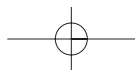
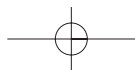
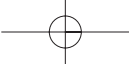


# Making Schools Different

## Alternative Approaches to Educating Young People







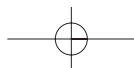
# Making Schools Different

Alternative Approaches to  
Educating Young People

Edited by Kitty te Riele



Los Angeles | London | New Delhi  
Singapore | Washington DC



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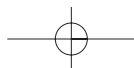
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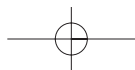
## Foreword

'Most people, you know, they have been in school for so many years, they just want to get on with their lives now ... not more writing and learning things that nobody cares about' (Wayne, quoted in Ball et al., 2000).

The non-participation of a small but entrenched minority of young people in education, training or employment in the period after the end of compulsory schooling remains an intractable and worrying problem in many Western societies – estimates of the size of this group range anywhere from 10–40 per cent of 14–25 year olds. Of course the 'problem' is construed in different ways by different constituencies, often with little recourse to the concerns of the young people themselves. It is an educational problem, particularly as these young people have typically had an unsatisfactory experience of compulsory schooling. Educational experiences have typically done little to contribute to a robust sense of self and have often instilled an enduring sense of inefficacy rather than resilience.

For Wayne, leaving school is not a stage in the continuity of learning – it is a break, a new beginning, an escape. An escape from the outlines of a 'totally pedagogised society' and the 'pedagogisation of life' in which learning is an activity that is conducted endlessly, 'in which the State is moving to ensure that there's no space or time which is not pedagogised' (Bernstein, 2001: 377). What Wayne's comment indicates is a different 'logic of practice' from that which underpins 'learning policy'. There is a mismatch between the logic and rhythms of policy and those of the lives of many young people.

As the papers in this collection demonstrate, non-participation and its concomitant alienations is also a social problem – non-participation places young people 'at risk'. And it is a political problem (in a variety of senses) – such young people are mostly unable to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and fail to become subject to the increasingly hegemonic conception of the lifelong learner. The lifelong learner is a much over-burdened and over-determined social subject within current education policy and within some current versions of social theory. Lifelong learning indeed is subject to a constant stream of 'over blown policy statements' (Edwards and Nicoll, 2001: 104) which seek to position young people like Wayne, alongside others, as nothing less than a new kind of person, and within a new 'ethic of personhood'; 'an entire self must be completely made over as an enterprising individual' (McWilliam, 2002: 292).

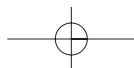




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But the real problem in all of this is policy itself and that the burden of policy is in fact focused in the wrong places, often on the young people themselves and their ‘motivations’ – a move which individualises and psychologises but which leaves policy itself and the institutional processes of schooling, or what te Riele calls the ‘intractability of schooling’, unaddressed. This book takes a different route and focuses on the need to ‘do school differently’ through innovations in learning, the use of time and place in different ways, and an engagement with complexity and diversity.

Stephen J. Ball  
Karl Mannheim Professor of Sociology of Education  
Institute of Education, University of London







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**Kitty te Riele** researches educational policy and practice for marginalized young people, including mainstream and alternative educational initiatives. She is interested in the ways schools can play a role both in marginalizing and in (re-)engaging young people. She is Senior Lecturer in Education in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), Australia where she teaches educational philosophy and professional ethics in Primary Education and in the doctoral research programme.

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Chapter 7 The research was funded by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The research team included principal investigator, Dr Heesoon Bai, Dr Wanda Cassidy, co-investigator, and Dr Kumari Beck (then a doctoral student/research assistant), all from Simon Fraser University's Faculty of Education. Details of the study and further information can be obtained from the authors.

Chapter 8 Examples are drawn from two Australian research projects:

Project A: 'Alternative education for marginalised youth: negotiating risk and hope', funded through a grant by the University of Technology Sydney, carried out by the author, 2006–08.

Project B: 'Changing schools in changing times: stabilising and sustaining whole school change in communities experiencing adverse conditions', an ARC-Linkage project with the NSW Department of Education and Training, 2005–08. The project is led by Debra Hayes of the University of Sydney and team members include Narelle Carey, Ken Johnston, Ann King, Rani Lewis-Jones, Kristal Morris, Chris Murray, Ishbel Murray, Kerith Power, Dianne Roberts, Kitty te Riele and Margaret Wheeler.

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Chapter 12 The data reported on in this chapter comes from research (ARC LP0562535) led by the author as chief investigator and includes Brian Devlin (second chief investigator) and Amy Hutchinson, Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory; Kylie Twyford, University of Newcastle, Australia, and Alan Anderson, Southern Cross University, NSW, Australia. The views expressed are

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my own and represent interim findings not yet endorsed by the industry partners.

Chapter 13 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual conference of the British Educational Research Association, Institute of Education London, September 2007. This paper is drawn from an Australian Research Council funded Linkage Project 'Pathways or cul-de-sacs? The causes, impact and implications of senior secondary part-time study', 2005–07 (LPO455760), conducted from 2005–07 with early work commencing in 2004. We are grateful to the ARC and peer reviewers for the project, to our research assistants over the project, Dr Lynette Arnold, Dr Katherine Hodgetts and Dr Kirrilly Thompson who have each come in at critical times to ensure that the work of the university chief investigators was able to be kept on track. Chief investigators on the project are: Professor Eleanor Ramsay, Professor Marie Brennan and Professor Alison Mackinnon from the University of South Australia, with partner investigators from the Department of Education and Children's Services: Wendy Engliss; Judith Lydeamore, Tanya Rogers, Bev Rogers (at different times); the Premier's Social Inclusion Unit, Dr Jan Patterson; and the state senior secondary curriculum authority, SSABSA: Dr Jan Keightley, then Dr Paul Kilvert. Our PhD student, Rochelle Woodley-Baker, has also been active in ensuring that gender issues and young people as agents in their own lives remained on the agenda.

