Educating in the knowledge era: a case study of an Australian school

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Thank you for the invitation to speak. We could have done this virtually. However, there is something still to be said for the personal interactions and connections that we can still make in our quest for relevant 21st century schooling for the most precious resource we have—our young people. We have not managed the transition from industrial to knowledge very well, but our young people will if we are prepared to take the risks needed to move into the new world. We will fail them if we insist on staying in our world.

All of us involved in teaching or educating were born in the last century. We were born and educated as part of the industrial era. National economies competed in relation to industrial manufacturing and products. It was not until the latter years of the last century that we started to experience the enormous enabling influence if ICT, particularly the Internet, and the start of the global knowledge economy, dependent on the creation of and trade in knowledge.

We teach young people who were born into this new world. Young people starting school today will work for the next 60 plus years, yet we are not sure what their and our world will look like in five to ten years. So, we teach them our world and our world will fail them.

How will we transform schools, set up for an industrial economy and culture, so that young people experience relevance, engagement and the opportunity to develop and apply their own creative talents?

This paper describes the experiences of one school in Australia. It is now a leader in schooling transformation. It does not provide answers, but rather says, regardless of culture, real transformation can happen. Schools can make a difference for young people.

The Restaurant
The early years philosophy, for children aged 3 to 6 years of age, at ELTHAM College of Education celebrates the importance of play, encouraging children to discover, question and create, and to investigate possibilities about themselves and their world. In 2004, staff in the Early Years Centres "imagined" a curriculum focus called “From Earth to the Table” and arranged a visit to the College Hospitality Centre (a Centre designed to provide hospitality training within a converged academic and vocational curriculum). Outcomes they desired included multi-aging, collaboration, ownership by students and self-direction of learning, looking at food and produce as the content area.

What emerged from the visit was the students’ desire to run their own restaurant. This was not what the teachers had imagined at all. Further discussion with the students revealed a determination to make the project succeed; the staff jumped on board and great things started to happen. Students, even as young as these, had quite a good sense of what might be involved in running a restaurant, and working committees quickly were formed covering vital areas such as invitations,
waiters, cooks, publicity etc. Possibilities for parent involvement were explored informally at first with staff and parents attending a dinner in the Hospitality Centre, and this quickly blossomed into full support and involvement by parents who worked with the students and teachers on committees, working bees etc.

A key principle at work was the teacher letting go and allowing the students to set the directions. Teachers as facilitators believe in the capacity of their students. They do not supply answers, nor do they believe that there is a correct answer. They talk constantly with each other, embedding fully into their work an ‘Action – Reflection’ cycle that operates seamlessly within the program but is a constant focus for formal staff meetings. As facilitators, teachers foster collaborative learning skills such as listening, modeling, negotiation and recognising strengths

It is worth noting the enormous value of this story in illustrating much of what is considered to be of significance in the learning equation for the 21st century. Students are engaged, they make choices and negotiate, they have time to tackle a big project and see it through to completion, they use authentic assessment, and they apply their existing knowledge and extend it. The project is dynamic, demanding interconnectedness. It allows for both individual and team learning where the expressive and imaginative domains are engaged. Students learn to view and interpret reality from different stances. Teachers facilitate learning, fostering engagement and connection. They cater to individual strengths, recognising multiple intelligences and different learning styles. They share in the learning, inviting further exploration by the students. They seize the “magic moments” recognising the breakthroughs in the group. They exercise control over themselves and their work, not over the students.

Why are rich and valuable learning experiences such as the aforementioned more the exception than the norm? Why do we start to tell students rather than help them to find out for themselves? Why do we tend to hear the answers we expect, the ‘correct’ answers, and not seize the many magic moments in the classroom? Why do we start to impose a content-driven curriculum, forcing us to leave aside the capacity to follow the interest of the learners? Is it inevitable that this should happen?

**Rationale**

We are in the 21st century dominated by the global knowledge economy. Knowledge is today’s valuable commodity. It is seen in the value of shares, as intellectual assets and in the value of an organisation as its intellectual property. In much of schooling, however, it is simply seen as the content of a subject and the aged routines of managing young people in a similar way to which factories were managed half a century ago.

