MAKING FEDERALISM WORK FOR SCHOOLS: DUE PROCESS, TRANSPARENCY, INFORMED CONSENT

Written by Lyndsay Connors

with additional papers by Max Angus, Richard Bates, Brian J. Caldwell, Michael Furtado, Alan Reid, Louise Watson and Bruce Wilson

Commissioned by the NSW Public Education Alliance

Lyndsay Connors, *Making Federalism Work for Schools: Due Process, Transparency, Informed Consent*

2007 NSW Public Education Alliance.
The Alliance comprises the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW, the NSW Primary Principals Association, the Public Schools Principals Forum, the Secondary Principals' Council and the NSW Teachers Federation.

CONTENTS

Making federalism work for schools: due process, transparency, informed consent
Lyndsay Connors: 6-109

PART TWO: ACCOMPANYING PAPERS 111-156

Max Angus: *Commonwealth-State Relations and the Funding of Australia's Schools* 112

Richard Bates: *Public Education and Social Justice* 117

Brian J. Caldwell: *Options for a New Federalism in Australia* 125

Michael Furtado: *Public Education in New Times: Possible futures for Commonwealth-State relations in sustaining and improving Australia's schools* 130

Alan Reid: *Putting the Public Back into Curriculum* 136

Louise Watson: *Possible futures for Commonwealth-State relations in sustaining and improving Australia's schools* 142

Bruce Wilson: *The politics of curriculum* 151

Notes on the authors 156

MAKING FEDERALISM WORK FOR SCHOOLS:
DUE PROCESS, TRANSPARENCY, INFORMED CONSENT

PART ONE

CONTENTS

Overview **6-10**

Options for moving forward 9

Introduction **11-13**

The Current Situation **14-65**

- Resources 15-38
  - Schools funding 15
  - Current federal arrangements for funding and planning 22
  - Funding and regulation 26
  - The broader context 34
  - Lack of clarity about the purpose of Commonwealth intervention in schooling 37
- Teaching and learning 39-65
  - Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting 39-54
    - Curriculum 39
    - Assessment and reporting 52
  - Teaching 55-65
    - Teacher supply: the current national outlook 56
    - Teaching quality and standards 60
    - Teaching standards 61

The Broader Context of Federalism **66-81**
Federal arrangements for schools seen in their broader context 66
Centralising tendency 67
Schools funding and fiscal federalism 68
The Constitution 75
The Commonwealth's role 76
Recent action by heads of government to reform the federal system 79

Options for Moving Forward **82-98**
Key priorities in schooling 82
The current federal agenda 84
A starting point for change 92
There are sound arguments for opting for the 'partnership' approach 94
A reduced role for governments? 95
Next steps 95
Proposal for the development of complementary federal legislation 97

- **Framework for Proposed Complementary Legislation** 99-103
  Purposes 99
  Principles 99
  Goals and Priorities 100
  Functions 101
  Structure 102

Conclusion **104**

References **105-108**

Notes on the author **109**

OVERVIEW

> *The Australian education system, taken as a whole, is evolving into something but we don't know what.*[1]

This quotation, from one of the accompanying papers to this report, expresses the widely held disquiet that the forces driving education policies and priorities within Australia's federal system are poorly understood and have taken on a life of their own.

It was this disquiet that led the NSW Public Education Alliance to commission this report on the effects of the interaction between the Commonwealth and state (including territory) governments on schools policies and related educational priorities. The project aims to contribute to informed discussion and debate of how our federal system might be made to work better from the standpoint of schools. The author was given complete independence to conduct the project, including to invite nationally recognised experts to contribute their own short papers outlining their views on key areas of schooling and on related federal arrangements.[2]

In their accompanying papers, these contributors reflect a broader consensus. Even among those who would favour vastly different options for reform, sometimes expressing opposing educational and policy viewpoints, there is a remarkable degree of agreement that there are many things wrong with the current situation that can be traced back to dysfunctional federal arrangements.

While the constitutional responsibility for schooling in Australia formally lies with the states, schooling became significant in the federal arena from the middle of the 1970s when the Commonwealth became a partner with the states in the funding of schools in both the public and private sectors. Since that time, the relationship of the Commonwealth and states to these two sectors has evolved to the point where the funding of private schools is now the Commonwealth's largest budgetary outlay within its education portfolio.

In no other country does the provision of public funding for non-government schools dominate the agenda of the national government. Largely, though not entirely, due to the Commonwealth's contribution, funding for non-government schools overall is growing at three times the rate of spending on public schools, far exceeding the rate of increase in the enrolment share of the private sector. This funding trend is now embedded in federal arrangements. It feeds a growing mismatch between public funding and public responsibilities between the two sectors of schooling.

Despite Australia's long period of strong economic growth, pockets of concentrated and severe social disadvantage have become entrenched across rural and remote as well as suburban Australia, where families and communities are detached from the modern economy and where high unemployment and low school participation and attainment are the norm[3].

---

[1] Quote from accompanying paper by Max Angus, Professor of Education at Edith Cowan University.

[2] The author acknowledges that all accompanying papers were completed in 2006 and that, therefore, the main paper may refer to developments which occurred after the accompanying papers were submitted.

[3] Vinson, T. 2007. *Dropping off the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia.* A report by Professor Tony Vinson for Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia.

One effect of this geographical divide has been to apportion the total workload of schooling in an increasingly unfair way among schools, between, as well as within, the public and the private sectors of schooling. This means that many schools, mainly public schools, are now being asked to deal with the educational challenges and costs that others can avoid and without a commensurate share of resources. Their students are missing out on access to the teaching that they would need to gain access to the depth and breadth of curriculum that is taken for granted in more advantaged communities. The differences in educational achievement among schools in Australia that are attributable to differences in the social background of students are sufficient to register on OECD indicators of inequality, and reflect no credit on such an affluent country.

Meanwhile, there is increasing political pressure for schools to disclose the performance of students on national benchmarking tests as part of the general push towards greater public accountability. Yet their performance is being judged without any real regard to the resources, government and private, that schools have available to enable high performance. And, on the federal agenda in recent times, the effect of Commonwealth influence has largely been to attempt to reduce these issues simply to questions of standards setting – for curriculum (particularly literacy and numeracy) and teaching. Important as these are, they do not constitute an adequate educational response.

Governments around Australia outlaid around $31 billion on the recurrent operation of schools in 2004-2005. Of this amount, state governments spent more than three times the contribution made by the Commonwealth: states outlaid around $24 billion on the recurrent operation of schools, while the Commonwealth spent under $7 billion[4].

But these funds are directed to public and private schools through an irrational and asymmetrical split in their respective responsibilities for each of these sectors. Seventy per cent of the Commonwealth's recurrent funding for schools in 2004-2005 was spent on the less than one third of all students who attend Catholic and independent, non-government schools. By contrast, state and territory governments outlaid 7 per cent of their expenditure on non-government schools.

To put this another way, government schools receive 9 per cent of their recurrent funds from the Commonwealth; while non-government schools, on average, depend on the Commonwealth for 73 per cent of their recurrent expenditure from public sources.

This report exposes the ways in which this irrational division of roles and responsibilities has obscured the realities of how these funds are allocated between and within the sectors; and has created complexities that are barriers to understanding for all but the few aficionados. This complexity and lack of understanding has, both by design and default, prevented proper debate and polluted the policy formulation process.

States operate and fund their own public school systems as well as providing the regulatory framework for the establishment and operation of private schools, for which they also provide subsidies. The Commonwealth also provides funding for both sectors. The minimum general recurrent grant paid by the Commonwealth is paid in respect of those students in the private schools ranked as the least needy in that sector, by virtue of the clientele they serve. Yet this

[4] Productivity Commission, *Report on government services 2007*, table 3.1, p. 3.4. Note that these figures exclude expenditure on capital works, but include estimates for the 'user cost of capital' in the government sector only.

minimum general recurrent grant now far outstrips that paid in respect of a student in the public schools operated by the states. The Commonwealth now spends more on the roughly 13 per cent of students nationally in independent non-government schools – less than one fifth of the enrolments of the public sector – than on those students in government schools. Whichever political party is in government at the Commonwealth level now has to find a justification for these circumstances.

This political necessity has led the Commonwealth in recent times to distance itself from responsibility for the nation's public schools. It has attempted to create by stealth, in the public mind, a separation of powers between the Commonwealth and the states for public and for private schools, a separation for which there are no constitutional, educational or logical grounds.

The report draws attention also to such factors as the contamination of Commonwealth indexation measures in the education sector to drive disproportionate funding increases to private schools, while avoiding public scrutiny.

Anomalies and weaknesses in federal arrangements for schools are part and parcel of the broader operation of federalism in Australia. These broader problems include poorly delineated sharing mechanisms in major policy areas such as health and education, leading to cost-shifting, blame-shifting and political opportunism. In particular, Australia's federal system has an advanced case of 'vertical fiscal imbalance'. The Commonwealth now accounts for 80 per cent of taxation revenue raised by governments and 54 per cent of all government expenditure. The states raise 16 per cent of taxation revenue but spend around 40 per cent.

With the entry of the Commonwealth to schools funding, the federal problem of 'vertical fiscal imbalance' now lies at the heart of the persistent and divisive debate about the public funding shares allocated to public and to private schools. Private schools, in addition to their private sources of income and the public funding they receive from states, receive the bulk of their public funding from the Commonwealth with its significantly greater financial power. Public schools are largely dependent for their funding on the states, where they compete with a range of other costly services and, in particular, the growing bill for health; and where they have an obligation to educate all comers.

This report argues that many of the problems with federal arrangements for schools can be traced to the lack of clarity in the role and responsibility of the Commonwealth. But this does not mean that there are no constructive roles for the Commonwealth. Experience has demonstrated that one of the most valuable roles played by the Commonwealth, through such agencies as the Schools Commission, was the publication and analysis of data to inform policy and public debate.

The report also provides examples of where, in the absence of proper avenues for the exercise of sustained responsibility and legitimate influence by the Commonwealth, there has been a slide in its role towards political opportunism. The flow-on effects to the formal federal agenda are outlined in the report. It finds that there is a significant mismatch between the challenges confronting Australia's school systems, the issues occupying the federal policy agenda, and funding trends and directions. Current federal arrangements do not assist the real priorities in education to surface; they even provide the means for obscuring and suppressing them.

Any coherent, comprehensive program for dealing with real priorities has yet to emerge from the various federal structures and processes that bring heads of government together within the Australian federation. For example, Australia is caught up in an international challenge to replace the large numbers of teachers recruited to deal with the surge in the school population of the 1960s and 1970s. A wise nation would be taking the collaborative action needed to turn this challenge into an opportunity for renewing and reinvigorating its teaching profession.

Australia's school systems perform at a high level for most students, according to broad, international indicators, and provide good value for the level of resources invested by governments. Despite this, there is a policy crisis that is denying a significant number of our schools the urgent action needed to meet their students' entitlements.

Options for moving forward

Considerations about the merits of proposals for reform of federal governance of schooling raise prior questions. What are the objectives of governance arrangements from the standpoint of education? And what kind of school system do we want for this country? The report draws on research evidence and experience of past policy directions and sets out the kinds of yardstick that can be used to describe the characteristics of 'good' school systems, with the capacity to deliver what their countries ask of them.

