Australia's Future in Education. Lessons from our International Links.

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Abstract

Over the past sixty years, Australia has become a very active part of the global community, greatly widening its earlier, mostly British, connections. We have gained from this wider horizon and also contributed significantly to the world community, largely through our active cooperation in international agencies. We now face a major issue in Australian education, to deliver an effective education for life to all our people. Our international links make clear the nature of this problem and also show us that it is possible to have high quality education without sacrificing equity.

BOX 1

I have a special motivation for writing this paper. It is 50 years since my first paper was published. That was focused on finding ways of helping students in danger of failing at university. This search for equity of opportunity has been a continuing theme for me over that period. Those years have been kind to me, largely through opportunities from education. Some of those opportunities came through schools and people in Australia. Some came from the chance to live, study and teach in other countries. I am increasingly sure that we can all learn in ways that will build a better future: learn from our own experience and learn from the experience of others. In a just society learning to build a better future is a crucial purpose.

Australia is not a large country in terms of population. It has overcome many of the potential disadvantages of this by linking with international agencies. Australians have benefitted greatly from these relationships and their contributions have also been strong. As one observer put it, 'consistently punching above their weight'. As the International agencies have benefitted from the inputs of Australians so Australians have gained in their capacity to contribute at home. International research and experience can teach us a vital lesson. While our best students perform as well as the best in the world, Australia has a large number of students who perform poorly. These students pose a problem for themselves: they pose an even bigger problem for our society. We know that some countries have both high quality and high equity in student outcomes. It is possible for Australia to learn from those countries to provide a sound education foundation for ALL its students. That learning is a necessity for our future.

1. A revolution in international outlook

Australia had a revolution in its national orientation. That revolution was triggered by the shock of imminent invasion in 1941, the realisation that our immediate environment could be threatening. The previous 170 years had been a time of self-imposed limitations. The removal of those limitations has affected not only the obvious areas of trade and defence but contributed to the positive development of many of the basic institutions of our society including our education, the physical and social sciences and our cultural institutions.

These areas have altered substantially because of this wider orientation, gaining directly through the impact of broader international links and the interactions between external and domestic activities. We have also gained from the development of the capacities and interests of the people who have made those links. There is now a large reservoir of people in responsible positions in our institutions who have had experience in many different environments, both in Australia and overseas. This has broadened and strengthened their capacity to contribute in Australia. These experiences and these people are a vital part of the dramatic and constructive changes that have occurred within Australia in education, in the sciences and in our cultural institutions over the period.

Policies of the Commonwealth Government implemented over the period 1995 – 2007 diminished these advantages, built up over the previous half-century. That approach concentrated much more on economic rather than social and cultural ends and this limitation is now having harmful effects. The current Commonwealth Government, with its policy of an 'education revolution', can gain valuable lessons from the past, recognising the positive interactions between external and internal activities and encouraging that wider horizon. Notable among the damaging changes in this recent past is reduced support for some of the international associations such as the United Nations, UN, and its associated organisation, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, UNESCO.

The next few years will be vital for Australia, both for its international associations and for its patterns of education. Australia is at a point where it must decide whether to pursue policies which rebuild and extend our international connections or whether to continue the more recent inward-looking approach. Simultaneously, in education we face major problems that threaten not only the health of

our education system but through that system, our social structure. We have much to lose by only looking inward at a time of such great challenge.

2. The Reversal in Outlook.

An inward-looking emphasis.

In the first 180 years of Australian history the nation was almost exclusively concerned with its own internal development. Initially this was a necessary result of our location which demanded a struggle for physical survival. Later this limited outlook became the result of the nation's perceived interests. External links were almost exclusively with Britain: the Australian population was predominantly British in origin; its political, legal and religious institutions were of British origin and practice; its common language was English and its culture essentially British in character. Most developments ignored the needs of its indigenous people and there was a restriction on immigration from non-European sources. Our neighbouring countries seemed more remote than Britain. It was not uncommon for Australians to refer to Britain as 'home'. The links with Britain were not just through the monarchy, in trade and defence but in sport, in the arts, in education and in science. Australian universities were limited largely to undergraduate courses and their most promising graduates proceeded to Oxford or Cambridge or a selected few other British universities. Many of these graduates did not return with their extra qualifications, preferring the opportunities offered in Britain.

Universal primary education was introduced by the various state Education Acts of the 1870s and the schools were eventually successful in enrolling most non-indigenous Australians. The policies were, and still are, much less effective for indigenous people, a situation which at last is now beginning to receive urgent attention. For non-indigenous Australians the states were highly successful in achieving universal primary education. This took several decades as the states struggled to develop systematic policies and to improve the quality of teaching. Beyond the primary level, secondary and post-secondary growth was slow as only a few occupations demanded anything beyond primary education. The stresses of war after 1939 further limited progress, with less than one in three students continuing on to secondary education and less than 5% of the

generation completing six years of that stage. Less than 2% of the age-group continued to university.

In other areas besides education the same restricted outlook applied. Australian culture through the arts looked mainly to Europe for its inspiration and when Australian artists sought further experience this was first from England and later from France or Italy. Australian publishing was predominantly through British firms and most textbooks in schools were of British origin. The history courses were essentially on British history with little acknowledgement of the past or present of our Pacific and Asian neighbours. The social sciences offered very limited opportunities and the physical sciences, while having more extensive links, depended very much for their research opportunities on British institutions. The major international contests in sport were on cricket grounds in battles for the Ashes where Australia and Britain were the contenders. In more damaging battles, Australian forces were almost automatically part of Britain's wars. These included the Boer War in Africa and World War 1 in Europe and the Middle East, a war in which many hundreds of thousands of our soldiers lost their lives.

World War 2 - a bringer of change

World War 2 changed that limited outlook for ever. In the early years of that war Australia was involved heavily in the fighting, but remained geographically remote from the contest. The early battles were fought in Europe and North Africa and Australians fought in those arenas, far from home soil. In a dramatic change in 1941 Australia suddenly became a site for war, following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour and the rapid Japanese moves south. For the first time since the 1850s Australia was threatened with invasion. This threat, together with the actuality of war on our own shores through air and sea attacks, caused radical and permanent changes in the national outlook. One major change, which still continues, has been to relate much more to our immediate environment in the Pacific and with Asia.

Australian governments became proactive before the war ended, seeking ways not only of achieving peace but also of maintaining it. In looking forward to peace, those governments were conscious that the approach taken after World War 1 had been a significant failure, contributing to another war only twenty years later.

The efforts in peace-making after World War 1 resulted in a major change in the ways that countries sought to maintain peace. Those interrelations had been essentially country-to country. The efforts after the war introduced international agencies with a world-wide brief as key players. Central to these was the League of Nations, established after World War 1. Great hopes were invested in this new body and its promise to reduce the possibility of war. Unfortunately the League became the victim of national rivalries which it had no effective means to affect or control. Its constitution and its power to operate were limited by the terms of its establishment, limitations to which Australia contributed.

The Australian Prime Minister in the post-war period, W. G (Billy) Hughes, played a very active part in forming the League of Nations. He joined with those who argued against the American President, Woodrow Wilson, over the conditions set for the combatant nations during peace. (Hughes, 2007) President Wilson saw benefit in the reconstruction of Europe after the war, a reconstruction which included Germany and her allies. The alternative argument for a more punitive approach supported by Hughes won the day and the subsequent Versailles Treaty exacted major penalties on the losing nations. Hughes was particularly concerned with the fate of New Guinea where there was a significant German colony. His understandable concern to ensure that Germany did not retain a colony so close to Australia caused him to seek more punitive conditions for the peace. In this environment, Germany and her allies suffered severe economic problems and found it very difficult to rebuild industries and social institutions devastated by war. The resulting depression in Germany in the 1920's and the general discontent in the country provided the setting and rationale for the rise of the Nazi Party and the subsequent path to war.

The lessons from the failures of policy after World War 1 were apparent to those who faced the same issues in shaping the peace after World War 2. There was a wide-spread determination not to repeat the failed policies of Versailles.

3. Reconstruction after World –War 2: An international priority.

The birth of new international organisations.

After 60 years it is difficult to recapture the excitement and hope that characterised that period of peace after so many years of war. The need to prepare actively for peace was recognised well before the war ended. Allied Powers meetings in London in 1942 began that sequence, laying the foundations for what was to become the UN and also UNESCO.

> The premise was that: tyranny in all its forms breeds on ignorance and prejudice. All individuals, no matter where they live, must therefore have the opportunity to learn and to cultivate humanistic values, the first as a motor for material progress, the second to lay the foundations for peace and respect for human rights.
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> UNESCO, 1945.

This faith in the capacity of learning to improve the quality of life was to be a continuing theme.

