, competitively tendering for work. Entrepreneurial skills are essential for survival, and inter-personal skills such as negotiation, communication, adaptability, team-working, etc. are essential for entrepreneurial success. In fact, the average growth rate in small business since 1983-4 has been strong, at 4.2%, with a 29% increase in businesses employing 1 to 9 people. The small business sector’s share of total employment grew until 1993-4 and has declined since then, but it is an area where openings for new lifestyle choices will continue to expand.

In the United States, much of the growth in small business has been led by women and SOHO (small office/home office) businesses. A third of all domestic companies and 40% of all service and retail companies are women-owned, and they employ more workers than the Fortune 500 companies employ worldwide. In Germany, a third of all start-up businesses are women-owned (Matathia & Salzman, 1998, p. 249).

The point here is that teachers (including vocational education teachers) know little about either business or entrepreneurial skills. They have been trained for tenured jobs within a large public employment system, and the schools have been geared to the same academic competences that gave teachers their job chances rather than to this huge sector of employment in Australia. That gap in knowledge and targeted curriculum design needs to be filled in the planning of schools for the future.
SECTION B : LINKING FAMILIES, WORKPLACES AND SCHOOLS

i. Thinking About Families and the Schools

As many of the trends indicated in Section A suggest, it is just as easy to be negative about trends in family life as it is about globalisation and the world of paid work. Rising divorce rates, child neglect and abuse, homelessness, doubtful parenting and the failure to socialise children, sexual promiscuity and the flight from commitment are repeated themes (Blankenhorn, 1995; Dreman, 1997; Ehrenreich, 1987; Popenoe, 1988: Schlesinger, 1992).

As Saunders (1999) puts it, “dramatic changes have taken place in family life – most notably, the rise in divorce rates (a 300 per cent increase since the 1960s), the rise in cohabitation outside marriage (more than a 300 per cent rise since the mid-seventies), and the rise in births outside marriage (a six-fold increase in the last 40 years). Today in Australia, more than 700,000 children live solely with one parent … and many more live in reconstituted families. Barry Maley (1996, p. 26) concludes that there has been ‘a profound decline in parental participation in the lives of a large proportion of children, and in their relations with their natural parents, within the space of 30 years.’ “

But the central issue is the extent to which we can or should blame parents as individuals for their ‘failure of responsibility’, or blame the social system for the pressures it has put on parents (through downsizing, unemployment, underemployment and, on the other hand longer working hours and work cultures that ignore employees’ family responsibilities) and its failure to support parents through adequate child care, family counselling and welfare services, schools and other community-based institutions designed to support them in the tasks of parenting.

As outlined above, the nature of work structures, timetables, and work cultures directly affects the way families are formed and the way they function. However, families are not passive victims of objective economic or social forces; they forge changes in their own right; they use and construct
other social institutions for their own purposes (Boulding, 1985); indeed, they shape the values and mores by which children judge their lives more than is often now credited (Moroney, 1976). When critics credit families with more power than they actually have, blaming parents for the breakdown of ‘family values’ and the traditional moral values of the community, they forget that social problems arise from a complex mix of both public and private action (and inaction). It is always a combination of both. Moreover, attributing blame is not the point; finding sensible solutions is.

As educators, we need to remember that the family is a universal unit of social cooperation, not just conflict; the so-called nuclear family of parent(s) and offspring living alone is not an outcome of industrial urbanisation, but preceded it; and the family has always been a ‘subversive’ unit standing between the individual and larger social structures and ‘mediating’ between their competing demands. (Berger & Kellner, 1964; Moroney, 1976, 1980; Edgar, 1991)

Families are distinguished from other groups in several ways, and it is unproductive to assert that defining the family is impossible. First, family is a blood tie based on a social declaration (usually also legal) of mutual commitment and obligations for its members in a way no friendship group ever does. Second, family is inter-generational, with parents and children, both past and future. It is only in that sense that a childless couple is a ‘family’ – each has parents and kin, and they can potentially have children of their blood or adoption; each partner has a family of origin and, together, they may form a family of procreation. Third, by implication, the family is not simply a household – it extends ‘beyond the front door’, with reciprocal relationships that continue over time and across different locations. Family relations thus fix individuals within their history, their traditions and their culture and act as a central reference point for the ‘meaning’ of life (Shils, 1981).

In terms of what families do – their actual functions, not just what they might ideally be expected to do – there are two central and related tasks which families, unlike voluntary friendship groups, must and do perform, however imperfectly. The first is to make a living, earn an income, produce food, clothing, shelter for the survival of the family unit and individual family members. Whilst individuals will do this for themselves, families accept and are bound by obligations to their kith and kin, at least for immediate family
members. So the second key task of family is to care for its members – for one’s partner, dependent children, perhaps also for disabled and ageing family members, and for oneself. Conventionally, men have shown their care for the family by ‘providing a roof over its head’, while women have carried the major burden of physical and emotional care.

As anthropological and sociological research shows, diverse cultures, religions and economic systems define differently how these two major tasks will be carried out. In the main, peasant societies based on generational ownership of land, put more emphasis on extended family obligations, while modern societies are less hierarchical and rigid because resources are more widely spread and the nuclear family formed by each couple is seen as the major focus of the caring and income-earning tasks. This, in turn, suggests that the marital bond based on attraction, love and free choice of partner, is and has been more all-pervasive throughout history and diverse cultures than many people might imagine (Macfarlane, 1978).

But there is a third key task which characterises all families and should not be forgotten in any discussion of education and the future. That is, to nurture, socialise and enculturate children into the accepted ways of behaving as civilised, social beings. Their very dependency (unlike baby animals which can feed and look after themselves very soon after birth) makes the human child dependent on adult protection and nurture for a prolonged period until its brain and body can handle life’s demands independently.

Social order, whether it be within a small group, a tribe or village, or the more complex societies of today, depends upon the transmission of core values and legitimate forms of behaviour from adults to children. Social mores, the rules of the game, the laws of the land are the ‘glue’ that holds society together. They are rarely absolute, are always challenged by divergent groups within the society (the essence of democracy), but they are ‘legitimated’ by the majority because they make sense of life and give it some predictability and order. Individual wants and goals are always met within the constraints of other people whose needs and goals must also be considered.

Of course such rules reflect the social distribution of power and economic resources in each society, but the process of learning to live within those limits (and to stretch or oppose them) is basically the same. Every philosophy of education, politics and moral development derives from this
central dilemma – how to balance the individual ego against the social alter. But that dichotomy often ignores the fact that no individual ego (the subjective self) develops apart from its symbolic interaction with others (the objective self) and the process of child (and adult) socialisation is symbiotic, rather than a simple clash of wills. (Durkheim, 1954/1912; Cooley, 1964/1902; Mead, 1964/1934; Brim & Wheeler, 1966; Edgar, 1980). The more complex the division of labour, the less repressive are laws and limits, because expertise must be exchanged freely and individual liberty to innovate is vital to progress. The aim is to allow wider choice and include as many people as possible in the reciprocal exchanges that make up the modern social order.

Perhaps the most difficult issue facing children, parents and schools today is the huge range of choice they face, and the lack of widely accepted guidelines for making choices among competing value systems and forms of behaviour. The essence of modern society is optionality, and many individuals are lost in a welter of choice, having to live with the consequences of their own actions, the wider society (or at least its powerful elites) taking less and less responsibility for those individual choices and the lack of resources which always limit the range of choices available to any individual or group within that society.

Witness the notions of ‘choice’ in child care or in private versus public schools. If you earn insufficient income, you can only ‘choose’ from the poorer alternatives available, so ‘choice’ is never an equalizer. In fact, the whole system of state-provided schooling is premised on the fact that access to a decent education is a key resource for later life ‘choices’, and the quality of that schooling has both public and private consequences. The starting point for many parents before the advent of free, compulsory and secular education was not to send their children to school at all; it was either a choice they made because they did not value education, they needed children to work for the family’s survival, or because they lacked the resources to make any other choice. Choice always operates within prior constraints.

Prime and continuing responsibility for the development of children rests with the parents; few societies take away that responsibility until more specialised skills and education than the parents can provide are required. But few societies have ever left sole responsibility for the upbringing of children to the parents alone. It is too complex a task and one in which the whole society
has a stake. Neither children nor education are a private good; they have public implications and require community input. As the saying goes, “It takes a village to raise a child.”

It should not be forgotten that schools as social institutions had their origins in the need for more widespread literacy and numeracy than families were providing in the home, and in the recognition that the family environment was often an unsafe one for children, indeed the city streets were unsafe environments for children, and rules of compulsory schooling were promulgated, against widespread opposition. (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Donzelot, 1980; Elkind, 1981; Garbarino, 1986; Hall, 1989; Ochiltree & Edgar, 1981; Shorter, 1976; Zelizer, 1985).