It then identifies a number of difficulties inherent to schooling in options for realigning functions between the two layers of government. The report concludes that schooling is not susceptible to the kinds of 'clean lines' division, where either the Commonwealth or the states could agree to vacate the field. Rather than attempting to allocate discrete or clearly defined responsibilities for key aspects of schooling between the two levels of government, Commonwealth and state, the report finds that it would make more sense from an education standpoint to accept that the two levels of government have a set of shared responsibilities. This creates the need to define their respective roles in managing those shared responsibilities. Such an approach would necessitate better mechanisms for intergovernmental cooperation and coordination in the planning and funding of schools and in setting national priorities, to avoid cost-shifting and blame-shifting.

The report also identifies a number of promising developments on which to build such action. These include, for example, the National Goals for Schooling; the set of priorities recently put forward by the Council for the Australian Federation; and the work of the MCEETYA Schools Resourcing Taskforce on establishing the resources schools actually need to achieve educational goals.

The report concludes with a proposal to reform existing federal arrangements through the development of complementary Commonwealth and state legislation. Such legislation would provide a means of engaging all parties and interests in the Commonwealth and state parliaments. This would assist in producing an enduring outcome that could outlast the changes in governments and ministerial responsibilities over time.

Complementary legislation would mean that all the parliaments in the Australian federation would consider and commit to a genuine national partnership on the purposes, goals, priorities and strategies for advancing the quality of schooling for all Australians. It would also mean

that all governments had a common legislative foundation for the performance and accountability of their responsibilities for all students in all schools.

The form and language of the legislation in the different jurisdictions could vary to take account of their specific circumstances and traditions, but would need to be drafted in such a way that ensures all governments have clear and explicit responsibilities grounded in a common and agreed framework. For illustrative purposes, the report outlines the possible elements of such a framework and provides descriptive comment.

The report also outlines the functions that would need to be performed and the structures that would be required to achieve its purposes, goals and priorities. These could include a *National Board of Schooling* to oversee all aspects of the national compact on schooling. Such a Board, the report suggests, would receive advice from two component entities: a *National Commission for Teaching and Learning in Schools*; and a *National Grants Commission for Schools.*

The report proposes developing draft legislation as a means of stimulating debate and action to make federalism work better for our schools. It does not require that the first steps necessarily be taken by governments themselves. Action to draw up proposed legislation can be taken by concerned citizens. The report recognises that such action may stimulate a range of additional or alternative options, but maintains that this only strengthens the arguments for taking such a course of action.

This proposal for drawing up draft legislation is put forward as a means of providing for the due process and transparency in federal arrangements for schools that are necessary conditions for reform. National policy trends and directions shape the learning experiences and opportunities of our children and young people in schools. We owe them national policies that have, and that are seen to have, the full and informed consent of the Australian people.

INTRODUCTION

This paper arises from widespread concerns within the education sector about the ways in which the interaction between the Commonwealth[5] and state[6] governments within Australia's federal system affects policies for schools and the setting of educational priorities.

Although constitutional responsibility for education resides formally with the states, a complicated interplay of Commonwealth and State Government policy-making has come to influence pre-school education, schooling, vocational education and training and higher education. Using its fiscal dominance, the Commonwealth is increasingly attempting to drive education policy.

This interplay is arguably at its most complex and controversial in the school sector. States have responsibility for the provision of public schooling and for regulating the quality of schooling generally, including for curriculum, assessment, credentialing and teaching, and the registration of schools in the private sector. They also provide public funding for private[7] schools. This is mainly in the form of recurrent grants, as well as through other forms of public assistance, including in kind.

The Commonwealth, through the political decisions of successive governments, has assumed funding responsibilities for schools in both sectors. The current situation sees public funding being provided to public and non-government schools by both levels of government through separate arrangements. The states and territories provide the bulk of public funding for public schools, with a lesser share for non-government schools. The situation is reversed for Commonwealth funding, the lion's share of which goes to schools in the private sector and the lesser share to public schools.

Particularly within the public school sector, there is mounting concern about the asymmetrical relationship that has developed over decades between the roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth and the states in the funding of government and non-government schools.

According to a joint report of the then Australian Council for Education Administration and the Australian College of Education, *A National Declaration for Education 2001*, the split-level nature of educational provision and control, the dispersion of legal responsibilities among state and federal bodies and the complications of funding arrangements had by then converged to make it difficult for those with a stake in education to put their views, to be given reliable data, to debate the policy options and to search for answers and consensus. A disturbing consequence of this imbalance in intergovernmental funding roles and responsibilities was a growing perception in the Australian community that public schools

[5] In 2003 the Federal Government adopted the title "Australian Government". To avoid confusion between references to the Federal and other Australian governments, the term "Commonwealth" is used throughout this paper when referring to the national government.

[6] Throughout this paper, references to states should be taken to include territories, unless otherwise indicated.

[7] This paper uses an OECD definition to differentiate between government or public schools and non-government or private schools, as follows: "*educational institutions are classified as either public or private according to whether a public agency or a private entity has the ultimate power to make decisions concerning the institution's affairs … an institution is classified as private if it is controlled and managed by a non-governmental organisation (e.g. a church, a trade union or a business enterprise) or if its governing board consists mostly of members not selected by a public agency …*"

were being down-valued (Australian Council for Educational Administration and Australian College of Education, 2001).

Since that time, the roles of the Commonwealth and states in education have continued to be far from fixed. The past several years have seen significant wrangling over responsibility in education. In particular, the Commonwealth has sought to gain greater influence over school curriculum, to establish a standardised system of certification, to ordain the form of reporting by schools to parents and, most recently, to set down conditions for teacher employment and rewards. These recent movements towards greater centralisation of responsibility are consistent with a longer trend of increasing Commonwealth involvement in education, as in other policy areas.

As part of a National Reform Agenda announced last year, the Council of Australian Governments (CoAG) has set broad but ambitious goals in education. These include significant improvements in participation and achievement. The Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) is the body charged with developing specific strategies to achieve these goals. This assignment raises the question of whether such improvements are best achieved through the current federal framework or whether a more radical overhaul of our federal arrangements in education might be needed.

This paper is intended as a contribution to that debate. It begins by looking at the current state of Commonwealth-State relations, primarily in the school sector, through describing developments in key dimensions of schooling. The paper focuses on: schools funding; curriculum, assessment and reporting; and teaching. The circumstances that are described in the paper have not happened overnight, however. Consideration of the options for overcoming current difficulties requires an understanding of the forces that have led to the current situation.

The paper considers the federal arrangements for schools in the light of discussions currently taking place about the need for reform of Australia's federal system more generally. Finally, the paper examines the options for re-defining intergovernmental roles and relationships in Australia in order to improve our capability for developing policies for school education that can raise the quality of outcomes overall and raise the level of achievement of those who currently achieve least, to bring them nearer to that of the highest achievers. These options range from maintaining the status quo to more radical options including handing absolute responsibility for education to a single tier of government. The paper has been informed by growing debate about our federal system beyond education.

As far as possible, this paper attempts to focus on the issue of intergovernmental relations within Australia's federal system, rather than on the prevailing ideologies of particular governments at Commonwealth, State or Territory level. Where particular policies are cited, the purpose is to illustrate aspects of the relationship between the levels of government.

There is a clear distinction drawn in this paper between Commonwealth policies that relate specifically to the objectives of the Commonwealth Government and national policies. National policy in education results from the adoption of education policies that are of concern to all governments and to the nation as a whole; and where all governments participate in their development, based on principles of collaboration and partnership. Both Commonwealth policies and national policies benefit generally from governments' willingness to engage with the relevant authorities, agencies and interest groups.

To support the preparation of this paper, a number of nationally recognised and experienced experts accepted invitations in 2006 to contribute their own papers, setting out their views on the directions that are needed to drive reforms in key areas of schooling, to improve the effectiveness of our school education system. Their individual contributions are presented, in full, as accompanying papers. These papers have been an invaluable stimulus and have informed the views expressed in this paper.

Valuable research assistance in relation to the debate occurring about the need for reform to Australia's federal system was provided by David Boyd.

It should be noted that neither he nor the accompanying authors bears any responsibility for, or should be taken to agree with, the views expressed in this paper. These views are entirely those of the author, who thanks them all for their generous contributions.

This paper was commissioned by the NSW Public Education Alliance as a contribution to informed discussion and debate of how our federal system might be made to work better from the perspective of schools (and of public schools, in particular). The author has been given complete freedom and independence in preparing this paper and in inviting others to prepare accompanying papers.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

By international standards, Australia's schools system performs at a high level for most students. It provides good value for the level of resources invested by governments. There are, however, some serious flaws and deficiencies that have persisted over decades.

Having recently returned to Australia from serving as Director for Education at the OECD, Professor Barry McGaw is well placed to provide an overview of the state of Australian schooling based on a range of international indicators. He concludes that, when measured by the percentages of its population which completes a full secondary school education, for example, Australia has had a persistently undistinguished record over the years, by comparison with many OECD countries. When seventeen of the 30 OECD countries were achieving completion rates of 80 per cent or more around seven to sixteen years ago (that is, in the age group now around 25 to 34), Australia was not among them. Since then, its rates have grown relatively slowly from this comparatively low base, so that Australia's ranking has slipped further, from equal 18th to 20$^{th.}$ (McGaw, 2006).

Despite its lengthy economic boom, Australia has lower participation rates in upper secondary and, as a result, in tertiary education than some other OECD countries with which it competes, according to McGaw's analysis. Australia commits less of its wealth to education overall than most other OECD countries and requires a higher private contribution than all but two. Australian school education is of high average quality, but social background is more strongly related to educational achievement than in many OECD countries. There are relatively large differences in educational achievement among schools in Australia, with 70 per cent of the differences attributable to differences in social background of students (McGaw, 2006).

It cannot be said that our performance relative to other countries can be attributed to federalism, per se. If we look, for example, at Canada on the grounds that it is a federal system which can well be compared with Australia, it is worth noting that while Australia has had a persistently mediocre ranking on the basis of secondary completion rates among OECD countries, Canada has held its place at 7th over the same period. And social background has far less influence on educational achievement in Canada than in Australia.

But this leaves open the question of whether Australia's federal system is adding to or detracting from the dividends we reap from our investment in schooling from the standpoint of the country as a whole or of its individual citizens?

There is no evidence to demonstrate that, of itself, a federal system of government affects the quality of a country's education system. But it is certainly the case that the quality of schooling can be affected, for good or ill, by the way in which the federal system operates in relation to key dimensions of schooling.

The Current Situation: Resources

Schools funding

Governments around Australia currently outlay more than $30 billion on schools each year. Of this amount, state governments spend more than three times the contribution made by the Commonwealth: in the financial year 2004-05, states outlaid around $24 billion on the recurrent operation of schools, while the Commonwealth spent around $7 billion.[8]

There is striking agreement among the authors invited to contribute papers to this project that arrangements for the public funding of schools in Australia are unique, and that their consequences for the school system as a whole are generally negative. Their conclusions raise serious questions about the integrity of schools funding in Australia, especially given that the main way governments influence what happens in schools is through their decisions about the level of overall public investment in school education and the allocation of resources among schools.