Nineteen forty six was a momentous year: the year of the first formal meetings of the UN and of UNESCO. In that year British troops also withdrew from Germany, signalling the end of conflict and the beginnings for peace. India, Jordan, the Malayan Union, Syria, the Philippines and Indonesia all celebrated the achievement of independence. On 31 December of that year the United States proclaimed the end of hostilities in World War Two.

The pace of change so evident in 1946 has accelerated even further, nationally and internationally, since that date. The search to build and maintain peace became a key issue. Education became a major focus of this search because it was seen as a major personal and social enabling mechanism, opening up opportunities for individuals and nations to be actively involved in solving their own problems. For Australia the links between external activities and internal developments in education have become clearer. Among the international connections whose efforts are providing valuable insights as to how to deal with these issues are UNESCO and OECD.

BOX 2.
My own international connection began with a scholarship taking me to Oxford in 1947. It was an interesting time to be there. Following the war, the intake of students was unusual, as in addition to entrants straight from school there were many who had returned after service in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. It was a lively mixture of people. For me, that time at Oxford changed my direction in life. I had been heading for a career in science so my studies were for a postgraduate degree in physics. When I discussed my proposed course with my supervisor I was surprised, then, that he queried my choice of the lectures to attend. 'Is that all? Had you thought of attending the lectures of C S Lewis or Kenneth Clark or David Cecil?' The answer was easy. 'No, they didn't come in my list of science options.' He persisted with his thought so, reluctantly, I went along as an auditor to the C S Lewis lectures. I was puzzled to note that the topic of the series was the poetry of Milton. What had that to do with physics? Nevertheless I went.

There were 60 enrolled for the course but there were almost 200 attending, most as auditors. I had read Milton's poem 'On his blindness' but not the poem featured in the lecture, 'Paradise Lost'. I skimmed this before my first lecture and found it obscure. As the lecture began I felt uninvolved and a little resentful. A waste of time? Lewis was not a showy lecturer. There were no illustrations or jokes – just a quietly spoken man who, to my surprise, by degrees succeeded in involving me with a different world through his words. At first this was the world of Milton with all its tensions. Gradually that world, so remote, came closer and illuminated the complex world in which I lived. That change was not easy or quick. Almost unrealised early, by the end of that series I saw how much Lewis had revealed about the past which illuminated the present and gave guidelines to the future. I did not understand how it happened. I did understand the power of a good teacher. After that term of lectures I knew that teaching was to be my choice of career. That choice has lasted.

The period immediately after the war was important in the shaping of the world to come. After the years of destruction, the allied nations saw the building and maintenance of peace as a post-war priority. A pre-requisite was seen as the reconstruction of both the social and the physical damage caused by war. Well before the end of the war, the Allies had begun to discuss the need for an international body to play such a role, focussed on peace-keeping but with a wider brief. As part of these discussions a special meeting was held in 1945 in the US at Bretton Woods where it was agreed to establish new bodies to replace the League of Nations as the means to establish and maintain peace and achieve development for reconstruction. The first such group to be established included the United Nations and the World Bank.

It is interesting that in November 2008 many nations met again at Bretton Woods, seeking again to find an international approach to the issues of global finance.

The UN's stated aims are to facilitate cooperation in international law, international security, economic development, social progress, human rights and the achievement of world peace. One of its early meetings, chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, agreed on the Declaration of Human Rights and this placed education as one of the essential rights of all people. The first of the three points of Article 26 reads:

> Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
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> UN, 1945.

This was and is a momentous commitment: to make education available freely to all people, world-wide. The thrust of the Declaration seems straightforward but is massive in its challenge. All countries have gained from that commitment but many millions of people are still left out. That need is obvious in the developing countries but it is now acknowledged afresh in countries like Australia.

For the World Bank the original focus was to rebuild a war-torn Europe. That reconstruction was substantially achieved, with major help from the contributions of the Marshall Plan. This was a very enlightened approach to building peace and stability, which involved major finance from America to aid all the nations affected by war, a radically different approach from the punitive activities after World-War 1. As the Marshall Plan effects became apparent in Europe the World Bank was able to develop new areas in which to focus its efforts, in particular rebuilding the infrastructure of Europe's former colonies in Asia and Africa. Since then it has made further changes in its focus and goals. From 1968-1981 it focused largely on poverty alleviation. From the '80s and into the 1990s its main focuses were debt management and structural adjustment. Increasingly the WB has found it is involved in education as that process is inextricably linked with economic development.

Currently the focus of the UN and the World Bank and their associates is on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These comprise the following:

1. *Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.*
2. *Achieve Universal Primary Education.*
3. *Promote gender equality and empower women.*
4. *Reduce child mortality.*
5. *Improve maternal health.*
6. *Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.*
7. *Ensure environmental sustainability.*
8. *Develop a global partnership for development.'*

UNESCO, 2008.

The MDGs are notable for the breadth as well as the specificity of the goals, representing as they do the experience of 60 years of effort in international cooperation and recognising also the new issues to be faced.

Australia played a significant part in ensuring that the emphases for the new bodies were broad from the beginning, realising that the narrow focus of the League of Nations had been one factor in its lack of effectiveness. To implement this broader task it was agreed to provide auxiliary bodies so that it could take account of the wider range of the issues involved in maintaining peace. Associate organisations specially created for this task included UNESCO; the United Nations Children's Education Foundation or UNICEF, which arose from the International Children's Emergency Fund established immediately after the war; the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the International Court of Justice which has featured in recent activities on war crimes.

The operations of these bodies at the international level may seem remote from ordinary Australian life and from the issues in our education system. On the contrary the connections were strong from the beginning and have continued and have important implications for our future.

Australia as a nation and individual Australians have played and are continuing to play significant roles in all these organisations. As with Billy Hughes after World War 1, the Australian Prime Minister, J B Chifley, gave strong support to the formation of UN, but this time with a very different emphasis. The results were also to be very

different. Chifley supported his Minister for External Affairs, Dr. H. V Evatt, in taking an active role in the formation of the new body. Evatt became the first president of the UN Assembly and had a major role in setting the guidelines for the first years of the international body. Chifley and Evatt were far-sighted in seeing reconstruction, both nationally and internationally, as the way forward in building and maintaining peace.

> Through the Minister for External Affairs, Dr. Evatt, Australia played an active part in the formation of the United Nations Organisation. Dr. Evatt believed that if the United Nations Organisation was to become an effective instrument for international security then it had to place stress on bringing about social and economic well-being, and not merely act as a diplomatic forum.
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> Jones and Symon, 1987.

It was this broad emphasis which had led to the establishment of the other UN bodies such as UNESCO and UNICEF. Australia had already been involved in the preliminary meetings in 1945 in London for an education-focussed body through a delegation led by Dr. Evatt. He went from that London meeting to the Bretton Woods meeting where the agreement to establish the UN was taken and a special role was foreseen for the body to take responsibility for education.

Australia acted quickly to support the new body. In Australia the government formed the Commonwealth Office of Education (COE), the first Commonwealth agency to be responsible for education. That body was given responsibility for any Commonwealth activity in education and also relations with UNESCO. The first Director of the COE was Richard Mills, formerly professor of economics at Sydney. He and W.J. (Jock) Weeden, later to become the head of the COE, were among Australia's early participants in the formation of UNESCO. Weeden later recalled the journey to the 1946 Paris meeting which formally established the organisation. That journey of ten days was radically different to the current jet flight of 20 hours.

> Just getting there was difficult. Professor R J Mills and I, then Director and Assistant Director of the Commonwealth Office of Education (COE), left Sydney for London early in November on what was then the fastest aircraft available – a modified version of the Lancaster bomber. It held six passengers and sleeping was on bunks. Three days later we arrived in London (to find the city enveloped in an old-style pea-souper). The fog was to prevent us from flying to Paris a day or two later as planned and we finally got there by surface transport after a week's delay. Weeden, 1987.

Three days to London – a drastic improvement to the usual journey, six weeks by sea. Current journeys of 20 hours make the distance shrink further.

Australia's initiative as part of the new body was to continue and grow over the ensuing years. While the relationship has passed through rocky periods it has remained an important part of Australia's international connections. For most of the period since the establishment of these international organisations the role of Australia was seen as to help other nations to achieve the major goals of UNESCO. In recent years it has become clear that we have much in Australia which does not meet the goals being set by UNESCO and other organisations. The connection with the international bodies thus has an increased relevance. Large segments of our own society show the same needs as those in developing countries where UNESCO's aid is essentially directed. The experience and knowledge gained elsewhere needs also to be applied at home.

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

The early action of the UN to establish UNESCO emphasised the latter's role as a major agent to achieve the purposes of the Charter. The Preamble to the UNESCO constitution states clearly the concept behind the initiative: 'Since wars begin in the minds of men it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.'(UNESCO, 1945) The founding meeting for UNESCO in London late in 1945 declared its central purpose in words that are still relevant.

