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The responsibility to lead: Education at a global crossroads

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The responsibility to lead: Education at a global crossroads

By Tom Bentley

1. Introduction and summary

In this monograph I address the role of educational leadership in facing contemporary global challenges which threaten crisis and conflict across our societies, environment and institutions.

I argue that education cannot escape a shared responsibility for renewing the shared contexts – social, economic, ethical and environmental – in which we live our lives.

The pressures and risks of global change are real for young people, forming their everyday experience and shaping the world for which education must help them prepare. The challenges require that we learn how to act in new ways, individually and collectively.

As a result, educational endeavour must go beyond developing individual knowledge and skills, and beyond leading and improving individual schools.

To understand the role and responsibilities of educational leadership, we need to understand more clearly the current role of education systems in distributing life chances and forming perspective and aspiration among young people.

As a result, I argue, we must reappraise the impact of education on inequality, in Australia and around the world, and acknowledge the powerful effects of educational institutions on our changing social and economic geography.

This focus does not deny the fundamental importance of student learning and teaching. It asserts, however, that unless we recognise and act on the dynamic relationships between education, families, social policy, employment and the future of our cities, education will not play its proper role in creating understanding and opportunity for all.

Addressing this need, and building the partnerships that can respond effectively to the challenges, is an urgent responsibility of educational leadership. The core elements of this responsibility are to deepen understanding, to build a broader community and to challenge injustice.

The monograph concludes with six areas for action in which leadership of educational practice and policy is needed: linking taxation of housing wealth with better investment in educational need; implementing equitable school funding across all sectors; recognising and developing the teachers who serve in areas of highest need; designing curriculum and assessment for understanding and mastery; building better pathways towards skills and work for all students; and growing the voice and agency of students in the everyday educational practice.

2. A changed global context

The nature of education prompts us to ask, what kind of world are we preparing students for?

It does not take much reflection to realise that we are living through strange and deeply unsettled times.

These conditions contrast starkly with the time, a quarter of a century ago, when I left the formal education system and first began to engage in education policy. During the 1990s, when the Cold War had just ended and the World Wide Web was a new thing, the world seemed full of possibility to many.

The perceived impact of globalisation and the explosion of technology-fuelled knowledge and information, while not without its challenges, was one of optimism and progress.

A knowledge-based economy, linking different countries, sectors and communities through a series of global networks and flows, created unlimited new possibilities for people everywhere.

Then, as now, education was central to this story – an engine of progress and opportunity, developing talent as fuel for this new economy, recognising human diversity as a source of cultural and economic riches. Many people aspired, as they still do today, for education to play an active role in creating social inclusion and reducing poverty.

Looking back, the ideas and assumptions that dominated politics, policy and economic decision-making in many countries, especially Australia, the UK and US, seem over-simplified, even naïve.

It is sobering to reflect now on how easy it was to believe that anything was possible during that period, and how quickly the shared myth that 'things can only get better' was able to take hold. Australia was a powerful international exemplar of this approach, pioneering a centrist social democratic politics in the 1980s which combined the embrace of free market economic policies with an active, redistributive state using wage standards, superannuation, welfare spending and public spending on health and education to limit inequality in both wealth and life chances.

However, from the 2000s onwards, this approach to governing has come increasingly unstuck around the world, as policymakers grappled with the shocks and crises arising from systemic risks and conflicts. The world is now closely interconnected, but at the same time riven by growing inequality, identity politics, strategic rivalry between the US, China and Russia, a growing environmental crisis and the inability of our governing institutions to adapt successfully to these changing conditions.

These changes have led us to a situation where:

- the Internet is used as a weapon of hatred and social division
- trust and support for major political parties are in long term decline, and political decision-making is increasingly fragmented and volatile
- terrorism takes the form of people driving cars and trucks into crowds to express their ideology and rage
- political leaders, unelected and elected, use news conferences and social media to threaten each other with fire and destruction
- identity politics and failures of democratic and regional governance feed terrorism and instability in many different forms, in turn fuelling a wider sense of global crisis and drift.

Such events and trends are underpinned by deeper, systemic crises:

- billions of people have suffered poverty, wage stagnation and unemployment over the last decade. The level of wealth held by a small percentage of the population has continued to rise
- automation and machine-based intelligence threaten to destabilise the jobs and livelihoods of large sections of society
- democracy, as a form of government and culture of citizenship, is in retreat
- dangerous climate change is inevitable, and threatens catastrophic damage to our planet's ecosystems, and to every aspect of our lives.

At the same time, our news media struggle to adapt to the changing landscape and to find a viable, legitimate place between the coercion of state control and the distortions of ideologically-driven corporate ownership.

The sense of insecurity, fear and potential conflict is palpable. Yet, there are many sources of progress, optimism and inspiration in today's society too. Perhaps it is important not to succumb to the general perception that 'everything is getting worse'.

However, the sense of insecurity and uncertainty is apparent, not just in the ongoing threats of financial instability, humanitarian disaster, environmental damage or social conflict – but also in the daily struggles faced by government and political parties to win support and make visible progress in responding to these challenges.

The possibility of a positive, long term consensus on how to achieve and sustain peace, justice and prosperity – let alone one that can be underpinned by effective, legitimate institutions – seems a long way away. In fact, we are so far from that consensus that the very nature of 'fact' and 'truth' are the subject of bitter contest in our media, politics, and international relations, in ways that George Orwell would have recognised.

3. Renewing shared context: Accepting the reality of interdependence

These are big and complex issues, and of course they are addressed gradually, by experts and policymakers working in complex systems and institutions in various sectors and fields.