Chapter 15 The research on Aboriginal education for this chapter was funded, in part, by the Department of Justice Canada, Youth Justice Fund. Principal investigator was Dr Wanda Cassidy, in association with Focus Foundation of British Columbia.

# 1 Educational innovation for young people

Kitty te Riele

This chapter sets the parameters for the kinds of educational innovation for young people that are needed – and that are expanded on in the remainder of the book. The chapter:

- discusses claims about the ‘intractability’ of schooling and supports an ‘inside-out’ approach to reform;
- outlines key societal changes that drive the need for doing school differently; and
- gives an overview of both the understanding of schooling and youth, and of the vision for innovation, that underpins this book.



Proposing that schooling should be done differently tends to run into two difficulties. First, people are quick to point out that educational practices are so entrenched that innovative attempts are doomed to fail. Secondly, if people allow that some reform is possible, controversy erupts about what that reform should look like. In this introductory chapter for the book, I start with the first difficulty, analysing persistent default practices and suggestions for enabling change from the inside out. Next I turn to the second difficulty, by exploring the kind of social changes I consider especially pertinent to young people and outlining the implications of these changes and the vision for innovation that underpin this book.

## The intractability of schooling

Studies of education can be broadly grouped on two sides: those that analyse what is wrong with education and those that provide solutions. The former range from doomsday newspaper reports blaming schools for all that is wrong with society to

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careful sociological attempts to outline why (in one famous title) schooling cannot compensate for society (Bernstein, 1977). The latter include not only myriad practical handbooks with handy hints for teachers but also results of often large-scale research on what contributes to school improvement. This book belongs in neither camp. It recognizes the inherent contradiction pointed out by Grace:

between analyses which suggest growing or insipient crisis and reports which document and exemplify school reform and progress. This can be confusing to students and teachers in the urban education field, who assume that once the causes of the crisis have been identified and once examples of good educational practice have been closely studied there will be some sustained and linear improvement in urban education systems. (1994: 46)

Grace's suggestion for an approach built on complex hope, drawing on localized examples of good practice in the face of challenging circumstances, underpins this book. The premise for the book is not to ignore difficult circumstances, but to take the analysis of these only as a starting point, rather than as the end (see Shade, 2006).

This means it is necessary to take seriously the critique that schooling is intractable, that is, it resists any attempts to change, influence or manipulate it in a significant way. Tyack and Cuban (1995: 86) explain that established traditions of schooling 'come to be understood by educators, students and the public as necessary features of a "real school" [...]. They become just the way schools are'. For example, a now classic study from the USA was struck by the sameness of schooling across the 13 primary, 12 junior high and 12 senior high schools it studied. Observations in classrooms provided nine patterns of teaching and learning that were largely common across schools, despite their external differences (Goodlad, 1984: 123–4):

1. Dominance of whole-class teaching, by one teacher for 20–30 students.
2. Students work and achieve mostly alone, there is little collaboration.
3. The teacher is the central figure who makes almost all decisions.
4. The teacher is dominant in the conduct of instruction – students rarely learn from one another.
5. There is paucity of praise and correction by the teacher.
6. Little variety in classroom activities – listening to the teacher, writing answers to questions, and taking tests and quizzes.
7. Variety is greatest in lower grades (early/mid primary) and least in secondary school.
8. Many students were nevertheless quite happy with schooling.
9. Students often did not understand or have time to finish what their teacher wanted them to do.

Although this study was conducted in the early 1980s, many of these patterns still strike true. A recent Australian study conducted classroom observations in the



junior classes of four disadvantaged high schools and noted that patterns of interaction between students and teachers were surprisingly similar (Johnston and Hayes, 2008: 114). They point to five key features which are rephrased here to highlight the similarities with several of Goodlad's patterns above.

1. Little variety in classroom activities – listening to the teacher, answering questions, and completing worksheets or other tasks (usually individually, occasionally in groups).
2. Limited demands in terms of literacy.
3. Limited intellectual demands (mostly factual and procedural).
4. The teacher is dominant in instruction and asking basic questions – students rarely engage in open discussion with each other or the teacher.
5. The teacher makes the decisions – students had no choice in what, how or when to learn.

The focus of the studies by Goodlad (1984) and Johnston and Hayes (2008) was different, they were conducted in different countries and more than 20 years apart. Nevertheless, the central role of the teacher, the repetitiveness of activities and the low level of intellectual engagement characterize classrooms in both studies. This approach remains dominant:

not because it has been shown to be a particularly good way to educate human beings, but because it works well in rooms of 600 square feet that are filled with twenty-five young people, more than two-thirds of whom, if given a choice, are likely to choose to be somewhere else. (Fenstermacher and Soltis, 1998: 22)

The pessimism expressed in phrases such as the persistent 'grammar of schooling' (Tyack and Cuban, 1995: 85) and the 'widespread and resilient logic of practice' (Johnston and Hayes, 2008: 110) is understandable in the light of such evidence.

What does this mean? We can either accept the default, even though few educators would consider it optimal, or we can continue to look for and find ways to do schooling differently – and better. As stated above, this book agrees with Shade (2006: 212) in perceiving that 'a realistic appraisal of current conditions is a starting and not a terminal point' – and thus chooses the second option.

## Inside-out reform

At times, radical change is advocated as the way forward. Goodlad (1984: 249) suggests that 'mere refinement of conventional practice is not sufficient'. Going further, Elmore (2006: n.p.) argues that the traditional school culture 'has been

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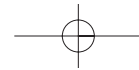
defeating people who try to change it for decades. You don't change a culture like this – you replace it!