> The purpose of the Organization is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language and religion, by the Charter of the United Nations.
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> UNESCO, 1945.

UNESCO's 60+ years have been directed towards the achievement of this purpose, 'peace and security by promoting collaboration'. Australia, as one of the first five countries to sign the formal agreement for the UNESCO Charter has been an active contributor,

not just financially, but through the many hundreds of people whom it has involved in the tasks of development on behalf of the new organisation. In turning to apply this purpose in our own country it will be wise still to note the means specified for UNESCO, 'through collaboration'. UNESCO has maintained this effort of collaboration, recognising the need to involve fully those people and nations seeking change. A respect for the integrity of those involved is essential in any change to achieve long-term improvement. Paternalistic approaches are not successful in other countries and they have clearly not been successful at home.

The commitment to assist all countries in the three broad areas of education, science and culture has achieved substantial progress but two factors have prevented success at the levels hoped for. Most significant has been the massive increase in world population, with population numbers growing from 2 billion to 6+ billion during the sixty years. Important also has been the rise in expectations so that, as will be noted particularly, the levels of achievement required for a basic education have risen significantly.

A multi-disciplinary body

The decision which made UNESCO multi-disciplinary has been highly significant for the long term nature of its work. Equally that decision has been very important to Australia. To have had three separate bodies would have been to confirm boundaries between those areas and thus limit the possibility of interdisciplinary approaches. The decision has not made the work of UNESCO itself easier. UNESCO frequently finds it difficult in its own programs to cross the boundaries which disciplines set for themselves but it has become clear that the intersections are vital to progress. The great value to Australia and to the other member nations of this multi-disciplinary approach has come to a significant extent because our educators, scientists and cultural activists have improved their capacity to work together not only in their chosen areas in different countries but in their own country and across the disciplinary boundaries.

In developing support for UNESCO in Australia a variety of people was called upon. Those selected for the early advisory committees were the most able and experienced in their various interest groups, people such as Harold White, Commonwealth Librarian, Eugene

Goossens in music, Harold Wyndham in education, Professor Alan Stout for films, Ian Clunies-Ross for science, Charles Moses for radio, Paul Hasluck and Douglas Copeland for the social sciences, Hal Missingham for the visual arts.

This pattern of involvement of capable and experienced people has been a continuing part of Australia's support of UNESCO, in Australia through the National Commission and at UNESCO in Paris or in some of the almost 200 member countries. People such as Colin Power, Michael Kirby, Ken Wiltshire, Gareth Evans and Susan Pascoe are examples of the breadth of the continuing contributions.

Australia has contributed substantially to UNESCO as a continuing member and through the active cooperation of many of its institutions and of many hundreds of active individuals. UNESCO, in turn, contributed to Australia through the opportunities provided to those institutions and individuals as well as to the nation as a whole. The growth has been striking in many fields, most notably in assisting in the forging of a more national consciousness, leading to more coherent ways of acting in UNESCO's diverse sectors. As a federated system, with responsibilities distributed in different ways in different areas there were limited opportunities to develop effective national policies in areas such as education, science, culture and communication. The result of bringing together specialists in all these areas from different parts of Australia has been to provide a focus for discussion, and often for action.

It is difficult to overstate the benefits both to Australian institutions and also to individuals of the opportunities given to their specialist personnel from all the sectors. These people have been provided with links to similar specialists overseas and to their base institutions. They have had the chance to work with these specialists on major world problems and issues. Within Australia, in the National Commission and outside it, they have had to work with people in a variety of other disciplines rather than remain exclusively within their specialist boundaries.

That association has been an effective one for UNESCO, with Australia not only one of its original supporters but the provider of one of its most widely used groups of specialists. The benefits are not in one direction only. Australia has gained greatly from such associations as that with UNESCO and has more to gain in the future. In Australia we are now recognising the relevance in our own

situation of the EFA concept of an essential basic education for all students. The sense of satisfaction with our situation has been replaced by the recognition that the needs we see in other parts of the world are also evident at home. This is all too evident with Australia's indigenous students where attendance figures for schools are very low and where the results in literacy and numeracy are also of real concern. The previous Australian Government set in place emergency measures to begin to deal with this issue and the new Government is currently considering if and how to continue with this initiative. At the same time, as mentioned earlier the results for many other Australian students show that significant numbers leave school with inadequate preparation for life and for work.

One aspect which has changed drastically in the past 15 years has been the reduction in political support for UNESCO. After staunch support by Australia for UNESCO for many years, including the difficult period of withdrawal of the USA and the UK, the Howard Government reduced its support. The National Commission itself has remained active and strong in its support but increasingly has been limited by greatly reduced funding. At one stage the National Commission had a support staff of 10 public servants, then in the education ministry. During the period when Gareth Evans was Foreign Minister, six of that staff were redeployed to Foreign Affairs. That support group was reduced by 2008 to the services of a half-time staff member. Simultaneously the funds available to the National Commission for seminars and other activities in the region have been severely cut. The future of the Commission as a body with the capacity for external activities is currently severely limited. The period ahead for the Australian National Commission for UNESCO is crucial. Sixty years of constructive support for UNESCO has yielded great benefits also to Australian life. The continuation of those benefits is now at severe risk.

EFA as a major priority

For UNESCO, a major and continuing aim has been its commitment to achieve a truly universal education base under the title 'Education for All' (EFA). It is a measure of the difficulty of achieving this that EFA remains as the major aim of UNESCO in 2009 even though major steps towards achieving free and compulsory education have been made. The task has grown substantially, particularly with the

emergence of the many new countries after 1946 together with the massive increase in population. The major goal for UNESCO of EFA is one example of the pressure arising from more sophisticated as well as numerically greater demands. The first emphasis of EFA, on Universal Primary Education or UPE, has been greatly extended under the concept of a basic education for all, an extension beyond primary education, which is also significant for Australia.

In the early years of the Australian connection with UNESCO EFA was viewed as a relevant goal for developing countries and as a successful achievement in developed societies. Although EFA remains as an unachieved goal real advances have been made. In 1960, 14 years after UNESCO made its commitment to education as a basic right for all, the numbers receiving primary education had increased fourfold, to 300 million, but another 250 million children in the world were still receiving no education. (Fernig, 1960) UNESCO has continued and extended this effort. The progress has been substantial so that the number receiving no schooling has been reduced to less than 50 million although access to primary schools is uneven. (UNESCO, 2008) This is a massive achievement but the problem of illiterate adults is still significant. The 1970 figure for illiterates in the age group 15+ was 760 million; by 1980 it was 824 million; by 1990 there were 882 million, with an estimate of 922 million by 2008.(UNESCO, 2008).

The World Conference on Education for All, (Jomtien, 1990) with 200 nations attending, began a reconsideration of EFA. The report from Jomtien showed that in spite of major efforts, nationally and internationally, the situation was, in many ways, worse. Poor literacy and school attendance figures are paralleled by other social indicators: high birth-rates, high infant mortality, low agricultural productivity, low life expectancy, poor housing quality, frequent unavailability of clean water, limited employment opportunities and low levels of political participation. Where there is deterioration in one indicator there tends to be deterioration in all. The Conference called this grim conjunction 'the convergence of disadvantage'. Education is seen as the essential tool for breaking this cycle of misfortune. The changing view of what was needed from education expanded the concept from universal primary education to a wider aim, basic education for all, an expansion whose need is apparent but whose achievement poses an additional challenge.

> These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem-solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning.
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> Jomtien, 1990

The goals for all countries are now more extensive. Where bodies such as the World Bank once followed a strictly economic agenda they now see the need for a more comprehensive approach involving both educational and social advances. 'The focus of development is shifting from charity and crisis appeal to sustainability – giving communities in the developing world the means to become self-sufficient. Education is central to this mission.' (Hoare, 2007) These comments are made in relation to developing countries but they also bring the uncomfortable recognition that many of the issues, once thought of as the preserve of developing countries, also have significance for Australia.

OECD

Australia also developed additional contacts to those with UNESCO to pursue the link between education and reconstruction. OECD was set up in 1948, initially to assist the economic reconstruction of Europe, under the name Organisation for European Economic Development with 10 member countries but in 1961 it adopted its current name and accepted a continuing and broader role. Originally an association of 10 members it has grown to 30 member countries and is in discussion with a much larger group of potential members. Australia became a member in 1971. Throughout its history it has broadened not only its membership but also its functions and OECD now provides information on a wide range of social processes to assist national governments. In particular it has greatly extended its attention to education and its impact on education, not just in its member countries but much more widely.