But the need to address the issues and engage with them in our personal, social and educational lives is also evident. They affect everyday life in numerous ways: including shaping the conditions in which our students will live their adult lives, and their perceptions of the future.

Many educators, as well as many parents, feel an acute sense of responsibility for helping to equip young people to thrive in these new conditions and play an active part in creating new solutions.

So how should we articulate the role for educational leadership in addressing these changing pressures?

I suggest that the starting point is to recognise a common element. The current state of the world shows that we cannot take the *context* in which we live our lives, or operate our education systems, for granted. We need to learn how to renew these shared contexts, under contemporary conditions.

Each of the crises outlined above: in civil society, terrorism, regional security, the global economy, the environment, democratic governance and politics, illustrates how the interaction of billions of individual humans, making their own autonomous

decisions, while influenced by the ideas and actions of others, can combine in our interconnected world to create systemic risks with potentially catastrophic consequences.

By acting in our own lives: connecting online, travelling, finding a home, taking on a job, choosing goods in the consumer economy, we are participating in the myriad ripple effects of an interconnected planet.

In the same way, no country can avoid the effects of what happens over in North Korea, how China's economy develops, what the US does next with climate change, or how conflict in the Middle East and Central Asia drive waves of refugees and asylum seekers across continents.

In this current period, we are grappling with how to prevent economic inequality, regional rivalry and identity politics from spinning out in ways that deepen and accelerate conflict and breakdown, creating situations in which people's experiences of poverty, marginalisation and humiliation feed cultural and political conflict in ways that make those conflicts irreconcilable.

These systemic problems not only threaten specific groups of people and specific institutions in our society: they also threaten those shared contexts on which we all depend, the settings and institutions in which we live out our lives, where resources and opportunities are distributed, and collective problems are solved.

By 'shared context' I mean the shared settings where we live out everyday lives - physical spaces and social networks, and also the institutional and cultural backgrounds which enable those settings to work. It includes shared norms and principles, rules of justice, organisations and systems that support the distribution of resources and life chances, and enable us to solve common problems.

On the global scale, one lesson from the last decade is that some pieces of this backdrop, which many of us in Western societies might have assumed would help to achieve this stability and progress - pieces such as a global economic and security architecture, well-functioning markets, poverty reduction, growing commitment to human rights, and democracy - cannot be taken for granted.

If we want these problems to not overwhelm us, or future generations, we need to urgently learn how to sustain and renew the wider context and to act properly within it.

How should we prepare children and young people for such a world? And what roles should education play in the situation that we find ourselves in today?

For an individual, facing this uncertain reality can easily become a crushing burden. How can any of us hope to really make a dent on issues of such intractable complexity?

Yet this is a version of the question that every one of our school students face as they grapple with the requirements and competitive dynamics of their schooling, struggle to form a sense of their own identity, and learn to engage with the world as they find it.

4. The pivotal role of education

This, clearly, is where education must play a role, both as a shaper of individual capabilities and one of the crucial shared contexts for social development.

Throughout the twists and turns of history, the pivotal role of education in enabling both social and economic progress, and in *mediating* the processes of technological innovation and market exchange, stands out with increasing clarity.

The last two centuries have also seen the ongoing expansion and growth of education services and institutions: introducing universal schooling, lifting the school leaving age, developing technical, vocational and university education and, more recently, building universal and targeted early childhood learning services. That growth continues, with an ever-stronger global focus on achieving universal education in the poorest countries and populations.

Across this debate, there is also a widespread assumption that more and better education is fundamental to improving the prosperity and cohesion of our societies.

However, more education does not automatically mean greater opportunity. I believe that the focus, during the last two decades, on establishing an evidence-based framework for teaching and learning and for school improvement, has unintentionally obscured the importance of the wider socio-economic, cultural and geographic context for evaluating the impact of education.

Understanding the importance of those wider factors, and sharing the responsibility for addressing them, is necessary in order to address the global challenges we face.

The pivotal role of the education sector in determining access to rewards and life chance helps to explain the rising sense of pressure and competition felt by education practitioners in many countries, especially Australia, as governments, parents, employers and different schooling sectors seek to lift the 'output' of education and justify its rising costs.

This translates into continuous pressure to absorb more content into the curriculum, to improve exam results, test scores and research outcomes, and for more intense competition for the educational places with the highest value and status.

There has been an encouraging shift in the last decade towards a sustained focus on collaboration, especially among educational professionals and between schools, as part of education system reform (Hargreaves & O'Connor 2017). On the broader scale, the competitive pressures have not abated.

I argue that we need to continue and deepen those system reforms which enable continuous improvement and innovation in teaching and learning, *while simultaneously* learning to address the wider dynamics of inequality and social fragmentation which threaten our shared educational context.

4.1 Teaching and learning in context

How to support and enable teachers and principals to learn as professionals, how to collaborate in teams and across professional networks, and how to design systems that support continuous improvement, innovation and sharing of knowledge, are understandably great preoccupations of educational leaders and practitioners.

There are many important aspects of this effort, and many promising developments in systems around the world, including Victoria and around Australia. They build on a long term movement to develop and deepen the professional impact of teacher professionalism through system reform, a field shaped in different ways by such contributors as John Hattie, Ben Jensen, Geoff Masters, Linda Darling-Hammond, Field Rickards, Michael Fullan, David Hopkins, Michael Barber and Andy Hargreaves, among many others (Hopkins 2017).

The current work includes a focus on system-wide learning, the creation and use of evidence-based knowledge, innovation strategies and systems, large-scale collaboration, community engagement and partnership, and the use of large datasets to achieve system-wide, ongoing growth in student learning outcomes (Eds Hargreaves et al. 2009).