While the world has moved very rapidly into the 21st century knowledge era, schools have tended to be comfortable with the industrial era of hierarchy, control and structure. While Australia and most nations demand knowledge workers, self-managing, self-directed, innovative and entrepreneurial young people, our schools lock young people into structured curriculum and assessment; people
hierarchies where young people are at the bottom; litigious environments where young people are mothballed.

It is hard to blame schools, as they have never been regarded as agents of change. Their own experience of change has been incremental and slow to a point where change becomes lost in the familiar ways of doing things. This is illustrated in secondary schooling where exciting and challenging middle years curriculum is viewed as subject preparation and assessment for finishing school examinations in Year 12. There is a huge issue with those of us schooled in the industrial world’s beliefs about intelligence and the predominance of traditional subject knowledge. We know, for example, that even in the sciences we need entrepreneurial and creative young scientists rather than subject experts. Yet, we resist the changes that are needed to allow such talents to grow.

Parents, media commentators and community members expect much from schools, however, they want them to operate like the institutions of their own childhood experience. Despite recognising the enormous transformation occurring in the global society, including the magnitude of changes in the youth labour market, adult people expect schools to provide traditional authority, structure, uniforms and discipline. The highest expectation is to provide young people access to “valued” university courses. Why do we still have the least creative of university courses and the most difficult entry? Medicine, law, veterinary science and the like do not add to our global economy base. Medical science does, but there is a great chasm between it and medicine!

Schooling today has to respond to the world of the 21st century. This is the world and future of young people. We have to work with them to help them develop their own world-view (Beare, 2000) and to develop their talents and dispositions to be able to work with and lead change. To move into this new knowledge world and escape from the industrial world, schools need to closely consider the following change issue:

First, there must be a commitment from the school to completely refocus from an environment that values adult knowledge and authority to one that shares knowledge creation and authority with young people.

Second, schools need to provide the culture that allows young people to take risks: to have space, time and the freedom to explore. Freedom is a key environmental feature of the knowledge era school and a difficult one to manage, not only in relation to issues such as levels of maturity, authority and safety, but also because we live in an increasingly litigious society and managers and teachers are tempted to be over-cautious.

Third, schools need to develop a culture of change. Change needs to be central to all that young people experience in school because through it young people will develop resiliency, adaptability and personal flexibility to become not only people who can cope with change but agents of it.
Fourth, schools should be able to model the world in which young people live and in which they will work. There needs to be a LifeWork focus and an environment enabled by information and communication technology, that is, one in touch with a global society.

Fifth, a willingness to revisit what knowledge means in a schooling context and to acknowledge that intelligence is beyond academic and about multiple intelligences and individual talents that can operate in a social, collaborative sense. It is about converging academic and vocational.

Sixth, a focus on knowledge era teaching and learning skills that include: collaboration and teaming; sharing leadership; negotiating to arrive at shared expectations; engagement and participation management (managing learning rather than classrooms); creating and managing knowledge; developing Individual Learning programs; innovation and creativity; risk-taking and entrepreneurialism; adaptability and managing complexity; teaching for self-awareness and self-evaluation; critical thinking; nurturing talent and the individual, and; teaching for self-management and self-directed learning.

There has to be substantial change in terms of each of these issues if we are going to significantly transform schools for the 21st century. Professor Hedley Beare in Creating the Future School (2001) creates a scenario around Angelica that sets a scene of urgency:

Hullo. I am Angelica. I am five years old. I really don’t have much of a past. In fact, I am the future…In future days I will admire you for being able to look forward with me and help me define what I need to learn…My world is already very different from the one you have grown up in.

This paper presents a story of transformation of one school. It is the story of ELTHAM College of Education. ELTHAM is a Kindergarten to Year 12 independent co-educational school of some 1100 students in northeast Melbourne. It has the courage and, therefore, the freedom to dream and set its own strategic directions.

A new start

In 1999 the Board of the College searched for a new Principal/CEO to commence in 2000. The charter for the new Principal was to re-establish a school that put the student first, was relevant to the 21st century, became a leader of schooling innovation and managed a changing population demographic. The Principal, therefore, commenced with the direction to transform and create a new vision for the school in the 21st century.

