

Generations in Dialogue about the Future: *The hopes and fears of young Australians*

Richard Eckersley,
Helen Cahill, Ani Wierenga and Johanna Wyn

with contributions from

Michael Waugh,
Dan Woodman,
Julian Waters-Lynch,
Janet McCalman,
and Jennifer Gidley

and

five students from a Melbourne High School

April 2007



*A project by Australia 21 Ltd
and the Australian Youth Research Centre,
funded by The University of Melbourne*

First published April 2007 by the Australian Youth Research Centre and Australia 21

ISBN 978 0 7340 3740 4

Electronic version available at:
www.australia21.org.au

Contact details:

Australia 21 Ltd

PO Box 3244
Weston ACT 2611

Phone: +61 2 6288 0823
Email: office@australia21.org.au
Web: www.australia21.org.au

Australian Youth Research Centre

Faculty of Education
University of Melbourne VIC 3010

Phone: +61 3 8344 9633
Fax: +61 3 8344 9632
Email: ycr@edfac.unimelb.edu.au
Web: www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/ycr/

© Australia 21 Ltd and Australian Youth Research Centre

All rights reserved. No part of this report may be reproduced or utilised in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from Australia 21 Ltd and the Australian Youth Research Centre.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of Australia 21 Ltd, the Australian Youth Research Centre, the Faculty of Education or The University of Melbourne.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	5
Introduction	11
<i>Pathways to the preferred futures of young Australians</i>	11
<i>Our approach to this report</i>	12
<i>Future and narrative studies</i>	13
<i>Future visions and wellbeing</i>	16
<i>Futures polls: losing faith in the official future?</i>	17
Youth Futures Consultation Day	21
<i>The workshop story</i>	21
Different Voices and Stories	31
<i>Doug's Reflection</i>	31
<i>Michael's Story</i>	31
<i>Bill's Reflection</i>	34
<i>Dan's Story</i>	35
<i>Julian's Story</i>	38
<i>Ani's Story</i>	40
<i>John's reflection</i>	43
<i>Richard's Story</i>	44
<i>Dave's reflection</i>	46
<i>Janet's Story</i>	47
<i>Jane's reflection</i>	49
<i>Jennifer's Story</i>	50
Implications	53
<i>Policy Implications</i>	54
<i>Research</i>	57
References	59

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the following people to this project:

- The 21 young people involved in this project
- Staff and Students at 'Seaside' High School
- David Newman
- Kate Donelan
- All others on the Research Panel
- Ipsos Mackay Research
- Glyn Davis, Vice Chancellor, The University of Melbourne

We also wish to thank Helen Stokes and Julie Marr at the Australian Youth Research Centre for administrative and managerial support.

Executive Summary

This project aims to improve the understanding of young people's sense of what the future holds for them. An innovative approach was designed specifically to open dialogue across traditional disciplinary and age boundaries and to bridge the gap between the agendas and preoccupations of academics and policy-makers and those of young people.

The project suggests that:

- young people value the opportunity to discuss the future with each other and with adults;
- they need to be given more of these opportunities, including in schools, families and communities, as part of making sense and meaning of the world and their lives; and
- they deserve a greater voice on matters of most concern to them.

Creating more spaces for dialogue would increase their engagement and capacity to act in the face of daunting challenges.

The project is the second within a research program, *Australians in society*, initiated by Australia 21, a non-profit, public-interest research company. The first project, *Pathways to success and wellbeing for Australia's young people*, sought to identify ways to help young people to optimise their wellbeing and to realise their full potential against a background of often adverse trends in their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

This project takes up themes discussed in the first project: the importance of cultural 'intangibles' to wellbeing, and the role of narrative in their lives. Like the first project, this project has the Australian Youth Research Centre as a collaborator. Funding came from The University of Melbourne.

Project aim and structure

The project aims to further the understanding of young people's views of the future and how these views are woven into the stories they create to make sense and meaning of their lives. This integration matters not only to young people themselves (by enhancing their sense of belonging, identity and control over their lives, for example), but also to Australian society (by engaging young people in the shared task of building a better future for the nation and the planet).

Thus, while the project is focused on young people's future visions, this focus is also a vehicle for exploring broader questions of identity, belonging, meaning and values. Their stories about the future allow the exploration of qualities that research has traditionally examined through objective parameters such as education and labour-force participation, marriage and parenthood.

The project includes several elements:

- a workshop using 'role-based enquiry', a drama technique that allowed students from a Melbourne high school to create, show, narrate and interpret their views of the future;
- a research panel (from futures studies, youth studies, education, psychology, history and drama) who also participated in the workshop;
- literature reviews; and
- surveys of young people's attitudes to trends in quality of life, the future of Australia and the world, and the impacts of science and technology.

Thus the project marries the sciences with the humanities and the arts, and quantitative with qualitative approaches.

This report describes the project activities and offers options for further development of the project. The report is presented in a way that gives the reader the opportunity to access the nature of the dialogue between adults from different academic disciplines and young people about young people's futures.

Rather than wash out the different points of view through the production of a synthesis, the report presents these different perspectives in the words of the different authors. There are many points of agreement woven through these narratives, and there are differences of interpretation by participants on key issues. This mode of presentation enables us to maintain integrity with the methodology employed in the project.

The context

Futures studies reveal the different ways in which researchers have approached the future and in which people construe the future. They note the human susceptibility to Apocalyptic ideas and, at the same time, the mythic need for Utopian ideals, both of which are embodied in stories. Narrative

studies have demonstrated the power of stories to transport ideas across time and space, construct meaning and identity, shape communities, enrich social life, define social issues, and even put together shattered lives.

Young people's concerns about the future of the world and humanity matter. The erosion of faith in society and its future influences the way people see their roles and responsibilities, and their relationship to social institutions, especially government. It denies them a social ideal to believe in and a wider framework of meaning in their lives, so increasing the psychological 'load' on personal expectations.

This issue has taken on added urgency because people's perceptions of the future are increasingly shaped by the images of global or distant threat and disaster to which they are exposed: earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, disease pandemics, terrorist attacks, genocide, and famine. While these hazards are not new, previous fears were never so sustained and varied, nor so powerfully reinforced by the frequency, immediacy and vividness of today's media images. This effect seems certain to intensify as global warming and other threats begin to impact more deeply on people's lives.

The polls

The project includes a quantitative component to assess the attitudes of young Australians to personal, national and global futures and if these attitudes have changed over time. These surveys also explore more specific questions about science and technology and their impacts. This part of the project provides a broader context to the qualitative research, a less rich but more representative picture of young people's views.

Most young Australians are personally optimistic about their own lives, but a growing proportion appears to believe quality of life is declining, despite a long

economic boom that has seen sustained, strong economic growth, declining unemployment and rising incomes. The gap between their expected and preferred futures for Australia has widened, and concerns about the future of the world have increased.

The results suggest a deepening rift between political action, with its focus on economic indicators, and public opinion about quality of life. They point to growing loss of faith in a future constructed around notions of material progress, economic growth and scientific and technological fixes to the challenges of this century. Many young people (and older) no longer believe in the 'official story' of the future on which governments base their policies.

The workshop

The responses of the young people who participated in the workshop are consistent with other research that suggests that young people are growing up in a context that individualises responsibility, but offers few clear answers to the 'big picture' challenges. They were interested in taking an active role in building a sustainable future, both environmentally and socially, yet most found it very difficult to name ways in which they could personally contribute to a wider agenda of constructing preferred futures and actively link the personal to the local to the global.

The workshop highlights the importance of developing processes that enable cross-disciplinary and inter-generational dialogue in a structured way that promotes active listening, the recognition of shared concerns and collective responsibility for developing solutions. It demonstrates that these structured processes can lead to hope, a sense of possibility, and an interest in taking action.

Young people's reflections indicate that they particularly value the opportunity to engage seriously with older people about ethical, social, political and environmental issues.

They would like to be heard by older people, but they also want to hear what older people think. This raises a critical question: how does society generally provide the spaces within which young and older people can engage in meaningful dialogue?

The project has significant messages for those involved in the development and implementation of youth policy, across all jurisdictions, for the private sector and for research. In particular, the young people revealed that they:

- Have a strong sense of personal responsibility for building positive futures, for themselves and their society. They have concerns about both personal issues (for example, getting a good job or doing well in their studies) and about community and global issues (for example, poverty, the environment and terrorism), but feel relatively helpless to address the 'big picture' issues and disempowered beyond individual responses.
- Enjoy sharing and creating stories from their own experience and hearing those passed on through family and community. Stories about overcoming adversity and about hope for the future are an important resource on which they draw in solving their own problems and in understanding how to take action.
- Find that a sense of agency, commitment and hope is generated when they engage in dialogue across the boundaries of age groupings, location and expertise.

The project highlights the responsibility that older people have to value dialogue with young people as a two-way process, listening to their views, providing young people with responses to their questions and showing an interest in jointly exploring answers in a time and place that is relevant to young people.

Many jurisdictions have responsibility for different aspects of young people's lives. In

terms of policy and governance, the trinity of education, health and juvenile justice are recognised as the dominant areas in which policies and programs are developed and enacted in young people's present interests, and on behalf of their future lives.

The project indicates that attention should also be given to environmental policy as an arena of particular significance to young people's futures. In practice, the environment is rarely considered in relation to youth health, education or employment. More attention also needs to be paid to the role of the media in shaping young people's views of the world and its future and, more broadly, their own lives and priorities.

Through its focus on futures, the project provides an approach towards a more coherent view of the role of policy in informing structural responses to shared problems. It also underlines the importance of giving greater priority to involving young people in policy-shaping processes.

The project shows that youth participation in research is a realistic and effective concept, but requires a shift away from traditional, adult-centred approaches; and that narratives and storying provide a useful tool for understanding current situations, for envisaging preferred directions, and for generating a sense of how to achieve change.

Further research is warranted to extend this project. The research methodology should be deployed within the framework of a larger, systematic research program involving workshops with diverse groups of young people, adults and 'experts'. The purpose of this would be to build a more systematic picture of how different communities can create visions of the future and build more effective pathways towards those futures.

Personal perspectives

One thing that was clear to me by the end of the day was that the experience of cross-generational dialogue, and the use of playful, interactive and inclusive forms to explore issues, had created an atmosphere of community, of care, and of personal and shared accountability for the future ... the research process not only provided a useful tool for understanding youth perspectives on personal and global futures, but also became a forum through which participants could create a sense of possibility about making a difference in the world and begin to rehearse for action.

Helen Cahill

I'm left wondering whether these students would be better equipped to embody a future of power and control if that sense of agency was a real part of their current experiences: what if the voices of now spoke to young people about being able to take meaningful action? This question provides my challenge and duty to represent these young people back at school, beyond the responsibility of that workshop day.

Michael Waugh

Some of the stories that allowed social action to take place in the past were simple linear stories that proposed one major problem, with one major cause (or scapegoat) and one major path of action ... The young people I worked with during

the workshop seemed neither willing, nor able, to believe in these closed stories. This might make social action harder, but it allows space for newer ... and more open narratives of social action to emerge, stories that allow engagement with a complex world ... I believe an important task for youth research is to be open for, and supportive of, these new stories of action and engagement emerging amongst young people.

Dan Woodman

In the discussion I considered the difference between my experience as a 26 year old, and many of these 15 year olds ... It is easy to over-estimate the role of political leadership. However I do think the rhetoric around vision for the future at the time of the Hawke/Keating government left a mark on me. I distinctly remember debate around Australia's future as a multicultural republic at a time when I was just awakening to the effect of macro-political and cultural forces on my life. I think in part the genius of Howard's political success has been a mastery of reserve in 'big picture' vision and radical changes. It seems that he has championed the cause and legitimacy of everyday Australian mums and dads, going about their everyday affairs ... I think the political context of their experience is easy for many older people, even myself, to forget.

Julian Waters-Lynch

It has been interesting to reflect on the workshop as a process of interruption. Perhaps what workshop participants were doing together, for a brief moment, was interrupting some of the forces that individualise and dehumanise, and that render people isolated or helpless to act and create change. So the young people identified the importance of respectful conversation about the future, being heard, adult listeners, witnesses, co-learners, safe spaces to speak, and opportunities to hear each other. They pointed to a sense of collectivity which led to a sense of hope. They also highlighted that these things were a departure from their everyday experiences.

Ani Wierenga

Society needs to consider to what extent family life (with its work-life pressures, structured activities and media distractions), education (with its curriculum demands), friendships (with a focus around entertainment), and the media (increasingly intrusive) are no longer allowing the time for the reflection and conversations needed for creating stories. Young people are, of course, exposed to huge numbers of stories, some of which reflect ages-old themes and myths. However, to a large extent, they do not inhabit these stories. However much they might identify with the characters, these are not personal narratives that provide storylines connecting them to the wider world and the future.

Richard Eckersley

You cannot develop a map for the future unless you have some knowledge and perspective on how human beings have put the world together in the past ... As a private individual, the past gives me hope for the future in that it reinforces my faith in the capacity of ordinary people to strive for decency and fairness in the world and to utilise new knowledge to solve problems. Life goes on, in spite of the most terrible events and transformations. And young people need to be given that hope that within ourselves we can make history even though the circumstances are never of our own choosing.

Janet McCalman

One of the most outstanding aspects of the ... workshop for me was the way that the young people were able to relax and open up because they felt that it was a safe, enabling environment. The intention and ability of all participants to let their traditional 'boundaries' become permeable enabled a high level of cross-disciplinary and cross-generational interaction. In these times of so much complexity, and conflict, new methods of breaking down barriers are so vital.

Jennifer Gidley

Introduction

Pathways to the preferred futures of young Australians

One of the most complex and least understood dimensions of the challenges facing Australia is how people affect, and are affected by, the processes of economic, social, environmental and cultural change. This is the realm of the subjective – of perceptions, expectations and emotions – with which research often struggles, yet which is so important to how Australia shapes its future.

The interactions between this ‘inner world’ and the ‘outer world’ are the subject of Australia 21’s Program One. Our initial focus has been on young people, who best reflect the tenor and tempo of the times and have the biggest stake in how the future plays out. The first project under the program, *Pathways to success and wellbeing for Australia’s young people*, aimed to identify ways to help young people to optimise their wellbeing and to realise their full potential against a background of often adverse trends in their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

That project, carried out in collaboration with the Australian Youth Research Centre and funded by VicHealth, is now finished, with the final report being published in March 2006. The report (Eckersley, Wierenga & Wyn 2006a) is available from the Australia 21 website (www.australia21.org.au). Papers drawing on the report have been published in *The Medical Journal of Australia* and *Youth Studies Australia* (Eckersley, Wierenga & Wyn 2005, 2006b).

The project involved a process of transdisciplinary synthesis and sought a better understanding of the points of convergence and divergence in the commentaries and evidence relating to young people’s wellbeing. It proved far from straightforward. Without the funds to buy researchers’ time and services, some participants withdrew from the project or were unable to deliver agreed work. Perspectives differed among different disciplines and between quantitative and qualitative researchers.

Even the authors of the report could not agree on several key issues concerning young people’s wellbeing, including: whether trends in wellbeing can be generalised; the extent to which different measures and findings can be explained and reconciled; the relative importance of social influences and individual capacities in determining wellbeing; the relative influences of biological and social factors in young people’s development; and whether potential and wellbeing are separate and distinct.

The project went beyond the orthodox scientific emphasis on structural changes in the economy, labour market, education and family in considering young people’s health and wellbeing. It suggested a need for a greater focus in both research and policy on the following issues: the ‘big picture’ of the broad social changes reshaping life today; holistic approaches to health and wellbeing (rather than just a focus on ill health); a whole of population approach (rather than

just a concern with the marginalised and at-risk); and consideration of the social and cultural resources, as well as the material and economic, that impact on wellbeing.

These issues reflect the need to: acknowledge that broad social changes do not 'just happen', but flow from the choices people make, individually and collectively; question the often-assumed links between means and ends that underpin these changes; give communities space for conversations about things of value; and allow time for reflection, for asking questions as well as seeking solutions.

The second project within Program One, *Pathways to the preferred futures of young Australians*, takes up themes discussed in the first project: the importance of cultural 'intangibles' to wellbeing (especially how young people see the future), and the role of narrative in their lives. This project also has the Australian Youth Research Centre as a collaborator, with funding coming from The University of Melbourne.

The project aims to further the understanding of young people's views of the future and how these views are woven into the stories young people create to make sense and meaning of their lives. This integration matters not only to young people themselves (by enhancing their sense of belonging, identity and control over their lives, for example), but also to Australian society (by engaging young people in the shared task of building a better future for the nation and the planet).

The project includes several elements: a literature survey; a workshop using 'role-based enquiry', a drama technique that allowed young people to create, show, narrate and interpret their views of the future; a 'network' of informed commentators (from futures studies, youth studies, education, psychology, history and drama) who played an important but contained role in witnessing and engaging with the youth

participants; and surveys by Ipsos Mackay Public Affairs of attitudes to trends in quality of life, the future of Australia and the world, and the impacts of science and technology. Thus the project marries the sciences with the humanities and the arts, quantitative with qualitative approaches.

