Opportunity Spaces
Community Engagement in the Planning, Use and Governance of Shared School Facilities

Working Paper #1
Sharing Schools – A Policy Overview

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1. Key points

The lack of formal measurement – e.g. shared resource efficiency, education outcomes and community engagement – is the critical point raised by this working paper. The Opportunity Spaces project will aim to construct bases for measurement in year 3 of the project (2015).

Summary. Provision for local communities to use school facilities and resources outside the hours of formal schooling has been part of Australian, and particularly Victorian, educational policy from the inception of mass public education in the late nineteenth century. Policy rationales, programs and expected outcomes are often tied to near-horizon political and policy concerns, and thus vary significantly over this period. However, in sum, they recognise the significance of schools as spatial, civic and educational resources for students and for local communities.

Policy gaps. Despite substantial recent investment, there has been little analysis of the contribution of new school infrastructure to aligning and achieving school-based and community-based goals. Evaluation of shared school policies and programs is underdeveloped in Australia. Current shared-use policy focuses on physical facilities, with little discussion of whether and how school digital resources might be more widely used. We argue that these are significant policy gaps that require redressing in twenty-first century educational provision, particularly where compulsory years schooling is located within life-long learning.

Early years focus. The paper identifies a significant international trend in policy development and coordination around early childhood education and care. This development has done much to shape the physical configuration of school sites and the service relationships of schools and other government and community sector organisations. This development has also shaped the construction of the ‘community’ with which schools engage, as consisting of students, school staff and parents.

Ongoing debate. The proposition that school facilities should be available for use by the wider community is the subject of ongoing debate. There are few critics of recent developments in multi-purpose or shared community infrastructure. However, the concept of shared schools is more complex and contested, raising questions about educational purpose, resource priorities, governance, and impact or outcomes.
2. Introduction

The past few years have been a highpoint of policy interest, investment and program development around the extended or shared use of schools. This paper discusses the context of this renewed interest, and maps and analyses educational, social and economic policies that propel and shape this interest. The paper reviews policy settings relating to the shared use of school facilities. It focuses on the Australian state of Victoria, locating developments in that state within wider Australian and international contexts.

Definitions

Recent literature on ‘shared’ or ‘extended use’ schools points to the difficulty of precisely defining this term (Black et al. 2011, Filardo et al. 2010). Diverse institutional models and approaches can be identified within the broad rubric of shared schools. These include the physical co-location of school and community services, the use of school facilities outside the formal hours of schooling, or more service-oriented conceptions described in terms such as extended or ‘full-service’ schools. The concept of schools as community hubs is a rhetorical and widely used expression of this mix of the normative (‘community’) and the service elements (the ‘hub’) of shared schools.

The physical parameters of these models are dynamic and planning, finance, construction, and operational models for shared schools have diversified in recent years. This area is a test-bed for new development arrangements and institutional partnerships.

The range of shared or extended uses is so varied that Black et al. (2011) have developed a typology of school-based and school-linked models, or models that focus on the school site, compared to those that connect the school with extra-mural programs, such as welfare and health services.

*Opportunity Spaces* focuses on school-based models in foregrounding the physical and digital infrastructure, facilities and spatial settings of schools. Infrastructure provides the foundations for productive social and economic behaviours. Often taken for granted, infrastructure resources entail long-term commitments with deep consequences for the public and they are at the centre of many contentious public policy debates (Frischmann 2012).

School infrastructure is a comparatively neglected area of analysis. While there has been substantial research on the contribution of educational spaces to pedagogy, we have little understanding of the role that physical or digital infrastructure plays as an enabler or barrier to community engagement with schools (Blackmore et al. 2011).

A facility is a particular type of infrastructure resource, defined as a conjunction of service and physical place (Brackertz & Kenley 2002). In the school-based model, the concept of school facilities has customarily been understood as the physical assets of a school. For example, digital resources were explicitly excluded from the scope of the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission’s (2009) inquiry into shared government and community facilities. However, the actual and potential uses of school digital resources – networks, hardware and software – in community engagement raises questions about the limitations of this place-based view. It also questions the human resources and expertise required to effectively implement an expanded conception of shared schools.
In summary, the *Opportunity Spaces* project conceptualises school facilities as physical and digital assets or resources, and examines the relationship between schools’ physical and virtual spaces. For convenience, this paper uses the term ‘shared schools’ to describe the policy field.

**Background and Positioning**

In Australia and internationally, education authorities and other government agencies are looking at the potential of schools to deliver improved educational, social, economic, planning and governance outcomes for the wider community. For some commentators, this move represents a trend towards the ‘educationalisation’ of social problems (Depaepe 1998). Conversely, Labaree (2010) argues that schools have always been charged with a wider social mission, reflecting political and social programs and concerns of the day.

In recent years Australian schools have been the focus of cross-portfolio and inter-governmental policy agenda, including early years care and development, social service engagement and coordination, student achievement and school performance, digital literacy, parental engagement with schooling, community building and civic participation, urban regeneration, and infrastructural and economic efficiency.

While national reforms in curricula and accountability seek greater uniformity, the school-community interface has considerable variation across school types and systems (primary and secondary, government and non-government), communities and regions. The breadth of this policy ensemble also brings tensions and contradictions. Claims that ‘school is for schooling’ have been re-asserted in the face of widening demands for school-based social programs and steepening resource constraints (Filardo et al. 2010). Additionally, ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ visions of the place of schools within communities may diverge. The concerns of education authorities for system-wide equity and efficiency may conflict with localised versions of how the resources of schools might be used, or whether the school will even stay open, in cases of under-enrolment or community change.

The Victorian and Australian governments have invested around $10 billion on Victorian school buildings and facilities in the past decade, with both depicting schools as shared community resources. The Victorian School Plan (VSP), which drove state-level investment, was developed within a whole-of-government framework concerned with community strengthening, investment in human capital and urban regeneration, focused on areas of spatial and economic disadvantage. The Commonwealth Government’s Building the Education Revolution, developed in response to the 2008 global financial crisis, prioritised national economic stimulus. Nevertheless, claims that schools should be “assets for the whole community” (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (hereafter DEECD) 2006), or should be “available for use by the wider community” (Australian Government 2009) capture the overall flavour of recent education policy.

Education is widely seen as a reforming project. Educational reform has been characterised as “steady work” (Elmore & McLaughlin 1988), a relentless process of “tinkering” (Tyack & Cuban 1995), or a series “small moves” (Ball 2008). Reform has been intense in Victoria, Australia and internationally in recent years. Most critical analysis of recent educational reform has focussed on pedagogy, student performance,
school accountability and consumer choice. There has been little attention to the relationship between reforms that focus on performance and accountability – including the engagement of parents with student learning – and the recent focus on schools as spatial and social resources of communities. Stage 2 of the Opportunity Spaces project will undertake field-based research to investigate this area in more detail. This paper lays the groundwork for such research and positions the Opportunity Spaces project by describing and analysing the wider policy and strategic environment framing the school-community interface.