The origin of OECD was essentially to implement the US-funded Marshall Plan which provided funds and incentives for the rebuilding of Europe. This initiative included the nations which had fought

against the Allies. The magnanimity of the Marshall Plan was a major factor in the prosperity of the new Europe and, in the longer term provided the means for the European Union and was significant in the disappearance of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of Communist governments in Eastern Europe. This year has seen Europe celebrating 60 years of the Marshall Plan. What the Marshall Plan through organisations such as OECD achieved in Europe has much in common with the goals that the UN and its organisations are working towards world-wide: providing the conditions for its 200 nation-members not only to live in peace but to achieve prosperity.

OECD has in its later years strongly emphasised the role of education, first in reconstruction and later in economic and social development. Its early definition of its areas of interest included education in the forms of technical and vocational education, the forms most directly linked with employment. As OECD continued, it became more conscious of the wider links between education and economic development. In developing that wider concept of education it has developed approaches which are important to Australia, identifying through its evaluation programs areas in which we are falling short.

For OECD as for UNESCO, Australians have played major roles, both as permanent members of staff and in part-time situations. Those roles have had direct implications for Australia but the indirect gains from the people involved have been even more significant.

4. Reconstruction after World War 2- a national priority

Opening up to Asia and the Pacific

Nineteen forty five was a year in which new directions needed to be developed for Australia and for the international community. Before 1939, Australia, while located in the Pacific, had looked mainly to Europe for its overseas travel, its cultural links, its trade and its major relationships. When the war began, Australian forces went to Europe and Africa to play their part. When war erupted also in the Pacific many of those serving forces returned from Europe or North Africa to fight in that arena. Those battles involved Australians in most areas of the Pacific and concluded in Japan after the war. Thousands of Australians spent years as prisoners of war in Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, and in Japan itself. What occurred through those experiences to change the national focus as a matter of necessity

became a major change of emphasis in peace, even though slowly, as Australians came to recognise that not only their history but their geography imposed new demands on the way they looked at the world. Those connections built by Australia in the Pacific continued after the war as trade and travel both strengthened the connections. These connections extended to education: initially Australian universities worked to help universities in Asia and the Pacific to develop further: since then many thousands of students from those areas have sought further education in Australia. Reciprocally, many Australian students now study in Asia.

BOX 3.

The University of the South Pacific.

In 1965 I became part of the Australian move towards the Pacific. I was the Australian member of the Inter-Governmental Mission to the South Pacific, also involving Britain and New Zealand. We travelled by ship and small planes to Papua-New Guinea, New Caledonia, the Gilbert Islands, the New Hebrides, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Samoa and Fiji seeking to find a solution to the need for post-school education. The area involved in our concerns is greater than Europe and the distances separating the many clusters of islands are immense. The outcome of our travels was the foundation of the University of the South Pacific with its main campus built on a former airfield in Suva and with supporting campuses in some of the territories. I remember vividly during those long journeys hearing of the strong wish for better education, a wish expressed by the wide range of people we met. The University has flourished as a regional university and retains strong links with Australia.

In altering its international connections to give greater emphasis to our neighbours Australia changed its links with UNESCO, moving from the European to the Asia-Pacific Electoral Group. Ken Wiltshire affirmed that both gains for Australia and contributions from Australia would come from the new association.

> Through its location, Australia has interests in Asia and the Pacific and through the growing diversity of its population Australia will be able to build stronger bridges with non Anglo-Saxon countries. Australia has much to offer as well as gain, in the work of UNESCO.
>
> Wiltshire, 1985

Australia's membership of the European bloc within UNESCO had

been a reflection of past history and also of the composition of the founding nations of UNESCO. When membership of the Asia-Pacific electoral bloc was finally achieved Richard Walsh, the current Chair of the National Commission, commended the change.

> I hope I can combine the idealism of Australia's continuing commitment to UNESCO with our growing awareness that it is of paramount national interest to devote our energy, resources, intellect and imagination to assisting the development of the Asia- Pacific region to its fullest potential.
>
> Walsh, 1989.

The pattern of internal change

These changes for Australia in external links accompanied an ambitious program of immigration: by 1950 a total of one million migrants had entered the country since 1945. That pattern of growth has continued, with migration playing a major part in the growth from 6 to 20 million. Australia has also greatly broadened its sources of intake to include Asia, the Pacific states, Africa and South America. This has been associated with a significant program of economic development and of social change. For Australia the associations with international organisations have contributed both to creating links with other nations in productive ways and also to building the domestic capacity to cope with change.

The motivation which caused Australia to move internationally for reconstruction was equally strong in bringing internal change. The Australian Government actively implemented policies of reconstruction well before the end of the war through new emphases in existing departments and also through new departments. J. B. Chifley was Minister for Post-War Reconstruction from 1942 to 1945, before becoming Prime Minister in that year with Dr. Evatt as his Minister for External Affairs. Both played important roles at home as well as internationally. The internal aim of reconstruction was parallel to the hope of many countries to build a more peaceful and more equitable society. The internal aim was linked with the perceived need for united international action to build and to maintain peace.

The international discussions in which Australia had been involved, resulting in the formation, first of the UN, then UNESCO .and later of OECD, were seen as the means through which international effort could be focused on reconstruction. This gave impetus in Australia to

the work of the newly-formed Commonwealth Office of Education, COE, which was given both a domestic task through the universities, and an external task through UNESCO. This dual role was important to long-term developments as for the first time Australia became sensitive to movements overseas, not only in Britain but more generally. Richard Mills in his role as the first head of the COE, involved the Office in both external and internal roles. These links between Australia and UNESCO thus began with mutually congenial purposes: the reconstruction of societies dislocated by war.

The Commonwealth Government actively implemented their policies of reconstruction well before the end of the war through new emphases in existing departments and also through new departments. Mr. Chifley was Minister for Post-War Reconstruction from 1942 to 1945 becoming Prime Minister in that year. Post-War Reconstruction was a Division in the Department of Labour and National Service. At the public service level key Australian figures in the task of reconstruction were Roland Wilson, then Secretary of the Department of Labour and National Service and H. C. Coombs then head of the Division of Post-War Reconstruction. The active interest of these public servants was significant as it was to continue for many years under different governments. In translating the policies into action at the public service level in Wilson's department, two major figures were Ronald Walker who had been professor of economics in Tasmania and subsequently a senior public servant in Melbourne, and Richard Mills. Both men played important roles in Australia's first links with UNESCO and were actively involved in the strengthening of education in Australia.

The internal effort towards reconstruction accorded well with Australia's international emphasis. Internally, the Commonwealth Government focused on reconstruction through new initiatives as well as existing departments. Those initiatives, originally limited in purpose, were to lead to major and irreversible changes to Australia's institutions, including those in education. One starting point was an increase in research opportunities as the need for new societal insights was recognised. The Department of Labour and National Service contributed to this expansion of university activity by increasing the Commonwealth's annual grant of £30,000 to support scientific research and a further £9,000 per annum for research in the social sciences. This grew further to £40,000 in 1944-45 and to £127,000 in 1948-9. (Macintyre, 2007) This money was initially administered by

the Division of Post-War Reconstruction and provided salaries and expenses for an increased range of projects. The amount now seems small but the significance has been substantial.

The social sciences had struggled for recognition in Australia but the climate which developed late in the war years emphasised the importance of such studies in building and maintaining peace. Ronald Walker had been a member of the Social Sciences Research Council (SSRC) and played an active role in obtaining research grants from UNESCO for Australian academics.

Stuart Macintyre has analysed the change that became possible in the social sciences through these links (Macintyre. 2007) In the period immediately following the war Richard Mills extended the capacity of the COE by using existing bodies such as the Social Sciences Research Council (SSRC) to give the new committee the support of the Australian academic community. Stuart Macintyre comments on the role played by that set of disciplines in the early days for the National Advisory Committee for UNESCO.

> Social sciences were one of the five initial departments (the others were education, natural sciences, communication and cultural activities), and took on an ambitious set of activities: the formation of international associations in social science disciplines, the compilation of handbooks, bibliographies and abstracts, and the initiation of major projects on nationalism and internationalism, population problems and lastly a study of the 'tensions crucial to peace'.
>
> Macintyre, 2007.

The social sciences had struggled for recognition in Australia but the climate which developed late in the war years emphasised the importance of such studies in building and maintaining peace. Ronald Walker played an active role in obtaining research grants from UNESCO for Australian academics. Macintyre notes that two UNESCO-sponsored studies came early to Australia, at a time when local research funds were very limited.

> Australia was one of four countries selected to conduct detailed community studies as part of the project on 'tensions crucial to peace' in the new world order that the Unesco delegates devised in the heady optimism of their first conference in Paris. Among the work commissioned by Unesco as part of the 'population problems' component of the Tensions Project was studies of the assimilation of immigrants in Australia, Belgium, Brazil, France and Israel. Mick Borrie was contracted

> to undertake the Australian investigation in 1950, and his study was subsequently published as *Italians and Germans in Australia.*
>
> Macintyre, 2007.