Our approach to this report

This monograph reports on the project activities and offers options for further development of the project. In keeping with the underlying principles that guided the design of the project, our report is presented in a way that maximises the opportunity for the reader to access the nature of the dialogue between adults from different academic disciplines and young people about young people's futures. As the purpose of this project was to trial an innovative approach to producing knowledge about young people's futures, our intention is to explore the possibilities in this methodology, which is described below.

Rather than wash out the different points of view through the production of a synthesis, we have chosen to present these different perspectives in the words of the different authors. These narratives provide a record of the data generated by the project in the form of reflections on the workshop day from most of the research panel and several of the students. There are many points of agreement woven through these narratives, and there are differences of interpretation by participants on key issues, such as the most appropriate solutions or ways ahead. This mode of presentation enables us to maintain integrity with the methodology employed in the project.

The narratives are framed at the start of the document by a brief summary of literature on future and narrative studies and the results of quantitative surveys of young people's attitudes to the future. Following the narratives, the report contains an analysis of the implications of the findings for policy and for future research.

Future and narrative studies

This section provides an overview of research into the role and importance of future visions and narrative in people's lives. It draws attention to the convergence and synergy between the two fields.

Future studies

Futures studies has existed as an academic discipline for over forty years. Over that time it has progressed through several phases or approaches. According to Slaughter (2006), for the first two or three decades, futures studies was preoccupied with the external world – tracking empirically verifiable changes and trends in the world to produce forecasts and trend charts; it was about trying 'to get the future right'.

There was then a shift into the use of scenarios to explore divergence in this forward view. Both these approaches overlooked the grounding of all such work in social and human factors, Slaughter says. The third approach, critical futures studies, brought into play the underlying issues of social construction, and how all societies use processes of legitimisation to maintain themselves.

Finally, there is integral futures, which, Slaughter says, has achieved two further advances: revealing the importance of 'human interiority' – the inner world – in futures studies; and providing a set of integral tools and methods for aligning the earlier developments in 'a greatly expanded metaperspective.' Perhaps the single most powerful insight to emerge is that it is depth within the practitioner that allows us to get the very best results from whatever methodology is being used,' he states (*ibid*: 29).

Gidley introduces another phase between the critical and integral: an empowerment-oriented, action-research component, which has been lying dormant since the mid-1990s, and is only now taking off (Gidley, Bateman & Smith 2004). She describes

the four approaches (excluding integral) as being concerned with, respectively, probable, possible, preferred and prospective futures.

Eckersley (2002, 2005) has suggested that another way to look at people's views of the future is to distinguish between expected (or probable), official (promised) and preferred futures. The official future is that extolled by political leaders, the future their policies will deliver. Here the social and psychological significance lies in part in the level of tension, or degree of coherence, between these three futures. Of particular importance is that young people do not see the *official* future of unlimited economic growth and technological development as delivering a *preferred* future, or addressing the problems characterising the *expected* future. Put another way, the future most young Australians want is neither the future they expect nor the future they are promised under current national priorities.

Another tension, or dissonance, that many futures researchers have noted is that between young people's personal future, which is overwhelmingly optimistic and positive, and the probable future of the world or humanity, which is mainly pessimistic and bleak. Most young people are confident they personally will get what they want out of life: a good job, travel, a partner and eventually a family of their own. However, most young people see the expected or probable future of humankind largely in terms of a continuation or worsening of today's global and national problems and difficulties. The probable future is also a problematic future.

Futures studies across many countries consistently reveal concerns about the pace of life, loss of community, family conflict and breakdown, growing social inequality and division, crime and violence, rampant consumerism, and destruction of the natural environment (Hicks 2006). People's preferred futures emphasise close-knit communities, more conviviality and intimacy,

social harmony, human-scale settlements and technologies, and a clean, healthy environment. The remarkable consistency of people's preferred futures has led to the suggestion that these represent a 'baseline' future, perhaps revealing humanity's evolutionary and historical origins.

Hicks (2006) stresses the importance of futures to education, describing it as the missing dimension. He underscores the hazards of the bleak images of the future and the necessity for hope. 'Apocalypse is at our fingertips in a way that it never was before,' he says (*ibid*: 111), and cites Thompson (1996): '... we should not underestimate the susceptibility of the human mind to apocalyptic ideas, especially at times of rapid change. Apocalypticism ... feeds on uncertainty and disorientation ... [and] is astonishingly versatile. End time scenarios have the ability to adapt to their surroundings through a rapid process of mutation.' (Hicks 2006: 110)

At the same time, however, a desire for utopia, an end to human ills and the creation of a just and equitable society, always lie just below the surface of the human imagination, Hicks says: a mythic need to which we can only keep returning. The current interest in envisioning preferred futures represents an often unconscious upwelling of that desire. Freire (1994, cited in Hicks 2006) said that he could not understand human existence, and the struggle to improve it, apart from hope and dream. Hence the importance of stories. Richardson (1996, cited in Hicks 2006) says we need stories – myths and folktales, as well as true accounts – to help us hold the beginnings, middles and ends of our lives together. 'Without them we shall not have hope; yes, to lose stories is to lose hope, but conversely to construct and cherish stories is to maintain hope.' (Hicks 2006: 77)

Future studies sits at the crossroads of apocalyptic fear and utopian hope. And here it links to research into storying and narrative.

Narrative studies

Within academic circles, interest in narrative is currently growing but the tradition of narrative studies is not new. Over the last 40 years, literature from anthropology, literary arts, history, psychology, sociology, moral philosophy, theology and education has increasingly drawn attention to the significance of stories both for ongoing community life and for individuals constructing their own lives.

For example, coming from an anthropological perspective, Lévi-Strauss (1979) charted how the 'schema' or central ideas of communities are carried between generations in the stories that they tell, and that story is a powerful vehicle for transporting ideas over both time and space. History reveals how this transmission is something that some nationalities and traditions have achieved particularly effectively.

Meanwhile, both literary arts and psychological traditions have been exploring the close inter-twinings of identity, story, and myth. For several decades social scientists have explored how individuals make meaning and construct identities in story (eg see Strauss 1977). Within moral philosophy, Taylor (1989) suggests individuals' stories are narratives of progress, charting the journey towards and away from 'the good' or valued goal-states.

More recently, a growing body of narrative theory (eg see Bruner 1987, Gergen and Gergen 1988) has drawn attention to the significance of narrative in the *multiple* and *changing* ways that people make sense of their lives and identities. That is, the same people can tell quite different stories about themselves, or a series of events, to quite different effect.

Out of the field of education comes the realisation that the kinds of stories social groups tell actually shape history (eg see Freire 1973). How people tell a story will

shape how they act, so what gets selected as being important, and how it is told, is inherently political. As a result, the narrative tradition has been significant for exploring social differences and social inequalities, and how these are differently being experienced and lived out.

Another significant shift in broader understandings happened when post-structuralist writers (eg Foucault 1980) began to highlight and question the way in which the stories that individuals and social groups tell about themselves *and others* are constructed in the context of socially shared storylines or 'discourses'. They argue that these publicly shared storylines are steeped in power relations, and selective in the 'truths' that they tell.

Alongside raising consciousness about problems and divisions, the narrative tradition has also been important for highlighting ways ahead. In anthropology, Clifford Geertz (1973) has cautioned that when researchers write about other cultures and communities, it is too easy to make theories that are over-simplified and impoverished. The alternative, Geertz suggests, is to seek detailed and 'thick' or 'rich' descriptions of the lives, worlds, meaning systems and lived experiences of those whom researchers study. Others (White 2000, Denzin 2001, Wierenga 2001, 2002, forthcoming) have continued to develop the notion of thick and thin stories, and their important role in enriching both social research and social life.

Some of the most compelling insights about the power of narrative continue to be developed through therapeutic practitioners. Since the early 1990s narrative therapists have explored the process of 're-storying' shattered lives (White and Epston 1990, White 1995). White highlights the dynamics of the re-storying process and the role of witnesses. He also explains the importance of hearing, rather than silencing, the stories

of despair because from these other critical narratives can be constructed: about the character of the speaker and about possible action.

Concurrently, within youth research tradition, there has been growing evidence of the significance of narrative in the way young people make their lives. Wierenga (1999, 2001, 2002, forthcoming) has highlighted the powerful role of 'storying' in the way that individuals are able to make lives. Her work highlights the correlation between storylessness and paralysis, between narrative and capacity to act. Probably most significantly, her research findings explain: 'a story will only grow where somebody trusted is listening' (Wierenga 2002: 11).

As shown above, many have drawn on narrative to explore some of the most significant social questions: about societies and their survival, about reasons for living, ways of living, and the complex relationships between individuals and their societies. Narrative has become central to explorations of social change and human dignity, and people's capacity to act within and on the world. It weaves through topics that are seen as central concerns from different disciplinary perspectives, and perhaps this is why it keeps emerging in layers through contemporary research.

Over time, the awareness of some researchers turned beyond the people or practices being studied, to also notice the form of particular research stories themselves. Questions from these writers sensitised other researchers to look for grand narratives and alternative narratives, or stories from the margins – and ask questions like: 'What is not being said here? In this particular story whose stories are excluded, silenced, and whose histories are erased?'

From a narrative perspective, research stories, evidence or knowledge from any disciplinary tradition can also be understood as recognising different stories about 'the

problem', claiming different kinds of evidence as 'truth', and leading different stories about possible solutions. A recent example of a project exploring this is described in our previous report (Eckersley, Wierenga & Wyn 2006a), which focused on young people's wellbeing, intentionally creating conversation across different traditions (eg biological science/sociology). As explained in the introduction, this led to both areas of agreement and 'flashpoints'.

These streams of thinking mentioned above also come together in this project. Readers might like to keep these things in mind as they listen to the different voices.

Future visions and wellbeing

People's concerns about the future of the world and humanity matter, regardless of whether they are 'factually' or 'objectively' valid. The erosion of faith in society and its future influences the way people see their roles and responsibilities, and their relationship to social institutions, especially government. It denies people a social ideal to believe in and a wider framework of meaning in their lives, so increasing the psychological 'load' on personal expectations.

This issue has taken on added urgency because our perceptions of the future are increasingly shaped by the images of global or distant threat and disaster to which people are exposed: earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, disease pandemics, terrorist attacks, genocide, and famine. While these hazards are not new, previous fears were never so sustained and varied, nor so powerfully reinforced by the frequency, immediacy and vividness of today's media images. This effect seems certain to intensify as global warming and other threats begin to impact more deeply on our lives.

Our responses to this situation involve subtle and complex interactions between the world 'out there' and the world 'in here' (in our minds). These have implications

for both personal wellbeing and social cohesion. Psychological research suggests that adaptability, being able to set goals and progress towards them, having goals that do not conflict, and viewing the world as essentially benevolent and controllable are all associated with wellbeing (Eckersley 2005). Biomedical research has shown that people become more stressed and more vulnerable to stress-related illness if they: feel they have little control over the causes of stress; don't know how long the source of stress will last or how intense it will be; interpret the stress as evidence that circumstances are worsening; and lack social support for the duress the stress causes (Sapolsky 2005). Negative expectations of the future of the world and humanity are likely to impact on several of these states, most obviously by encouraging perceptions of the world as hostile and dangerous and that circumstances are deteriorating.

These expectations also shape how societies respond to the challenges of the future. Eckersley (2006) has argued that people are being drawn in at least three directions by the prospects of dramatic, even catastrophic, change: towards nihilism (a loss of belief), fundamentalism (a retreat to certain belief), and activism (a transformation of belief). These responses highlight how people, individually and collectively, can react very differently to the same perceptions of threat and hazard; in effect, they represent different narratives through which people make sense of what is happening and how to respond.

He suggests all three responses are growing in social intensity, a head-to-head contest that, sooner or later, will shatter the status quo. Nihilism and fundamentalism represent maladaptive responses to threat, whatever their short-term or personal appeal. Because they do not address the root causes of a problem, they risk amplifying the costs to human wellbeing. Such strategies have led in the past to the collapse of societies confronting environmental strains (Wright

2004, Diamond 2005). Activism is an adaptive response because it tackles the fundamental task of redirecting the future.

In other words, it is critical that society encourages a constructive social response, and work with young people to create positive storylines or pathways to their preferred futures.

Futures polls: losing faith in the official future?

The project included a quantitative component to assess the attitudes of young Australians to personal, national and global futures and if these attitudes have changed over time. These surveys also explored more specific questions about science and technology and their future impacts. This part of the project provides a broader context to the qualitative research – a less rich but more representative picture of young people's views.

The polls conducted by Ipsos Mackay Research (2005a, 2006a,b) included questions that were asked previously in 1988 and/or 1995. The Ipsos Mackay surveys were conducted online, involving about 1000 Australians aged 18 and over (age group cited here 18-24 years, n=110, 96, 86); the 1995 survey for the Australian Science, Technology and Engineering Council (Eckersley 1999) was a telephone survey of 802 Australians aged 15-24 years; the 1988 survey for the Commission for the Future (unpublished) involved face-to-face interviews with 1026 Australians aged 14 years and over (age group cited here 20-29 years, n=238).

The small sample sizes of young people in several of the surveys limit their statistical power; the different methodologies used also make direct comparisons difficult (for example, the online survey offered a 'don't know' option; the telephone survey allowed this response but did not offer it, reducing the numbers that chose it). Nevertheless, the

broadly similar results across age groups, and the consistency of changes over time across these groups, do indicate changes in concern about national and global futures.

Personal, national and global futures

Most young Australians remain optimistic about their own personal futures. There has been little change between 1988 and 2005; 83 per cent were optimistic or hopeful about their own lives in 1988, and 85 per cent in 2005. In 1988, those aged 20-29 years stood out from other age groups in saying they were 'very' optimistic (35 per cent, compared to 23 per cent for all ages); in 2005, this gap had closed, with an increased proportion of older people now claiming to be very optimistic (36 per cent for the 18-24 years age group, and 39 per cent overall).

However, most young Australians are pessimistic about the future of humanity. This was the case two decades ago and remains true today. In 1988, 40 per cent were optimistic and 55 per cent pessimistic; in 2005, the figures were 38 per cent and 60 per cent respectively. Other results suggest concerns about the future have deepened over the past decade or two. Asked to choose between two statements about the world in the 21st century, only 16 per cent in 2005 thought it was likely to be 'a new age of peace and prosperity', down from 41 per cent in 1995; 65 per cent opted for 'a bad time of crisis and trouble', up from 55 per cent in 1995 (Q1).

Optimism about Australia's future also appears to have fallen in the past decade. The proportion saying quality of life in Australia in about 15 years' time would be better changed from 28 per cent in 1988 to 35 per cent in 1995 and to 24 per cent in 2005; the proportion that said it would be worse went from 36 per cent in 1988 to 34 per cent in 1995 and to 49 per cent in 2005 (Q2).

Offered two positive scenarios of Australia's future – one focused on individual wealth, economic growth and efficiency and enjoying

'the good life', the other on community, family, equality and environmental sustainability – 63 per cent expected the former in 1995 and 77 per cent in 2005; 81 per cent preferred the latter in 1995 and 89 per cent in 2005 (Q3). In other words, the gap between expectations and preferences has widened since 1995.

In summary, most young Australians are personally optimistic about their own lives, but a growing proportion appear to believe quality of life is declining, despite a decade-and-a-half-long economic boom that has seen sustained, strong economic growth, declining unemployment and rising incomes. The gap between expected and preferred futures for Australia has widened, and concerns about the future of the world have increased.

Young Australians' views on quality of life and the future: 1988, 1995 and 2005

Q1: Thinking about the world in the 21st Century, which of the following statements most closely reflects your view? *

- I. By continuing on its current path of economic and technological development, humanity will overcome the obstacles it faces and enter a new age of peace and prosperity.
- II. More people, environmental destruction, new diseases and ethnic and regional conflicts mean the world is heading for a bad time of crisis and trouble.

1995: age 15-24 years: 41% chose I, 55% chose II.

2005: age 18-24 years: 16% chose I, 65% chose II (all ages: 23% I, 66% II).

Q2: Thinking about Australia in 15 years time, that's the year 2020, do you think that our overall quality of life (QoL) will be better than it is now, worse than it is now, or about the same? (time period adjusted to ask about QoL about 15 years ahead).

1988: 28% thought QoL would be better, 36% worse, and 35% the same (all ages: 30%, 40%, 29%).

1995: 35% thought QoL would be better, 34% worse, and 29% the same.

2005: 24% thought QoL would be better, 49% worse, and 18% the same. (all ages: 23%, 46%, 25%)

Q3: Please read the following brief descriptions of two very different possible futures of Australia in 2020 and then give your opinion of them. *

- I. A fast-paced, internationally competitive society, with the emphasis on individual wealth generation and

enjoying 'the good life'. Power has shifted to international organisations and business corporations. Technologically advanced, with the focus on economic growth and efficiency and the development of new consumer products.

- II. A greener, more stable society, where the emphasis is on cooperation, community and family, more equal distribution of wealth, and greater economic self-sufficiency. An international outlook, but strong national and local orientation and control. Technologically advanced, with the focus on building communities living in harmony with the environment, including greater use of alternative and renewable resources.

- a) Which of the two describes or comes closer to the type of society that you **expect** Australia will be?
- b) Which of the two describes or comes closer to the type of society you would **prefer** Australia to be?

a) 1995: age 15-24 years: 63% expected I, 35% expected II.

