



# TAKING THE LEAD

A FUTURE FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

Denis Fitzgerald

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**A NSW Teachers Federation book**

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## Foreword

*Taking the Lead* is a discussion paper that sets out possible directions for the future of public education in New South Wales.

Its author, Denis Fitzgerald, is a public school teacher, a former NSW Teachers Federation President, and is currently a Vice President of our union.

This paper provides insights and responses to the challenges confronting all of us who share a deep and abiding commitment to the right of every Australian child to attend an excellent public school in his or her local community.

As public educators, we know that the universal provision of high quality, high equity public schooling is the foundation for a fair, just, economically prosperous, socially cohesive and democratic nation.

As someone who has served in public schools for more than thirty years, including a decade as a high school principal, I am proud of the extraordinary achievements of our profession, of our students, of our public schools.

I hope you find *Taking the Lead* stimulating, motivational and useful as we strive to develop the strategies that ensure that our strong traditions lead us to a certain future.

Federation welcomes your feedback and contribution to the essential task of revitalising and strengthening our public school system – for every child, for every community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Maurie Mulheron'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Maurie' being more prominent than the last name 'Mulheron'.

**Maurie Mulheron**  
**President**  
**NSW Teachers Federation**

“The supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as ‘domination’ and as ‘intellectual and moral leadership’. A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise ‘leadership’ before winning governmental power.”

*Antonio Gramsci*

# Taking the lead in public education policy

For most of the post-war period progressive forces in education have been the major influences on public education policy. Over the past two decades however, debates have been dominated by radical right-wing or conservative forces which have been able to lead much of public policy and the popular imagination. As a consequence, a great deal of the work of the NSW Teachers Federation has been essentially reactive — resisting changes, “reforms”, cutbacks and the redistribution of priorities. This has involved seeking to halt or stymie right-wing agendas in funding, industrial relations, curriculum, management theory, values, testing, reporting, discipline, standards, teaching quality, salary structures, student behaviour, principalship and accountability. In each of these areas, the right has had a coherent, strongly advocated and shared set of policy goals. In response, Federation has sought to conserve that which had been built of quality and substance over the preceding decades.

This right-wing dominance did not occur by accident. For many years they have published books, developed think tanks, engaged in research and policy formulation and promulgated their ideas nationally and globally. Other voices in public education have been eclipsed in this process. Consequently, it has been at times difficult for Federation and its members to assert *what*

*we actively believe in* as so many debates became purely defensive battles.

This paper seeks to make a contribution to breaking this defensive cycle and to develop a positive public education agenda for the 21st century. The esteem in which our system of education is held politically and publicly is now a cause for both concern and action. Much, perhaps most, of the reason for the declining fortunes of public education is the generation-long war that has been fought against it, on so many fronts, as indicated above. However, it is timely to turn our gaze to how we would actively reshape certain policy areas in public education with the view of making our system the first choice school option for the great majority of parents in Australia.

Researching the statements made by Federation over the past few decades reveals a heritage of consistency, principle and unrelenting policy frustration. This frustration needs to transform itself into a determination to create new policy directions.

The paper will focus on schools policy as the changes wrought in the TAFE and training sector would warrant its own unique analysis and investigation.

The thesis will be presented within the text and various policy suggestions will be made along the way.



# The story so far ...

**P**ublic schools are the best they have ever been. Public schools create skills, life chances and opportunities better than they ever have. Public schools have more highly talented and effective teachers than they ever have. Public schools are happy and successful places full of the joy of life and learning. But, the public school system is in modest but accelerating decline so, something in this tale does not add up.

Much of this anomalous situation is due not to the force of either justice or reason. For decades, philistine voices, an ignorant media, supine politicians and longstanding foes of public provision have waged unrelenting war against our public schools and public school teachers. Others who might have been expected to defend and buttress public schooling — bureaucrats and politicians of the erstwhile left — have been silent or complicit or negligent as this assault unfolded. Meanwhile, the funds and affections of governments of all stripes have been directed towards private schooling. A good deal has been said and written on these topics of funding and bias to private schools and it is not the purpose of this work to dwell further on these grievous errors. Those battles must be fought and won in other contexts.

It is timely, perhaps urgently so, to concentrate on what we might do to rethink some elements of public education policy in order to help restore it to the levels of confidence and support that it enjoyed a generation ago.

**A** 1987 survey conducted on behalf of the NSW Teachers Federation and the Australian Teachers Federation could report that 79 per cent of those whose children attended a Government secondary school saw their children's education as successful with 25 per cent seeing it as very successful. 21 per cent viewed their child's education as unsuccessful. Similar results were recorded from survey work conducted by Professor Neil Baumgart in the preceding decade.<sup>1</sup> By the

earlier part of this century attitudes had changed. An Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) survey conducted by Dr Adrian Beavis in 2004 found that 34 per cent of public school parents would change to a private school if they could afford the fees. Parents cited their perceptions around discipline issues, a better quality of education, superior facilities along with the attraction of uniform-wearing and the superior value systems within private schools.<sup>2</sup> Whilst such surveys may have significant imperfections and may not reflect the underlying reasons for many parents who send their child to a private school there is a pattern and a message in such surveys that cannot be responsibly disregarded.

Without question the shift in attitudes reflects the historical epoch in which they are found. The previous generation also saw attacks on and subsequent liquidation of government provision in the fields of banking, insurance, shipping, energy provision, transport, roads, blood products, telephony, electricity generation, vaccines, telecommunications and domestic and international air travel. Public schooling was not spared any assault in this era and its survival is both unique and remarkable, a testament to its hardiness and quality.

Yet we must assume that the offensives will continue on many fronts. If, as the union has expressed it, public education is the promise that one generation makes to the next, we will need to be nimble and adaptive to keep our end of the promise.

Rupert Murdoch, for one, continued with his global foray against public schooling. In his 2008 Boyer Lectures he provided the line for his planetary media empire telling us, "The unvarnished truth is that in countries such as Australia, Britain, and particularly the United States, our public education systems are a disgrace. Despite spending more and more money, our children seem to be learning less

and less — especially for those who are most vulnerable in our society.” Murdoch went on to observe, “It is inarguable that our lesser schools are leaving far too many children innumerate, illiterate, and ignorant of our history.”<sup>3</sup> Whilst Murdoch has been lecturing this country from afar for some time he might have accompanied his damaging assertions with some evidence for his claims. He failed to do so. He might also have revealed that he did not write his own Boyer Lectures but rather he employed another American, Bill McGurn, a former George W Bush speechwriter, to pen them for him.<sup>4</sup> Regardless, it is a generic, global, unoriginal critique of public schooling but none the less influential and ubiquitous as a slur against our system and the children and teachers within it.

Such ignorance needs to be seen in conjunction with other recognitions of the real difficulties that public education faces. The NSW Public Education Council (PEC) described “a climate of insecurity in NSW for public education”. The PEC further identified, “the growing loss of public confidence in the face of the perceived lack of support for public schools by governments.” It also observed, “It is apparent that growing numbers of parents have come to believe that securing their children’s futures will best be achieved by enrolling them in a non-government school, in the belief that that will ensure they receive a high quality education and achieve good outcomes from schooling.”<sup>5</sup>

One historic and ironic difficulty for teachers and the union in all of this has come with the manifestly unjust redistribution of funding shares towards private education. Whilst this must be pointed out by public education advocates it serves at the same time as a lesson to all that private schooling is being granted an ever increasing level of enhanced resourcing and in parents’ eyes, school resourcing often equates to a perception of enhanced opportunity for one’s child.

Similar tactical difficulties exist in a period when there is an unprecedented consanguinity between the two major sides of parliamentary politics in relation to education policy. Given the predominance of dilettantism in education policy, the perceived need to placate media populists, the decades-long antipathy to public provision, a colonial mindset in relation to policy development and a philistine hostility to teachers and teacher unions, there is now a bipartisan consensus around educational directions. The old tory agendas around testing, markets, competition, devolution and reporting have become the school policy uniform. There is but one hymnsheet. An ALP Prime Minister can talk of making school

principals “like CEOs in private enterprise” and seek to have Australia emulate the failed policies of the educational mother countries, England and the United States of America, whilst the Coalition finds difficulty in locating any patch that is further to the right than the ALP.

In easier times, there might be reliance on state bureaucrats, experts, ministers and advisers but they have long ceased to exercise any relevance or creativity and independence of thought. Ministers, with senior departmental officials in tow, come together sporadically and issue lofty statements. The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians signed by all education ministers in December 2008 had them all in full-throated agreement around the delivery of “equality of opportunity”, “the necessary knowledge and skills to thrive in an information-rich world”, “social cohesion through sharing values and aspirations” and so forth. Such platitudes seem to be so quickly forgotten.

Education departments seem to be no better. Their own publications report on endless success and bountiful harvests. “Results show strong performance” crowed a typical NSW education department publication, with gladdening accounts of how the department “is on track to meet targets set out in the NSW State Plan”. It is all very fanciful and irrelevant and ignored. It is not a peculiarly NSW phenomenon of course. All state government departments have investigated themselves mightily in recent times and are forever “raising the bar” and “changing the architecture” and engaging in tri-level reform and “functionally realigning” and generally carrying on with nonsense. Queensland promised another “Flying Start for Queensland Children”. This one breathlessly declared, “It’s part of the Government’s vision for tomorrow’s Queensland to be strong, green, smart, healthy and fair.” This would all be stirring stuff if teachers hadn’t heard this kind of flightless epiphany before and if the same bureaucrats and politicians were not just as likely to be tearing into public schools and teachers and their union within the fortnight.

Whilst these historical processes have been unfolding public schooling has been viewed in some quarters as the last bastion of 1960s style educational progressivism wherein educational standards of a traditional kind have been on the wane; where tougher intellectual demands have been superseded; where grammar had been bypassed in favour of children’s need to express themselves in an unfettered fashion and where behaviour and ethical standards

had been let slip. In short, some have come to see public schools as a place wherein welfarism has overtaken intellectual accomplishment as the primary purpose of the institution.

Hence, we have well-intended academics contribute to the discussion by asserting that “public schools teach public reasonableness” and that they should be supported and patronised because they are a “public good” contributing to building the nation and the democracy and cohesion and amity. As it happens all of these statements are good and important and provide a worthwhile depiction of the general role of public education but they are an insufficient condition for the great majority of parents to send their child to their local public school. Whilst Peter Costello suggested parents have one child “for the country” this argument suggests that parents send their offspring to a public school “for the country”. Parenting is simply not like that.

**F**or government schools, only a small minority of parents send their child to a system of schooling. They send their child to a particular school and above all else, it is the quality of education that is to be found at the local public school that is its greatest asset and attraction. It is for this reason that public schooling has been able to withstand the generation-long assault upon it and why, with an 8 per cent enrolment shift away from it in recent decades, it has meant on average, in human terms, the loss of only one child per class over this period.

Whilst public education will inevitably continue in its unique role as a builder of a better nation this paper will focus on its fundamental role as the

provider of individual, collective and family enhancements consistent with its public purpose.

In this context we might be very cautious about those misguided elements who want to address this issue by “redefining” what public education is. There are those

who want to assert that anything that is publicly funded is *ipso facto* the equivalent of public education. It is not.

A public school is one that is resourced by the state, with a secular ethos and curriculum, responsive to its community, which is free, which accepts children regardless of background, capacities or means and which aims for the highest possible educational outcomes for all children and which serves a public purpose and contributes to the

creation of a better society. As Federation Annual Conference declared back in 2004, “Public education is a defining institution in Australian society. The pursuit of educational excellence for all, regardless of cultural, religious, racial or economic background, geographical location or special needs, has directly shaped Australia to be one of the most tolerant, socially cohesive, non-violent and multi-cultural societies in the world.”

We might acknowledge that fundamental to the threat to our system is demographic change. The funding policies of tory politicians, from both sides of parliament, have been about shifting the middle class out of public schooling and to make the private system more exclusive thereby leaving the public provision in a position to look after the rest, not unlike the role of public housing. This is clearly seen in the research of Campbell and Sherington from Sydney University. What they demonstrate is that the shift is on and the implications may be dire. They link the work of Michael Pusey to this demographic change as he suggests that the middle classes have been compelled to make these choices as a consequence of being forced into aggressive individualism and competitiveness as a result of decades of neo-liberalism.

It is certainly true that the work intensification that has befallen most working people in the era where the interests of big business has been allowed to be triumphant has meant that parents have far less time to spend with their children. Consequently, anxiety levels about opportunity, credentials and success in a shaky, restructuring capitalism are exacerbated. In a consumer culture, parents are compelled to think about buying and outsourcing the support and educational resourcing and time which they can no longer contribute.

However, this paper suggests that it is misguided to see these phenomena as purely middle class demons being exorcised. The fact is that all parents love their kids and fret about them and want what is best for them. Chatter about the “aspirational class” is merely a reheated version of what Menzies used to call “the Forgotten People”, the worthy, sacrificing petit bourgeois who deserved the policy preference of government.

Any reshaping of emphases in public education policy needs to be directed to all parents and the hopes and dreams they have for their kids.

**I**t is fair to observe that there has indeed been much “reshaping” in educational policy to this point. The recent past has given us centres of excellence; specialist schools; Highly Accomplished

“Any reshaping of emphases in public education policy needs to be directed to all parents and the hopes and dreams they have for their kids”

Teachers; autonomy; devolution; leading teachers; performance pay proposals; charter schools; independent public schools; vouchers; students as clients; parents as customers; accountabilities; restructures; clusters, realignments; multi-campus; more selective schools; choice theory; dezoning; senior highs; choice and diversity; Empowering Local Schools; Every Student, Every School; Local Schools, Local Decisions; collegiates; super teachers and daily proposals as to what should be added to the school curriculum.

What characterises all of these “reforms” is that they fail to go to the heart of teaching and worse, they focus on a lucky dip approach to school reform which provides piecemeal tinkering with educational provision. In isolation, certain individual students might benefit from a few of these initiatives but always at someone else’s cost. They all fail the test of universal benefit. Do all children gain access to the changes or does it privilege some at the expense of others? They all fail the related systemic test of lifting the overall growth in quality in that there is at best a zero sum gain. They are structuralist rather than seeking to achieve universal culture change and improvement. They are often irrelevant exercises in a distracting accountancy masquerad-

ing as educational policy. Winners and losers are created. They are antithetical to the ethos of quality public education. It needs to be observed, however, that this is not a uniquely Australian phenomenon. Casting his researcher’s eye across the planet, the Canadian, Ben Levin concluded, “there are not many examples of a serious effort, sustained over time, to build improved performance across an entire education system including a serious commitment to reducing equity gaps.”<sup>6</sup> This paper will seek to address this neglect at least in relation to the NSW public education system.

This paper will make some suggestions about how policy in relation to public schooling might be changed. These proposals will be universalist and systemic in focus. They will be focussed not on what we oppose but on what we actively believe in — as public educators and unionists.