However, that discussion of school reform, on its own, is not enough to address the broader challenges outlined above. Focusing only on the effectiveness of teaching and learning *within* schools, building up a framework of evidence and impact focused only on these classroom practices and actions to support learning in classrooms, would mean missing an essential part of the picture.

Addressing current global issues by trying to focus exclusively on data and practice about teaching and learning is like trying to treat a population-based pandemic with a series of keyhole surgeries. The interventions can become ever more targeted and precise, but that won't stop many of the patients from being overwhelmed by the wider picture.

This does not mean that I believe we should lessen the focus on student learning or the impact of teaching within our current efforts. But they need to be placed in a broader framework of issues and action. The system dynamics that we must also address are, in a sense, even deeper and more fundamental than the interactions between professionals, students and administrators within formal education. They are about the formation and evolution of educational institutions, and how they are aligned with the ongoing formation of our wider society.

4.2 The bigger picture: Education co-evolves with society

One way to illustrate these wider dynamics is to think about urbanisation. Cities have their origins in places of meeting and exchange. These meeting points are partly shaped by geography, as well as by the technologies of communication and transportation: for example, cities have grown up at river crossings, next to ports, and in places where industrial technologies and production have clustered during different stages of economic development.

Over time, these common activities and the growth of urban populations quickly created shared needs for places to live, work and learn. As a result, cities are constantly developing and redeveloping the institutions and infrastructure to meet those shared needs.

Education systems grow out of this open-ended process, and they have become one of the most powerful shapers of the wider urban pattern.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, education was bound up with the formation of states and nations, for example, through national curriculum, professional accreditation and funding legislation. However, educational institutions actually have deeper roots in the never-ceasing process of urban and regional development, in both their economic and social dimensions.

Globally, the formation of schools, early years centres, technical institutes, and universities is bound up in the historical process of urbanisation, which plays as great a role today in shaping economic and social development as it has ever done.

In that process, the earliest-established institutions: those which achieve their identity, resourcing and critical mass first, tend to develop an advantage in the ongoing competition to survive and thrive, to learn and adapt, to attract the best minds and the most ambitious souls. That is one reason why the world's oldest universities also tend to be the richest.

In Australia, this helps to explain how and why we have developed school systems which co-exist in uncomfortable interdependence which have evolved out of the parallel efforts of settlers and reformers to establish: secular public schools, Catholic schools and systems, independent, religious and charitable schools, that are all funded in different combinations by state and commonwealth governments as well as private income.

In Australia, this mix of historical evolution and market-driven competition has produced an intriguing hybrid system, which brings together independent schools, Catholic school systems and secular public schools maintained by the state.

This has created a fascinating but troubling situation, in which schools and sectors co-exist while furiously competing, funded simultaneously by billions of dollars of public funding, and by billions of dollars of property-based wealth and debt.

The evidence of the last twenty years suggests that these increases in public funding for private schooling, and of private debt for mortgages and school fees in desirable school catchment areas, have not been to the benefit of Australia's economy, our society, or our educational performance.

The stuff of our education system is woven into the fabric of our cities, and the reality of interdependence applies at this level too.

For example, my daughter recently played in a jazz band competition at the Australian Institute of Music in Melbourne. There were many fine ensembles, including one from the Sir John Monash Science School. On the way to the venue, we had driven past the city campus of Haileybury, a highly successful multi-campus independent school. The campus fully occupies the site of what was previously a large-scale international hotel.

As education changes, so does the city. Another example of how education can influence the urban landscape is the James Morrison Academy of Music and its location in Mount Gambier, South Australia. Thirty years ago, a group of musicians began a festival called Generations in Jazz, which has now grown into an annual gathering of some 10,000 people. Ensembles and choirs from schools around Australia travel to perform and learn with some of the world's leading jazz musicians.

The James Morrison Academy of Music, a year-round intensive school for musicians moving from schooling towards professional mastery, is now based in Mount Gambier's old town hall. A jazz club has opened down the road. The wider community is involved in hosting, supporting and organising these ever-changing educational activities; in turn, the growth of the music activities is changing the town and its surrounding communities.

These small examples are modest and personal. There are thousands of other examples that form the complex educational ecosystem. They illustrate why it is impossible to fully understand or evaluate the impact of education by analysing schools as single and separate organisational units, by keeping them within hard boundaries of curriculum and professional practice, by measuring them only according to economic 'output', or by reducing them to questions of jurisdictional control.

Education changes the city and the community. As the city and its economy change, so in turn education changes.

Education is woven into the community, whether urban or rural, and into the surrounding relationships of family and social network. The boundaries are porous, and the crucial influences are distributed *across* these relationships: one reason why my first book was called *Learning Beyond the Classr*oom (Bentley 1998).

Why does all this matter? Because it forms the dynamic context for understanding education's role in forming personal character, social identity, and economic opportunity.

The choice for Australia is whether education will act as a magnifying lens, concentrating advantage and opportunity in particular locations and widening the structure of inequality, or as a different kind of reflective lens, able to help our society to understand itself better, and to spread opportunities and insights more widely and fairly.

The choice is prompted partly by the disruptive trends and pressures facing the world in 2018. But it is made sharper by the fact that the equity performance of Australian education has declined over the last two decades, the same period during which economic inequality has increased locally and around the world.

5. Education and inequality: The uncomfortable coincidence of knowledge and wealth

The uncomfortable reality is that more education, and more expensive education, does not automatically lead to greater economic productivity or social opportunity. Certainly, lack of education hinders both opportunity and growth, but whether educational investment leads to greater equity and capability depends on how educational resources are *distributed*, and on how formal education *interacts* with the wider systems I have mentioned – labour markets, housing, neighbourhoods and social networks.