Perhaps because of the separation of children from the home in that industrial era, schools have tended to forget that the first educators of children are their parents, and they are always ‘partners’ with parents. What goes on in the home can positively reinforce or undermine what is taught in the schools (Marjoribanks, 1996). The apparent disjunction between family and school has bedevilled educational debate for over a century. And it is the changing nature of that relationship that should be the focus of any discussion of trends in family life as they affect schooling in the next century.

Repeated questions arise over whether and how much parents should prepare their children for school, for example in pre-reading skills; over whether and how much parents should be involved in curriculum decisions as compared with school administration or ancillary activities; over whether and how much school teachers can be expected to act as ‘social workers’ for children traumatised by family breakdown and dysfunction, compensating for poor parental socialisation of children and countering unacceptable value systems and behaviour that stem from the home environment.

The issue needs to be stated simply and unequivocally:

Teachers and the schools are partners with parents in raising competent future citizens; they cannot ignore the broader socialisation functions in favour of narrow subject matter teaching or vocational skills training.
The child comes to the school as a whole person and the school must treat each one as a whole person, embedded in a family and wider community culture which affects learning outcomes.

Because that family and community context has changed dramatically over the past several decades, the school system faces a challenge of unprecedented proportions which cannot be dealt with effectively within the traditional educational structures.

Today’s children are born to older parents who are both likely to be in paid work. They have fewer siblings and family size is smaller.

Those two facts help explain the apparent change in children. They are highly valued, invested in heavily by parents who have themselves come from small families in which the individual child was paid more attention than in the larger families of previous generations. The investment is more in financial terms than in parental time, though that time is less widely spread across a large number of siblings than before. The main problems working parents report is not having enough time to spend with children (Petrie, 1998; Russell, 1997; Edgar, 1995; Glezer & Wolcott, 1999). In return, children regret the lack of time they spend with children and their lack of close knowledge of their fathers in particular (Amato, 1993; Lamb, 1987). So-called ‘quality time’ is no substitute for the day-to-day, minute-to-minute interactions from which children learn about life and its limits.

Having fewer siblings means that children are less subject to the rough and tumble of friendly competition from within the family; they can demand and receive instant attention to their needs and wants; they learn less about cooperation and compromise in the home than might be desirable; and their parents are less often present to serve as role models for acceptable behaviour. That of course can have its positive side as well, if we count the range of other adults and child carers with whom the child has contact in the early years. But behaviour needs close monitoring and some researchers argue that the mother-centred family has given way to the child-centred family, many children raising themselves and their siblings with little guidance from parents and simply spending organised time, not guided and mentored time, with other adults in formal child-minding settings. (Qvortrup, 1993).
This is not to suggest that parents have to spend all day every day with their children (Leach, 1987; Biddulph, 1997), but it is to suggest that children need more one-on-one attention than many are now receiving. It also suggests that the schools have to devote more attention, not less, to the social learning side of school, to building substitute peer groups and family-like ‘home rooms’ and to bringing children into more regular and meaningful contact with a range of adults (Ainley, et al, 1998). Teachers alone cannot do this, but they could draw on the resources of others in the community and make schools a true ‘gathering place’ for the aged, for family support service agencies, for business and other mentors who could add value to the shared socialisation task of parents and teachers.

ii. The Changing Ecology of Childhood

We have to think of children and the schools in terms of the contexts in which they operate. Bronfenbrenner (1983) and Popenoe (1988) refer to this as the ‘ecology’ of childhood, to indicate the complex systems of influence that surround child development. The ecology of childhood has changed dramatically.

As already indicated above, schools as such were once not even part of the ecology of childhood. Children were treated as little adults, used in productive labour for the family, not regarded as having special qualities or needs at all (Shorter, 1975). Only the wealthy could have their children educated. The first compulsory schools were established in a context of rising industrialisation where manufacturing jobs required basic literacy and numeracy in the growing mass of labourers and clerical assistants. Schools were also established because of philanthropic concerns about child neglect, abuse and safety on the streets, a new image of children as innocents in need of careful nurture in the garden of children (Froebel’s kindergarten), a new psychology of early childhood development and a new political willingness to interfere with the previously sacrosanct rights of parents to use their children as they chose.
Those early schools were resisted by some parents because they took away from parents the child’s immediate ‘use value’, and thereby not only deferred the ‘payoff’ from investing in schooling, but also made that payoff something the child itself benefited from, not necessarily the parents. Birth control and lower birth rates reflected the new ‘place’ of children and transformed the nature of intimacy within the marriage relationship (Edgar, 1997; Giddens, 1992). Couples timed the spacing of and had fewer children, in whom they invested more heavily, both financially and in terms of time. But the gap between school and its later use value has become prolonged in recent times, with more than basic skills required, and the investment by parents in educating their children has become a major burden. Many parents cannot see the ‘use’ of schooling, certainly if no jobs are available on completion, so it is not surprising that the role of schools today is being questioned by both children and adults alike.

The purpose of schooling is still bedevilled by this central dichotomy between education as preparation for making a living and education (and childhood) as an end in itself. If we reconceptualised schooling as guiding children to develop all their talents to the optimum level of excellence, that dichotomy might go away.

The ecology of childhood has changed in many other ways as well. The concept of the local school embedded children within a neighbourhood context, within a community of shared values, similar lifestyles and adult reinforcement of the school’s basic principles of order, socially responsible behaviour and academic effort. The primary school gave children their first experience of ‘objective’ standards, of social rules beyond those of the family or town, of the wider social and national purposes of education and individual achievement. By extension, also, schools undermined the authority of parents and gave children a wider reference point for self-evaluation and achievement goals. They were judged against their peers, learned to conform to the rule of law, had patriotism and the work ethic drilled into them. Secondary schools in turn took children beyond that localised ecology, into a wider, more specialised world, sometimes away from their families and neighbours and into the wider universe of economic life.

One constant, however (though it never applied to every child at any point in history) was the security of family, parental concern and a home base. For a migrant nation like Australia, with few extended family connections, the

Under the ‘Federation Settlement’ (Kelly, P. (1992), The End of Certainty, Allen & Unwin, Sydney), the law discouraged divorce, the welfare state guaranteed trade protection, a ‘family wage’ and a minimal safety net for those who pursued productive labour, ownership of the family home became the dream if not the reality for most people, and doing the best by your children was the guiding principle of family life, the father showing he cared by working for a decent wage, the mother showing her care in other ways within the home. There was always inequality, poverty, desertion, family violence and singlehood (for close to a quarter of the population up to the 1940s), but the Australian dream surrounded every child, permeated the national culture and gave meaning and direction to parents and their children’s lives.

That consensus, that nurturing family ecology, has melted away. The change has profound consequences for what schools can and should be doing with children, and we need to distinguish between schools as social environments for young children and schools dealing with teenagers and young adults.

The following outline of family change adds up to a vastly different ecology for childhood today and in the future from in the past. (figures are drawn from various ABS publications: Australian Social Trends, 1997, ABS Cat. 4102.0; Children, Australia: A Social Report, 1999, ABS Cat. 4119.0; Marriages and Divorces, Australia, ABS Cat. 3310.0’ Family Characteristics, Australia, 1997, ABS Cat. 4442.0; Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Families, ABS Cat. 6224.0, 1997; Australian Demographic Trends, ABS Cat. 3102.0, 1997)

iii. Summary of Changed Family Life Conditions:
• The median age at first marriage has increased between 1974 and 1995 from 23.3 years to 27.3 years for grooms, and from 20.9 years to 25.3 years for brides. This reflects the improvement of women in both education and labour force participation, as well as changed values about the validity and timing of marriage and child-bearing. It means fewer children are born to older parents and they are raised in smaller families in which each child is more ‘precious’ than ever before.

• 34% of all marriages are now second or subsequent marriages for one or both partners. The ABS reports that 859,900 children in Australia have their natural father ‘living elsewhere’, and 118,500 whose mother ‘lives elsewhere’, leaving 3,505,400 living with both natural parents. The Stepfamily Association of Australia regards the ABS figures for stepfamilies (88,900, with one natural and one step parent) and blended families (75,300, with both natural parents, but a step sibling in the household) as an underestimate of the number of all forms of stepfamily in Australia (e.g. where children visit the home of a natural parent who has repartnered), which they put at one in every five families. This is a very large number of children for whom home is very different from the stable nuclear family of old.

• Of all couples with dependent children (1,988,100 in 1996), 378,300 are de facto married, but this figure ignores the large numbers living in de facto arrangements of a shorter and more unstable nature.