An expanding Commonwealth role

This initiative in reconstruction through research was reinforced by further moves in education. As early as 1943 an interdepartmental committee under Ronald Walker proposed the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme (CRTS) to offer discharged members of the armed forces free places and generous financial assistance for university study. This was introduced in 1945 within the COE. Initially the intention was to assist 10,000 CRTS students in a limited range of courses but by the end of 1949 more than 25,000 had benefited at a cost of £12m. This initiative provided opportunity not only for the individuals themselves but for the universities. The universities had been small and with limited funding: just six universities with an enrolment by 1939 of 14,000 declining to 10,000 by 1942. At this stage the universities were essentially teaching institutions with a limited range of faculties. The CRTS initiative brought a rapid expansion of undergraduate numbers, up to 15,586 in 1945 and 30,477 by 1947. Of these increased numbers 40% were CRTS students. They were no longer restricted to reserved courses in the sciences and many undertook degrees in Arts, Commerce or Law. This enabled the universities to begin to develop a wider range of courses and, with the increases in staff and in funding, to make substantial moves in research. Melbourne took the lead in establishing the Ph.D. as a higher research degree in 1945, and was followed by other universities.

In addition to the growth in the social sciences the natural sciences and education both profited from the changes and the international links. At the time of entry to UNESCO all three of these fields in Australia were seeking to establish themselves with the possible exception of the natural sciences. The sciences had been encouraged during the war to develop research facilities for that struggle and thus had a base on which to build, particularly in areas such as physics, chemistry, engineering and agriculture. The supporting mechanisms for research and development were almost non-existent for education, the social sciences and cultural activities. All these profited greatly

from the opportunities that international experience offered through bodies such as UNESCO and OECD, opportunities which had not been available during the war years or before the war.

The natural sciences

Professor Ralph Slatyer is one of many Australian scientists who became linked with UNESCO. During his early work at the Commonwealth Science and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), as an ecological physiologist, Slatyer became involved in the UNESCO Arid Zones Project. This project bears a very topical emphasis, exploring the potential of the arid zones of the world to become a 'food bowl' for the world, to utilise their sunshine and consistent weather to produce the crops needed to supply countries with less helpful climates. The major international effort showed the flaws in this ambition, as conditions made such an achievement highly unlikely. In a current replay of the same issue the drought conditions in Australia and the growing acceptance of the idea of global warming have revived the idea of moving substantial parts of agriculture from south to north in Australia. Slatyer, reminiscing after 50 years, sees no better prospects for success in the future. 'The combination of poor soil, the intense heat during the main growing season, a wide variety of pests and intermittent torrential rain made those areas unsuitable then – and will continue to do so now.' (Slatyer, 2007) After this early introduction to UNESCO, Ralph Slatyer was to play other important roles. In 1978 he became the Australian Ambassador to UNESCO at an important time and was involved in many of the UNESCO science programs. He noted that when the USA and UK left UNESCO, together with South Africa, this meant that Australia and Canada were the major countries remaining whose language was English. Given the heavy demand for consultants with English skills for many consultancies in UNESCO, this involved many Australians and the record shows the extent of the activity. (Slatyer, 1988)

Education

In education the injection of ideas and opportunities was just as significant. Prior to the war, education was exclusively a state concern, with most state schools being primary only, feeding to a much smaller number of secondary schools. There were six universities with courses almost exclusively at the undergraduate level. Research opportunities were limited until the demands of war required the development of war-related investigations in areas such as optics. The end of the war brought dramatic changes and Australia became involved with educational and commercial activities both inside and outside the country, in Asia and the Pacific area. For example, Australia played an active role, in cooperation with New Zealand and Britain, in the foundation of the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji, to provide a service to ten Pacific territories. (HMSO, 1966) This was typical of many activities for Australia and Australians in the region, building better connections with these countries.

A major agent in the broadening of activities in education was the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). Its main effort had been directed at the provision of tests for school systems. The Carnegie Foundation provided the first funds for research, starting a long development in which ACER has become one of the world's most highly regarded educational research organizations. Its first director, Dr. K. S. Cunningham, was active in supporting the growth of research not only in education but also in the social sciences. Cunningham became an inaugural member of the National Advisory Committee for UNESCO, as Chair of the Advisory Committee for the Social Sciences.

Education broadened its contacts through external links such as UNESCO and at home with the social sciences. ACER, with its close association with the Commonwealth Office of Education and with the Advisory Committee for UNESCO, was able to play an important role in the early work of both organizations. In addition ACER maintained strong links with the states, first through its testing programs but later in research through its own staff and through the establishment of state institutes of educational research.

Prior to the war and during it, the states had had little contact with each other in education and they had even less contact internationally. ACER was important in building these interstate connections in education. The Council through all its Directors have maintained this

aspect. The second Director, W. C. Radford, also worked to ensure that ACER played an important role internationally. In 1960 the UNESCO Institute for Education at Hamburg proposed to link educational research and comparative education. ACER played an active role through Radford in the development of testing programs that were to be the progenitors of the current tests operated through OECD. The initiatives led to the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement which commenced with mathematics and science projects in ten participating countries in 1964 (Connell, 1980). Subsequent Directors of ACER, John Keeves, Barry McGaw and Geoff Masters, have continued and extended this international role of ACER, a role which has been both informative and constructive for Australia.

Secondary and primary education.

A further change of long-term significance occurred because of the rapid growth of university numbers. As opportunities within the universities were increased this led to a rapid expansion of secondary education nationally. That growth was rapid and caused major concerns about the nature of the provision for the secondary age-group and also forced a reconsideration of the selective system for secondary entry. The early response to increased secondary numbers was to have two types of secondary school, high schools and secondary modern schools. Entry to these was based on selection tests. Research showed the inadequacy of the selection measures to predict later performance accurately and gradually the two-part system was replaced by one, the comprehensive high school. This pattern is still the usual form but it is frequently criticised on the basis of its value for all students, particularly after the retention of students at the secondary level increased, first to Year 10 and later to Year 12. That increase in retention continued into the 1990s but slowed and even reversed after 2000 as a significant proportion of students dropped out in the later secondary years. The inadequacies of this pattern and its wastefulness have been clearly revealed through Australia's international connections, particularly the tests developed by the OECD, which have confirmed the unsuitability of current secondary education for many students in Australia, an issue which needs urgent redress.

Growth in Commonwealth powers in education.

The solution of education problems in Australia is complicated by the divided responsibilities for administration of schools. The exclusive control of school education by the states in our early history has been altered, piece-by-piece, as the Commonwealth has continued and developed further the interest begun after the war. The powers that the Commonwealth had taken from the states for the urgencies of war remained with the central government and have become of increasing importance in peace-time. Currently, as a new Commonwealth Government shows its special interest in education, the resolution of administrative problems has taken on a new urgency. The establishment of the National Curriculum Board signals the opening up of new areas of Commonwealth interest which will change the scene still further. Interestingly, the choice of the Government to head up this endeavour was Professor Barry McGaw, fresh from his work at OECD.

The linking of activities at the national level with those at the international level is not a recent trend. It dates from the first years following the war and Australia's experience at that wider level has fed back into developments within the nation. At the first meeting of UNESCO in Paris Richard Mills and Ronald Walker were both part of the delegation, appropriately since both men had helped in the move for Australia to join UNESCO. To ensure a continuing connection between Australia's domestic policies and the activities in Paris, a Permanent Delegation to UNESCO was formed in Paris headed by Ronald Walker. Later the task of this branch of Foreign Affairs in Paris was expanded to include the links with OECD. Those links begun so early have continued and grown.

The decision of UNESCO to adopt education, science and culture as its means of operation was to be highly significant for Australia. The national body for UNESCO in Australia, later to be called the National Commission for UNESCO, accepted the same combination of disciplines. The linking together of these three groups of disciplines within UNESCO, and in Australia through the National Commission for UNESCO, proved of immense value, creating inter-disciplinary links between education, the sciences and the cultural organisations where none had existed and, equally significantly, developing interrelationships between the specialists involved.

Australians and the international scene.

The international agencies.

Australians have played a major role in the international organisations such as the World Bank, UNESCO and OECD which aim to achieve peace through development. Many individuals have been permanent members of the organisations, others have been participants asked to use their expertise on specific tasks. These Australian international links date from the earliest days of such endeavours.

Ronald Walker together with Richard Mills played a significant role in the birth of UNESCO. Walker, after playing a key role in developments in Australia, moved to Paris and served on the first Executive Board of UNESCO, a board of 18 members, and Walker became the second Chairman. The Board was a very select body, with Jean Piaget and Paolo Carneiro as members. Walker, later Sir Ronald Walker, became the fourth person to preside over the General Conference.