It will identify three directions we need to explicitly emphasise:

1. The building of achievement and intellectual capital for all;
2. An explicit public schools’ value system;
3. Practices that allow for orderly learning environments for all.

## Notes

1. See Greg Smith 1987 *Funding Campaign Directions* Paper NSWTF Sydney 1987
2. Adrian Beavis *Why parents choose private or public schools* ACER Melbourne 2004
3. Rupert Murdoch *Lecture 4* 2008 Boyer Lectures ABC Books Sydney 2009
4. See Bruce Guthrie *Man Bites Murdoch* Melbourne University Press Carlton 2010 p 14
5. NSW Public Education Council *Building on Strong Foundations* Sydney 2005
6. Ben Levin “Governments and education reform: some lessons from the last 50 years” *Journal of Education Policy* Vol 25 Number 6 November 2010 p742.

# Achievement

Let's start at the very beginning. So contested has been the role of public schooling and so great have been the number and nature of matters it has been called upon to take responsibility for, it is useful to remind ourselves what schools are for. They are to help develop the greatest possible level of achievement for each individual child and to help create worthwhile human beings along the way.

Despite the welter of fads and gimmickry we have seen strewn along the path, the best way to achieve these outcomes is through the quality of teaching that the children experience. All children, as a birth-right, have an entitlement to this. Put simply, children deserve the most highly effective teaching in highly effective schools. Any educational "reforms" that do not contribute to this are policy fluff.

As public education is the system based on the belief in human reason and equality we should begin our thesis by examining what the research teaches us on these questions.

The work of Rowe, Scheerens and Bosker along with that of Fullan and others taken together allows us to know certain educational truths. The first is that an effective set of teachers is the greatest educational gift a student can have. There are major factors which inhibit learning but powerful teaching is the one variable that contributes most substantially to success. At the school level, this means that early identification and intervention is vital; that continuing teacher and whole school and system-wide professional development is fundamental and that a worthwhile school has a commitment to optimal success for each student. Hence, regardless of background, quality professional development is the foundation for greater skill levels, professionalism, impact and sustainable change. There are some things that a teacher or school cannot change which act as inhibitors on a student's capacity to learn. The wise option therefore is to focus policy on those areas where

change and improvement can be engendered and most specifically on assisting teachers to become consistently and constantly better at teaching.

Part of this can be found at a broader level. The research of Richard Teese and John Polesel is of the utmost relevance here. Teese and Polesel conducted their work on analysing what the existing global research indicates about school effectiveness. These two academics found a consistent pattern from the volume of work that had been carried out across the world. They discovered that what makes a school most effective are:

- positive academic expectations and requirements;
- strong leadership;
- high levels of student and parental involvement;
- structured teaching programs;
- low levels of coercion;
- an orderly learning and teaching environment;
- a shared sense of mission;
- high teacher-student ratios;
- small school size.

On a similarly broad canvas, Bob Lingard and David Reynolds, investigating the success of Finland in international educational comparisons found a pattern of characteristics which were causal in that nation consistently topping analyses of performance. They found that Finland had an educational and social culture which included:

- respect for teaching;
- high levels of teacher qualifications;
- a near universal system of public education;
- schools that were truly comprehensive;
- a national funding commitment to the less privileged;
- high rates of remuneration, appreciation and trust being experienced by teachers;
- high levels of in-school assessment and constant high quality feedback to students;
- no high stakes external testing or assessment or ranking;



- principals being conspicuously honoured by politicians.

In order to balance the analysis and to avoid an over-reliance on the Finnish phenomenon one can also glance at Shanghai, one of the emerging success stories of international assessments of educational standards, and note that what they have concentrated on includes the upgrading of all schools to similar levels, sending teams of experienced teachers from high performing schools into those schools that are battling and most of all, giving all teachers 240 hours of professional development over a five year period.

What is striking in relation to both syntheses of global educational research is the complete absence of the piecemeal, randomised educational reforms (outlined in the preceding chapter), that have been at the centre of education policy in this country. The conclusion that might clearly be drawn is that education policy programs that have only certain schools or communities as beneficiaries are doomed to failure and serve as a cause (rather than as a remedy) of deteriorating educational standards.

For if there is one thing certain, Australia faces a period of declining educational standards as a direct consequence of the failed educational reforms of recent times. We have been driven by politicians to emulate education systems and programs of declining nations and have rejected the clear policy inferences from the most successful countries.

**I**t is timely to note the advice tended from the NSW Ministerial Advisory Group on Literacy and Numeracy to the government in the state. This advice, based on empirical research and the latest educational data is clear:

“Our national performance, including NSW performance, appears to be in gradual but steady decline both in absolute terms and in comparison with other countries ... young Australians at age 15 were less literate and numerate than their peers three years ago; they in turn were less literate and numerate than their peers three and six years previously. This decline has occurred in the highest quartile of performance, as well as in the other three quartiles.”<sup>1</sup>

This data is especially telling for NSW as the Advisory Group’s analysis notes that of the 500 primary schools in NSW (18.5 per cent of the total) with the lowest NAPLAN performance in literacy and numeracy 11 are independent schools, 28 are Catholic schools and 461 are public schools. This unquestionably constitutes a crisis in achievement and standards. Whilst much of this can be

accounted for in terms of student intake and community profiles it is still a statistic that demands radical action.

Demonstrably, the literacy and numeracy initiatives of governments coupled with a regressive form of public reporting over the last decade have been a huge failure. Part of the explanation is certainly that schools and individual teachers have been pressured to narrow and generally lower the focus of their teaching programs. Teachers have often been systematically compelled to exclude vital parts of the curriculum whilst engaging in teaching that concentrates on a restricted body of skills and capacities which has consequently led to a decline in achievement across all quartiles. Teaching quality has suffered as has educational achievement. This educational perfect storm has hit NSW public education especially hard whereby now over 92 per cent of the lowest achieving primary schools are government schools.

**A** sound policy emphasis would have two abiding characteristics. It would place teaching quality at the centre of all proposals for change and it would ensure a universalism of access to this quality, guaranteeing all children the best possible teaching.

We see now that Australia is beginning to struggle. The policy chickens are coming home to roost. Barry McGaw’s 2010 analysis of PISA data<sup>2</sup> shows Australia’s performance declining in the upper levels of achievement. He reveals that the slump in reading results is “statistically significant” and “occurred primarily because of a decline in performance at the highest level”. This was the consequence of schools “focusing more on basic achievement and not so much on the development of sophisticated reading of complex text”. In Mathematics there has also been a decline at the top end.

McGaw also went on to reveal that Australia has a very high social gradient meaning that social background in this country has a well above average effect on educational outcomes. As he describes the outcome: “The schooling system largely reproduces the existing social arrangements, conferring privilege where it already exists and denying it where it does not.” And when seeking root causes for this in

“A sound policy emphasis would have two abiding characteristics. It would place teaching quality at the centre of all proposals for change and it would ensure a universalism of access to this quality, guaranteeing all children the best possible teaching.”



Australia his report concludes: “Where differences in social background account for a large percentage of the between school variation, this suggests that the educational arrangements in the country are inequitable...there is a benefit for advantaged students keeping company with similarly advantaged students but a compounded disadvantage for disadvantaged students keeping company with others like themselves.”

Hence, policies that concentrate on betterments for the few exacerbate this inequality and at the same time drive down overall educational standards in the state and in the country.

If there is one overarching description of educational policy changes of recent decades that have emanated from the Liberal-Labor consensus it is that they have all contributed to the radical resegregation of schooling. Sporadic change. Gimmickry. Undermining the comprehensive ideal. Shifting resources to the noisome not the needy. Flimsy policy via media release and photo opportunity.

This sweeping resegregation leads us back to the vastly unequal educational times of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This trend has caused Andrew Jacobowicz to reflect that by the early part of this century “some of the great tradition of public education as the beachhead for intercultural engagement had begun to come unstuck”.<sup>3</sup> Christina Ho detects a range of processes that are leading to more intense divisions in cultural and ethnic terms developing in our schools as a result of this resegregation and warns of the dangers of this process. Ho observes, “Monocultural schools ... cannot socialise children for the reality of a cosmopolitan and a globalised world. Nor do heavily migrant-dominated schools, bereft of Anglo-Australians, provide a balanced microcosm of

Australian society for socialising young people ... If current trends continue, we risk creating highly unbalanced school communities that, rather than reflecting the full diversity of Australian society, instead constitute

unhealthy and unnatural bubbles of segregation and isolation.”<sup>4</sup>

So it falls upon us to create an education policy program that makes us the champion of educational standards and cultural and intellectual enrichment at the same time. The current generation of change has failed the great majority of children as it has failed the nation.

In the process we might need to free ourselves from some practices and priorities that have overtaken some elements of public schooling. In this we might need to examine whether we have taken upon ourselves roles that do not reflect the central purpose of an educator. Traditional sources of comfort and certainty for our young have been withering and the painful consequences of this have become ever more apparent for so many teachers. As schools have become the place where the harshness of modern life has become uncovered many compassionate public educators have assumed mantles that are fundamentally that of welfare workers. Schools have become the places where the painful conclusions of these social changes have been played out.

For the very best and most humane of reasons, this has led to distraction for some schools. Do we soften the curriculum? Do we tolerate behaviour that is undermining the learning environment for the many? Do we spend our hours trying to change things that we as teachers cannot change? Do we lose our central focus?

Schools cannot change the socio-economic status (SES) of the family that a child comes from. We can only slightly ameliorate the effects that such a situation might provide. One of many examples that might be cited in this respect relates to a child's lexicon and initial language experience. John Hattie cites one telling piece of empirical research that reveals that, on average, children from low SES backgrounds have spoken 2.5 million words by the time of starting school whilst their higher SES counterparts have spoken 4.5 million words. The playing field is heavily tilted from the first whistle.<sup>5</sup>

The real impact public schooling has on SES is to provide opportunity, through the curriculum, to lift the SES of a student in the future by providing the gift of academic success and intellectual advancement. Poverty, for example, is a culturally bound set of complex circumstances that schools can address but not reverse. A recent study from the NSW department of community services conducted a study of resilience in various parts of the state. It found that some communities were completely “non-resilient”. As *The Australian* newspaper summarised the conclusion for this investigation, “In other words, nothing holds back the tide of disadvantage from swamping children in the area.”<sup>6</sup> The encouraging and daunting news for educators though is that teacher effects are much larger in low SES schools.<sup>7</sup> As this paper will reiterate, teachers and teaching are of the utmost importance for battling students and communities.

“teachers and teaching are of the utmost importance for battling students and communities”

Similarly, other education studies have shown that factors such as family and community engagement are very difficult to engender in such contexts and schools can spend inordinate amounts of effort in seeking to achieve transformation in these connections.

In a finite school day, principals and teachers have some hard choices to make about how to balance the intellectual and personal needs of students, recognising as public educators do, that a damaged child is not one that takes to academic endeavour readily.

But schools have not created the social problems that many children have to endure and nor can they resolve them. What they can do is reassert the primacy of the educational function of schooling. Well meant, progressivist impulses in theory and practice have seen public schools take over welfare provision as part of their core responsibilities in recent times. This has been exacerbated by the erosion of traditional sources of certainty and support. Many traditional belief systems are in terminal decline whilst family and kinship patterns have been eroding. Schools have been encouraged by the benign and the misguided to fill this void. In many schools, welfare has overtaken the roles of both teachers and principals to an extraordinary and diverting extent. The “crowded curriculum” is often the result of well-intended external forces turning to schools to solve a myriad of non-educational problems.

One can gain encouragement from Singapore for example with its emphases on curriculum and teaching as the best means to build educational and human futures for their young. The island state performs especially well on international measures even though 80 per cent of Singapore’s students live in public housing of a generally modest nature. The difference is that once they leave their small apartments they enter well-resourced schools where “libraries and classrooms are well stocked; instructional technology is plentiful; and teachers are well trained and well supported”.<sup>8</sup>

The purpose of schooling is education. The greatest good a school can provide for the long-term welfare of children is an excellent program of education equipping them with the intellectual, reasoning and personal skills for later life.

Public education has been particularly distracted by these changes. Its exemplary and lofty intention of welcoming 100 per cent of all children into its care has been mistakenly taken to mean that all children and all difficulties can be addressed in a public school. They cannot.

One possibly related consequence of dealing with greater proportions of children with particular needs and difficulties has been the occasional wariness of some public educators in responding to the call for the education of the “gifted”. As the comprehensive ideal has been disparaged and damaged by policymakers it is vital that it be defended through the process of ensuring that education for the full range of students is offered at every public school.

Whilst it is never the role of the union to tell schools how they should be internally organised the words of the Public Education Council [PEC] are useful in this regard. As the Council declared, “Public comprehensive high schools, if they are to remain truly comprehensive, must be able to provide a wide curriculum choice and cater for both academic students and those who are aiming for vocational pathways. If comprehensive schools are not able to balance the competing demands for rigour and inclusiveness they risk losing one or the other group.”<sup>9</sup>

It has been interesting to note how the NSW Teachers Federation has moved itself closer to the recognition of what true comprehensiveness might entail in terms of modes of internal school organisation. In 2004, the Federation’s annual conference declared, “where a school is failing to attract or to meet the needs of academically talented students, an academic extension (gifted education) initiative should be instituted, involving professional development and the accessing of appropriate resources.”

So, we might begin to focus policy in the future on what ensures a quality teaching and learning experience for every child in every public school.

More than 10 years ago, the NSW Teachers Federation recognised the centrality of this consideration when its annual conference stated, “The quality of teaching is the single most important determinant of educational outcomes for students... Every student in public education has a right to be taught by well qualified, high quality and caring teachers. As part of its commitment to public education the Federation will campaign for the maintenance of, and improvements in, the quality of the teaching service.”

Now, how do we go about this?

Well, decades of policy eccentricity may have blinded us to the simplest of answers. Back in the

“The quality of teaching is the single most important determinant of educational outcomes for students... Every student in public education has a right to be taught by well qualified, high quality and caring teachers”

nineteenth century, Sir Henry Parkes had it right when he observed, “there can be no good school anywhere without a good teacher.” Over a century later the same proposition was expressed by the empirical researchers, McKinsey and Company. Their research concluded, “the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.” Using fancier language, modern researchers have now consistently pointed to the need for enhanced intellectual capital amongst the teaching service as the prerequisite to raising the intellectual capital of the student body.

The Business Council of Australia has joined in with its study which led it to finding that “the evidence is clear that nothing is as fundamental to the quality of learning opportunities that students receive in schools as the quality of their teachers”. Little of this would startle teachers or most parents but it is now timely to reassert this obvious wisdom. The McKinsey study took matters a step further and posited views that would have us fundamentally reshape policy and focus on teacher selection, education and recruitment, and then continuing training for teachers during service. What we currently see in Australia is an amateurisation of some teacher recruitment. Under the Teach for Australia model, another colonial importation of a failed United States fad, student teachers are given a few months training and then unleashed on students and communities most in need of highly skilled, highly trained, experienced teachers. As other

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professions such as medicine and dentistry move to deeper training with undergraduate degrees followed by post-graduate degrees to complete training, teaching models are being developed which are to be measured in months rather than years.”