• Australia’s fertility rate fell during the 1960s and was below replacement rate by 1976. Though the overall number of children more than doubled between 1925 (2.2 million) and 1997 (4.7 million aged 0-17), mostly due to the post-War Baby Boom, they represent a decreasing proportion of our slowly aging population and rose by only 2% in the decade 1985-1995. By the year 2020, children will be a smaller group than those over age sixty. However, growth rates will vary across the States, with Queensland’s child population projected to grow by 30% to the year 2025, compared with a drop of – 5.2% for Victoria, and a growth of 7.7% in child numbers for NSW up to the year 2025.

• The divorce rate (per 1000 currently married men) has continued to rise, from 10.7 in 1986 to 12.9 in 1996.

• The crude divorce rate in 1996 was 2.9 (per 1000 population). This is the third highest rate ever recorded (4.5 in 1976 and 3.2 in 1977, following
passage of the Family Law Act 1975 which cleared a huge backlog of previously separated couples).

- The median age at divorce has risen (in parallel with the later age at first marriage) to 40.2 years for men and 37.4 years for women, an increase of 4.9 years for men and 4.7 years for women since 1980. The median duration of marriage to divorce has fluctuated between 10.1 and 11.0 years, and duration from marriage to separation has increased from 6.9 years in 1976 to 7.6 years in 1996.

- Since 1984, when joint applications for divorce became available, the number of joint applications (indicating at least some degree of mutual cooperation between divorcing partners) has increased from 7% in 1986 to 22% of divorces in 1996.

- Most applications are, however, still lodged singly, with 46% being lodged by wives (53% where children are involved) and 32% by husbands in 1996. There is no standard ‘role’ for men and women, husbands and wives; everything in a relationship has to be negotiated. (Edgar, D. & H. Glezer (1993), ‘Family and intimacy’, contributed chapter in N.J. Smelser, Sociology, Blackwell/UNESCO)

- Again because of later age at marriage and delayed/reduced fertility, the number of divorces involving children has fallen, from 60% in 1986 to 54% in 1996. Of divorces granted in 1996, where children under 18 years were involved, the average issue was 1.9 children, Nevertheless, in that year, a total of 52 455 children were affected by their parents’ divorce.

- Divorce expectations rise from 8% of all marriages likely to end in divorce within five years of marriage, to 19% within ten years, 32% within twenty years and 39% within thirty years. These projections are often misrepresented as if a third of all current marriages have already ended in divorce; what they in fact show is that many couples persist with marriage over a longer period than their forebears did, and that six out of every ten marriages are likely to, and do endure ‘until death do us part’.

- Remarriages, for both men and women, after divorce or widowhood, fell in all age groups between 1976 and 1996; more people choose to remain single or live together informally rather than to remarry. This is an entirely different context for both partnering and parenting.

- There are 1 199 000 (21%) Australian children living in one-parent families, only 14% with their fathers as principal carer. While the number of children in Australia rose only 3% between 1986-96, the number in one-parent families rose 50%. Of these one-parent families, 62% result from
separation or divorce, 31% were not previously married, but more were de facto than single mother households, and 7% were widowed. For those children in sole care, 41.2% see the other parent once a fortnight or more, while 29.8% see them less than once a year or never. The significant role of the father as ‘a double engine behind the child’s potentiality’ is thus reduced dramatically for many children. (Jackson, B. (1982), Fatherhood, George Allen & Unwin, London).

- Despite constant reference in the law to ‘the best interests of children’, our systems fail them in many ways. The 1997 ABS Family Characteristics Survey identified 978 000 children living in 597 500 families, with one natural parent living outside the household. Though the collection of child support has improved, only 42% of these families received cash child support payments, and of them 31% got less than $100 per month per child. Some 97 200 families received only in-kind child support, such as pocket money, clothing, help with school fees and health insurance.

- Very few Australian families are ‘extended’ – 4% of children have other relatives living with them, 2% have non-relatives in the household, and 3% live in households with more than one family unit. 56% of indigenous children have a grandparent living with them. Contact with the extended family is quite high (Milward, 1992; Kolar, 1999), and not just for NESB families, with reciprocal support being provided both to and from the younger and older generations, but research suggests that children have few contacts with older people outside their own kin network. (Tongue, A. & N. Ballenden (1999), ‘Families and ageing in the 21st century’, Family Matters, 52, 4-8, AIFS, Melbourne.)

- 54% of children in 1997 had both parents employed in the paid workforce, 38% had one parent employed. Only 44% of sole parents were employed. This is doubtless the most profound change affecting children, because it alters the time they spend with parents and involves a new pattern of child care, both formal and informal.

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<th>Mothers with dependent children, employed in</th>
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<td>1983 41%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<td>1993 54%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998 57%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• With more mothers in the paid labour force, 1.5 million children aged under 12 used some form of child care (12% formal care only, 28% informal care only, 8% both formal and informal). Only 8% of those under age 1, but 62% of those aged 4 use formal child care. Favoured formal care arrangements are out-of-school hours care (86.8%), long day care centres (60.0%), family day care houses (74.3%), occasional care (30.8%) and pre-school (11.3%). Informal care is undertaken by relatives, usually grandparents (45.5%), other siblings (47.1%) and non-relatives (52.0%).

• 88% of children live in separate houses (78% of couples with children are owners or purchasers), 5% in semi-detached and 5% in flats/apartments.

• Family size has decreased (average 1.9 children), with 38% an only child, 40% having one sibling, 17% with two siblings and 6% living in families with 4 or more children. This makes the internal ecology of sibling relationships very different from the larger families of old, probably giving equal age peers an even more significant part in the development of Australian children.

• When family income is looked at from the perspective of children in families, only 3% of children (146 400) live in the lowest income quintile, and 66% of children (3 million) live in the higher income quintiles. As the report Children, Australia: A Social Report, 1999 (ABS Cat. No. 4119.0) puts it – “Many couple families have greater earning capacity than one-parent families due to the possibility of dual incomes. Of all couple families with dependent children, those with two earners were more likely to be placed at the higher end of the income distribution (55% in the two highest quintiles). Conversely, half of all couple families with one earner, and 95% of couple families with no earner were placed in the lower two income quintiles.” (p. 46) Parents thus have to trade off time spent with children against the extra income that can be earned, and cost of child care is a major consideration, especially for families at the lower income end who may lose other benefits through tight targeting and high marginal taxation rates.

• Income distribution is, however, very unequal across family types, with larger proportions of one-parent families reliant on government payments as their main income source:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Queensland</th>
<th>West. Aust.</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per capita h’hold disposable income (in $000)</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% income to top quintile</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>337.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% income to bottom quintile</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main income source from govt. payments</td>
<td>Couples 10.3% One-parent 58.8%</td>
<td>Couples 12.4% One-parent 61.4%</td>
<td>Couples 10.9% One-parent 66.7%</td>
<td>Couples 11.4% One-parent 59.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Family mobility is quite high, with 14.2% of couple families living at a different address from a year ago, and 40.5% at a different address from 5 years ago. The figures for one-parent families are of course higher, with 29.0% at a different address from one year ago, and 57.2% at a different address from five years ago. The WA Child Health Survey (1996) found that, on average, 4 year old children had lived in at least two different dwellings; 8 year olds in three dwellings; and 14 year olds in up to four different dwellings. However, 61% of primary school students had attended only one school, and another 25% had been to two schools, so changes of house often centre round choice of school, and school remains a point of stability for many children.

- Research on divorce effects on children suggest it is the disruption of children’s home residency, with consequent disruption to schooling and friendships, that explains many of the negative impacts, as well as the degree of conflict between parents in sorting out access and property arrangements after divorce (Amato & Booth, 1998).

- Infant mortality has continued to improve, dropping from 17 per 1000 live births in 1971 to 5.3 in 1997. Overall, children have fewer medical visits than adults, but health problems persist with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

- For all children aged below 18 in 1993, some 7% (318 800) suffered from a disability, 6% of them with a handicap (i.e. limited ability to perform the tasks of daily living) and 1% without a handicap.
Concerns about child abuse have increased, though in 1995-96 only 91,700 cases were recorded, of which 44.9% were substantiated (47% boys and 53% girls). These reported cases comprised 28% physical abuse, 31% emotional abuse, 24% neglect and 16% sexual abuse. In most cases (71%) the abuse was by a natural or adoptive parent, 17% by a stepparent, 22% by other relatives or guardians and 10% by friends or neighbours. Sexual abuse was committed by natural/adoptive parents (24%), stepparents (24%), other relatives (22%) and friends/neighbours (10%). Figures vary for different states with different reporting systems, with some mandatory reporting increasing the recorded incidence of abuse.

