

Participation in the classroom, productivity in the workforce – unfulfilled expectations



Stuart Macintyre

*Harvard University, USA
University of Melbourne*

Stuart Macintyre is the Ernest Scott Professor of History at the University of Melbourne, and the author of a number of books on Australian history including *The Reds*, *The History Wars*, volume 4 of the *Oxford History of Australia* and *A Concise History of Australia*. In 2007/8 he was visiting professor of Australian history at Harvard University and is currently the President of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia.

Abstract

In Australia, as in other countries, three public concerns about education can be discerned. One of them is concerned with work skills in the context of economic objectives of innovation and productivity. Another is concerned with life skills in the context of objectives of social sustainability and self-fulfilment. The third is concerned with the maintenance of cultural and intellectual standards – and has often been associated with criticism of educational progressivism. These concerns have informed Australian educational policy. The economic objective has been particularly influential in higher education; the social objective has informed school initiatives concerned with values education, and civics and citizenship; and the third was apparent in the efforts by the Howard government to prescribe a national curriculum in Australian history. This paper explores the provenance of these concerns and considers the consequences of the policies that have pursued their different objectives.