It is the tinkering approach now so dominant in educational policy. It is a short step away from its close policy cousins that take a demeaning and disdainful approach to teaching and teachers. These initiatives focus on market approaches — the establish-

ment of charter schools for the few; the dismissal of publicly shamed teachers; the closure of schools deemed to have “failed”; using testing not as assessment but as educational accountancy — and their breadth of support amongst politicians

makes our construction of a total policy alternative, urgent and imperative.

It was the very failure of these approaches in the United States that caused Diane Ravitch, the former Assistant Secretary of Education for former United States President George W Bush, to recant from such philosophies and issue the clarion call to her nation, and ours, that, “On our present course, we are disrupting communities, dumbing down our schools, giving students false reports of their progress, and creating a private sector that will undermine public education without improving it.”<sup>10</sup>

Yet as we head to a new policy future we might dwell more on the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of what is presently put before us rather than a philosophical distaste for what is proposed. An example of this is to be found in so-called “merit pay” or “performance pay” proposals. The simple fact is that such ideas do not achieve their self-stated goals. The United States, latter-day godhead of such ideas, has seen widespread implementation of such pay systems and they have had “no overall impact on student achievement”<sup>11</sup> according to the National Center on Performance Initiatives at Vanderbilt University. As the *Education Week* report revealed, performance pay is at best an irrelevance which simply did not do much of anything in relation to student outcomes, based as it is on the false assumption that teachers are generally being lazy and will only reach optimal performance if they are paid extra for their exertions.

Similarly, the goal of diversifying and stratifying schools and systems (as we have already noted in the analysis of Program for International Student Assessment data) has the effect of driving down standards not only in Australia but in all countries in which they have been encouraged. There is in such countries “a higher degree of overall disparity in student performance than countries that have non-selective education systems” and “they also perform less well in absolute outcome terms”.<sup>12</sup>

We might also pause here and analyse local, recent research about how schooling is organised and how it impacts on student achievement and communities. In its submission to the Federal Government’s review of funding for schooling in 2011 the NSW education department issued a discussion paper revealing empirical research with telling implications.<sup>13</sup> The paper reinforced the long-established recognition that there is a clear connection between individual student socio-economic status (SES) and academic performance. More significant was its research finding, “concentrations of disadvantage at the school level have a powerful

additional impact on student performance.”<sup>14</sup>

The Department’s research, conducted on its own schools and on a system for which they hold organisational responsibility established that:

“There is a considerable ‘neighbourhood effect’ with regard to SES which impacts on student performance in government schools in NSW. That is, the SES of the other students in a school impacts on the performance of any other student, adding to the already significant impact of the student’s own SES on their performance.”<sup>15</sup> Further, we now know, for a fact, that the combined effect of SES and that of the policies of lumping battling, residualised kids and communities in together robs them of educational opportunity and life chances. This effect grows stronger from about year 3 and carries on up to year 9 and beyond. The Department’s research gives incontrovertible support to McGaw’s analysis of Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) data which points in an identical direction.

We now enter a realm therefore that transcends questions of educational philosophy or personal preference. It is demonstrable that policies that stratify schools and communities and that re-segregate schooling do powerful harm to those who lose out in such a regime. Thus, the recent decades that have undermined neighbourhood comprehensive schooling; that have elevated “choice” in policy; that have wound back zoning policies and have used transport subsidies to encourage privileged students and families to flee their local school have all conspired to create a more unequal society. It has robbed schools of social and intellectual capital and created an intensified social division. It has also created declining educational standards as its lasting residue.

So if we are looking for modes of optimal system and school-based effectiveness the current direction in education policy and organisation must change. To do otherwise would be to accept, as a matter of fact, public education becoming an instrument of inequality and division. In this context, a modern and updated reassertion of the comprehensive ideal as the cornerstone of public education is essential to a strengthening of school and system effectiveness. Comprehensiveness becomes both an ethical and pragmatic essential if we are about looking after each individual child and the overall level of educational performance of public education.

As we shall see the most educationally successful nations have done precisely this and focussed on quality provision being the right of every child within one’s local community. As Henna Virkkunen, the Finnish Minister for Education expressed it:

“We teach all pupils in the same classrooms. We don’t have really good, top schools and very poor, bad schools.”<sup>16</sup> Hence, we find that a precondition of Finland establishing the world standard in educational achievement is predicated on the reality of their schools having the situation where the learning differences among their schools and pupils are the lowest in OECD countries.

Indeed whilst local politicians and policymakers were busily pulling down the comprehensive school system Finland occupied itself in constructing a system-wide network of comprehensive schooling. From the 1970s on, the Finns painstakingly built their comprehensive schools from north to south and had the comprehensive goal or *peruskoulu* achieved by 1977. As the OECD report on this pivotal reform established, “most Finnish analysts believe that the comprehensive school... is the foundation upon which all subsequent reforms rest. As Pasi Sahlberg, Director of the Center for International Mobility and Co-operation, and an interpreter of Finland’s education story to the outside world put it during an interview for this report “The comprehensive school is not merely a form of school organisation. It embodies a philosophy of education as well as a deep set of societal values about what all children need and deserve.”<sup>17</sup>

“The comprehensive school is not merely a form of school organisation. It embodies a philosophy of education as well as a deep set of societal values about what all children need and deserve.”

#### 1.1 In conjunction with other changes proposed in this paper we need to:

- a) freeze all selective school enrolments and create no more selective schools;
- b) phase out specialist schools;
- c) establish comprehensive neighbourhood schools as the norm within communities;
- d) remove transport subsidies that fund students to be carried beyond their local school;
- e) make neighbourhood zones the norm for enrolling children in public education.

These recommendations are not based on old policy nostrums or fond romanticism for the past but are derived from what research now tells us about achieving the highest possible standards for the greatest number of students. Yet it is essential also to consider these ideas within the context of later proposals relating to teacher quality, professional development, achievement and orderly learning.



So, consistent with the goal of this present work — to propose rather than to merely oppose — what else is working?

The research gives us a number of clear signposts for deepening teacher quality, preparation and training.

For example, Motoko Akiba headed a study in 46 nations on mathematics education. This investigation found that the teachers' qualification levels in education and the discipline coupled with a minimum of three years of teaching experience was the universal prerequisite for student success.<sup>18</sup> More specifically, the highly-rated South Korean system of education insists on high levels of entry standards for teachers to the profession, "an aggressive class size reduction policy", highly desirable working conditions, detailed supportive induction programs and intensive continuous, in-service professional development. Unlike current fads in Australia, experience is venerated in South Korea and promotion recognises length of service along with teaching skill, research and service in schools which are regarded as more challenging. As Linda Darling-Hammond concludes of this range of practices in South Korea, "The end result is a highly qualified, experienced, and stable teaching force in all schools, providing a foundation for strong student learning."<sup>19</sup>

In short, teaching, in successful countries, is a profession "in which every practitioner has the opportunity and the expectation to master the knowledge and skills needed for effective practice, and makes the moral commitment to use this knowledge."<sup>20</sup>

"current chart-topping nations have education systems which only a few decades ago were regarded as sub-standard. These nations teach us that radical change and improvement is possible and that it can be achieved over a relatively short period of time"

This one reflection provides the essence of what teacher unions have as part of their own professional responsibility in the immediate future. Bureaucracies, politicians and pundits have all failed public education in recent times. Only teacher unions, in alliance with other forces that hold the interests of public education firmly, can build the next policy agenda. This is not merely an ideological inclination. It is practical necessity. It is

observable truth. As Professor Ben Levin points out, "Virtually all the top performing countries on international education measures have strong teacher unions."<sup>21</sup> Levin went on to show that countries or

states that sought to weaken teacher unions did not demonstrate any lift in educational standards and some, such as England, had to improve teachers' conditions in order to improve the conditions of learning and student outcomes.

In this respect it is important to note that those countries that top global indices of educational performance were not always so dominant but they achieved their pre-eminence by radically changing their national approaches to education and training. All of the current chart-topping nations have education systems which only a few decades ago were regarded as sub-standard. These nations teach us that radical change and improvement is possible and that it can be achieved over a relatively short period of time.

This improvement process has gone well beyond our elementary setting of formal, prescriptive standards which is an existing feature of quality control across contemporary education systems. Hence, we have some standards that purport to measure teacher quality in NSW through the transfer and promotion system where quality is meant to be confirmed and assessed.

At the transfer stage, teachers are theoretically given a quality sign-off by the principal but this is often perfunctory and there have been moments when a teacher moving on from a school may have been followed by a sigh of relief. In the promotion system, with documentation and interviews at its core, there is an insufficient correlation between the skills that often provide success in such processes and the skills that need to be made manifest from the first day on the job at the new school.

All of these quality control mechanisms arose after the weakening of the power of the NSW education department and the gutting of its staffing levels, its cutbacks to curriculum and professional support functions, the winding back of in-class observations and the general use of remote control mechanisms for assessing the actual worth and effectiveness of teaching.

At the initial entry point to the profession there is still abiding concern about the university cut-off levels that allow access to certain teacher training courses whilst at the other end there is some evidence that some teachers being granted university qualifications are less than dazzling when setting out on their careers. Ontario for example commonly requires entrants to teacher training to be drawn from the top 30 per cent of matriculants whilst Finland requires a Master's degree and it also provides intensive, supervised teacher training during the courses of teacher preparation includ-

ing the use of “training schools”. The question of the recognition of some external qualifications for teaching has also alarmed some schools and principals and this is especially vexing when one notes that some of the possibly under-prepared, unsuited or insufficiently qualified, early career teachers seem to find their way, in vast disproportion, to the most challenging schools.

So there are many management advances that can be made to lift professional standards. The following policy directions are proposed:

- 2.1 That entry level standards to university training courses be regulated and that a minimum standard be adopted requiring all entrants to teacher training to be in the high range of the matriculation group.
- 2.2 That students who enter teacher training from the top 10 per cent of matriculants have their HECS paid progressively and totally over the first five years of their teaching after graduation.
- 2.3 That universities be held accountable for graduates of their universities who have been certified as competent by the university to begin work as teachers but who rapidly become problems to the system.
- 2.4 That a review be conducted of the processes for recognising other qualifications with a view to detecting the flaws that currently indicate that too many less able people are being granted approval to teach.
- 2.5 That early career teachers who demonstrate after 12 months’ probation the likelihood of long-term, endemic difficulties with teaching be no longer employed.
- 2.6 That the Department ensure that early career teachers are appointed across all parts of the state and all parts of the system.
- 2.7 That the union and NSW education department work more closely and rigorously on the fair and expeditious implementation of performance review process and in necessary cases, cooperatively enforce the removal of teachers who cannot be confidently allowed to continue in the profession.
- 2.8 That the principal’s signoff on applicants for transfer and promotion be indicative of their professional belief that the applicant is a suitable candidate for the position sought. If in the 12 months after a transfer or promotion occurs questions arise as to the fitness of the teacher the principal will be asked to justify and authenticate their endorsement of the original application.

**T**he first precondition to moving to a fully professional teaching service is for the union to move to a central position in determining and buttressing professional standards. The first step to the type of transformation needed to reposition the teaching profession will be to build real

and integral standards as the precondition to creating a culture of trust in the profession. It is only with substantial root and branch union involvement in this work will there be a guarantee of common-sense and practicality along with fairness and confidence in the processes.

The linked consideration is how we decide on the nature of the distribution of staffing. The existing New Right agenda focuses on demand-side approaches to staffing where the most “attractive” schools receive a disproportionate number of applicants whilst challenging schools often find that very few people consciously desire to go to their school, for a range of reasons including the consequent modern day difficulties in moving from a school. At classroom teacher and executive levels certain schools become difficult to staff. This means quite often that the school gets an ever younger age profile and a consequent reduction in experience levels which taken together often exacerbates the degree of difficulty of working in a particular school. Educational inequality intensifies.

In a broader sense, it also contributes to a more immobile teaching profession and the opportunities for professional cross-fertilisation are reduced for all parts of the system. The reality is now that teachers will work at fewer and fewer schools over the course of a career whilst the demographic reality is that most teachers entering the profession will never be promoted. Both of these phenomena work against increased levels of teacher quality. Meanwhile, schools have been encouraged not to take teachers from a transfer list as a stigma is occasionally and wrongly attached to such applicants while the curriculum vitae and interview system is valorised regardless of the reality that no evidence exists to suggest better quality teachers come through that method of appointment.

Of late, there have been some minute programs that have purported to address the issue of augmenting experience and skill levels in harder to staff schools. In 2010, for example, we saw yet another piecemeal program, the advent of the Highly Accomplished Teachers. As the breathless media release heralding the arrival of these super teachers described their work, they were to “coordinate professional learning, forge links with universities and support their colleagues to improve

“It is only with substantial root and branch union involvement in this work will there be a guarantee of common-sense and practicality along with fairness and confidence in the processes.”



student learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy”. Whilst this was certainly enough to keep the dull times away for the teachers appointed to these positions the fact that only 47 of them were actually to be appointed reveals the vacuousness of the announcement — almost a caricature of the very real need of the students and communities at the schools to which they were sent.

The NSW Teachers Federation might be wise to revisit its general attitude to this type of position, however, and insist that such programs should be radically expanded, learning as relevant from the Singaporean approach in this regard. For such positions to have any real and sustained impacts schools in the greatest need should have at least a half of their staffing drawn from a soundly constructed super teacher pool. If we are to turn around the vastly unequal educational outcomes in certain low socio-economic status (SES), Aboriginal, remote and rural communities we need to be radical and not allow the market to decide priorities. We need hundreds of the very best and brightest, like an educational SAS, to work and stay in these school communities and to display the transformational power of public education properly supported and delivered.

**3.1 That the Teachers Federation support a complete transformation of the Highly Accomplished Teacher program to ensure that identified schools have large numbers of such teachers appointed for sustained periods of time and that the entire school community be preferentially supported and resourced for a minimum of five years.**

The longer term goal needs to see public education move towards providing the very best teachers, in great and consistent numbers, to those school communities in greatest need.

This is essential in a country where the pursuit of equality is still part of the political discourse. Teachers matter more to less successful students. As Aaronson et al established, struggling students benefit more from high quality teaching than do those performing at the average and above.<sup>22</sup> Other research<sup>23</sup> has shown that teacher effectiveness varies more broadly within low SES

“low SES students have their life chances more strongly influenced by the quality of the teaching they experience than do students from higher SES categories”

schools in Australia and the methods of staffing schools is critically important to the educational outcomes for those students from battling backgrounds. To be blunt, low SES students have their

life chances more strongly influenced by the quality of the teaching they experience than do students from higher SES categories. If we do not get the best possible teachers to the students who need them most then other equity initiatives are merely cosmetic.

Yet if we are critical of educational change that only concentrates on sub-sections of the student population we need to broaden our own gaze and establish means that seek to ensure quality teaching for all students in all situations.