2005: age 18-24 years: 77% expected I, 23% expected II (all ages: 73% I, 27% II).

b) 1995: age 15-24 years: 16% preferred I, 81% preferred II

2005: age 18-24 years: 11% preferred I, 89% preferred II (all ages: 7% I, 93% II).

* The scenarios were based on the findings of a series of scenario-creation workshops conducted as part of the 1995 survey. Those in Q3 were drawn from young people's preferred and expected futures. However, with the latter, the negative expectations were left out to allow a comparison between what might be called the 'official' or promised future and the preferred.

Future impacts of science and technology

Science and technology are a common feature of futures scenarios. The 1995 study (Eckersley 1999) found that, while young people acknowledged the potential of science and technology as a powerful tool in achieving a preferred future, they generally did not believe in technical fixes to social and global problems, and were very concerned about some future impacts of scientific and technological advances. A key finding was the extent to which views on science and technology were embedded in a wider social context. The role young people saw for science and technology – and hence their impacts – changed markedly between the expected and preferred futures (as evident in the poll scenarios cited above).

In the 1995 survey, young people were asked to agree or disagree with a range of specific statements about science and technology. These questions were included in Ipsos Mackay online surveys conducted in February and March 2006 (Ipsos Mackay Research 2006a,b). The results

are given in Table 1. Again, small samples sizes in the 2006 surveys and differences in survey methods mean comparisons are tentative.

Young people today appear less likely to think technology is increasing unemployment, a finding consistent with lessened community concern as unemployment rates have fallen. They remain more likely to think that technology will be used as instruments of government control (77 percent) than that it will give people more control over governments (31 per cent). They are more likely to think science will conquer new diseases (78 per cent) than that it will provide ways of growing enough food for a growing world population (40 per cent) or of solving environmental problems without the need to change lifestyles (33 per cent).

Compared to older age groups, young people appear more likely to believe science and technology will solve environmental problems (18-24 years: 33 percent; age 55+ years: 15 per cent), but also more likely to think computers and machines will take over the world (18-24

Table 1: *The opinions of young Australians on aspects of the future role of science and technology, 1995 and 2006*

Issue		Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Don't know (%)
Computers and robots are taking over jobs, increasing unemployment.	1995	58	40	3
	2006	37	52	10
Advances in computers and other technologies will make democracy stronger, giving people more control over their own lives and governments.	1995	43	51	6
	2006	31	38	30
Science will find ways to conquer the new diseases appearing in the world.	1995	87	11	2
	2006	78	9	13
Governments will use computers and technology to watch and regulate people more.	1995	78	20	3
	2006	77	15	8
Science and technology will find ways of solving environmental problems without the need to change our lifestyle.	1995	45	52	3
	2006	33	47	20
Science and technology are alienating and isolating people from each other and from nature.	1995	53	43	4
	2006	30	53	17
Computers and machines will eventually take over the world.	1995	35	62	3
	2006	36	49	15
Science will find ways to produce enough food to feed the growing world population.	1995	39	58	4
	2006	40	33	27
Science and technology offer the best hope for meeting the challenges ahead of us.	1995	69	28	3
	2006	65	15	21

years: 36 per cent; age 55+ years: 11 per cent), and less likely to consider that technology will make democracy stronger (18-24 years: 31 per cent; age 55+ years: 46 per cent).

Generally speaking, the findings do not suggest any major shifts in young people's perceptions about the effects of science and technology in their lives.

Summing up

From an orthodox political viewpoint, the poll findings are striking, given the sustained good economic news over this period. The results suggest a deepening rift between political action, with its focus on economic indicators, and public opinion about quality of life. They are consistent with those of the 2005 *Mind and Mood* report from Ipsos Mackay Research (2005b), which found a growing concern about the state of Australian society – rougher, tougher, more competitive, less compassionate – that was producing stress, edginess and a feeling of personal vulnerability. Australians felt 'we seem to lurching from one difficulty to another with the prospect of a serious crisis emerging.'

Overall, the results point to growing loss of faith in a future constructed around notions of material progress, economic growth and scientific and technological fixes to the challenges of this century. Many young people (and older) no longer believe in the 'official story' of the future on which governments base their policies.

Youth Futures Consultation Day

Helen Cahill

The goal of the youth consultation forum was to provide an opportunity for adults to engage in a research dialogue with young people about their view of the future. A number of techniques were used to structure the dialogue. These included discussion, brainstorming and drama-based techniques involving the creation and portrayal of images, narratives and scenarios.

Techniques of role-based enquiry (drama-based activities) were used alongside the more conventional focus group methods. My previous experience in using drama-based methods to research with young people (Cahill 2001, 2002, 2005, 2006, in press) has indicated that they make it possible for the participants to engage in a research dialogue which assists the participants to:

- Work across boundaries associated with age, role, gender and culture to learn with and from each other;
- Realise that their voice matters and will be heard;
- Generate a sense of community, connectedness and shared purpose;
- Show as well as tell others about their experiences;
- Investigate the inter-connected nature of the personal, social, institutional and environmental conditions that affect their lives;
- Deepen their understanding of the way in which norms, assumptions, traditions and values govern behaviour and shape responses to problems;

- Create models for action and rehearse for change;
- Generate the hope and agency that enables engagement in emancipatory action;
- Connect to the broader sense of moral purpose that informs the research; and
- Share in a responsibility for the research to contribute to practical and ethical outcomes.

The communal and multi-modal process generates a capacity-building form of research. As well as identifying problems, participants consider the need for change; explore the social, emotional, political barriers which constrain action; rehearse change-strategies; generate hope and passion for change; and enhance their sense of personal and collective agency.

The workshop story

The following account, written from my perspective as the facilitator of the research workshop, describes each of the activities that the participants were engaged in, and gives a brief account of the responses that were forthcoming. My description is followed by twelve different accounts of the day, each carrying interpretations about the value of the day and the meaning of the work presented. Five accounts come from the students themselves and seven from the adult investigators who participated with the young people.

These accounts provide a series of multiple perspectives, each of which throws a different light on the nature and meaning of the event. Many points of similarity or resonance can also be noted between the accounts. The young people, for example, highlight the value of being listened to. They appreciate the provision of a deep attending which is so rare in their experience. They note the need to look at these 'serious' issues and enjoy being able to do so in a 'fun' way. They appreciate the way in which the drama techniques provide the possibility of exploring these issues in ensemble, not only working with each other, but also working across the usual boundary of adult/youth. They also note the value of techniques that help them to access and articulate their thoughts and it seems that being in this atmosphere of attending and high expectation allows them to express how deeply they care about global issues which are usually left in the back of their minds.

The adult views can be noted for their points of similarity as well as their points of difference. Each of the adults commented on the young people's valuing of the listening they were given, theorising about the role of integrative relationships in equipping young people to think about as well as to live into their futures. Other similarities include concern about the difficulty the young people seemed to experience in imagining possible actions for themselves and the lack of a sense of accountability or politicisation relating to change.

The workshop was conducted in six key phases and occurred across one day, with a mid-morning and a lunch break. The enquiry was designed to explore the key themes of the imminent personal future, hopes for the short-term (5 years) personal future, fears for the long-term world future (20-30 years), and actions to build the preferred future.

There were 21 youth participants. 18 of them were Year 10 students of Drama at 'Seaside

High School' (a fictional name) (8 females and 10 males), and three were tertiary students (females) with an interest in drama and a continuing connection to Seaside High School via the drama teacher. The school students attended with their drama teacher who was also one of the adult participants. There were ten adult participants (5 females and 5 males). They represented a range of disciplinary backgrounds including sociology, history, youth studies, futures studies, arts, education, psychology and youth affairs. The adults also represented a range of generations with participants aged in their late twenties (2), thirties (3), forties (2), and fifties (3).

The academic panel met at the start of the day to introduce themselves to each other and to be briefed on how the research process would proceed. They met again once during the workshop and reconvened at the end of the day to discuss their interpretations and responses to the material that had emerged in the workshop. During the day the adults participated with the young people, playing in the early dramas and later stepping back to observe the creative activities, but remaining participants in the reflective discussions.

Phase One: Generating the communicative space

Phase One of the workshop was designed to build the atmosphere of collegiality, inclusion and social support that would be fundamental to supporting the interactions to follow (Hughes, Bellamy *et al* 2000). The first activities were designed to assist participants to work together across the adult/youth divide. They were also designed to accommodate the fact that most of the adult participants would not identify themselves as 'drama literate' in that they were not accustomed to representing their ideas in the dramatic form.

We began with a set of short, paired activities designed to have adults and young people mix and interact, whilst also focusing on the theme of the consultation. The first

ice-breaker activities called upon players to meet in pairs and find out a few things about each other (a two-way research process via mini-interviews). This process was repeated a few times, thus establishing a pattern of interchange or two-way dialogue in which both parties asked questions and both made offerings or answers. This is a somewhat different pattern from that commonly used in interview-based research where often there is a division between respondent and enquirer (Holstein 2002). I intended that this dialogic pattern inform the pattern for our work together, so the young people were not the only ones who were asked to consider and share about the future.

The paired interviews were then followed by a number of grouping tasks in which players were asked to take up positions in the room that indicated the categories they belonged to. Some categories asked for groupings according to age, thus showing the range of generations represented in the room. Others called for cross-age groupings such as birth months, number of siblings, tastes in food, thus showing that participants may have points in common despite their age differences. This was a symbolic reminder at the commencement of the work that we should avoid the tendency to assume similarity and group all members of an age cohort when we talk about them, thus showing a lack of regard for the variety and differences within the age-based membership group.

Phase Two: Considering the imminent personal future

The thematic intention of Phase Two of the workshop was to focus on the young people's perceptions of their personal and imminent futures. The tasks for Phase Two of the workshop were also designed to build a sense of 'literacy' in the group around the use of the drama-based techniques as a means of showing and telling.

The participants were asked to work in cross-age pairs to enact a scenario in which a parent and young person expressed conflicting views about what the young person should select as their post-school pathway. The participants were left to choose how to cast their pairs. Some elected to put the adult in the parent role, whilst others cross-cast with the teenager playing the parent and the academic playing the young person. Each pair tried out their scene simultaneously, creating a dialogue and a relational dynamic in their scene. We then took a short look at each scene, just long enough to gain a sense of what the struggle was *about* as well as how it was being *manifested* between the two characters.

The play back of these scenes quickly revealed a range of pressures on young people to find an education 'pathway' that would guarantee them 'success' in life. In each of the scenes portrayed some degree of tension between a young person's desire to find a life that would reflect their interests, beliefs and values, and the desire to find some form of security. Those in role as parents encouraged 'safe' choices (argued to be those likely to bring financial security, status and social acceptability). Those in role as the young people expressed a desire to follow their interests, curiosity, beliefs or values and to make their own path. Thus the scenes replicated the conventional 'wisdom' about what to consider in relation to one's future.

What could also be noticed in observing these scenes was that 'choice' itself was played to be pivotal, relevant and risky. Each scenario illustrated the notion that choice (right choice or wrong choice) was important. Choice was not only played as risky (one might make the wrong choice), but it was also the site of lobbying and struggle (with different views expressed about what constitutes a good or a bad choice). In this the scenarios illustrated Beck's notion of a 'risk society' in which the young person

faces an increased burden of choice as they negotiate an (apparently) individual pathway, rather than enter a predictable, anticipated and patterned path (Beck 1992). These scenarios sketched out a world in which multiple generations (both the parents and the young people) subscribe to the notion of choice, without necessarily enquiring about the degree to which choice actually exists. A high level of autonomy is assumed, and responsibility seems to be understood as individualised and personalised. There was little sense expressed that class, gender, ability, ethnicity, or location might constrain choice.

The dramatic offerings were then used as the material around which to invite comment. The participants were asked to consider the degree to which the scenarios presented actually reflected the way they experienced the world. We thus explored the reality-testing question: *To what degree is this like or not like real life? What pressures do you think young people feel in relation to their imminent personal future?*

The young people talked about the pressure they feel not to disappoint parents; the pressure to succeed in life; and the yearning to be true to a self they were not very clear about yet. They also commented on how uncertain they felt about their future, how little opportunity there was to discuss these issues, and how future choices were associated with a hierarchy relating to entry to 'wiser' or more 'successful' pathways. A number of students commented on how much pressure they feel to choose the 'right' path and how much covert ranking and judgment goes on about the sort of subjects you choose or tertiary or career course you head for. They reported that the pressure to succeed in life is felt everywhere, from making subject selections at the end of Year 10, to academic grades and gaining tertiary entry scores or selecting tertiary courses, and even to having the right friends, the right image and engaging in the right social

activities. Many of them said they felt that there was something wrong with them if they could not imagine what they would do in the future, or who they would 'be'. They thought that expectations and pathways are not so clear nowadays, and whilst this may be experienced as a freedom to choose, it was also felt as a burden in that it can be frightening to have no sense of a probable future for oneself.

I then set out to deepen the enquiry into these scenes by using a dramatic device to give voice to the multiple layers of thoughts, feelings, assumptions, expectations, hopes and fears that may have been part of the inner world of the characters. We were to seek the internal conversations or the dialogue in the head (and the discourses that inform this dialogue).

I asked for one of the scenes to be played over again. Having watched it, volunteers stepped forward to take on the role of the *Hidden Thoughts* of the characters. I interviewed the players in the *Hidden Thoughts* roles, asking: *What might this character be thinking or feeling but not actually saying out aloud? And what else? What might s/he be hoping for? What might s/he be afraid of?* The players gave multiple answers to each of these questions, and fellow participants added their responses. The *Hidden Thoughts* dialogue revealed a much more complex web of fears and hopes than had been expressed in the previous naturalistic scenes.

Key amongst the hopes expressed were the young person's yearning for belonging to family, peers and community, and the desire for the freedom to *act on your own will* and to have your choices understood and accepted. Also expressed was the urge to find meaning, purpose, self-expression and a level of joy in life. A strongly expressed fear was that of disappointing the parent or of making them feel that their efforts or generosity had been wasted. Another dominant fear was that of failure – of not finding a place in

the world or a group of people to enjoy life with. The urge to break away from the adult's guidance that we had seen illustrated in the naturalistic scenes was now depicted as layered with the desire to please and the fear of failure.

After the *Hidden Thoughts* exploration, the participants engaged in a paired sharing exercise in which they talked about the pressure and influences that they felt were affecting young people as they approached their personal future. These thoughts were then shared in a plenary discussion. Responses included that *there's a pressure that makes it seem like all your choices are final choices, and whatever you choose now will affect the whole of your life*. Others commented that there was a pressure to fulfill your parents' expectations, and a sense that there were different paths but you must somehow choose the 'right' path. They described a struggle to balance social and study life, and the limiting factor of real world pressures to do with money *that affect your ideas about doing stuff you believe in like working in a developing country*. Some of the pressures around the 'rightness' of the path were associated with what others (such as parents) thought of your choice. Other pressures involved a conflict in desires such as *whether you want to make a lot of money or be happy*.

When asked what helps to keep a passion alive, such as that associated with making a difference to the world or following a dream, the young people responded that support from your parents, the opportunity to participate with and share the dream with others, and the inherent pleasure or reward of the activity, could help to keep the dream alive.

The use of the *Hidden Thoughts* device and the deepening discussion revealed the complexity of the relationship to one's personal future. It assisted the participants to move beyond the more stereotypical portrayal of the young person as standing apart from the adult world and showed the

interconnected and interwoven nature of the concerns, fears, hopes and interests of both generations, and the potential tensions between the urge for security (wealth) and the urge to follow one's values or dreams. This suggests to me that young people's views about the future should not be studied in isolation from the surrounding generation's views. The scenarios and the subsequent discussion showed that the story of what a future 'should' hold is in large part inherited from one's society and family. The discourses that inform how we approach living our lives have been well learnt, even if only consciously taken up as something to be resisted. The deeper portrayal of the layers of fear, hope, desire and expectation was also a reminder of how easy it is to allow young people to represent only the 'typical' youth response. The participants engaged in a richer and more variegated telling of 'who they are' when given a mode of representation that invited a range of responses.

Phase Three: Representing the preferred short-term future (5 years)

Phase Three of the workshop entailed shifting the focus forward to imagine the preferred short-term future. Participants were asked what they hoped they would be doing in five years, considering: *What are the essential elements I want to see in my life in the next five years?* They were asked to first brainstorm these hopes, with a recorder working in each group. Then each task group was asked to select elements from this list and to convey via a 'sculpture' the essential nature of their hopes.

The multi-age task groups of about four or five worked together to find a way to represent their hopes for their futures via the 'sculpture'. The images were then presented to the group who attempted to read the images and ascertain what they represented. The players also stated their design intentions and thus articulated the concepts that they had in mind.

The 'hopes for the future' tableaux illustrated many of the material, social, financial, experiential and spiritual desires named by the group members in their brainstorming. The dramatic images encapsulated the co-existing desires for success and security (via graduation and employment); purpose (via contributing to others, or changing or improving the world); creativity and self-expression (via arts or community participation); peace (via leisure, relaxation or interaction with the natural environment); adventure and fun (via travel); belonging and happiness (via relationships); health (via friendships and physical activity); and thoughtful choices (at moments when encountering 'crossroads in pathways').