Richard Mills continued his involvement with UNESCO, while retaining his central role for the Commonwealth at home. The COE maintained its close connection with UNESCO, first through Mills and, later, through W J (Jock) Weeden who succeeded Mills at the COE. Weeden was one of those far-sighted public servants who sought to use the lessons from international contacts to solve domestic problems. In particular, as head of the Commonwealth Department of Education, he worked hard to improve the educational opportunities for indigenous Australians, introducing the Commonwealth Teaching Service which made a major contribution to increase the supply of trained teachers to the Northern Territory.

James Wolfensohn, a graduate of Sydney University and later of Harvard, after a distinguished career in law and business in Australia, moved to the USA, later becoming president of the World Bank. He played a significant role from 1995 to 2005 in economic policy in developing nations and is credited with being the first World Bank president to focus attention on the problem of corruption in the area of development financing.

Colin Power was a graduate of Queensland University and, later Professor of Education at Flinders University. He was recruited by UNESCO, playing an important role in UNESCO's science education

initiatives and later in its key program, EFA, first as Assistant Director General for Education and then as Deputy Director General. Colin Power stresses the valuable experience gained by large numbers of Australians recruited to act as consultants to UNESCO. He comments that Australia's universities and schools, research associations, and legal and political institutions have all been substantial beneficiaries through the experiences overseas of those who work within them. (Power, 2007)

Former Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, was a strong supporter of UNESCO, both as Prime Minister and later as Australia's Ambassador to UNESCO. He was elected to UNESCO's Executive Board where he was a very active contributor. He played a significant role during a period when Australia was questioning the value of remaining in UNESCO.

Professor Ken Wiltshire of the University of Queensland, who followed Mr. Whitlam on the Executive Board, was also a significant contributor in its deliberations. A major part of his work on the Board was to make UNESCO more conscious of the role of young people, leading to their inclusion in most UNESCO delegations. Management of Social Transformations (MOST), was an initiative which Dr. Wiltshire encouraged from its beginning, seeing a vital need for UNESCO to strengthen its work in the social sciences sector, an area which lacked the financial support that was available from outside sources to the natural sciences. MOST maintains 7 to 8 programs during any period, seeking to provide valuable information and insights about major issues for government policies.

> The social sciences lack the support from governments which is usually available to the natural sciences, which are seen by authorities as providing assistance to practical problems in areas such as agriculture, fisheries, industrial production. One might almost believe that some governments think of the idea of supporting the social sciences as equivalent to providing tools for the use of a burglar. I worked to ensure that MOST dealt with some of the practical problems which concern governments, issues such as urban settlement and migration.
>
> Wiltshire, 2007.

Dr. Stephen Hill, as Director of the UNESCO Regional Office for Science and Technology for South-East Asia from1995 to 2005, was instrumental in strengthening the role of Field Offices in UNESCO.

Dr. Hill played an important part in the efforts to rebuild facilities and resources and to provide short-term aid to the victims of the Tsunami which devastated so much of the Pacific region near Indonesia. His major contribution to UNESCO was in the much greater role played by field offices and field staff in shaping policy as well as programs.

Justice Michael Kirby's legal knowledge and experience combined with his personal gifts, enabled him to make a unique contribution to UNESCO. Justice Kirby played a key role in the development of the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights as Chair of the special Drafting Committee. He was named in 1998 as the Laureate of the UNESCO Prize for Human Rights Education

Dr. Rupert Maclean worked for UNESCO in Myanmar initially, then in Bangkok where he became Chief of ACEID with a very strong contribution to developments in the Asia-Pacific Region, and then as the founding Director of the UNESCO Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Bonn, Germany. This was a major new initiative for UNESCO. In that role he has played a leading part in publications to support initiatives in technical and vocational education and training. His role in Bangkok in the program APEID was highly significant for the long term involvement of UNESCO. The Asia-Pacific Program of Education and Innovation for Development or APEID, has been a major activity for Australia and the region. The initiative linked institutions in the region in partnerships, rather than as donor-recipients in what is essentially a form of mutual assistance in solving problems. Beginning in 1974, APEID quickly established a list of partner institutions working together in groups which were more effective and more able to provide assistance to others. Currently there are more than 200 in 35 countries, employing APEID's unique style of operation.(Maclean, 2007)

Another Australian, Dr. W Gardner Davies, played an active role with the Australian Permanent Delegation to UNESCO for a very long period. He first worked with UNESCO in 1947 and became a Permanent Delegate from 1954 to 1972, a longer tenancy than any other Australian. Gardner Davies became a member of the Executive Board in 1956 and served for 4 years. He was appointed to the UNESCO Secretariat in 1979, retaining a connection with UNESCO for over 30 years. Professor Hugh Philp was a member of the Executive Board from 1974 to 1978 and Vice-Chairman from 1976 to

1978. Professor Ralph Slatyer was Ambassador to UNESCO from 1978 to 1981 with an active role in the Delegation as well as specialist roles in key scientific programs.

In Australia, participation in UNESCO activities has been vigorous. The COE initially set up 11 Australian advisory committees to support the National Commission. These first advisory committees were developed to include key interests in Australian public life: education, radio, press, films, libraries, museums, natural sciences, visual arts, social sciences, music and the combined area of drama, literature and the theatre. As many as 120 people were included in these advisory committees and more were involved in support groups.

This pattern has continued in different forms in Australia, adding not only variety from the international experience but involving significant interdisciplinary exchange, but as noted earlier, the Australian contribution to UNESCO (and UNESCO's contribution to Australia) is at risk because of the Commonwealth Government's policies towards UNESCO, dating from the mid-1990s to the current day.

At OECD headquarters contributions have been largely through active participation in the Paris office. A number of Australians have played significant roles. For example Professor Malcolm Skilbeck was Director of the Education Division of OECD in Paris for many years. A distinguished educator who had worked in London and Northern Ireland, he came back to Australia to lead the Curriculum Corporation in its first very active years and was later the Vice-Chancellor of Deakin University. From the beginning of his appointment he was conscious of the very limited view of the role of education in OECD which from its foundation had been focused strongly on economic development with education included mainly to ensure the appropriate education of workers. Skilbeck saw this view as reductionist and harmful and a major change of direction for OECD came from his recognition of the wider emphasis on education required for social as well as economic wellbeing. Convincing the organisation that general education was a major requisite for economic development, Skilbeck extended the OECD brief to include informal education as well as school and higher education,. He also maintained close contacts with UNESCO.

> UNESCO stands for the (practical) idealism of a world in peace, safe from war and enjoying the richness and interactions of diverse cultures with education as a fundamental instrument for forging harmonious, mutually respectful international life. What happened to all that and what did Australians do to foster, support, sustain these values, ideals, perceptions, processes both in other countries and here? Quite a lot, of course, but let's not forget the barriers, government and bureaucratic cynicism and the countervailing forces. Miraculously the UNESCO dream is still there - but is the upcoming generation of teachers and academics aware of it? OECD is always more hard-headed, down to earth, narrowly utilitarian and self interested. Education despite our best efforts could never escape the grip of the economists' vision that serving one's own best interest is the way to serve the needs of the world - or that the rising (economic) wave will carry everything forward.
>
> Skilbeck, 2008.

Malcolm Skilbeck was succeeded by another Australian, Barry McGaw, moving from roles as Professor of Education at Murdoch University and then Director of the ACER. McGaw further strengthened OECD's education functions, particularly through the use of international tests in literacy, science and mathematics, using such tools as the Program for International Student Assessment or PISA, which is now in wide use internationally.

On his return to Australia McGaw has played an active role on the national scene, first at Melbourne University and, more recently as the Chair of the National Curriculum Board set up by the Commonwealth Government. Like Barry McGaw, many others such as Malcolm Skilbeck, Colin Power, Ken Wiltshire, Ralph Slatyer and Richard Sweet are playing major roles on the national scene. The impact is evident in education, the sciences, the arts and culture where overseas experience has provided a significant impetus for action at the local and national levels. This experience, combined with the increased readiness to look critically at our own situation, provides powerful ways of looking at our future.

Australians and international experience.

BOX 4.

Australia has always gained from its links with the wider world. Well before the First Fleet our indigenous people had contacts with the Pacific area. After the Fleet, Australia became the setting for the largest planned migration in history as many thousands of 'selected immigrants' came by ship from the prisons and courts of England. The Gold Rush in the 1850s saw major new additions to the local population as so many people came to seek their fortune.