This book does not support such dramatic reform. As Tyack and Cuban (1995) so convincingly demonstrate, this kind of reform rarely lasts – even when it is based on good ideas in the first place. They analyse historical examples of large-scale innovations adopted by school districts and other bureaucracies, supported by academics or education associations, or pushed by corporations – and are gloomy about the outcomes:

For over a century, ambitious reformers have promised to create sleek, efficient school machines 'light years' ahead of the fusty schools of their times. But in practice their reforms have often resembled shooting stars that spurted across the pedagogical heavens, leaving a meteoric trail in the media but burning up and disappearing in the everyday atmosphere of the schools. (Tyack and Cuban, 1995: 111)

A major reason for the long-term (and sometimes even short-term) failure of top-down reforms are the translations that happen along the way. Bernstein (2000) points to three key sites in the life of a reform strategy. The strategy begins in a site of production, whether it is a scholarly site (such as the work by Elmore, 2006) or a for-profit think tank (see examples in Tyack and Cuban, 1995). This is where the research and development work takes place to construct ideas for reform. The second site consists of educational bureaucracies (government districts and departments or non-government foundations or associations) that selectively reinterpret these ideas and translate them into practical guidelines and policy documents. A further translation occurs as these documents enter schools and classrooms, where staff attempt to apply, adapt or resist the officially endorsed reform strategy. The translations and reinterpretations that happen along the way inevitably alter the strategy – usually back towards the default grammar of schooling. Elmore's (2006) suggestion about education reform that 'you take [the current culture] out and put something else in its place' is not only patronizing but unrealistic and naive about the complexities of the relations of schooling.

However, the phenomenon of reform (re-)translation does not mean that it is impossible to improve education, to change the default grammar so as to do schooling differently. Schools have diverse, ambiguous and contradictory purposes and effects. In a context of the broad similarities pointed out above, individual teachers and schools nevertheless continue to demonstrate different approaches (for example, Johnston and Hayes, 2008: 119) in the face of restrictions posed by bureaucratic requirements and cultural expectations. Despite their critical analysis of the history of school reform in the USA, Tyack and Cuban remain cautiously optimistic: 'We do not expect some magical Phoenix to arise from the



“ashes” of the current system. We do not believe in educational Phoenixes and do not think that the system is in ashes’ (1995: 134).

While acknowledging cultural, structural and systemic constraints, this book supports a perspective on how to change schooling that starts with the current system, so that ‘the actual [is] reinterpreted and reconstructed in the light of the possible’ (Alexander, 1990, in Russell, 1999: 103). Default practices can be challenged because they remain in place at least partly due to ‘unexamined institutional habits and widespread cultural beliefs’ (Tyack and Cuban, 1995: 88) so that teachers are ‘restrained by the power of existing regularities [and do not] attempt to explore other possibilities’ (Goodlad, 1984: 249). This book aims to provide teachers and youth workers first and foremost, but also scholars and policy-makers, with tools for examining such taken-for-granted habits and beliefs, thus enabling them to explore options for doing schooling differently.

Most importantly, this means working with and supporting practitioners – to try out new ideas as well as to continue with the good work individual teachers and schools are already doing. Such a ‘chalk face’ approach reinvigorates hope for social and educational change. Understanding as well as action must start within local and specific situations. As Crump (1995: 212) explained ‘local struggles are an expression of what is occurring, or possible, at regional, state, national and even international levels’. Tyack and Cuban (1995: 133, 135) outline what this means for school reform:

Rather than starting from scratch in reinventing schools, it makes most sense to us to graft thoughtful reforms onto what is healthy in the present system. Schooling is being reinvented all the time, but not necessarily in ways envisaged in macro planning. Good teachers reinvent the world every day for the children in their classes. [...] Better schooling will result in the future – as it has in the past and does now – chiefly from the steady reflective efforts of the practitioners who work in schools.

This book therefore proposes to ‘focus on ways to improve instruction from the inside out rather than the top down’ (Tyack and Cuban, 1995: 134). This places much more emphasis on the active involvement of teachers to draw on resources for innovation (provided by themselves as well as scholars, corporations and policy) and adapt these flexibly to their own circumstances and local knowledge.

## Societal changes

This book appreciates the diversification of recognized learning sites and schools which have attempted to respond constructively to social, economic and technological changes to better cater for a diversity of young people by changing the

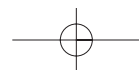
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experience of schooling. The book has its origin in both educational research and practices that ask questions and explore contradictions within established and changing patterns of educational institutions and of young people's lives. It aims to provide some answers about how schooling can be done differently to suit several major societal changes.

First, social and political change since the mid-1980s has seen a shift from community to more individual orientations. This trend towards individualization has also affected the discursive construction of young people's experiences. It has been suggested that in contemporary 'late-modern' society 'choice biographies' have replaced the 'normal biographies' of the industrial world (Beck, 1992). Choice biography may be interpreted positively as providing agency or more negatively as forcing people to make decisions even if their options are limited. Beck points to the coercive aspect of choice – people inevitably *must* construct a great proportion of their biography personally: 'Even when the word "decisions" is too grandiose, because neither consciousness nor alternatives are present, the individual will have to "pay for" the consequences of decisions not taken' (Beck, 1992: 135). A tension between freedom and coercion is inherent in choice biographies. In either case, it contributes to an impression of personal responsibility not only for life experiences, but also for constructing a viable personal identity.

A second major change has been the rise of the knowledge society. Across the industrialized world, economic prosperity has become increasingly reliant on knowledge or information (Thurow, 1999). This has had a major impact on education and training for young people. National policies to increase participation in education together with the collapse of the youth labour market have put pressure on young people to remain in or return to education. The observation by Furlong and Cartmel (1997: 17) in the UK that this 'has produced an army of reluctant conscripts to post-compulsory education' has international resonance. Recent policy moves to extend the compulsory age for school attendance (for example, to 16 in the state of New South Wales, Australia, and to 17 in the UK, see Chapter 4 in this volume) further reinforce this. Engaging a much broader range of young people in extended schooling requires renewed consideration of pedagogical approaches.

