



Education Heresies Colloquia 2011–2012

Colloquium Four: Schools not fit for purpose: new schools for the times

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Abstract: My presentation draws on *Touching the Future: Building Skills for Life and Work* (ACER, 2009). I will elaborate on the key messages of the book, which are summarised by Andy Furlong in the Foreword: “this book brings together two stories: one relating to the ways in which young people’s worlds have changed radically over the last three or four decades; the other relating to the growing gap between the skills that we try to equip young people with, through processes of formal education, and those skills that they need to build a future for themselves. In advanced contemporary societies, education is simply no longer fit for purpose. Young people’s lives have moved in ways which call into question some of the central principles on which post-war education was founded. The changes that have taken place have had an impact on the core values, orientations and expectations of modern youth with contrasts being made between the contemporary Generation Y and their predecessors, Generation X. Modern youth have to negotiate new work–life balances, develop an ability to live with uncertainty and manage their careers in contexts where reliable signposts are rare. In such situations, the pay-off for participation in education and training becomes less certain and formal education loses credibility as young people discover that they can learn effectively in non-formal contexts. The main changes that have taken place in the education system have tended to be based on a ‘more of the same’ approach. In other words, preparation of young people for life in the 21st century is thought to require longer engagement with the educational worlds and, in particular, tertiary education. Yet both secondary and tertiary education have retained an emphasis on teaching ‘hard’, work-related skills, rather than promoting the development of ‘soft’ skills and preparation for citizenship. While there are certainly core skills that are central to the education of all young people, in areas such as literacy and numeracy, Wyn reminds us that not only do most young people fail to work in occupational areas linked to their training, but many do not even want to work in these fields.” I argue that schools that are fit for purpose in these new times require a strengthening of educational policies to implement programs that are holistic, flexible and based on social justice.