The enormous volume of policy, programs and analytical literature related to shared schools has meant a selective approach to the task of collation and analysis. This is not only for the sake of textual economy. In some cases, the speed of reform and structural change in education and social policy, in concert with a shift to online publication of government information, means that some policy documents cannot be readily located. If education reform is ‘steady work’, its documentary record is patchy. In tracing the recent policy trajectory of shared schools, this paper brings some of the key policy documents.

Policy and Partnership

The language of partnerships suffuses current Australian educational policy, locating it within a global educational reform movement influenced by wider conceptions of neo-liberal governance (Franklin et al. 2004). The term ‘educational partnership’ encompasses various programs and institutional arrangements which bring populations and institutions into the educational project. Partnerships often focus on the delivery of educational services through ‘joined up’, inter-sectoral and sometimes highly innovative mechanisms. This includes new relationships between public education systems and private providers, as well as joint programs involving schools and social service organisations, local communities, businesses and philanthropic organisations. More directly, they link schools and students’ families. The educational rationale of partnerships is founded on a conviction that efficiency, effectiveness and equity in early years care, compulsory education, and learning across the life course, require new forms of investment, oversight, professional support, and community and family participation. In framing the Opportunity Spaces project within a partnership rubric, we are influenced by Seddon’s (2004) observation that systematic inquiry into educational partnerships calls for a critical stance that neither celebrates or circumscribes the partnerships as artefacts of neo-liberal rationality, but analyses their multi-dimensional politics and actions.
3. **Australian National Policy**

This section identifies Australian policy trends and emerging policy gaps that are relevant to the construct of shared schools. While current Australian education reform reflects international patterns in many areas, distinctive constitutional and federal arrangements introduce vernacular policy and institutional developments that require mapping and analysis. The most significant recent institutional development has been the co-ordination work of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and ministerial education councils. At state government level co-ordination efforts have been focussed on implementing national frameworks and partnership agreements within the human capital agenda that the Victorian government promoted as a ‘third wave’ of Australian governmental reform (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2005). For our purposes, the national early childhood framework and partnership agreements on digital and built school infrastructure are most significant.

All state governments in recent years have taken a close interest in ‘public schools as public infrastructure’ (Vincent 2006), rebuilding schools as a focal point of urban regeneration and social investment in areas of disadvantage. This is a significant Australian example of what Gallop (2008) terms the intersection of place and case management, or spatial and personal or client-based policy interventions. The focus on early childhood, and the engagement of families with early childhood services and home-school partnerships, dominates recent education policy. By contrast, community, further or adult education was a focus of policy and legislative reform around the extended use of school infrastructure during the twentieth century. Notwithstanding new programs such as Victoria’s Local Learning and Education Networks, schools as a locus of post-compulsory, non-formal or informal education appear to have slipped as a policy priority in recent years.

**National Frameworks and Agreements**

*Schooling*

Australian education ministers and departmental officials have met together since the 1920s (there was no Commonwealth portfolio minister until 1963), but their meeting in 1989 was the first to produce an agreed set of goals for schooling. The Hobart Declaration (1989) has had two subsequent iterations (Adelaide 1999) and Melbourne (2008) (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs 1989, 1999, 2008). Common curriculum and learning objectives, countering educational disadvantage, and performance reporting for schools are common themes. Concerns about Australia’s international educational ranking and economic performance emerged as a particular concern in the Melbourne document.

The concept of an educational partnership appears in the Adelaide document (1999), with a commitment to “further strengthening schools as learning communities where teachers, students and their families work in partnership with business, industry and the wider community.” The Melbourne declaration strengthens this reference to say

> Australian governments commit to working with all school sectors to ensure that schools engage young Australians, parents, carer families, other education and training providers, business and the broader community to support students’ progress through schooling… (pp. 10-11).
The emphasis of the declarations is on the educational outcomes of school students, with no specific attention paid in these high level documents to issues associated with school sites or spaces.

**Early Childhood**
A second significant move in national coordination that has specifically influenced the configuration of school sites and programs is the national framework for early learning (Australian Government Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations 2009). Introduced in 2009, the framework draws on new knowledge about the developmental significance of the early years of life, and the benefits of acquiring early social and language competencies on school performance. The document reinforces home-school (or home-care provider) partnerships in supporting its aims to provide guidance and set benchmarks for early childhood educators and the quality of care.

Along with the recent realignment of state ministerial portfolios which shifted bureaucratic oversight for early childhood from health to education departments, the framework signals an important discursive shift from maternal health and child nurturing, to pedagogy. The co-location of early childhood services and primary schools is a physical and service outcome of this trend. The focus of ‘engagement’ is on parents and carers, in the care and education of their children, and with ancillary or allied educational and health services. There are examples of community centres in Australia and internationally combining early learning and care programs with wider community facility provision. However, this model appears to increase the design and operational complexity of facilities. Tensions between the care and risk settings associated with early childhood, and the accessibility of community services and spaces, are well documented and inform current facility design and operational briefs (Municipal Association of Victoria 2009).

**Building the Education Revolution (BER)**
BER delivered a $16 billion investment in new school facilities across Australia, the bulk of which was allocated to primary schools. BER prioritised economic stimulus, with a second objective to:

…build learning environments to help children, families and communities participate in activities that will support achievement, develop learning potential and bring communities together.

The projected outcome is “[m]odern teaching and learning environments for school and community use” (National Partnership Agreement on the Nation Building and Jobs Plan 2008).

The circumstances under which BER was developed are seen by some commentators as unique (Althaus 2011; Parker & Kayrooz 2011). Others set this initiative within a longer cycle of public infrastructure investment where points of crisis induce ‘heroic’ political action (McShane 2012). Regardless, two relevant issues that emerge from BER are:

- what ‘community use’ means and what accountabilities schools and educational authorities have in regard to this funding condition
- whether aspirations for community use are supported by facility design and school budgets.
Digital Education Revolution and National Broadband Network

The Australian Labor Party’s 2007 national election platform promised a Digital Education Revolution (DER) that would provide ‘the toolbox of the twenty-first century’ – notebook computers – for every Australian senior secondary school student. In 2008 the Rudd Labor government announced a $42 billion high-speed (100 Mbps) national broadband network (NBN). Both DER and BER are the subject of COAG partnership agreements, with the digital and physical policy strands woven together with language about the funding of new ‘learning environments’ and implementation of a ‘flexible learning’ pedagogy (Council of Australian Governments 2009). The first Australian school – the Circular Head Christian School in Smithton, Tasmania - was connected to NBN’s fibre network in 2011.