Travel from Australia was much more limited. The main avenue of sea travel was lengthy and expensive. My own first experience was on a ship which took over five weeks via Suez to London. That journey was a rarity, shared by the wealthy (of whom I was not a part). That pattern changed dramatically in the years following the war, at first in selected areas but later much more generally. The early Australian travellers tended to be scholars in search of further opportunities. Through people such as Professor Bill Connell of Sydney University and Professor Bill Walker of the University of New England, links were made, first with British universities such as London and later with North American universities, with Illinois, Harvard, Stanford, Alberta coming early in an ever-extending list.

Air travel has revolutionised the possibilities and the flow of scholars was followed by thousands of travellers, particularly young travellers. The Gap Year has become a regular feature in which many thousands of students travel abroad between Year 12 and further education. In addition approximately 750,000 Australians live outside Australia, not only in countries such as the United Kingdom and America but in Europe and Asia. These include those who work in science related fields, in schools, in the finance and travel industries: these are all part of a global employment market. Other key factors are more accessible and economical international transport, and increasingly sophisticated communication technologies. Over two-thirds of these Australians are professionals, para-professionals, managers or in administrative occupations.

This sense of adventure abroad is not new. In the late 19th century, a group of radical Australians voluntarily went to Paraguay to create a master-planned community, known as Nueva (New) Australia. That plan failed but the willingness to seek other opportunities remains.

Our most productive periods in Australia's history owe a great deal to our willingness to look objectively at our own situation and to be willing to learn, not only from our own experience but from that of other countries. The next ten years in Australia will be much richer and more productive if we learn from international experience as well as our own.

5. Where do we go from here?

Decision time in education.

The next few years in Australia will be of crucial importance in at least three fields. The current financial crisis dominates the headlines. At least as important but less publicised is the issue of our global environment. The third issue is our education future. Seemingly less urgent, nevertheless we are close to a point of no return in our education of young people. Our future as a fair society is very much at stake. In all these areas, the information for our activities at home from our international connections is particularly important.

One area of relevance is with the continuing UNESCO goal of Education for All. This is no longer a goal just for others but applies directly to our situation. UNESCO set out in 1993 to re-develop its policy directions for the future through the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, the Delors Report. This Commission investigated education world-wide for three years before presenting its report. This recognised the continuing commitment to good quality basic education for everyone but stressed that this now implied an extension beyond primary to secondary education. That extension demands the reform of secondary education. This is now especially urgent, given that it has become a stage for all students in Australia and is becoming so more universally.

> Many of the hopes and criticisms aroused by the formal systems seem to focus on secondary education. On the one hand, it is often regarded as the gateway to social and economic advancement. It is accused on the other hand, of being inegalitarian and not sufficiently open to the outside world and generally failing to prepare adolescents not only for higher education but also for the world of work. In addition, it is also argued that the subjects taught are irrelevant and that not enough attention is paid to the acquisition of attitudes and values. It is now generally recognised that, for economic growth to take place, a high proportion of the population has to have received secondary education. It would thus be useful to clarify what secondary education needs to do to prepare young people for adulthood.
>
> Delors, 1996

These comments are relevant to our situation in Australia where large numbers of students pass through secondary school without that necessary preparation 'for adulthood' and for the world outside school.

This term 'basic education' was further elaborated by the current Director-General of UNESCO:

> Basic education denotes the minimum skills and knowledge needed in order to be able to make a full contribution to one's environment and to be in control of one's life. In an increasingly interdependent world, the contents, and therefore the very notion of the 'quality' of basic education are evolving. It can no longer be reduced to learning reading, writing and arithmetic. It must also teach individuals to be, to do, to learn and to live together.
>
> Maatsuura, 2000.

This current interpretation of 'basic education' as necessary for all students is now of relevance to all countries. This is the base which is intended to provide a satisfactory platform for all students, providing viable options for the future. It is in building such a base which works for all that our challenges lie.

BOX 5.
In 2002 on a visit to a series of Chinese universities I received an insight into the impact of the Delors agenda. I met with a cross-section of post-graduate Chinese students, near the end of their research degrees. I had come with the support of UNESCO to provide some follow-up in China to the Delors recommendations. To my surprise and pleasure these bright young students knew all about the Report. Their concern was not to find out about it but to discuss the means of making it a practical reality in China. I have little doubt that they will, representing as they do the face of a new China. The reports to UNESCO of the developments in China show the seriousness devoted to dealing with the needs in secondary education.

That knowledge and commitment are still rare in Australia. In particular the damage done to our public education system in the past fifteen years is just being recognised.

A growing Commonwealth role.

The international initiatives outlined above are part of an agenda that Australia has actively supported. This support goes back to the origins of Australia's membership of UNESCO and the move of the Commonwealth Government into education, until then a preserve of the states. As noted the first such initiative in education by the Commonwealth Government was to strengthen higher education in the 1940s with the introduction of the CRTS scheme. This

intervention became a launching pad for much wider action. The interest in higher education led directly, not only to an expansion of university numbers, but to expanding research capabilities within the universities. This in turn led as university enrolments were increased, to a rapid expansion of secondary education. Where only one in three primary students went on to secondary education at the end of the war, in a comparatively short time all primary students continued on to secondary education.

The flow-on effect from university growth to secondary numbers and the impact of that change on primary education was part of the major expansions which have shaped Australian education. The movement which began with an increase in university numbers changed for ever not only the universities but also the secondary schools which supplied their students and which began their major expansion on the base of the university changes. In turn the primary schools took on a new role. No longer serving as the selection process for secondary schools, they now began to see their role more broadly as the foundation stage of universal education.

In later years a series of national programs demonstrated the continuing Commonwealth interest in education. These included the Commonwealth Science Program, the Commonwealth Secondary Schools Libraries Program, the Schools Commission, the Disadvantaged Schools Project, the Curriculum Corporation and latterly the National Curriculum Board. These have all been important developments but the important challenge for the next few years in Australia will be crucial in making a reality of 'education for all', rather considering it as a slogan applying to others.

Clear advances.

In the past 60 years Australia's concern with international organisations have shown both change and consistency. The joint history illustrates both the changes and the underlying agreement on purposes. Some issues have remained as concerns over the years. As noted, the emphasis on 'Education for All', initially seen as an aim for developing countries, has now become a priority for all.

The advances in Australia over the 60 years are clear. In education, for example, there are not only many more universities, schools and

colleges but they have grown substantially in student numbers and in the scope of their studies. The universities have also enrolled many thousands of students from overseas. In 1945 there were just 6 universities with 10,000 students. These universities had no graduate degrees and their capacity for research was limited to the physical sciences in support of the war effort. Currently there are 40 universities with over 900,000 students. Their fields of research have expanded to include the social sciences, medicine, the arts and the earlier emphases in the physical sciences have expanded greatly. There have also been strong increases in vocational areas, for example, in business and the information sciences.

Equally dramatic growth has occurred at the primary and secondary levels, particularly at the latter level which has grown at a much faster pace than has the population. Retention to year 12 in Australian schools rose from 5% in 1946 to 76% just 60 years later. Much of the initiative for growth has been related to the interaction of external and internal activities. Australian initiatives following World War 2 linked the reconstruction which was undertaken internationally with that which was developed internally.

A major challenge for our future.

In the international tests of PISA, organised by OECD over the past seven years, the best students in our secondary schools have regularly featured among the top 4-5 nations in the world but Australia also has many students who score poorly in these tests and whose subsequent opportunities in life will be severely restricted.

The Business Council of Australia (BCA) has played a crucial role in pointing out the challenge which faces the country for the future.

> The key to a skilled workforce is a high-quality and world-leading education system.
> The BCA Education, Skills and Innovation Task Force engaged the Australian Council for Educational Research to present an overview on the current state of Australia's education system.
> It is also where we are failing more than 300,000 young people aged between 15 and 24 who are either unemployed or working part-time and not undertaking full-time education. Currently, the overall level of unemployment is 4.3 per cent; the unemployment rate for 15-to-24-

> year-olds is more than double that rate at 9.1 per cent.
> Australia must pursue policies that close and prevent gaps in educational quality, such as gaps between schools in different locations or between private and public schools. All students should receive a high-quality education no matter which school they attend.
>
> BCA, 2007.

The need for *'….policies that close and prevent gaps in educational quality'* reveals major challenges arising for the long-term commitment to provide an effective education for all students. This is glaringly true for indigenous students where so much recent attention has been focused. Retention of indigenous students to Year 12 stands at 40% in contrast to the overall Australian figure of 76%. A similar challenge applies for all students, despite a commitment to provide such an education that dates back almost 150 years. Australian education has much of which to be proud but it now has a major challenge to face.