The symbolic nature of the sculptures meant that many of these hopes could be co-located in the one dramatic image (the sculpture), thus avoiding the creation of a false binary between seeming opposites (eg security and adventure) or an artificial hierarchy between desires that were co-existent. The presence of multiple co-existing desires means that inevitably some tension will be experienced as different desires predominate in the moment of making choices.

Phase Four: Depicting the feared long-term future (20-30 years)

The next major question to be investigated through the drama was: *What do we fear for the world's longer-term future?* The aim of this question was to take the participants well beyond their concern for themselves as individuals, to focus on issues at an environmental, national and global level. Working in a new task group (this time without the adults as co-players) they were asked to brainstorm their fears for the longer-term future, and in each group one of the adult investigators recorded the brainstorm. They were then asked to weave the most significant fears into a 'nightmare' scene, which would illustrate the nature of these concerns to their audience.

The surrealist and symbolic nature of the 'nightmare' mode of portrayal was chosen to assist the young people to represent the impact of abstract or meta-fears.

Once they had prepared their scenarios, the 'nightmares' were presented to the group. Fellow participants were invited to 'read' the scenarios as if they were dream therapists seeking to understand the sorts of fears or concerns that could be affecting the youth of today. Audience members thus engaged in reading and interpreting the scenarios, naming the sorts of fears and concerns that they thought could be at play. The presenters were also asked to speak to their intentions in shaping the scene and thus also articulated the sorts of fears they were concerned to represent as well as their impact and the inter-relationships between them.

The scenes depicted a range of deep concerns about the future. The foremost amongst them were concerns with environmental degradation, terrorism, war, violence, nuclear winter, and forms of surveillance and governmental mind-control (via media and drugs). What could be noted in the scenarios was the universalised and de-personalised nature of the anticipated problem. The feared events were depicted as affecting all, despite that there might be some groups who might appear to be more the winners than the losers. In this the young people showed an imagined regard for the potential plight of the species, rather than just for particular groups, nations or peoples. In this they illustrated their awareness that the world, its peoples and their environments are part of an interconnected whole. Poverty, suffering, hunger, thirst, greed or 'mind-control', though experienced by individuals, would be organic and systemic. A common theme in the mode of portrayal was the dehumanising of people, whether in the face of war, privation, fear or forms of media-driven mind-control. One young man pointed out his group had considered that, whilst the people might believe they are part

of a democracy, they might in the future actually be under constant surveillance and have their thoughts controlled via the media. In discussing their concerns about people becoming dehumanised, one young woman commented that her group had hoped to show that one fear for the future was that you might ... *forget that you are a person alive, trying to live a life, and so instead of thinking about the life, you think about work and getting money and having war, and that becomes life.* This again was a form of dehumanisation or a deep ethical disjuncture rupturing actions apart from values.

What I noticed was that through these poignant and haunting scenarios, the young people depicted a deep caring for the future of humanity (rather than just for themselves), and a capacity to consider the interconnection of the political and the personal, and the inseparability of local and global.

In the discussion following these scenes, I asked the young people if they really did worry about the sorts of things that they had depicted in the nightmare scenarios. The consensus was that they did have these concerns, but that they might be in the background of their mind or be forgotten, unless something occurred to raise the topic, or unless there was some possibility of action. Some of the responses illustrated how a concern could seem to be both present and absent from their mind at the same time, and tied up with concepts of agency and voice.

I never worry about it really except when everyone's talking about it – but I do worry about it.

Everyone worries about it, but in reality there is nothing we can do about it.

I think a lot of the idea about resources being taken over – we think about that, and we try to think now about how we're going to deal with it then. Really we should be looking for ways to prevent it.

The things I worry about most are like either not being able to do something, or no one else wanting to do something about it. We know a lot of people who want to do something about it.

Following the darkness of these images (albeit that some had been presented interlaced with humour), I felt it was important to ask the participants what helps to give them hope when they think about the problems that beset the world. The intention of this activity was to gain insight into the strategies that the young people perceived themselves as using to maintain their hope and optimism and thus their capacity to take action. I also intended that those who might feel defeated or despairing at the picture painted of the world's possible future might learn from others how people cope and thus add to their own coping repertoire (Frydenberg 1997).

Responses gathered included statements about belief in the power of political responses such as collective action or achieving a change in government; belief in power of technological solutions; the notion of social support such as that attained by having a family around you; the hope of getting a job where you can make a difference; and learning from the past via movies and books that have shown how people have made changes or fought for change.

The sharing of these thoughts called for a more personal form of sharing than in much of the prior discussion. I invited the adults to share as well, as this seemed to me to be an opportunity for the young people to learn from a collection of committed adults who clearly cared very much about building a good future for the future generations. The sharing both rested upon the trust and camaraderie that had developed in the group across the day and further contributed to an atmosphere of intimacy and caring.

Watching these scenarios, and attending to the subsequent discussion, illustrated to me that young people think about the future in global as well as personal terms. For anyone, however, it is difficult to imagine how one's own actions can be a part of history, a history that can bring about or avert this imagined future. Thus Phase Five of the workshop was designed to ask the participants to identify how they thought that they could be part of history.

Phase Five: A case for action – inviting the preferred future

In Phase Five of the workshop, the youth participants engaged in the final drama-based enquiry task of identifying possible actions to work towards a preferred future. The intention of this task was to gain a sense of what the young people imagine they or others could or should do to help to build the world that they wanted to live in. An additional aim was to leave the participants with some sense of personal agency despite the mega-nature of the problems they had just considered (Seligman 1995). In newly re-formed task groups (of four to five youth participants) they brainstormed possible actions that could be taken to avert a future such as that depicted in the 'nightmare' scenes and create a more desired future. They were then asked to prepare a short 'cartoon' or set of three frames that showed how an action could be taken that would contribute to building a preferred future. To do this they not only had to think through what sort of actions could be taken, but also had to select the issue/s that they think most warranted the attention of their audience.

The adult recorders reported that the young people found this brainstorm to be very challenging. It seemed that it was hard for them to think up actions that would help to make the world turn out 'better'. This is not surprising as short of magic, no small action would of itself make a big change. Perhaps these young people had also seen little

evidence of people acting to build such a future. Nonetheless the lists were developed and scenes prepared.

The 'cartoon frames' were shown and read by the group. They included actions that were political, environmental, and relational. Political strategies included joining with others to make collective political protest, cutting the strings of governmental control, and turning off the TV to protect oneself from media-created desire. Environmental actions included taking shorter showers, saving trees, re-using and recycling, and disposing of rubbish in an appropriate way. Relational strategies included 'being' the change you want to see, being kind to others, refraining from engaging in racial prejudice, and seeking to work with and understand those who were different.

When asked what they noticed about engaging with this task, responses foregrounded the challenge of transferring from an easy focus on criticising the failure of others to provide a solution, to a more challenging focus on action or solutions. *The discussion went from world problems to us making changes where we can.* This was seen to be a harder thing to think about. *It's a bit harder to think about what you could do.* They pointed to a lack of motivation or a lack of integrity between knowledge and action. *It is stuff you already know but don't do – such as shorter showers.* One person noted that *a form of laziness stops you.* Some made comments about the lack of a personal sense of responsibility. *Are we waiting for someone in power to take action before we start to check our own and others' behaviour? We could work together without having to wait for someone else.* One person mentioned that lack of accountability or reprisals for breaches in care for the environment meant that people did not take enough care. There was some discussion about whether their schooling assisted them to feel sufficiently informed or to feel responsible for their actions. Some respondents identified that they gained

information about the environment from the media more than from school. Others noted that the actions they took were influenced by their family's response, such as walking or riding instead of taking the car.

This reflective discussion on what it would take to shift from a focus on problems to an involvement in enacting solutions showed that the participants perceived that barriers to action were not chiefly due to lack of knowledge, but rather with a lack of engagement or discipline, or with a lack of involvement in practices or traditions around taking action.

To acknowledge that change was also about what we hope others would do as well as about what we plan to do ourselves, the participants were asked to write a message to a political leader, either real or imaginary, in which they requested an action that would contribute to changing the world. These messages were shuffled and distributed and then read by groups who discussed whether these requests would lead to positive changes. Most of these requests related to stopping involvement in war, attending to the issue of global warming and environmental degradation, stopping consumer greed, and ensuring a more equitable distribution of riches between and within nations.

Phase Six: Closure

As a closing activity the participants were invited to complete 'a postcard to one's self' so as to remind them of an action they intended to take following the day's workshop. The intention of this activity was to remind the participants that small personal actions are also political actions and can be part of a grassroots change (Waghid 2005). It was also a way to link the one-off nature of the workshop with ongoing life. I undertook to post these cards within a week. The youth participants (and some of the adults) took up this invitation. Some put their notes to themselves in sealed envelopes. Others elected the post card mode. Most of the

postcards contained messages about small actions to take care of the environment, such as reduced water usage, recycling or rubbish reduction.

We returned to the circle to finish the day's proceedings. I asked each person to think of something they would like to say to the group about what they had valued in the day or would take away to think about. The intention of this activity was to give each person a chance to speak as an individual as much of their more public speaking had been through collaborative forms. The activity was also designed to focus on the positive aspects of the day. Follow up written sheets (to be completed back at school) would give the opportunity for more detailed and critical feedback. As many participants had taken a social or personal risk to contribute, it seemed appropriate for them to hear how their actions had made a contribution.

The consistent message from the young people was one of appreciation at being given the opportunity to think and speak about serious matters; to be really 'heard' by adults; and to engage with each other and with the adults in a playful and creative manner. A number of them noted the absence of such forums in their everyday and institutional lives (both school and university) and the lack of educational opportunities around the issues of environment and world futures. Some also noted that they intended to make changes in their own lives and practices as a result of their experience of the day.

It was not stressed out. No one got told off and everyone was respected.

I really enjoyed today – meeting new people, sharing ideas, yeah – and I'll definitely think about what we talked about, and not spend so much time in the shower.

I've learned new things about different aspects of how people think, and I'm actually thinking more about the world, and how we can be better off with the world.

One thing I realised – when you talk to a group like this – we are worried about how the world is going to turn to, and wars, and that's how it's almost going now – but that's when it's run by a different generation – all us people make the choices of how the future will be – hearing the opinions and what we believe in, it's not necessarily going to be like that – that's given me a different outlook.

One thing that was clear to me by the end of the day was that the experience of cross-generational dialogue, and the use of playful, interactive and inclusive forms to explore issues, had created an atmosphere of community, of care, and of personal and shared accountability for the future. My sense was that the form as well as the focus

of the day has light to shed on our approach to involving young people in building the preferred future. They found that gathering around issues of shared concern and working in collaborative, creative and reflexive modes assisted them to reflect on how they could align personal, social and political actions so as to better express their inherent orientation of care for the world, its peoples and the environment. In this, the research process not only provided a useful tool for understanding youth perspectives on personal and global futures, but also became a forum through which participants could create a sense of possibility about making a difference in the world and begin to rehearse for action. In the words of one young woman: *this has left me thinking about the next step.*

Different Voices and Stories

This part of the report presents the reactions of individual students and researchers to the workshop. Our intention is to allow a deeper reflection on the experience, and to demonstrate the range of perspectives and insights, and the convergences and divergences, which emerged. For ethical reasons, we have changed the names of the students.

Michael's story

Michael Waugh (age 35: Drama teacher of students present at the workshop, with a research interest in student participation)

I am a teacher of the young people who attended the 'Youth Futures' research workshop. My role was to act as advocate and carer. I am currently researching students' sense of power and agency experienced through drama, but this interest was secondary to my concern about the young people's personal experiences of the day.

I was responsible for marking the roll, making sure that they arrived and left safely and that they were comfortable and happy. I had formed close relationships with these people over several years of teaching them, and being involved in a variety of experiences with them in and out of class. I wanted the academics to like the kids, and for the kids to enjoy the day. I have a great deal of respect for the facilitator, Helen Cahill, and wanted the day to be a success for her. I felt

Doug's reflection

'Doug' (Year 10 Drama student)

Our future is a very interesting topic. It is something that can often be drummed out of our minds by the demands of the present.

I thought researching our views through theatre was a fantastic idea, especially the improvisation activities, because this is when you bring up thoughts and ideas that are more in your sub-conscious and that you may not come up with simply in an interview scenario.

Aside from all the bad things we found about the world and our fears for the future, it was refreshing to have a refocus on all the good things. These things included the fact that although you might think that people are making bad decisions now, they are not the people who make the decisions in the future and things could change. We might just be swept off into a completely unforeseen reality.

Working with the academics in the drama atmosphere was also a lot of fun and it was great to see everyone working so co-operatively in all the activities. The skits were all entertaining and interesting to analyse in the way of interpreting the dreams, fears and metaphors.

Over all I think the day was a great success and I hope everyone got something nice from it. I would very much like to see drama used as a way of learning in a lot more areas of study as I think it is a very effective tool.

PS I also enjoyed getting the Tuesday off school. It is really the most tedious day of the week.

real ownership and responsibility for these students. They've been involved in my drama programs and classes. I'm proud of how I've raised the profile of Drama in the school, and particularly proud of how I've been instrumental in increasing the participation of boys in Drama. They are my kids. They are here because they know and trust me. I have a duty to make sure that they are not misrepresented.

While part of me wanted to learn about what futures are imagined by my students, my ears were tuned in more carefully to individual stories, and this coloured the way that I read their drama. I feel that my duty to be advocate to these young people should extend into my reflections about the day. While I can't tell about all of their stories, I feel that it is important to know who some of these young people are.

The day of the workshop was also:

- The funeral of an English teacher from our school. Several of the students had wanted to attend this funeral, and were experiencing some grief after the sudden death of the teacher in the week preceding the workshop;
- Less than a week after the funeral of one of the participant's grandparents. This participant was also worried about their best friend who went home during the day;
- The first public 'performance' for several students who felt very scared and nervous. Though an emphasis was put on experiencing the drama activities rather than performing, some of the young people felt apprehensive about being judged as poor performers;
- Less than a week after a very successful school production performance where many of the participants had experienced a strong sense of achievement and community; and
- A day where several students would normally have classes that they did not enjoy or feel successful. The day was

a welcome change for many of these students.

Some of the students experienced some deeper fears and sadness about a variety of personal issues. This probably didn't come out of the work, but impacted on their engagement. There was also a practical health problem for one of the participants. Though all of the students wanted to stay, two of the students went home. The students wanted to stay because there was a great deal of laughter, interesting questions and respect given to the students by significant adults.

Physically and emotionally, much of me was not with the drama or the research, but with the young people who were experiencing sadness or joy because of these factors. At times, I needed to be out of the room counseling students or organising some aspect of their care. Of course, what I've mentioned is only a small part of their stories. Nonetheless, these individual narratives were much louder (to me and to them) than the stories being told through the workshop. I realised that many students could not have committed themselves to imagining some time in the future when the voices of *now* or *just the other day* or *within the next week* were so intense, immediate and all encompassing.

I was a privileged observer of the day. I was able to listen in to the conversations between researchers as well as hear some of the students' private stories. Many of the adults knew little about drama, and all of these people knew nothing about the young people (apart from Helen Cahill, who had come in to meet these students over three double lessons leading up to the workshop day). Helen Cahill was a contact point for many of the students, and I felt that I shared the sense of care for the kids with her.

Some of the views expressed by the adult researchers drew links to theories about hope and hopelessness, raised criticism about contemporary education in terms of

how it has failed to provide these students with stories from the past that would provide inspiration about human resilience, or were interested in drama as a research methodology. I kept thinking about the young people and some of the amazing things that had been achieved:

- One of the students who had said that they were *not a drama person, but I'll have a go* commented at the end of the day that they had had *a good time and met people*. This person had not been engaged at school, had been often truant and felt embarrassed about performance. Performing without embarrassment and feeling valued by other people was significant for this student, and for me as their teacher;
- One of the students commented that it was a good day because *no one got into trouble*. This was important because they had a history of being disciplined and feeling misunderstood by teachers. Experiencing a full day without being criticised by an authoritarian figure was significant for this student, and for me as their teacher;
- One of the students said that they felt *relieved that other people feel the same as me*. This person was a popular student who had experienced success in a number of different forums. It was significant to them that they didn't feel alone in their thoughts or feelings about the future. It was important that they had a chance to speak to their peers about these things, as the school didn't often give them a chance to engage in this type of conversation. It was an important reminder to me about not taking students at face value, and realising that all young people can feel alone, regardless of popularity;
- One of the students said that they felt that they were listened to with *respect* and that this didn't often happen with *grown ups* at school. This was significant for this young person, and for me as a

teacher at a school that perhaps doesn't often value the thoughts and feelings of young people as much as we should.

I have always seen drama as learning through and about the body. It was interesting then how much I felt that the day was about being disembodied. Many of the young people represented their fears about the future in terms of a faceless image of power that had been dehumanised in its representation. For example, one of the scenes showed a slow, mechanical, expressionless figure voicelessly pointing orders from a high physical level. Equally, the hope for the future was often in a superhuman shape, such as space travel, alien intervention or some other type of technological advancement, or it was difficult to embody as any significant action other than picking up rubbish or taking shorter showers. The fear about the future as much as the hope for the future seemed to be not so much out of the imagining of these young people as much as being outside of their embodied realities. Perhaps they don't have the chance to feel what it's like to be in control of their own futures.