NBN’s final form, perhaps its very existence, is the subject of ongoing debate in a volatile national political climate. Current rollout plans indicate that NBN’s stated intention to connect every school to its network will take some years to be realised. The dimensions of DER and NBN, the work of state education departments in developing departmental and school networks, and questions around the potential uses of those networks as community resources, will be examined in a separate working paper. However, it is important to note here that the potential for sharing school digital resources has been articulated in recent Victorian policy, indicating a softening of the physical/digital divide observed above (DEECD 2012).

Policy Gaps

A survey of relevant national policy developments in the field of shared schools indicates limited connections with the domain of urban planning. This can be observed in COAG coordination mechanisms. For example, the recently released national urban strategy refers to the significance of schools for human capital development, but makes no recognition of their role – either existing or potential – as social or community service hubs (Department of Infrastructure and Transport 2011). Similarly, the recently released national urban design protocol gives little attention to schools as key parts of the urban fabric (Major Cities Unit 2011). Additionally, there appear to be no links between new national investment programs in school infrastructure, and community infrastructure controlled by local government authorities (LGAs) funded by the National Economic Stimulus program.

The limits – or choices – of national education policy agenda can also be observed in the area of adult or further education. National education partnerships focus on birth to transition into employment, training or further education. Framed thus, education may be viewed as preparation for working life, rather than occurring through the life course. COAG’s National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development, which focuses on the important work of establishing pathways between schools and employment or further education, offers a similar educational trajectory.

However, an emerging discussion of concepts such as “dual-generation learning” (Smith Family 2010), particularly around digital literacy, suggests a wider conversation about learning and community use of educational facilities is warranted. The social policy challenges presented by changing population structures, for example the presence of newly-arrived communities with little experience of formal schooling, issues a challenge to look beyond schools as exclusively tied to the education of young people.
Funding features prominently in current Australian educational debate, following a review of funding structures by an expert panel chaired by David Gonski (2011). This report discusses school infrastructure and community engagement with schools at a number of places. The report’s assertion that the quality of school infrastructure positively impacts both student performance and community perceptions of schools is backed by international research (Blackmore et al. 2011, Uline 2009). Consistent with its remit, the Gonski report frames community engagement with schools – which it strongly supports - in philanthropic terms (volunteering, financial support). A full analysis of the complex inter-section between parental aspirations, school quality, community support and funding is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the impact of funding models on the student and social mix of schools, and the flow on to community engagement with schools, is an issue of concern for some Australian commentators (Bonner & Caro 2012, Bottrell & Goodwin 2011).
4. Australian State Programs

State Strategic Plans
All Australian state education authorities produce strategic plans setting out high level objectives and outcome measures, mostly against a four year timetable. The plans reflect minor differences in portfolio roles and state-level political outlooks. For example, at time of writing the NSW portfolio is Education and Communities, where all other states are configured either as early childhood and education, or education and training. Consistent with national coordination efforts, though, the plans have shared priorities in areas such as learning achievement and teaching, equity, school leadership and organisational or corporate development. Partnership rhetoric is sprinkled through all plans, directed towards promoting school readiness or achieving educational success. Enhancing school- and community-based decision-making is also a common theme. Measures of student success are focussed on national performance benchmarks, work readiness or transition to further education. The South Australian plan is unique in mentioning the development of a democratic or civic ethos as a key aspect of public education. Queensland mentions supporting students with an extended social service network. Tasmania locates education in a life-long learning context.

The plans are chiefly concerned with system-level priorities and reforms. The broader emphasis on partnership-building and devolution gives schools decision-making flexibility over the use of physical and digital resources, within the limits of delegated powers and departmental guidelines. Trujillo (2012) and Smyth (2011) call attention to potential conflict between local, democratic decision-making around schools and national and international performance regimes favouring individualised and competitive achievement. This is most obviously resolved by conceptualising community as a school community, consisting of school staff, students and parents/carers. The terms of community engagement, then, can be more easily focussed around student learning and family support. However, the mobilisation of business and philanthropic support around schools (Anderson & Curtin 2012) paints an increasingly complex picture of school-community relationships that warrants further empirical research.

The state strategic plans, then, give little detail of specific policy settings around shared schools. However, turning to a review of state-level education statutes and select programs, we see that the rationales, opportunities and constraints around shared schools is a persistent policy theme for education authorities, and, increasingly, other portfolios. This is detailed below through an analysis of four Australian states.

Victoria
The inclusion of a power to use public school facilities for purposes other than formal schooling appears in Victoria’s first education act (1872). School facilities have consistently been seen as instrumental to achieving broader social policy objectives. For example, the establishment of secular public education, an overriding concern of the 1872 act, is reinforced by a section permitting the use of school buildings outside normal hours of instruction for any purpose other than religious instruction. Building confidence in public schooling, and representing progress and social order through school buildings, were key objectives of the 1910 and 1928 acts. These acts direct school councils to care for the school facilities and “generally to stimulate interest in the
school”, although there is no specific mention of the use of facilities for non-school purposes. The fading of concerns around denominationalism is seen in the Education Act 1958 provision for school buildings and grounds to be used for any purpose outside normal hours of instruction. This provision is included within a section that sets out conditions under which religious instruction may take place in state schools.

The last half of the twentieth century sees policy advocacy of joint municipal-school buildings, development of school grounds and facility sharing. The Youth, Sport and Recreation Act 1972 was especially important here. This act reflected emerging international trends in multi-use facilities and placed pressure on the state education department to make wider use of school buildings and grounds. YSR also developed model joint-use agreements that were taken up by schools and municipalities, although education department records held in the Public Records Office of Victoria show a history of disputes over these agreements. This extended to – in the eyes of some municipal governments – the reluctance of the Department of Education to make school facilities readily available. Again, the tension between the school in the community – focussed on its prime role of schooling – and the school of the community is evident.

Victoria’s Education and Training Reform Act 2006 followed a decade or more of state-level policy development around infrastructure renewal and management and the co-ordination or joining up of educational and community services. This act broadly follows its 1958 predecessor, including the section authorising religious instruction. However, emerging policy interest in extended, co-located or jointly used facilities is evident in the inclusion of new and specific powers in this area. The focus on early childhood programs is also evident in the inclusion of powers for provision or licensing of pre-school programs on the school’s land.