Finally, complexity in young people's lives has implications for education, especially in terms of its timing and location. While schooling continues to take up a large part of young lives, there is increasing recognition that this sits alongside their work, sport, music, peer and family commitments. Spierings suggests the metaphor of a mosaic: 'Young people, both as teenagers and as young adults, are required to put all the pieces into place and to find the answers to life's jigsaw using their own devices' (1999: 7). Although the mosaic has various components, work and education are especially important. For example, in Australia about half



of young people combine full-time schooling with part-time study (Vickers et al., 2003). One of the key features identified by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (in AIG/DSE, 2007: 19) as contributing to a successful transition from education to work for young people is 'workplace experience combined with education'. Nevertheless, schools in general are not yet used to making constructive use of the work experience students gain in their part-time jobs, nor to giving genuine recognition for the competing demands on young people's time and energy.

## Implications and vision

The three societal changes above have some specific implications for the approach taken in this book. First, both schooling and young people are conceptualized broadly. Schooling here includes a range of formal, credentialed education and training options for young people – including vocational and general, part-time and re-entry, and in traditional as well as alternative settings.

While youth may be defined as the phase of life between childhood and adulthood, individuals negotiate the transition to adulthood at different speeds and at different ages. Markers of adulthood are increasingly unclear, as young people move between work and education, and between living independently and with their parents. At the same time traditional teenage lifestyles, in relation to patterns of consumption and dress, are increasingly adopted by children under the age of 12. It is therefore impossible to give definite ages when youth begins and ends, although it is likely to continue to extend, at the upper as well as the lower end. As a rough guide, most chapters in this book refer to young people aged between 15 and 25, but some examples will include younger or older students.

The final implication is that the book focuses especially on those young people currently served least well by various forms of schooling. The intention is not to stereotype marginalized young people. As Raywid (1994) argues, marginalized students are quite similar to the rest of the student population. For example Dwyer (1996) estimated that on top of the quarter or so of actual early school leavers in Australia, another quarter of students in senior high school would prefer to leave if they could. In Holdsworth's (2004: 4) portrayal, these young people 'sit in classrooms, passively cooperating, even responding positively, but waiting for the bell'. Although they do not actively rebel against school, they would rather do it differently. However, as Raywid (1994: 27) further suggests, marginalized students 'are just more dependent on a good education'. The argument underpinning this book is that reforms that make schooling work better for marginalized students can provide insights to improve schooling for most students in regular schools as well.

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The focus on innovation and on catering better for marginalized youth in this book means many chapters draw on examples from non-traditional schools. For this reason, the next chapter outlines a broad concept of alternative education, why it is needed and how it may be understood.

Following Chapter 2, the book is organized around three themes: identity, pedagogy, and place and time. Each theme not only relates to the societal changes outlined above, but also represents a dimension of education and training that provides opportunities for catering better for a diversity of young people by 'doing school differently'.

The first theme highlights changes in youth identity and ways in which schooling can respond and contribute constructively to these identities. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 provide scholarly views, while Chapter 6 incorporates two practical case studies that demonstrate how schooling may be done differently in response to the issues raised about identity.

The second theme addresses how teaching can be done differently to engage all young people, including the most marginalized. Chapters 7, 8 and 9 present academic perspectives, again followed by a chapter (10) that applies these ideas in two case studies.

The third theme demonstrates how the stereotypical image of school as separate from the world (Ferguson and Seddon, 2007) can be challenged to organize schooling in different places and/or at different times to better suit a diverse range of young people. Chapters 11, 12 and 13 offer research-based discussions, with Chapter 14 including three further practical case studies. The book is concluded by Chapter 15 which considers all three themes through an indigenous education vision.

The book brings together important new perspectives on the opportunities provided by the changed experience of youth in current economic and social contexts. It offers both practitioners and researchers insights into questions about how to think differently about education for young people as well as reflections on projects and programmes that have attempted to put such thoughts into practice. The suggestions provided in the chapters tackle some of the real difficulties many young people, educational institutions and policy-makers face.

Providing ideas and practical examples for doing school differently, this book does not advocate simplistic hope but rather contributes to a 'continuing source of optimism of the will' (Grace, 1994: 56) in education. The research and cases presented can be used imaginatively by educational practitioners, administrators and researchers to improve education for all young people. I encourage you to use it in the spirit of Max Lerner's vision (Lagemann, 1992: 201) of being neither an optimist nor a pessimist but a possibilist:

A possibilist would be able to approach educational problems with an eagerness to explore new ideas and practices, but without a willingness to be carried away by inflated expectations or promises. Knowing that panaceas abound in education and that prudence is rare, a possibilist would profoundly understand the vital importance of education and the perpetually imperfect nature of the endeavour. Most of all, perhaps, a possibilist would recognise the degree to which education is enmeshed in the historic problems and the contemporary and future prospects of the society of which it is a part.

### Discussion questions



1. Do the patterns of classroom interaction outlined by Goodlad (1984) and Johnston and Hayes (2008) strike true? How might those patterns be changed?
2. How will society continue to change over the next few decades and what implications does that have for schooling and for young people?

### Further reading



- Ball, S., Goodson, I. and Maguire, M. (2007) *Education, Globalisation and New Times*. London: Routledge.
- Grace, G. (1994) 'Urban education and the culture of contentment: the politics, culture, and economics of inner-city schooling', in N. Stromquist (ed.), *Education in Urban Areas: Cross-national Dimensions*. Westport, CT: Praeger. pp. 45–59.
- Tyack, D. and Cuban, L. (1995) *Tinkering toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- World Bank (2005) *Expanding Opportunities and Building Competencies for Young People: A New Agenda for Secondary Education*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

### Websites



- Australian National Schools Network: <http://www.ansn.edu.au/>
- Coalition of Essential Schools: [http://www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces\\_docs/about/about.html](http://www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces_docs/about/about.html)

## 2 Alternative schooling in the USA

Laudan Aron

This chapter outlines a broad concept of alternative education, why it is needed and how it may be understood. The chapter:

- provides an overview of the need for alternative schooling in the USA;
- describes what is meant by the term 'alternative schools' and reviews several proposed typologies of such schools; and
- examines the characteristics of high-quality programmes and the outcomes that alternative schools should be able to demonstrate.