A new vision

The vision directed attention to the student as a collaborative individual with talents to grow and share within the environment of the global knowledge.
economy. The school had to focus on the new world of young people, enabled by modern and rapidly growing information and communication technology capabilities. This new world had to be seen in the dual context of the world of young people now (an ever changing kaleidoscope) and the skills and attitudes they would need to manage themselves in their future world. The key mover was the development of young people with the disposition and skill to be self-directed learners. In our examination focused system this was taking the rhetoric of the 'life-long learner' into uncharted waters. The Victorian assessment system had just become completely teacher directed. How could a school create self-direction and at the same time meet the demands of the external examination system?

The school community from 2000 began to read stories such as this one:

As a school we are not imposing a world-view, but rather recognising that we exist in a society that has changed dramatically and is continuing to alter at an immeasurable rate. Our responsibility is to teach for the strengths that will enable young people today to live, work and play successfully and with confidence in a global environment of massive change, an environment that is dominated by knowledge and the easy transfer of information.

A simple illustration is in Information Technology:

Students can tell us and show us more about how to exploit technology to our own ends than most of us could dream of. We have, for example, two Year 10 students developing a self-learning computer package for the Internet to enable us to develop skills in using all the major functions inherent in Microsoft Office. They are using teachers as resources in terms of pedagogy, but are creating the package using their own skills.

Few of us, as adults or teachers, have these skills so we have to learn to accept and work with people where we can integrate our different levels of expertise and value the contributions of each other. We learn to share authority and expertise.

Students do not live in the industrial era that dominated our experiences, where control prevailed rather than the sharing of authority and expertise. We should not attempt to shackle them within this out-dated model of the industrial world because it is more comfortable for us. We, as responsible adults – parents and educators –, have to create ways in which the two can co-exist while we catch up as best we can. The new paradigm of the knowledge world values different types and levels of expertise and the skills of collaboration and negotiation. The new paradigm for schooling is no different to that confronting society as a whole: people have to be able to manage themselves (Drucker, 2000) and a key element of this is self-directed learning.

In a few hundred years, when the history of our time will be written from a long-term perspective, it is likely that the most important event historians will see is not technology, not the Internet, not e-commerce. It is an
unprecedented change in the human condition. For the first time – literally – substantial and rapidly growing numbers of people have choices. For the first time, they will have to manage themselves. And society is totally unprepared for it.” (Peter Drucker 2000)

The vision and the culture
The new Principal started the year’s traditional Flag Pole Assembly with a bright yellow “GameBoy”. The message: no adult teaches young people how to use them, solve their problems or how to play together. It is the same today with their more mobile communication technologies. Young people are good learners, great teachers, competent problem solvers and good collaborators. Schooling needs to work with this and ensure young people continue as self-directed learners.

“Kid, you have these tremendous skills. I have some other skills. Working together we can learn for the 21st century.”

SELF, PEER AND TEACHER ASSESSMENT IN YEAR 5
All major learning tasks include some form of self and peer assessment as well as teacher assessment. Students know the assessment criteria beforehand. Sometimes these are negotiated “What makes a really effective brochure”: at other times, they are teacher nominated. In their Expert Planetary Investigations, students were required to present a PowerPoint Presentation addressing criteria under the broad headings of content, presentation and specific ICT skills.

Their self-assessment component saw them complete the same assessment sheet as their teacher. They are often a little hard on themselves, though more realistic with peers. To be able to recognise good work and give oneself credit for a good job is quite challenging at this age.

Peer assessment happens when the students present their work to the class, but it is an active assessment as each student is required to complete a Profiling the Planets data chart, relying only on the information presented by their peers. This allows them to make really useful judgments about the effectiveness of each other’s work.

Discussion with the teacher allows the students to focus on their learning and to set goals for the next learning task. In addition, they record their skill development on a Skills Checklist where progress indicators range from “I’ve never heard of it” to “Evidence of this in my work”. In this way, students are constantly updating their résumé of skills.

At a staff meeting the previous day “the student as client” was a central theme: young people need to be able to negotiate their learning with the school and its staff. While the last few years has seen change in teacher beliefs, the notion of the student as client raised several hackles, chief amongst them being “this is a business-world term and we are about educating the whole person” and “but it is our curriculum and what do they really know about the curriculum.” Despite the
history of vocational education in senior schooling since the mid 1980s, schools have resisted the association between what they do and the world of business and industry outside. Teachers do not really like seeing their students as “clients” because that relates to a different world than their school world and gives new rights to young people.