We can commence with an ethical, and empirically established, proposition that if teaching quality is the underlying variable for student success then all pupils have an equal right to experience this quality. As indicated above there is a range of recruitment, staffing and management processes that can be sharpened up considerably to move towards this goal.

Beyond that we can draw some lessons from more pragmatic research that can be deployed to the benefit of public education and the profession of teaching. A recent report from the Grattan Institute *Investing in our teachers, investing in our economy*<sup>24</sup> suggests that we might productively rethink some of our conventional approaches.

The Grattan report is very direct and is worth quoting at some length. It establishes that,

“Improving teacher effectiveness would have a greater impact on economic growth than any other reform before Australian governments ... An increase in teacher effectiveness of 10 per cent would lift Australia’s education systems into the highest performing group of countries in the world. A 10 per cent increase in teacher effectiveness improves student performance and, in the longer term, the productivity of the labour force. The increased productivity of Australian workers would increase long-run economic growth by \$90 billion by 2050, making Australians 12 per cent richer by the turn of the century — quite apart from the other benefits to individual well-being and society of better education.

“Improving teacher effectiveness also has substantial benefits for individuals. Young people who stay in school and invest in further education can expect to earn an additional 8–10 per cent per year for each additional year of education they undertake.

“Increasing teacher effectiveness is thus perhaps the single most profound economic transformation open to Australian governments. And improvements of this magnitude are achievable...

“However, education policy priorities would need to change.”

The Grattan Institute findings are unremarkable perhaps for those who have tracked the fundamental reshaping of educational policies in the most highly successful education nations in the world.

Yet they are sensational in terms of what teachers in public education have had to endure in recent times. In Australia, teachers in the public sector have seen a shift of investment out of public education. The teaching and learning conditions of educators and students have been whittled away by successive governments and education departments have sought trade-offs and forms of work intensification during very hard-fought salaries negotiations. Teachers have been told that they do not exist in “the real world” and that they make no contribution to the important business of building the nation’s wealth.

All of this now stands as misguided and fallacious. Instead of being a problem, we are in fact the solution. In the future, national wealth and well-being may ride on the teachers’ back. For decades, teachers and their union have been lectured about how they were an economic burden; about how teacher pay rises would cripple the economy; and, about how they had to pay for their own salary increases through “productivity offsets” which invariably made the task of teaching more difficult. Significantly, none of the high performing education nations tried this sort of thing on.

We now know that both the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development and the World Bank<sup>25</sup> have identified the necessity of driving economic growth through increasing school quality. In a practical sense, this also means that investing in already privileged segments of the education sector is incredibly inefficient and only through targeting mass, public systems of schooling will the economic benefits flow through.

This dovetails into a longstanding recognition by the union about the importance of professional learning. The NSW Teachers Federation’s 2009 Annual Conference restated the union’s position on professional development: “The Teachers Federation recognises that the continued provision of quality teaching and learning for every child in every community across NSW is fundamental to the success of our great public education system, the renewal of an educated citizenry and the realisation of a society that is cohesive and socially just.” The conference went on to call on government to enter a commitment “to making professional learning the *guiding principle* [original emphasis] in the provision of quality teaching and learning and the management of teacher performance in NSW public schools”.

We now have the opportunity and the rationale to bring this into being. This needs to be entered into without forfeiting any industrial rights. It needs also to recognise that professional development must move beyond the existing overemphasis on compliance with transient government enthusiasms.

We can establish an enduring process that lifts the status and income of the profession; end salary negotiations which include trading off teaching and learning conditions; move the profession to a situation where every teacher, every year is engaging in relevant professional learning and where every student is being taught at every moment by a teacher who is undertaking continuing, career long, professional learning. It is an opportunity for universal, mass capacity-building and one which would not only be self-funding but would also immeasurably improve the perception of the profession and the public education system itself. It should also be conducted in the absence of the whimsical approaches to policy discussed previously. Taken in conjunction with previous policy suggestions it might, over time, fundamentally and permanently transform the profession to the status teaching has in other, highly successful nations. The alternative is a teaching profession of declining levels of real income, respect and influence which is a concomitant of declining educational standards and reduced levels of economic growth. (It is notable that when the Coalition Government assumed office in NSW in 2011 it found the predictable Treasury “black hole” and also discovered that the public sector, principally teachers, would pay the cost of it by facing the prospect of long-term decreases in the real value of their salaries.)

“professional development must move beyond the existing overemphasis on compliance with transient government enthusiasms”

Such an approach would also reflect what Michael Fullan identified through his research as the essence of universalist educational improvement. “No nation,” Fullan concluded, “has got better by focussing on individual teachers as the driver. Better performing countries did not set out to have a very good teacher here and another good one there, and so on. They were successful because they developed the *entire teaching profession* [his emphasis] — raising the bar for all. Systems are successful as systems because 95 per cent or more of their teachers become damn good.”<sup>26</sup>

To achieve this, the NSW education department will need to be resourced and supported to become the major, system-wide provider of professional development.

**4.1 Public education needs to be taken out of the cycles of political contestation and the finite nature of governments. The Federation, the Department and the Parliament need to draw together in a Public Education Charter with a minimum 10 year duration. No educational change of worth can be put in place without a long term perspective. The electoral cycle assures nothing other than episodic and populist policy fixes with superficial and reductionist characteristics.**

The mechanism that guarantees this Charter is an agreement embodied in bipartisan legislation which provides a 10 year funding assurance for the system and which legally includes all parties in the pursuit of the goals. This reflects the intellectual and historical reality that educational improvement can only be sustainably delivered by collective, robust multi-partite agreement. It is the fundamental means whereby the transient, the ephemeral and the partisan are taken out of educational policy-setting.

Professional development is the universal precondition of quality teaching and it is itself the only meaningful conceptualisation of “productivity” in education. Accordingly, it is the responsibility of every teacher, every year, to be undertaking substantial professional development.

Real and sustained increases in the value of teacher salaries are to be guaranteed by the legislated Charter. The productivity payoff arrangement is by means of all teachers entering into a substantial, continuous and supervised program of professional development. 50 per cent of this professional development would be devoted to meaningful system requirements of an educational nature and 50 per cent would be chosen by the teacher to enhance their individual teaching skills.

A 10 year Charter would provide for consumer price index increases plus 2 per cent annually. At the end of the 10 year period the profession and public education would be substantially repositioned in terms of salary, trust, status and reputation.

Whilst the Charter and its details would require significant discussion and development the union has a rare opportunity to harness the implications of positive overseas developments, capture the research around the education-economy nexus and build something positive, lasting and historic for public education and the profession. Every child, in every lesson, would be taught by a teacher who is undertaking substantial and continuous professional development. And every family, everywhere, would know this. Whilst some

teachers will be wary of this comprehensive, career-long approach to professional development given some of the ideological intrusions that have been foisted on school-based professional development in the recent past one cannot escape the reality that high quality professional development has a very large and demonstrably positive effect on student achievement.<sup>27</sup> Yet it will have to be delivered in a thoughtful and considered fashion mindful of what has been shown to be what works in the most powerful fashion — over an extended period of time; blending outside experts and in-school practice; engaging teachers during the learning process to deepen skills; appropriately challenging teachers’ preconceptions about learning and being conspicuously supported by the school leadership.<sup>28</sup>

This approach recognises the essential truth of education reform which establishes that sustainable educational improvement cannot be imposed on a system and a profession. It is also now clear that worthwhile change cannot take hold within the confines of a single electoral cycle which by its nature is ephemeral, shallow and insubstantial given to fickle and populist sway rather than deep thought and the consolidation of that which is visionary.

Such a fundamental reshaping of policies and priorities would allow for more thoughtful approaches to real notions of accountability and child-centred learning. At present, the predominant policy model of accountability is around testing and public reporting and consequent humiliations. Such devices are useful in giving the appearance of accountability but they in fact divert from an examination of the performance of many forces and factors that contribute to inequality and underperformance.

**B**y building mechanisms that enhance trust in the profession teachers are encouraged to engage in educational processes that they know to be most effective for the individuals in their care. We move then towards an intelligent accountability and weaken the rationale for punitive testing and reporting processes that parade as accountability.

Schools are then freed up to move to a much broader curriculum provision and away from the narrowing constraints that external, high stake testing has on the curriculum and the life opportunities of students. It is the precondition allowing the profession to be more pluralist, less compliant and conformist and for schools to treasure the diversity, creativity and originality in students.

Once more, teaching can become the pursuit of the personal optimal achievement of every individual student.

## Notes

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# Values

Having made a case for explicitly asserting achievement as the primary purpose of public education it is now necessary to examine the ethical context in which such broadly-based achievement ought to be pursued.

In a certain sense this is woefully unfair as public education is the only system of education wherein modern values-laden schooling is pursued. Other systems that like to proclaim their own values have at their core a culture that is quintessentially exclusive. They are there to build fences, to keep certain children and communities and beliefs out. They are about bonding and homogeneity. They occasionally like to parade a few children from “equity” groups in the school blazer for marketing and funding purposes but their real gates and walls are much more effective than sandstone.

Yet the systemic nature of public education and the shared values and beliefs which bind it have been under assault for some time. For a generation now each individual school has been encouraged to invent a unique mission or vision for its purposes. There has been an increased level of stratification within public education as schools have been enticed to display a diverse and separate and implicitly superior orientation. There is much evidence of increased inequality within public

education itself. Notions of autonomy and self-management have caused competition to be exacerbated between public schools. External reporting, shading in schools as reds or greens on the My School website, has only hardened some of this stratification. The

comprehensive ideal has been under assault for decades. The idea that public educators have a unique responsibility for all children in a commu-

nity, not simply those within one’s own school, has diminished in certain places.

However, the times in which we live and the futures that will be experienced by young people suit the nature of public education. The old walled schools were appropriate if the function of education was to create elites to lead an empire or reassert the natural superiority of a class or religion or caste. The globalised world however requires young people entering that world to know and to prize difference; to understand and respect a range of diverse views and ways of seeing the world; to be able to work and travel and to fall in love with people who are not just like all the people that one went to school with. Only public education can prepare young people for the globalised world of dissolving barriers that we are rapidly evolving towards.

It is all the more important then, that we actively resist the atomising effects of policies that would divide and stratify our children in our public schools. We are bound to encounter more regressive proposals around developing Independent Public Schools such as in Western Australia. Out on that extreme, all public schools are being invited to opt out of the system of schooling. All schools in Western Australia are being invited to build their own school ethos, separate from their neighbours and other communities.

Paradoxically, schooling is now conducted in an environment where schools are expected to provide much of what used to be gained through family life and community institutions. As rigid borders collapse, as the nation state ceases to have much meaning in terms of economic and cultural autonomy, as many of the peoples of the world become increasingly unwilling to accept a subordinate status, the bonding notions of neighbourhood and community and tolerance and acceptance become more important to young people’s sense of well-being. In such a context, a system of interconnected

“the times in which we live and the futures that will be experienced by young people suit the nature of public education”

public schools based on the comprehensive inclusion of children from all manner of backgrounds becomes ever more desirable as well as a practical necessity. Nation building in such an era is based on building the bridges between the communities.

Chris Bonnor has argued that it is wise for us to therefore, “link commonly held values to our school values.”<sup>1</sup> He suggests that we need to constantly emit explicit messages from our schools to our communities that place emphasis on “hard work, persistence, personal responsibility and respectful behaviour”. Bonnor argues that we should talk up codes of conduct and naturally point out the benefits of public education to the community and nation but to also emphasise the individual child and what they directly gain from public education’s unique nature. We need to be constant and comfortable in expressing support for, and insisting upon excellence, respect, integrity, responsibility, cooperation, participation, care, fairness and democracy.

It is fair to reckon that most of these terms are to be found in most of the avowed intentions of public schools. The real test is whether a school and a system models these values in the way in which they deal with all the children under the care of public education. One cannot mouth these verities and seek to selectively enrol able students from other school communities or to talk down neighbouring schools or to proclaim one’s superiority to a community. At a system level, unless all children are given equal educational opportunity then one is replicating the values of other education systems whose very purpose is to create hierarchies and a profound sense of difference.

In another formulation, George Lakoff, wrote of how right-wing forces have been able to “frame” debates and to suggest that somehow their way of thinking and their institutions were naturally correct in articulating the views and desires of the people. Lakoff argued for the liberal articulation of the logic of progressive values, of caring and responsibility, of protection, fulfilment in life, fairness, all pursued and carried out with strength in an atmosphere of nurturance.<sup>2</sup>

In a more specifically educational environment, Caldwell and Harris<sup>3</sup>, in their study of effective schooling locate “Affairs of the Spirit” and the need for Spiritual Capital as essential underpinnings of high quality education. Whilst one might find some discomfort in some of the terms used in their analysis their explication has significance for public educators. They contend, “spiritual capital refers to the strength of moral purpose and the degree of coherence among values, beliefs and attitudes about life and learning ... spiritual capital may refer to

ethics and values shared by members of the school and its community ... and is as important in public schools as it is in private schools.” They also argue that it is important to embed these values and beliefs in the mission, vision, goals, policies, curriculum and plans of the school and to be constantly and explicitly articulating these values.

Whilst one might have profound intellectual difficulty in finding moral purpose or spiritual capital in a school or system that discriminates or excludes certain children the notions are useful here if we relate them to a whole network of public schooling as well as to each school within its community. Years of market-speak and harsh competition and school

specialisation and encouraging principals to think and act like CEOs have lessened the ethical capital of much of public education. Further, it has been both cruel and ironic to observe certain politicians who have ladled these notions into public education then proclaim their despair at public schools being “values neutral” or “ethical deserts”.

In the dustier recesses of senior bureaucrats’ offices can still be found worthy documents such as Values in NSW Public Schools but it is some time since they have been active working inspirations for the practices and policies of these leaders.

Such approaches need to be integrated into and across all sectors of public education and need to be made essential to the very being of every public educator. This requires our shared ethical focus to be incorporated into the recruitment, initial appointment, professional development, assessment and promotion of every teacher and officer in the system.

It will be necessary to go back to first principles in order to revise and rehabilitate this values-based approach to public education. We might ask, for example, how public education got to become a system with its unique form of values orientation before being recently side-tracked.

The historical and intellectual source of the systems of public education in the Western world is the set of ideas generally known as The Enlightenment.

Eric Hobsbawm described some time ago this revolutionary movement thus: “Its champions believed firmly (and correctly) that human history was an ascent, rather than a decline or an undulating movement about a level trend. They could observe that man’s scientific knowledge and technical control over nature increased daily. They believed that human society and individual man

“Years of market-speak and harsh competition and school specialisation and encouraging principals to think and act like CEOs have lessened the ethical capital of much of public education.”



could be perfected by the same application of reason, and were destined to be so perfected by history ... It was rigorously rationalist and secular; that is to say convinced of the ability of men in principle to understand all and to solve all questions by the use of reason, and the tendency of irrational behaviour and institutions (among which traditionalism and all religion other than the rational) to obscure rather than enlighten.”<sup>4</sup>

Robert Owen was to expand on this Enlightenment thinking and observed, “The primary and necessary object of all existence is to be happy, but happiness cannot be achieved individually; it is useless to expect isolated happiness; all must partake of it or the few will never enjoy it.”