Max Angus, for example, in his paper "Commonwealth-State Relations and the Funding of Australia's Schools" makes the point that:

> *the negative consequences of the current funding arrangements are a bit like concrete cancer in a large building, or changes to the ozone layer in our atmosphere. The degradation is slow and almost imperceptible. The net effect is a growing differentiation between those government and non-government schools that serve the families on high incomes and those who are not well off. The Australian education system, taken as a whole, is evolving into something but we don't know what*. (Angus, 2007)

Trends in schools funding since the 1970s have been shaped by the irrational division of funding responsibilities between the state and Commonwealth governments for public and private schools. As Louise Watson (2007) points out in "Possible futures for Commonwealth-State relations in sustaining and improving Australia's schools", Australia is unique for its policy divisions between federal and state/territory governments with respect to public and private schools:

> *In Australia, state governments retain financial and policy control over public schools while the federal government is primarily concerned with funding private schools. Although the federal government provides a token amount of funding to public schools, and the states provide the equivalent of roughly half the federal subsidy to private schools, the governance arrangements for public and private schools are entirely separate. In practice, the federal government controls the funding and policy environment for private schools, while the states and territories control the funding and policy environment for public schools*.

Brian Caldwell (2007) goes so far in his paper "Options for a New Federalism in Australia" as to identify the arrangements made for the public funding of non-government schools as one of the main areas where federalism itself appears dysfunctional:

[8] Productivity Commission, *Report on government services 2007*, table 3.1, p. 3.4. Note that these figures exclude expenditure on capital works, but include estimates for the 'user cost of capital' in the government sector only.

> *Before comparing arrangements for education in Australia with those in other countries, it is important to acknowledge developments and debates in matters related to the funding of non-government schools. This is one of the main areas where federalism appears dysfunctional*.

Since the mid 1970s, when the Commonwealth entered schools funding as a significant partner, there has been a huge shift in distribution of its funding for schools. This has been accompanied by a shift of around 11 percentage points of the total school population from the public to the non-government school sector over those years. This shift in the enrolment balance between the sectors, in turn, has contributed to the shift in the funding balance, but is only one of the contributing factors.

There is an asymmetrical split between the two levels of government in relation to their shared funding of public and private schools. According to figures regularly quoted by members of the current Commonwealth Government, the 68 per cent of students in public schools across Australia receive around 75 per cent of total public outlays on schools; while the 32 per cent in private schools receive around 25 per cent.[9] States provide around 91 per cent of total recurrent expenditure on government schools, with the remainder coming from the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth provides 73 per cent of total government grants to non-government schools, with the remainder coming from the states.[10]

A huge transformation had taken place in the contribution of the Commonwealth over three decades. The share of the public funds the Commonwealth provided to schools in the form of general recurrent grants had risen from just under 50 per cent, where it began under the Whitlam Government, to over 75 per cent, with the bulk now going to non-government schools. This shift has led to the situation where public schools will now get around 31 per cent and non-government schools 69 per cent of the total the Commonwealth provides for schools – a near reversal of where it began. Of the total public funds provided by the Commonwealth for schools starting in 1974, around 70 per cent was directed to government schools, around 27 per cent to non-government schools and the remainder to joint programs. This approximated their relative share of enrolments.

By 2004, Commonwealth general recurrent funding to independent non-government schools alone reached the point where it outstripped its funding to the whole of the public school sector. The Commonwealth Minister's Budget media release at the time (Nelson, 2004) showed that the roughly 13 per cent of students nationally in independent non-government schools, with less than one-fifth of the enrolments of the public sector, would be allocated $7.6 billion in general recurrent funding from Canberra for the new funding quadrennium. $7.2 billion was allocated for the 2.25 million students in government schools.

For most non-government schools, Commonwealth and state/territory grants in total now constitute the bulk of their funding. The 2005 Annual National Report on Schooling in Australia (ANR) shows that the public funding of these schools is now around 57 per cent on average (ANR 2005, Statistical Appendix, Table 23). But there are significant variations among the resource levels of schools across the non-government sector. The Catholic systemic schools that make up almost two-thirds of all non-government schools, for example, have a significantly higher reliance on public funding, which now makes up around three

[9] Hon. Julie Bishop, ABC's *Lateline*, 11/4/07; Hon. John Howard, doorstop interview transcript, 11/4/07, Prime Minister's Media Centre.
[10] Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 4102.0 – *Australian Social Trends*, 2006, p.6.

quarters of their total funding, with the rest being covered through private fees, charges and donations.

When funding for Catholic schools from all sources is taken into account, experts agree that these schools now have resource levels at least comparable with schools in the public sector, particularly when account is taken of the more socio-economically selective intake of non-government schools, as set out in census data (Burke, 2002).

The independent schools within the non-government sector are now the most rapidly growing area of schooling in Australia. According to Richard Bates (2007) in his accompanying paper entitled "Public Education and Social Justice", it is here that "the extreme form of maldistribution of resources can be seen … where it is achieved by the concentration of both private and public resources". This sector is comprised of schools that cover the full range of resource levels – from the lowest to the highest in the country. Drawing on a survey of 1,000 independent schools' tuition fees plus funding data from the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, Watson (2004) estimated the total average operating resources per student in each independent school in 2004 and compared this to the average recurrent resources per student in government schools. This comparison revealed that 27 per cent of independent non-government school students in the survey attended schools where the income from tuition fees alone exceeded the average resources per student in government schools. These schools received $368 million per year in government grants that assisted in raising their total average resources per student to more than 62 per cent above average government school resources. Overall, 55 per cent of independent school students attend schools where the total average resource level per student is higher than that of the average government school.

In broad terms, and relying on data available through the Commonwealth's Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and the ANR, it appears that the total expenditure per student on average is comparable for both sectors. This is the conclusion reached also by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in its comparison of funding between the sectors, but its report does make the point that expenditure per student in the non-government sector can vary greatly due to variations in parental fees in combination with public grants.[11]

A study by Trevor Cobbold (2003) demonstrated the methodologies by which DEST underestimates expenditure on non-government schools in comparison with government schools. This study concluded that, depending on which projections of non-government schools funding were used, non-government schools would have an advantage in their total funding over government schools of between 12 and 17 per cent, with Catholic school funding improving relative to government schools from the 9 per cent below in 2000-2001 to being on a par with them by 2003-2004. This study put the funding advantage of independent non-government schools over government schools at 40 to 44 per cent by 2003-2004. It should be noted that such comparisons are purely financial and take no account of the vastly different public responsibilities between the sectors in relation to student admission and exclusion policies and practices; or for adjusting to rises, falls and shifts in the school population. Even on this basis, however, it would take an increased investment of almost $4 billion annually to bring resources for students in government schools up to the average for their counterparts in independent schools within the non-government sector, reflecting the point made above by Bates.

[11] Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 4102.0 – *Australian Social Trends*, 2006, p.6.

Yet, according to the recent Australian Bureau of Statistics report, *Australian Social Trends 2006*, funding for non government schools overall is growing at three times the rate of spending on public schools. That is largely, though not entirely, the influence of the Commonwealth expenditure.

This can be explained in part by the fact that the Federal government raises the lion's share of all revenues. Watson (1998) provides a detailed account of the steps by which, at the time of World War II, the states' ceding of their income taxing powers to the Commonwealth created the capacity for it to enter the field of education. The Commonwealth can easily afford to increase grants to schools in the non-government sector, especially when it is only half the size of the public sector. It has been doing this at a rate that is far harder for states and territories to match for the much larger public sector, given competing claims on their tighter budgets for the delivery of basic services.

Three quarters of the $8.7 billion the Commonwealth provides annually for schools is now delivered through general recurrent grants. Whichever political party gains power at the Commonwealth level now finds itself locked into the situation of having to defend a highly asymmetrical funding responsibility for private and public schools. As a corollary, the Commonwealth's policy relationship with public schooling has progressively weakened.

The rate of growth in public funding to schools in the private sector can also be explained in part by the use of a device known as Average Government School Recurrent Cost (AGSRC).

In his accompanying paper, Angus refers to the fact that much of the debate about the fairness of school funding in Australia is based on averages – such as the average government primary or secondary school per capita recurrent costs – in the absence of capacity to compare the total resources schools have at their disposal and the ability to compare resource levels for schools serving similar communities (Angus, 2007).

The reason why there is much debate about average annual spending on a government school student has little to do with the funding of these public schools. It is because a measure of movements in average recurrent expenditure by state and territory governments is used as the basis for determining Commonwealth funding to non-government schools. Most states and territories use a similar measure for determining their own funding of non-government schools. In New South Wales, this is set out in its Education Act, which includes an explicit provision that state per capita funding of non-government schools is 25 per cent of the NSW average expenditure on a student in a public school.

As far as government schools are concerned, the AGSRC is simply an after-the-fact reflection of states' and territories' outlays on government schools, turned into a per student average. But the Commonwealth has adopted this measure as a basis for indexing its own grants to schools annually. If the annual average rises, then the Commonwealth passes on the increase to all schools as an annual adjustment to the per student grants set out in legislation. The benefits of this linkage to AGSRC are greater for schools in the private than the public sector, since the non-government sector gets the far higher proportion of its total public funding from the Commonwealth.

From the standpoint of the public school system, this arrangement is given a bizarre twist by what appears now to be an annual Commonwealth Budget ritual, where the Commonwealth

attacks the states for 'failing to match' its own funding increases for government schools. Yet, at other times, Commonwealth Ministers defend their record by explaining that Commonwealth recurrent funding for government schools is necessarily linked to state expenditures, in an apparent attempt to suggest that this limits the Commonwealth's discretion to increase its own outlays on public schools. Either way, the AGSRC mechanism locks in the disparities arising from the imbalance in the Commonwealth's commitment to the public and private sectors.

Understandable public confusion about the real intent of Commonwealth indexation arrangements allows the Commonwealth to present these contrary arguments, usually without any public or media scrutiny.

As a matter of bipartisan policy, the federal funding arrangements that will deliver more than $40 billion to schools for the next quadrennium have at their heart a funding mechanism that consists of a mishmash of different cash and accrual accounting practices among school authorities, that involves an 18 month time lag, and that fails to acknowledge the different responsibilities required of the two sectors. This 'average' simply aggregates and incorporates such different influences on states' and territories' outlays as: the accounting effects of the unavoidable diseconomies and inefficiencies that occur when the public system contracts overall or in particular localities; the costs of provision of services to higher concentrations of students with special needs and for schools in isolated communities; and policy decisions designed to improve the quality of public schooling in general of for specific groups of students.

There are serious doubts about whether the AGSRC is a proper device for governments to use as the basis for indexing grants. Indexation is normally used in public finance as a tool to maintain the real value of government outlays, and therefore to prevent the erosion of policy intentions through inflation. Most Commonwealth Budget indexation decisions use 'deflators', such as the GDP (non-farm) deflator. Commonwealth expenditure on education for most of the past three decades has used education-specific measures such as the former Schools Price Index and the 'safety net adjustment' for university funding. Most of the Commonwealth's indexation arrangements, however, have been contaminated since the time of the Keating Government by the intrusion of political, rather than educational, considerations.

