

The significance of collaboration in education

Mitchell Education Policy Director, Dr Sara Glover discusses the significance of a new Mitchell research report, *The Shared Work of Learning*.

Twelve months ago, the Mitchell Institute launched its education program and called for *New Approaches to Persistent Problems*.

This was the name of our first forum and subsequent report which centred on four propositions to accelerate educational transformation.

As we undertook this work, one common and important message was patently clear: There is a growing imbalance in educational outcomes in Australia. If system reform is to work, it must create the environment whereby change can be locally led and sustained.

What we also know is that growing concentrations of housing wealth and private spending, clustered around high status schools in our cities, is contributing to stagnation in overall progress, frustrating efforts to improve student learning across all schools.

We argue that what has been missing in discussions of system-wide educational improvement is the question of how schools can interact with wider systems – both the formal system of governance and accountability, and the socio-economic system of educational opportunity, employment and advantage.

That is why we embarked on a new research project with the Centre for Strategic Education to examine how locally-led decision making and collaboration is working to generate impact on learning. In addition, we wanted to explore how system-wide policy can enable these high impact and purposeful collaborations to develop, multiply and thrive.

Some of our most innovative models are those designed locally with some of the most disadvantaged communities and young people. The case studies in *The Shared work for learning* report show us that collaboration is integral to the way these schools, and their partners, pursue student learning progress.

Unfortunately, the methods and successes of school and community collaboration have received far less policy attention, investment and measurement than other aspects of schooling.

The aim of *The Shared Work for Learning* is to propose an agenda for systemic change that helps use collaboration systematically and intentionally to accelerate improvement for all students, making much greater use of local partnerships and support from employers, industry, families, and community organisations.

The good news is – as was demonstrated in our case studies across three sites in the states of South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales – this work is already happening, the challenge is to expand capabilities across education systems and make it count for every student.

This is an excerpt from a speech by Dr Sara Glover delivered at the launch of *The Shared work of learning: Lifting educational achievement through collaboration* by Tom Bentley and Dr Ciannon Cazaly on 14 May 2015.