The following table selects some demographic/family characteristics where Queensland parallels or differs from the national average:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Queensland</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median age</td>
<td>32.3 years</td>
<td>34.0 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% aged 0-14</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% aged 65+</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas-born</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in NESB country</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in capital city</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>63.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popln. Growth rate</td>
<td>2.37% (highest of all)</td>
<td>1.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% growth child popln., projected 1995-2025</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Births outside marriage</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De facto couples</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Births to Mos. Under 20</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12 retention rate</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
<td>71.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not complete secy. ed.</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most crucial issue arising from all these changes in family life is how they are affecting, and will affect, children and their schooling. Teachers today report the obvious signs of family disruption – anxiety, depression, lack of discipline, aggression, the need for firm and caring adult guidance.
There are reports of a ‘crisis in parenting’ across the nation, with many parents confused about whether and how to set limits on their children’s behaviour. The WA Child Health Survey (1996) found that parental disciplinary style strongly affects child health outcomes, with coercive (5% of parents), inconsistent (38%), neutral (7%) and encouraging (49%) styles ranging from negative to positive effects on children. One-parent families are often the subject of criticism, despite research which shows many of them bring up children who are socially competent, independent and academically successful (Amato, 1993). The WA Child Health Survey did find an independent and negative effect of sole and step parenting on children, but mainly where it involved significant family discord and a coercive parenting style. They conclude that “regardless of family income, children in one-parent and step/blended families have an increased risk of mental health problems than children in original families when similar conditions of family discord and parental disciplinary style apply. These data also indicate the extent to which the protective effects of positive family relationships and encouraging parenting can offset the risks associated with the particular family structure a child happens to be living in" (p. 56). Amato & Booth (1997), in an extensive analysis of divorce effects studies, plus a longitudinal study of a large US sample of children whose parents had divorced, also emphasise the modifying effects of good parenting (which they define as ‘authoritative parenting’ where warmth and support are combined with consistent limit-setting) both before and after the parents separate. Both teachers and parents might benefit from a close examination of such findings.

iv. Australian Multiculturalism

Another basic message to be conveyed in any review of social trends affecting education is that we are a very diverse society, despite the nation’s origins in Anglo-Celtic settlement, with over 100 birthplace groups now identified in the Census.

Demographically, we are diverse in ethnic origin, in family forms, and in age groups and all three affect the ecology of childhood and the nature of schooling. And though the ethnic mix and its relative concentration vary widely by city and region, our schools must consider their role in the context of a very pluralistic society.
Total population has risen from 7.6 million in 1947, having doubled by 1979, and was estimated at 18.5 million in June, 1997, reaching 19 million by June 1999. The original inhabitants of the land, our indigenous Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, number some 265,500, and our overseas-born population has increased from 2.8 million (20%) in 1976 to 4.2 million (23%) in 1996. By 1996, Asian-born people represented 22% of all people born overseas.

Population projections depend on expected birth rates and levels of migration, but will increase to between 22.1 and 26.4 million by the year 2051. By the turn of the century, well over 40% of our people will be ethnically ‘mixed’ (Price, 1993), so the concept of national identity has to deal with what the present government’s bilaterally agreed policy calls “Australian multiculturalism” – an attempt to avoid the divisive connotations of previous years and to stress ‘inclusiveness’ and emphasise “the things that unite us as a people – our common membership of the Australian community; our shared desire for social harmony; the benefits of our diversity; our evolving national character and identity.” (NMAC Report, 1999, p. 7).

The key principles of Australian multiculturalism are stated as being ‘civic duty’, ‘cultural respect’, ‘social equity’ and ‘productive diversity’, and retention of the term is based on opinion polls which indicate a high degree of public support. For example, a 1996 AGB McNair survey found 61% of Australians agreed with multiculturalism, defined as “encouraging migrants to become Australians without having to give up their own culture”, and 70% disagreed with the proposition that multiculturalism should be abolished. An April 1997 survey by Newspoll asked if multiculturalism had been good or bad for Australia. 78% said it had been good (41% ‘very good’) and only 16% said it had been bad (6% ‘very bad’) (Goot, cited on p. 37 of NMAC Report, 1999). It must be acknowledged, of course, that the last couple of years have seen a resurgence of anti-migration sentiment, with clearly racist overtones, and if the government’s declared support for multiculturalism is to hold sway, the schools will carry a major responsibility for teaching tolerance and the benefits of diversity in the modern age.

English is the national language, but in 1996 nearly 2.5 million people spoke other languages at home. Of these, 74% were overseas-born, with 26%
Australian-born children of migrants. Teaching English as a second language is a major goal, particularly since the new information technologies make English the language of global communication.

**v. Australia’s Increasing Age Divide**

But the one change not immediately apparent from the statistics relates to the disappearance of family-oriented adults from the lives of many children and their replacement by young adults who have no interest in children or their future, at least until they themselves decide to establish a family.

The focus is usually put on the ‘ageing’ of our population, that is a growing imbalance between the proportions of young and old. For example, whereas children comprised 36% of Australia’s total population in 1925, by 1995 this had decreased to 26%. Or while the child population grew by only 1% between 1975 and 1995, the population aged 65 and over increased by 78%. With declining fertility, children in the 0-4 years age group have come to represent a smaller proportion of the child population (28% in 1995), thus shifting the demand to services for older children. Projected growth of the child population also varies by state, as different age groups shift house for reasons of jobs or lifestyle and as immigration favours some states over others. The following table shows projected state growth of the child population:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/territory</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2025</th>
<th>% change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'000</td>
<td>'000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>1 546.8</td>
<td>1 665.3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic.</td>
<td>1 125.8</td>
<td>1 067.8</td>
<td>- 5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld.</td>
<td>863.0</td>
<td>1 125.8</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>358.8</td>
<td>324.5</td>
<td>- 9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>462.5</td>
<td>563.6</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tas.</td>
<td>126.9</td>
<td>102.4</td>
<td>- 19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td>89.1</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>4 620.3</td>
<td>5 005.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
But of equal significance is the fact that close to a third of the population (31.73% in 1994 and 29.15% by 2010) are/will be aged between 20 and 40, traditionally the years of marriage and child-bearing, but increasingly now years of singlehood and career orientation.

Already one in every four households in Australia is a single-person household (including old as well as young singles), and the lifestyle of child-free singles is very different from that of young parents. For children, there are fewer adult role models who have the commitments of marriage and parenthood; their key age reference group (always the group just a little older than themselves) is out having a good time, making money, building a career (the job market willing), changing sexual partners at will, and generating a consumer base for mass entertainment of a kind the older generation finds distasteful or, at best, wearying (violent films and videos, explicit sexual content, every night football matches, discos, bars, breakfast/lunch and dinner restaurants, the drug culture, and an extended-hours work-based peer reference group).

So while most children still live in a family household where meals are eaten, gardens planted and lawns mown, the reality is not the same as it was twenty years ago. Their parents are both juggling work demands on family time, fast food is replacing home cooking, much household work is outsourced (or left undone), television and computer games keep the kids occupied instead of games being played or stories being read, their lives are hurried and managed by specialist adults (gym., music, sports coaches, child care workers, tutors, etc.) and their role models, the sort of person they want to be, is the thirty-something yuppy on TV or the carefree young adult out on the prowl with few parental constraints.

Perhaps this explains the qualitative change in the nature of violence in films (from a symbolic battle between good and evil to gratuitous violence as entertainment) and the rise in economic importance of the entertainment industry as such. (Patricia Edgar, 1999) If you’re not busy having children and looking after a house, what else do you do with your time and money? Unencumbered singles and uncommitted couples have high discretionary income and demand variety in entertainment forms to cater to their needs.
Small wonder parents and teachers have a hard time inculcating the old values of delayed gratification, respect for one’s elders, concern for the wider social good, obedience to the law.

In fact, there is research evidence for the shift in values of children between primary and secondary school, when this new adult lifestyle comes into view.

A recent ACER survey of 2646 teachers and 8144 students from Years 5 and 10 across Australia (Ainley, J., M. Batten, C. Collins & G. Withers (1998), Schools and the Social Development of Young Australians, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne) found large discrepancies between the social goals of teachers and those of children, especially of older students. They looked at such oft-repeated goals as learning to relate well to others, commitment to community well-being, conforming to rules and conventions, interest in lifelong learning, self-confidence and optimism for the future.

Teachers strongly emphasise in their daily work caring for other people, tolerance and respect for others, a capacity to work cooperatively and interpersonal communication skills. The majority of both younger and older students agreed about ‘helping a friend who is in trouble’, ‘accepting someone of a different race as a friend’, but only 23% of Year 10 students agreed that ‘helping someone who is less well of than you’, and only 40% that ‘looking after someone who is not well or upset’, are extremely important.

While most students agree on the importance of ‘protecting children from harm’ and ‘treating all races equally’, only 31% of Year 10 students are concerned about reducing poverty, and only 11% see ‘helping in community groups’ as of key importance. Their primary school counterparts were more community oriented than they.

