



BUILDING RESILIENCE IN OUR CHILDREN AND OUR COMMUNITIES

Australia is one of the most urbanised nations on Earth, with more than 80% of us living in cities and towns. Providing a taste of his presentation at the 2016 ELAA Conference, the City of Melbourne's Chief Resilience Officer Toby Kent describes how early childhood education programs are pivotal to creating better futures as communities around the world become increasingly urbanised.

As a response to the impacts of accelerating urbanisation, the Rockefeller Foundation has created the 100 Resilient Cities (100RC) initiative. 100RC exists to help cities around the world adapt, survive and thrive in the face of whatever chronic stresses and acute shocks they encounter. These same aspirations equally apply to communities within cities and the individuals that make up those communities.

The Resilient Melbourne initiative operates across the 32 councils that make up metropolitan Melbourne, covering 10,000 km². The population already totals more than 4.3 million – with around one in five Melbournians under the age of 15.

After extensive consultation, Resilient Melbourne has developed long-term objectives which go to the heart of what enables us to flourish as a society. These objectives have specific implications for early learning.

Stronger together

Across Australia, we see increasing emphasis on resilience in schools. Despite this, too often our programs, interventions and market mechanisms foster a culture of dependency, rather than equipping people with the capacity to feel empowered and to take responsibility for their own and others well-being.

From a broader resilience perspective, this is critical, because we are looking at a future which is likely to be more hazardous, in which events may occur simultaneously and people may not be able to rely always on emergency services and immediate government action.

***Point to consider:** From a biological perspective, 'diversity' is a critical element of resilience. Broadening our concepts of 'our communities' will also become more important as our society continues to diversify culturally. When elements of our community are excluded, not only does this tear away at the fabric of our society over time, but shock events can amplify divisions, exacerbating the consequences of events.*

“ We need to much more closely involve children in planning our cities and the places we inhabit. After all, these are their cities, their shared spaces.”

Of course, there is only so much that one can demand of our youngest students, but as ELAA's members know, it is not the specific skills but the culture and expectation that is set at young ages that determine how we act as individuals in later life and collectively as a society.

Our shared places

As VicHealth notes in its Mental Wellbeing Strategy 2015–2019, “the environments where we live, work, learn, play and build relationships with others are powerful influences on our mental wellbeing”.

We need to develop our cities, neighbourhoods, streetscapes and public spaces in ways that encourage social interaction – not by children alone but also between adults, setting positive examples for future generations. This requires attitudinal shifts and a willingness to invest differently in property and infrastructure. This will include breaking away from the car-dependent, community-remote development models that are increasingly prevalent today.

The resilience of our young people will be enhanced by increased exposure to older generations, and will also make our society better connected and more robust overall and requires a shift in perceptions as well as changes in the built environment.

Point to consider: *A city that is accessible to an eight year-old is also likely to be accessible to an 80 year-old. If we are to foster a society that looks after itself better, we need to break the trend towards age segregation, where children are cocooned and our senior citizens too often isolated.*

A dynamic economy

The purpose of education is to equip our young for fulfilling lives in a wide variety of fields. For many people, a job is important in contributing to their own resilience, be it in the bonds they form, options they create, or resilience tools it allows them to access, such as healthcare and household insurance.

Technology is enabling international learning, exposure to international culture, talent and innovative ideas, making educational experiences richer and more rewarding for many. However, technology also increases competition and places new demands on young people. Education

needs to help children be prepared to operate in this new environment, which is a challenge for adult educators, who are also experiencing this new environment for the first time.

Inequality is a further inhibitor of economic dynamism and collective resilience, and while Australia has enjoyed over 20 years of economic growth, inequality in pay and economic participation between different groups in Australia indicates our economy is not resilient. Resilience will come from economic diversification and, perhaps more fundamentally, from enabling all of our collective human potential to

contribute to the economy. This starts with equality of access to learning.

Point to consider: *Our economy is changing and our young students need new skills. PwC analysis suggests that 39 per cent of Melbourne's current workforce is in jobs at risk of disappearing in the face of technological change and automation. More specifically, 75 per cent of Australia's fastest growing occupations now require science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills. Yet STEM university completions are flat, the number of Year 12 students studying STEM subjects is declining and businesses are struggling to find STEM-skilled employees.*

A RESILIENT FUTURE

Resilient Melbourne has developed four inter-generational objectives:

Stronger together –
empower communities to take more responsibility for their own and each other's safety, well-being and health

Our shared places –
create and maintain places that promote social cohesion, equality of opportunity and well-being

A dynamic economy –
enable diverse local economies, equipping an agile workforce prepared for the jobs of the future

A healthier environment –
protect and enhance our natural environment alongside a growing population