The recent story in Australia should make for uncomfortable reading, as in many places around the world.

Australia's shift towards a knowledge-based economy is one in which more people attain more years of education, and education plays an ever-greater role in our economy, both as a sector providing jobs and exports, and as a source of skills and knowledge for firms in other sectors. Nonetheless, this is not a story of growing opportunity and mobility. Instead, it is a story of opportunity and reward being concentrated increasingly in the hands of people who begin life with access to wealth and knowledge.

While Australia's overall schooling performance is relatively good by international standards, according to OECD comparisons, our overall performance and equity have both declined, during the period in which enrolments in non-government schools, private spending on education, and competition between schools have all grown (OECD 2016).

During the same period, state and federal governments have struggled to achieve a lasting, equitable funding settlement for schooling, able to work across Australia's diverse states, territories, geographies and school sectors.

Our higher education system has an international reputation for high quality, and as a result of reforms in the 1970s, 1980s and late 2000s, participation in higher education has continued to grow. Early childhood learning services have also grown, and their quality may be gradually improving too.

Overall, our incremental progress in enhancing the accessibility and quality of education is struggling against the cumulative effects of deeper trends: the geographical concentration of wealth and advantage, growth in inequality of wealth and connections, and growing social and cultural segregation.

This mixed educational performance fits into a wider picture where disparities of wealth have grown, real wage growth has been subdued, and the rewards on offer from newly created jobs vary hugely between jobs for highly qualified specialists and financial investors, or jobs requiring fewer qualifications in service sectors vulnerable to casualisation and automation.

Over the 25 years to 2010, real wages increased by 50 per cent on average, but by 14 per cent for those in the bottom 10 per cent of the income distribution, compared to 72 per cent for those in the top 10 per cent.

Between 2004-11, the average wealth for Australians in the top 20 per cent of the wealth distribution increased by 28 per cent, while for those in the bottom 20 per cent of the wealth distribution it increased by 3 per cent (ACOSS 2015*)*.

At the same time, while participation in higher education has expanded as a result of the demand-based system introduced by Julia Gillard's government, commencement of degree courses by students from low SES background students at Group of 8 universities has remained stubbornly under 10 per cent since 2011, and actually declined from 2014-15.

The 2009 ABS Survey of Education and Training (SET) showed that while year 12 attainment of young people (20-24 years) rose from 70 per cent to 75 per cent between 2001 and 2009, it did not rise among those who were most disadvantaged. For those living in the most disadvantaged areas it fluctuated between 50 and 60 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009).

In Australia the highest earning, highest skilled 20 per cent of work has grown its share of employment in every decade. Jobs in lower-earning other categories have not grown.

Yet access to those jobs is getting more difficult, unless you are born into a family where higher levels of education and housing wealth are already present. ABS data recently showed that income mobility in Australia is falling.

In the knowledge-based, network-connected economy we currently live in, geography still plays a fundamental role in shaping economic activity and social organisation.

As our economy shifts further in this direction, through regionalised hubs of production, linked global networks and concentration in locations where comparative advantage is strong, the distribution of knowledge and wealth becomes even more important.

The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) estimates that the wage premium for those holding a postgraduate degree, over a lifetime, is around $1 million dollars. In Melbourne, an estimated 90 per cent of the new jobs created are in the central city. The value of Gross State Product created in the area covering the CBD, Parkville, Fitzroy, Southbank and Port Melbourne is six or eight times that of the equivalent population size in Geelong, Bendigo and Ballarat (City of Melbourne 2016).

School and university choices are part of the social and economic magnetism of these knowledge hubs. Popular schools stoke house prices in their catchment areas. Studies show the correlation between high performing schools and house prices, estimating a premium of around 15 per cent.

Catchments shrink, and either house prices or school fees increase above inflation, further segregating the urban population. People with fewer assets, income and education can find housing only in suburbs further from the metropolis. The city is reshaped.

Of course, governments have policies to invest in new education and transport infrastructure, to develop communities and to encourage regional economic development, reflecting population growth and community demand. But the changes are running faster and deeper than the incremental steps to support demand.

The effects are not only which students are in government or non-government schools. They are about the segregation of school students, in all sectors, by wealth and cultural background.

For example, 71 per cent of students at Melbourne High School (a select entry school and one of the highest achieving state schools in Victoria) come from the wealthiest quarter of the Australian population. That is nearly three times the concentration of wealth we would expect if academic success was blind to the advantages created by wealth – or in other words, was based solely on merit (see www.myschool.edu.au).

At Princes Hill Secondary College in North Carlton, the median house price in the local neighbourhood was $1.1 million in 2014 (www.realestate.com). Students from outside the local catchment can apply if they have a specific 'curriculum ground.' The school will take students from wider Melbourne if they have learned to speak French or play two musical instruments by the age of 11. While it is possible to assess these achievements purely by performance, the demographic characteristics of children with these skills are not hard to predict.

The University of Canberra's NATSEM analysis of average family spending on education shows that between 2003-04 and 2009-10 spending on pre-school/primary education increased by 79 per cent, and average family spending on secondary education increased by 101 per cent (NATSEM 2012).

At Clifton Hill Primary School, the My School website shows that 77 per cent of students come from families in the best-off quarter of the Australian population. This school raised more than $108,000 at its 2014 fete. Just 1.1km south is St Joseph's Catholic Primary School. The My School website shows that 70 per cent of St Joseph's students come from families in the lowest quarter of socio-economic advantage. They held a fete and made $14.36 profit (Bentley & Cazaly 2015).