A century after Owen, Henry Parkes was drawing closer to putting Enlightenment thoughts into action. As he declared at a school opening in 1869, “Whatever may be our form of government...Let us by every means in our power take care that the children of the country grow up under such a sound and enlightened system of instruction, that they will consider the dearest of all possessions the free exercise of their own judgement in the secular affairs of life, and that each man will shrink from being subservient to any other man or earthly power.”<sup>5</sup>

Upon such an intellectual rock was public education founded and so much of its modern character descends. As Lindsay Connors observes, it spreads as far as how we teach and view the children in our care. In her experience “the legal obligation upon schools to accept students from all walks of life produces in teachers a capacity for invention that is bred by necessity. And that necessity tends to create a disposition towards broadmindedness, liberalism and a tolerance of diversity.”<sup>6</sup>

So let us stand for something large and worthwhile and life-affirming. Let us stand for those values that provide the richest of soils for young people to grow and mature in. Let us have those school by school mission and vision statements, if we

“Let us stand for those values that provide the richest of soils for young people to grow and mature in.”

must, but recognise that all of our schools are part of a much larger whole and it is to that much larger idea that we owe our primary commitment. As Voltaire understood it, there is but one absolute human value

and that is the human race. And it is public education that is designed to attend to the intellectual and social needs of young humanity.

Reason is the instrument that separates us from the other creatures and it is much more than the mere accumulation of facts. As human history teaches us, progress is the gradual assertion of reason. It has allowed us to understand the universe and its workings. It has allowed us to actively solve problems. It builds towards an open and pluralistic society. It requires us to place religion in a separate and private domain. It replaces superstition with understanding and the quest for intrinsic moral purpose as opposed to external or fear-fuelled motivations for moral behaviour. It is the meeting point between the cultivation of personal intellectual excellence and moral excellence. Educated in such a climate, young people will grow naturally, in their diverse ways, towards altruism, integrity, honesty, tolerance and responsibility and away from dogmatism, sectarianism and conceit.

And if this sounds too lofty, empirical research now also shows the pragmatic benefits of basing education and public policy on the principles of equality and reason. Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett in their international study *The Spirit Level: Why more equal societies almost always do better* establish that political and social policies that seek to facilitate equality and social justice lead to better outcomes for the great majority of human beings across a wide range of indices. These researchers analysed statistical data across a broad range of performance and attainment levels for nations throughout the developed and developing world. They found, “A common element related to the prevalence of ... health and social problems is indeed the amount of inequality in each country.”<sup>7</sup> They also reveal that child wellbeing is directly linked to how unequal a society has become and that more unequal countries have inferior educational attainment.

So just as investment in teacher professional development has a rich economic and educational payoff for a state and a nation the movement for educational equality also leads to higher performance across a range of fundamental measures. Decent values then are not merely a nice or worthy adjunct to an education system; they are basic to the achievement of the higher and richer things in life.

In the quest for the moral consistency and coherence that Caldwell and Harris suggest is essential for the highest quality schooling it is timely to return to first principles around public education and to review where we are with the goals of being “free, secular and compulsory”. Whilst we are still largely free and still compulsory (though perhaps some students and families do not altogether share this view) we are not a truly secular system.

It is worth recalling that our public education system was established in a time when the great majority of the population affirmed and practiced a religious faith and that faith was overwhelmingly Christian. In the year of Federation, 1901, the Census revealed that 99 per cent of Australians held a belief in a deity and of those almost all saw that deity in Christian terms.

Many of the powerful churches had lobbied mightily against the establishment of the public school system and a compromise had to be reached that allowed them access to the schools and a period of instruction in Scripture mandated by legislation became part of the public school curriculum. In the decades that followed the Churches have sought to intrude into the conduct of public education as if it was a God-given right. As recently as the 1960s the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Dr H R Gough had been pressuring the NSW Education Minister, Mr Wetherell, to make Christian teaching a compulsory secondary school subject.

Churches have pathologically opposed the secular public education system, as according to Hobsbawm, they worried about the corrosive powers of reason and liberalism and “once the principle of thinking rather than obeying was accepted, the end was in sight”.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps now the end is in sight.

The existing compromises around secularism in public education did arise in a period when there was strong religious and denominational Christian commitment. Those times have now passed. Religious adherence and church attendance are in free-fall. Separate and flourishing government-funded private schools exist for all of those who maintain such a commitment and who believe that religion should form part of a school curriculum. These private schools often loudly proclaim their religious affiliation and those parents who wish to outsource the religious inculcation of their particular belief system are now utterly spoiled for choice.

Meanwhile, the principle of secularism has been undermined by politicians who have foisted chaplaincies on public education. Religious leaders have also taken it upon themselves to seek to dictate to governments what they deem to be permissible parts of the public school curriculum with campaigns against ethics classes and sporadic interference into debates as to what texts they view as suitable to be taught in our classrooms. The Fred Nile Christian Democratic Party (CDP) campaigned in the March 2011 state election for example on a platform that called on the faithful to “Vote CDP to Save Our Scripture” with no illusions as to who had

proprietary rights to this part of the public school curriculum.

Public education in a globalised, multicultural, multid denominational, ever more sceptical world requires a commitment to the values of reason and tolerance and the separation of church and state. It is time for our curriculum and practices to manifest this coherence and to become totally secular. Allowing anyone to enter school grounds and classrooms to market and promulgate individual faith systems that undermine the modern curriculum, question what is taught in conventional science and humanities classes and the values of public education is a vestige of the past.

To be consistent with its value system; to provide intellectual coherence; to place religion and dogma in its proper domain as a private, individual or family matter; to appropriately value rationalism as the unique underpinning of public education then public education must now become truly secular.

It is sufficient and proper to continue with the option of allowing schools to choose Board-developed courses for study where young people can learn about religion. It is useful knowledge for children to discover the range of forms of thought and belief that have evolved over time. That is a part of knowledge and rationality in the educational context of learning “public reasonableness”. But children are compelled by law to attend school. It is no longer reasonable to require children to attend school and to allow external forces to come to a school and, from a privileged position, advertise, model or proselytise a belief system. Public schools were never designed to free children from the flames of Hell.

Meanwhile, the churches are in profound crisis. Their “faith” schools scarcely have any religious orders. They would certainly implode without massive government funding. The largest church in Australia, Catholicism, is collapsing.<sup>9</sup> In a generation the ranks of its orders have halved. The average age of those in orders is 73 years old, whilst only 8 per cent are under 50 with a quarter over 80. Religious commitment is fading fast with only a tiny minority of those who declare a religious faith actually attending church. When public school children are given a free choice between attending

“It is no longer reasonable to require children to attend school and to allow external forces to come to a school and, from a privileged position, advertise, model or proselytise a belief system. Public schools were never designed to free children from the flames of Hell.”

scripture or going home for example the great majority make the secular choice. Australia is, for all practical purposes, a strongly secular nation.

Non-Christian religions are among the few that are actually growing and increasing proportions of the population declare that they have no faith whatsoever. As Census figures reveal, the younger a person is the more likely they are to declare themselves to have no religious faith. The churches are dying and it is inexorable. We now live in a world completely unlike the one that forged the compromises that provided access to schools for religious officials.

Yet it is far more than the one hour of Scripture that compels us now to become a truly secular education system. In recent years, political parties have sought to use schools as the locus for their culture wars. We have had flagpoles and Simpson's donkey and attacks on ethics classes and national anthems and most of all, a tsunami of chaplains.

This last has been the most egregious because of where it takes us. The very idea of chaplains in schools was first mooted by a coterie of religious figures from the Mornington Peninsula who contacted their local Liberal MP, Greg Hunt, suggesting that having chaplains throughout all schools would be a jolly good idea. Hunt passed the suggestion on to the Prime Minister of the time, John Howard, and within six months the word had been made flesh and the chaplains were off and running. Introduced by the Coalition government it was gormlessly continued and enhanced by two successive ALP Prime Ministers without any regard for the reckless danger in which it placed the public school ethos.

The National School Chaplaincy Program is now big business. This should come as no surprise as it came at a time when religion was in dire straits, church attendances were miniscule, religious orders were ceasing to exist and Christian hegemony was in decline. So when the government offered exclusive and taxpayer-funded access for religious officials to the minds and lives of millions of school children it must have seemed a godsend.

John Howard opened the bidding with a \$90 million program over three years but Julia Gillard topped this with a \$222 million commitment upon coming to office. Dressed in the usual padding of attending to the welfare of children it was quickly revealed to be a windfall for Protestant churches in particular and a wave that private schools and the Catholic school system have generally left to pass. The doctrinally

conservative Scripture Union supplies 85 per cent of the chaplains in government schools and fortuitously, this hitherto cash-strapped organisation will reap \$50 million for itself for "administrative costs" from the public funds.

In our multid denominational and multicultural society, more than 98.5 per cent of the chaplains initially appointed turned out to be Christian and despite the initial marketing that the chaplains did not necessarily have to be religious only 0.01 per cent had a secular background. The costs have blown out to amount to over \$500 million up until 2014.<sup>10</sup> Thousands of public schools will have become enmeshed in the program by then. Leaving aside what this money could have been used to achieve for the education and wellbeing of young people in schools it reminds us of the historic propensity of organised religions to use our schools for their purposes.

It also reveals the ahistoricism of politicians. In drawing up the guidelines for the program, they required (almost certainly at the behest of the churches) that these chaplains had to be ordained, commissioned or endorsed by a recognised or accepted religious institution or approved chaplaincy service. The guidelines became subject to a major High Court challenge as their conditions were argued to provide for a religious test for public office, a provision that it expressly forbidden in the Australian Constitution. Given the somewhat chequered record of certain religious officials in dealing with children the fact that the Commonwealth Ombudsman found that these chaplains were "inadequately supervised" and answerable to their church but no specific government agency was more than a little discomfiting.

The further fact that these programs and their architects know no bounds was further revealed in the aftermath of the Queensland floods of early 2011 when the Federal Education Minister, announced that another 15 chaplains would descend on Queensland schools to assist in the recovery from the floods. Whilst some religions might claim a special understanding of the true provenance of floods and cyclones, to spend money in these times in this fashion in public schools reveals a scorn for the principles and values of public education.

Australia has moved on. In a pluralist society that defends and treasures the right of people and families to believe what they will in their private sphere freedom of religion is a fundamental right. But in an evolving Australia freedom from religion is also fundamental.

Our world is replete with those from Christian, Islamic, Judaic and other traditions that want to

"freedom of religion is a fundamental right. But in an evolving Australia freedom from religion is also fundamental"

conflate the roles of church and state and have the state serve as the instrument and sword of faith. Those that want the state to serve religion invariably want to deploy the education system to serve its purposes. And to be accurate, up until the late eighteenth century, the state and education were synonymous with the interests of the church. Many conservative Christians, Muslims and Jews still want this to continue. Hence we have those who fight for Mosaic, Sharia or Biblical beliefs to form the way a nation and its school system should be run. But in our period of modern history most have moved beyond this era when men with beards generally ran the show.

Churches have, however, had a seemingly eternal capacity to resurrect their interests in times they regard as politically propitious. As we take our gaze over to that Mother Country of educational ideas, England, we can note some alarmingly relevant developments.

The Coalition government in Downing Street has recently embarked on the standard Tory fare of seeking to dismember the system of public education and to enshrine local control of schools whilst encouraging external forces to set up their own schools within the government school system. The Church of England has seized upon this and is now rapidly expanding its influence within the public sector. According to the *Times Educational Supplement* this has already “raised fears that the Church is attempting to colonise state education to evangelise and to create new followers”.<sup>11</sup> The Anglican Church now runs 4600 primary schools in the public sector and is expanding on the 240 secondary schools it controls there. Excited by this potential for expansion, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, recently proclaimed that his Church now faced the “breath-taking” prospect of becoming the dominant force in state education in England.<sup>12</sup>

This political godsend arrives at a time when a small proportion of people in England actually voluntarily attend an Anglican church. As the Director of England’s National Secular Society observed, “The Church is ambitious to influence the whole education system. Education has become the *raison d’être* for the Church of England as fewer and fewer people are bothered about their primary purpose any more. There is no doubt that there is evangelising in schools in an attempt to create new Christians.”<sup>13</sup> It will surprise few in Australian public education to learn, however, that the Anglicans have been keen to sift the children that they wish to target and to focus on the privileged. As the think tank, Ekklesia, reported, these expanding Anglican

schools “are taking way below the national average when it comes to children who are vulnerable, have special education needs and are from deprived backgrounds”.<sup>14</sup> Blessed are the poor, but ever more blessed are the bourgeoisie. Just to top things up, the Secretary of State for Education in England, Michael Gove, has sent every school a copy of the King James Bible.

Recent times in more civilised nations have settled upon a secular consensus where there is an absence of religious involvement in government affairs and an absence of government involvement in religious affairs. This has been the intellectual precondition for freedom of thought and religion in advanced societies. Church and state must be completely separate. This becomes ever more important as religion becomes less significant in people’s lives and societies become more complex and diverse.

Civil society and calm rests upon the division between public and private life. Belief exists in the private space and the public sphere unites us all as equal and equally important citizens. Contemporary history, and indeed any working television set, reminds us of the need to jealously guard this secular domain.

“Church and state must be completely separate. This becomes ever more important as religion becomes less significant in people’s lives and societies become more complex and diverse.”

- 5.1. The public education system must become completely secular basing its content, philosophy, staffing and values on secularity and reason.
- 5.2. Scripture is no longer to be accorded any formal time in the public school curriculum.
- 5.3. Schools are free to choose to offer Board-developed courses in religious studies.
- 5.4. No religious figure or church official has any role to play in the educational or welfare provision of any public school.
- 5.5. Curriculum development must become entirely secular and based on reason and knowledge. Organisations are free to make submissions to experts developing curriculum but arguments that go to questions of religious belief or sensibility are to be disregarded. This includes questions of content, texts, methodology or seeking “equal time” or an “alternative” viewpoint.

Modern Australia requires a true separation of church and state. It has moved on from the compromises of the late nineteenth century which were carried out in an era of Christian hegemony. The



Churches are still seeking to play an intrusive role in the affairs of public education whilst also insisting that governments fund their own separate and exclusive, religiously-based schools. Whilst religions are dying they encroach on public education at an unprecedented rate. A multicultural, multidenominational and increasingly non-religious nation needs a public school system that reflects contemporary change. For those who require choice in their schooling, private education now offers every religion its place in the sun. In the public system, however, a rational values-based education needs, for the sake of its intellectual and moral coherence, to now eschew non-rational thought and belief systems. As has been seen in the precedents of the courts and parliament, the oaths, prayers and trappings of previous times can be readily replaced with significant benefit, little fanfare and no harm.