The term “young people” also was interesting. Language is a big part of our schooling culture. Young people are really students and/or children! So to refer to them as young people, clients and collaborators raises questions about their relative position within a school. The familiar terms are authority terms: the adult is in charge of the *child*; the teacher is in charge of the *student*. However, young people’s exposure to the world does not leave them feeling comfortable with traditional notions of schooling where someone else has the authority rather than authority being shared. Nevertheless, this also is part of their experience of schooling and they often grudgingly accept it or get into conflict with adults by rejecting it. Hence, the frequent media reports on so-called “discipline” problems in schools with media doing surveys, for example, which show that everyone wants schools to have tougher discipline policies.

Young people bring enormous skill, talent and refreshing attitude to their schooling experience, but we quickly, although often unintentionally, put them back into a student-child position. We use our language and behaviour as adults to draw clear lines between them and us. This is not saying that teachers are not often very friendly and supportive in doing this, but they clearly do have their expectations of who has the authority.

At ELTHAM we set out to change this culture.

The Executive Director, Learning Programs, brought into an Executive meeting the small book *Who moved my cheese?* She was impressed with it because it directed attention to a number of the issues we were facing in helping people face change. At the next staff meeting the Principal talked to staff about the story and that several copies had been purchased for them by the library.

It didn’t really impress staff until the story was told to students. Young people still remember it and actually understand why it was told.

There were two deliberate approaches to creating a change culture so that transformation could occur. The first was to use young people themselves as agents of change. The second was to change conditions under which the school operated.

Students as agents of change

The GameBoy episode and “Who moved my cheese?” were powerful stories to tell to young people. They were exposed to a Principal telling them that it was all right to expect to be treated differently and telling them about how they should be treated. They heard about the values of the College and about a program we
introduced called PeaceBuilders ® that required all of us to be peace builders and to work to the simple principles associated with PeaceBuilders. These principles were: praise people, give up put-downs, seek wise people, notice hurts and right wrongs. The Principal gave them approval to pull up him and anyone else who did not work to these principles and slowly they did. This included the Principal who one day asked a student to leave a meeting because of a uniform indiscretion: the kids saw him afterwards and said, “You were not a Peacebuilder! Didn’t you know that XXX had been kicked out of home? You should have checked first.” Pretty powerful stuff! If they could do this with the Principal, they would also confront others.

At the same time we started talking about developing the disposition and skill for self-directed learning. We talked with our young people about their responsibility for their learning—at different ages, we talked in different ways, however, and it was always the same message. Teachers had to prepare activities within their curriculum to teach for self-direction.

The Principal also opened the door to students, including student leaders. There was a comfortable style for students. The down side was that teachers thought the students were talking about them as individuals, but the reality was that students just felt good about being able to discuss issues. Few teachers took up the invitation to also come in. Teacher cultures have been around for a lot longer than student cultures. If young people are able to change so much with their new world and the enabling capacities of ICT and media, then changing expectations about schooling should not be all that difficult. At least in theory!

A traditional approach in the school was to have Heads of Subject Departments write annual reports. We were struck by the negative way in which boys were classified. Statistical analyses had been conducted in some Departments on grades for achievement and effort. Amazingly, the boys didn’t fare all that well, particularly for effort. Accompanying this finding was the observation of young men in senior years displaying lots of negativity and aggressive behaviour. Some came and talked about how from their first year in Year 7 they had been regarded as a “bad” lot.

So, we focused on “not leaving boys behind” and in talking with parents one of our female teachers coined: “We now have affirmative action for both boys and girls.” That was a pretty good start and the response from teachers was quick and very impressive. Students began to expect this treatment and to receive praise rather than put-downs. We believe that it has made a difference to the way in which young men see themselves and their level of self-esteem.

A small group of young people came with a uniform issue (the dreaded curse of all schooling). They didn’t like the socks! So, we changed them and quite quickly. It helped develop that sense of “We can get things to happen.”
Now, all these things depend on a particular approach to leadership. We could take a scenario with the “socks” and refer it to staff or the uniform committee. On the other hand, we could just make the decision.