That is not to say that my students don't have resources gained through formal education. They have a capacity to read and critique media they know to be constructing realities that should not be blindly accepted. One of the tableaux represented a puppet whose strings were being cut. Another showed a television being switched off. They know who has the power, and they know that it's not them. They know who has been preventing them from having power. Parents and teachers figured as the faces of power in much of the scene work. John Howard and George W Bush appeared as abstracted extensions to these locales of authority.

Again, I thought about those individual stories and individual achievements. While the other researchers were focused on the stories of the future told through the dramas, I realised that a great deal was being said about the young people's futures in what was

sitting at the edge of these dramas, in these voices that were louder to me than to other adults in the room because of my relationships with the young people. These surely were more about the lived experiences of these young people than of a danger or a hope for relief that was outside of their control.

Within the research panel there was discussion around students needing stories about the past to see how humans have overcome adversity. As much as this is important and on the current public agenda, I'm not sure that they would believe all they are told. They've been trained to be critical of the way that stories are constructed. I am not convinced that these stories about the past would speak any louder than the individual stories.

My students presented a disembodied version of the future. In part the voices of *now* were perhaps louder than the distant voices of *later* and certainly more relevant than the voices of *then*. I was again inspired by the work done by Helen Cahill, and learned a great deal about how to work with students with respect, and how to reflect on my own practice. I was left wondering whether the power structures in schools and families allowed students the agency to truly imagine (through their own bodies) what things might be like at a time in the future when they inhabit bodies that control the world. As one of my students said: *I think that things won't be so bad in the future, because the leaders will be people like us, and not the current generation of leaders that have left the world in the state that it's in.*

I'm left wondering whether these students would be better equipped to embody a future of power and control if that sense of agency was a real part of their current experiences: what if the voices of *now* spoke to young people about being able to take meaningful action? This question provides my challenge and duty to represent these young people back at school, beyond the responsibility of that workshop day.

Bill's reflection

'Bill' (Year 10 Drama student)

Last Tuesday, a group of Year 10 Drama students went to Melbourne University to participate in a study about youth's views of the future.

On the whole, I believe it was a very good experience. Before going to the place, I really didn't know what to expect. I was imagining for the event to be rather formal and awkward, however this was very wrong. After arriving and getting into the swing of things, it was a very friendly environment. It was really nice to be treated with respect from adults. Generally, older people (good, I feel stereotypical) all look down a little on youths; however, here we were treated like equals and the adults there seemed genuinely interested in what we had to say. We all could sit and have interesting conversations with one another.

For the actual exercises, they were all fairly simple theatre sport-ish things which were fun. They seemed a little pointless; however they gave us a more interesting way of expressing our ideas than just straight out talking.

Talking to some of the other students after the event, it was apparent that everyone enjoyed it. It was good for us because we were treated with respect and our ideas could be openly expressed without any fear of reprisal. We got to associate with some really nice adults, as well as the couple of ex-students who turned up who were all really cool people. The people running the event seemed like they probably got what they wanted out of us, so it was a well rounded day.

Dan's story

Dan Woodman (age 26: sociologist with interests in young people's health and wellbeing and post high-school transitions)

In this response, I follow one particular train of thought that emerged for me during the workshop. In doing this, several important things are sidelined: the individual stories, the nature of the interaction of the young people with each other and with the older researchers, the impact of the remarkable pedagogy employed and the effects of a multidisciplinary approach to research. Others have commented on these topics far better than I could. All I will say is that the group was inspiring, and taking part a privilege.

I focus instead on what I saw as some broad commonalities in the way the group performed and discussed issues of taking action to shape both their personal future and a broader social future. I suggest these commonalities might be linked to a sense of the future as uncertain and a weakening of older narratives of action.

Social change and uncertainty

Young Australians, like the rest of us, live in a world in which it seems that our personal and social, national and global wellbeing and security face predicaments that are interrelated, urgent and on a global scale. Contemporary Australia, with other nations, is undergoing a complex conjunction of economic, technological and cultural change that has been labelled globalisation. We are surrounded by hybrids; the problems we face in the contemporary world are, more often than not, natural and social, personal and political, human and technological, global and local. The complexity of the challenges the world faces emerges from this amalgamation of issues. It is often difficult to calculate risk, attribute blame, precisely identify victims, or to identify who is responsible for taking action.

Predicting the world of the next 10, 20 or 50 years is extraordinarily difficult. It is possible, maybe even probable, that the current major actors will rise further or fall while new actors may surface, and that new forms of politics and new ways of being in the world may emerge. However, whatever the future challenges that face the generation of which our younger participants are members, both in building an individual life and building strong communities, it is likely that these challenges will be global, interconnected, and complex.

The personal biography and uncertainty

The workshop performances and discussions on personal futures resonated for me with the widespread notion in contemporary sociological theory that managing the 'personal biography' in the face of relative uncertainty has become increasingly important (Giddens 1991, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002). In general, the participants seem to see their lives as projects focused on managing both possibility and uncertainty. They spoke of stress, of feeling pressure from their own and others' expectations about what paths they should follow in life, and of uncertainty about how to succeed on these paths. A few participants seemed to be struggling with thinking about their future and telling a positive story about it. However, and taking into account the differing level of ability, engagement and pre-event reflection participants brought to the day, those I worked with were generally capable of telling hopeful stories about their own futures. They spoke of having a couple of plans, a main plan and a backup or second plan, in case the first plan did not work out and seemed quite strategic in the way they spoke about making choices, such as subject selections, in a way that gave them options later in life. These stories were malleable and multifaceted enough, I believe, to allow a high degree of flexibility and resilience in the face of uncertainty.

Social fears and uncertainty

While the predicaments facing Australian society might be extraordinarily complex, the young people I worked with at the workshop seemed to be able to tell stories that helped them understand their broader social fears. While in some ways the issues they raised were relatively new to the forefront of the contemporary social imagination, such as global warming and the 'war on terrorism', there were some signs of continuity with the past in the resources they drew on to think about these issues. They seemed to appropriate some aspects in their telling of their fears from the archetypal images in the 'Western Canon'. The young people in my group spoke about and performed fears of total war, propaganda, control of the media, dictatorships, mind control and drugs, which had resonances with the plots of Orwell's *1984* or Huxley's *Brave New World*. Many of these fears are not new to this generation, but they linked these fears in creative and complex ways with the newer fears, such as global warming. It could be argued that some of the detail within the stories were a little confused or fanciful. Yet others, such as the sociologist John Law (2004), would argue back that the world might indeed be a little confused and fanciful. While debates could be had over whether these stories of society are right or wrong, these young people seem able to ask questions of what they are told, see shades of grey and tell stories about the global and interconnected nature of social problems.

However, and unlike the discussions on how to take action for personal futures, when it came to discussing and performing possible ways of taking action on these broader social fears and challenges, the groups I worked with found it remarkably difficult. They did eventually come up with some possible actions, but spoke mostly of local and personal actions (helping an older person cross the street) and actions focused on the management of personal consumption

(not littering, taking shorter showers).

Although one group mentioned collective action, a similar focus on consumption and local action seemed to emerge in the other groups' performances. These are in many ways positive actions, and the management of personal consumption clearly links with issues like global warming. Overall however, there seemed to be a noteworthy disconnect between the fears participants held for Australian society, which had much to do with global and national politics, the media, knowledge and power, and most of the actions they felt they could take to bring about a preferred future.

Complexity and narrating engagement

Several possibilities come to mind to explain this disconnection between fears and actions. It might partly have to do with the types of social predicaments Australia faces and could face in the future. The global and interconnected nature of the problems we face, which the young people I worked with seemed to grasp to some extent, might make taking action seem almost impossible. Another possibility is that, as many participants were in Year 10 in high school, they had perhaps not been exposed to the various options for engagement, and accompanying narratives of why to engage, that become more readily available in institutions of higher education or workplaces. Or alternatively, the other researchers and I may have brought a particular vision of what it means to take social action to shape the future into the workshop that limited our ability to see new links between action and social fears amongst the participants. Possibly, in a changing world, researchers need to rethink their own ideas of what it means to take future oriented action. Many other, more or less plausible, possibilities can be imagined and it would be interesting to do further workshops to explore these questions, possibly with slightly older (post-high school) young people.

A closing about open stories

In general, this group of young people seemed to both understand and be capable of narrating complexity and uncertainty within their own lives and a changing Australia. Many seemed able to tell stories of engaging with this uncertainty around their own biographies, but most found this remarkably difficult with questions of the broader social future. Social narratives that allow people, and communities, to tell their own story about who they are and what they stand for are important as they give meaning to life and provide a base from which to take action. However, as many have pointed out, some of the stories that allowed social action to take place in the past were simple linear stories that proposed one major problem, with one major cause (or scapegoat) and one major path of action. Some of the narratives currently available are similarly dogmatic, more about exclusion than about belonging, and close off the possibility of openness, adaptation and engagement with complexity. In the end, these kinds of stories will not

allow us to confront the global challenges we face as they do not allow an active engagement with change.

The young people I worked with during the workshop seemed neither willing, nor able, to believe in these closed stories. This might make social action harder, but it allows space for newer (although they will likely draw on elements from older narratives) and more open narratives of social action to emerge, stories that allow engagement with a complex world. These could emerge, or maybe already have, in a number of places. The political leadership is one, and it is important to have leaders who can rebuild these young people's trust in politics. Another is amongst young people themselves. I believe an important task for youth research is to be open for, and supportive of, these new stories of action and engagement emerging amongst young people. To do this well, researchers, including myself, may need to be more open with our own ideas of what it means to take action to shape the future.

Workshop data

Personal hopes – by one small group

For my job to not be the only thing in my life
 To be successful
 To be happy
 To have somewhere to live
 To have traveled
 To have gone wild a bit
 To be alive
 To have an adventure
 To **not** have a dull routine
 To still have good friends
 To live in the jungle
 To wake up somewhere different each morning
To party lots, meet people, experience everything – except dying – Things I'll gain stuff
 To not be stressed
 To have a sweet partner
To have a friend with benefits – a relaxed relationship (without stress of 'all the strings')
 To have a pet
 When I'm **old** I want to settle down
 From what I've seen, kids ruin lives
I don't want to bring a kid into the world in 20 years
 It seems depressing **not** to have kids

Julian's story

Julian Waters-Lynch (age 26: research interest: globalisation, developmental psychology, education and social change)

I was very grateful to be able to spend the day in creative engagement with the twenty-odd young students who attended the day. It taught me a lot about teaching and group interaction with young people, and in many ways my response will be coloured through thinking around pedagogy, content and the school system.

Diversity and group dynamics

Immediately, as is often the case with the group, I was struck by the diversity of personality types and stages of physical and mental development of the group. In light of the panel discussions after the students left for the day, I think this is a key point to remember and honour. I fully understand the usefulness of making general statements about a class or group, even a generation. However I also believe that some of the cursory conclusions generated by simply observing the theatrical 'snapshots' would mask the complexity of thinking that students were able to perform.

I notice a tendency in group dynamics, particularly amongst school children, for a 'centre of gravity' of group understanding to emerge. This average ability for expressing complexity of ideas will misrepresent the more advanced thinkers of the group, and equally 'pull up' the understanding of those at the bottom. It is as if the micro-culture of the group becomes established. Certainly the three university students injected into the mix a deeper capacity for reflection and, in one case, a commitment to a political philosophy for action beyond most of the school students.

I make this point in part as an expression of my own frustration both at working as a facilitator with larger groups, and within 'student-centred' philosophical frameworks.

On one level, I am highly sympathetic to Neil Postman's (1969) challenge to educators to 'never ask questions one already knows the answer to', especially in its implications that learning is a journey for adults, children, teachers and students alike. On the other hand, I find myself very at ease with many traditional and pre-industrial cultural practices of respect for the 'wisdom of the elders', and the importance of actually (even passively) absorbing information from those who have experience in a domain of knowledge. When working as a facilitator with young people, there are many instances where I've felt it appropriate to move towards a more traditional didactic exchange for a time.

Pedagogy

I understand that the aim of the day was not so much to impart knowledge to the students, as provide an opportunity to learn from their own perceptions of the world and their place in it. Nevertheless at times the exercises presented difficulties in moving forward without basic foundational knowledge of economics, history, governance and civics – subjects that should be covered in SOSE (Studies of Society and Environment). One example came up when we were reading the letters to a world leader. One of the girls began reading her letter's recommendation that John Howard should lower petrol prices, and I asked her if he could do that as part of his job. She didn't know but appeared interested in the answer. At that point we began to discuss government taxes on fuel and the associated government revenue at which point she asked if John Howard personally got that money. Considering we had just finished an activity involving designing a project for local action to address local or global problems, in other words civic engagement as a fundamental expression of a healthy democratic society, conflation between the role of a Prime Minister in a Westminster System with some sort of oil baron dictator (whatever one

thinks of Howard) is problematic to say the least. It seemed like an appropriate time for some basic lessons, however I also recognise that the activities so far were instrumental in getting the student to ask the questions in the first place. I can't help but long to see schools and teachers not just associating progressive pedagogical frameworks with drama and creative self expression but also as an effective mechanism for imparting 'traditional' knowledge areas.

Multiple skills and abilities

All discussion and reflections on the day, including the previous points, are limited by a lack in common language to discuss various dimensions of human development. For me this was highlighted when we imagined a group of kids going through the same workshop 50 years ago. It was suggested that they might have had a more grounded political identity (even assuming this is a good thing) and may have known more about avenues for civic engagement. The veracity of this claim is one question, but regardless of the answer, it neglects discussion of a range of other skills, including emotional intelligence, communicative freedom, creative ability etc. Howard Gardner (1983) has been writing about 'multiple intelligences' since at least 1983, which provide some way of explaining how individuals might be highly developed in one area – say interpersonal and musical ability – and highly underdeveloped in another area – say mathematical and spatial intelligence. My hunch is we're seeing cultural terrain that develops some areas more highly, but perhaps neglects others. If we simply assess these kids on knowledge of civics and history we can come to a certain conclusion. But I think this is too close to the 'deficit model' often spoken of in community development. We need to remember the multiple forms of literacy displayed through the activities on the day. I would have loved to see a group of adults engaging in the same

kind of challenges: how do you express a tangible action for social change in a four person 'freeze frame statue' with five minutes' preparation time?

A few thoughts about generational characteristics

In the discussion I considered the difference between my experience as a 26 year old, and many of these 15 year olds. The students were mostly 15-16 years, and I was that age in 1995-1996. It is easy to over-estimate the role of political leadership. However I do think the rhetoric around vision for the future at the time of the Hawke/Keating government left a mark on me. I distinctly remember debate around Australia's future as a multicultural republic at a time when I was just awakening to the effect of macro-political and cultural forces on my life. I think in part the genius of Howard's political success has been a mastery of reserve in 'big picture' vision and radical changes. It seems that he has championed the cause and legitimacy of everyday Australian mums and dads, going about their everyday affairs. It strikes me as amazing (if not scary) that these kids have spent most of their life under such a political figure. With very little experience of radical changes as espoused by a leader (leaving aside the GST and industrial relations) in areas related to their concerns – global warming, nuclear disarmament, water conservation, lack of civil liberties – it makes sense to me that change is left to the area of Hollywood fantasy and computer assisted imagination in many of their minds. I think the political context of their experience is easy for many older people, even myself, to forget.

Workshop data

Fears for the shared future – by one small group

Running out of resources, eg oil
More/less welcoming of asylum seekers
Environmental degradation and climate change
The effects of global warming, eg rising water
That the amazing people doing great things will be outnumbered and overpowered by the greedy, selfish people
Not being able to do anything or change anything
Fear of not succeeding in life
Globalisation of current system of capitalism: inequality, poverty, exploitation, self-interest, disturbed conception of what life really means, is worth
Increasing conflict in the Middle East

Ani's story

Ani Wierenga (age 38: research interests include the connections between young people and their communities, people's active social participation, and storying)

In the Youth Futures workshop, participants talked about personal futures, shared futures, fears and hopes. One theme that emerged early in the day was the disconnect between everyday lives and bigger concerns (war, ecological destruction, running out of water) between what comes in view when people talk about personal futures and what comes to the fore when talking about shared futures. Almost like a lens set to a different focus, it seems very hard to keep both in clear view at once. Of the big picture, young people said:

It crosses my mind every now and then.

Other things [I'm] looking at rather than worrying about that.

I never worry about it really except when everyone's talking about it – but I do worry about it.

One wrote later:

Our future is a very interesting topic. It is something that can often be drummed out of our minds by the demands of the present.

On the day, one high school participant explained it this way:

One of the things I sometimes worry about corrupt government, terrorism, wars and everything, and that's what you see on the news and hear that it's definitely going to happen, but then you just walk down the street and see some old lady feeding birds, and you think of all the things that are close to you, and usually they are just good, and we get blinded, and just kind of forget – get blinded by other things.