As in other parts of the education portfolio, in the higher education sector the major 'price' driver is salaries, for academic and other staff. These have risen each year along with other areas of the economy by an average annual rate of 3 to 4 per cent[12]. The Commonwealth's indexation measure, however, has provided annual increases of only around 2 per cent. This under-indexation quite patently has failed to protect the real value of Commonwealth grants and has had to be offset by a more than $2 billion increase in private fees and other income, a more than doubling of student contributions. This cancerous effect on university funding, at a cumulative cost approaching $3 billion over ten years, has not been able to surface as a significant political issue despite the best efforts of vice-chancellors and education unions. Indexation has been a means of achieving by stealth real cuts to public funding of higher education that might have been far more politically contentious had they not been buried in the complexity of the language of indexation.

[12] Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC), *Laying the foundations: the AVCC /submission to the Review of the Indexation of University Funding*, December 2004, Table 1, p. 6.

In the schools sector, the use of AGSRC as indexation for Commonwealth grants to schools has in fact provided real increases. Over more than a decade, despite significant annual fluctuations, the average annual increase in AGSRC has been just over 6 per cent; whereas teacher salary increases have averaged around 3 to 4 per cent. This provides, in effect, real increases in Commonwealth recurrent grants to schools of around 2 percentage points per annum; a cumulative real increase over 10 years of more than 20 per cent. As noted above, these benefits fall disproportionately on the non-government sector. Again, indexation – a financial tool – has been used as a policy device, in this case to link Commonwealth funding for private schools to changes in state expenditures on government schools. This is a long-held policy within the non-government sector, with roots to the origins of the 'state aid debate' in this country.

This kind of measure arguably had more justification in earlier decades, at a time when the vast majority of non-government schools were operating below the resources standards in public schools. The policy implications of employing such a measure are quite different in a situation where schools in the non-government sector are typically operating at or above the resources standards in government schools. As discussed earlier, in the growing independent schools sector, for example, 55 per cent of students are attending schools with higher resource levels than public schools and 27 per cent are attending schools where the income from fees alone exceeds the average resources per students in a public school (Watson, 2003).

In the current situation, where the school population overall is not in a period of rapid growth, the formula has an insidious effect. The more students drift to private schools, the more the average cost per student rises in the public schools because of the loss of economies of scale. The more the public per student cost increases, the more the per student grant to private schools increases because the latter is indexed to the former. This automatic flow-on of increases in outlays on public schools to the private school sector ignores the competitive disadvantage that public schools face where private school students come disproportionately from higher income families; and where public school services must be provided without enough students to remain viable where these are the only school left in a district.

The current disreputable state of the Commonwealth general recurrent grant scheme for non-government schools, however, can be largely attributed to the Commonwealth's political decision that its funding formula would not be applied to any non-government schools where this would result in a reduction in the school's grant. As a result of this political decision made by the Howard Government when it introduced its new SES-based funding scheme for non-government schools (discussed below, see pages 24-25), only around half of the schools in that sector are being funded according to the Commonwealth's own formula. The other half are being funded above the level the formula says they should be getting, at a cost of $2 billion over the current four year funding period. Six years into this scheme, there is no readily apparent means for rectifying the anomalies and inequities this decision has generated. Despite this, it now appears to be a bi-partisan policy to provide political guarantees that no non-government schools will receive less funding, with full indexation of grants against AGSRC.

The late Jean Blackburn was a member of both the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission, which provided advice to the Whitlam Government that laid the foundations for Commonwealth funding for government and non-government schools, and of the Schools Commission itself. Writing a decade ago about the situation that had evolved then in relation to schools funding, she stated that "the conditions under which private schools

operate and draw subsidies in Australia are to a degree an artefact of our federal system. The Commonwealth Government has no national public system that it could oblige private schools to enter as a condition of national subvention, even if it favoured such a policy". She referred to "the Federal Government, on an unexamined legal basis, having covertly acted on the unexpressed assumption that the public-private balance of Australian school provision is within its power to determine" (Blackburn, 1996). Both Angus and Watson, in their respective accompanying papers, point to the fact that federal schools funding arrangements have evolved in the absence of any agreed educational rationale.

Watson (2007) attributes the absence of a coherent policy framework governing schools funding partly to the division of responsibilities for education within the Australian federal system and, in particular, to the "lack of any overarching educational policy objective for the provision of Commonwealth funding for schools".

She finds it to be a curious feature of Australian education policy:

> *that government funding for private schools is provided on the basis of financial 'need' alone, rather than the goal of maximising educational outcomes for all students. As a consequence, private schools receive public subsidies without any consideration of the impact of subsidised private schools on the public school system. There has been little interest – at either the state or federal level – in properly defining the role and purpose of public schools alongside a subsidised private system, or in regulating the public and private sector to maximise student outcomes overall. Instead, for three decades, private schools have been funded on a mass basis, under their own funding scheme, with few limits placed on their enrolment growth.*
>
> *In the absence of an overarching educational policy objective, private schools receive government subsidies free of any regulatory constraints that might serve to maximise student outcomes. The state and federal governments expect no specific "dividends" from private schools in return for a substantial public investment. Subsidised private schools are not subject to regulation over the tuition fees they charge, nor are they subject to any expectations regarding access or equity for students.*

Watson argues that a properly designed framework may have "fashioned the subsidies" (from both levels of government: Commonwealth and state/territory) "to contribute to the public policy goal of achieving higher quality schooling for all students – in both public and private schools".

Angus sees the states as being strongly implicated also in the lack of a proper educational rationale for federal funding arrangements. Both Angus and Watson see this lack of a clear rationale as being a factor in current resource inequalities.

> *There is no agreed federal framework for determining the resource needs of all schools, nor a national system of accounting for government funding, nor a non-partisan agency that is able to ensure that funding from both levels of government is being allocated fairly and effectively to schools. In this vacuum, there is the risk that Australian education, once envied by experts from other countries for the equity of its school funding, is at risk of becoming socially and educationally polarised. There are cases where schools serving well-off families are operating with considerably higher*

> *resource levels than schools with concentrations of socially disadvantaged children. Current school funding policies appear to be extending this trend and widening the differentiation.* (Angus, 2007)

Watson points out that the increase in enrolments in private schools at the expense of enrolments in public schools has been achieved with minimal impact on the socio-economic status of the non-government schools. As census data demonstrate, the higher the income bracket in which a child's family is situated, the more likely the child is to attend a non-government school. Watson argues that because private schools have used their public subsidies to position themselves in the market for students from more socio-economically privileged families rather than to reduce their admission fees, they have managed to maintain their own social economic composition while leaving public schools to cater for an increasing proportion of students from families in lower income brackets and socio-economic circumstances generally, with implications for both the cost and the outcomes of public schooling.

The current era of federal schools funding is characterised by, at best, an indifference to the respective roles of the Commonwealth and state/territory governments in schools funding. Or, at worst, it could be argued that the federal structures enable both state and Commonwealth governments to pursue their policy directions in ways that obscure their effects and constrain opportunities for public understanding, scrutiny and debate.

This new period of unilateralism on the part of the Commonwealth follows a period – the years of the Hawke and Keating Labor governments – where the Commonwealth had generally attempted to improve national consistency and coherence in schools policies, including funding, through negotiation with states and territories. Policy for schools funding was underpinned by the recognition that Australia had a 'dual system' of public and private schooling and needed to recognise this through strategies designed to minimise conflict, inequality, duplication and waste. It was during this period that much of the action in driving policy directions moved from Commonwealth agencies such as the Schools Commission and, later, the National Board of Employment, Education and Training to a council of Commonwealth and state ministers. In June 1993, the Council of Australian Governments (CoAG) amalgamated a number of ministerial councils in order to optimise policy coordination across portfolios. Three councils: the Australian Education Council, the Council of Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training (MOVEET) and the Youth Ministers Council (YMC), were merged to form the Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

Current federal arrangements for funding and planning

In her accompanying paper, Watson (2007) draws attention to the way in which the split in responsibilities for the public funding of public and private schools has created the potential for separating schools funding from planning considerations. Under current arrangements, the Commonwealth has been able to fund non-government schools as if they were operating in a demographic vacuum; leaving states and territories to deal with problems from any resultant maldistribution of school places in relation to population demand. In political terms, the Howard Government adopted individual parental choice of schooling as the driving idea

behind schools funding. The disciplines necessary to maintain a 'dual system' were seen as barriers to such choice and were removed.

Watson argues that Australia's inadequate policy framework has permitted – and possibly facilitated – the expansion of its subsidised private school sector with little regard for the consequences of this expansion on public provision.

> *The only period in which governments showed a policy interest in the impact of subsidised private schools on public schools was during the implementation of the New Schools Policy between 1986 and 1996.*

The New Schools Policy was introduced by the Hawke Labor Government to support 'planned educational provision' by placing some limits on the establishment and expansion of private schools in areas of stable or declining student populations. It provided for priority to be given, in the provision of Commonwealth funding for new non-government school places, to those being proposed in areas of population growth, so that public funding was being applied in areas where there was a demographic need for new schools or additional places – rather than in those areas where there was already an over-supply of places in existing schools, public and private.

The 1996 Commonwealth Budget marked a radical turning point in federal funding relations in regard to schools funding through changes to the funding of non-government schools, in particular.

In that Budget the Commonwealth announced the abolition of the previous New Schools Policy, consistent with the political decision to increase support for the growth of non-government schooling as a means of expanding parental choice of schooling while reducing the public costs of schooling overall to governments. A 1996 Commonwealth Treasury Budget Statement estimated that the abolition of the New Schools Policy would cost the Commonwealth $66.7m by 2000.

The problem for the Commonwealth was that any savings that might result from students transferring out of public schools would accrue to the states and territories, which meet most of the costs of public schools.

It is arguable that encouraging more parents to pay privately towards their children's tuition by moving them from public to private schools would, over time, reduce the proportion of the costs of schooling met publicly. Particularly in a time where the growth in the school population has slowed, such savings would only occur over a lengthy period as the result of abandonment of public schooling on a significant scale by parents and state governments. Even then, it is not clear that public resources would be saved even in the longer term.

> *If student drift followed recent trends, from public schools into 'low fee'-high public subsidy non-government schools, the difference in the public expenditure on these transferring students would be of a very much lesser order than often suggested by advocates of unfettered choice. By way of example, currently public funding for Catholic schools and comparably resourced schools in the independent sector, from Commonwealth and NSW Government sources, represents around 80 per cent of their recurrent expenditures. For such modest public savings to accrue, the drift would need to be representative of the full spectrum of students … and it would need to*

> *be possible to adjust to and maintain efficient capital utilization in the public system. Realistically it is likely that neither of these conditions would prevail and per capita costs would be driven up for public provision. Potential public savings from increased participation in non-government schooling are thus essentially illusory*. (NSW Public Education Council, 2005)

Whether savings were real and significant or not for the states and territories, the effect of expanding the private sector is certainly a real and direct cost to the Commonwealth. Every student who enters a non-government school attracts a subsidy, and since the Commonwealth is the major partner in providing public funding to non-government schools, it foots the major part of the bill.