All school teachers regard it as their job to encourage a knowledge of socially appropriate behaviour, a sense of social responsibility, respect for the law and a training in leadership. Yet the survey found 72% of Year 5 but only 32% of Year 10 students ranked ‘respecting society’s rules and laws’ as extremely important; 67% compared with 41% did so on ‘being honest when buying or selling things’; ‘telling the truth even when it may hurt you’ was extremely important to 63% of Year 5 students compared to 29% of Year 10
students; and only a quarter of either group gave importance to ‘controlling one’s temper when angry’.

On interest in learning, the results are no more encouraging. Though schools encourage wider interests in debating, music, arts, drama, the pursuit of personal curiosity, ‘finding out how something works’ attracted extreme interest from only 46% of primary students and 30% of secondary. Only 45% of Year 10 students were extremely interested in ‘improving skills after starting work; and, on general statements like ‘thinking about why the world is in the state it is’ and ‘finding out why something happened the way it did’, only 22% of Year 10 compared to 35% of Year 5 students expressed keen interest.

Most schools in recent years have also put a high level of effort into building students’ self-confidence and sense of belonging, through Peer Support Programs, pastoral care groupings, transition programs in Years 7 and 8, and a focus on building resilience, initiative and personal excellence. And though most students surveyed had a positive image of their life chances (over 80% think they will ‘reach their goals in life’ and ‘do well in the things that mattered’ to them), only 12% of secondary school students feel that, almost always, ‘other people think a lot of me’. That’s a sad commentary on the efficacy of Australian adolescents. Similarly, there is little optimism about the future among older students, with only 26% agreeing ‘in the future our world will be better for most people’ and ‘in future there will be less conflict and war’. Whereas 61% of Year 5 students agreed with the statement ‘in the future people will be able to shape what they do’, only 39% of Year 10 students agreed. Only half of these older students indicated their school was a place where they ‘felt happy or interested’, 54% agreed it was a place where they ‘enjoyed learning’, and 77% of Year 5 but only 51% of Year 10 students agreed their teachers were ‘almost always friendly and helpful’.

Such recent findings stand in stark contrast to my own survey of adolescents back in 1979, when their optimism shone through in comparison with their middle-aged fathers. Then, some 75% of teenagers agreed ‘I feel I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane to others’ (only 2% of fathers agreed); 81% said ‘On the whole, I think I am quite a happy person’ (4.7% of fathers agreed); and 38% said ‘I wish I could have more respect for myself’ (63% of fathers agreed with this statement). My interpretation then was that middle-aged fathers, their life options and ambitions now closing
off, were affronted by the optimism of youth and much parent-teen conflict resulted from this clash. There was then as now, as might be expected, a similar adolescent rejection of authoritarian rules and constraints. (e.g. only 36% agreed ‘The most important thing to teach children is obedience to their parents’; 32% that ‘It generally works best to keep on doing things the way they have done before’) But there are signs in this most recent ACER survey of a growing distrust of adult institutional structures and a desire to go their own way, do their own thing.

This is not to say the next generation will not settle down, marry and have children as the time clock moves on. And though their life priorities follow a similar ‘study/work/settle down’ sequence, the timing and the content of each stage is very different and for many the ‘settling down’ will not include marriage or children at all.

In an international study of 2500 students from top universities in 11 countries, including Australia, 57% said that ‘finding a balance between their private life and their career’ was their top priority (up from 45% in the first Price Waterhouse Survey of 1995). Their three-year perspective ranked ‘career development’ and ‘personal development and growth’ at almost the same level (a top priority for 55%); gaining international experience next (31%); and ‘building a family’ a priority for only 12%. But asked about their life 10 years on, some 48% said ‘building a family’ would be a priority; 38% said so for ‘spending time with friends and family’; and ‘career development’ plus ‘personal development and growth’ had reduced as a priority in comparison, though they were still priorities for over 40% of these top university students. Most of them expect to work long hours in their first jobs (an average of 47.1 hours) but want a company that will give them a good career start, values a balance between personal life and career, and provides them with inspiring colleagues and a competitive salary. (Carson, A. (8 June, 1999), The Age, Melbourne, p. 13)

Such results simply reinforce how different are the life experiences and expectations of this younger adult group. They face a world that is structurally and culturally different from the world of the Baby Boom generation, and schools need to see that world of singles concentrating on career (balanced by quality in personal leisure lifestyle) as the future reality faced by secondary students today. They are the models, the reference group, not the parents or the older generation. And we can expect a growing
sense of alienation and disappointment as the gap between the work-rich and the work-poor increases. Common to both groups, nevertheless, will be the need to fill private time with ‘entertainment’, not in the old style of Saturday at the footie, washing the car at the weekend and nights spent with family in front of the tellie, but in an ever-expanding rush of new experiences, both real and virtual, paid for out of hard-earned long hours at work but with few interpersonal encumbrances to time out or private wish-fulfilment. Individual values, private choice, the rejection of commonly accepted rules and norms will predominate.

The range of factors driving this dramatic shift in the lives of children and families is large and not confined simply to economic forces within the global marketplace.

But it is important to understand the impact of global change on the nature of government, government service-provision, and the nature of community life in which the schools now have to operate.

We have already given central importance in this paper to the extent of structural change in the Australian economy, since this affects directly the resources available for education and the nature of education likely to be demanded of young people in the next century. We now turn to the new ways in which the state, the workplace and the wider community are likely to interact with that changed economic reality in the next decades.
SECTION C : TOWARDS A NEW INTEGRATION:  
SCHOOLS AT THE CENTRE

i. The Changing Role of Government

To reiterate the argument thus far, and to emphasise the changed context in which our schools will have to operate, we need to re-think the links between the state, the marketplace and the community. There are both negatives and positives and schools could play a leading role in shaping the nature of Australian society in the next century if they would ‘seize the day’.

While the world is becoming more inter-linked globally, the impacts of globalisation on nation states is not uniform. On the one hand, universal principles of human rights impinge on the right of sovereign states to pursue policies of oppression; on the other, uncontrolled capital flows manipulated via the Internet by huge companies and financial institutions can undermine the economies of whole nations. So-called free market principles benefit the
powerful trading countries which often, in fact, impose import restrictions, offer subsidies to their own exporters and demand concessions from other nations that are not in their national interest (as in the recent US imposition of a tariff on imported Australian lamb). As well, though the global economy seems to promise a more unified world culture (or the threat of a McDonaldised/Disneyfied one) the reaction to opening up formerly controlled economies to competition has driven a ‘new tribalism’, ethnic reassertion and conflict based on narrow national and group interests.

Nonetheless, it is clear that nation states, governments, have and will have less control over their own economies in this global marketplace. They can, of course, still control how taxation revenue will be collected and how it will be distributed, but every decision on monetary and fiscal policy is now subject to assessment and possibly negative reaction by those who trade and exchange money round the world. The degree of political unrest and union militancy, the size of interest rates, wage agreements, openness to competition, corporate taxation and controls, all are now subject to scrutiny from outside the nation, and a ‘strike of capital’ or threat of withdrawn defense support can make governments wilt under pressure.


Perhaps the key to addressing the role of schools in this increasingly complex world is again to remind those most centrally concerned (teachers, parents and politicians) that Australia’s first century of federation was built on an industrial model of managing society. The next century will not offer the same degree of order and simplicity. We are in the post-industrial age.

Work was arranged into fixed jobs, with fixed tasks, fixed timetables and fixed, relatively secure salaries. There was an agreed social contract between the state, employers and the trade unions/employees that, in return for productive labour, the state would guarantee some degree of protection from foreign competition, and provide the basic services of health, education, public transport and police, plus a safety net of welfare security for those who could not work or sustain themselves. The notion of citizenship was premised on being male, white and gainfully employed and the family unit was central to social stability and well-being because it recognised the value of women’s work and carried out the central task of raising the next generation of productive citizens.

The job of the nation’s schools was clear – help parents in that task through imparting fixed bodies of information, set skills and positive social values, in ways that could be planned like an industrial production line, and tested in standard examinations of performance.

That form of corporate state bargain has virtually disappeared. Global competition was always a threat to Australia’s national integrity, but information technology has now put paid to the capacity of any government to protect its industries and economy from competition, or to control the flow of global capital into and out of the nation, or to limit the nature of values children will learn. Information is now global and accessible via the mass media and the new technology; the nation’s wealth and job market is subject to indifferent global manipulators; a child’s future is no longer predictable in terms of what they need to know, where or how they will apply their acquired knowledge, and how much it will be worth. Moreover, the neo-liberal values of competition in a free market and the primacy of unfettered individual choice of lifestyle now seem to hold sway over a broader sense of the common good or participatory and responsible citizenship.
As we have seen, family and community life no longer fit the industrial model of old. Children grow up in increasingly complex family arrangements, mobility is high, conflict and stress are endemic for many and the sense of place which once defined the neighborhood and its school is under threat. The old social bargain of a fair wage and a fair go is being undermined by increasing disparities of family income and there is growing regional and localised poverty and social disadvantage. Families have to stitch together an income to meet their joint needs by having both partners in paid work; part-time and casual work disrupt family routines and create insecurity; the sense of community has moved from traditional groups such as the churches, sporting and social service clubs to the more remote and unshared groups of the workplace or the Internet.