Policy coordination of children’s care, welfare and education emerged as a policy priority in the new millennium in Victoria and elsewhere (Department of Human Services 2006, UK Treasury 2003). A service integration perspective, encouraging engagement with and seamless provision of children’s services, was supported by investment in new multi-purpose children’s centres, particularly in disadvantaged and growth areas of Victoria (Moore 2008). Originally located in the Department of Human Services, the orientation of this program shifted from a health and wellbeing to an ‘educare’ outlook (to borrow a Canadian term), with the 2006 reconfiguration of Victoria’s education portfolio to expand its role in early years development. Funding preference for children’s centres located on primary school sites was an important program outcome of this shift (DEECD 2009). While this focus on early years development chimed with policy, service and capital programs elsewhere in Australia and internationally, it can also be connected with other policy and bureaucratic developments in Victoria in the areas of community strengthening and social infrastructure, such as:

- the launching of a major project on constructing indicators of community strength (Victorian Community Indicators Project 2006)
- the formation of the Department for Victorian Communities (and later absorption into the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) to strengthen connections with physical planning)
- an inquiry into the community or third sector in Victoria, which paid some attention to community infrastructure (Stronger Community Organisations Project 2007)
• the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission’s inquiry into shared
government and community facilities (VCEC 2009)
• establishment of high-level interdepartmental coordinating committee on shared
and community facilities.

Identifying robust measures of the downstream social values or outcomes of social and
educational infrastructure investment has proven elusive for these initiatives, but this
challenge is not isolated to Victoria. Nonetheless, these various strands are indicative of
a widening vision incorporating social infrastructure as an integral component of civic
capacity.

The issue of shared schools has been a focus of policy development and coordination in
this field. As the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission (VCEC) inquiry
pointed out, there is a record of informal community use of school facilities, with
Corresponding attempts to formalise and extend this tradition. Awareness of recurrent
problems around shared schools are reflected in a range of Department of Education and
Training (DET), DEECD and DPCD planning documents and use guidelines for
‘community precincts’ and shared facilities (Department of Education and Training
2005; Department of Planning and Community Development 2010a; Department of
Planning and Community Development 2010b). In some instances, the development of
new education-based precincts has been contentious, particularly when they have
involved closure of existing schools. Published discussion of education renewal projects
has sometimes been frank in advocating new capital investment as a response to
entrenched educational failures (DEECD 2009a). With the investment cycle of the past
decade moving to a ‘post-occupancy’ phase, this rationale, and wider claims for shared
schools (for example, service access, social networks, enhanced reputation, physical
security and community well-being, see DEECD 2010) require exploration and testing.

Local Responsibility
Victorian legislation has long placed decision-making responsibility on school boards of
advice, committees or councils (as they are successively titled). These are delegated
powers to promote and oversee the extended use of school facilities, and (with
Ministerial approval) to authorise joint developments and improvements to school
buildings and grounds. This role is specifically set out in the Education (Schools

This situation is broadly replicated across Australian state education jurisdictions. Most
state education acts delegate powers around the use of school property to school
councils and the principal, although not all are as specific on this point as Victoria1.
Other states make general references to the community’s interest in schooling, while
community members are encouraged to participate by becoming council members or by
forming citizen and parent groups2.

Local responsibility and decision-making was a central theme of the Victorian minister
for education in setting out a new state education policy agenda (Dixon 2011). The

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1 Eg. Education (General Provisions) Act 2006, (QLD) (S81) and School Education Act 1999, (WA) (S219). In South Australia
under the Education Regulations 1997 (S5) the power to grant use of the school to the community lies with the Head Teacher with
the consultation of the school Council.

2 See School Education Act 1999, (WA) (S128(b)), and the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006, (QLD) (S7, Guiding
Principles).
document embeds school facilities and institutional relationships within wider discussion of school-community integration, and commits all Victorian schools to develop partnerships with local businesses, community groups and government agencies. The specific policy timeframe - 10-20 years – can be read at one level as a standard acknowledgement of long-term educational outcomes, but it is worth noting its congruence with Victorian municipal strategic planning timeframes, especially for infrastructure planning.

The responsibility for leadership in community engagement is firmly located with school principals. Renewed policy interest in community engagement is also reflected in the national agreement on the professional standards of principals (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 2011), and state-level statements on the roles of school principals. “Engaging and working with the community” is one of five standards in the national agreement, drawing comment from analysts on the challenges of effectively undertaking this role within existing resources (TNS Research 2011).

New South Wales
The trajectory of NSW policy is similar to Victoria’s. Consistent with Kenway’s (2006) perception of a shift during the 1990s from individualism to a community focus in social policy settings, community engagement and service coordination became significant social policy themes in that state, enacted through a program on schools as community centres. Early childhood care, parental support and school readiness were major program objectives (Social Systems and Evaluation 1996).

As with Victoria, some baseline data on shared use of NSW schools was obtained through a public inquiry into the shared use of public facilities (New South Wales Parliament 2004). That inquiry has come closer than any other Australian public body to mandating the extended or joint use of community and school facilities, to enhance service and economic efficiency by arguing that “a service-led rather than a building-led approach to the development of schools should be encouraged to ensure the long-term usability of schools by the community” (p xvii). The inquiry’s recommendations on simplifying processes for shared use, including contracts and risk management procedures, were implemented through a suite of policy and process initiatives of the NSW Department of Education and Training (for example, Department of Education and Training 2009). These have been available for almost a decade, but there appears to be no published evaluation of their use. A recent review of NSW education provision reiterated earlier policy by urging greater attention to shared facilities such as ovals and libraries, and an increase in the community use of facilities out of school hours (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2012).

South Australia
South Australia has been at the forefront of inter-jurisdictional cooperation around shared facilities through its school-community library (SCL) program. Starting in 1975, the school-based public library program established 46 shared libraries in rural South Australia. The scheme was initially designed for towns with a population of less than 3,000. The philosophy and design of the program sought to achieve service and economic efficiencies by providing quality library service to schools and communities through combined state and local government resources. Governance of the facilities is organised through a board of management with ex-officio appointments, elected local officials and community representatives. The scheme was innovative in leveraging new
Commonwealth funding for school libraries (Lawson and Barry 2001).

The South Australian scheme has been influential in Australia, with the concept taken up in rural and metropolitan regions in other parts of Australia. The scheme is probably the best documented and analysed program involving shared school-community infrastructure in Australia (Bundy 2003, also see Liu 2008 for an international view). This documentation is informative around program design, administrative processes and governance, as well as the potential and pitfalls of sharing.

Consistent with developments at all levels of Australian government, South Australian, physical recreation bureaucrats took a leading hand in policy development around shared schools, through a preparatory survey and policy work by the Physical Activity Council. In 2012 the Department of Education and Child Development (2012) released its policy on shared schools, adapting guidelines from NSW. South Australian policy in this field also encompasses perspectives from local government (Suter Planners 2011) and state-level urban strategy. The Strategic Infrastructure Plan for South Australia (Government of South Australia 2005) and the 30 Year Plan for Greater Adelaide (Department of Planning and Local Government 2010) both identify the need to co-locate and integrate community services and promote schools as community-based multipurpose facilities. Lack of development capital, underutilisation of infrastructure, responding effectively to infill development, and strengthening claims for the retention of public assets in the event of school closures are advanced by the local government sector as rationales for shared use or partnership development.