At the same time, the competitive pressure on schools to show positive results also creates some very negative effects for those at greatest risk. Last year the Victorian Ombudsman reported that more than 6000 students each year are being informally excluded from state schools, their destination unknown. The youth offending and adult prison populations continue to be dominated by people who have disengaged from school, lack basic skills and qualifications, and have been unable to find consistent pathways to achievement. Of adult prisoners in Victoria, 97 per cent did not complete high school.

These issues take us beyond the traditional scope and policy authority of education. They cannot be solved without education; it is urgent and necessary to frame the problems more widely, and to develop new responses.

The cumulative impact of market competition in education reinforces inequality – promoting divergence, not convergence, in cities and regions, in schools and universities, in jobs and incomes, in people's lives.

As a result, in Australia and all around the world, it turns out that when it comes to educational inequality, if you're not part of the solution, then you're part of the problem.

6. Economics and technology: Reframing the possibilities

To address the challenge of growing inequality and articulate the proper role of education, we also need to address key aspects of economics and technology – and their interaction with education.

In large part, the recent failures of governance and public policy in responding to the current global challenges stem from the limitations of mainstream economics to provide an adequate basis for explaining, developing or governing the world.

A set of core economic ideas formed a 'neo-liberal consensus': a theoretical model of a world dominated by rational, self-interested individuals, driven by price-based economic competition as the basis for efficient allocation of resources.

This consensus generated a policy framework in which competition, privatisation and deregulation have dominated policymaking for decades, not only as principles of economic organisation, but of wider public administration, for several decades.

That dominance was punctured by the onset of the Global Financial Crisis in 2007-8, a crisis leading to large scale unemployment, austerity and economic suffering in many parts of the world, and to accelerating inequality of wealth.

Australia successfully avoided economic recession, partly by investing in education and infrastructure, nevertheless, the economic and political conditions of the previous two decades were destabilised. Governments and political leaders are still searching for the ideas, explanations and policy programs that will help them to achieve traction and progress amidst these changing conditions.

Although the 'neo-liberal consensus' has been clearly challenged, it has not yet been replaced by any clear alternative. Around the world, these questions are genuinely open and contested, part of an increasingly intense search for new solutions and approaches.

Educational institutions and leadership occupy a crucial role, not only in supplying the talent and expertise that will fuel the next versions of our economies and societies, but also in forming and shaping the thought that can lead to new consensus.

6.1 Knowledge, capital and technology: New directions

The crisis has revealed the extent to which our world is distorted and constrained by the growth of economic inequality, and how that inequality magnifies and focuses the other challenges we are discussing.

That recognition has been driven by the impact of Thomas Piketty's book, *Capital in the 21st Century*, with its time series data over two centuries, showing how the distribution of wealth and income will diverge over time, pushing up inequality as a function of market exchange, unless other pressures, including public policy and institutional design, limit its growth and spread resources more widely across the population (Piketty 2014).

The book has provoked worldwide discussion about the role of market exchange in widening inequality. That discussion also reflects the pivotal role of education and knowledge.

As Piketty (2014) puts it:

> Knowledge and skill diffusion is the key to overall productivity growth as well as the reduction of inequality both within and between countries.

6.2 The unsettling effects of technology

So the ways in which knowledge and skill are created – and spread – across the population will have a profound effect on the dynamics of wealth and inequality in our contemporary economy.

The role of education in deepening skills and broadening opportunity is vital. This role is made more acute by the effects of technological change, on the education sector and on the broader economy.

We are increasingly familiar with the idea that technological innovation is driving many of the changes that are unsettling our world, restructuring our economy by 'disrupting' traditional business models, increasing the mobility of workers and production centres across global markets, and making many traditional skills and organisational processes obsolete.

This is true - and it always has been.

A current wave of innovation, driven by ICTs and social networking technologies, is creating a new set of questions through the application of large scale data analytics and the emergence of artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality.

The implication of technology-driven change is that work and tasks involving more routine and less judgment tend to be eliminated by the introduction of new standardised and automated routines.

However, the most important thing about these technologies and their potentially disruptive social and economic effects is that their impacts are not predetermined. Our responses – social and institutional – to these disruptions, will determine their eventual outcomes. This has been true throughout history, especially over the last 500 years as industrialisation and urbanisation have intensified.

Within education, there is a long history of introducing new technology applications with the hope of radically improving learning processes and outcomes, to find that only incremental change is achieved, and that costs and complexity have increased.

The way to avoid this is not to seek out the 'killer app' or the 'disruptive business model' that will somehow turn existing practices upside down and revolutionise results, but instead learn how to identify, interpret and cultivate a capacity for *systemic* learning across the networks and organisations that collectively produce education outcomes (Nooteboom 2000; Sitglitz & Greenwald 2014).

In relation to the impact of technology-driven change on inequality, the key point is to address the role of education in mediating these impacts, and identify the choices and implications for education policy and leadership.

In their landmark study, *The Race between education and technology*, Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F Katz offer long term, data-driven perspective on these issues (Goldin & Katz 2009).

Studying the US economy, comparing and analysing data about occupations, education levels and income, they show how 'skill-biased technological change' works its way through the economy, as new jobs and occupational structures are created in response to demand arising from technological innovation.

Goldin and Katz show that the impact of technological change on inequality is greatly affected by the supply and quality of education. In short, when the supply of good quality education keeps growing *along with* demand for new skills arising from technology-driven change, then inequality is limited and the benefits of economic growth are spread more widely. Their study shows that wage differentials between people of different levels of education did not grow.