To deal with this potential for cost-shifting, the Commonwealth introduced a mechanism called the Enrolment Benchmark Adjustment (EBA), as a means of covering part of the cost of its policy change. Its purpose was to reduce per student grants to government schools in states and territories where the proportion of students in non-government schools increased accordingly compared with a 1996 benchmark.

Had consultations been held with the states and territories prior to the removal of the New Schools Policy, the flaws in the Commonwealth's understanding of the financing of school systems, as distinct from individual schools, would have become apparent. It soon became clear that, in calculating 'savings' to the states and territories, the Commonwealth had made no allowance for the difference between average and marginal costs in the public sector; and had made flawed assumptions about how any 'savings' might result from the personal decisions of individual parents about the school sector to which they would send their children.

Following considerable political pressure, the EBA was wound back through a series of face-saving modifications and the funds the Commonwealth garnered were used to create a program focusing on science, mathematics and innovation in schools. This 'initiative' redirects more than $530 million over four years (2005 to 2008) from the general recurrent allocations of those states and territories where a shift in the enrolment balance triggers the EBA![13] It is difficult to imagine any clearer indicator of the current bizarre state of schools funding arrangements between the two levels of government than the establishment of a program for the teaching of mathematics and science in public schools funded by the Commonwealth in those states where its own funding incentives to expand private schools led to a shift in the balance of enrolments (not in the numbers, but in the proportion) between the public and private school sectors.

The Commonwealth continued its unilateralist approach with the introduction of its current scheme for general recurrent funding of non-government schools. The Howard Government used the new scheme, introduced in 2001, to break the nexus between the private resources available to non-government schools and their entitlement to public funding; and to introduce a measure of the characteristics of individual parents, not the characteristics of the schools or school systems, as the basis for determining schools' relative funding entitlements. Since 2001, the Commonwealth structures its general recurrent grants to non-government schools on the basis of a measure of the socio-economic status (SES) of the parents' census collection district. According to an average of parents' SES scores, schools are ranked across 46 categories for funding purposes.

[13] DEST, *Backing Australia's Ability*, May 2006, p. 60.

The Commonwealth introduced this scheme without regard to the existing state and territory arrangements for funding the same schools, or to the anomalies which were thus produced. A political decision was made by the Commonwealth to maintain the funding of those non-government schools which were entitled to a lower grant under the new scheme than they had enjoyed under the scheme it replaced. This has produced some startling anomalies among non-government schools, evidenced by the fact that schools with the same SES score can be funded at four different and, in some cases, widely divergent levels.

States have generally and understandably been unwilling to simply adopt a parallel version of the Commonwealth scheme. Even if they had been prepared to accept the political philosophy it embodies, to piggyback their own funding upon it would have simply magnified its widely acknowledged inequities among non-government schools.

Thus, the federal funding arrangements for non-government schools lack national consistency, coherence or complementarity for reasons that go beyond political differences. It would have been quite possible for the Commonwealth to consult states and territories, as had been done previously by the Hawke Government, and to invite their adoption of complementary arrangements. It would have been possible to invite states to examine ways of dovetailing their own funding arrangements in the interests of reducing duplication in administration, accountability and public reporting.

One of the few areas of Commonwealth-state congruity following the Commonwealth's change to an SES-based formula for distributing its general recurrent grants to non-government schools has resulted from action in New South Wales. In the wake of the changes to Commonwealth funding for non-government schools, the NSW Labor Government undertook a review of its own funding for these schools, in 2000. The terms of reference for the review were, however, restricted to a consideration of non-government schools, as if these were operating in a vacuum. The first report of the review, which dealt with matters including state-wide planning, was released in 2002 (Grimshaw, 2002). The response of the NSW Government – responding to the same political pressure for unfettered parental choice as had motivated the Commonwealth – was to follow the Commonwealth in specifically excluding any planning criteria from its funding provision for non-government schools. This further entrenched the situation where the responsibility for the adjustments needed to maintain an economic balance between the number of school places and the overall size and geographic distribution of the school population falls almost entirely upon public school systems.

As pointed out by Margaret Vickers (2005), "*Australia is unusual in lacking clear mechanisms for adjusting the supply of school places to demographic demand. In the USA, for example, neighbourhood schools are funded through local property taxes, which means that local citizens are more inclined to reform their neighbourhood schools than to fund a parallel system of schools that would potentially lead to a wasteful duplication of existing facilities*". She points out that approximately 90 per cent of children in the USA attend public schools from kindergarten to twelfth grade and that, despite substantial improvements in real family incomes over the past sixty years, this overall proportion has not varied greatly over that period.

Funding and regulation

The growing convergence between the public and the non-government sectors of schooling in terms of reliance on various forms of public funding has not been matched by the requirement for non-government schools to take on key responsibilities that attach to public funding in the public sector. It is not only in relation to the fact that there are generally few planning criteria attached to public funding for non-government schools that makes Australian federal funding arrangements for schools unusual. Non-government school authorities have retained the same right to make decisions privately about the setting of fees, student admission and exclusion policies, and staffing policies as if they were fully privately funded. They have been granted statutory exceptions from aspects of anti-discrimination legislation in order to preserve their special character. OECD reports confirm that the countries with as high or higher proportion of 'government-dependent private' schools as Australia have accompanied this funding with stronger regulatory conditions.

Because of the powerful religious and class interests involved, it would always have been a daunting challenge for governments to impose regulations and funding conditions upon schools in the private sector, commensurate with their increasing access to public funding. This would have been the case even if the funding responsibility for both sectors had resided solely with either one level of government.

In Australia, the asymmetrical split in funding responsibility for schools in both sectors has provided governments with a convenient way of dealing with these interests. Each level of government is able to shift to the other any of the political odium of regulation to force private providers of schooling to take on responsibilities more comparable with those of the public sector.

Advice on the need for greater consistency in the scope and standards of regulation, accountability and transparency between the school sectors was provided periodically by the Commonwealth's major advisory bodies, including the Interim Committee for the Schools Commission and then the Schools Commission itself, followed by the Schools Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET). But this advice was persistently ignored, despite the increasing convergence in relation to public funding. Under current federal arrangements, the Commonwealth can argue that the responsibility for the regulation of schooling lies with the states and territories. All that the Commonwealth requires from non-government school authorities is approval by state/territory registration bodies and the normal accounting information and financial reporting consistent with meeting acceptable standards of probity. The financial data provided by these authorities to the Commonwealth are generally not available for public inspection other than in the form of the aggregated data necessary to meet the requirement for participation in MCEETYA's national annual reporting process.

The conditions imposed by the Commonwealth on its major funding grants are increasingly and randomly extrinsic to the program itself. There is almost no public regulation of the funds provided to schools in the non-government sector when it comes to the conditions that determine which students are or are not able to gain access to these public funds, or the level and range of private fees and charges that such schools can impose on top of their public grants. Rather, the Commonwealth is increasingly using these grants as a source of leverage for imposing its own political and educational preferences and priorities in areas ranging

across flagpoles, the style of reporting to parents and the devolution of power to principals to hire and fire staff.

As for the states and territories, as the Commonwealth's Schools Commission stated in its final triennial report (1985), these governments have seemed "rather unconcerned" about the way in which their per capita payments to non-government schools were being used. This lack of concern can be attributed, as well as to politics, to the states' rationalisation that they are, after all, only the minor partners in the federal funding arrangements for non-government schools.

There is little wonder then that an inquiry into accountability in Commonwealth-State Funding Arrangements in Education in 1995 (Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee, 1995) found that whatever accountability mechanisms had been put in place as a result, there still prevailed the same lack of information that could shed light on educational effectiveness as a guide to future policy as had been identified 22 years previously by the Interim Committee.

In at least two States, NSW and Victoria, reports of Auditors-General have pointed out that the provisions for accountability and transparency imposed on government schools have not been applied to private schools even when public funds are provided to these schools, and have pointed out the risks of providing public funds to non-government organisations that are not directly accountable to government or taxpayers for their overall operations (Audit Office of NSW, 1999; Auditor General Victoria, 2000).

While the bulk of Commonwealth funding, provided in the form of recurrent grants to state and territory governments and to non-government school authorities, is subject to little real accountability for educational outcomes, this does not apply uniformly across all its school programs. There have been many examples where the benefits of relatively small project grants are diluted by demands for evaluation and reporting to satisfy accountability criteria that are disproportionate in terms of the funds provided. Sadly, it has been programs for the poorest children, including for indigenous students, which seem to be most burdened in this way, including sometimes with contrived and artificial forms of accountability.

The lack of a clear and consistent rationale for the role of the Commonwealth in schools funding, and, according to Angus (2007), the lack of a rational basis for schools funding in Australia more generally, have an adverse effect on education debate in Australia. In these circumstances, there is much scope for reducing schools funding to a matter of clashing ideologies and media spin.

> *One of the reasons why the problem of school resource differentiation is so hard to establish or refute is that there is a paucity of information about the actual quantum of resources acquired by individual schools from government and private sources. In the absence of this information, discussions about school funding are necessarily based on system or sectoral aggregates and averages, or on the funding of particular programs where the program funds constitute a minor proportion of the total school resource allocation. Neither provides a satisfactory basis for making public policy* (Angus, 2007).

Angus argues, further, that funding mechanisms generally – the formulae and the processes through which funds get from governments into schools – are unnecessarily complex and

lacking in transparency. *"In a national study of primary schools, my colleagues and I showed how the resource allocation mechanisms for primary schools are unhelpfully complex and exceedingly opaque*." He points out that the federal system merely adds to the complexities that arise from arrangements established and maintained by state authorities.

> *The federal system is only one of the complicating factors. Much of the complexity arises because of arrangements established by system authorities. The arrangements are often deeply embedded in administrative practice and in the case of staffing, the largest school recurrent cost, held in place by industrial agreements. Simplifying the process would require public debates about new formulae, especially if the adoption of simplified funding models meant that some schools received less because the new formula advantaged others … the complexity of funding arrangements is the initial stumbling block for further school finance reform. It is hard to carry any argument forward that some categories of schools need more funds than others while at the same time arguing that it is better not to know the facts. The paucity of our knowledge of the facts of school funding leads advocates of particular courses of action to base their arguments on conjecture or hyperbole*. (Angus, 2007)

According to Angus, it would be possible for large state systems to replace the plethora of existing allocation mechanisms with a simple and transparent model without necessarily altering the funding outcomes for schools.

The complexity of federal arrangements for schools funding is possibly even more of an issue in the non-government sector. Here funding comes from three sources, with private funding being added to the public grants received from the Commonwealth and state/territory governments. A poll conducted in 2001 by the NSW Catholic Education Commission revealed widespread confusion. Two-thirds of all the Catholics who responded to the survey believed that parents provided most or all of the funding for Catholic primary schools, whereas, according to figures provided by the Commission, they provide less than 15 per cent of the total resources ("Fundamental ignorance exposed", *Sun-Herald*, 16/9/01). There is no evidence that either governments or non-government school authorities have conducted an education campaign since that time to ensure that parents and communities understand the extent of their reliance on public funding for their children's schooling.

