International Trends in Education

Keynote Address by Professor Colin Power, NCISA 2000 Conference, 14-16 July, 2000

Introduction

The theme of the Year 2000 NCISA Conference encapsulates the major international trends in education: we are seeing a reaffirmation of the most enduring values in education but at the same time dramatic changes in its structure and modalities and in the demands being made on our schools. At the dawn of the new millennium we are being forced to return to basic philosophical questions about the nature and purposes of schooling – the question UNESCO (1) set for the International Commission of Education for the 21st century: what kind of education is needed for the kind of society we want for the future?

Last night, Minister Kemp set out the expectations of the Australian government for the nation’s schools. My task is to review some of the major international trends in education and the challenges these pose for independent schools in Australia today. Over the past 11 years as Deputy Director-General of UNESCO I have worked with most of the world’s education Ministers. Regardless of political affiliation, they share the concerns expressed by Dr Kemp and most of their reforms follow a similar direction. At the international level, education systems are responding to a common set of global economic and technological pressures, and the social and moral tensions stemming from these.

In an age of increasing global competitiveness in which knowledge has replaced resources as the engine of development, the quality of education has become a key political issue. However, the basic social and moral fabric of society is being torn apart by global economic forces - by corruption, violence, substance abuse, suicide, racism and other social and moral ills. We are seeing the application of market principles to education, but at the same time a reaffirmation of the broad humanistic purposes of education. Schools are being asked to produce students with the competencies needed to be productive in a rapidly changing, knowledge-driven age, but who are also good citizens and responsible adults. In essence, schools are faced with trying to meet rapidly changing, constantly rising and at times contradictory demands from an increasing number of stakeholders, and their quality is being judged by both old and new international and national standards.

In this address, I will focus on six international trends:

(a) The reaffirmation of the mission of schools to promote the harmonious development of the individual (social, cultural, moral, intellectual, economic);
(b) The role of schools in laying strong foundations for lifelong learning by
building the four ‘pillars’ of learning and promoting higher and more
differentiated patterns of competence;
(c) Rising international and national standards for schools and teachers;
growing inequity and marginalisation of a youth underclass;
(d) Diversification of provision and modes of delivery of educational services
with multiple learning opportunities using new information technologies,
(e) Shifts in public policy, devolution, new partnerships between schools and
stakeholders and modes of financing education; and
(f) Inter-cultural understanding and exchanges, ‘learning to live and to work
together’ in a multi-cultural world.

The Mission of Education at the School Level

“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality
and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental
freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, friendship among all
nations, racial and religious groups.” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
article 26.2).

In setting up the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century,
UNESCO set out to help its Member States to address the issue of what is a
school and what ought to be its mission. In its opening chapter, Jacques
Delors affirmed the Commission’s conviction that education is one of the
principal means available to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of
human development: “its mission is to enable each of us, without exception, to
develop all our talents to the full and to realize our creative potential, including
responsibility for our own lives and the achievement of personal aims.” There
is, for the Commission, every reason to place renewed emphasis on “the
moral and cultural dimensions of education, enabling each person to grasp
the individuality of other people and to understand the world’s erratic
progression towards a certain unity; but this process must begin with self-
understanding through an inner voyage whose milestones are knowledge,
meditation and the practice of self-criticism.”

Officially the full development of the individual features as central to the
mission of schools in almost every nation. But when it comes to the crunch,
governments and other powerful stakeholders exert pressure to assure that
the needs of the State are given the highest priority. Indeed until recently,
most education systems were dominated by highly centralised regimes. In
the past decade, we have seen both the collapse of the Soviet system and the
rise of the ideology of the market. There has been a dramatic shift away from
reliance on the State to deliver education, health and other services towards
one which places more onus on the individual and the private sector, but at
the same time, very strong pressures to ensure that schools continue to serve
the functions expected of them by governments.

With increasing privatisation and decentralisation, schools in developed
countries are being asked to define more precisely their mission, to resolve
tensions between their humanistic and instrumental functions, and to establish priorities among the outcomes sought.

