

## Part IV

# Prelude: Looking More Widely

Robert and Paris Strom from Arizona State University have developed a curriculum to help today's grandparents define their place in society. They consider them to be uncertain about their role in the family, and they are more likely to entertain their grandchildren than support the parents. They believe they assume too little responsibility and are not contributing as they could be. They suggest useful means for broadening contacts for learners especially for students for whom school is difficult. *'A more promising way of thinking about lifespan development is to encourage people from all ages to adjust to certain aspects of change together by learning from other generations. When reciprocal learning is recognized as essential, it is possible to facilitate harmony and ensure everyone stays in touch with the present and future of other cohorts'*.

The programme at Arizona State University introduced by Robert Strom has already proved to be a valuable source of help to many.

Paul Brock has been a wonderful example to Australians in his refusal to allow his almost total paralysis from motor neurone disease to contain his enthusiasm for life, his work output and his determination to continue his witness to the power of education. *'I saw on TV a distraught Sudanese mother holding her starving child who was asked by a reporter "what do you need most for your child?" "Food and education" was the desperate woman's immediate reply. Not only Australia, but our world needs the nurturing and irrigation of ideas, values, skills, knowledge, vision, hope, spirituality, and respect that education can bring to individuals, communities and societies'*.

Christine Deer, formerly Professor of Education at the University of Technology in Sydney, has first-hand experience with children who have more hurdles to jump than most to access appropriate education through her membership of the advisory board of the Salvation Army and also the board of the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children. In her chapter, she focuses on four priorities:

1. *The centrality of the teacher*
2. *The importance of preschool education*

3. *The curriculum priorities*
4. *The need to establish an agreed and equitable system of financing education across all systems.*

Patrick Daunt, looking back after a distinguished career as teacher, school principal and a leading role for some years at the European Commission in Brussels where he headed the European action programme for disabled people, is very unhappy with the nature of the interaction between politics and education, seeing the political time span as being wildly out of kilter with the desirable pattern of change in schools. ‘...education has become as hot as any political sector; a highly desirable staging post for young hopefuls, driven by the need to make their mark within two or three years by means of some loud but politically fragrant programme of parliamentary adventures’.

Joanna Le Metais and Don Jordan in their Britain-Australia partnership start from the recognition of the depth of the problem.

*On average across OECD countries, around one fifth of 15-year-olds did not attain proficiency Level 2 in three core areas of learning, namely reading (19%), mathematics (22%) and science (18%) and, consequently, lacked the essential skills needed to make sense of a complex world and to participate effectively and productively in society.*

Joanna was the head of International Project Development at the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales for many years and continues to work in the areas of curriculum review, reform and development through consultancies in many countries. Don is an experienced primary and secondary teacher whose recent consultancies are as varied as working with disaffected students in the United Kingdom and with Bachelor of Education students in the Gaza Strip. They are not content to end in gloom but map some realistic ways to move ahead.

Mal Lee focuses strongly on education’s general failure to make more effective use of the modern technology which so many young people are so enthusiastically embracing. He feels that education in general has been reluctant to recognise a reality from which they might profit.

*While individual schools are addressing these shortcomings there has not been from government a preparedness to take advantage of the shift to the digital and networked modes to ask how best their nation should school its young.*

Don Aitkin is a widely experienced university administrator, most recently as vice chancellor of the University of Canberra. He also has a strong interest in the quality of school education and a deep concern for wasted potential. His concern goes deeper. ‘More, it is doubtful that our community understands that while those first five years represent only a little more than five per cent of the future adult’s life, they are very probably the most important five years of all’.

Neil Dempster in his section takes up the same issue. He speaks from a broad background of higher education and also considerable experience in schools.

*A great education starts with parents who know how dramatic their influence is on the architecture of the minds and bodies of their children. From birth, though Fiona Stanley, Australian of the Year in 2003, would say for at least two years before birth, children are mightily influenced by the behaviour, health and well being of their parents.*