Change leadership is not about reaching consensus or having democratic processes. Empowering students, for example, is not about passing it on to staff first or putting it into a committee.

Three things stand out with students as agents of change:
- establishing expectations with young people that things will be different e.g. “These are our shared values. If I don’t live up to them you need to say so.”
- opening the door for students to walk in, trust you and share with you e.g. working with them as equals without playing roles. It is about style.
- making a change that students requested e.g. a uniform change.

So, what happens when young people in school are empowered to challenge it?

We said that the most important outcomes from schooling are having the disposition and skill to be a self-directed learner and being able to self-manage your LifeWork. In addition, teachers have to model this goal. Amazing how people can misinterpret as part of resistance: some said “They are self-directed, let them go” and hoped it would fall over. Young people are resilient and it didn’t. The concept of LifeWork is now integral to our curriculum from the early years. Our LifeWork Centre formally strats its counseling work with Year 9 helping young people, in-collaboration with their parents, link living, working and learning through the senior years and into the post school life long learning environment.

**SELF – PACED LEARNING IN SENIOR YEARS**

Senior students who choose Multimedia work towards a dual credential by successfully completing their studies. In addition to contributing to the Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER), used by tertiary institutions as part of their selection, the successful student develops work related competencies and skills and receives a nationally recognised Certificate III in Multimedia.

Students provide evidence of their competency in a variety of nominated skills by completing a series of assessment tasks. For his Write, Content and Copy unit of competency requiring him to write for multimedia within a design focus, David worked with a ‘client’, a staff member with responsibility for the Care Program in the senior years, to develop a Care web site.

The process involved an initial interview with the client, a response by David to the brief that was confirmed by the client, then a series of mock-ups in his visual diary as he worked towards the finished product that can be seen at www.elthammultimedia.com\davidy This competency has a notional time allocation of 50 hours. Although David’s timetable shows Multimedia as one of his subjects, he is not required to “in class” at that time. He may be meeting with his client, he may be working elsewhere in the school, and he might even be
doing French. He works in a self-paced environment where he manages his time and the available resources to get the work done.

His Multimedia classroom operates as a drop-in studio, where he has access to not only the hardware and software needed to complete the task, but to qualified staff with whom he can consult. They may offer extended hours as the deadline for competencies approaches. David owns his work; he accepts accountability for managing himself. He knows, however, that he can access any amount of support from his teachers and other critical adults in his world. He knows that there is a ‘safety net’ should he make mistakes or poor decisions.

His issues will not be solved for him, but his teachers and mentors will work with him to identify the problems, scope a range of strategies to address these problems and set up an action plan to implement the best strategy. Life after school will expect him to have these skills, whether he enters the workforce or further study.

We took other straightforward steps. Sport was made non-compulsory in the senior years, but students still had to find ways to meet our commitment to the sporting body to which we belonged. Sport became a negotiated exercise and, in some instances, we ran risks with our sporting body because of the number of forfeits. However, we worked through these with our students and now have few issues. Our collegiate schools also began to recognise, through pressure from their young men and women, that the notion of compulsory in the senior years could be modified.

Detentions, a traditional symbol of school and teacher authority through punishment, were stopped. First, by direction to the Senior School and then, by those that ran detentions in the middle years recognising that there was little point running detentions for the same group of kids, for the same teachers and the same offences. So, they stopped happening and teachers had to accept responsibility for working with their own young people. This was, and indeed for some, still is a huge issue: what consequences can we use? It took a long time for some to recognise that young people and adult people could negotiate expectations and consequences. It also took a long time for some people to recognise that it was not about punishment but learning. We spent considerable time on the issue of justice versus fair. We had to, and continue to have to, help our entire community understand that the world of behaviour for young people is not about “black and white” (a somewhat different matter for Occupational Health and Safety matters that apply to all of us), but varying shades of grey. If we are going to pursue a learning philosophy and approach that directs attention to the individual in collaboration with others, we had to do the same with social behaviour. Every similar action would not have the same consequence because the individuals and the context were different. Of course, this raises the old ‘bogey’ about consistency, but it passes with time and re-education.

However, these were peripheral to the big picture transformation agenda, even though they were important catalysts in their own way.
As this was occurring, it was important to ensure that staff understood that change was seriously going to happen and become part of the culture: Heads of Department positions were abolished, professional teachers were asked to team and own their jobs.