Given that almost all young people in the developed world are staying at school until they are 17 or 18 and the weakness of many of our basic social institutions, schools are being asked to take on many developmental tasks which were formerly the responsibility of the family, the community, the church or the employer. Too much is being demanded of our schools. Individually and collectively, schools do need to explain to all stakeholders what is central to their mission and the outcomes for which they can legitimately be asked to assume prime responsibility -- and those which they cannot.

Employer organizations in most developed countries have set out the general competencies, attitudes and values they see as the responsibility of schools and as crucially important in a constantly changing and tough global labour market. A commitment to lifelong learning and a strong work ethic as well as high levels of literacy, communication skills and those involved in solving complex problems, dealing with uncertainty, working flexibly and co-operatively in teams and in different cultural contexts -- the lists we see include many important facets of human development, even though some are difficult to achieve in practice. But while schools must prepare the young for productive life, we ought not to accept all of the hidden agendas of the market: as one MBA professor from a prestigious US university put it, we need to decide whether we are setting out to train barracudas or educating human beings.

Schools have to face up to the problem of helping young people being torn between economic and global forces whose manifestations are invading our public and private lives as they search for roots, points of reference and a sense of belonging. While the means used are as varied as the cultures and circumstances, the central mission of our schools must remain that of the fulfillment of the individual as a human being. Education serves as a vehicle for social and cultural development, but the task is made even more difficult by the breakdown of social ties and institutions (especially the family and community) which are leading to dangerously high levels of social exclusion, inequality, intolerance, substance abuse, suicide and violence. And everywhere schools are being expected to redress weaknesses in the social and moral fabric of the communities of which they are part -- and that is not an easy task.

At a recent European Ministerial Conferences, I was struck by the number of Ministers concern about the moral crisis facing youth and schools, and the extent to which they stressed the ethical and cultural and not just the economic mission of education. During the hearings and debates of the Delors Commission, the spiritual dimension of the inner voyage which is at the heart of education in its full sense kept coming back on the agenda. Parents increasingly are choosing schools which see as helping to provide the ethical as well the social and intellectual roots crucial to the harmonious development
of their child. A school then is not just a place of instruction, but a key developmental context, a community wherein values are shared and developed, social and spiritual lives and values as well as minds are forged.

Despite its limitations, the Delors Report has struck a respondent chord with many educational stakeholders, reaffirming what most of us as parents, employers and citizens reaffirming what most of us believe: the mission of school is ‘to enable each of us, without exception, to develop our talents to the full and to realise our creative potential, including responsibility for our own lives and the achievement of our personal aims.’

In my experience, many independent schools in developed countries have generated quite good mission statements which clearly set out their priorities and responsibilities. The problem is the gap between the rhetoric and the reality.

**The Four Pillars and Lifelong Learning**

Internationally, many countries have begun to understand the importance of creating a ‘learning society’ and that constant and unpredictable change necessitates that we all continue to learn throughout life. In the developed countries, almost all young people are now participating in full or part time secondary education, and gross enrolment ratios at the tertiary level now exceed 60% (2).

It is being increasingly recognized that while the new information technologies open up many new possibilities for learning throughout life, individuals will not be able to make optimal use of these resources unless they have received a sound general education and leave school with a strong love of learning.

Most of you are familiar with the general proposition put forward by the Delors Commission which stressed the need to base the foundations of such an education on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be. The Report insists on the need to build a common core of knowledge, skills and values, and see a broad general education as the passport to lifelong education and subsequent in-depth and specialised studies.