In contrast, the slowdown in the supply of college-educated Americans from the 1980s onwards played an important role in growing inequality of income and wealth, in a situation where technology-driven change and market liberalisation restructured the US labour market. As the supply of newly educated workers slowed, wage premiums associated with specialised skills increased, benefiting those who already possessed such qualifications, but doing little for wider productivity or social mobility.

As they put it:

> Had the relative supply of college workers increased from 1980 to 2005 at the same rate that it had from 1960 to 1980, the college premium, rather than rising, would have fallen. Late in the twentieth century, education lost the race to technology. (Goldin & Katz 2009, p. 321)

Technological innovation will always create demand for new skills and for skilled workers: automation and artificial intelligence will be no different. But whether new technologies lead to a greater divide between the haves and the have-nots depends on policy choices and social choices that are ours to make: on how we structure our cities, labour markets and welfare systems. Crucially, it also depends on whether we ensure that relevant, high quality educational opportunities grow and become accessible to all.

7. Responding to human potential

In the face of this disruption and dislocation, is it possible to articulate an educational response to growing conflict, inequality and insecurity, and for educational leadership to engage with the wider challenges facing our societies?

I think we begin by recognising that the history of humanity, and of technology-induced change, is a history of human ingenuity and potential.

Perhaps most relevant for now the history of education shows that human potential for learning consistently goes *beyond* the institutional boundaries, frameworks and measures that develop in each era.

Let me illustrate what I mean, with a personal example.

Meet Bodrul Hoque, a Londoner of Bangladeshi descent, who I have known for almost twenty years. When I first met him, he was a slick-talking 15 year old at a local secondary school in Tower Hamlets, the East London borough where I also grew up. I was, for a period of time, his volunteer mentor. He was a bright, popular and engaged young person, but his relationship with education was precarious. His parents had separated when he was nine, and he played a vital role in supporting his disabled mother, who also suffered from mental health problems, and his brother and sister. He was, and is, deeply connected to the networks of his local community.

Bodrul has lived through two decades of intense change in London – a period which has seen dizzying house price increases, large scale migration, intense development of technology and media industries, financial crisis, austerity, war in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, and now Britain exiting the European Union.

When he left school, he was just on the margins of achieving the results that would have given him a clear academic pathway into higher education and a stable occupation. Though he was never in trouble, he was distracted and uncertain. He started college after high school, and then wavered over what to do. He retained his passionate commitment to voluntary youth and community work, and eventually worked out a pathway through college to becoming a teaching assistant. For some of those years, he was working 7 days a week to study and support his family.

Ten years after that, Bodrul is the first ever head of a year level at St Paul's Way School in Bow, East London, who is not a teacher. He is a widely recognised and valued member of staff, connected to hundreds of students and dozens of local community partners. He has contributed to collaborative teams supporting other schools through the London Challenge. Last month he texted me to tell me of the birth of his second child, a daughter.

St Paul's Way Trust is a community school serving students from the Bangladeshi and other migrant communities, as well as other local families. When I grew up in that area in the 1980s, it was a rough, unpopular school with a poor reputation. Now it is widely reputed as an outstanding community school creating excellent life chances for its highly diverse students. It describes itself as 'the university school in the heart of East London'. The Mulberry School for Girls, a girls secondary school in the same borough, with a similar intake of student backgrounds, achieves equally glorious results and reviews.

These schools are part of a collective shift that has taken place in London education over the last two decades, driven by collaborative strategies and a shared commitment to serving the whole community. My brother now teaches in a primary school located between the two high schools.

St Paul's Way, required by central government legislation to become an academy school separate from local authority control, decided to join with universities and other partners to become a community-driven trust working across several institutions, not just to offer excellent education, but to design new and better forms of education for the future.

Leaders and professionals from The Mulberry School for Girls are working not only with fellow inner city schools, but also with rural schools adapting to their own distinctive challenges.

When I recently visited The Mulberry School for Girls with a fellow Australian educationalist, she came away equally impressed by what she saw and the students we spoke to. As we left, she asked me: 'So, is it a private school?' 'No', I replied. 'Oh, is it a specialist academy?' No - it's a local community state school, with a non-selective intake. Those schools are part of a continuous effort to transform individual learning experiences and remake both the educational context in which students learn, and the community context too.

That is just one example, although there is a lot of evidence behind the story of the London Challenge. Bodrul's story is not only a story of education, but of family, community and voluntary effort, affordable housing, an innovative career path and of his own individual character. That is all part of the education story that we need to tell.

We need to be identifying and sharing the same stories around Australia, and working to create the conditions where such stories are repeated thousands of times and incorporated, through evidence, into policy and professional knowledge.

This example also serves to illustrate a wider point about our institutional status quo. As our societies change, so do our definitions of what a successful educational institution looks like. There is not a single structure, model or protocol that is the best for every circumstance, or that cannot be improved, with learning, over time.

In Australia, as in most systems, we have diverse institutions, developed at different times, all now operating together in a complex, interdependent educational eco-system.

But underpinning that ecosystem are historical assumptions and institutional designs which are often not fit for purpose, or reflective of the best evidence. For example, the conceptual underpinnings of intelligence testing, the ranking system of the ATAR, the ratios of executives and professors to teachers and support staff, the subject-based departmental structures and industrial bargaining methods that determine workforce structures; all of these have evolved from specific points in time; all can be renewed and redeveloped in the light of new insight and changing objectives.

The assumptions, methods and rules that underpin the workings of our system represent no more than the best efforts of past generations of institutional designers. Sometimes they are not even that.

In Australia, it is increasingly clear that the dominance of a particular paradigm of schooling: the selective, highly competitive, often single-sex school, either in the non-government sector or operating as a selective government school, is damaging our social and economic future.