As a result, schools find it more difficult to mobilise family and community support at a time when they remain the one common meeting point for many in the community.

For children growing up within this increasing complexity, the need for security, consistency, inclusion, social recognition and connectedness is high; but they face a world in which their private family background resources and their individual learning capacities will determine life chances even more relentlessly than in the past. The central ethic seems to be individual choice, competitive struggle and coping alone in a global marketplace. Schools and teachers thus face a complex task in helping students cope as individuals while also functioning as socially responsible citizens.

ii. The Nature of Community

The dominant ideology of small government and economic rationalism both derive from and further stimulate the shift in national control over financial exchange. The largesse of the welfare state gives way to attacks on ‘welfare dependency’ and narrowly targeted residual welfare for the ‘deserving disadvantaged’, but everyone must aim at self-sufficiency and independent effort.
Government is now seen as a ‘purchaser’ of services, not as a direct ‘provider’, and a whole range of community services are tendered out, on a competitive basis, in the interests of reducing costs and improving their effectiveness. There is little point in debating the pros and cons of such a shift here; more important to think through how it affects the school and its approach to ‘community’.

Welfare services such as child care, child protection, family counselling, youth support have traditionally been provided by non-government agencies funded in part by the state. They now have to compete with private, commercially-based providers who often have less knowledge of and interest in the local communities they are meant to serve. The local networks of church and other service-providers are being dissolved, with a consequent undermining of the altruism and self-interest that jointly motivate much voluntary work. (ABS (1995), Voluntary Work, Australia, Cat. 4441.0)

User-pays requirements put some services out of reach of ordinary families in need of advice and occasional assistance, and turn others into residual services narrowly targeted at those considered at the bottom of the heap. There has been a decline in universal, preventative support services, accessible to the whole community if and when they might need assistance. (Tomison, A. (1997), Overcoming Structural Barriers to the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect – A Discussion Paper, NSW Child Protection Council, Sydney).

The result is that scarce government resources are increasingly directed at crisis intervention (in itself more costly and invasive of family autonomy), not at more positive early intervention, growth-oriented services which might prevent the sorts of family and individual dysfunction that we all deplore. Funds go to ‘the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff’, not to ‘the fence around the top of the cliff’. The effect on society is to distort values and divide the community of trust on which social order depends. (Cox, E. (1998), ‘Measuring social capital as part of progress and well-being’, in R. Eckersley (ed.), Measuring Progress: Is Life Getting Better? CSIRO, Melbourne, 157-168.)

In theory, ‘community’ arises out of the need for people to group together and develop services or activities not already being provided. The ‘civil society’ is supposed to be that network of civil relationships through which
diverse groups interact, on a basis of trust, for the common good. So one might expect a reduction in government, top-down service provision, to lead to a resurgence of community activity, a renewal of self-help and mutual support. Instead, in Australia so far, it has led to more centralised bureaucratic control, since services are defined categorically by the planning managers, and successful tenderers for service provision are held accountable to an army of bureaucrats. It need not be this way, and some states are moving to allow more regionally and locally-responsive arrangements which would involve active participation by community groups, a better integration across government departments and greater trust in local initiatives. (Edgar, D. (1999), Promoting the Positive for Children and Families, Deakin Human Services, Melbourne)

However community, it must be remembered, just as often arises out of conflict between competing interest groups, the threat of ‘outsiders’ engendering a common group purpose to defend one’s own turf. And in a privatised society, where each family pursues its own interests and where the individual’s pursuit of happiness is paramount, notions of the common good, public spirit, community mindedness, are less likely to hold sway. The ethic of competition holds that those who win are the most deserving; why support people who cannot (do not?) help themselves? And sensible notions of ‘reciprocal responsibility’ become distorted into business philanthropy, charity hand-outs for PR purposes and to preserve social order, as opposed to a true partnership between businesses which draw their resources and profits from particular communities and regions (not to mention nations) and the schools, community welfare support groups and local infrastructure which contribute to their productive viability.

Several commentators decry the disappearance of ‘community’, of the ‘civil society’, the triumph of individualism and consumerism over a sense of shared responsibility for ‘the common good’ (Cox, 1995, 1998; Eckersley, 1998; Uslaner, 1997; Theobald, 1997; Tanner, 1999). This is coupled with a critique of free market ideologies, economic rationalism and the disjunction between economic and social development.

Robert Theobald has become something of a guru, calling for change, but he does not explain how to achieve his naïve commitment to:

(a) decrease lifetime hours spent on jobs as quickly as possible
(b) discourage consumption rather than promote it
(c) provide people with the opportunity to learn on a lifetime basis
(d) reintroduce spiritual values into our decision-making processes and use them as a compass” (1997, p. 77)

Offe (19996) and Capling et al (1998) call for a rejuvenation of ‘thick’ rather than ‘thin’ democratic participation through more active and decentralised community relationships. As Offe and Cox both stress, children need to move from trusting relationships within their own family to wider social circles, through positive experiences with others that develop and reinforce trust which, in turn, allows the transfer of trust to social ‘strangers’. If allowed to stay within closed groups, familial or cultural, children and adults become anti-social, their particularistic trust not transferable to the rest of the community. (Banfield, 1958, wrote of the Mafia and ‘amoral familism.’)

Uslaner (1997) says when ‘generalised trust’ fails, so does life satisfaction and social cohesion.

Children have to be taught to pay attention outside their own self-absorption and learn sociability skills in order to experience trust and engagement with others. Cox (1998) distinguishes between ‘social trust’ (which facilitates interaction in daily life) and ‘civic trust’ which affects our wider political institutions and develops what is called ‘social capital’, as opposed to individual ‘human capital’. For society to operate with some degree of effectiveness and social justice, we have to develop through our own life narratives, our accumulated experiences with others, a sense of our own efficacy, and a trust in social processes. Without this, we cannot reliably predict how others will behave, we fear other people, are less accepting of diversity and difference, and society loses cohesion and fairness.

The schools are a key social institution in which both social trust and civic trust can be nurtured. Schools are the first move for most children beyond the particularistic affection and values of the family; they move children towards more universal standards of behaviour, of evaluation and the child’s place in the wider society. Unfortunately, they are structured around competition and individual achievement - no problem if that gives children a sense of efficacy and competence, but a real problem if it excludes large numbers of children from respect and achievement.
Luke & Luke (1995) point out that the system’s usual response to the challenge of globalisation and the restructuring of work has been a deficit one, the deficit being a lack of job-related skills or competences or citizenship qualities that must be rectified. “Yet such approaches fail to consider that the key variable is not individual deficiency, but rather the relationship between students’ cultural resources and the demands of new social relations, technologies and contexts.” (p. 12). They call for a repertoire of ‘multi-literacies’ based on the full range of media and cultural forms and a renewed emphasis on intensive face-to-face communication, teamwork, cooperation, problem-solving and productivity. (Cope et al, 1994). To do this, schools must shift from being a closed environment and develop “a renewed commitment to community collaboration and a two-way exchange of knowledge and expertise” (p.10).

Similarly, Marginson (1995) claims “Education develops the cultural conditions that are necessary for a successful economy … education is a builder of the capacity to form and work relationships between people, which are crucial in all economic (and social) settings” (p. 19). But they cannot do this in isolation and should not accept a brief from society that assumes they can alone overcome the problems of a complex modern society. Better links with community welfare services, local businesses, TAFE colleges, parents and the elderly could expand the resources available to schools to ensure the full human development (as opposed to academic, economic and vocational development) of our children. He quotes Raymond Williams’ statement in The Long Revolution: “self-management and devolution can be used to release a tremendous reservoir of social energy, now locked in resentment of bureaucratic and hierarchical organisations, and to create collaborative, participating communities in which the ideals of caring and sharing are central. In this form devolution itself is an educative process, providing opportunities not only for participation in decisions, but the sharing of cultures and experiences.”