At the time I was not sure whether he was saying that the big picture was a distraction from the everyday, or the everyday was a distraction from the big picture. (Now I am wishing I had the wits about me to ask.) Whichever the case, both sentiments echo the findings of other research. In project 1, Eckersley *et al* (2006a) discussed how media-based narratives can create a distortion of life. Meanwhile, research on young people's lives (eg Dwyer *et al* 2005) reveals that against quite bleak backdrops, young people can hold very positive views about their own futures.

Participants noted the disconnection between the scope of problems and solutions: *[It's] a lot easier to criticise what's wrong but harder to find out what we can do.*

Some people talked about feeling powerless: *Everyone worries about it but in reality there is nothing we can do about it.* Some young people also saw the urgent need to do something:

I think a lot of the idea about resources being taken over and we think about that, and we try to think now about how we're going to deal with it then – really we should be looking for ways to prevent it.

One young person explained:

The things I worry about most are like either not being able to do something or no one else wanting to do something about it...

Participants also shared some effectively communicated take-home messages, or personal sound-bites: *Don't litter, don't be prejudiced, have shorter showers.* Each of these is a 'micro' solution to the 'macro' problems they identified (ecological destruction, war, water). They are also very atomised and individualised solutions. Panel members noticed that in media, education and public forums there seemed to be fewer readily accessible sound-bites about shared solutions or things folks could do together. The panel discussed how young people are growing up in a context that individualises: the individual alone is responsible for finding solutions. A growing body of local and international research suggests this pattern affects all ages – not only young people – but these young people are constructing lives in the middle of it.

This is a 'what can one person do' dilemma. Tackling it is about claiming 'agency', or one's capacity to act in and on the world, in the face of counter-messages that can make people feel helpless. In the context of some of the more threatening problems facing humanity, a wise adage advises people to 'think globally and act locally'. It will be important to develop models and processes where communities can better educate,

prepare and support each other to do just that.

Particularly in the later part of the day, the group's attention turned to hope. Young people's comments showed that hope was strongly related to firstly being heard, and secondly hearing each other. They highlighted the importance of the respectful conversation between themselves and the panel members:

Really liked today – all the adults – respect – don't really get that terribly often – really appreciate it.

No one got told off and everyone was respected.

Their reflections highlight the importance of creating safe spaces for stories to emerge, and again reinforce the message that a story will grow when somebody trusted is listening:

I've learned new things about different aspects of how people think and I'm actually thinking more about the world, and how we can be better off with the world.

I have been questioning what to do with this trust, and particularly how to write about the conversation. In his work around narrative processes and transformation, Michael White (2000) highlights the importance of witnesses. I am wondering about appropriate rules of engagement, when the witnesses are mostly researchers, not therapists. Also, possibilities are different for on-going relationships than for one-off encounters, or conversations that continue on paper. How do I write the things that these young people say, with my own critical/sociological agenda, while honouring that trust?

During the day when ideas were mirrored, when witnesses richly re-storied what they had seen and heard, the depth of what was being talked about seemed to grow exponentially. For example, unpacking a drama, this conversation unfolded:

YP: [We were exploring] being told what to do like you have no say in it.

Michael: I was interested that the way power was being represented seemed to have very little personality or real face – it was almost they seemed a bit powerless too – was that part of the decision?

Helen: Would you like to comment on that?

YP: One of our themes that we were talking about was like to do with um global systems and whatever – it's like distortion of what life means and like your perception of life ... in the power relations and that way of life, you forget that you are a person alive, trying to live a life, and so instead of thinking about the life, you think about work and getting money ...

Helen: Do you have more general worries that there could be pressures to get dehumanised?

YP: Yes.

Beyond appreciating engagement with the adults, the young people's feedback also highlighted the importance of hearing each other: *A chance to learn from other people – [we] don't know what each other think.* This sense of having shared concerns seems to be a powerful antidote to the individualising forces that surround. As the things that worry individuals are discussed, personal problems become shared issues (see Mills 1959). All this talking, playing and listening create links across the gap we identified between the personal and the collective. One of the young people explained:

One thing I realised – when you talk to a group like this – [we're] worried how the world is going to turn out and wars and that's how it's almost going now – but that's when it's run by a different generation. All us people make the choices of how the future will be – hearing the opinions and what we believe in, its not necessarily going to be like that – that's given me a different outlook.

Workshop data

Actions to build a preferred future – by two small groups

Understanding of all opinions

Being supportive

Recycle shower water

Short shower

Acts of kindness

Recycling

Don't litter

Expressing opinions

Non-supportive of prejudice

VOTING

Turn off lights when you're not using them. Fix dripping taps

Be more aware, and change

More charity runs

Write issues that need attention; cut out propaganda

Quick articles for newspapers and such about the problems that need help fixing

Don't get people in your habits

Don't advertise your own bad habits

Could look like: people helping others, helping the environment, working in groups to, maybe make a difference (advertise the right thing)

Be the change that you want to see.

Another commented that they were: *Actually [just?] getting started.* In her evaluation sheet, one young woman explained: *although it was supposed to help the organisers ... I think it helped every person that attended.*

Michael Apple (1996) writes about how individuals (citizens) become reduced to mere economic players under certain forms of governance. He highlights the importance of engaging in 'politics of interruption', creating processes or claiming moments to question these social forces. He identifies education as a key site for this action. It has been interesting to reflect on the workshop as a process of interruption. Perhaps what workshop participants were doing together, for a brief moment, was interrupting some of the forces that individualise and dehumanise, and that render people isolated or helpless to act and create change.

So the young people identified the importance of respectful conversation about the future, being heard, adult listeners, witnesses, co-learners, safe spaces to speak, and opportunities to hear each other. They pointed to a sense of collectivity which led to a sense of hope. They also highlighted that these things were a departure from their everyday experiences.

The experience also leaves me wondering about other possible sites for interruptions to dehumanising, individualising forces. How might these powerful processes identified by the young people be more incorporated into life, community and education? Rather than simply laying this demand on schools, education can be seen as a process that happens inside and outside schools, for young people and adults (life-long, formal and informal settings). There are some ongoing projects that do exactly this, for example NGOs who work in partnership with schools, and I recognise in a new way the importance of what these folks are doing. The listening extends over time to experiential learning, local action or global

John's reflection

'John' (Year 10 Drama student)

On the 29th August, I was invited on an excursion of the Year 10 Drama class to go to Melbourne University. I accepted the offer of course, not only because it was on a Tuesday, but because the idea of researching what people my age thought about the future appealed to me, and a lot of my friends were doing it.

Nathan and I caught the train there together; at first we were confused as to where the graduate house was, but we eventually found it. It was a lot more classy than what it looked from outside – quite modern!

Nathan and I were two of the first students there, and we got to talk to some former Seaside High School students; they were really nice and friendly to talk to.

About half an hour later, everyone had arrived and we got the show on the road. I met a few other new people; some flew from Canberra and Sydney just to talk to us, a group of High School students.

All the people there were very interesting. It was good to hear different points of views and similar ideas to mine. It was sort of reassuring that I wasn't the only teenager that thought about oil prices and global warming and war and not just what's happening on the weekend.

Most of the work we did was in groups of four or five and we made freeze frames to represent different possibilities for the future and how we could change the future. A lot of the stuff we did was group discussion, on how different people and groups interpreted different freeze frames.

All in all, I think everyone had an enjoyable day; it was definitely worth it – it was a lot of fun. Thanks Michael for the invite!

relationships. These processes are not optional extras, not nice youth participation projects for organisations' decoration or young people's entertainment, but central to claiming human agency and citizenship. This is about learning, recognising, knowing and feeling one's capacity to act in, and on, the world. When facing the future, exploring effective processes is not an optional extra, but a central part of the work that lies ahead.

Richard's story

Richard Eckersley (age 59: research interests include futures, progress, health and wellbeing, and young people)

A couple of years ago, my son, then aged about 18, and I were watching SBS *World News* (it was on after the comedy, *Pizza*, which he enjoyed). An item about the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, Sudan, began. 'Can we turn this off, Dad?' my son asked. 'Yeah, sure,' I replied, 'but why?' 'It's depressing,' he said. 'I don't need reminding what a horrible place the world is.'

The bleak view of the world and its future held by many young people, which I encountered when working with the Commission for the Future almost 20 years ago, first aroused my interest in their health, and then in progress and wellbeing more broadly. The issue was then, and remains, often misunderstood. Most young people, like most older people, are optimistic about their personal futures. Having concerns about the future of the world does not mean being morose or dejected, or even thinking a lot about it. And, as pointed out in the section on future visions and wellbeing, people can respond quite differently to the concerns.

In the 1988 Commission for the Future study (cited elsewhere in this report), the 53 per cent of respondents who were pessimistic about the future of humanity were asked if their concerns 'in general diminish or reduce your enjoyment of life' (Eckersley, 2000).

Only 2 per cent said 'very much' and 13 per cent 'quite a lot', while 48 per cent said 'not much' and 35 per cent 'not at all' (still, this means 63 per cent of this group claimed they were personally affected).

Future fears no doubt impact most on those who are already psychologically vulnerable, magnifying their personal problems by making them seem part of a far larger predicament. Less directly and more commonly, however, these concerns can reinforce a self-focus and political disengagement that are also encouraged by growing individualism and materialism. And this orientation has implications for wellbeing, social as well as personal. Ultimately, it can sap people's will to address global issues – unless their concerns can be harnessed to produce social change. And this 'activation' depends in turn on how the concerns are embodied in the narratives of people's lives, especially whether people are cast as passive observers or active players in the larger picture.

Being heard

For most of the students who participated in the workshop, the stand-out feature of the experience seemed to be that they were listened to and, importantly, listened to with respect. They also clearly enjoyed being able to discuss and play out their fears and hopes about the future. This finding supports that of earlier, more extensive research (Eckersley, 1999, 2002; Gidley, Bateman & Smith, 2004). Their gratitude for the experience raises the question of how often this happens – within schools and families and amongst peers.

As discussed in the first project report (Eckersley, Wierenga & Wyn, 2006a), young people need to be able to create stories or narratives that allow them to make sense of the world and their lives. This is important to their wellbeing and to Australia's future. The opportunity to talk about the world and themselves is an essential ingredient of this

story-making. Yet the students' reactions hint at the absence of opportunity.

Society needs to consider to what extent family life (with its work-life pressures, structured activities and media distractions), education (with its curriculum demands), friendships (with a focus around entertainment), and the media (increasingly intrusive) are no longer allowing the time for the reflection and conversations needed for creating stories. Young people are, of course, exposed to huge numbers of stories, some of which reflect ages-old themes and myths. However, to a large extent, they do not inhabit these stories. However much they might identify with the characters, these are not personal narratives that provide storylines connecting them to the wider world and the future.

The first report noted among its key findings the need 'for communities to claim space for conversations about things of value; and to allow time for reflection, for asking questions as well as seeking solutions'. The workshop affirmed this need, specifically in relation to the future young people will inherit and shape.

Disconnections

The workshop students were aware of national and global issues and problems, but most appeared to feel they did not have the personal capacity to do anything about them. The task was momentous, the proposed remedies trivial; there was little sense of collective or political agency. This was, for the research panel, a striking feature of the workshop, one which very likely flows from the lack of opportunities to create narratives that connect personal stories to social histories. This is hardly surprising: the gulf between the magnitude of the challenges facing humanity and the scale of its responses runs right through society to include the activities of government and other major institutions.

At a time when there is growing attention and debate on policy and technological responses to terrorism, global warming and other threats, the importance of the subjective and intangible is often overlooked. Yet these dimensions are crucial to the development of adequate, effective responses. The focus is on the 'hard' issues of economic instruments and technological innovation, but, ultimately, it is the 'soft' aspects of life – values, beliefs, stories – that are more important.

Generational shifts?

Several recent studies and commentaries have suggested that today's youth, Gen Y, are more optimistic about the future than their predecessors. Adapted to a globalised, high-tech world, knowing only economic stability and prosperity, they are 'fearless and flexible' (Saulwick Muller 2006). In contrast to Generation X, Huntley (2006) says, 'Yers are a happy, well-behaved and optimistic bunch ... This is a healthy demographic, reporting low levels of psychological distress.'

This portrait of youth is neither new nor complete (Eckersley, 1997, 2002). This project – especially the survey results – does not support this view of a generational shift in optimism. The surveys span (late) Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y. They show that, whatever changes in 'style' there may have been, these generations have been overwhelmingly optimistic about their personal futures, and they are more likely than not to be pessimistic about national and global futures. Nor, contrary to what Huntley (2006) suggests, do young people appear to have more faith today than in the past that science and technology will provide solutions to humanity's difficulties. If anything, young people's concerns about the world have deepened, a hardly surprising development given both the current and emerging realities of global terrorism, climate change and other threats, and their intensifying media coverage.

Dave's reflection

'Dave' (Year 10 Drama student)

On Tuesday, August the 29th, a group of people from Seaside High School went to Melbourne University to attend a study on what young people think the future may hold. There were roughly 20 students from school, and about seven adults, that had come from all over Australia to conduct the study.

We arrived at the university at 9:15, and were taken into a room where a woman called Helen (the person in charge of the seminar) told us why we were there; following that, we did a Mexican wave, saying our name when we stood up.

When the adults came into the room, we each said a little bit about ourselves, and did the Mexican wave again.

The first proper activity that we did was to improvise and perform a small scene on parental pressure regarding kids' choices in VCE. Each group of two then played the scene again, but this time swapped roles. Once a few of the scenes had been shown to the rest of the group, we had a discussion on what we think drives parents to pressure their kids, and what pressures there may be.

After the discussion, we made new groups, this time of four or five people. We were then instructed to brainstorm a few ideas of where we would like to see ourselves in five years. After that, we were asked to create a small freeze frame (small movements were allowed), showing one of the ideas in detail. This was followed by a discussion on what these scenes may mean, and then finally recess.

As we filed out of the room into the eating area, we saw tea, coffee, and an assortment of biscuits that we helped ourselves to.

Once satisfied, we moved back into the room where we continued the study. This

time, we were asked to put ourselves into different groups again. We then brainstormed ideas about what we were scared that the future might turn out like, and then put it into a short play. Our group came up with a scene showing a severe water shortage, terrorism, and a big brother type world where the government controls everything. As each group showed their scene, the rest of the people tried to work out what it meant, and what the ideas were that were brainstormed.

As this took a little bit longer than expected, it was lunchtime after the scenes were performed. Just like before, we moved out into the eating area where this time we saw sandwiches, cut into little triangles. Not many people could figure out what exactly was in the sandwiches, but they tasted great all the same.

After lunch, we went back into the room and did basically the same thing, but this time we were talking about our hopes for the future. After we had brainstormed our ideas, we were to show each one in a two second freeze frame, one after the other. These scenes were titled, so little discussion was needed to work out what they meant.

Once that was finished, we formed a big circle, and, one by one, told the rest of the group what they liked about the day. Then everybody was given a certificate, and a movie pass to say thank you for being part of the study. We were dismissed from the University at 3:00.

All in all, the day was a lot of fun, and I learned a lot of stuff that I wouldn't have thought about otherwise. I talked to people that I wouldn't normally talk to, and went home feeling like I had accomplished something. The end of the day seemed to drag on a little bit, but it was a day off school, and a worthwhile one at that.

Beneath the different readings of generational attributes and attitudes to the future swirls a complex mix of disciplinary perspective and tensions, as the first project report highlighted. These also emerged in the research panel discussions in this project. Huntley (2006) says she has tried her best to avoid the tendency of older people to see young people as 'a problem that needs fixing'. Defending young people against social criticism and control is a recurring theme in youth studies. The danger in this approach is that it risks glossing over real concerns, such as the adverse trends in young people's health and wellbeing, and, as a result, downplays the fact that there are problems that affect young people that 'need fixing'. In other words, young people are not the problem; what is causing problems among young people is.

The complexities of this question were discussed in detail in the first report (Eckersley, Wierenga & Wyn, 2006a). This project provides further evidence that discourses framed around generational differences, even 'wars', have at best a limited validity. In today's world, what unites generations is far bigger than what divides them.

Janet's story

Janet McCalman (age 58: social and medical historian)

The day spent with the 'Seasiders' was one of mixed emotions. Coming in 'cold', as an outsider, unfamiliar with the school and its community, I was at first overwhelmed with a feeling that these young people have been let down by their education, especially by the part for which I bear some responsibility. That is SOSE (Studies of Society and Environment) which includes history, geography, economics, politics and environmental studies and which above all is the study area that needs to prepare them for their future as citizens not just of this country, but of the world. According to at least one of the students, this day spent in

the Youth Futures workshop was found more interesting than the SOSE class it replaced on a Tuesday.

On paper, the list of their concerns for the future was sophisticated and aware of the world, but the content of their role-playing – which was admirably spontaneous – was troubling. Its sources were not their schooling, but the external popular culture they inhabited outside of school – a largely digital culture driven by commercial agendas. This is not suggesting that their formal education should provide the dominant content of their minds, and it was very clear that the 'Seasiders' were critical young people who were far from passive consumers of Hollywood and its ubiquitous offspring. Somehow their SOSE classes were not relevant.

However much the Prime Minister calls for better 'history in schools' that would unequivocally serve a narrow, nationalistic agenda, this does not mean that we back away from teaching thoughtful, critical and rich content to our students. Part of the problem is that the SOSE teacher's classroom story is competing with the powerfully told stories of commercial media. It is very difficult to provide a classroom story that is compelling and absorbing – particularly in a subtle history like Australia's.