The complexity and lack of transparency in schools funding in Australia has potentially serious consequences. As Angus points out:

> *Schools are increasingly expected to disclose the performance of students on national benchmarking tests as part of the general push towards greater public accountability. Yet their performance is being judged without any real regard to the resources, government and private, that schools have at their disposal. There should be much higher performance expectations of schools with selective intakes and per capita allocations two or three times the size of other schools. Disclosure of student performance results without disclosure of resource levels is unfair and misleading*.

Policy development and debate on schools funding in Australia are bedevilled by the difficulties of establishing valid and reliable data as a guide to the effects of particular policies and to options for future action.

As Angus points out, Australia has actually gone backwards in this regard.

> *During 1974-1987 the Australian Schools Commission played an important role in monitoring per pupil expenditures and advising the Commonwealth on school needs and other funding matters. In fulfilling this role the Schools Commission provided national leadership. Its reports on school funding are unsurpassed for their comprehensiveness, tough-mindedness and detail. Their authors were able to be provocative because the Commission was at arms length from government*. (Angus, 2007)

The quality and availability of school statistics in Australia at the present time, by contrast, leaves much to be desired.

The so-called 'inputs' of schooling, especially the non-financial data collected from school authorities by the ABS, are well established. We can be confident about the quality of data from this source on trends in the numbers of schools, students and teachers in government and non-government school sectors. But ABS data on school expenditure is less useful, being expressed at high levels of generality and taking some years to publish.

State, territory and Commonwealth authorities collaborate with the ABS to produce the annual National School Statistics Collection, under the auspices of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). A selection of these data is published in the statistical appendix of each year's National Report on Schooling (ANR). These data, however, are expressed at a high degree of aggregation, are heavily qualified so as to protect the jurisdictions that are being compared, and are often three years or more old by the time they are published.

The Productivity Commission attempts to coordinate data from these sources in its regular reports on government services. These reports include the presentation of data in the form of 'performance indicators' for the 'outcomes' of equity, effectiveness and efficiency. State and territory authorities also publish a range of data relating to their responsibilities, most often in annual departmental reports.

What is absent from these reports, however, is a clear sense of their implications for policy evaluation and development.

For example, the current Commonwealth Government has placed 'choice of schooling' at the centre of its policies and programs. This is evident in its legislation for schools[14] and related administrative guidelines:

> *A fundamental principle underlying the Australian Government's role in school education is support for the right of parents to choose the educational environment which best suits the needs of their child, whether this is in the government or non-government sector …*[15]

This principle has been in place since at least 1996, when the Howard Government was elected – although it could also be argued that both major parties have included 'choice of schooling' within their policy rhetoric for the past three decades.

[14] *Learning Together – Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity Act 2004*.

[15] Department of Education, Science and Training, *Quadrennial Administrative Guidelines (for schools) – 2007 Update*, paragraph 4, p. 8.

But the current state of educational statistics and other information provides no more than a superficial understanding of the effects and implications of this policy. We may know about the numbers and 'market shares' of schools and students in the government and non-government sectors over time (although even here it is necessary to examine the underlying data 'cubes' for the ABS collection and the accompanying papers for the National Schools Statistics Collection, the ANR and the Productivity Commission reports on government services, if we want to know more about the characteristics of schools and students within the non-government sector). This is a technical exercise that few would have time or expertise to analyse in depth. Raw numbers of students and schools, however, tell us little about some of the key questions for monitoring the outcomes of the policy of 'choice', including:

- Which schools and communities have benefited from the policy; and which have been disadvantaged?
- How many new schools – and extensions to existing schools – have been fostered by the policy?
- What are the factors associated with the expression of choice: resources? religious background? enrolment criteria? school structures?
- What have been the effects on teacher numbers and characteristics?
- Is 'choice' resulting in changes in student choice of subjects and other curriculum patterns?
- What are the effects on student participation and achievement?
- What are the changing characteristics of students and communities affected by the policy?

The answers to each of these questions would require a range of detailed data, which are generally unavailable to the public.

Previous governments – and more recently the current Federal Opposition – have supplemented the 'choice' principle with concerns about quality and equity in school resources. The work of the MCEETYA taskforce on school resources, for example, is developing advice on the recurrent resources that all schools should have to achieve the national goals of schooling for their students. This taskforce has presented a 'national school resources standard' as a policy goal for all governments.

Providing a minimum standard of resources for all students may be a long-standing and fundamental policy goal, but it is impossible to monitor progress from currently-available data. We are left with drawing implications from state and sector aggregate and average financial statistics. But even here, the interested reader is confronted with a bewildering array of technical issues: accrual versus cash accounting; implications of recurrent and capital costs, such as estimating the 'user costs of capital'; making sense of the funding provided by governments across general per capita grants, capital grants and interest subsidies for building projects and targeted programs for schools, students and communities; and the balance of Commonwealth, state/territory and private sources of funding. Not surprisingly, all sides of the political arguments about school funding and resources select from the data for their own advocacy purposes. The dysfunctional split in responsibility for schools now embedded in federal arrangements offers governments wishing to avoid controversy and challenge to their policies a ready means of burying major indicators of policy trends in a mire of statistics which distract from the educational realities that confront Australia's schools.

School retention and participation are clearly fundamental policy issues for education. But deciding when and how to use data on *apparent* school retention rates (which are significantly affected by internal and overseas migration and by post-year 10 structures in schools and TAFE, for example) on the one hand and *actual* school and education participation rates for particular age groups (for example, 15-19 year olds) on the other is a key technical and educational policy question. Similar questions can be raised about monitoring trends on *completion* rates, for Year 12 and its equivalent in the vocational sector or for a particular age group (for example, 19 year olds). Decisions about such data sources will determine the validity of otherwise of the conclusions drawn.

A final example: governments are increasingly interested in policies to support higher levels of literacy and numeracy. But the annual national reports, through MCEETYA, on student testing are presented at very high levels of aggregation and show very little change in trends over time. These reports do provide valuable information on differences in achievement by groups of students, such as indigenous students, but can tell us little about trends and ranges in literacy and numeracy standards over time, and how these relate to other policies, such as concerning school choice and school resources.

Understanding these issues involves a number of complex technical and policy questions. What is needed is a credible mechanism for the collection, coordination and analysis of data so that their policy implications can be clearly described and explained. A national agency, established by ministers but operating at arms' length from governments, would be best placed to do this. Such a body would need to have both technical expertise and authority and the capacity to balance policy and political sensitivities, including balancing the legitimate needs of governments and educational providers and the broader community's need for an independent view of policy implications.

The potential benefits of a more vigorous national agency for advising on schools policy, including regular monitoring of school statistics, is discussed further in a later section of this paper.

Some of the more hardened observers of the politics of education in Australia might see the establishment of an 'arms' length' process for the collection and analysis of schools' data as a naïve view of the way things work at the highest levels of government. Such scepticism is understandable in the light of recent history.

But it should be possible to persuade the community generally and government more particularly that the fostering of informed public debate on trends in the finances, resources and educational inputs, outputs and outcomes – and the relationship between these – would be a positive step. The alternative is the current situation: increasing media and public interest in school issues, but no readily available data to inform debate. As a result, the data are mainly interpreted by ministers and interest groups. Public confusion continues to be exploited for political gain and media reports are generally superficial and simplistic.

In the void left by the abolition of advisory and consultative bodies such as the Schools Commission and the Higher Education Commission and then the National Board of Employment Education and Training, it is left to the small cadre of those with expertise in reading the entrails of assorted sets of data to work independently of government in order to try to bring to public attention matters of policy significance. There is no doubt that, had they

still been in operation, the bodies referred to above would have alerted the public to such important indicators of policy trends as, for example, the extent to which teachers in Australian schools now rely for their salaries on the public purse. Across both the public and private sectors, 90 to 95 per cent of all teachers in Australian schools now have their salaries met entirely from the public purse, the remainder being a proportion of the teachers in non-government, independent schools, whose salaries are less than fully covered by their public grants.

Angus argues that, while the Schools Commission may have run its course, its demise has left a vacuum. "Nearly 20 years on it is clear that MCEETYA cannot fill the void. MCEETYA has achieved some success. All education ministers have agreed to a set of national goals for schooling, a national curriculum and assessment framework and various national policies on important educational matters. What is needed is a national system of school funding that underpins these educational frameworks" (Angus, 2007).

As Angus points out also, there has been almost no progress despite attempts to produce such agreement through MCEETYA. Following the introduction of the Enrolment Benchmark Adjustment (EBA) referred to above, the state Labor governments responded in part by establishing a national Schools Resourcing Taskforce through MCEETYA. The Taskforce was asked to advise all ministers on resources in public schools, especially to answer the accusation by the Commonwealth Government that there was a direct relationship between resources required by public schools and the net transfer of students to the private sector.

This Taskforce continued its work even after the Commonwealth was forced to back down on the EBA. The focus of its work changed to advising governments of resources needed to achieve the National Goals for Schooling. This became a significant reference point for the Federal Labor Opposition in the development of its policies for schools prior to the 2004 election. The Taskforce put forward the idea of a national schools resources standard which would be sufficient to enable all students to achieve the educational goals set out in the National Goals for Schooling. Its current role and functions are unclear, largely attributable to the wariness of individual governments to commit to the resources required to meet the standard. In particular, the absence of any firm commitment by the Commonwealth to real increases in recurrent funding for government schools beyond indexation is a major impediment to any further progress.

There is no doubt that the federal funding arrangements for schools in Australia have evolved in ways highly conducive to duplication, buck-passing, blame-shifting, political opportunism and bullying. The role and responsibility of the Commonwealth has been ill-defined; and there are inadequate mechanisms for the shared development of educationally strategic policies based on the best available evidence.

A recent example of political opportunism was the sudden and unilateral decision by the Commonwealth in 2006 to introduce a National School Chaplaincy Programme. The $90 million allocated to this program over three years was highly significant for this form of targeted program, comparable with the annual expenditure by the Commonwealth on teacher professional development. According to the Commonwealth Government, the program was a response to the call that chaplaincy services be made more broadly available. Where this call came from has not been identified, but it soon became clear that it did not come from school authorities. The National Catholic Education Commission advised that the program in its current form is not appropriate for Catholic schools, and representations from other religious

denominations sponsoring schools have also expressed concerns. The National School Chaplaincy Programme was not based on any evaluation of the chaplaincy programs already operating in parts of the public sector, or of the non-government sector.

Because of its greater financial capacity and its lack of responsibility for the direct delivery of education, there is greater scope and temptation for the Commonwealth than for the states and territories to indulge in political opportunism and point-scoring. As Calwell (2007) points out in his accompanying paper, the Commonwealth has always been able to use its funding capacity to force states, territories and non-government school authorities to adopt its own particular priorities, by threatening to withhold funds.