If we want to respond to the broader challenges of the present and to honour the potential of all students then, as a community of educators, we should be willing to look beyond the institutional constraints of the status quo, and embrace the task of renewing and remaking our complex educational system.

8. The responsibility to lead

Education is formative in shaping our response to the current set of global pressures. It plays a pivotal role, not only in forming individual perspectives and capabilities, but in mediating our social, economic and cultural responses.

This creates a dilemma for educational practitioners. Given the scale and complexity of the challenges, where are the appropriate limits of our response? How do we respond in ways that we can act on? How do we work out where to place our energies and discharge our responsibilities?

I believe there is a clear answer for all leaders. Act in the present. Do what you can, but act for the future by seeking to deepen your positive imprint. Build teams, create trust and shared commitment, and aim to leave a lasting imprint behind you.

This has obvious resonance for education, where leadership is focused on developing the future capabilities of students. But our students are also part of today's wider reality. And this discussion has grappled with how far education should play a role in addressing that wider reality *together* with its formal role in delivering a formal curriculum through teaching and learning.

This means we need to face up to a contemporary dilemma of educational leadership: the central importance of education can be used to defend the status quo against the waves of change and the threat of destabilisation. Different school sectors and their advocacy groups can continue to make claim and counter-claim about why they must be protected and funded better.

But if we stop there, at asserting and incrementally enhancing the institutions we currently have, we will be complicit in the deepening of inequality and a worsening of the wider conditions. The worsening of those conditions harms the whole community, and it hurts the worst off the most. Even with the best of intentions, that doesn't strike me as an outcome that any of us would be comfortable with.

Given the role of education in determining who is rewarded, and who accesses opportunities for enrichment, should we be comfortable with educational leadership only serving the interests of those who are already highly educated? Or do we recognise a deeper, broader responsibility? How can we articulate that responsibility in terms that educators can recognise and act on?

I propose three basic responsibilities of educational leadership.

8.1 Responsibility 1: Deepen understanding

Following Howard Gardner, the Harvard intellectual who has most influenced me, I argue that the primary purpose of education is not to impart knowledge, or facts, or skills, or qualifications, or relationships, or values, or even jobs and employability.

The primary purpose is to develop understanding.

> ...a sufficient grasp of concepts, principles or skills so that one can bring them to bear on new problems and situations, deciding in which ways one's present competences can suffice and in which ways one may require new skills and knowledge.
> (Gardner 2011)

Understanding involves knowledge and information, concepts and ideas, practical skills and intuitions. Fundamentally, it involves bringing them together, integrating and applying them, in ways that are appropriate to the situation at hand.

The crucial point about it is not just that understanding involves depth and integration of knowledge, but that demonstrating understanding always involves evaluating and deciding how to apply one's own knowledge in a given situation, and what else one might learn. An active, responsible role for the learner is built in.

This is one reason why education for understanding must involve a more diverse range of learning experiences and settings than the standard classroom format.

As Gardner goes on to say in *The Unschooled Mind* (2011, p. 13):

> Genuine understanding is most likely to emerge, and be apparent to others, if people possess a number of ways of representing knowledge of a concept or skill and move readily back and forth among these forms of knowing.

There are some promising signs that educational practice and policy are moving towards such an approach. These include the focus on learning for 'mastery' in Singapore and other school systems. The adoption of broad 'Education State' goals in Victoria, which value scientific literacy, arts, creative and critical thinking, and physical development alongside numeracy and literacy.

Northcote High School, a government high school in Melbourne that both my daughters attend, has recently embraced a 'Northcote model' to create more varied choices for students in years 9 and 10, giving students the option to pursue greater breadth and depth in areas of learning where they are passionate or curious, with a corresponding flexibility to align and sequence other units of learning around those interests.

The Northcote model's vision for student learners includes:

> ...building their own capacity to work independently and collaboratively, recognise and reflect on their own learning, to know themselves as learners and to understand what they are ready to learn next. (Northcote High School 2017)

The Northcote model is a positive and promising development: though I note that this depth and breadth cannot be pursued in the same ways into years 11 and 12, for the simple reason that the VCE framework requires a different set of combinations.

That prompts an overarching conclusion: education for understanding will only progress significantly when the mandatory content of the curriculum, and the scope of standardised forms of assessment, are significantly reduced.

This is a task of educational leadership: to explain and advocate for curriculum and assessment which prioritise depth of understanding, and encourage breadth of engagement in learning across the community.

This priority is also consistent with the wider challenge to leadership, of building public understanding, through engagement, of complex and important issues in the world.

8.2 Responsibility 2: Build a broader community

The drivers of change outlined above connect us together and expose us to shared risk, as part of a global population, while also undermining the forms of tradition and solidarity that our communities have previously relied on.

It is a paradox of globalisation that it encourages greater social diversity and greater exchange of knowledge and culture, while also promoting forms of commerce and competitive exchange which undermine social solidarity and create marginalisation or humiliation.

Another basic responsibility of educational leadership, therefore, is to build a broader community, to reach outwards, and help to create the norms and relationships that support civilized exchange and mutual understanding across diverse communities; for learning, democracy, social cohesion and for an innovative economy.

Educational leaders have done this for many generations. But nonetheless, there is a special responsibility now, and it requires going against the grain of the competitive dynamics and hierarchical bureaucracies that still dominate our institutions.

The kind of leadership I have in mind is exemplified by Beverley Hansen, principal of Dandenong West Primary School and Marg Batt, recently retired as principal of St Anthony's Noble Park. As we described in our study *The shared work of learning* (Bentley & Cazaly 2015), these leaders developed an approach which intentionally strengthened social capital and community learning, in tandem with professional collaboration and classroom instruction.