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In any consideration of values the focus of discussion needs to move much more substantially than has recently existed away from an individual school concentration and towards the way school systems treat children and their rights and entitlements.

As with all areas of public policy we are dealing with the interconnectedness of decision making and the consequences that a decision made in one particular area might have in other domains. This is especially important when dealing with institutions that so greatly affect the opportunity and life chances for young people. The essential difficulty with this whimsical policy making, as previously discussed, is that a decision made about one school can gravely affect the educational options and quality at other schools and in other communities.

For decades, since the time that “NSW Inc” became modish, leadership and management models have taken their cues from market theory. Principals and school communities have now been long encouraged to focus entirely on their own school and to settle with a particularly narrow gaze. Principals became “chief executive officers”, parents became “consumers” and the students became “clients”. And competition became the wand which improved quality, at least for the fortunate few. Testing became both the measurement rod and the mechanism for

“The sense of a system with shared values, principles of equality and the equitable distribution of resources including teacher quality has been jettisoned.”

apportioning praise and blame. Education departments and bodies, having long given up the tiresome task of teaching and curriculum support, turned into ratings agencies, publishing multi-coloured charts of success and failure with some schools getting their AAA rating whilst others suffered the fall down the snake being passed by those with the ladders.

The most egregious form of this policy thinking has been found out in the far west of Australia with Western Australia’s Independent Public School concept. In Western Australia, all public schools have been invited to opt out of the systemic nature of public schooling. Schools joining the Independent Public School set-up have been allowed to adopt a local curriculum, remove themselves from the statewide staffing and transfer system, apply their own budgeting processes, recruit their own casual and permanent staff, compete for available graduate teachers, manage school logistics themselves and develop their own unique school ethos. The schools are to be run by a Board which must include industry representation. These Boards are to have powers to set fees, determine courses and texts for study and determine the role of religious and other forces within the school.

What these schools are being offered is the startling modern opportunity to operate like nineteenth-century private schools. The sense of a system with shared values, principles of equality and the equitable distribution of resources including teacher quality has been jettisoned. It is old Tory orthodoxy using faddish marketing nostrums and economic conventions of autonomy and individual choice added to the populism of community control and charters. To the devil take the hindmost.

This is the ancient right-wing desire to break up public education and all it stands for. The Federal ALP’s policy of Empowering Local Schools, for example, is the same sort of ephemera that right-wing forces have been mouthing for decades in their antipathy to the post-war growth of universal, systematic, high quality, comprehensive public schooling. The NSW Coalition’s, Local Schools, Local Decisions is merely the latest incarnation. It is not policy. It is ideology.

It also flies in the face of academic research around school autonomy and its effects on students and communities. David Plank and BetsAnn Smith<sup>15</sup> conducted an extensive review of research studies which found that these experiments in autonomy simply fail to achieve the stated goals for their initiative. Plank and Smith had to conclude that such dismemberment of system-wide approaches



“has not by itself generated many of the systemic improvements, innovation or productivity gains that policy makers had hoped for”. Significantly, their evidence did compel them to observe that this upheaval might slightly advantage already privileged schools, but that “a line of studies conducted across many countries and contexts offers remarkably similar conclusions. Overall, the record suggests that outcomes range from the insignificant to the modestly positive”.

As Cathy Wiley, at the 2009 New Zealand Association for Research in Education Conference, concluded from her analysis of 20 years of global research into such autonomy, it “cannot improve learning outcomes at a systematic level, cannot offer greater efficiencies” and it is “likely to only provide a more inegalitarian system that will result in static or declining system performance”.

In contrast, notable improvements have been uncovered in those educational communities which have emphasised collaboration and shared professionalism. Autonomy as a policy model has simply not improved teaching quality but it has served to exacerbate inequality. As we have seen in the section on Achievement the research on teacher and school effectiveness has a global consensus about what works best for quality outcomes and management models simply do not figure. School improvement requires system-wide resourcing, targeted and preferential funding levels, and continuing support and collegiality. The least appropriate model for school change and improvement is one which cuts off a school from external support and the shared values framework that nurtures public education.

Autonomy is also a giant distraction. The excessive emphasis on the leader principle by current policy makers harks back to the times when the head “master” was the qualified teacher at a school aided by “assistant” teachers. Autonomy fails to understand that teaching a child is essentially a collective enterprise where the combined skills of a range of teachers over a range of classes, subjects and years contribute to the lifting of skills and knowledge of an individual child. If the literacy skills of a student are lifted, for example, it will be because a school has adopted the best practice of making literacy a component of every lesson, every day, cleverly delivered over a substantial period. The lone teacher as miracle worker is the stuff of movies. Naturally, one teacher can facilitate a breakthrough and turn a reluctant learner into a successful student but the true and sustained changes in students’ lives and

performance is an endeavour shared by many.

The same goes for the role of principal. The successful school leader is one who harnesses the capacities of a school staff and provides the resources and atmosphere in which highly productive teaching can take place. John Hattie has marshalled a wealth of research evidence that outlines

“the greatest of the cons in current education”

which dimensions of instructional leadership from principals have the greatest positive results in terms of improving student achievement. The most powerful factors that a principal can facilitate to lift academic performance are, in order — facilitating teacher learning and development; evaluating teaching practice; strategic resourcing; establishing goals and expectations and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment.

However, contemporary politicians, with compliant bureaucrats in tow, like to tantalise certain principals with the prospect of “freeing” principals to run their own production in autonomous schools with the right of principals to manage, hire, fire and deploy as they see fit.

This however, is the greatest of the cons in current education. Whilst principals are increasingly given the right to choose where they will purchase bios the real business of schooling is becoming increasingly politicised and centralised under what has become known as the Command and Control model. Principals have been freed up to have their leadership and autonomy except that they have no other choice other than to:

- being subject to public naming and shaming;
- being told how they are allowed to report to parents on student progress;
- being made to sign school reports that they might find ethically distasteful;
- being told how their school will be represented to the public and the media;
- being told to forage for their own staffing but not necessarily being provided equitably with a range of high quality candidates to choose from;
- being cut loose from Departmental professional support;
- being told how a curriculum will descend upon their school;
- being subject to years of education portfolio cutbacks; and;
- being subject to irregular campaigns of intimidation by bureaucracies and government authorities if they choose to exercise their professional judgement in ways inconsistent with the political whims of the day.

Indeed, principals are as free and autonomous as they could hope to be except in the areas of facilities, resources, curriculum, access to quality staffing, assessment, reporting and community relations. The freedom of the principals under the current dispensation is the freedom to comply and obey.

The tragedy of all this is that good leadership is an essential in public education at the school and at the system level. Good leadership frees up teachers to teach. It is about leading for learning. It provides coherence across a system and across a school. It acts as the conduit for the values of the system and the school to become integral to all of the operations of public education. At its best it serves as an embodiment of all that is worthy in public education.

Meanwhile, at the top of the former Department of Education and Training there had been a vacuum of leadership for a decade where the senior figures acted as a praetorian guard for the political machine of the day. It is no coincidence that in the recent past there has been no educator at the peak of the NSW education department. Consequently, there has been no figure with significant experience or understanding of NSW public education and the realities of the classroom and the principal's office anywhere near the levers of power. Like all members of the Senior Executive Service they can be sacked at any time by their political bosses "for any or no reason" under the Public Sector Management Act. The "leadership" of public education had become amateurised just as it has become politicised. Perhaps this will change.

Down the chain of command, principals have been offered a low level administrative devolution dealing increasingly with maintenance, local tradespeople, trouble shooting, scores of accountabilities and hunting down minor resources for

the school. This used to be done by the education department but devolving such odd jobs to principals actually frees up the senior officials to get on with their business of attending to the needs of their masters.

"managerialism is not any meaningful source of substantial educational leadership"

It is time to consider another approach to leadership in public education beginning by reshaping our policies and relationships. This begins with the policy assumption that all schools are to operate within a statewide values framework, with equitable resourcing of schools including a preferential distribution of resources to those school

communities in greatest need. It also is predicated on a common curriculum emanating from Board-developed and Board-endorsed courses.

**6.1. It is the responsibility of the government and its department to provide the necessary resources for quality education adequately and equitably to schools. It is therefore their role to "drop these resources at the school gate".**

**6.2. It is then the role of the principal in negotiation with the teaching staff and community to determine how these resources should be deployed and organised within a school. This school-based decision making should be allowed to make all consequent decisions within their school except those that might harm the interests of a child or teacher at another school or might be inconsistent with the values and framework of public education. Equity programs and system-wide responsibilities would remain.**

The overarching goals here are to require the government and department to do what is needed of them — provide the quality resources and program support and oversee the intellectual and moral strength and coherence of the system — whilst moving principals to a position of real leadership in the things that matter most in schooling. It frees them up to work towards Achievement, Values and Orderly Learning.

This requires a different and fair dinkum approach to leadership; one which goes to what really matters in our network of interconnected and interdependent public schools. Wherein leadership is based in curriculum; in real educational opportunity for all; that focuses on quality outcomes stemming from professional satisfaction and enhanced professional development; about learning from the rest and best of the world about what works and to use the research about school effectiveness to guide and lead the future.

This allows true leadership to once more place learning outcomes at the centre of all endeavour and policy and to operate on the principle that excellence and equity are not dichotomous and recognise that one cannot exist without the other.

Under this understanding collaborative principalship can become something durable and meaningful. Whilst the conceptualisation of the role of the principal is reduced to some odd assortment of marketing mantras detached from educational purpose it will remain humbug. For what we have seen is that managerialism is not any meaningful source of substantial educational leadership. In fact, it is its most profound antithesis, a distraction from leading for learning.

The values of our system and the work of our principals should be synonymous. Both should

draw from the Enlightenment ideals. A principal's leadership checklist then might look like this:

- the determination to progress through reason;
- the belief that knowledge is power;
- an insistence on intellectual strength and autonomy;
- a commitment to free inquiry;
- the rejection of tradition and established authority as a source of infallible truth;
- a loathing of bigotry and persecution;
- an assault on superstition and absolutism;
- a thorough belief in secular democracy.

Then we would have begun to establish educational leadership based on the finest traditions of western thought. Principals would truly become leaders. However, unlike in private schools, true authority in public education is not achieved *ex officio*, simply because of where one sits in a hierarchy.

Principals in public education gain and enhance their authority by their understanding of the school, their staff, their students and their community. As in medicine and the law, principals grow to further authority through being seen as a natural leader in the professional sense. This cannot be legislated for. It can never be merely imposed.

Under the demarcation of the School Gate model there will be continuing and indeed intensified debate as to what is best for a particular school. However, there is greater confidence that the most worthwhile, professional resolution of discussions can be reached at the school level rather than within the current arrangement where schools and teachers are being increasingly disempowered and told how to operate under the command and control *modus operandi*. Schools are the best place to determine (within the statewide framework of values, staffing, curriculum and programs) what to teach, how to teach and what is the most appropriate form of assessment, testing, reporting and pedagogy for the children in their care.

What also needs to be recognised is that the current growing inequalities in school opportunity stem not from changes made within schools but the organisational changes that have been made between schools. Variegation, resegregation and stratification of schools and systems have been the causes of increased inequality. The differences between schools not the innovations within them have been the problem. And as a public provision our schools will continue to be prey to those tireless ideologues who will want to see them downsized, merged, marketed and otherwise diced and sliced.

It is vital that public schools then become more the hub of community. This has not only intrinsic worth by allowing these public resources (school halls, libraries, WIFI, classrooms, gyms, play equipment, sporting facilities, kitchens) to be used at appropriate times by the community but it also increases the sense of the local public school being seen as "ours" and thereby worthy of supporting and defending. We need the public inside their schools to increase the sense of true public ownership. Similarly, having the public inside their school and its forums and decision-making is both consistent with modern forms of democracy and the true notion of public education.

One cannot, however, consider the linked questions of leadership and values in public education without consideration of the other levels at which leadership needs to be transformed. Existing government and operational arrangements of the education department will also need to be changed concomitantly. Indeed, the practice of teacher unionism will also need to be fundamentally modified. Teacher unions and departments of education are, and will remain, the constants in public education in the times to come. The requirements of public education will forever exist because the quality of attending to the needs of children will always indicate the degree to which we are a worthwhile civilisation. This is why a Charter is needed to take temporal, diurnal politics out of public education. It is why symbiotic partnerships need to be entered into between the union and the department.

"a Charter is needed to take temporal, diurnal politics out of public education"

**7.1 The Department needs to be headed by an independent Director-General who is responsible only to the parliament and is appointed for the duration of any Charter. This can be on a model similar to the role of the NSW Director of Public Prosecutions. The Director-General's role is simple — to defend and extend the interests of public education and to pursue the goals of the Charter. It will be essential to remove all the senior positions in the education department from the provisions of public sector management legislation which presently couple the leadership of the education department to the political regime of the hour. Accountability relationships should exist between the departmental figures and the parliament as expressed in the Charter. Within the education department the principles of the Charter serve as a universal accountability measure. They are there to support and guarantee the equitable delivery of resources to the system and to ensure that it pursues achievement, values and orderly learning.**

We have lost our way in a most fundamental fashion. The education department has ceased to be an institution dedicated to helping teachers teach or to facilitate student learning and engender school improvement.

League tables, testing for public spectacle, key performance indicators, targets, and other modern management paraphernalia found their place and role in educational history because of the collapse of robust, unifying principles for public education. They followed in time the dismemberment of contact forms of supervision and quality control. All these thoroughly modern measures share the general characteristic of being long distance instruments and thus are reliant on modes of accountancy and authoritarian enforcement processes masquerading as accountability provisions.

“Testing” for example has become the show business of modern education. It provides headlines, star performers and sound and fury. What it does not do is improve standards. Indeed as the previous discussion of related research reveals, it leads to diminishing standards and lower levels of excellence. In this there has been no leadership, less quality and wasted opportunity. Sound and continuous assessment is an essential component of quality teaching programs. A range of forms of information, including relevant and purposeful data is fundamental to guiding teacher practice, individualised learning and adaptive programming. Leadership at all levels requires the forging of the distinction between worthwhile assessment practices and regressive and harmful reporting practices.

## Notes

1. *Creating the agenda in public education advocacy* Unpublished paper September 2005
2. *Don't Think of an Elephant* Scribe Carlton 2004
3. Brian J Caldwell and Jessica Harris *Why Not the Best Schools?* ACER Press Camberwell 2008
4. *The Age Of Revolution* London 1962 p 286
5. See Lindsay Connors *The Henry Parkes Oration 2010* National Library Canberra October 2010
6. *Ibid* p 4
7. Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett *The Spirit level: Why more equal societies almost always do better* Penguin London 2009 pp 22, 23, 105, 108-9
8. Hobsbawm op cit p 281
9. See *Sydney Morning Herald* November 13-14 2010
10. For details of the program see Justine Ferrari “School chaplains not representative of community” *The Australian* February 12-13 2011 p 10 and “With God on their side” [www.smh.com.au](http://www.smh.com.au) October 30 2010
11. *Times Educational Supplement* 23-30 December, 2011 p 26
12. *Ibid* p 4
13. *Ibid* p 30
14. *Ibid* p 30
15. David N Plank and BetsAnn Smith “Autonomous Schools: Theory Evidence and Policy in Helen F Ladd and Edward B Fiske [eds] *Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy* Routledge New York 2008 cited at [www.saveourschools.com.au](http://www.saveourschools.com.au)

What is posited in this paper is true leadership being shown at all points. The parliament through the Charter delivers long-term resources and support to public education. The education department delivers the resources to schools. Collaborative principals have the authority at the school level (as previously discussed) to exercise collective, local, professional judgement and leadership.

