

Part I

Prelude: The Public Sector in Education

The eight papers in this section present powerful and coherent arguments for the strengthening of the public sector in education. The context of their thinking is the recognition that education for all is not a distant hope but an achievable reality.

Geoff Masters emphasises the dangers of stereotyping, where students are assigned to low-achieving groups and, predictably, typically perform to match the stereotype. He makes an important point: *'there is a question as to whether emphasising group membership is counterproductive. A preoccupation with demographic distinctions may serve only to highlight existing differences and cement future expectations'*.

Denise Bradley points out sharply the inequity which is the basis of many education systems, making a powerful argument for social justice. As she points out, countries with such inequalities are perpetuating harmful and expensive divisions. *'All Australian schools receive some public funds but schools in the poorest and most socially deprived areas of our country, schools which educate the children most in need of a rich and nurturing educational experience, languish'*.

Don Anderson takes these arguments further, stressing the need for a more equitable approach to education. *'I see the divide between public and private schooling as the single greatest structural impediment to advancing the quality of education in Australia'*.

Deborah Meier has been one of the leading figures in the USA seeking major reform in schools. She founded a network of small public schools in East Harlem and later in Boston. The schools she has helped create serve predominantly low-income African-American and Latino students. She is a passionate advocate of an effective education for all, despite their background. *'At the very least, school should be a place where children are not treated as though they are data or numbers in someone else's policy war, or as only "future" members of society.'* *'Each school community needs to think through what important achievements look and sound like—set their standards and defend them even as they revise and edit'*.

Michael Fullan, surely the epitome of the universal educator given his wide involvement with so many countries, draws a powerful conclusion. His role in his own country in achieving an effective education for all gives extra weight to his

words. *'In all of this what we are learning is that you have to pay close attention to personalizing education experiences for students, valuing them as individuals, building the instructional capacity of teachers both individually, and especially collectively to enable them to work in professional learning communities, and to building connections with parents, communities and business'*.

Lyndsay Connors, one of Australia's most experienced observers of education, also sees the danger from a possible decline in the quality of public education: *'It would be tragic if the "democratic right to accessible, affordable, quality education" that is embodied in the concept of a socially representative, free and secular public school system were to be lightly brushed aside'*.

Malcolm Skilbeck and Helen Connell turn to the vital question of the content of the necessary education for all. *'A task on which we have barely begun is the extension of personal and citizenship education throughout the lifecycle. If lifelong learning for all is to rise above the level of a slogan, new policies, new structures, new personnel, new content, new approaches to teaching and learning, and new ways of financing the whole educational enterprise are called for'*.

Kerry Kennedy from his vantage point in Hong Kong appeals for education to achieve its potential in transforming life chances: *'But it is education that has the potential to move individuals into a different space from where they can see life in a new way and indeed can create a new life for themselves. Education, unlike other areas of social service, can be transformational; yet it is not so for everyone'*.