Clearly, the implication for schools is that they cannot operate separately from other governmental and community structures, so administrative ‘silo-building’ and ‘gateway maintenance’ must give way to a more coordinated integration of government departments and policies which affect children and their parents. This stands in sharp contrast to the recent tendency for central education managers to dictate the terms of school management and national curriculum guidelines top-down, with little consultation with those most
directly affected – the teachers, school principals and parents. (Lingard & Rivzi, 1995) And, as Renshaw (1995) puts it, schools need to be organised round a ‘sociocultural model’ of learning in which “the learner is seen as in the process of entering the practices, values and ways of thinking and speaking of a wider community. Central to the process of learning is participation in activities with others”, in a “community of learning” where “knowledge is seen as socially achieved … not a set of facts to be accepted on the authority of the expert, but rather a process that begins with questions and curiosity about social and physical phenomena, and involves the gathering of evidence that satisfies certain public criteria for coherence and logic.” (p. 32).

iii. Integrating Government Services Around Children

How to better integrate schools with other community agencies is the core issue. And it cannot be done by assuming current structures will remain the same. It will involve active intervention by governments aimed at building new forms of community participation and decision-making. It must combine cross-departmental cooperative arrangements with cross-age and inter-generational opportunities for learning. And it must break down current barriers between business, education and community services.

Moves towards closer integration across government departments reflect a major shift in the delivery of government services as a whole. As we have already indicated, with global flows of finance virtually uncontrollable by national governments, the state has a diminished capacity to collect taxation in the standard form of income tax, no matter ‘progressive’ the tax scales may be. That is why current attempts to broaden the tax base through some form of a Goods and Services Tax are so urgent and why further reforms of business tax and social security income transfers are being pursued. But the effects are already apparent in reduced government provision of services and a shift towards privatisation and user-pays principles.

Neo-liberal philosophy and what has been labelled ‘economic rationalism’ (Pusey, 1992) have been entrenched through the National Competition Policy
into an insistence on competitive tendering, the government as ‘purchaser’ not the ‘provider’ of services. So far, this has affected welfare community services and health services more than education, but federal education policy regarding the funding of private and public schools appears to be moving in the same direction.

This is a major challenge for state systems of education, and schools may well find themselves pushed into competitive tendering for the provision of schooling in competition with the likes of IBM, Hewlett Packard and major companies such as Woolworths (which has already set up a partnership with Deakin University to provide skills training and university qualifications for its employees).

Thus the challenge for schools in the coming decade is much more than how to purchase and use computers in the classroom; technology makes it possible for schools as institutions to be superseded by new structures more deliberately focused on developing the skills needed by industry (Lee, 1999). They will have to articulate clearly exactly what they have to offer that is better for students and for society as a whole than what their competitors may provide.

The most sensible strategy would be for schools to forge new partnerships with ‘external’ organisations, those most allied in the educational enterprise and those who can contribute to an enriched education for children in a complex world. In particular, alliances with local and regional libraries, other human service providers (youth, family, ethnic, health, etc.), and agreements with employers to cross-fertilise regarding vocational training, work experience and those generic skills most needed in the new global market – emotional intelligence, communication, problem-solving, teamwork, using diversity productively and entrepreneurial creativity. Ainley & McKenzie (1998) argue it is not just “imperative for more young people to consider remaining at school but that conditions in schools provide the opportunity for them to actually remain in school. … The recent OECD review of young people’s transition from education to work suggested that, in addition to broadening the curriculum … schools as they are presently structured are unlikely to be able to provide the range of support services that at-risk youth need if they are to navigate their way successfully through school and into the labour market.”
There are several options to consider in this regard. One is the ‘full service school’ model in which schools become a central point for both identifying the needs of children and families for additional family support, and in some instances also the on-site provision of that support. Social welfare, marriage and divorce counselling, child protection, home help, intensive family strengthening programs, youth and ethnic support services can be housed in the school as a non-stigmatising central point for parent information, advice and referral. One version of this is the ‘Health-Promoting Schools’ movement, which aims at schools addressing the total physical, mental and emotional health of children and their parents.

Another model for such an integrated system might be the British Education Action Zones, which give local/regional areas control over the resources from several functional departments in order to allow them the flexibility to forge new alliances between business, education and the human services. An extension of this model has been proposed for Victoria (Edgar, 1999) in which Family Resource Zones, run by Family Community Forums, and using local schools, child care centres, libraries and shopping centres as a network of Family Resource Centres, would completely transform the way community services operate and bring the schools into a closer relationship with family and community support, as well as regional economic development.

What such a model argues is that, though governments may have less control over capital flows across their national borders, they can still shape the ways in which national expenditure is handled. As well, it suggests that governments need not retain central control over the detail of school or human service operations, but should decentralise those operations so that different regions/zones/areas can tailor-make their services to fit the particular demographic and social profile of their citizens.

Thirdly, it insists that governments do have a duty to enhance the civil society and this can be best done by removing the centralised managerialism that bedevils a system supposedly based on the notion of ‘small government’ but which in fact gives more control to central bureaucrats who do not understand that one size will no longer fit all.

Especially in education, the complexity of students’ family lives, the complexity and rapid change of the workplace they will face, combine to
suggest a need for radical reform in the direction of greater school ‘autonomy’, but not in isolation from productive partnerships with those other community and business organisations which affect the quality of life of present and future generations.

The new information technology makes the development and management of such a complex system feasible for the first time.

iv. The School as ‘Gathering Place’

In this climate, the schools remain one of the few local ‘gathering places’ for community groups and activities. They are a positive service, not a negative one; they are provided ‘free’ for any child and family (the very nature of ‘public education’); they aim at positive growth, child development, to teach social values and skills for the good of the wider society. Schools should have, by their very nature, high public respect and strong public support.

The problem is, schools have in the past tended to turn away from the wider community. Teachers focus on children and, to a limited extent, their parents; that is ‘the school community’. They have failed to draw on the support and interests of others in the wider community who have (or could have) a vested interest in ensuring the viability and political priority of schooling.

Employers have a direct interest in the ‘product’ of the school, a legitimate interest in what children learn, the skills they develop, yet educators have tended to reject this as narrow vocationalism. Despite improvements in vocational education, too much of it is narrowly skills based, too often work-experience is peripheral to the curriculum, not valued, not properly integrated into the curriculum or the student evaluation system. Insufficient emphasis is placed on entrepreneurial skills, though the majority of Australian students will end up working in small, rather than large, businesses. (ABS, (1997), Small Business in Australia, Cat. 1321.0).

School councils have only recently been allowed to consider issues such as staff appointments, the nature and quality of the curriculum, school organisational and managerial/administrative matters, despite the obvious advantages of drawing on the talents of local business people and administrators. In Victoria, controversy still surrounds what is, in essence, a
very forward-looking initiative – schools can opt to become ‘Self-Governing Schools – because of fears they may be thrown onto their own capacity to raise funds, with government finance withdrawn. This is, of course, a legitimate concern, but it should not overshadow the real opportunity it provides for schools to move forward as community organisations linking lifetime education, workplaces and community services.

Schools have been closed at weekends and evenings, except for parent-teacher meetings or school events, yet they represent a vast public resource, funded by public taxation, and their sports facilities, halls, libraries and science labs. could be much more efficiently used for adult and further education, as a base for community organisations in need of space at low or no rentals. One obvious way of maintaining the interest of young adults would be to develop schools as adult entertainment centres, facilities to be used flexibly by the singles in search of outlets for their energetic enthusiasms. Much training and retraining could utilise school facilities, forging better links between schools, TAFE colleges and business.

The usual excuses have been that funds must be spent on children only, or that safety regulations and public liability are too difficult, or that teachers don’t have time to organise such things as well as doing their teaching. All lame, given new management skills, the potential of computer links and information access, and the urgent need for schools to make themselves the new ‘gathering places’ of the community if they are to survive with widespread public support.

Central departmental policies and bureaucratic procedures are at fault too, but this will change as governments drive their efficiency rules towards the integration of related services to meet public goals more effectively. It is astonishing that Education and Human Services Departments do not work more closely together, or that child care, infant health, community health centres, even aged care support, are not clustered round or commonly use the facilities of the schools. It is equally astonishing that school libraries are not linked into the public library network, and that all libraries are not used as a network of family information and resource centres.

All of this of course, indicates the need for major change in the culture of our schools, and it will be different in primary schools from secondary schools because of their different focus and the needs of children at each level. But it
also requires a major change in the culture of government bureaucracies and in the culture of the workplace.

As was made clear in SECTION B, future schools will have to cater for an increasingly diverse set of family circumstances in which their pupils live. Teachers must be aware of how varied family life is and not assume all children come from a comfortable, two parent, intact married family.

Most teachers are already aware of this complexity, but schools as organisations are still designed around a stereotype of families with a mother at home and relative stability. Daily timetables rarely take account of the complexity of parents’ working lives, all children having to attend at standard hours rather than at times which fit with other child care arrangements. Meetings with parents will have to be varied to catch the range of times suitable to them, not just to suit teachers and school administrators.