The BCA research shows that 35,000 students leave school every year without the qualifications needed to take up employment or further education or training. They become part of that group of over 300,000 young people who are effectively outside the work-force. They not only find it difficult to enter work but also to play their part as citizens or to build useful lives. The burden from their plight falls not only on them and their families but also on the entire community. The results from the PISA tests have shown that 13 per cent of Australian 15-year-olds perform at a minimum baseline level below which students are considered at risk of not having the basic skills to work or participate in the community. In his final address as Chair of the Business Council, Michael Chaney expressed his deep concern at the current situation:

> There are two significant problems with our school system: Firstly there is a significant proportion of young people who become disengaged during their school years, achieve only minimal educational outcomes and have limited subsequent engagement in work or further learning. Second, there is a shortage of young people with the knowledge and skills required for effective participation in the Australian workforce.
> There's now a real need for new approaches and policies. We need a greater emphasis on national approaches to school curriculum and teacher training. We also need a renewed focus on teaching and learning foundation skills such as literacy, numeracy, and computing, as well as focusing on the importance of independent, lifelong learning.
>
> Chaney, 2007

A recent public statement as reported in *The Age* newspaper by the head of the Australian Research Council identified a related issue:

> Australian Council for Educational Research chief executive Geoff Masters said Year 12 certificates should come with a guarantee that students had achieved minimum standards in some basic skills. At an ACER research conference next week, Professor Masters will propose minimum levels be set for fundamental skills including reading, writing, numeracy, science, civics and citizenship, and information technology.
>
> "Most students can complete 13 years of school and be awarded a senior certificate without having to demonstrate minimally acceptable levels of proficiency across a range of fundamental areas," he said yesterday. "Some things are so fundamental we should expect all students to achieve at least a minimum standard by the time they leave school."
> Professor Masters said the available evidence suggested that many students leave high school without possessing these fundamental skills.
>
> *The Age*, 14 Aug.2008.

The efforts to build up a comprehensive and high quality education system, an aim which had seemed almost achieved, is now facing major difficulties. Not coincidentally, it is largely through the insights from our international connections that the real needs in our current situation are becoming clearer.The Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, acknowledged the relevance of this OECD assessment in elaborating his idea of an 'Education Revolution', defined by the his Government as one of its key policies for the future:

> In Australia, socio-economic status is more strongly associated with educational achievement than it should be. I have already referred to the OECD research which found that students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile lagged those in the highest socioeconomic quartile by 2½ years.
>
> If Australia is to be the land genuinely of the fair go, we must do a better job in ensuring that every young Australian gets a decent education. That is why today I announce that we will pursue a further National Policy Partnership with the States and Territories to tackle underachievement in our schools. There is no 'one size fits all' answer to school underperformance
>
> Rudd, 27 Aug. 2008.

Australia, *'the land genuinely of the fair go'* is not where we are currently. Many thousands of students in our society do not get a fair

go. As a consequence they suffer throughout their lives as does our society as a whole. The Rudd comment on the major impact of socio-economic status of Australian students is taken directly from the OECD test analysis. We know from this international source that Australia is failing to educate effectively a major segment of our society. OECD sources suggest that this does not need to be so. Other countries whose students perform as well as our best students do not have our large numbers of unsuccessful students. The comment that Australia must do a better job in ensuring that every young Australian gets a decent education is highly significant. It points to the urgent need to provide more adequately for those schools which have the responsibility of educating the most needy students in our society.

This problem is a creation of the recent past. When the Howard Government came to office the Commonwealth had established itself as a major player in Australian education. The Commonwealth contributed around $1.4 billion to Australia's public schools, some 13 per cent of total public expenditure on those schools. For non-government schools, however, Commonwealth funding had by 1996 expanded to the point where it was providing around $2 billion for the 26 per cent of all Australia schools in the non-government sector. The next decade changed these relativities dramatically. While there were significant increases in Commonwealth's funding for both government and non-government schools, over the decade government schools gained an extra $2 billion while the increase for non-government schools, with only half the number of students of government schools, was $4.7 billion.

Barry McGaw emphasises the challenges arising from that situation, specifically the challenge to maintain quality in education but at the same time to achieve equity:

> In Australia, we have evolved a system of government and non-government schools in which there are marked differences in resource levels among schools. Among the poorly resourced schools there are both government and non-government schools but the well-resourced schools are exclusively non-government schools.
>
> These differences have been exacerbated by Australian government policy since the basis of funding for non-government schools was altered in 2001. Prior to the change, funding was based on relative need with account taken of a non-government school's other resources including the level of fees it set. That imposed some incentive to hold fees down.

> Since 2001, funding for non-government schools has been based on social background, not of the students themselves but of the communities in which they live. Relatively advantaged students from disadvantaged communities carry with them to a non-government school an Australian government voucher based on the students they leave behind in their communities.
>
> The change in model has had substantial effects, particularly on well-resourced non-government schools. Some of them have had increased Australian government funding per student between 2001 and 2007 of 200-300% while they have also increased fees by between 40 and 80%.

McGaw goes on to consider the reason for the differences.

> An obvious question is how much of the differences among Australian schools is due to whether they are government or non-government. We cannot answer that from the OECD PISA results since Australia suppresses the information on type of school in the data it submits to the OECD. Australia is the only country to do so.

This change in the balance between government and non-government schools over the period also applied to universities, where reduced funding made them more dependent on student fees.

> The Australian government now spends more on non-government schools than it does on universities – $4.8bn on non-government schools compared with $3.5bn on universities in 2005. Funding for universities was already behind in 2002 but between 2002 and 2005, Australian government funding for universities was increased by 9% while the increase for non-government schools was 30%.
>
> McGaw, 2008.

A major issue over the next few years will be the extent to which the balance can be restored in the provision of government school funding. The real hope for the future is that in the course of its 'Education Revolution' the Rudd government provides a more equitable pattern of funding. However, the Rudd Government has for the immediate period ahead committed itself to continue current levels of funding. While this commitment is consistent with election promises it raises the vital question 'What changes will follow after this commitment is satisfied?' The period immediately following that decision in 2010 will be crucial to the future of Australia's government schools. The much more generous treatment of non-government

schools has caused a flow of students to those schools. The effect of this pattern will be disastrous in the long term since it will mean that the government schools are increasingly deprived of the more able students whose presence lifts the performance of all students in the school. In an Education Foundation Australia Fact sheet, called 'How equitable are our schools?', the need for a more equitable system is emphasised:

> Australia also has a particularly large achievement gap between students from high and from low socio-economic backgrounds and between schools with large proportions of high and low socio-economic students. By contrast, countries such as Canada, Finland, Japan, Korea, Iceland and Sweden all manage to combine high educational achievement with small gaps between students and schools.
>
> Education Foundation Australia, 2007.

It is clear from the results of other countries that it is possible to combine excellence with equity. Surely the time has come now to heed this lesson from overseas which has so much to promise us. This is not a long-established pattern in Australia but one implemented in a comparatively recent period. That pattern needs to be altered urgently before the change becomes irreversible.

The Australian National University Centre for Economic Policy Research wrote in 2004 about the drastic effects of the transfer of high socio-economic (SES) students from government to private schools. The paper notes that the literature on peer group studies supports the belief that the aggregate of student characteristics such as ability, motivation and aspiration produces a dominant ethos that affects student achievement. The paper goes on to comment:

> In summary, the transfer of high-SES students from government to private schools since 1975 has changed the average socio-economic composition of government schools. The majority of students in government schools now attend schools where the average socio-economic status of students is below average. The proportion of government schools with concentrations of low-SES students increased between 1975 and 1998. These trends have implications for both the cost and educational outcomes of government schooling.
>
> Ryan and Watson, 2004.

The change in government school funding which occurred under the late Howard Government, particularly after 2001, as documented

by McGaw, has greatly exacerbated the situation, leaving the government schools under-financed, in out-of date buildings, and without the capacity to provide equity of opportunities for their students. A major venture in high quality public education dating from the 1870s has been thrown out of balance by a socially unjust pattern of school financing introduced by the previous government. This requires urgent action to provide equitable opportunities for the children of all parents, no matter what their choice of schooling.

The comments of Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, offer some prospect of change.

> For too long the debate about schools was diverted into unproductive avenues. Public schools were pitted against private, traditional curriculum was pitted against new, and academic ends were pitted against technical. That era is now over. The true target of our efforts must be individual students no matter which type of school they attend.
>
> The Commonwealth has embarked on a new direction. It's being driven by new understandings about the best ways to improve education outcomes; most significantly by new evidence about the importance of high quality teaching.
>
> Gillard, 2008.

At the moment our system of funding for schools is deeply flawed, providing a much greater leve lof funding to independent schools than at any time in Australian history. In any reconsideration the pressing needs of the government schools have to be recognised. It may be that the pendulum has swung too far and that the pattern which served Australia well will have to be reinvented. This need demands a fundamental reconsideration of our total pattern of education. This is not just a question of justice for all students but is desperately needed for a healthy Australian society.

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