But states and territories are not necessarily passive victims in this kind of game. If the Commonwealth imposes a policy which attracts political opposition, states and territories are well placed to accept the funding but to deflect criticisms towards the Commonwealth (even if the state or territory was not necessarily averse to the policy imposed by the Commonwealth). This was the stance taken by the NSW Government when the Commonwealth recently imposed a form of reporting to parents that was opposed in NSW by many in the education community, including principals, teachers and parents. The NSW Government argued that it could not afford to put the state's Commonwealth funding at risk by refusing to comply.

One of the cards that school authorities hold in our federal system is that, in the end, it is up to them whether or not policies imposed by the Commonwealth can work, and can be seen to work, effectively. Rather than resisting the conditions imposed by the Commonwealth, authorities can simply accept them in order to secure the funds, and then manipulate the conditions in order to suit their own circumstances or purposes. In this case, the Commonwealth may judge that it is unable to afford politically to have its programs simply fail to be implemented.

A further example of such policy dysfunction was the establishment of a national network of twenty-five Australian Technical Colleges. At a total cost of $343 million over five years,[16] this was one of the Howard Government's defining education policies in the 2004 election. This policy was trumpeted as a major event in Australia's federal system, where for the first time the Commonwealth Government would take direct responsibility for the delivery of education.

The application of this policy, however, has taken a very different form. The bulk of the colleges that have been announced are either existing non-government schools or have had to be established as independent non-government schools in order to qualify for general recurrent grants and other programs for schools. Because the Commonwealth insisted that applicants adopt Australian Workplace Agreements as a condition of funding, almost all of the applications from State Government authorities refused to do this and were unsuccessful. The Victorian Government was able to attract funding for some of its existing secondary colleges, either alone or as part of a consortium with an existing non-government school, by separating the employment conditions for new administrative staff and existing teaching staff, and applying the AWA condition to the new staff only.

Some of the agreements with Catholic school authorities were even more creative. As reported in a letter to its members by the General Secretary of the NSW Independent

[16] Hon. Andrew Robb, *Media Release*, 9 February 2007.

Education Union, in relation to the winning tender by a Catholic college in Port Macquarie and Taree:

> *… to this end the Diocese is establishing a separate company that will be the employer for all staff at the Technical College … This will be reflected in a collective Certified Agreement that will … mirror in all its terms and conditions the Teachers … State Award … In order to comply with the funding requirements employees will be offered individual Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) that will be identical to the Collective Agreement ….* [17]

In these cases, the Commonwealth has the choice of bearing the political costs of failing to get its programs implemented; or of agreeing to participate in a charade.

This approach by government in relation to education and our children's futures is not particularly edifying, nor does it represent a constructive use of time and resources. But perhaps what is most disturbing is that the practices of federalism in schools funding in this country act to reduce our school system to a matter of disputes about cost-shifting or industrial relations, rather than a matter of commitment to investment in schooling as a nation building enterprise and a source of shared, national pride.

The broader context

Bates (2007) describes the current federal schools funding situation as having produced "a pernicious maldistribution of resources in the provision of adequate schooling in Australia". Both Bates and Michael Furtado, in their respective accompanying papers, remind us, however, that current problems in schools funding cannot be simply attributed to dysfunctions in the federal system. Trends in schools funding need to be seen in their broader context.

Bates argues that the current realities of schools funding are the outcome of shifts in the economic, political and cultural contexts which have left public schooling stranded between "two great steering mechanisms: on the one hand, markets and money with all their associated strategies, risks and uncertainties; on the other hand, culture and values, with their competing demands for loyalty and belief".

Furtado (2007) also identifies these and other related factors and their effects on the role of governments:

> *The cultural imperative of nationalism, from 1870 onwards, giving dramatic impetus to the rationale for state schools, has long since gone, to be replaced by a global imperative, in which, while all subscribe to some forms of global identity, they actually succumb to a kind of fragmented identity based on ethnicity, gender, religion and class. Most of these identities are readily reflected in the variety of schools that have emerged since the funding dispensations to non-government schools commenced from 1975 onwards.*

[17] Dick Shearman, *New College at Port Macquarie*, NSW/ACT Independent Education Union, General News, 21 December 2006.

> *Once the nationalistic imperative wanes, such a phenomenon cannot be contained within the ambit of one public school system, especially in a post-statist context, in which the very role of the state is to assist the reform agenda and actively disengage from the task of being a fair and just arbiter of educational provision in the polity other than to ensure that the conditions of the market economy, and especially the principles and practices of equal opportunity and inclusion, are upheld*. (Furtado, 2007)

The argument that schools funding in Australia reflects the effects of these broad economic, political and cultural shifts does not negate the argument that these effects have been exaggerated, rather than tempered, by the asymmetrical split in funding responsibilities for public and private schools between the two levels of government.

The Grimshaw Review of non-government schools in NSW (2002) concluded that:

> *Educational resourcing has become an issue of national significance and it is clear that any lasting new settlement in school funding can only be achieved on the basis of a consensus among the funding partners. Neither New South Wales nor any other jurisdiction acting alone can resolve the funding debate and see relations between the sectors restored to more-or-less equable levels. Work currently being undertaken at the national level on schools resourcing may therefore offer the best prospect in the longer term for a new funding deal that addresses the needs and entitlements of all Australian schools and their communities.*

Much the same conclusion had been reached the previous year by the author of this paper in the course of the *Inquiry into ACT Education Funding* (ACT Department of Education, Youth and Family Services, 2003).

If there is one area of striking agreement among those who have contributed papers to this project, however, it is that federal arrangements for the funding of public and private schools have now taken on a life of their own, to the point where they will be very difficult to change.

Angus doubts "*whether for the time being the Commonwealth and the states will agree to an alignment of funding so that there is a proper complementarity. It does not suit their political interests to do so*."

Caldwell sees little chance of agreement either among governments or stakeholder groups for a shift of power to the Commonwealth, whether or not involving constitutional change, to enable a truly 'national' approach to schooling. He refers to the "possibility of a continuing relatively high level of cooperation through the agreement of governments in forums such as MCEETYA or CoAG". Angus takes the contrasting view, that attempts to produce agreement through MCEETYA on a national system of schools funding to underpin educational frameworks on, for example, curriculum and assessment, have made almost no progress.

> *This is partly a result of the habitual distrust between the Commonwealth and states over financial matters but is also due to the fact that neither side feels compelled to reach an agreement since an agreement would impose some constraint over spending priorities. The Commonwealth seems content to position itself as the principal provider for the non-government sector and the states are obliged to provide principally for the government sector.*

> *Neither side recognises any impending crisis and there is no circuit-breaker in sight*. (Angus 2007)

This is a view that is widely held inside and beyond the education community. In the absence of an agreed national framework for enabling an analysis of whether individual schools have sufficient resources to produce the results expected of them, Angus argues that (as cited earlier) "*Australian education, once envied by experts from other countries for the equity of its school funding, is at risk of becoming socially educationally polarised … with a growing differentiation between those government and non-government schools that serve the families on high incomes and those who are not well off*."

The problem of federal arrangements for schools funding has now become such a source of frustration, exhaustion and cynicism, such a distraction from the realities in schools, that it is increasingly common to hear proposals from academics and politicians, in particular, either that there are no significant differences, in public policy terms, between public and private schools (and between vastly different kinds of private school); or that any differences can simply be ignored in funding arrangements; or that all problems can be swept away by governments supplying parents with public funding in the form of a voucher to take to their school of their choice. None of these proposals, even if they could be implemented, resolve the deficiencies in federal funding arrangements as set out above.

As Angus argues:

> *These deficiencies affect all school sectors. However, while the present funding arrangements remain in force it is hard to be optimistic about the longer-term future of public education as we know it. When I talk on an off the record basis with senior educators who throughout their professional life have been staunch supporters of state education systems, they are invariably pessimistic*. (Angus, 2007).

From the standpoint of the private school sector, the current arrangements lack integrity. While they have secured continuing increases in public funding, they have been brought into disrepute by ongoing controversy and reliance on political deals.

Those who are critical of the outcomes of current federal funding arrangements for school on the grounds that they are inconsistent with the responsibility of governments for equality of educational opportunity are not alone. The conclusion reached in the latest report in the OECD *Education at a Glance* series (2006) has relevance to circumstances in Australia:

> *The education systems in OECD countries will have to make considerable headway if they are to meet the demands of modern societies. Some of these changes will require additional investment, but the evidence also suggests that money is a necessary but not sufficient guarantee for strong results. Put simply, education systems need to develop more challenging and more supportive learning environments and learn to be more flexible and effective in improving learning outcomes. And they must scale back the inherent class bias and sometimes catastrophically regressive way of funding existing educational opportunities – taxing the poor to subsidise educational opportunity for the rich – in existing systems)*. (OECD, 2006)

Lack of clarity about the purpose of Commonwealth intervention in schooling

Watson (1998, 2007) identifies the fact that the Commonwealth became a major partner in school funding in the absence of any nationally agreed, overarching educational policy objective for the provision of its funding**.** In the context of World War II, it was the ceding by states of their income taxing powers to the Commonwealth that created the capacity for the Commonwealth to enter the field of education. Watson then traces the emergence of human capital theory as a basis for the advocacy of increased public investment in education at all levels in Australia. This kind of argument was used to support increased Commonwealth expenditure on higher education. It was also the rationale used by state education ministers, when they requested direct assistance from the Commonwealth in 1963, citing economic goals. But, as Watson documents, successive Commonwealth governments were careful to avoid economic issues in their policy statements for the funding of schools. This is de spite the fact that the Commonwealth Government has the primary role and responsibility for national economic policy.

By the 1970s, there were social, educational and demographic imperatives for Commonwealth funding assistance to schools over and above what states were providing. And the Commonwealth's greater revenue basis gave it the capacity to assist. But the Commonwealth's entry to schools funding, unlike its entry to funding for universities, was grounded more in political than educational imperatives. It was the willingness of Menzies, as Liberal Prime Minister, to reverse a long held opposition to Federal involvement in schooling, that took the Commonwealth into schooling. The split in the Australian Labor Party and the formation of the Catholic-dominated breakaway Democratic Labor Party provided the ideal opportunity. Menzies promised to provide direct Federal assistance to non-government schools, aimed at luring Catholic voters away from the Labor Party while its ranks were divided on the issue of state aid for their schools. His landslide win in 1963 turned schools funding into a challenge issue that Labor had to accept. Labor won the 1972 election with its promise of funding increases for public and non-government schools. The entry of the Commonwealth to schools funding had the effect of spreading the politics of schools funding to another and more fiscally powerful level of government.

There are many signs that the Commonwealth's role in schools funding has never been able to rise above the political opportunism and the sectarian politics that loomed so large in bringing it into existence. If anything, the signs are that satisfying political considerations has become even more blatant. The *Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement through Choice and Opportunity) Act* covers schools financial assistance for 2005 to 2008. This Act sets down the terms of the agreement that a state or territory must make with the Commonwealth for the Commonwealth Minister to authorise payment of this funding in respect of government schools.[18] These conditions ride roughshod over the states' and territories' authority and power for determining where responsibility is best placed for school staffing appointments and for other functions within the school systems they own and operate. The conditions require devolution of responsibility for programs, staffing, budget and other aspects of schools' operations to individual school principals. But when it comes to Catholic schools, the Act has a 'let out' clause, providing for arrangements for staffing appointments

[18] *Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement through Choice and Opportunity) Act* 2004, Sections 14 & 31. http://scaleplus.law.gov.au/cgi-bin/download.pl?/scale/data/pasteact/3/3687 (accessed 9/5/07).