South Australia innovated with public-private partnerships (PPPs) in this area. In 1984, a PPP constructed three co-located schools and community facilities within a new Adelaide housing development. This is one of only a handful of such developments where an attempt has been made to evaluate the economic, service and social values of the project (New South Wales Parliament 2004, 4).

**Western Australia**

Western Australia is notable for the advocacy of its sport and recreation ministries in extending or sharing school facilities. Concurrent with Victorian developments, during the 1970s the Education Department of Western Australia and the Department of Sport and Recreation both developed policies on shared schools, with the WA Physical Activity Council taking the lead in recent years. The WA Sports Federation has also been an important advocate in this area. The topic of shared schools has been an area of consistent policy attention in WA, with inter-jurisdictional co-operation a persistent concern. The WA local government peak body expressed concerns over the inefficient process of individual negotiations of joint use agreements between local authorities and the state education department, and, in its view, the ease with which the department could overturn these agreements. The development of a resource kit for shared facility use, modelled on Victorian practice, has sought to promote shared schools and minimise friction between sectors of government (Physical Activity Taskforce 2012). The group of WA local authorities known as the Outer Metropolitan Growth Councils have shown particular interest in shared use developments (Western Australian Local Government Association 2010).
5. Australian Local Government

Australian local government has its roots in community resource management, with the appointment of committees of management for land reserves often a precursor of the statutory establishment of municipalities. Community involvement in managing environmental, recreational and educational assets has been a continuing theme in Australia. The move from single purpose to shared or multi-use recreation and civic facilities in the late twentieth century was in some cases resisted by community groups that had used and cared for facilities and had a strong sense of proprietorship over these places (Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) 2009). The line between community use and interest group capture of community facilities can be very blurred.

The Australian local government sector, in comparison to many OECD counterparts, has a relatively limited jurisdiction. The educational role of Australian local authorities is restricted to childcare and pre-school provision, and funding institutions in the informal or parallel education sector (local libraries, museums and galleries, cultural centres, neighbourhood houses, adult learning programs and so on). However, a policy focus on education partnerships and the temporal extension of state education department concerns (Victoria’s remit is now described as ‘birth to adulthood’) has blurred formal boundaries. Child care and pre-school education, and vocational and adult education, are now areas of increasing cross-jurisdictional and cross-sectoral (government, business, community) responsibility (see for example DEECD-MAV 2011; Brimbank City Council 2010).

The strategic turn of local government has also meant greater focus on the economic and service efficiencies of local-level social infrastructure and community services. Structural reform in the late twentieth century amalgamated small councils into larger jurisdictions, and extended markets and contestability in local service delivery. New planning protocols sought to coordinate physical and service planning, and policy attention was focused on the management and use of Australia’s ageing stock of local-level public infrastructure assets (Department for Victorian Communities 2003).

The development of co-located, flexible, shared or multi-use facilities was seen as an important infrastructural strategy to unite and implement these various policy strands. In principle, these places would assist the coordination of local community services, promote community building, and achieve economic efficiencies through extending the use of expensive infrastructure. In practice, the outcomes of sharing and multi-use have been difficult to measure (Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission 2009).

While much of this policy discussion was led by higher governments in Australia, a related policy concern expressed by the local government sector over the past decade has been cost-shifting and financial sustainability (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics and Public Administration 2003). Debate on these issues reflects the expanding role of the local government sector in community service provision, which, the sector contends, is not adequately recognised in local government revenue and funding models (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2006). Concerns about cost-shifting are focussed directly on community and educational infrastructure in some of the discussion. For example, the local government sector voiced concern over reductions in state funding of local libraries and cost-shifting associated with the national government investment in local telecentres (Regional Telecommunications Inquiry 2002). Concern has also been voiced over the exemption of schools from...
municipal rates and planning provisions (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2006). The key issue here is that the local government sector is wary of what it sees as a tendency of higher government programs to influence or distort local priorities and choices, particularly in areas such as infrastructure with long-lived costs.

Detailed documented knowledge of interaction between the Australian local government sector and education authorities around shared schools dates from the early 1970s. As noted above, the Victorian Department of Youth, Sport and Recreation was mandated to open up schools for after-hours use, and provided the local government sector with administrative support and model joint use agreements (JUAs) to encourage inter-jurisdictional cooperation in this regard. While conflict around the JUAs is more likely to be noted in the archival record than success, MAV’s contention that the transaction costs associated with shared use facilities can be significant is backed up by the archival record.

This backgrounds the move of the Victorian departments of education and planning to develop new JUAs and guides to shared facilities in 2006. When the (then) Department of Education and Training began its round of policy development in this area, it made clear that local government authorities were only one of a number of potential partners in shared facilities. Accordingly, Victoria’s model agreements, and adaptations elsewhere in Australia, set out procedures relating to risk and financial management and governance structures that are intended to assist small community organisations. DEECD’s negotiation of an overarching partnership with MAV (2009) (and with the community sector peak body Victorian Council of Social Services (2009)) emphasised principles, roles and obligations of the inter-governmental relationship, leaving procedural detail to individual MOUs and JUAs. The use and effectiveness of model agreements and associated supports is an area requiring further research and evaluation.

Sharing Local Digital Infrastructure
Supporting this paper’s argument that shared school-community facilities focus on bricks and mortar, there is no mention of sharing digital infrastructure in any partnership agreements (beyond the DER agreement struck between the Rudd national government and state governments in 2008). The local government sector provides the backbone of Australia’s public internet access through its major funding of the local public library network. However, this network is under significant strain to meet demand (Australian Library and Information Association 2011). Australian local authorities have made few other moves to widen public internet access. There are, for example, few public wi-fi hotspots in Australian cities. Similarly, we have found few examples of schools sharing their digital infrastructure with local communities. The tale of school resources standing idle when community resources are stretched is repeated in the digital domain, although the wider availability and use of school digital infrastructure raises distinctive issues around resourcing and user capability.

Viewed another way, though, local authorities and schools currently share the role of providing digital resources to students. It is estimated that around 30% of public library patrons are school students (McShane 2012). Although some concession should be made for the circumstances under which BER was designed and for the rapidly evolving technological and telecommunications policy environment, the lack of integration between digital and physical infrastructure in the BER program, and coordination between BER and DER, is indicative of a wider problem of policy coordination in this
field. Is there a case for schools and local authorities to cooperate in boosting the digital access and digital literacy of local communities? Further analysis of this area is warranted, particularly in light of the current roll-out of the National Broadband Network.