The union, as the voice and representative of the profession, must also step up to greater responsibility and leadership and share in the Charter and its goals and consequences. It is the leading hand in enhancing the quality and efficiency of teachers. This will include being part of just processes for removing people who are not suited to teaching in a public school. More importantly, it will be central in making it clear that all teachers have a responsibility to extend their professional development and skills at all points of their career. Similarly, it shares leadership responsibility to guarantee that the principles of the Charter are pursued with equity and vigour. It is also the opportunity for the union to become a major provider of professional learning to its membership.



# Orderly Learning

Having discussed the need to focus clearly on schools as a place for achievement, broadly understood, and to seek that goal within a coherent and explicit values framework, the third consideration for public education is the nature of the learning environment which students experience.

Again we need to consider the social and cultural changes that have impacted upon Australia in the recent past and to review how public education can best meet the needs of the young in the changed context.

The Australia of today is not entirely the place it was when mass public education was first established. Childhood is different. The old formal relationships between the generations have changed radically. There is not a widespread expectation of deference to older people, nor the indicators of orthodox respect to parents and elders. There is far less contact time between many parents and children with the intensification of work patterns. The conventional family is no longer the dominant form of background for many children as they present at school. It can be hard to be a parent these days and it can be hard to be a kid. The decline of religion has also seen the lessening of patriarchal and heavy authority in some instances.

Schools are called upon to do much more, often in domains that were formerly those of the nuclear family, social groups, institutions, community groups or the extended family. The crowded and expanded curriculum is the consequence of the retreat of many of these erstwhile shapers and moulders of our young. Parents seem often almost afraid of their young and sometimes reluctant to discipline them in ways they might have in the past. The language and interactions within families and social groups are far less formal and often very blunt. Language that might have earned an automatic school suspension a generation ago has

become commonplace in the playground. Problems of behaviour and demeanour that might have been seen in secondary school years are increasingly reported by primary school teachers where discipline has become a real and growing consideration. Social media have further transformed the nature of relationships and human interactions and have blurred former understandings of the public and private domains.

This is not to romanticise some mythical, golden past. There were harsh times for our young in many of these former periods. There was unquestioned authority and patriarchy, unhappy families and much abuse that went unreported. Learning disabilities were often misunderstood and wrongly diagnosed. Battling students were often eased out of schooling at 14 years and 9 months and physical punishments, at home and at school, often proved to be a cure worse than the disease. Whole social groups, and in particular Aboriginal children, were systematically denied a quality education and consequently missed out on the ensuing life opportunities. The actual role of churches and religious orders in dealing with children is now only being uncovered in their often deep and shameful past. There was no golden age.

The past was ostensibly a time of social and cultural conformity and of homogeneity. That time is no more. Diversity and questioned authority now form the hallmarks of our world. Modern Australia has grown and matured to be a more complex place and the old hegemonies are in decline. There is no longer a “natural” authority. We have become a better place in many ways. Difference is more likely to be tolerated and in some instances, celebrated. We are a place of emerging cultural and ethnic diversity. People’s beliefs are far more heterodox than in the past. All of the professions come under greater scrutiny and questioning and the futures available to the young are breathtaking in their scope.



Public education has been at the centre of much of this change and improvement. We have educated the great bulk of the population and students have stayed longer and more successfully within our schools. The principles of critical analysis, assertion of one's rights, action based on knowledge and thought, have all been central to our teaching and ways of dealing with the young. At the same time we have maintained, quite rightly, our commitment to being open to all.

However, many of the social and cultural changes mentioned here have, unsurprisingly, manifested themselves in our schools, our playgrounds and our classrooms. This has formed a major challenge to the orderliness of the learning environment and the reputation of public schools in the community. Whilst these phenomena and behaviours have become manifest in our schools too often public education has become blamed, quite unfairly, for being the actual cause of these developments. Yet it needs to be observed that this is not a recent process.

By the late 1970s, anxieties were showing up in surveys of parents about what were generally but simplistically described as "discipline" issues in public schools. A generation ago, a union survey reported, "a concern which repeatedly shows up in various questions in the poll concerns discipline ... [and] it usually ranks as the second issue of concern amongst those who believe their needs are not being adequately met."<sup>1</sup> The same survey found a general belief that teachers were not as strict as teachers of the past were and a widely held view that children were taking advantage of teachers. There was an appreciation that teachers cared a lot about their students and that more was expected of teachers than in the past.

As we move to the present day, empirical research finds that these concerns have intensified. The 2010 Grattan Institute survey of teachers finds an abiding concern amongst the profession about losing "time on task" and this loss is seen as undermining the capacity to engage in effective teaching. According to this research, on average an Australian lower secondary teacher is losing 24 per cent of their class time or 196 teaching hours per year to distractions. One quarter of teachers are reported as losing 30 per cent of their

class time in this fashion with the great bulk of the diversions being caused by trying to keep order in the classroom. 11 per cent of teachers were recorded as losing half of their class time to disruptions and poor behaviour.<sup>2</sup>

In all of this it is understood or inferred that such distractions are not being evenly spread across the school systems. And with the resegregation of schooling we see the discipline problems unevenly distributed within public systems as well.

**I**t has been instructive to observe how private education has dealt with these social changes and to note how they have put in place policies and practices to meet these social changes.

The unerring conclusion to be drawn from private school behaviour is that they have deliberately set out to make themselves more exclusive and to increasingly evict those students who might present a challenge to them and their classroom management procedures. As census data reveals, private schools teach the more privileged elements in society. Whatever religious group they claim to serve it is the more affluent end of the spectrum that is allowed into their academies. Heaven looks set to be populated by a very nice class of person.

Private schools, almost without exception, have used the most recent years of government largesse to make their schools more expensive and increasingly off limits to battling families. As one newspaper investigation headlined its findings in relation to school fees, "School Fees Explode: Charges double in 10 years leaving inflation for dead."<sup>3</sup> The newspaper's survey indicated that the fees were rising at a rate far in excess of the rises in costs required to deliver education so a more significant driver of the policy is to be found. As the front page story continued, these schools are "more out of reach than ever to ordinary families" and this applied to Anglican schools, Catholic schools and Muslim schools.

So it is a deliberate policy of making these schools literally more exclusive by using the ultimate tool of discrimination, a family's capacity to pay. Private schools are not restricting themselves to using economic levers to predetermine what class of child is allowed to abide within their gates, however. Increasingly, private schools are developing enrolment policies that serve as hurdles for children that might be more difficult to manage and to educate. Enrolment policies can be as discriminatory as any school feels like creating. These schools are in receipt of massive amounts of public funding but there is no obligation for them to accept the public. And they don't.

"[private schools have] deliberately set out to make themselves more exclusive and to increasingly evict those students who might present a challenge to them and their classroom management procedures"

Many private schools have developed systematic approaches to weed out children that might be academic strugglers or management issues. As but one example, a certain Sydney religious school declares in its enrolment policy that “students with disability will be considered for enrolment if [the school] is confident it can provide adequately for the student’s disability needs”. The same school also requires children to be assessed on previous reports, the results of the school’s entrance tests and an interview with the student and both parents. If a battling student does get past the admission requirements of the school there is a culling of students at the end of year 6 based on academic performance. The weeding out of students is a constant ordeal and the policy makes it plain that “Progression from Year 9 to 10 should not be considered automatic”. At the most senior levels of schooling the enrolment policy makes it clear that “enrolment for Year 11 depends on exceptional academic potential evident from past academic history”. Indeed, “enrolment is reviewed on a yearly basis and may be reviewed at any time if the behaviour or academic progress of a student is deemed unsatisfactory”.

And what do they suggest for the cast-offs from their school? Simple. “Students who have not met the minimum requirements may be counselled towards seeking a course of study in TAFE courses more appropriate to their career aspirations.”

This last suggestion is of course quite a coy manoeuvre as public schools consistently and increasingly report regular sequences of enrolments from private schools especially going in to year 7 and year 11 as the nearby private schools Weed the Lord’s Garden of students who might affect the academic or behavioural standards of their school.

As Lindsay Connors observes of the current state of play between the school systems:

“In Australia’s hybrid school system, the public school system is, to borrow a biological metaphor, the host organism. Public schools could exist, though they never have, in the absence of non-government schools. But non-government schooling as currently operated is only viable because of the existence of public schools. In biological terms, non-government schools exist in a parasitical relationship with the host. This can be a mutually beneficial relationship in nature; or it can be a relationship that damages the host.”<sup>4</sup>

So what we have is a system of private schooling that has chosen this time in history to make itself more exclusive. They have done this at a time when the pressures on families and children have never been greater and where the nature of child-

hood and behaviour is changing radically. As young people and parents need to rely more on schooling to provide forms of support and engagement that were once the province of a great range of social structures and institutions private schools are vacating the field. Increasingly they teach an atypical sample of children and they use various and subtle methods of ridding their schools of unwanted students. This last phenomenon is reported across the entire education sector. There would scarcely be a public school of any size that does not have some children who have been removed from a private school as a result of some of the processes described herein.

Put plainly, private systems of education use the public system as a repository for children they do not want in the first place and then later as a dumping ground for their own students who display intellectual or behavioural shortcomings.

The show business effect of this for private schools is to allow them to crow about their shining scholastic results, their wonderful school tone and how lovely their students look in a blazer.

The effect for public schools is that there is an obvious and statistically inevitable decline in overall academic achievement and the greatly increased threat of behavioural problems and a worsening of the learning environment for some or many students and teachers in the school receiving those evicted or excluded. Principals and teachers are increasingly concerned with offensive and violent behaviour and have found it occupying a greater share of their professional time. It has been quite difficult at times for schools to gain true and accurate details of students’ histories.

This is not a new development but it is an intensifying one. It is likely to increase exponentially in the future as media-based school reporting and testing takes further hold in the community and private schools continue to take no share of responsibility for addressing or remedying the increased pressures families and kids are placed under.

Meanwhile, the human and statistical consequence of this is to see public schools contain increasing numbers and proportions of students with lesser intellectual capacity and an increased propensity to misbehave in class and in the playground. It is a blunt and melancholy conclusion but it is so.

“private systems of education use the public system as a repository for children they do not want in the first place and then later as a dumping ground for their own students who display intellectual or behavioural shortcomings”

This trend comes on the back of perhaps an excessive inclination of public schools to show “understanding” for troublesome kids. Whilst this is fuelled by compassion it has at times gone too far as teachers have come to recalibrate what “normal” is in terms of behaviour and much of what has become acceptable is simply corrosive of good learning conditions.

This is by no means a uniquely Australian phenomenon. “Discipline” issues in England, for example, are an increasingly disturbing issue and one administrative response has been to authorise the use of physical force by teachers to address the problem. As the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported, “Teachers in England are being told to use force to physically control any unruly pupils under a back-to-basics crackdown on bad behaviour in schools. Staff in England should use ‘reasonable’ measures to remove disruptive children from classrooms, break up fights and prevent pupils attacking other teachers or classmates.”<sup>5</sup> The newspaper coverage proceeded to cite figures that revealed that assaults on staff were at a five year high with 44 teachers being taken to hospital with serious injuries in 2010. For Australian public education, giving teachers the right to place students in hammerlocks is not quite the ideal teacher-student relationship and seems to be missing the point. The problem is real. The solutions need to be just as real.

**T**he proud heritage of public education in accepting all children from all backgrounds must never change. It is fundamental to our being. However, it is time, given the developments and practices adopted by outside forces, the social changes that are afoot and an occasional inclination to tolerate very poor behaviour to consider how

“our public schools too often have kids within them who have deep problems of a non-educational nature and who seriously worsen the learning environment and life opportunities of other students at the school”

we best meet the needs of all children within our schools facing these contemporary realities.

We should continue to accept all students who wish to enrol at our schools but we need to recognise that we cannot successfully educate all children. As with any profession we cannot ever have a 100 per cent success rate. Not all medical conditions are cured. Not all court cases are won. Not all professional interventions succeed. To put it directly, contagious patients are not allowed to remain

within a medical environment if they might harm others.

Uniquely, when a public school gets to the point where they can no longer educate a child they often have to continue to have that child within their premises, often to the profound detriment of the remaining students and teachers and families. Not all problems that a young person has are educational problems. They can be medical, personal, mental, nutritional, family, social or economic problems. The school can address the manifestation of some of these problems but it sometimes cannot remedy them. It is beyond the domain of education, even an education as compassionate and embracing as public education.

Principals often report to their superiors that a particular child has been given every form of assistance and the school can do no more yet the response is often that the department or authority dealing with the issue has nowhere to send the child and therefore they have to stay at the school. This is simply unfortunate if the child presents no danger to the composure or wellbeing or educational advancement of other students. It is wrong beyond measure however if the child does indeed present a threat to the social and learning environment of other children at the school.

And frankly, for a whole set of reasons discussed within this chapter, our public schools too often have kids within them who have deep problems of a non-educational nature and who seriously worsen the learning environment and life opportunities of other students at the school. And as already suggested these young people are to be found disproportionately in schools with a high incidence of battling families who dearly need a settled learning environment and the rare gift that a successful public education can provide.

**8.1 If a student gets to the point where they cannot be taught successfully and where their continued presence at a school will harm the learning and life chances of other children at a school then they should be excluded from that school. If there is nowhere else to send them then that is not the province or problem of that school but of the society and relevant authorities dealing with the non-educational needs of the child.**

As long as good-hearted principals and teachers continue to keep the child technically or actually within the school there will continue to be insufficient pressure on other authorities to take over the matter beyond the school gates. This might require far greater external support and specialist units being developed. It might mean a greater role for

the Department of Family and Community Services or other similar departments. In any event, schools cannot wait for all of these answers to exist before moving to a practice of having intractable young people removed from a learning environment.

The philosophical shift in all of this is to assert that we welcome all children but that we need to recognise that we cannot retain all children without profound harm to other children.

In practical terms this will mean that public schools cease to be the locus of addressing the damage caused to young people by contemporary social, economic and emotional breakdown and the refusal of private schooling to take their share of responsibility in dealing with these issues. Let us say that we will welcome all children but we do not welcome all behaviours. Let us indicate that we can successfully educate 99.5 per cent of all children who enter our schools and not delude ourselves with a goal of being able to succeed in all cases. In this we adopt a utilitarian view of public schooling where we seek the greatest good for the greatest number. This also represents a shift away from seeing public education as a form of welfarism.