**Learning to know** means more than acquiring a specific body of knowledge – indeed with the exponential growth in knowledge and the broadening range of responsibilities and clienteles of education, the central questions are how to ensure comprehensiveness and relevance while avoiding overloading of the curriculum, how to make the curriculum responsive to new social concerns without vitiating its long-term purpose in the transmission of culture and values; how to provide for diversity of offerings to meet the demands of diverse clienteles while ensuring focus and coherence; how to redefine the core curriculum in a situation in which technology is becoming part of general culture. Give the thrust towards lifelong learning, we do need to redefine what
is the core of initial education and what can and should be left to later levels. Internationally, the trend has been away from detailed national syllabi and towards centrally defined curriculum frameworks and setting of minimum national learning objectives by means by which the performance of schools is assessed. This has gone hand-in-hand with a wider variety of options in other subject areas at the upper secondary level, depending on the needs of students and concerns of each school community. With the exponential expansion of knowledge and the emergence of so many new interdisciplinary fields, the traditional split between general and vocational education is breaking down.

*Learning to do*, traditionally separated from learning to know, is of course not only concerned with the acquisition of skills, but with the application of knowledge and the set of competencies that are broadly termed 'life skills.' There remains a long tradition which has constantly sought to link learning with doing and the breaking down of the barriers between intellectual and practical knowledge and the development of the ability to solve problems and use one's knowledge in a variety of situations. Now that the vast majority of young people have no choice but to remain within the education system until early adulthood, the pressure on schools and universities to provide forms of meaningful work experience will continue.

Relationships between schools, industry and unions have not always been smooth. I recall the story of one workshop foreman who was sent a young man for 'work experience.' Being busy, the foreman handed him a broom with a polite request to tidy the floor a bit until someone could show him some proper work. 'But I'm a graduate engineer' protested the young man. 'I'm sorry, I didn't think' apologised the foreman, taking the broom: 'Look this is how you do it.' There are a few, too few perhaps, examples of active partnerships between industry and schools led by innovative principals and forward-looking corporations.

*Learning to live together* has assumed a very much higher priority in most countries – in the wake of the moral crisis which is tearing apart of the social fabric binding us. Living together means far more than simply tolerating otherness, but wanting to understand, work with others and live together in mutual respect, and to assume civic responsibilities as citizens of a community, nation and the world. It we wish, through education, to learn to live together, we must reform the way in which history, geography and languages are taught, and critically examine the policies and practices of the school, its administration and teachers. For schools must serve as models of the type of society we wish to create.

We have also seen the rapid expansion in the introduction of civics education programmes (3). Many governments have come to the view that the teaching of democracy and one's rights and responsibilities as citizens are important for schools and the life of a nation. The UK, for example, aims at no less than a change in the political culture of the country: to learn to think of
themselves as active citizens, willing and able to have an influence in public life, to critically weigh evidence, and to extend 'radically to young people the best in existing traditions of community involvement and public service.'

Learning to live together also requires that schools must provide opportunities for successful joint ventures and exchanges with schools serving other groups and cultures (as has been the case with some UNESCO Associated Schools projects and programmes of the European Union) and establish formal ways of demonstrating that community service is valued (cf. International Baccalaureate graduation requirements).

*Learning to be* takes us back to that inner voyage that leads to construction of one's personality, and to the spiritual and moral challenges facing our schools and society. Encouraging the fullest development of the creative potential of each individual, in all its richness and complexity demands that we identify and seek to build upon all of the talents of our students, the 'treasure within.' Learning to exercise greater independence and judgment combined with a sense of personal responsibility for the attainment of common goals represents a key part of the ethos of a good school permeating its daily life and practices.

Quite a number of independent schools thus see learning to be as a key part of their mission, and justifiably are proud of those ex-students who have become outstanding citizens. But we do need to reflect as well on our failures, and to ask what kinds of learning experiences may have helped students whose potential has not been fulfilled and end up losing their way.

These four pillars, then aim to place on equal footing the development of the individual and the individual's place in society. They aim to emphasize the equal importance of the intellectual and the practical, and should make clear that the 'inner journey' of education must, to be complete, culminate in an understanding of one's self and relationship with others.

**Globalisation, Standards, Accountability and Equity**

At least five global trends pose challenges for education in the 21st century. I will deal with three now: increased international competition and rising standards, demands for greater transparency and accountability, and growing inequity and new forms of marginalisation. In subsequent sections I will look at the challenges posed by new information technology, new partnerships and modes of financing, and multi-culturalism.