Like many other countries, the USA has a long history of alternative schooling and education system reform. These efforts have taken on a sense of urgency for at least the past quarter century. We have gone from being 'a nation at risk', the title of a high-profile 1983 publication sounding alarms about the quality of the nation's schools (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), to being in the midst of what some are calling a 'quiet crisis' in education (Smith, 2004). This crisis includes a major dropout problem and a lesser known but equally important 'skills gap'.

In response, states and school districts across the country have been pushing for higher academic standards, more rigorous graduation requirements and greater accountability. In the USA, education is primarily the responsibility of state and local governments, but through the legislative process the federal government supports state activities. At the federal level, legislation known as the No Child Left Behind Act has attempted to strengthen the nation's schools through a system of state standards, new tests and a national accountability system, including a targeted effort to help low-performing schools and students. One unfortunate consequence of this movement towards greater accountability, high-stakes testing and new zero-tolerance disciplinary policies is that some low-performing students



are not just dropping out of schools but may be getting pushed out.

This 'quiet crisis' has clear implications for the nation as a whole. Ninety per cent of the fastest growing jobs in the knowledge economy require some post-secondary education (US Government Accountability Office, 2007), but as the US Chamber of Commerce, representing more than 3 million businesses across the country, observes:

Despite decades of reform efforts and many trillions of dollars in public investment, US schools are not equipping our children with the skills and knowledge they – and the nation – so badly need. It has been nearly a quarter century since the seminal report *A Nation at Risk* was issued in 1983. Since that time, a knowledge-based economy has emerged, the Internet has reshaped commerce and communication, exemplars of creative commerce like Microsoft, eBay, and Southwest Airlines have revolutionized the way we live, and the global economy has undergone wrenching change. Throughout that period, education spending has steadily increased and rafts of well-intentioned school reforms have come and gone. But student achievement has remained stagnant, and our K–12 schools have stayed remarkably unchanged – preserving, as if in amber, the routines, culture, and operations of an obsolete 1930s manufacturing plant. (Institute for a Competitive Workforce, 2008)

Estimates drawing on unpublished data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, show that in 2003 there were 1.1 million youth aged 16 to 19 who did not have a high school diploma (or an alternative credential known as the General Educational Development test, or GED) and were not enrolled in school; another 2.4 million youth age 20 to 24 were in the same situation for a grand total of 3.5 million youth (Barton, 2005).

While the failure of 'traditional' schools for many young people is clear, the 'alternatives' we have in place are too few and most are of unknown quality. There is no precise accounting of the number or types of alternative schools or programmes in the USA. Available estimates suggest that there are over 20,000 alternative schools and programmes currently in operation, most designed to reach students at risk of school failure, not those who are out of school (Lange and Sletten, 2002). The number of full-time, federally funded education, employment and national service programmes available to teenaged high school dropouts is estimated at 100,000 (based on an estimated total of 300,000 opportunities for the 2.4 million low-income 16- to 24-year-olds who left school without a diploma or received a diploma but could not find a job) (Barton, 2005). Whatever the exact numbers, when it comes to alternative education for vulnerable youth, demand is far outpacing supply.

High-quality, alternative pathways to educational and vocational success are needed for children and youth of all ages. In thinking about alternative education,

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it is important to remember that young people do not disconnect from traditional developmental pathways (or high schools for that matter) because of the failure of any one system. Likewise, *reconnecting* youth requires collaboration and coordination among multiple youth-serving systems. In addition to school and youth employment and training programmes, these systems include child protection and juvenile justice, and a variety of health and social welfare agencies (such as mental health and substance abuse treatment programmes, crisis intervention centres, and runaway and homeless youth shelters). Finally, one should acknowledge that communities, neighbourhoods, families, adult mentors and peers can also have a major influence on the developmental trajectories of children and youth.

### What do we mean by ‘alternative education’?

The term ‘alternative education’ in its broadest sense covers all educational activities that fall outside the *traditional* K–12 school system (including home schooling, GED preparation programmes, special programmes for gifted children, charter schools). However, the term is often used to describe programmes serving vulnerable youth who are either at risk of dropping out or are no longer in traditional schools. Ironically, because they are often associated with students who were unsuccessful in the past, many alternative schools are thought to be of much poorer quality than the traditional K–12 school system, and yet because they are challenged to motivate and educate disengaged students many alternative education programmes are known for their innovation and creativity.

The Common Core of Data, the US Department of Education’s primary database on public elementary and secondary education, defines an alternative education school as ‘a public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education’ (US NCES, 2002: 14, table 2).

A definitive typology of the many types of alternative education schools and programmes that fall within this rather broad definition has yet to be developed and accepted by the field. Many dimensions of interest that could be used to develop a typology of alternative schools and programmes have been identified (Aron and Zweig, 2003). In the early 1990s, Mary Anne Raywid (1994: 26–31) proposed a typology based on a programme’s goals as their distinguishing characteristic. Despite being quite old, Raywid’s typology is still widely used, in part because it captures such a full continuum of existing programme types:

- Type I schools 'offer full-time, multiyear, education options for students of all kinds, including those needing more individualization, those seeking an innovative or challenging curriculum, or dropouts wishing to earn their diplomas. A full instructional program offers students the credits needed for graduation. Students choose to attend. [...] Models range from schools-within-schools to magnet schools, charter schools, schools without walls, experiential schools, career-focused and job-based schools, dropout-recovery programs, after-hours schools, and schools in atypical settings like shopping malls and museums' (ibid.).
- Type II schools' distinguishing 'characteristic is discipline, which aims to segregate, contain, and reform disruptive students. Students typically do not choose to attend, but are sent to the school for specified time periods or until behavior requirements are met. Since placement is short-term, the curriculum is limited to a few basic, required courses or is entirely supplied by the "home school" as a list of assignments. Familiar models include last-chance schools and in-school suspension' (ibid.).
- Type III programs 'provide short-term but therapeutic settings for students with social and emotional problems that create academic and behavioral barriers to learning. Although Type III programs target specific populations – offering counselling, access to social services, and academic remediation – students can choose not to participate' (ibid.).