This approach crosses sectoral lines and formed alliances with other institutions like health services, libraries and local employers in an area of great flux, diversity and disadvantage. It's a form of leadership that sets out to develop more widely distributed capacity for collaboration as part of its own everyday practice. It is no coincidence that the leadership examples I cite are women.

Education is one of relatively few contemporary institutions able to provide a meeting ground for people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives to learn together and develop the civic and social behaviours and norms that will help them to prosper and thrive in diverse, interconnected societies. We should be learning more from the exemplars of leadership in these diverse communities.

8.3 Responsibility 3: Challenge injustice

The third responsibility is to challenge injustice. This is controversial, of course. The thrust of my argument above is that education cannot avoid the questions of ethics, identity and equity running through our society – because education plays an active part in shaping their outcomes. Educational leadership, in the broader context of a changing community, must surely also engage with broader issues of justice and equity.

The long term character of education, its public and publicly-funded nature, capacity to draw on evidence and deliberation, and privileged position in the community, surely mean that it must be part of the role of educational leadership to identify and challenge injustice.

There are different views of justice: there will be lively debates and controversies, but that is all part of a process; an open, reasoned, plural process, on which our societies rely, and in which education plays a fundamental part. The role of education is not to be neutral, but to serve the interests of the whole society and to use its expertise and ethical judgment to challenge injustice and develop innovative responses to it.

This will involve engaging with and educating people about the bigger global issues. It also means clearly addressing the issues of equity in the way we fund and structure educational opportunities closer to home. For example over the last decade in Australia, an effort has been going on to build a consensus around what is an equitable, cost-effective, long term approach to school funding.

Some progress has been made towards renewing that consensus – it is now far more widely accepted that schools should be funded on a 'sector-blind, needs-based' formula, in which overall public funding reflects the level of disadvantage faced by school students, wherever they are.

However, as in past decades, the goal of actually implementing those arrangements so that the students with most to gain from high quality education receive a level of investment commensurate with that resource standard, keeps slipping from view.

This is consistent with a pattern of politics in which the status quo re-asserts itself, through the claims of different interest groups and stakeholders to hold on to their existing privileges – and the future interests of less powerful citizens are pushed down the list.

For example, the contention that the Commonwealth government should guarantee four-fifths of the national resource standard for government schools, while leaving 80 per cent of the funding load to states and territories for public schools, requires further examination. But in the current debate, it is being accepted almost without question.

With leadership and persistent effort, community consensus can really be shifted, even in turbulent times. However, the political and institutional changes needed to implement the consensus lag far behind. In the meantime, the parts of the system that benefit disproportionately are those that already command the greatest wealth, the best connections, and the loudest voices.

In 2018, we need to face up to an uncomfortable truth about the status quo of Australian schooling. The current system of competitive, selective, secondary schooling, funded simultaneously by both levels of government *and* by rising private expenditure is economically wasteful, socially harmful, and morally dubious.

We are collectively responsible for this situation. Over the last half century, Australia has been simultaneously one of the wealthiest, the best educated, and the most egalitarian societies in the world. Unfortunately, that position is slipping, just as the reality of our interdependence with the rest of the planet begins to dawn on a new generation.

When we look at the global situation, it is clear that we are living through a period of profound uncertainty, and that our younger generations will find themselves responsible for remaking and reshaping much of the world as we know it, especially the social, civic and public institutions that underpin our ability to thrive.

My experience of learners and young people across different times and places reinforces my confidence that they can rise to the new challenges.

My experience of political institutions and professional cultures, of negotiation between vested interests, of compromise and failure, says that if we want to reflect this learning potential better in our education systems, then we need to be challenged more strongly, as adults with responsibility for the system, to remake it.

Let me conclude with five suggestions about what it could mean to act on these conclusions with greater clarity and ambition.

First, rather than allowing education supply to drive house prices and inequality, we should take a more dynamic and equitable approach to educational investment. Why not hypothecate a percentage of stamp duties from housing sales – or even better, a percentage of a land value tax, to investing in education for communities and students where need is greatest?

Second, the investment in equity needed to meet a schooling resource standard for the least advantaged students is a national priority: it cannot be endlessly deferred and postponed because different levels of government want to avoid the fiscal cost and different school sectors want to hold on to their existing privileges. Reaching that standard is a task that must be fairly shared between federal, state and private sources of school funding.

Third, we know that experienced and highly skilled teachers in Australia often end up working in schools located in more affluent communities. Education systems maintain various incentives to encourage teachers to serve in remote, regional and disadvantaged locations. Why not recognise and develop professionals who serve in those schools where the need is greatest, by also making sure they get the greatest opportunities for professional learning?

Fourth, curriculum and assessment reform should pursue deeper understanding and greater mastery, together with the skills and capabilities for engaging successfully in a fast-changing community. Cross-curricular themes do not add value to learning unless they are applied to specific situations and valued alongside cognitive knowledge. That is why the scope and coverage of curriculum subject content should be reduced, in order to enable deeper learning and broader engagement of learners.

Fifth, vocational learning pathways towards advanced qualifications and skilled employment need greater priority alongside academic pathways to universities. To design and construct those pathways, and build the partnerships that make them viable for large numbers of students, is a core responsibility of school leaders working alongside tertiary, community and industry leaders.

Sixth, and finally, these goals will all be served by continuing to build the agency and voices of students and young people into the everyday practice of educational leadership.

We rely on younger generations to make their own world as they go out to shape the future. As leaders, we can do more to remake a shared context in which all of them can thrive.

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The responsibility to lead: Education at a global crossroads

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