There is a growing international consensus that each nation must lay the foundations for national development and productivity in the information age by raising its educational standards. Evidence (4) and experience have convinced many of the world's leaders that 'education, education, education is the key to development and the different future we so deeply desire for our children.' Governments and employers know that there is a strong correlation
between the profile of educational qualifications in the workforce and national productivity and competitiveness. A recent OECD study (5) showed that literacy and educational levels are strongly associated with economic chances and well-being of individuals affecting their employment stability, the incidence of unemployment and income, and at the national level, GDP.

Globalisation has meant that nations are at the one and the same time increasingly competitive, unequal and inter-dependent. As a result, education is becoming ever more internationalised. We are seeing more examples of international and regional co-operation in education, especially in the development of indicator systems and statistics and the sharing of experience and tools for setting of standards, international exchanges and franchising of programmes, and the rise of international schools, certification mechanisms and curriculum frameworks. We are also witnessing greater mobility in the international labour market, and intense competition for students and resources among education institutions within and between countries.

Progressively, major trading nations have used international educational data to drive reform agendas aimed at assuring their place in the knowledge-driven globalised markets of the future. In particular, the OECD INIS Project, the IEA Studies and the Joint UNESCO-OECD Global Indicators project are being used, and at times abused, to provide international benchmarks and to rank order national education systems. As Lamar Alexander (6) when Secretary of Education in the USA put it "as we talk about educational standards in our country, it is virtually impossible to do so without understanding what standards are in other parts of the world."

Having worked on these programmes, I (7) know that there remain many conceptual and technical difficulties to be overcome, and that some of the judgements being made by governments and the media are of doubtful validity. Also, one must ask if the systems being used really point to what is important. They provide information about inputs and some knowledge outcomes, but say little about the extent to which students are learning to live together or learning to be. Nonetheless, our education systems are being ranked ordered and judged, and educational reforms shaped, by international indicators and standards.

At least thirty countries are striving to define national goals and standards for education, and to set up national assessment systems. President Clinton, for example, was elected on an educational platform that called for the establishment of standards, of world-class assessments, of greater deregulation and decentralisation so that people in schools would have greater power to try different ways of achieving those standards. In reality, in most cases we end up with fairly minimal common standards and instruments which fall short of capturing the qualities which lie at the heart of the broad concept of human development which features in the mission statements on good schools. While President of the American Federation of Teachers, Al Shanker (8) insisted that schools must provide the 'tough love' needed by
students and that are a result of ‘minimum competency testing is that ... there
are fewer dropouts, and there are more youngsters are meeting those
standards.’

What is particularly problematic is the use of such assessments and public
examination results to establish educational league tables among schools.
and nations. Every measurement specialist will affirm that the errors of
measurement are not insignificant and often greater than the differences in
the results of the schools and countries being compared. Moreover, there are
great differences in the profile of populations from which different schools
draw their students, the impact of which are too often seriously
underestimated. Even a cursory glance at international and national league
tables shows that the nations and schools at the top are inevitably the most
economically and socially advantaged and those at the bottom the most
disadvantaged.

Whatever the limitations of the new mechanisms emerging for assessing
schools, education systems and schools will continue to be under pressure to
meet the standards being set nationally and internationally, and will be held
accountable if levels of achievement fall below expectations. The
assessments highlight the growing inequality in education within and between
nations. We must be concerned when we see that a significant number of
young people (typically 15% to 20% of the cohort) are leaving the education
system lacking the knowledge and skills needed to participate in the world of
the 21st century.

The number of youth leaving school lacking the basic skills and values
needed for a productive society is the tip of the iceberg - functional illiteracy is
closely associated with exclusion and a myriad of social ills. In the UK, for
example, over 19% of young people aged 16 to 19 are neither attending
school nor employed. The concerns expressed by the Heads of Government
at the G-8 summit in Cologne relate predominantly to this ‘underclass’ of
disadvantaged young people who are dropping out of education early,
functionally illiterate and are virtually unemployable, and whose anti-social
behaviour at school and in the community constitutes a threat to the security
and quality of life of themselves and the society.