However when we fail to teach young people history or SOSE in a progressive program that matches their emotional and intellectual development, then we deprive them of the understanding of how the world works that can give them a map for the future. It's like sending people out the door into a wilderness without a compass or guide. How can they think about the things that concern them for the future if they have not the least idea of how people in the past dealt with things, made change, agitated, fought, criticised, and used new tools? They cannot expect to start from scratch, with a blank

slate. They need to be able to do better than conceptualise dangerous executive power on a global scale as an 'American Hitler'. If they cannot begin to learn how to think about the world and learn from the collective human experience that is history, then they are being thrust into life without the most important intellectual tools they will need for survival.

A new book on how some young people can find their way, *Out of the Woods: tales of resilient teens*, by Stuart Hauser, Joseph Allen and Eve Golden (2006), reveals the importance of history-making as the sense-making of suffering in recovery from adolescent psychosis. It was the ability to reshape personal narratives into increasingly complex, rich and structured (or 'smooth') personal histories that distinguished the few that got themselves 'out of the woods'. By analysing these narratives in comparison with others who demonstrated less resilience, the authors were able to observe over time – from ages 12 through to 25 – how what is essentially historical thinking emerged as the process of building resilience, of somehow 'turning on' the resilience gene through cognitive growth.

During an earlier skirmish in the History Wars, a psychiatrist responded to one of my Age columns with the observation that what the suicidal young people he saw lacked most of all, was a sense of history. How can a sense of history increase your resilience in the face of discouragement and despair? Indeed, what distinguishes suicidal young people is their inability to imagine the future: that's why they want to die – they cannot see how they can live, what they can do, how it could possibly turn out. To imagine the future, we need to have signposts of ways forward, and those we learn from experience, both personal and vicarious. And the formal as well as the informal study of history can be regarded as tapping into collective or vicarious human experience. You cannot develop a map for the future unless you have some knowledge and perspective on how

human beings have put the world together in the past.

Two American historians, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen have interviewed 1400 American adults – 600 of them Afro-Americans, Mexican Americans or Sioux – about how they make history inside their own heads, how they find meaning in the past in their everyday lives. A majority of these people feel a powerful sense of engagement with the past, but overwhelmingly theirs is a familial and intimate historicity. They are not uninterested in large events – on a community, national or global scale. But they connect with the march of history through private experience of those large historical events – if you like, private history amidst the public.

However, the least likely to privatise history in this way are Afro-Americans and Sioux Indians and, to the authors' surprise, it is the Afro-Americans who have most preserved the progressive narrative of American History, 'albeit not in its most easily recognisable forms'. Ray Rosenzweig (2000) continues: 'To a startling degree black Americans constructed a story of progress when they looked at the past – a rather traditional story that was hard to find among white Americans.' And they are far more likely than whites to describe change for the better. Here we see, for both Afro-Americans and Amerindians, the making of a history that is enabling for the individual as well as for the group, even if it is unrecognisable to many professionals.

All of this challenges us as writers and teachers, argues David Thelen, 'to pay more attention to individuals both as interpreters of and actors in the past', and rely less on our preferred protagonists – abstracted actors in groups, communities, classes, and nations. Thelen (2000) confesses:

...our respondents were challenging me to see history as a tension between large

events and circumstances that shape the range within which people think and act on the one hand, and the tremendously active and varied ways that individuals tried to meet intimate needs, on the other.

Even more challenging was what the respondents said they wanted school history to do for their children, and that was nothing less, in fact, than preparing them for adult life: not quite making them good American citizens, but rather, effective, autonomous people who believed that they had some control over their destiny. This was revealed by the way they constructed historical narratives in their own lives, where people often assembled isolated experiences into narratives or trajectories. From these narratives 'they could project what might happen next, set priorities, and try to take responsibility for the future course of events.' And, fascinatingly, 'the rhythms of family life, often the responsibility parents felt to prepare their children for what lay ahead, inspired the narratives they found to explain change and continuity in the larger world.' Thus they made the connection between private history and public history, but the essential part of that link was their need to affirm personal agency in their own lives and in the wider world.

Thelen concludes from reviewing the testimony of this wide sample of American parents: "The past thus becomes a vast reservoir for exploring to what extent and under what circumstances and with what support individuals might be able to shape the course of events, whether of alcoholism in themselves or racism in the larger society'.

What the American parents and our Melbourne psychiatrist are seeing in good history teaching is the *unlearning of helplessness*. One of the characteristics of depression, particularly in the young, is learned helplessness; that nothing you can do can make any difference. And when we teach history as abstracted to the point of

Jane's reflection

'Jane' (Year 10 Drama student)

I got the opportunity to interact with people I wouldn't usually interact with. I also got to interact with people I usually interact with, but in a different environment. Everyone's needs were catered for throughout the day. Everybody took part productively. Free food :) It was good to hear people's perspectives on very serious issues we are facing today. I enjoyed the active learning environment; I would like if our school undertook more of this. I enjoyed working with Helen, she was a very lovely woman, and she put a lot of effort in to making our day go smoothly. I would like very much if we kept in touch with her.

Everyone got along with each other very well. It was great working with the adults involved as well.

concealing individual agency, we perhaps can break many youthful hearts who need to believe that the world is worthwhile and that they have a purposeful place in it, and that it is possible to bring about change. But how do we teach that to young people both in schools and universities? This is in fact one of the most difficult intellectual problems in the humanities and social sciences: the relationship between the individual and his or her agency in the course of events, and the larger social forces that shape the world.

As a private individual, the past gives me hope for the future in that it reinforces my faith in the capacity of ordinary people to strive for decency and fairness in the world and to utilise new knowledge to solve problems. Life goes on, in spite of the most terrible events and transformations. And young people need to be given that hope that within ourselves we can make history even

though the circumstances are never of our own choosing.

The SOSE curriculum is therefore just as important as literacy or mathematics, for SOSE is learning how to go about the task of living in the world from the collective experience of others. Perhaps we need to do much more work on theorising the role of knowledge of the past and of others in the building of reflexivity, perspective and resilience in young people. And on the basis of that theory, work towards a richer school SOSE curriculum.

Jennifer's story

Jennifer Gidley (age 50s: research interests include youth and educational futures, spiritual psychology, educational transformation and evolution of consciousness)

Throughout the day of the youth futures workshop, although I saw many things that I could comment on, the most striking thing that came to me and kept tapping on my shoulder throughout the day, was a comment made by Richard in the very first morning session with the panel. He pointed out that an unforeseen challenge in the overall process of the Australia 21 research project was the difficulties that arose from within the cross-disciplinary team, particularly when it came to writing up the research. I was slightly shocked to hear that even such a well-intentioned attempt at cross-disciplinary research between close colleagues can be problematic. Some of the major challenges were that there may be contentious issues around choices of methodology, interpretation of findings and the challenges in arriving at 'multi-perspectival' rather than 'disciplinary perspectives' in report writing. As pointed out in the report *Flashpoints and Signposts: Pathways to success and well-being for Australia's young people*, these methodological, interpretive and pragmatic issues arise from disciplinary perspectives being underpinned by deeper conceptual,

even philosophical, frameworks that can be quite distinct.

However, tensions – 'flashpoints' – remained because of different disciplines often drawing on different conceptual frameworks to interpret the evidence ... A push into inter-disciplinary work means entering a newer territory that requires its own process and conceptual development. (Eckersley, Wierenga & Wyn 2006a: 9)

I carried this surprise and slight perturbation with me throughout the day as it tapped into my own current research, which attempts to take a transdisciplinary approach to the evolution of consciousness. Observing and participating throughout the day, I was mindful of just how complex was the diversity of contributions and how challenging it would be to produce a meta-perspective on the workshop via a report. In addition to the dozen or so academic researchers from a variety of disciplines, there were some ex-students who were now student teachers, as well as the young people themselves, who were also identified as co-researchers. In my own internal dialogue and the dialogue I had with several of the panel throughout the day, I tried to grapple with how some of the theories and methodologies that I am drawing on in my research (eg integral studies, futures studies, research 'bricoleur'ship) might be able to inform a cross-disciplinary study such as this.

A rather powerful insight came to me as we reflected at the end of the day. I saw how well we were all able to interrelate throughout the day, in spite of our multiple perspectives, because we were not just relating from our 'head knowledge' but in an embodied way (using our hearts and hands as well) through the medium of drama and narrative. I thought that perhaps we could draw an analogy between this and the difficulties that we sometimes have as academics, professionals or researchers, because we

communicate mostly 'head knowledge' through discussion and text.

I wonder how different this might be if we used other more integrated methods that utilised, in addition to concepts, such processes as drama, narrative, and other artistic media. Since the workshop itself, I have continued to explore this theme of the challenges of cross-disciplinary research, and have some brief pointers to make about what it means to me in regard to the futures of research potential.

From my perspective, the struggles of this research group reflect a wider picture of researchers attempting to come to grips with what I see as an emerging new stage of consciousness, referred to variously in the research as 'post-formal', 'post-rational' or 'integral' consciousness (Gebser 1991, Kincheloe & Steinberg 1993, Wilber 2000, Gidley 2006). The appearance of potential new faculties of consciousness arising globally is well reflected in the 'cross-disciplinary turn' in contemporary research developments:

- Teams of experts/researchers from different disciplines coming together to attempt to gain a broader understanding of a complex issue;
- Individual researchers drawing on a range of disciplines in order to arrive at a multi-faceted, broader understanding of a complex issue; and
- Newer academic fields which embrace a number of previously distinct disciplinary areas, such as youth studies, women's studies, sustainability, futures studies, complexity science and, more recently, integral studies.

Challenges and creative futures of cross-disciplinarity

There are a number of challenges to the use of cross-disciplinary approaches to research. However, there are also theories and methodologies that are better adapted to the

new challenges created by the complexities of contemporary social issues, and to addressing the 'big picture' dimensions of the 21st century.

I would like to briefly point to some theories and methodologies that might assist in going beyond singular 'disciplinary' approaches and enable new ways of thinking, researching and writing about complex issues in these complex times.

- ***Holistic Perspectives and Integral Theory.*** An increasing disenchantment with scientific reductionism, particularly when it comes to researching complex social issues, has led to a move towards more holistic approaches to research and praxis. Probably the most comprehensive conceptual mapping that builds towards an integral theory has been attempted by contemporary philosopher Ken Wilber (2000).
- ***Depth Futures Methodologies.*** One of the methodological approaches from the futures studies field that I personally find very valuable in terms of depth analysis is the Causal Layered Analysis (CLA), developed by Sohail Inayatullah (2000). This methodological approach has provided some valuable insights into some of the issues underlying youth suicide (Gidley 2005).
- ***Intertextuality as a Writing Approach.*** In terms of how we actually write up cross-disciplinary research, the post-structuralist approach of intertextuality honours both the complexity and non-linearity of cross-disciplinary research. Joe Kincheloe (2005) links intertextuality and the 'post-formal' research called '*bricolage*'. He points out that 'all narratives obtain meaning not merely by their relationship to material reality but from their connection to other narratives.'
- ***Bricolage as Research Philosophy and Methodology.*** Describing *bricolage*

as a 'multimethod mode of research', Kincheloe (2005) links it to multi-disciplinary research as it includes: 'Ethnography, textual analysis, semiotics, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, historiography, discourse analysis combined with philosophical analysis, literary analysis, aesthetic criticism, and theatrical and dramatic ways of observing and making meaning.' In my view this approach seems to have particular relevance to the writing up of the research for our project as it involves the integration of multiple voices and multiple perspectives.

As both an ending and a beginning ...

One of the most outstanding aspects of the Australia 21 youth futures workshop for me was the way that the young people were able to relax and open up because they felt that it was a safe, enabling environment. The intention and ability of all participants to let their traditional 'boundaries' become permeable enabled a high level of cross-disciplinary and cross-generational interaction. In these times of so much complexity, and conflict, new methods of breaking down barriers are so vital. What the processes of the Australia 21 youth futures workshop sparked in me is the realisation that it is more urgent than ever for those of us pushing into cross-disciplinary and even transdisciplinary modes of research and conceptualisation, to recognise and utilise the range of emergent philosophical, theoretical and methodological approaches available to assist us to more broadly, deeply, sensitively and rigorously, pursue our passions.

Implications

This project aimed to make a contribution to our understanding of young people's sense of what the future holds for them. As described above, an innovative methodology was designed specifically to open dialogue across traditional disciplinary and age boundaries and to bridge the gap between the agendas and preoccupations of academics and policy-makers and those of ordinary young people.

We can draw a number of conclusions from this project. We found congruence between the expressions of the young people and the wider bodies of research to suggest that young people are growing up in a context that individualises responsibility, but offers few clear answers to the big picture challenges – both geographic and temporal. The young people who participated in this project were interested to take an active role in building a sustainable future, both environmentally and socially, yet most found it very difficult to name ways in which they could personally contribute to a wider agenda of constructing preferred futures and actively link the personal to the local to the global.

One panel member noted that young people have grown up under the influence of a national leadership that does not talk about the future. Indeed, the scenarios created by the young people depicted political leadership as manipulative, exploitative, self-interested, dehumanised and concerned to deny the existence of enduring challenges such as poverty and inequality and environmental threat. Their

representations of what they saw as ethically bereft leadership were shown to be integrally connected to feelings of helplessness or even a sense of collective threat from 'new' external factors such as social and environmental change and difference.

The methodology highlighted the importance of developing processes that enable cross-disciplinary and inter-generational dialogue in a structured way that promotes active listening, the recognition of shared concerns and collective responsibility for developing solutions. The workshop demonstrated that these structured processes can lead to hope, a sense of possibility, and an interest in taking action.

Young people's reflections on the workshop reveal that they particularly value the opportunity to engage seriously with older people about ethical, social, political and environmental issues. They would like to be heard by older people, but they also want to hear what older people think. This provoked us to ask, how does our society generally provide the spaces within which young and older people can engage in meaningful dialogue?

We acknowledge we are drawing on just one workshop with young people, and that we need to do more research to develop this work. However, the poll results suggest that, broadly speaking, the workshop outcomes are indicative of the views of many of their generation. This is true not just of their broad expectations of the future, but also

of some specific concerns. For example, the students' fears of authoritarian control are reflected in the poll findings that young people are more likely to agree that governments will use new technologies to watch and regulate people more than that they will make democracy stronger and give people more control over their lives.

In this section we draw on the findings of the project to provide a synthesis of policy implications. The project has demonstrated that young people have the capacity to provide views which challenge adult ways of thinking and open up new approaches to finding pathways to preferred futures. It has some significant messages for all those involved in the development and implementation of youth policy, across all jurisdictions, for the private sector and for research. In particular, the young people in this project revealed that they:

- ✦ Have a strong sense of personal responsibility for building positive futures, for themselves and their society. They hold concerns about both personal issues (for example, getting a good job or doing well in their studies) and about community and global issues (for example, poverty, the environment and terrorism), but feel relatively helpless to address the 'big picture' issues and disempowered beyond individual responses;
- ✦ Enjoy sharing and creating stories from their own experience and hearing those passed on through family and community. Stories about overcoming adversity and about hope for the future are an important resource on which they draw in solving their own problems and in understanding how to take action; and
- ✦ Find that a sense of agency, commitment and hope is generated when they engage in dialogue across the boundaries of age groupings, location and expertise.

Across all jurisdictions and policy areas, the project highlighted the responsibility that older people have to engage in dialogue with young people as a two-way process, listening to their views, providing young people with responses to their questions and showing an interest in jointly exploring answers in a time and place that is relevant to young people.

Policy implications

Ordinary young people have important things to say, but know their voice is not heard. Young people are usually positioned as passive recipients of adult knowledge and advice. In this project, they appreciated the opportunity to ask questions of older people and valued hearing about older people's experiences in an interactive context.

Many jurisdictions have responsibility for different aspects of young people's lives. In terms of policy and governance, the trinity of Education, Health and Juvenile Justice are recognised as the dominant three areas where policies and programs are developed and enacted in young people's present interests, and on behalf of their future lives. The young people in this study highlighted that equal attention should be given to environment policy as an arena of significant import in relation to their futures. In practice, environment is rarely considered in relation to youth health, education or employment. We also believe more attention needs to be paid to the role of the media in shaping young people's views of the world and its future and, more broadly, their own lives and priorities.

In Australian Federal and State Governments, responsibilities for youth are broken down into many separate and overlapping portfolios, including Offices of Youth and Community Services. There are periodic attempts to bring greater coherence to the governance of young people's lives through inter-departmental and inter-sectoral initiatives which bring representatives of health, education and

justice together, in recognition of the need to take a more holistic approach to young people's lives, and to enact 'upstream' policies that are preventive rather than reactive.

Young people themselves are pointing out that to work 'upstream' we must also take a longer view of the future and encompass a broader sense of what constitutes their world. While this project has implications across the breadth of policy arenas that relate to young people, we highlight implications for youth policy, education, media and the environment.