The relationships between schools and local authorities are multi-dimensional and vary widely across Australia. There are limits to the degree we can generalise about these relationships. The policy environment can be mapped with relative ease. However, there has been little empirical research on the functioning of shared use schools and co-located -local government community facilities with schools. This will be a focus of Opportunity Spaces field research.
6. Comparative International Developments

International influences have shaped domestic education reform from the inception of formal education provision in Australia. So-called policy borrowing or policy transfer may be as widespread in the field of shared or extended use of schools as any other facet of educational reform, reflecting long-standing international interest around the design and use of education facilities.

A range of recent Australian research reports cite diverse developments in extended schools in other countries as models for Australian practice. Familiarity with these models and the policy settings within which they are embedded can be highly instructive for Australian policy makers, if the distinctive political, demographic, urban and civic contexts of these programs are recognised. As UK analysts of early childhood services observed, local efforts at service integration may work very differently across jurisdictions and countries (Penn et al. 2004).

This section discusses select policies and programs in the area of shared-use from a small sample of OECD countries, and discusses the co-ordinating interests of the OECD itself in this area. While the programs and settings are distinctive, this assessment reinforces the theme of this paper that school sites are increasingly seen as a resource to tackle a complex social, health and urban problems.

**OECD**

From its formation in 1961, the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has taken a close interest in the educational systems of member nations, seeing education as a key driver of human development, economic growth and national competitiveness. From its earliest years, OECD has also been an advocate of educationally effective and economic design of school buildings (OECD 1968). Its interest in educational spaces focussed around its Programme on Educational Buildings (PEB). The transition of this program into the Centre for Effective Learning Environments (CELE) in 2006 echoed moves in educational jurisdictions to better reflect, in conceptual and program terms, the expansion of ICTs in schools.

During the 1990s, the OECD’s PEB program held a series of conferences on shared use school facilities (OECD 1998). In addition to the developing emphasis of shared schools policy on early childhood and student and family support, the report asserted the potential contribution of shared educational and community facilities for lifelong learning.

However, the OECD has been critical of the lack of systematic approaches to evaluation of investment in school buildings and facilities. Australia has been an important contributor to PEB/CELE programs, but assessment of the organisation’s influence on Australian policy is limited (Carroll & Kellow 2012). OECD coordinates the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, which benchmarks the educational performance of 15-year-olds in a large group of member and non-member countries. The relationship between the organisation’s interest in learning environments and standardised testing is close - PISA is flagged as a key measure of the effectiveness of capital investment.
**Early Childhood**

In 2001 OECD signalled its growing interest in policy development and coordination of member states in the field of educare by releasing the first of the Starting Strong series of publications (OECD 2001). This publication is a comparative analysis of early childhood policy and practice in twelve member states, including Australia. The report proposed an eight part framework for quality and equitable access in educare. For our purposes, the framework includes references to investment in infrastructure and services, and the development of long-term and consistent evaluation programs. The framework’s emphasis on the organic relationship of the knowledge, service and infrastructure elements makes it a particularly interesting for our purposes here. The third volume in the series (OECD 2012) provides an online ‘toolbox’ of policy and practice.

**United Kingdom**

The United Kingdom is often treated as a single entity in policy literature, but consists of four education systems, with substantial differences in curriculum and education administration (Siraj-Blatchford 2010). That said, reform of early childhood education and care, and regeneration through capital investment in education facilities have been common education policy priorities in recent years. Recent analysis has traced the development of formal arrangements around the extended use of schools in the UK from the 1930s (Dyson 2011), supporting claims of recurrent policy interest in this area. Major developments in this field in recent years have been strongly congruent with the Australian scene in regard to school capital investment and early childhood policy.

**Building Schools for the Future**

The Blair government’s (1997-2007) major capital investment program *Building Schools for the Future* (BSF) was launched in 2004, with the aim of rebuilding or refurbishing every secondary school in England over a period of 15-20 years. BSF was also designed to support changing school demographics and expand diversity of provision through new Academy and specialist schools (National Audit Office 2009). BSF’s design, implementation and cancellation in 2010 by the Conservative-Liberal coalition government have been extensively analysed by UK parliamentary committees, academic analysts, and evaluation consultants. The program’s links to urban (‘area based’) regeneration, educational revitalisation and public-private partnerships bear comparison with Australian state government rebuilding programs, and the national political debate over the program has parallels with BER. BSF was initially criticised for its lack of local consultation and community ‘buy in’ in the regeneration process. Consequently, program managers worked to improve integration and community utilisation of schools (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2008).

One significant difference between BSF and its nearest Australian equivalent, BER, was the inclusion of digital technologies within BSF’s program design. Around 10% of the program budget was allocated to ICTs for use in classrooms, administrative and building management environments. Investment rationales promoted innovative approaches to long-standing organisational and pedagogical concerns, for example the use of smart-card technology to promote efficient transactions and reduce bullying through cashless transactions (Heyward 2007). BSF’s complex finance, procurement and service management processes – it was a flagship private finance initiative scheme (PPP) – have overshadowed analysis of the program’s impact on learning in evaluation studies (Mahony et al. 2011).
Early Childhood Programs
Consistent with Australia’s experience, institutional child care in the UK at the end of the twentieth century was provided by a patchwork of institutions, had inconsistent standards of care and instruction, and limited capacity. Upon election in 1997, the Blair government set about expanding early care and pre-school services, principally as a measure to counter disadvantage in education and workforce participation. Lacking data on the developmental impact of early years learning, the government commissioned the influential Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) longitudinal study (Sylva et al. 2004), later extending its remit to track children in the study sample (n=3,000) through to post-school choices. The project also researched participants’ home educational environment.

The study found that participation in pre-school education positively impacted on intellectual and social/behavioural development and ameliorated the effects of social disadvantage. The study made recommendations around training and pedagogy in early childhood settings, and reinforced the importance of the “home learning environment” on children. EPPE has been a central influence on educational policy and practice in many parts of the globe, including Australia (Sylva et al. 2010).

Sure Start and Children’s Centres
EPPE project researchers pointed to the real-time impact of the study on policy evolution. The policy climate was receptive to research, and EPPE’s progressive findings were quickly translated into – or confirmed the direction of – policy measures to ‘narrow the gap’ between the life chances of the rich and the poor. One relevant outcome was the Blair government’s establishment in 2004 of Children’s Centres (CC). CCs were an evolution of the Sure Start program, which, beginning in 1998, established childcare and early learning centres in disadvantaged areas. Sure Start was a venture in ‘joined up’ or coordinated service provision. The program was designed to be locally responsive and had significant regional variation. The menu of services was wide, including outreach and home visits, drop-in parenting sessions, advice on play, learning and childcare, support for children with special needs, primary and community health care, and advice on housing and benefits.