This change brought with it a major message: we were serious about transformation. Further, as a school we will model the world for which young people are preparing.

The response from young people was positive. There was a “student voice”. For a long time it was more informal than formal. They felt able, individually and in groups, to talk with adults whom they felt would help them make a difference. Tom and his friends (Year 8 and now Year 12) had a story to tell and they told it at a seminar for school leaders (The Challenge to Re-Imagine the School, Professor Brian Caldwell, February 2005).

We felt that some teachers were not listening to us in terms of how we wanted to be treated and also how we felt we could be better challenged in our work. We went to the Principal and through him we met with a senior student who needed to do a drama project with a large group and the team leaders of the Years 7-8 clusters. We put on a workshop with role-plays of the issues we were most concerned about. It worked for some staff and students, but not for others. The latter needed more time and some were angry that the workshop had been allowed and some students gave up on the exercise.

Formally, the Student Advisory Council became the Student Council elected democratically and it was accorded status. School Captains became strategic partners with the school senior leadership and became part of the College Board’s annual Business Planning process. Now school policy has young people on all committees or groups that have anything to do with decision-making or policy in relation to young people.

Now we have staff that provide leadership with young people, involve them and work with them. It is a different type of relationship because it is much less about traditional teacher authority and more about how teachers can lead.

But, students have more say than us!

The Executive Director, Human Resources responded at a staff meeting: **You need to recognise that the school is not about you but about students. We now have a student focused culture rather than a teacher focused culture.** He reinforced the “student as client” message.

So, an important question was: what is our structure to support our new culture?
The structure of the College was about young people. We grouped young people according to their developmental stages allowing room within for both extremes of development and we said to staff: You must select a student group with which to work. We now are focused on student needs. If you cannot do this, then you must look for another job. This is not-negotiable. The secondary cry was what about our careers and our subject expertise? Legitimate in terms of how teaching and management careers in secondary school were viewed. However, the response was “we will help you gain the experiences you need for your career, but the school is about what is best for young people.”

Years 3/4 - The History Centre
Students in years 3 and 4 gain a fascinating insight into the early days of European Settlement on The History Centre. Students and teachers create spectacular historic environments of the Endeavour, early Sydney town and the Goldfields. An innovative, dramatic simulation allows teachers and students to role-play, negotiating their way through realistic historical events of early pioneer and convict life. The program promotes hands-on independent learning and integrates the wider curriculum to include journal keeping, numeracy, art, music and Mandarin Chinese.

Teachers act as facilitators, asking leading questions and guiding frameworks. In role, they are commissioners – government workers in charge of assay prices etc. They are an unhappy lot, often gruff and authoritarian. They are bad-tempered and shout a bit! One student in role noticed how unhappy one of the commissioners seemed to be so she started writing love-letters to the commissioner. Not one of the teachers had anticipated this! The commissioner responded and within two weeks had received a proposal of marriage. A group of ten or so students planned all aspects of the wedding including costumes, period music, invitations and the actual ceremony. Every member of the community had an assigned role on the day.

Curriculum outcomes evolved rapidly to match the changing daily events, so writing styles incorporated letters of invitation etc. Everyone involved will remember the wedding, its lead-up period, the context and the characters. Teachers and students together seized the magic moments and created a learning-rich spectacle.

Some teachers asked: Can we slow down this change? Can we consolidate now? The answer: “No. Change is now part of our culture because we are modeling also the world of work in which young people now live and which they will experience themselves.”

We have organised ELTHAM in relation to the best interests of young people: early and junior years (Kindergarten to Year 4), the middle years (5-8), Year 9 was on its own at our City Campus, the senior college (Years10-12). Within each were other, smaller self-managing teams, as for example, Years 5-6 were a separate team within a larger middle years team. Teachers chose their group or left. Outcomes were relevant to each grouping. The VCE became important once students reached the Senior School in Year 10. This was
prefaced by: As young people, their world and their interaction with their world changes so will our structures. Perhaps in X years, Year 8 will be in the City, Year 9 in senior school and Year 11’s will finish their VCE.