The first group includes many of the original alternative education programmes developed for at-risk youth and are often referred to as 'popular innovations' or 'true educational alternatives'. Programmes for high school dropouts (or potential dropouts) sponsored by school districts would fit into this category, along with newer programmes for students unable to pass standardized tests (Krentz et al., 2005). The other two types are more correctional in focus, one being primarily disciplinary ('last chance' or 'soft jail' programmes) and the other therapeutic ('treatment' programmes). Most of these operate separately from regular schools, although they can be sponsored by school districts.

Preliminary research by Raywid and others suggests that the first group of programmes – the true educational alternatives – are the most successful, while alternative discipline programmes are much less likely to lead to substantial student gains. Rigorous evaluation studies are still needed, but anecdotal evidence suggests that outcomes for therapeutic programmes are more mixed, with students often making progress while enrolled but regressing when they return to a more traditional school.

It should also be noted that as more programmes develop a mix of strategies and approaches, often intended to meet multiple needs, the distinctions between Raywid's groupings can blur. So for example, Type I and Type II schools are increasingly likely to offer clinical counselling (a Type III characteristic).

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Another promising typology, proposed by Melissa Roderick, of the University of Chicago, puts students' educational needs at front and centre. Rather than focusing on a student's demographic characteristic (or 'risk factor') or even a programme characteristic, this typology focuses on the educational challenges students present (Aron and Zweig, 2003: 28). Roderick has identified several distinct groups:

- Students who have fallen 'off track' because they have got into trouble and need short-term systems of recovery to route them back into high schools. The goal of getting them back into regular high schools is both appropriate and realistic for this group.
- Students who have prematurely transitioned to adulthood either because they are (about to become) parents, or have home situations that do not allow them to attend school regularly (for example, immigrant children taking care of siblings while their parents work, those coming out of the juvenile justice system with many demands on their time).
- Students who have fallen substantially off track educationally, but are older and are returning to obtain the credits they need to transition into community colleges (or other programmes) very rapidly. These include, for example, older individuals who are just a few credits away from graduation (many of whom dropped out at age 16 or 17), or are transitioning out of the jail system, or have had a pregnancy and are now ready to complete their secondary schooling. Roderick notes that these students are currently populating most alternative education programmes in large urban areas – they are a very diverse group and tend to be well served by the existing alternative school system.
- The final group consists of students who have fallen substantially behind educationally – they have significant problems, very low reading levels and are often way over age for grade. Many of these children have been retained repeatedly and a number of them have come out of special education. They include 17- or 18-year-olds with third and fourth grade reading levels who have never graduated from eighth grade (or who have gone to high school for a few years but have never actually accumulated any credits). This is a very large group of youth, and most school systems do not have any programmes that can meet their needs.

Roderick argues that by targeting a particular demographic or 'problem' group, such as pregnant/parenting teens, programmes may be setting themselves up for failure if the students in a single programme encompass too much educational diversity. As a group, pregnant/parenting teens may include students who are two credits away from graduation, others who are wards of child welfare agencies and who have multiple problems such as being far over age for grade, and yet others who have significant behavioural problems and may be weaving in and out of the

juvenile justice system. No single school or programme can be expected to handle such a wide array of educational and other needs.

## What characterizes high-quality alternative education programmes?

Research on what works and for whom in alternative education is still evolving. There are few scientifically based, rigorous evaluations establishing which programme components lead to various positive outcomes for different subgroups of youth. The newness of the field means that researchers and policy-makers are still examining the characteristics of promising programmes, but lists of these characteristics are starting to converge and point to the variables that should be measured and monitored as more rigorous evaluations are designed and conducted. These characteristics include the following (drawn from a summary reported in Aron, 2006):

- **Academic instruction.** Successful programmes have a clear focus on academic learning that combines high academic standards with engaging and creative instruction and a culture of high expectations for all students. Learning must be relevant and applicable to life outside school and to future learning and work opportunities. Applied learning is an important component of the academic programme. This is often where employers can play important roles as partners. The curricula address the education and career interests of the students. The curricula are academically rigorous and tied to state standards and accountability systems. The students, staff and parents know and share the learning goals. Students have personalized learning plans and set learning goals based on their individual plans. There are opportunities for youth to catch up and accelerate knowledge and skills. A mixture of instructional approaches is available to help youth achieve academic objectives.
- **Instructional staff.** Instructors in successful alternative programmes choose to be part of the programme, routinely employ positive discipline techniques and establish rapport with students and peers. They have high expectations of the youth, are certified in their academic content area and are creative in their classrooms. They have a role in governing the school and designing the programme and curriculum.
- **Professional development.** Successful alternative education programmes provide instructors with ongoing professional development activities that help them maintain an academic focus, enhance teaching strategies and develop alternative instructional methods. Staff development involves teacher input, work with colleagues and opportunities to visit and observe teaching in other settings.