Governments are calling on schools to pay greater attention to challenges
facing by youth in general, and in particular to the problems of the ‘underclass’
which exists, to a greater or lesser degree, in every school. Sadly Australia
now ranks with the USA and UK as one of the most inequitable of the OECD
countries (10) and faces increasingly serious problems of youth suicide,
violence, alcohol and substance abuse. As participation in independent
schools increases, the problems they face in dealing with disaffected youth
will also increase. Co-operation among schools in developing effective
policies and programmes to address these problems then will increasingly
become a priority issue.
The cumulative social and educational effects of sustained patterns of impaired child-parent relationships, instability and disruption in key developmental contexts particularly the family and the school have been well documented in the research (9). Irrespective of cultural context, it is difficult for families and schools to maintain the sustained care and interaction needed by a child to develop in conditions of poverty, conflict and constant change. But schools do differ in the extent to which they are have been successful in meeting the basic educational and social needs of all the students for whom they are responsible, and they will and should be held accountable for the educating all the children for whom they are responsible.

The results of most school effectiveness research are fairly consistent with what we know about learning organizations and good management. Effective schools do have effective instructional leadership — good principals and senior staff focus on key curriculum and instructional issues, know exactly what is going on in and outside the classroom, provide the 'tough caring' needed by all students, work hard at creating a sense of community and a shared vision. Effective schools also seek to maximize learning time, expect their students to learn, and provide the support needed for all to achieve. Staff assume a high level of professional responsibility and are actively involved in extra-curricular activities and school improvement programmes. Parents and the school community are well informed about what is happening in the school and work closely in partnership with it to facilitate education and development of their children.

While some parents will choose an independent school because of their denominational affiliation or pedagogical orientation, all expect the school to be effective with their child, the principal is an outstanding educational leader and that the school is well managed. While on the Council of one independent school, I became acutely aware of the heavy responsibility being placed on the Council and the principal, and the difficulties schools face in meeting the demands of Commonwealth and States governments, parents and staff. Organizations like the NCISA have a key role to play in facilitating co-operation among independent schools, supporting principals and School Councils and in defending the concept of independence while at the same time demonstrating that its members are accountable and contributing to the common good.

Having seen what can happen when schools are totally controlled by the State, the architects of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights not only insists on the right of all to an education directed at the full development of the human personality and the protection of human rights, but also on the right of parents to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children. Parents choosing to send their children to an independent school are seeking a particular kind of education for their child, and in making that choice expect the school chosen to provide that education. Naturally, they expect high quality programmes, excellence in teaching, a safe environment, and the highest ethical standards.
The policies of many governments (including countries in transition) have encouraged the expansion and diversification of independent schools and the privatisation of many aspects of public education. But the rapid shifts in policy can bring problems. It is crucially important that private schools, individually and collectively, establish rigorous codes of ethics for staff and performance standards for themselves if they are to earn the trust placed in them, or suffer the consequences. Many of the private institutions set up in former Eastern block countries have been of poor quality and ultimately governments were forced to create accreditation legislation leading to the closure of the most inadequate institutions. The lack of principle shown by some Australian English Language Colleges did little for Australia's image in China, and we have seen recently just how vigilant we must be in ensuring that all staff abide by the moral codes expected of our schools and in helping to protect our students from abuse, even within the family.

In their discussions of educational reform, world leaders and Ministers of Education have almost universally announced plans to reform aspects of the teaching profession, including measures to attract high quality people into the profession, to set national standards for the professional training and registration of teachers, and to work with teachers' organizations to develop codes of ethics. The reputation of a school is a precarious thing – difficult to build and very easy to tamish.

The freedom to choose the kind of education one seeks for one's child is one of the fundamental principles of democracy. We need schools offer different kinds of education, schools which accommodate the diversity of cultures and faiths of our multicultural world, schools which are not wholly subservient to the state and which are accountable to the particular community they serve. But all schools, public and private, will need to work together to build social cohesion and to provide a better education for all of our children. We need good schools, both public and private, if we are to meet the challenges facing us at the dawn of the new millennium.