It is instructive to note here the conclusions of the contribution of John Hattie in his seminal work *Visible Learning*<sup>6</sup> Hattie took on the task of synthesising more than 800 meta-analyses of worldwide research relating to student achievement and was able thereby to draw together a monumental set of conclusions as to what truly contributes to success in schooling. He found that dealing with “classroom behavioural” issues was one of the very top factors in all contexts leading to improvement in student outcomes. It will surprise few teachers to note Hattie’s conclusions which establish that classroom management and classroom cohesion have an extremely high correlation with enhanced learning outcomes and that, according to a wealth of evidence “the presence of disruptive students can have negative effects on their own and all other students’ achievement outcomes”<sup>7</sup> In a technical sense, Skiba and Casey discovered that “interventions for disruptive students” have an extremely high 0.91 effectiveness measure. In simple terms, this means that very few things outrank eliminating classroom disruption as a means of enhancing student achievement.<sup>8</sup>

The essential gift we provide in public schooling is education. It is our core and our purpose. Along the way we provide it in a supportive, compassionate and humane environment. But achievement, broadly and deeply understood, is our reason for being. With the collapse of other supports for our young in recent decades schools have been encouraged, sometimes divertingly, to place disproportionate emphasis

on welfarist activities and the educational function has withered somewhat. So if we note government funding policies discriminating in favour of private education along with practices that have both re-segregated schools and intensified inequalities between them and we observe deliberate private school enrolment tactics which have made them more exclusive it comes as little surprise that public schools have in certain cases become residualised and suffer deteriorating learning environments.

This is not merely a philosophical question. There are practical changes in policy and approach required if we are to turn around the perceived and sometimes real problems in relation to the learning environment in public schools and classrooms. Part of this change needs to involve public schools being placed in a position of professional trust where they are best placed to determine their enrolment policy based on the overall interests of children at the school. Public schools must also cease to be the dumping grounds for difficult or underachieving students from private schools. Only when public schools are able to say no, in certain circumstances, will private schools be compelled to take their share of responsibility for young people.

- 9.1. That principals in consultation with teachers at a school be empowered to remove a student from a school roll if, having exhausted all reasonable avenues of support, the view of the school is that the continued presence of the student at the school would undermine the learning opportunities of other students at the school. The student is then to become the responsibility of other authorities beyond the school.
- 9.2. That the NSW education department is to establish a monitoring provision to ensure that disadvantaged groups are not unfairly dealt with in the shifting of the authority for exclusion to the school as described above.
- 9.3. That public schools cease automatically enrolling students from private schools. A parent enrolling their child at a private school needs to understand that they are making a decision that the private school will have ongoing responsibility for their child.
- 9.4. A student may be enrolled from a private school if they are in possession of a statutory declaration signed by the principal of the private school and the relevant private school system authority indicating that the student is not moving from the school because of poor behaviour, a record of violence, antisocial activity or below standard academic achievement. If such a declaration does not exist then they are to continue to be the responsibility of the private school.



## Notes

1. Greg Smith op cit p 1
2. Grattan Institute op cit p 20
3. Anna Patty *Sun-Herald* January 23 2011 p 1
4. Lindsay Connors op cit p 7
5. “Teachers free to use ‘reasonable force’ on pupils” *Sydney Morning Herald* 12 July 2011 p 8
6. John Hattie *Visible Learning* Routledge London 2009
7. Ibid p 103
8. Ibid p 104

# Next?

The purpose of this project is to consider ideas that may allow public education to continue to survive and prosper over the next generation. The timespan of the policy suggestions is hence, medium to long term. Not all of the proposals would find their way into practice.

Within the next generation it is likely that the forces of privatisation, a concept that enjoys support across the parliamentary spectrum, will continue their march. More services and institutions that were provided in the public domain are likely to be put out to market with a residual rump being given grudging support from government. These are our times. We cannot ourselves alone stop the full wave of privatisation but we can as educators conserve mass quality public education if we amend our tactics somewhat. It is essential to remember that our ideals need to be constant but our approaches may vary, just as they have been modified in the provision of public education for well over a century.

To achieve this we need to build a program of ideas to replace the currently dominant rightist way of thinking. The essence of our program should focus on principles of quality provision that all children have an entitlement to experience across their years of schooling. The goal is to replace the piecemeal, populist, market-based approaches that so bedevil education thinking and to construct a coherent program that will encourage the great majority of families to actively want public education. It also is designed to move advocates of public education, such as the NSW Teachers Federation, away from defensive and reactive battles against the latest ill-considered stirrings from right-wing ideologues and move it toward building a public education for that 80 per cent of the population that potentially might choose our system.

Unsurprisingly, the rightist approaches have benefited those with existing social capital or those

fortunate enough to benefit from dilettantish methods of school system planning and organisation.

This current project is explored in the full knowledge of one Florentine thinker's warning about change: "There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things."<sup>1</sup>

The alternative, however, is passivity and an acceptance that the other side will develop the big ideas and we will merely respond with a mixture of contempt, frustration and resignation. The alternative is to see public education become like public housing — the place where the battlers go. This might happen on our watch.

Too many of us already know too many erstwhile progressive people who have found any number of specious and spurious reasons to send their kids to private schools. Overwhelmingly, politicians, opinion formers and senior education bureaucrats send their kids to schools to get them away from public school children. Many graduates of public schools display both a pride in their background and an intention not to send their children to that system. A greater range of religious and community groups are establishing their own schools and these are almost always designed for the more privileged end of their community or belief system. When increasing numbers and proportions of people with social capital move away from public education its capacity to preserve for itself a place in the sun is seriously diminished.

This is not to be apocalyptic however. A public education system will survive. It is a very sturdy blossom and one with passionate and skilled advocates. It will continue to educate the majority of children.

Yet the composition of the student body is likely to become less representative of the full range of the Australian community in all of its diversity and this

is completely antithetical to the founding principle of public education that it is intended to have all young children, side by side, learning and growing together.

The sound response is not merely the recitation of how good we are for the nation and how effective we are for all children, even though both propositions are profoundly true. The core of our response needs to focus on quality. Sending one's child to a public school is neither an act of charity nor an exercise in nation-building. It is the best and smartest choice for one's child. Our program must be based on both the perception and delivery of quality.

One of the encouraging facts from the history of educational change is the timespan in which it can be achieved. The existing right-wing approaches posit a short term magic bullet approach that seeks to turn around outcomes within months or a few years. Hence we have politicians congratulating themselves that literacy levels have improved mightily over a 12 month period because of some testing or reporting regime. Other media commentators stare in wonder at the sight of selective schools gaining good academic results. This is all fancy and predicated not on a child's or a community's sustained and real improvement in performance but on the needs of the electoral cycle or media chatter.

What we know about whole system educational change and improvement is that it can be made within the space of a decade. After that the growth can be exponential. Our old friends, the Finns, took several decades to identify their needs and turn around their results. It required an educational policy that was grounded in a support and trust in the teaching profession, a recognition that excellence and equity went hand in hand and the knowl-

edge that governments at all levels needed to share the project as did the key stakeholders.

In NSW, such an unhurried approach led to the immensely successful Wyndham Scheme<sup>2</sup> that fundamentally opened up secondary schooling oppor-

tunity for an entire generation. Harold Wyndham's Committee of Inquiry into Secondary Education commenced its work in 1953 and did not issue its report until four years later. It was another five years before implementation of the scheme came into being. This committee was thorough, measured

and totally centred on the educational well-being of students. It survived a change of government and even the death of two of its executive officers along the way. At the end, radical change was possible as the community and the profession were taken along with it at every step by the committee. It held 92 meetings, 61 public hearings and received 49 research reports. By the end, however, the report was a simple 109 pages in length. It was warmly received. By the time the Wyndham Scheme was fully implemented NSW had enjoyed a long period of stability and student-centred consensus. Between 1940 and 1968, NSW public education had had only two Directors-General and even under Wyndham's extensive tenure there had been only three Ministers for Education. Continuity and security of tenure had been a precondition for long term fundamental reform.

More recently, what we can also learn from the most successful nations is that education reform must be conducted on a broader canvas and one that transcends a mere focus on an education portfolio or technocracy as the scope of change. As Alan Luke is able to conclude about the top performing nations, their stories "are not about the triumph of scientific 'methods', they are not about the triumph of markets, or successful standardisation — they are about public and governmental settlements, about profound historical, social and cultural commitments to particular forms of education and, indeed, forms of life".<sup>3</sup> Luke also cautions us against thoughtlessly seeking to import the latest of overseas fashion in education, which, "do not necessarily travel well".

Indeed we would not want some of these fashions to travel at all. South Korea is a case in point. Its educational AAA rating has come at a huge cost borne in particular by children. According to the South Korean Education Ministry the number of school age suicides rose from 100 in 2003 to 202 in 2009. Official statistics reveal that the average high school student sleeps about five hours and studies more than eleven hours a day. Government figures also show that 38 per cent of South Korean schools now need to offer basic screening for depression and at risk behaviour. According to Park Jae-Won, the head of Seoul's Visang Education research Centre, South Korean children are "in a constant state of extreme exhaustion, sleep deprivation and depression".<sup>4</sup>

England, as ever, provides the most telling case of negative example for us. The top education bureaucrat there, Sir Michael Wilshaw, opened the 2012 school year by opining that a principal must be

"education reform must be conducted on a broader canvas and one that transcends a mere focus on an education portfolio or technocracy as the scope of change"

getting something right if staff morale was at an all-time low. Walshaw has introduced “dawn raids” on schools as a new element into the existing school inspection system and his organisation, Ofsted, has said that it will use unannounced “raids” for all schools. According to the *Times Educational Supplement*, 1500 dawn raids have been conducted. Meanwhile, the government’s new parent View website has been expanded to allow parents to air their views on schools all year round.<sup>5</sup> The Con-Dem Coalition government continues with its task of breaking up the system of public education in England with the majority of secondary schools now becoming “academies” broken asunder from the regulation and shared ethos and values of a network of public schooling.

Downing Street is also now rolling out its Troops to Teachers initiative. According to the *Times Educational Supplement*, “Politicians think soldiers have much to offer schools and want more to become teachers.” Education Secretary Michael Gove has said this will bring “more male role models” into teaching. He believes that “the right sort of military training can have a fantastically beneficial impact on young people with a history of poor behaviour... the very values that characterise the military such as discipline, teamwork, respect and leadership, are central to raising standards in schools”. Gove has indicated that the Troops to Teachers plan will focus on schools in disadvantaged areas and especially for those curriculum areas that have teacher shortages.<sup>6</sup> Already there are plans for an entire school in Oldham to be entirely staffed by former soldiers and the intended principal, a former army captain, reckons that under his watch “every liberal shibboleth taught in teacher-training courses will be discarded in favour of proven methods”.<sup>7</sup>

Whilst all of this has been unfolding the educational standards in England have been plummeting, not surprisingly. England has dropped in the latest PISA ratings from 7th to 25th in literacy, 4th to 16th in science and from 8th to 27th in mathematics.

We could comfort ourselves with seeing much of this policy as dwelling somewhere between eccentricity and lunacy. Yet it is difficult to recall a policy in the past 25 years that has been developed in England not being tried on in Australia by either Coalition or Labor governments. If we do not take the lead in education policy we face the void that will continue to be filled by right-wing experimentation and ideology.

We can safely conclude that there is nothing that can be usefully imported from the United States in recent education practice and from the English we

might stick with their system of spelling and little else. It was Mao who taught the principle of “negative example” and our mother countries are, in education policy, the very apotheosis of that Maoist notion. Similarly we might be tempered in our enthusiasm for seeking some other replacement godhead nations to serve as the new template for our public education. As much as we might gain inspiration from certain countries and their ideas we are going to have to work through our solutions within the unique social, cultural and historical realities in which public education exists.

**A**s one step we could begin by seeking to introduce the concept of an Education Impact Test not unlike an environmental impact statement. This ought to be the initial assessment of any new policy idea or brainwave that occurs to a bureaucrat or politician in relation to education. Such a test would be simple. With the idea being considered, to what degree would the reform assist the capacity of children to gain important knowledge and to what degree would it help or hinder teachers or principals in performing their core educational function.

It will also require a modified role for both government and teachers and their union. No recent, worthwhile and sustained educational reform has taken place without a partnership between government, the department and the teacher union. Politicians cannot hope to change that which is most important in education policy and practice without the active consent of the profession. That is simply the way of the modern world. Teachers and their union might also consider the other side of the equation. If we are to preserve and extend the public education system we need to consider the ways in which we change our game as well.

To shift teacher sentiment and practice the union will need to take the lead as well. We need to be part of a process of continued and sustained effort from our members to focus ever more heavily on quality.

After having endured a couple of decades where politicians took fitful stances in trying to exclude us from leadership and policy it is time for us to come in from out of the cold.

This will involve us shifting government away from long distance and illusory methods of quality control such as mass testing, punitive reporting, dumb

“After having endured a couple of decades where politicians took fitful stances in trying to exclude us from leadership and policy it is time for us to come in from out of the cold.”



accountabilities and ‘carrot and stick’ approaches to teacher performance. For the changes that are required to take hold they will need to be professionally driven and endorsed and led by the union.

Research indicates that in culturally cognate countries to Australia educational quality resides alongside a deep-seated level of trust in the profession. Testing intended to drive practice, performance pay proposals, draconian reporting, accountabilities by the gross and a generalised sense of assault on the profession are all indicators of a profound lack of trust in the profession. They are distant, instrumentalist, blunt and misguided means to “make” teachers do what their architects believe they should. We will not turn around any of this culture by simply calling for trust in the profession. “Trust” in any mode of relationship is not something that can be declared, insisted upon or deemed to exist. It has to be built.

Only when parents and thinking policymakers see a profession-wide and explicit commitment to achievement and values and orderly learning can the trust truly begin to flow. Only when the community knows that the best and the brightest are becoming teachers and that their training is rigorous and sustained and career-long will attitudes turn around. Only when all schools, and especially the school down the road, are known to be places of settled learning where high expectations of behaviour are insisted upon will confidence become endemic. When this begins to transpire then salary recognition can also begin to match the importance and demands of the job.

High quality teachers in effective schools sharing a sense of public ethical purpose within a network of similarly good schools dedicated to optimal individual student performance is the goal within our grasp. This is proper union business. The alternative is clear and it is before us.

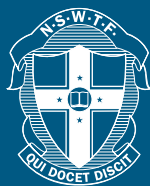
## Notes

1. Nicolo Machiavelli *The Prince* [Yes, I know]
2. See Brian Croke “Wyndham and History” Address for ACE Awards 5 August 2011
3. Alan Luke “Generalising Across Borders: Policy and the Limits of Educational Science” AERA Distinguished Lecture New Orleans April 8 2011
4. Data and observations are taken from “School crushing S.Korea teens” *New Straits Times* June 7 2011 p 27
5. *Times Educational Supplement* January 13 2012 p 10
6. *Ibid* p 4
7. *Ibid* p 7

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