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- **Size.** Many alternative education programmes are small with a low teacher/student ratio and have small classes that encourage caring relationships between youth and adults.
- **Facility.** Effective alternative learning programmes are in clean and well-maintained buildings (not necessarily a traditional school building) that are attractive and inviting and that foster emotional well-being, a sense of pride, and safety. In some instances, the programmes are located away from other high schools in 'neutral' territory. Most are close to public transportation.
- **Relationships/building a sense of community.** Successful alternative education programmes link to a wide variety of community organizations (cultural, social service, educational, and so on) and the business community to provide assistance and opportunities for participants. Through partnerships with the business community, alternative education providers are able to provide their students with job shadowing and internship opportunities, guest speakers and company tours, and receive valuable input into their curriculum and project development. Connections with community organizations can provide health care, mental health services, cultural and recreational opportunities for youth in their schools.
- **Leadership, governance, administration and oversight.** Many studies highlight the need for administrative and bureaucratic autonomy and operational flexibility. Administrators, teachers, support services staff, students and parents should be involved in the different aspects of the programme. This autonomy builds trust and loyalty among the staff. A successful alternative education programme has a strong, engaged, continuous and competent leadership, preferably with a teacher/director administering the programme.
- **Student supports.** Successful alternative education programmes support their students through flexible individualized programming with high expectations and clear rules of behaviour. They provide opportunities for youth to participate and have a voice in school matters. Structure, curricula and supportive services are designed with both the educational and social needs of the student in mind. Many schools do daily follow-up with all students who are absent or tardy and develop reward systems to promote attendance and academic achievement. Programmes are both highly structured and extremely flexible. Rules for the school, which the students help create, are few, simple and consistently enforced. There are processes in place that assist students in transitioning from school to work and from high school to post-high school training.
- **Other contributing factors** include clearly identified goals; the integration of research into practice in areas such as assessment, curriculum and teacher training; the integration of special education services and English Language Learning (ELL); and stable and diverse funding.

An interesting aspect of this list is how universal and appealing it is. These are qualities that would seem to benefit *any* educational programme, not just 'alternative' ones. This supports the idea that while current approaches to alternative education may be defined by and understood as being 'different' from mainstream educational options, one future vision is that communities have an array of high-quality educational options that all share many of these desirable characteristics.

## What should alternative education programmes accomplish?

Currently there are few rigorous studies that examine the effectiveness of alternative education programmes in terms of student outcomes. Much more research is needed in this area, especially given that performance measures used by mainstream schools may not be appropriate for some alternative schools or programmes.

Work has advanced on what types of outcome measures *should* be targeted and monitored. Alternative education programmes are first and foremost *educational* programmes, so they need to focus on preparing students academically while also meeting the additional needs of their students. Evaluations of the programmes should include a variety of educational and other outcomes for participants.

Aron and Zweig (2003) have already noted the importance of developing accountability systems as well as better data collection and analysis that would support such systems. Part of the challenge involves figuring out 'how to introduce high academic standards in alternative education systems without sacrificing the elements that make alternative programmes successful, and without compromising the integrity of the high standards' (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2001: 1). Recommendations designed to strengthen the adoption of high standards by alternative education programmes include:

- improving 'early warning systems' to identify lower-performing students;
- collecting and analysing student-level data;
- developing enhanced GED programmes;
- developing data-driven accountability measures for alternative education programmes;
- strengthening links between traditional and non-traditional education systems;
- investing resources to support the transition to high academic standards and beyond; and



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- supporting longer-term alternative education programmes.

Along with high standards should come adequate and reliable funding. Adopting a single high standard, even a voluntary standard, would help the field identify and promote those high-quality alternatives that deserve more support and replication across communities, and eliminate those low-performing ones that are not serving young people well. It would also go a long way towards increasing the legitimacy of alternative offerings, demonstrating the feasibility (and desirability) of offering multiple high-quality options and even integrating the traditional and alternative ends of the educational continuum. Ironically, these two ends are not so far apart. As Raywid observed in 1994 and which is still true today:

Amid all the current talk of school restructuring, alternatives are the clearest example we have of what a restructured school might look like. They represent our most definitive departure from the programmatic, organizational and behavioral regularities that inhibit school reform. Moreover, many of the reforms currently pursued in traditional schools – downsizing the high school, pursuing a focus or theme, students and teacher choice, making the school a community, empowering staff, active learner engagement, authentic assessment – are practices that alternative schools pioneered. (1994: 26)

### Discussion questions



1. What can and should local communities do to develop a portfolio of high-quality schooling options that best matches the educational needs of young people? How might these portfolios differ from one community to another, or in one community over time?
2. What can and should be done at the local, regional and national levels to raise the profile of alternative schools and the widespread need for such schools? What can traditional schools learn from high-quality alternative schools and vice versa?
3. Can we dispense with the labels 'traditional' and 'alternative' when it comes to schools? What exactly are these terms meant to reflect, and are there other, better, terms that capture what we usually mean when we talk about a traditional or alternative school?

### Further reading

Dignity in Schools Campaign (2007) *Alternative Schools and Pushout: Research and Advocacy Guide*. Retrieved 13 September 2008 from <http://www.nesri.org/>



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# 3

## The need for dialogue in vocational education

Frans Meijers

This chapter stresses the need for career learning in vocational education. The chapter will:

- explain how the individualization of society and the rise of a service economy ask for self-directed learning with regard to careers;
- present empirical evidence that makes clear that a strong career-learning environment is a dialogical environment; and
- provide practical examples drawn from research.



More than 2,000 years ago, the Roman philosopher Seneca succinctly formulated the importance of school in the sentence '*Non scolae sed vitae discimus*' (Not for school, but for life, do we learn). Even so, most students in the Dutch educational system have little idea at the beginning of their study (but also often long after that) exactly why they are there.

If one asked them, most would say that they are investing in their future. However, if one asks further as to what that future may hold, the silence is deafening. Most young people invest 'blindly' in their future, mainly because their environment – correctly – made clear to them that a diploma is important. As early as 1961, Schelsky (1961: 14) remarked that education had become 'the primary, determining, and almost unique social allocation authority for status, employment opportunities, and survival for an individual'. Parents respond to the increasing social meritocracy by keeping their children in school longer, or by pressuring them to remain in school as long as possible. Primary vocational education is the only place where these dynamics do not exist; children are 'sent' to this form of education by their score on national mathematical and verbal achievement tests, which are administered at the end of primary school.<sup>1</sup> This mostly

involves children from families with little cultural, scholastic and economic capital, in which little value is attached to investing in education. However, in vocational education, students have developed hardly any career perspectives at all, a concern that applies to their peers in the rest of the secondary educational system as well (Ester et al., 2003; Meijers et al., 2006).

