

Changing the paradigm: Education as the key to a socially inclusive future

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High levels of education attainment and performance are repeatedly linked in the Australian and overseas research literature to positive economic and social outcomes.

This edited volume argues that traditional educational approaches are failing those from marginalised groups and provides many South Australian practical examples which reflect a new and more effective educational paradigm. Successful educational approaches outlined by various authors include more 'joined up' approaches built on collective partnerships across government services and groups; individualised curriculum to ensure relevance and engagement; listening and responding to student voice; and building relationships between individual learners, educators, peers and institutions.

There are two parts to the book. Part 1 is concerned with the South Australian policy context and challenging the present, while Part 2 provides case studies of successful approaches to changing the educational paradigm and foregrounds the future.

Jan Patterson's introductory chapter sets the scene within the South Australian Social Inclusion Initiative and the School Retention Action Plan, with her additional chapter outlining challenges of initially developing innovative across-agency approaches and of upscaling and mainstreaming. Patterson highlights demonstration project key success strategies for supporting vulnerable young people. These strategies include case management involving individually-tailored learning and living plans, skill-building, intensive support and building relevant partnerships and relationships between teachers and students, school and community. Broader learning highlighted from the Social Inclusion initiative and demonstration projects are about the benefits of tackling complex social policy issues such as school retention and equity using whole-of-government and joined up approaches, particularly connecting educational pedagogy with youth and community development strategies.

Changing local and global contexts and youth navigation of multiple pathways and transitions through education is highlighted by several authors. They emphasise the increasing complexity of young peoples' identities and roles as part-time workers, family carers, in juvenile justice and under the guardianship of the Minister. Alison MacKinnon highlights the importance of humanistic as well as economic education, with risk, multiple biographies, transitions and discontinuity being key characteristics of the new world. She uses a 'roadmap' and global positioning system (GPS) metaphor as a means of reconceptualising the approach required to meet the needs of marginalised young people, with GPS being de-centred, offering a bird's eye view, transcending boundaries and sometimes having unclear destinations. Similarly, Katherine Hodgetts and Marie Brennan also focus on the need for reframing secondary schooling through examining the nature of part-timeness, impacts on curriculum and teachers' work and successful strategies for sustaining student engagement. They call for policy responses involving all players

in longer term discussions to develop policies based on informed judgements and consideration of the historical and educational issues at stake, including evaluating initiatives and the practices in use.

Throughout the various chapters, key themes for the new educational paradigm for successfully supporting improved educational and social outcomes for marginalised youth are consistently reinforced.

The importance of building strong relationships and listening to vulnerable young people and taking action to respond to their educational and wider needs is a mantra which permeates chapter after chapter of the book. Rob Hattam's chapter highlights 'voiced research' and relevant methodological issues, including decades of South Australian and other research about the most marginalised students 'dropping out'. Listening and acting on young people's perspectives, building positive relationships and learning from 'second chance' alternative programs to tackle uninspiring curriculum and pedagogies are the ways forward, while also negotiating the curriculum in ways that 'connect young people's lifeworlds to the official curriculum'. Understanding institutionalized exclusion through gaining marginalised youth perspectives on hopefulness and the future is the focus of the chapter by O'Leary, Bishop, Mackinnon and Robb, with respectful and caring relationships being emphasised as important building blocks for nurturing hope.

Interwoven with the responsiveness to student voice and positive relationships theme, the various authors consistently emphasise re-engagement in learning through youth-centred, strengths-based and personalised case management approaches, focused on partnerships across local communities and services. Based on these principles, Koen and Duigan highlight the range of Innovative Community Action Network (ICAN) projects and achievements over several years. Around 8000 South Australian students with multiple personal barriers preventing school attendance are now being successfully re-engaged in learning and earning pathways each year, with improved individual and community well-being as well as involvement in employment being the benefits. Dolan and Miller's chapter provides details of various successful programs for indigenous youth, while also focusing on the benefits of the new South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) introduced in 2009. Success for Indigenous students is about utilising the 'cultural interface', involving collaboration within local contexts to design sport, literacy, vocational and multimedia curricula which re-engage Indigenous students to operate in the wider world while also retaining their own cultural identity. Stehlik also highlights the value of alternative community-based programs which involve flexible, relevant and individualised learning, while also emphasising the benefits of formalisation and accreditation within the SACE.

Stehlik's closing chapter captures the overall book theme that state, national and international agendas are now refocusing on the social and economic imperatives for the future and highlighting the urgency of embracing a new educational paradigm. The new paradigm moves beyond tinkering and improving the traditional schooling model. It's about learning from the 'alternative' programs established to re-engage marginalised youth and upscaling and mainstreaming based on these principles. It's about recognising the complexity of young

people's lives and the importance of education for life, with policies going beyond a mere retention strategy to really engage all young people in meaningful learning activities.

For all true believers about the power of education to reinvigorate individual lives, 'Changing the Paradigm: Education as the Key to a Socially Inclusive Future' is a 'must read' book. Stehlik's closing statements highlight that beyond the innovative demonstration projects designed to re-engage marginalised youth, the pathway for a new educational paradigm for all students is provided, with Australia's young people, its economy and society as a whole being the ultimate beneficiaries.

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