Obviously, teachers cannot avoid having to deal with the fallout from family complexity and trauma. Despite attempts to assuage adult concerns about separation and divorce, the research evidence is clear that such processes affect children over a long period of time - they are not simple ‘events’ in the life of a child – and every child is distressed at the break-up of the only family they know (Amato & Booth, 1997). Often marital breakdown involves severe conflict, with children confused about what is going on, even blaming themselves for the problem. Parents do not divorce lightly; they separate, come back together, experience more difficulty and separate again. Children’s ability to concentrate at school is clearly affected, and severe emotional problems affect their behaviour.

Teachers thus need careful training in coping with the emotional problems of children; they need to have ready access to psychologists, counsellors, family support groups, preferably within the school itself, so that children experiencing difficulties can be referred to expert help. Such support is as vital to the learning outcomes of school as are the academic qualifications and general teaching skills of teachers.

Third, the school will need to actively encourage ‘good enough’ parenting, and probably should become the central location of parent education programs in the community. Since many Australians (and especially those from NESB countries) are resistant to notions of counselling, even needing
help of any kind from outsiders (McCaughey, 1987), such programs should preferably not be called ‘parent education’ as such. Instead, short workshops on ‘homework help’, ‘transition to secondary school’, ‘boys and dads’, ‘mothers and sons/daughters’, ‘dealing with puberty’, ‘making stepfamilies work’, and the like are more likely to attract parents to come. Beyond that, teachers might get out of the classroom to visit parents in their own homes, as in the Bellfield Reading Project (Toomey, 1981), which showed illiterate parents how to help their children learn to read, with huge improvements in children’s reading.

Fourth, given that many children suffer doubts about the security of their own family life, schools must make every effort to ensure school is a secure and accepting environment. Organisational changes are proving to be more effective than individual counselling interventions; changes such as home-rooms, grouping children into teams that work together on a range of projects, including extra-curricular activities, longer periods with fewer teachers, instead of constant change between classrooms and teachers, active participation by students in negotiating their curriculum and developing positive disciplinary policies for the school, would all help overcome the sense of isolation and fear many students experience. The school must be a human and humane place of inclusion and connectedness, not one which sets students apart on the basis of difference or ability.

But the key change will have to be having schools more closely linked with the wider community, and the workplace, so that schooling is not seen as something separate from community life and children are encouraged to see learning as something that permeates everything, is lifelong, and can be achieved with people other than accredited teachers.
SECTION D : ASKING WHAT IS TECHNOLOGY FOR?

It may surprise some that, in a Discussion Paper about social trends affecting schools into the next century, I have left the role of technology to the last section. In fact, of course, the impact of technology pervades all of the previous discussion – on the nature of work, on the powers of national government, on the nature of family and community interaction. And that is the point. Technology is not an end in itself; it is a force for change which must be managed in the interests of children and the wider society. So the key question is, what is the place of technology in the schools?

Queensland’s draft report on ‘The application of new technologies … (March, 1999) probably places the emphasis correctly in the wording of the rest of its title ‘ … to enhance learning outcomes for students.’ If the new media, new forms of technology, do not enhance those outcomes, what is the point of pursuing them?

There is no doubt that the mass media have transformed the nature of education, nor that the new information technology is transforming both industry and educational processes.

Unfortunately, both seem to have developed as competitors to schooling rather than as powerful tools in its service. In particular, the academic culture has long regarded television and other mass media as too low-brow to be either studied in their own right or used in the classroom as a new medium for learning, thus missing much of the potential of the medium as an educational tool and context (Patricia Edgar, 1998). Ironically, the new technologies of computers and the Internet have been seized on as though they will rescue poor educational processes – a desk top or a lap top for every student – perhaps because the technology has a verbal, not visual base.

The costs involved in equipping schools with computer networks, servicing them adequately, training teachers to use them more effectively, threaten to swamp other teaching needs, such as libraries, science equipment, support personnel, smaller class sizes. As Jane Kenway (1995) puts it, teachers “are
confronted with the problem of teaching ‘high tech kids’ in ‘low tech schools’, and of being the print/TV generation teaching the Nintendo generation.” (p. 20) Many teachers are not even the TV generation, having set their eyes firmly against such lowly material.

There are dangers, too, of creating a new social divide between poor and rich schools (both public and private/religious) through unequal access to computers and the new information world of the Internet. Indeed, some private schools are already moving away from laptops for every student, towards school-based intranet and internet services, for reasons of personal safety as well as cost and efficiency. They, of course, assume that students can access the school’s computer server via their own home-based computers. Universities are also moving to link their library facilities via intranet services in order to maximize their use of scarce resources.

This suggests what is perhaps the key implication of technology advances for schools in the future. Computers give students access to learning resources beyond the school, and to teachers/experts outside the classroom.

This fundamentally alters the social definition of schooling and the structures and processes by which students learn. The teacher’s authority as expert is challenged, so teaching as the passive transmission of knowledge cannot survive. It gives new meaning to individualised instruction and to interactive learning. It means “the home is likely to converge more with the school, so there is a need for different and better links between the home, the school and other educational sites”; that teachers will have to develop “a cooperative learning community with regard to the new technologies”; it promises “the possibility of boundary blurring between classes, schools, sectors, and across State and national boundaries, and between education and other workplaces”; it gives students “a strong sense of cultural agency” in their own learning; and it exposes the schools to a “new global provider of curriculum materials”.

“When education, technology and entertainment converge, a parallel education industry emerges (so) the work of science and technology parks, theme parks and the technologised educational arms of art galleries, libraries and museums … and mounts a serious challenge to the role of institutionalised, formal and face-to-face learning in students’ lives.” (Kenway, 1995, p. 22-23).
The role of school teacher will thus become more that of a ‘learning navigator’ (Victoria 2010 Report) and the schools will have to forge new links with other centres of learning such as local libraries, workplace information centres and linked networks of expertise round the nation and the globe. As suggested above, there is also the potential for schools to forge closer links with community support services via technology and become vital family information centres for their local regions.

There will, of course, always be the need for schools to act as social centres for children (to put it less kindly, baby-sitting centres) but the conglomerate nature of schools will have to move away from regimented timetables and discipline through groups towards a much more complex array of group and team projects which will probably cut across age-grade barriers and draw on a wider array of experts apart from designated teachers.

As Kenway insists, it is important that the rush to computerise schools not ignore the content of education, in particular the challenge to national identity and the myths and narratives that make up our shared culture; and the danger of breeding passive consumers of global culture rather than active learners/citizens for the future.

Enthusiasts such as Mal Lee (Access, May 1999, ACT), talk of a ‘new global education system’ challenging the Industrial Age school and preparing the young to thrive in a knowledge-based society. The elements of this somewhat chaotic system include: the individualisation of learning; self-control and self-learning; a constructivist/discovery approach to learning; a willingness to explore the unknown and take reasoned risks; critical thinking; a lifelong learning capacity and interest; reliance on peer networks and teams for support and guidance; an acceptance of diversity through global contacts; and enhanced social skills ‘for effective interaction in the digital economy’. As he points out, all these are qualities aimed at in the schools, but schools are currently organised in ways that often stifle them.

Though the research base is somewhat thin, it does suggest that, when used appropriately (a big proviso), information and communications technologies have:
• a significant positive effect on achievement in all major subject areas, in preschool through to higher education, for both mainstream and special needs students
• positive effects on student attitudes toward learning and on student self-concept. Students felt more successful in school, were more motivated to learn and had increased self-confidence and self-esteem
• a beneficial effect on classroom interaction patterns – toward greater interaction with teachers and among class members and toward more collaborative learning experiences.


There can be no doubt that every member of society, whether child or adult, will have to be computer-literate, simply to cope with banking, shopping, paying bills, etc. Lee points to the high take-up rate of Australians with all new technological forms, but acknowledges a bias in favour of boys because of the content of much multi-media, and the widening gap between children from different socio-economic backgrounds, with the new technology exacerbating the gap between ‘information-rich’ and ‘information-poor’.

Schools that rely on pupils having home-based computer equipment add to that gap inevitably, but the state school system has a responsibility to ensure disadvantaged students are taught the same skills, and given access to the worldwide resources of the Internet, if they are to compete with students from the private school system. In the USA, the FCC approved $2.25 billion to provide half a million and low income classrooms with Internet access. Schools and libraries will share the funds, but there are fears that such a huge impetus may lead private phone companies to hike their phone rates by as much as $22.50 p.a.. The FCC holds that any such increase would amount to only $4 p.a., but this illustrates the problem of ensuring equitable access to the new technology. The FCC argues simply, “We can’t afford to leave poor kids in the Dark Ages.” The old and the financially disadvantaged would inevitably fall behind in a world of advancing technological complexity, and schools could play a vital role in educating the public by becoming community information and technology centres.
SECTION E : SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOLS OF THE FUTURE

- to be written after further discussion and feedback from Reference Group?

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