The transition to CCs involved a more concerted focus on early learning rather than area-based labour market participation (Lewis 2011). Where Sure Start programs took a variety of physical forms, CCs were often established in association with primary schools (Lewis et al. 2010). The transition also involved considerable changes to governance structures, through which municipal authorities took over the running of CCs from community based organisations that answered to the central government. The success of EPPE as a longitudinal study saw the extension of the project to continue studying its research cohort in primary school. A major, mixed methods evaluation of CCs was planned to run from 2009-2015. Commitment to program evaluation, driven by the UK Audit Office, is a feature of school or early childhood investment in the UK.

New Zealand
New Zealand is interesting for its range of cross-portfolio programs encompassing the idea of shared schools. Further research is needed to fully understand the policy and administrative dynamics at play here, but some innovative programs have been developed from this standpoint.
**Extended Services and Private Providers**
The term, ‘Extended Services’ (ES), has a more specific meaning in New Zealand than it does in many other jurisdictions. ES refers to out of school care and recreation (OSCAR) programs funded to promote activities for 5-14 year olds. As with similar programs in Australia (e.g. Camp Australia) these out-of-hours care programs are hybrid models, provided by private companies on school sites. ES are funded by the Ministry of Social Development (2012a). A 2009 report on the ES program programs found they made a positive contribution to participants’ development and wellbeing and were successful in reaching children in low-SES schools (Centre for Social Research and Evaluation for the Ministry of Social Development 2009).

**Facility Partnership Policy**
The New Zealand local government sector is also pursuing shared use policies for community facilities. In 2009 the Auckland City Council released its Facility Partnership Policy to assist ‘council, community organisations and other not-for-profit groups form partnerships to develop community, arts, cultural and recreation facilities, including sports fields’ (Auckland City Council 2009). Schools may apply to be partners in the scheme.

**Social and Health Programs**
Schools are involved in the Ministry for Social Development’s Social Sector Trials program, which seeks to build local partnerships for service delivery to young people (12-18). The program’s rationale is that local agencies and networks are best placed to identify service needs and design effective delivery models. The program seeks to reduce offending, truancy and alcohol and drug use by young people, and boost participation in education and employment. School resources are used in at least three of the six regional trials (Ministry for Social Development 2012b).

**Canada**
Canada has a well-documented history of shared schools and other community-level institutions. Community schools, defined as those with additional staff ‘who were funded to work with the community and to facilitate programs in that school that went beyond a narrow definition of the role schools should play’ (Kuehn 2010, 104) were common in the 1970s. Following policy and funding cycles, community schools declined in the 1980s but were revived in the 2000s. Political pressure, new research, and changing policy goals relating to educational outcomes and community strengthening contributed to the model’s rehabilitation. This included a renewed focus on the integration of early childhood and schooling, following a period in the 1990s when out-of-home childcare fell out of favour.

In the 1990s Canada also lead the field of community-based internet provision, with schools, community facilities and shopping malls providing access points at no or low cost (Stevens 2006). Network advocates pointed to their contribution to community development and vitality, literacy, universal access and Canadian content. These developments received funding and encouragement in national policy that aimed to make Canada “the most connected nation on earth” (Powell & Shade 2006, 385). Similarities in geographic, demographic and governance characteristics invite comparison between Canada and Australia in education and other policy areas. The relatively low rank of Canada and Australia on UNICEF’s (2008) index of early childhood education and care has been a particular point of comparison.
Neighbourhood Learning Centres – British Columbia
The tradition of community-centred schools is exemplified by British Columbia’s Neighbourhood Learning Centres (NLCs). NLCs are described as ‘schools that offer educational programs for all ages and reach out to engage their communities on a year-round basis,’ (British Columbia Ministry of Education 2012), and sites that provide and promote facilities for health, recreation and lifelong learning (MacDiarmid 2010). Predictably community engagement is a strong focus of NLCs. The Ministry of Education sees the main purpose of community engagement as to improve student outcomes by giving schools ‘additional resources, expertise and supports’. A further goal is to ‘strengthen families and communities.’ (British Columbia Ministry of Education 2012)

Toronto First Duty
Toronto First Duty (TFD) was a multi-agency (government, philanthropic) school-based program aiming to promote healthy development from conception to Grade 1 (Corter et al. 2007) that has attracted Australian attention. TFD emerged out of policy discussions of early childhood education and care in the 1980s. These discussions produced several educare programs, with TFD the principal school-focussed project. TFD was styled as a demonstration project, with the hope that outcomes and lessons learnt would inform wider Canadian developments. Patel (2008) notes that although it was generally rolled out in disadvantaged areas it was not designed as a targeted program. Rather it drew participants from across neighbourhoods and the socio-economic spectrum. TFD was a staged program, with the stages moving from service integration through to curriculum implementation.

The use of schools as early learning and care hubs generated debate in Canada, with critics pointing to the potential for ‘schoolification’ and inappropriate academic programming for young children, while advocates hoped for influence in the opposite direction through the ‘careification’ of schools (Pelletier 2012). Evaluation studies of TFD found that participation in the program produced modest but significant improvements in cognitive and social development of children, chiming with EPPE (see UK section) in this regard. TFD evaluation was particularly focussed on what Patel (2008) called the ‘dosage’, or frequency and intensity of participation. However, TFD’s designers also took a close interest in processes of service coordination and integration. In addition to data on participation in educare, TFD produced two other outcomes that merit closer analysis:
- a three part evaluation model focussing on 1) programs, practices and policy, 2) children and families, and 3) community impact and awareness; and
- an “indicators of change” tool that measures the ecology of service integration.

United States of America
Notwithstanding variations across the US educational landscape, there are a number of common trends and various national policy initiatives in the shared schools area. Initiatives include the use of school sites for extended services; engagement with the community to improve student outcomes; and the use of schools as sites for primary health interventions, particularly in low socio-economic areas or densely urban areas. There is also a debate over whether community engagement with schools is intended to act principally on the school (ie. promote student outcomes) or the community (initiate community change). As Black et al. (2010) note, some wildly optimistic claims for extended use or extended service schools weigh against impartial evaluation.
Molloy (1973) observes that the first public school in the US – English High School in Boston, established in 1821 – shared its premises with the local fire brigade. However, shared use has been a contentious issue in the US, played out in court rulings during the nineteenth and early twentieth century that alternatively mandate or prohibit the use of school facilities by the wider community. The issue is entangled in constitutional jurisprudence and battles over local taxes, both of which are remote to Australian settings.