Devolution, Partnerships and Financing

Throughout the world, there has been a strong trend towards decentralisation and devolution of responsibility to local and institutional levels. It is at these levels that problems facing schools in the education and socialisation of young people can best be identified and solutions applied. New questions in turn are raised about the role and contributions of international, state, regional and local authorities, employer and employee organizations to all aspects of education – from goals and curriculum to personnel management and financing.
Education is now big business and becoming a major international trade item. The education and training industry is now the second largest in North America and accounts for nearly 10% of the GNP. It is also its fifth largest expert. Worldwide, the market for educational software alone stands at over $4 billion. Schools must now cope with the cost of constantly upgrading its hardware and software, and taking advantage (?) of the newest online service for schools. Being part of the new world places new demands on staff for professional development, and on bursars and parents for funds.

In countries like Australia which have had a long tradition of both public and private education, governments do contribute to the funding of independent schools, and as stakeholders, they exert an important influence not only on the substance but also the way schools are managed. We have seen the strong influence of corporate management models in education, but learned that devolution of responsibility does not mean more autonomy in what matters most to governments.

Behind decentralisation and devolution, we see that governments have been seeking to accommodate the expansion of education and to improve its quality without increasing public expenditure. In other words, most of the additional burden and cost increases have fallen on parents and, at higher levels, on students. For an increasing number of families, the rising cost of education does represent a considerable burden. They are willing to make sacrifices, but there are limits. And so good financial management and cost-containment are key issues facing every school. Independent schools must find ways to ensure that the educational programmes they provide are both of high quality and affordable. Thus the need for closer co-operation among schools and new partnerships with the community, and to find creative ways of ensuring that the school has the facilities it needs to provide high quality education but remains affordable.

In one sense, the Delors Report takes us back to the little red schoolhouse, to a school which is very much an integral part of its community, a site for multiple services, and the door linking its students with adult life and work. Some the better schools, public and private, I have visited are the hub of community life – educational, cultural, vocational and social. In some cases, corporations have provided the latest technology to a secondary school, been actively involved in designing programmes and in teaching, provided scholarships and work experience opportunities, and supported professional development of staff. In others, world-class musicians and artists have freely given of their time and expertise; in others, students learn to care by working actively in community projects with the aged or the disabled. My point is that now that almost all young people between 5 and 18 are in school, a school cannot just be a place of instruction: it is a community in all facets of the human personality are being forged. It is life. It must reach out to its community.
Diversification and NICT

With devolution and decentralisation, we have seen increasing diversification of education in most countries. While schools are being pressured to conform to common national and international standards, nonetheless they are becoming ever more diverse in terms of student intakes, structure and modalities of teaching and learning. In Australia, independent schools can no longer be neatly characterised or clustered, and the range of options available in education is expanding continuously. One must again back to the problem of finding unity within diversity – to the issue of what unites independent schools as well as what distinguishes them from each other – to avoid a brave new world, independent schools will need to speak with one voice on key issues relating to the mission of schools and the values they hold to be sacred.

While the essential mission of schools in developing to the full the talents of individuals must be defended, we also must learn to accept that that means can vary and will change as new technologies impact on our lives and research about learning and development reorient our thinking about teaching.

There can be no doubt that the most visible symbol of globalisation has been the spectacular development of new information technologies and the creation of planetary communication networks with no structured organization or centralised management. The NICT constitute an extra-ordinary resource for storing, processing, disseminating and sharing information and offer as yet many unrealised possibilities for teaching and learning. We can expect the new technologies ultimately to be as important a tool in learning as the book became with the introduction of the printing press. Increasingly, a good many of the instructional tasks associated with the learning of content and skills will supported by software packages, and higher levels of competence in using the technologies to communicate and learn how to learn will be demanded of teachers and students. If we are smart we will learn the optimal combinations of teacher and technology for different learning tasks and types of students. Certainly, we need to find ways to free teachers to spend more time on helping students to learn to live together and to learn to be, and to provide the attention to the real needs of individual students as they embark on their inner voyage which is so often lacking in our globalised and materialistic world.