This is Year 9: learn to learn and find some independence. Year 9 didn’t really challenge me academically. It was all right, but Year 9 challenged me as a person. I learned about me and how I work with others. It was more about EQ (emotional intelligence) than my subjects. Year 9 became an independent, full-year program largely away from the main campus with one-semester in the City and one in the bush. Previously, a feature term or third-of-a year in the city was destroyed by the teacher, indeed parent attitude: “Now you are back here and you can learn normally with real subjects...Now we have to work very hard to make up for what you have missed.”

NEGOTIATED LEARNING IN YEAR 9
In 1996, ELTHAM launched its City Campus. Year 9 students, aged fourteen, ready for independence, new stimulus and challenge, spent one third of their year at the heart of Melbourne’s Central Business District. Combining collaborative teamwork (e.g. group projects) with independent research, the students responded through a thematic approach to their curriculum to the city’s colourful past, present and future. The themes investigated Melbourne as a visionary and livable city.

The City Campus program quickly became a highlight of Middle School for students. Once there, they are purposefully engaged in producing work of a very high standard. They work collaboratively in small teams, negotiating their learning tasks. They regularly choose to work through lunch-breaks, and those with a reputation of ‘being difficult’ seem to thrive. Parents comment on their child’s newfound independence and, for the first time in years, are hearing about what has happened at school that day. Teachers in the program quickly learned to move beyond the traditional transmission of information. They scaffold the students’ learning experiences, they respond to the changing world of the city on a daily basis, they facilitate effective group work and they answer questions with more questions.

In 2002, a whole-year program was developed, incorporating an innovative Environmental Program at our main campus that complements perfectly the urban environment of the city, offering 20 hectares of environmental reserve, an established vineyard and a local area rich in indigenous history and the arts. The same principles of facilitating student learning continued, but the students are challenged by an entirely different environment and context.

The Family Project addresses the importance of belonging (safety, growth, creativity, support, and confidence) to a variety of communities, the most immediate one being the family. Students form co-operative working groups to create a fictitious family and the dice is rolled to determine the family income and number of children. Within these parameters, students are then given the job of working out how the family can sustain itself for one year. This includes budgeting for all family needs, including dealing with tax and insurance. Students
are encouraged to use all the resources at their disposal, including asking for advice from their own families and making phone calls to appropriate organisations.

The findings are presented in a dossier format, incorporating the rationale, budgeting strategies, calculations and bibliography. The family is thrown into disarray by taking on a surprise element and has to create strategies to overcome the situation. This offers the opportunity to discuss such community issues as alcoholism, drugs, violence, gambling, illness and unwanted pregnancy. Students are encouraged to analyse the situation and look at various solutions to the problems that arise, including learning about the various support networks that exist in the community. The groups rehearse and express their solution through a role-play, accompanied by a written report and bibliography. At all stages of their learning students are aware of the learning outcomes and the assessment criteria.

The precise nature of their work is not pre-determined; it develops as the team of students engages with the task, draws on a wide variety of resources and discusses their learning with their teacher. The final outcome is negotiated along the way. Exercising choice and allowing for personal experience and interests ensures commitment and engagement for the duration of the project.

Now Year 9 spends a full year in the heart of the City, visiting the main campus one-day a week.

Then came Year 10: flap your wings and learn to fly, flex your muscles and make mistakes. Learn to manage freedom. But, can’t we (said teachers) learn from last year and now manage them. Give them freedom more gradually.

Some people wanted to control their freedom despite Lea, Year 9, saying:

_We like to be consulted on problems that concern us rather than having decisions made for us. We also don’t want to be treated like kids anymore; we want to be treated with a degree of trust. We’d like to be disciplined like adults and stop having disruptions during classes. We expect that students in Year 10 are ready and willing to learn and that they will be mature and responsible about their schooling._

Teachers began to learn to live with change and work with young people. Why would you take away from young people the opportunity to learn to make good decisions for themselves? Many began to revisit the story of the lost cheese. We have just commenced a process of reducing and eventually ending the traditional custodial role of teachers for supervising young people out of the classroom, indicating to our teachers that their value is in the teaching-learning interactions and in the caring relationships rather than in the custodial.