There is a strong body of evidence that supports the conclusion that while young Australians are disengaged from the formal political processes through which our society is governed, they are active participants in civic society in a wide range of ways (Vronen 2003). Participation in policy formation and gaining an understanding of the contribution that they can make to policy – and how policy affects their lives – is a key component of the governance process that would enable young people to understand the links between voting in elections and the policies that govern their lives. While young people do not necessarily see the things they are concerned about as 'politics', engaging with young people around issues that are relevant to their lives would make a significant contribution to developing 'political literacies' (Fyfe & Wyn 2006).

This project connects with other existing work (eg Holdsworth 2003) to identify a workable methodology for engaging young people meaningfully in shaping policy and taking action. Most youth policies derive from a 'top-down' process, in which young people have a relatively token involvement in consultations. The diversity of their voices is often washed out by aggregated responses and they often have no role in enacting policy. While there is an increasing interest in youth participation in some areas of government, especially through Offices of Youth, this project suggests that there

would be significant benefits in creating more meaningful and widespread processes of dialogue between adults and young people at all stages of policy formation and enactment.

The issue of futures represents a 'missing link' in these processes. To elaborate briefly, many policies are enacted around a deficit and individualised approach to young people. Targets are set in order to reduce the proportions of 'vulnerable' and 'at-risk' youth, or to ensure that individuals can compete in the market place. This gives only token recognition to the fact that social conditions make some groups of young people vulnerable to particular outcomes at particular points in time, and fails to recognise that deficits may reside within the system rather than within the young person. Vulnerability and risk are a function of environmental conditions, social conditions and relationships.

The individualised approach does little to address the processes that create unequal outcomes amongst young people, and provides no way to address the more significant questions: What sort of world do we need to sustain life? What are we aiming for? What are we responsible for? What do enabling social structures, policies and relationships look like? Through its focus on futures, this project provides an approach towards a more coherent view of the role of policy in informing structural responses to shared problems. It highlights the concern of young people with the interconnected nature of their own and their society's wellbeing and with their shared dependence on (and responsibility for) a 'well' environment. It also underlines the importance of giving greater priority to involving young people in policy-shaping processes.

Many of the policy issues raised here relate equally to education. This project on youth futures has significant implications for education because young people are explicitly

there to prepare for their futures. Young people are also expected to spend more time than ever before within educational institutions. There is an emerging sense, however, that educational institutions have been slow to respond to the changing nature of youth and adulthood, and to pick up the philosophical, ethical and practical concerns that young people have with shaping their shared futures. Educational processes and structures continue to reflect the legacy of their origins in the industrial world of Australia in the 1950s. Today, young people have token representation in education policy and in decision-making within their 'own' institutions. While they are locked into age-based, linear concepts of learning, and held apart from roles of use or value in their broader community, there is little opportunity for action or for dialogue between generations and across social groups.

Young people have the greatest stake in the longer range view of the future and thus have a particular interest in how environment policy will shape the world that they live in. It is not surprising then that they showed a particular concern with the ethics that informs environmental policy. It is here that they were interested to see themselves as shapers of change. It is here that they were most interested to be given an arena for voice, learning and action.

The following dot points provide a summary of the main policy implications of the project for the youth policy, education and other policy areas.

Youth policy

- Young people value the opportunity to have dialogue about the important issues that affect their lives, individually and collectively, with adults who demonstrate that they are listening.
- Effective dialogue between generations depends on the creation of effective design (structure and process) through which the talk can proceed and through

which different points of view and voices can be recognised.

- Effective dialogue includes the opportunity to take action and effect change.
- Young people have particular concerns that are age-specific, but they also share many concerns with older people. However, consultations with young people are often limited to 'youth issues' and result in policy frameworks pertaining only to targeted areas of 'at-risk', 'marginal' or 'vulnerable' youth. Offices for Youth (for example) could play a greater role in advocating for young people's engagement in decision-making across the spectrum of policy issues in which young people would make a special contribution around:

◇ *Visioning futures.* In what is currently a significant policy gap, young people have a role to play in contributing to debate about what a good community and society would look like in the future. This issue has the potential to engage the diverse narratives and perspectives of Australians. In part, visioning the future involves acknowledging stories of achievement and hope from the past, and most centrally, narratives from indigenous communities, from the historical waves of different migrant groups and communities and from refugee groups.

◇ *Building futures.* Young people are important partners in building futures – both through their active engagement in meaningful policy enactment and program delivery, and through civic actions of their own choice. The workshop demonstrated the importance of drawing on new approaches to youth participation to work with young people in partnership.

Education

- ✦ Young people have a real contribution to make to the shaping of new educational agendas. Their role in the key policy-making organisations in government, in schools and in professional organisations such as Institutes of Teaching is under-estimated.
- ✦ Young people have a significant contribution to make in problem-solving as well as problem-identification and their role in effecting change and in teaching and equipping peers to engage in change-acts is yet to be fully imagined.
- ✦ Greater inter-generational dialogue could be fostered explicitly within a range of curricula and be of mutual value to youth and adults alike. In (important) arguments about the need to hear 'youth voices', other important notions of context, relationship and dialogue can be lost. Young people have highlighted the value of not only speaking directly with adults but also of hearing adults' thoughts.
- ✦ Narratives and stories are important tools for making sense of the past, for envisaging likely and alternative futures, for identifying what is of value, and for devising ways to act.
- ✦ Interactive and innovative approaches to dialogue and learning can assist young people and their communities to build a sense of the imperative and legitimacy of taking action to build their preferred future world.
- ✦ This project would not have been possible without the (unresourced) support of the school. What resources would it take to equip more schools to build innovative partnerships involving this kind of dialogue across generations and sectors into their curricula?
- ✦ It will be increasingly important to explore possibilities for partnerships with schools, and to recognise that education happens in informal and formal settings.

Other policy areas

While it is difficult to address the implications of this project in arenas not directly or specifically concerned with youth, we nonetheless felt that there were several issues that warrant attention.

- ✦ Young people value the opportunity for spaces within which inter-generational dialogue can be enacted, and within which narratives of resilience, practice and partnership can be constructed around issues of shared concern. They are keen to find a meaningful role within their communities and to find a way to take action that is communal in both focus and in design. The environment is one issue which resonates with many young people.
- ✦ The mass media have enormous reach and influence in shaping society's defining stories. Media impacts remain a hotly contested topic of research. A recent international review calls for a risk-based approach that takes more account of the complex, interactive and indirect pathways by which the media contribute to social issues (Millwood Hargrave & Livingstone 2006). We note that the Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA 2006) is currently conducting a major study of electronic media use by children and young people and its effects. Such studies should include the role of the media in shaping young people's expectations of the future.

Research

This trial of an innovative participatory approach to researching youth futures has a number of implications for further research. The project has demonstrated the value of employing drama as a structured form of research enabling participants to communicate across traditional (eg age and expertise) barriers. In particular, it has

provided a process for opening up dialogue on a notoriously difficult topic (futures), enabling the collection of data that moved beyond the stereotypical binary of optimism/pessimism to produce an insight into a more complex positioning of young people on this topic.

The project has also demonstrated the relevance of 'storying' as part of the process of creating images of feared and preferred futures and of drama-based processes as enabling a rehearsal for action. As the workshop demonstrated, stories are part of the 'glue' that holds a society together, and that make it possible to take an active role in shaping futures. Equally, the participatory nature of the workshop process illustrated the need for dialogue as a community building strategy. The report highlights the value of seeking qualitative data via interactive and participatory research processes in order to deepen, and in some instances to shift, understandings generated by statistical data. Most importantly, the project has demonstrated the benefits of involving young people directly in the research process, enabling them to both challenge and contribute to the insights and views that academics and policy-makers have developed.

The project has the following implications for research:

- ✦ Youth participation in research is a realistic and effective concept, but it requires a shift away from traditional, adult-centred approaches (such as interviewing, focus groups or surveys).
- ✦ Narratives and storying provide a useful tool for understanding current situations, for envisaging preferred directions, and for generating a sense of how to achieve change.

Further research extending this project is warranted. The research methodology should be deployed within the framework of a larger, systematic research program involving workshops with diverse groups of young people, adults and 'experts'. The purpose of this would be to build a more systematic picture of how different communities can create visions of the future and build more effective pathways towards those futures.

References

- ACMA (2006). Media and society research project initiated. *ACMAsphere* issue 14, November: 5
- Apple, M. (1996). **Cultural politics and education**. New York: Teachers College Press
- Beck, U. (1992). **Risk Society. Towards a New Modernity**. London: Sage
- Beck, U. & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002). **Individualization**. London: Sage
- Bruner, J. (1987) Life as narrative. *Social Research* 54 (1): 11-32
- Cahill, H. (2001). Drama for empowerment: Enhancing resilience through Drama. *Language, Literacy and Arts Education*. Melbourne: The University of Melbourne
- Cahill, H. (2002). Teaching for community: Empowerment through Drama. *Melbourne Studies in Education* 43 (2): 12-25
- Cahill, H. (2005). Profound learning: Drama partnerships between adolescents and tertiary students. *Drama Australia Journal* NJ 29 (2): 59-72
- Cahill, H. (2006). Sensitive issues: Supportive structures. *Drama Australia Journal* NJ 30 (1): 7-23
- Cahill, H. (in press). Research acts: using the drama workshop as a site for conducting participatory action research. *Drama Australia Journal* NJ (forthcoming)
- Denzin, N. (2001). **Interpretive Interactionism**, 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage
- Diamond, J. (2005). **Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed**. London: Allen Lane
- Dwyer, P., Smith, G., Tyler, D. & Wyn, J. (2005). **Immigrants in Time: Life-Patterns 2004**. Melbourne: Australian Youth Research Centre
- Eckersley, R. (1997). Portraits of youth - understanding young people's relationship with the future. *Futures* 29 (3): 243-249
- Eckersley, R. (1999). Dreams and expectations: Young people's expected and preferred futures and their significance for education. *Futures* 31 (1): 73-90
- Eckersley, R. (2000). The state and fate of nations: Implications of subjective measures of personal and social quality of life. *Social Indicators Research* 52: 3-27
- Eckersley, R. (2002). Future visions, social realities and private lives: Young people and their personal well-being, in Gidley, J. & Inayatullah, S. (eds). **Youth Futures: Comparative Research and Transformative Visions**: 31-41. Westport, Conn: Praeger
- Eckersley, R. (2005). **Well & Good: Morality, Meaning and Happiness**, 2nd edition. Melbourne: Text Publishing

- Eckersley, R. (2006). What's wrong with the official future? in Hassan, G. (ed). **After Blair: Politics After the New Labour Decade**. London: Lawrence and Wishart
- Eckersley R., Wierenga, A. & Wyn, J. (2005). Life in a time of uncertainty: Optimising the health and wellbeing of young Australians. *Medical Journal of Australia* 183 (8): 402-404
- Eckersley, R., Wierenga, A. & Wyn, J. (2006a). **Flashpoints and Signposts: Pathways to Success and Wellbeing for Australia's Young People**. Canberra: Australia 21 Ltd and Melbourne: Australian Youth Research Centre and VicHealth. At: www.australia21.org.au
- Eckersley, R., Wierenga, A. & Wyn, J. (2006b). Success & wellbeing: A preview of the Australia 21 report on young people's wellbeing. *Youth Studies Australia* 25 (1): 10-18
- Foucault, M. (1980). **Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings**. New York: Pantheon Books
- Freire, P. (1973). **Education for Critical Consciousness**. New York: Seabury Press
- Frydenberg, E. (1997). **Adolescent Coping: Theoretical and Research Perspectives**. London: Routledge
- Fyfe, J. & Wyn, J. (2006). Young activists making the news: The role of the media in youth political and civic engagement, in K. Edwards, M. Print and L. Saha (eds). **Youth and Political Participation**, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers
- Gardner, H. (1983). **Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences**. New York: Basic Books
- Gebser, J. (1991). **The Ever-Present Origin**. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press
- Geertz, C. (1973). Thick description: towards an interpretive theory of culture, in Geertz, C. (ed). **The interpretation of cultures**. New York: Basic Books
- Gergen, K. J. & Gergen, M. M. (1988). Narrative and the self as relationship. *Advances in experimental social psychology* 21: 17-56
- Giddens, A. (1991). **Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age**. Cambridge: Polity
- Gidley, J. (2005). Giving hope back to our young people: Creating a new spiritual mythology for western culture. *Journal of Futures Studies* 9 (3): 17-30
- Gidley, J. (2006). Spiritual epistemologies and integral cosmologies: Transforming thinking and culture, in S. Awbrey, D. Dana, V. Miller *et al* (eds) **Integrative Learning and Action: A Call to Wholeness**. New York: Peter Lang Publishing
- Gidley, J. M., Bateman, D. & Smith, C. (2004). **Futures in Education: Principles, Practice and Potential**, Monograph series no. 5. Melbourne: Australian Foresight Institute (now Strategic Foresight Program), Swinburne University of Technology
- Hauser S., Allen, J. & Golden, E. (2006). **Out of the Woods: Tales of Resilient Teens**. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press
- Hicks, D. W. (2006). **Lessons for the Future: The Missing Dimension in Education**. Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing
- Holdsworth, R. (2003). **Youth participation**, at 2003 Local Government Youth Services Conference, City of Casey, October

- Holstein, J. F. G. a. J. A. (2002). From the individual interview to the interview society, in J. F. G. a. J. A. Holstein (ed). **Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method**. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications
- Hughes, P., Bellamy, J. et al (2000). Building social trust through education, in I. Winter (ed). **Social Capital and Public Policy in Australia**. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies
- Huntley, R. (2006). **The World According to Y: Inside the New Adult Generation**. Sydney: Allen & Unwin
- Inayatullah, S. (2000). **Alternative futures: Methodology, society, macrohistory and the long-term future**. Tamkang Chair Lecture Series. Taipei
- Ipsos Mackay Research (2005a). Where are we headed as a community? **National omnibus poll**, November. Sydney: Ipsos Mackay Public Affairs
- Ipsos Mackay Research (2005b). **Mind and Mood**, The Ipsos Mackay Report no. 116. Sydney: Ipsos Mackay Public Affairs
- Ipsos Mackay Research (2006a). Australian views on science and technology. **National omnibus poll**, February. Sydney: Ipsos Mackay Public Affairs
- Ipsos Mackay Research (2006b). Australian views on computers and robots. **National omnibus poll**, March. Sydney: Ipsos Mackay Public Affairs
- Kincheloe, J. (2005). On to the next level: Continuing the conceptualisation of the bricolage. *Qualitative Inquiry* 11 (3): 323-350
- Kincheloe, J. & Steinberg, S. (1993). A tentative description of post-formal thinking: The critical confrontation with cognitive theory. *Harvard Educational Review* 63 (3): 296-320
- Law, J. (2004). **After Method: Mess in Social Science Research**. Abingdon: Routledge
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1979). **The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology: I**. New York: Octagon Books
- Mills, C. W. (1959). **The Sociological Imagination**. New York: Penguin
- Millwood Hargrave, A. & Livingstone, S. (2006). **Harm and Offence in Media Content: A Review of the Evidence**. Bristol and Portland: Intellect Books
- Postman, N. and Weingartner, C. (1969). **Teaching as a Subversive Activity**. Dell: New York
- Rosenszweig, R. (2000). Popular uses of history in the United States: Professional historians and public history makers. *Perspectives* 38 (5): 19-21
- Seligman, M. (1995). **The Optimistic Child**. Sydney: Random House
- Sapolsky, R. (2005). Sick of poverty. *Scientific American*, December
- Saulwick Muller Social Research (2006). **Fearless and Flexible: Views of Gen Y. A Qualitative Study of People Aged 16 to 24 in Australia**. Report for Dusseldorp Skills Forum, October, Melbourne
- Slaughter, R. A. (2006). **Pathways and Impediments to Social Foresight**, Monograph series no. 10. Melbourne: Strategic Foresight Program, Swinburne University of Technology
- Strauss, A. (1977). **Mirrors and Masks: The Search for Identity**. London: M Robertson

- Taylor, C. (1989). **Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity**. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press
- Thelen, D. (2000). Popular uses of history in the United States: Individuals in history. *Perspectives* 38 (5): 22-25
- Vronen, A. (2003). Traversing time and gender: Australian young people's participation. *Journal of Youth Studies* 6 (3): 277-294
- Waghid, Y. (2005). Action as an educational virtue: Toward a different understanding of democratic citizenship education. *Educational Theory* 55 (3): 323-342
- White, M. (1995). **Re-authoring lives: Interviews and essays by Michael White**. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre
- White, M. (2000). **Reflections on Narrative Practice**. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications
- White, M. & Epston, D. (1990). **Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends**. New York: Norton
- Wierenga, A. (1999). Imagined trajectories: Local culture and social identity, in R. White (ed). **Australian Youth Subcultures: On the Margins and in the Mainstream**. Hobart: Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies
- Wierenga, A. (2001). **Making a Life**, PhD thesis. Hobart: University of Tasmania
- Wierenga, A. (2002). Losing and finding the plot: Storying and the value of listening to young people. *Scottish Youth Issues Journal* (4) 9-30
- Wierenga, A. (forthcoming). **Young People Making a Life**. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan
- Wilber, K. (2000). **A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science and Spirituality**. Boulder: Shambhala
- Wright, R. (2004). **A Short History of Progress**. Melbourne: Text Publishing