The consequence of this is that most young people – whether they attend primary vocational education or university – employ a survival strategy. This strategy is described by Holt on the basis of his observations as a high school teacher:

It has become clear [to me] over the [last] year that these children see school almost entirely in terms of the day-to-day and hour-to-hour tasks that we impose on them. [...] School feels like this to children: it is a place where they make you go and where they tell you to do things and where they try to make your life unpleasant if you don't do them right. For children, the central business of school is not learning, whatever this vague word means; it is getting these tasks done, or at least out of the way, with a minimum of effort and unpleasantness. Each task is an end in itself. The children don't care how they dispose of it. If they can get it out of the way by doing it, they'll do it; if experience has taught them that this does not work very well, they will turn to other means, illegitimate means, that wholly defeat whatever purpose the task-giver may have had in mind. (1995: 47)

The lack of a clear future in which investments in education acquire meaning, and the subsequent application of a survival strategy, have a number of related consequences:

- Most students are not intrinsically motivated by the subject matter. The consequence is that students forget much of what they had learned, within several weeks after the examination (Van der Werff, 2005).
- There is an increasing lack of motivation in students during the course of their study, that is – to a large extent – caused by a poor study and/or career choice (Zijlstra and Meijers, 2006).
- As a consequence of this, teachers are forced – often against their will – to view pedagogical relations in terms of maintaining an 'orderly, and subject-matter based' form of communication. In practice, this means that they (must) invest much effort in preserving order (Meijers and Wesselingh, 1999).
- As a consequence of limited intrinsic and continuously decreasing motivation, in combination with that fact the student–teacher interaction is reduced to an 'exchange of knowledge for order' (Willis, 1977), 35 per cent of every cohort, from primary vocational education to the university level, leaves school without a diploma (even though many do obtain a diploma later).

The fact that many young people 'survive' their educational experience does not imply that they do not learn anything. They, of course, learn something – in addition to survival skills. However, what they learn is – from the viewpoint of the school – largely dependent upon chance: a teacher who does not limit him or herself only to teaching the subject matter but is also honestly interested in the student, a previously existing student interest, the students' background, the support given by the students' parents, and so on.

## Self-determination becomes important

For many years, the fact that most young people did not learn for life, but rather for school, was not viewed as being problematical. However, as a consequence of the individualization of society and the transition to a service and knowledge economy, the lack of a future perspective becomes increasingly problematical. An increasing freedom of choice means that individuals are increasingly being forced to make choices. In a society that is becoming less structured, this then leads to more uncertainty (some even speak of a risk society; Beck, 1992). In the individualized society, individuals are expected to be more reflective and self-determining (Giddens, 1991).

Self-determination is the ability to identify one's self (ie., to voluntarily and protractedly associate) with people and organizations, to develop a plan of action on that basis and to implement that plan (Meijers and Wardekker, 2002). When we view self-determination as the ability to associate or relate, it becomes immediately clear that this also involves skills other than only cognitive ones. Of course, an individual must be able and willing to make informed choices, and to delay immediate gratification of needs (affect regulation), in order to develop a long-term perspective. However, an individual must also be able and willing to reflect critically upon the primary relations acquired during primary socialization, as well as the relations that he or she has – consciously or unconsciously – acquired thereafter. He or she must furthermore be able to consider the uncertainty resulting from that reflection, and be able to relate to other concrete people and institutions. The first step requires a mainly cognitive approach: one must be able to find relevant information, process it and draw conclusions. The second step requires an entirely different, more 'literary' approach: it is mainly concerned with determining the central values in one's life, which may become clear by considering one's own personal history and one's 'life story', which is based upon that. The individual also needs to learn to cope with his or her own emotions. This includes both emotions in general, as well as negative emotions, which are inherently associated with distancing one's self from previous relations – and is related to accepting uncertainty. Self-determination is therefore the ability to discover one's own 'life

theme' (Van Maanen, 1977) and to relate that to a social role (Law et al., 2002).

Self-determination is not only important due to the individualization of society, but also due to the emergence of three trends. First, the market is becoming increasingly demand-driven, which means that clients not only want 'tailor-made' products, but also that the producer has to take the entire life cycle of a product into consideration. Secondly, there is increasing globalization (the 'global village'), in which time-to-market is of essential importance. The time between product development and the actual production and marketing of the product must become increasingly brief in order to remain competitive. Finally, there is an increasing technological vitality (Korbijn, 2003).

The effect of these trends is that the marketplace is changing constantly and unpredictably, that innovative ability is becoming an increasingly important competitive advantage and that knowledge is of essential importance. In order to survive in this 'booming, buzzing confusion', companies are forced to innovate continuously. They must also apply 'concurrent engineering' in organizing their production, such that employees are simultaneously able to work on multiple product improvements, as well as applying integrated design principles in multi-disciplinary teams. This implies that the organization of labour must become much less hierarchical, and must become more focused on utilizing all of their employees' talents and skills. The organization must become flexible and 'self-learning', which implies not only investment in knowledge management, but also that employees become entrepreneurs: they must be able to manage themselves. This is becoming increasingly important, because traditional career paths are disappearing: the concept of the boundaryless career is gaining ground (Arthur et al., 1999). In addition, in some branches there appears to be an increase in the amount of 'emotional work' (work in which emotions have to be consciously involved; see Hochschild, 1983). For this reason, the educational system has to develop not only the head (theory) and the hands (skills), but also the heart. In order to be able to do that, the educational system will have to develop from being an 'industrial training factory' to becoming a 'career centre', that conceives of itself as a service provider (Geurts, 2007).

## Career learning in vocational education

How should educational teaching process and the counselling support for these learning processes be organized such that a school functions as a career centre? This was the guiding question of a study concerning career learning in the primary (vmbo) and secondary (mbo) vocational education in the Netherlands (Meijers et al., 2006).