_We worked also to a principle that said: If it is important for young people and their learning, we need to do it right away not just plan to do it._
One of the issues associated with transformation is that of people’s beliefs that it should happen quickly and then all will be well. This first happened with self-directed learning. Right through the school there was a feeling that if we talked about it, it would happen. Perhaps the best example came at Year 10, the start of the senior years. There was a general belief that when we had experienced doing things differently once or even twice we would know what to do and we would not have any more problems. It has taken time for teachers in particular to recognise that each year the new cohort of students coming through have to experience the same freedoms and challenges if they are going to learn. Each cohort needs to experience the freedoms to explore, take risks and begin to learn to better manage themselves.

Are parents content? Parent Forums and focused independent surveys have become very supportive and positive. In Year 7-8 Parent 2004 Survey, the researcher said: A number of findings of this report are providing very specific and real support for this notion that Knowledge Era culture is becoming part of the ELTHAM parent experience. More than two-thirds of parents rated the development of self-direction as one of the two most desirable goals for their child. The second most desirable goal was creative and innovative individuals. There is still some concern that discipline is not strong enough, as for example in the way we manage students wearing their uniform. Despite being able to articulate the value in teaching for self-direction, they still want a sense of traditional discipline. However, there is emerging a sense that students can self-discipline.

And teachers? Still coming to terms with it. 83% in an independent survey said they enjoyed their workplace; 88% said the College encourages their creativity and innovation, but still listed student discipline as the thing that they disliked, most wanting greater control exerted by management. Only 34% felt supported in managing students. Kids can own, teachers have greater difficulty. Leaders must learn to work more closely and provide guidance and support, but there is no half-way point if the school is going to have the student as the most important unit of organisation. It is their new world. We should not want to teach them for our world.

And young people? I remind people of Sophie (Year 8): “At some schools they have forgotten what their job is. They keep making rules thinking they will make their school and their students perfect but it doesn’t work that way at all… Not only is a controlled school harder for the teacher, it also stifles student learning. No one likes it or benefits.”

Our surveys of students who have finished school indicate that they feel comfortable in their self management and their capacity as self directed learners whether at University, VET or in the work place. They contrast the greater ease of their transition to post-school living, learning and working that their colleagues from more traditional industrial era school backgrounds.
And, of course, talk with the young people!

**Conclusion**

None of us in schools would deny that the world has changed and is rapidly changing. In Australia, for example, we have gone from 15% to over 70% of homes with young people, having Internet connectivity. The February 2006 announcement of Internet connectivity to elementary schools in Mexico again illustrates the enormous access that young people will experience. In fact, Mexico may offer the most promising model to Latin America for overcoming some of the major obstacles to connectivity and the global knowledge economy.

Young people are of the Internet age, with its access to immediacy of information, and the mobile phone, with its access to immediacy of communication. Now the PC and phone are combined! We all recognise that there are negatives. When haven’t there been negatives with change? However, these negatives aside, young people are different and permanently changed. They are no longer simply going through a phase of development like previous generations. They are of this new world.

One seriously can ponder the question of just how much do young people need our schools? The answer will be that they do need schooling, but not our industrially managed 20th century schools. They need schools that will respect their talents, work with them, provide learning experiences that converge living and working through both curriculum and exposure to the rich world outside of school, provide and value learning experiences for Emotional Intelligence and which work for young people being able to self-manage, not simply pass teacher directed assessments.

21st century schooling is about:

- sharing knowledge creation and authority with young people.
- the culture that allows young people to take risks: to have space, time and the freedom to explore.
- a culture of change where young people are able to develop resiliency, adaptability and personal flexibility to become not only people who can cope with change but become agents of it.
- modeling the world in which young people live and in which they will work.
- acknowledging that intelligence is beyond academic but about multiple intelligences and individual talents that can operate in a social, collaborative sense. It is about converging academic and vocational.
- knowledge era teaching and learning skills. These include:
  - collaboration and teaming;
  - sharing leadership;
✓ negotiating to arrive at shared expectations;
✓ engagement management (managing learning rather than classrooms);
✓ creating and managing knowledge;
✓ teaching for self-awareness and self-evaluation;
✓ teaching for self-management and self-directed learning.

ELTHAM, in a western country, has demonstrated that schooling transformation for the knowledge era is possible. It also has demonstrated that transformation of schooling should and can occur in any culture in the global knowledge economy. If we are to connect with young people in their 21st century world, we must transform ourselves and their schools.

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