However, the provision of education and community services within a single jurisdiction has created strong incentives to cooperate. Resource constraints saw the development of formal agreements on facility sharing – in lieu of constructing new facilities – in the US from the 1920s. Philanthropic involvement in shared schools is a feature of the US scene, with Flint, Michigan (General Motors’ home town) an oft-cited example (Molloy 1973). By the 1960s a model focussed on the out-of-hours use of schools had been reconceptualised as an education precinct, combining two or more educational institutions and ancillary education and service agencies. Following the OECD’s lead, the Ford Foundation funded an Educational Facilities Laboratory that pioneered work around the retention and adaptive use of educational facilities during a dip in school-age cohort in the early 1970s.

**Child-focused Programs**

US early childhood and school intervention and support programs trace back to at least the 1960s and have exerted considerable influence internationally. Connected with disciplinary and practice backgrounds in developmental psychology, pioneering programs like the Schools Development Program, Abecedarian and Schools for the 21st Century initially targeted disadvantaged, often inner urban populations, and provided a range of programs (child focussed and parent focussed) in community and school settings. The more generic concept of ‘full service’ schools that appears in the 1970s, shifts the focus to school programs. The concept is strongly associated with Joy Dryfoos who attracted national policy attention with her claim that “one in four children growing up in America cannot become a healthy, self-sustaining adult without immediate attention”. Full service schools were predicated on expert school-based health and welfare interventions to support at risk students (Dryfoos 1994).

A further shift in rhetoric and design is evident in the emergence of the ‘community school’ concept in the 1990s. Here, discussion of partnerships begins to displace the emphasis on service. The *Educate America Act 1994* said that “[b]y the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children” (US Congress 1994). Out-of-hours school programs came under scrutiny, as policymakers sought school-based responses to perceived conflicts between the promotion of labour market participation and child welfare. The *21st Century Community Learning Centres Program*, authorised by the US Congress in 1994, which was a major funder of out of hours programs, reflected the shift from the language of expert intervention to the more inclusive language of community. In contrast with assessment of participation in preschool programs, evaluations of this initiative have shown mixed results (Little et al. 2008, Dynarski et al. 2005), although local provision could be expected to produce variations in programs and pose challenges for systematic evaluation.

There has been substantial international interest in US school-based service models, not
the least in Australia. Numerous institutional and practice examples are cited in literature advancing the concept here. Amidst this interest, it is difficult to find critical voices, although concerns about the reduction of diversity in the community service landscape, resource pressures, uncertainty over lines of authority, and the alienating effect of schools as service locales have been raised (Smith 2004). This is an area that warrants more empirical investigation.

The extended service paradigm also tends to regard school infrastructure as a given, with discussion of policy developments around the design, financing, use and governance of school facilities a secondary issue. However, long-standing debates over taxation and public outlays, in addition to the fiscal squeeze experienced by many US municipalities, inform policy interest in shared services. US local governments spend around 40% of their total revenue on school systems – their largest expenditure category (Congressional Budget Office 2010). Concerns with the spatial, planning, infrastructural and governance questions around shared schools has seen the development of a range of ‘how to’ guides around shared use by community sector organisations. The trend is summarised by a leader in this field: “maximizing access to existing facilities—rather than trying to construct new ones—is the most efficient and economical use of public resources” (ChangeLab Solutions 2012).
7. CONCLUSION

When the concept of social capital was revived in the scholarly and policy literature in the 1990s, scholars discovered that one of the term’s earliest uses focused on the role of schools in community building (Hanifan 1916). Whether expressed in utilitarian terms such as after-hours or extended use, or normative terms like engagement or partnerships, it is clear that the presence of schools in neighbourhoods or local communities has been widely perceived as instrumental to policy objectives that lie beyond formal schooling. Rationales for recent investment in shared school buildings and facilities in Australia illustrate this point well. As discussed above some of the extra-school rationales include

- urban renewal and re-construction
- economic efficiency through shared facilities and services
- community infrastructure provision in underserved areas
- coordination of community and educational services
- boosting the skills and networks of staff
- building community capacity and social capital
- boosting confidence and participation in the public school system.

This investment has occurred during a period of intense educational policy reform, potentially heightening tensions between the school’s focus on schooling and student outcomes (especially as measured through standardised testing), and the school’s engagement with its surrounding community. However, the two domains of school and community are increasingly linked in policy and programs, for two reasons:

- parent and community engagement with schools and the learning process is seen as a positive factor in student success, and
- formal or compulsory years’ schooling is embedded in a wider conception of an active learning community and ‘knowledge society’.

As we have argued, the first of these points is clearly expressed in policy, but the second is less evident.

A commitment to shared school facilities in the Victorian and Australian setting raises important policy and practical questions, both long-standing and newly emerging. In Australia, the split of responsibilities in the provision of social infrastructure across state and local government – in contrast to the more common grouping of educational and social provision at municipal level in many OECD countries – gives inter-jurisdictional issues particular salience. Similarly, lack of detailed empirical analysis and evaluative studies of shared schools limits our understanding of the educational, social and economic outcomes of the school-community interface.

Current policy makes the case for devolved decision-making to encourage local responsiveness and adaptation. However, there is concern that changes in the social mix of school populations may contribute to a weakening of community capacity. Discussion of ‘community’ in this policy domain is focused on early years education and primary schools. Concepts of community and partnership become more diffuse at secondary level, with the different spatial and demographic coordinates of secondary schools. To bring secondary-level facilities into the centre of the picture, and address an apparent disconnect between school and life-long learning, there may be a case for expanding policy discussion from community and education to community education.
Finally, Victoria has the lowest proportion of its student population in the government school system of any Australian state - around 63%. This trend is lamented by supporters of public education and welcomed by those with an interest in choice and markets. Sidestepping this debate, the size and diversity of the non-government education system in Victoria raises the question of whether there are important lessons regarding shared schools, devolved governance structures, and community engagement that can be learned from a study of that sector, and that can benefit the wider project of education.

8. Acknowledgements and Project Details

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The project has three phases: 1) a strategic review of relevant policies, programs and literature in the broad field of shared school facilities; 2) fieldwork at three Victorian school sites where public school facilities are shared or co-located with local government and/or not-for-profit organisations, and 3) an evaluation and project write-up phase.

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This paper is one of four planned Opportunity Spaces working papers that together comprise the first phase of the project, focussing on policy and literature review and program evaluation. The series is:

1. Sharing Schools – A Policy Overview (March 2013)
2. Schools as Community Hubs: Physical and Digital Facilities (due 2013)
3. Community Use of Schools – Literature Review (due 2013)
4. Schools as Community Hubs: Measurement of Effectiveness (due 2014)
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