Learning to live with cultural diversity in a global village

Global movements and trends mean an ever greater mingling of cultures, languages and religions, and thus globally learning to live together, cultural identity, religious tolerance and the peaceful resolution of conflicts are become priority issues for more and more countries.
The gap between the rich and poor is growing exponentially: within and between countries, the rich are becoming richer and richer, and the poor, poorer and more desperate. As in the past, globalisation means increased population movement – successive waves of political, religious and economic refugees will, legally or illegally, seek a better life in another country. Progressively, the developed world will become increasingly a multi-cultural one. We must learn to ensure this influx of languages, cultures and religions becomes an asset not a threat, the source of the vitality and dynamism of nations and schools in which we learn to respect each other and to live together.

Schools adopting a multicultural approach to education have all sought to develop programmes in which students have opportunities to develop to a reasonably high level competence in the national language(s) and at least one or two others and set out to develop an understanding and respect for the major cultures (their history, literatures, religious values etc) of the nation and its neighbours.

The rise of the far right and racism is the product of the fear of large population flows interacting with ignorance of the other which have created so many conflicts and abuses of human rights in the past. The affluent elite of the knowledge society tend to live increasingly separate lives from the masses, and are often end up indifferent to and ignorant of the extent and origins of poverty. And it seems to me that the schools serving more affluent communities must help their students to learn to share and to care through direct experience and create more opportunities for disadvantaged students to attend their schools.

Our common future will depend on the degree to which we all become better world and Australian citizens, creating the unity within diversity that comes from an education which builds strong cultural and spiritual roots, to understand and respect the cultures and religions of others and to live together harmoniously in multi-cultural schools and communities.

Our education system as a whole may need to change the way in which relates to students. As in South Africa, we have not finished the task of helping to transform the canons and assumptions underlying those aspects of our education system which have failed our indigenous peoples, nor have we taken heed the history of countries where the legacy of a differentialist approach to diversity continues to underpin a culture of violence. In essence, in an increasingly interdependent but unequal and polarised world, we will need to work much harder at creating unity within diversity within our schools, and on issues of equity, justice and tolerance.
Conclusion

Education is a long-term process, a life-long inner voyage, the basic direction of which is set in two major developmental contexts – the family and the school. What we do in our schools today will make an important difference to the kind of society Australia will become, and to the material, cultural and spiritual well-being of the individual students entrusted to our care. Our schools must play a key role to play in preserving and developing those human values which lie at the heart of the kind of future we want for our children.

The international tensions and trends I have outlined indicate that while we can expect constant pressure to employ new tools, to modify structures, to take on new developmental tasks and to meet new standards, the fundamental mission of the school remains that of building not only minds but human beings. We must constantly remember that this is the prime responsibility of the school is to each of its students.

In conclusion let me close with six questions which flow from the issues I have tried to address:

(a) What are independent schools and do they have a role which justifies their place in the type of society we wish to become?
(b) Do you agree with the general principles put forward by the UNESCO International Commission on Education for the 21st Century and if the educational priorities of your school and the nation need to change?
(c) What role should independent schools and the NCIS play in helping define and set international and national goals, standards and accountability mechanisms, and in helping those who have trouble meeting them?
(d) How can independent schools make optimal use of new opportunities for learning created by NICT, while building defences against the dehumanizing elements in its misuse?
(e) How can the NICS and schools help each other to forge new partnerships with the community in ways which open new doors for students while not adding to the financial burden on parents?
(f) How will independent schools contribute to creating a less violent and unequal world, to greater intercultural understanding and tolerance, and to better deal for the growing number of young people struggling to find their way in an excessively materialistic and ruthless world?
Notes and references


4. cf. election campaigns of Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, Lionel Jospin