"*to take account of the relationship of the school with the bishop, parish priests and the leadership of religious institutions*".

The current situation is not sustainable. The most principled and the most practical way to move forward is to place educational considerations and goals at the heart of federal schools funding arrangements, with an emphasis on clarifying the role and responsibility of the Commonwealth through its major programs.

When government funds schools, what they are providing primarily is teachers. Public funds are being provided to meet the costs of students' tuition, through funding salaries to hire teachers. Teacher salaries are the major driver of schools funding. Of all the factors that governments can influence to affect the quality of an individual's schooling, the quality of teaching is widely accepted as the most significant. Ensuring that there is an adequate supply of well-educated and able teachers is one of the major responsibilities of government in education and the key to equality of educational opportunity.

By focusing less on the dollars governments provide, and more on the teachers whose salaries these dollars pay, the citizens of this country might be able to frame sensible questions about the respective responsibilities of the Commonwealth and the states and territories. They might be able to frame even more sensible questions – from the standpoint of students in schools and the community generally, about who should decide the conditions on which students gain access to those teachers and how those teachers should be allocated among schools – than those that lead to wrangles about parents' status as taxpayers rather than about the education of their children.

A rationale of focusing general recurrent funding for schools on the costs of teachers has the virtue of a logical consistency with the historical roots of public funding for both sectors in Australia. The original political imperative for recurrent subsidies to non-government schools in the 1970s was the crisis in the large Catholic sector. This resulted from the decline in the supply of religious teachers prepared to contribute their services. It can be argued that there is both a need and a rationale for a new funding framework grounded in the provision of teachers, given that the public purse now provides fully for the salaries of such a large majority of the teachers in the non-government sector, as well as of all teachers in public schools.

To express Commonwealth and state and territory recurrent funding of schools in both sectors in terms of the numbers and conditions of teachers they provide to achieve agreed educational purposes would have the virtue of being an approach that most members of the community could readily understood. Such an approach could also provide a means of maintaining the real value of grants – they could be linked to actual increases in teacher salary costs. This would provide an alternative to the current practice where the Commonwealth, as well as some states, pass on movements in expenditure on government schools to the private sector, whether or not these are relevant.

It would be naïve to imagine that reform of federal funding arrangements for schools based on teacher salaries would, of itself, remove political tensions or ideological debates. But such a reform could transform the quality of public debate and broaden the range of those able to take part in it.

The Current Situation: Teaching and Learning

Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting

Curriculum

> *While the Australian Government's funding contribution for schools is significant, State and Territory education authorities have the primary responsibility for the provision of schooling in Australia. School curriculum issues, including in relation to science and religious education, are therefore State and Territory responsibilities …*

This is an extract from a response to a constituent from the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training in March 2006[19]. The constituent had written to the Minister seeking clarification on the specific issue of whether the Commonwealth Government advocated the teaching of a US program entitled 'Intelligent Design' as a replacement for, or in addition to, the teaching of the theory of evolution in school science in Australia.

The Minister's response reflects accurately the constitutional reality that responsibility for curriculum, as for schooling generally, lies with the states and territories. At the same time it serves the purpose of locating responsibility for a potential controversy with another level of government.

But this is an expedient and selective response, which belies the true situation. The Commonwealth has had no compunction about intervening in the responsibility of states and territories in relation to the history curriculum, for example. Nor was its intervention confined to the issue of improving consistency across the nation, but rather it was motivated by the Commonwealth's disagreement with the content and philosophical approach to the teaching of history in some of the states.

As described by Alan Reid, in his accompanying paper, "Putting the Public Back into Curriculum" (2007):

> *Since 2003, the Liberal Federal Government has been pursuing an increasingly interventionist agenda, proposing a national certificate of education, compulsory (narrative) history at every year level, common 'plain-English' report cards, national benchmark testing, nationally consistent curriculum in 'key' areas of learning and so on.*
> *Predictably the states have either resisted on the grounds of local autonomy, reluctantly agreed (especially where they have been threatened with the loss of federal funding) or compromised by taking a lowest common denominator approach, such as adopting 'national' approaches that identify what is already common in state curricula. Given the nature of the federal proposals, many of which herald a return to an educational past, these responses are understandable. But they are not productive.*

The real story is that there have been various attempts by the Commonwealth over the past four decades to strengthen national curriculum collaboration in Australia, employing the

[19] Copy of letter held by author.

disparate rationales of consistency, quality and the economic use of resources. These have all succumbed to a range of obstacles. States have fought hard any attempts to weaken their historical 'ownership' of curriculum.

According to Reid,

> "*since school education is constitutionally the responsibility of the States, for most of Australia's history curriculum debates were conducted inside state boundaries and largely dominated by education professionals. This history of state-based curriculum 'ownership' meant that when, from the 1970s onwards, the Australian Government began to express an interest in curriculum matters there was a tendency for the states to protect their curriculum turf, by overtly or passively resisting attempts to engineer national approaches or by trying to control the process.*"

What serious attempts there have been to achieve greater national consistency in curriculum have largely been made by the Commonwealth, rather than through spontaneous collaboration among the states and territories. Angus (2007) acknowledges this in relation to the current situation:

> *The present federal system in which the Commonwealth government assumes leadership for providing an overarching policy framework through a ministerial council has been a positive force over the years, particularly in regard to the brokering of agreement about the national curriculum framework*. (Angus, 2007)

For those who see value in collaboration between states and territories and the Commonwealth to improve the consistency of curriculum across the country, progress has been slow and halting. This is despite the arrival of technologies that make collaboration more practicable than was the case for most of the first century following Federation.

This cautious response by states can be attributed at least partly to the fact that they have already invested time, resources and political capital in working through these curriculum issues in their own jurisdictions and are reluctant to see their efforts wasted or undermined. It may also reflect an understanding on the part of states that, in working through these issues as the authorities directly responsible for the provision of schooling, they have gained insights and experience that may not be shared by a Commonwealth government more distant from the field.

Some observers are more critical of the cautious and defensive behaviour of (mainly state) authorities and of the current state of curriculum in Australia's federal arrangements for schooling. Bruce Wilson, for example, in his accompanying paper, "The Politics of Curriculum" resorts to metaphor:

> *Curriculum in Australia is a dog's breakfast. Despite recent attempts to achieve greater consistency, it is one area of Australian school education in which practice across the nation is utterly incompatible.*
>
> *Each state and territory has its own structures for developing, implementing, supporting and assessing curricula. … Each jurisdiction adopts its own approach to the structure of the curriculum, while claiming to operate within a set of national goals which have been painfully negotiated twice. The goals do not impose unreasonable constraints on*

> *curriculum development. Indeed a comparison of the curriculum frameworks of any two states will reveal that adherence to the same goals can produce startling variety, suggesting that the national goals impose no constraint at all. Those are the kinds of goals you want if the outcome you seek is complete autonomy with an illusion of commonality. …*
>
> *Such variety is extraordinary in a relatively small nation with a mostly common language and a strong sense of a shared culture*. (Wilson, 2007)

There is support for this point of view.

> *The current system of curriculum and assessment bears all the marks and wounds of a system that has emerged over time rather than one that has been carefully planned. Despite the numerous examples of co-operation and collaboration among the states and Commonwealth, there are many more examples of inefficiency, waste, opportunistic politicking and dysfunction*. (Riordan, 2006)

Wilson grounds his overview of the state of curriculum nationally in the realities of classrooms. As he points out, differences in curriculum documents among states do not necessarily translate into equivalent difference in school practice. Teachers in the privacy of their own classrooms across the country produce their own versions of the official curriculum guidelines and requirements as they grapple with the individual differences of their students in schools in vastly disparate communities. He makes the wry observation that they often deal with the stream of ad hoc and uncoordinated innovations and policy changes by "hunkering down and acting on the assumption that they will survive most innovations, an assumption which proves empirically well-founded".

He observes that "it would mostly be difficult to identify the state in which a specific school was located based on curriculum and teaching practice alone. One reason for this is that the variety in curriculum is not only evident between states and territories, but within them". State agencies might jealously guard their curriculum autonomy and display a reluctance to learn from each other. It is, however, quite possible that classroom educators are participating in a greater degree of cross-fertilisation across the eight jurisdictions than central authorities know about, as well as drawing on curriculum from the Curriculum Corporation, Commonwealth projects and international sources.

As Reid (2007) points out in his accompanying paper, curriculum debate cannot simply be reduced to a demarcation dispute based on geographical boundaries drawn up in the 19th century. Curriculum – what our children should be taught – "lies at the heart of the education enterprise":

> *When public monies are expended on education, it is assumed that such expenditure will function in the public interest. Since what constitutes the public interest is contested, then public engagement in debates about the ways in which education policy contributes to the public good should be an important part of the democratic life of any society … Curriculum lies at the heart of the education enterprise and should therefore be a key focus of these debates.*

Arguments for and against greater national consistency and commonality in curriculum all come up against the questions of 'whose curriculum?'

When there has been more than one authority involved in curriculum, there is nothing surprising in the fact that each has produced its own version of curriculum. These reflect different local traditions and power relations among the various contributors to curriculum policy and development between states. But they also reflect different understandings of the purposes and nuances of curriculum.

Over the past century, there has been a range of contending education philosophies about curriculum content and process. In the heat of debate, they can be represented falsely as dichotomies. Examples are the ongoing tensions between the academic curriculum and vocational and technical education; between the view that the curriculum should pass on to all children society's commonly valued and validated knowledge and the view that curriculum should be shaped around the needs and interest of each individual child to develop his or her unique, personal capabilities. There is continuing debate about whether there are different purposes for curriculum to serve according to particular stages of schooling – from early childhood, through primary and secondary to the post-compulsory stage; or whether schooling is a seamless process with a corresponding curriculum. State differences embody changing responses over time to these persistently contested issues. So it is not surprising to find that arguments for changes to curriculum decision-making structures and processes federally are often thinly veiled arguments about the content of the curriculum.

It is certainly not the case that national consistency and commonality are universally hailed as virtues. Relocating the source of authority for curriculum is seen as one means for keeping out opposing ideological forces, or even for reducing the influence of governments significantly.

John Roskam, for example, argues that "for decades, school curriculums have been manipulated to serve a particular world view" (Roskam, 2006). Roskam sees damage control as a central argument for a federal system:

> *the whole point of a federal system, and of dividing power between different levels of government, is to dilute that power and limit the reach of government. Having each state and territory administering its own curriculums might be expensive and inefficient. But arguments based on expense and inefficiency have their limits. … Attempts to centralise the curriculum ignore one of the key advantages of a federal system. A mistake made by one state government affects only the people unlucky enough to be living in that state. Exactly that principle applies to education*. (Roskam, 2006)

In his paper, "Comparing School Systems across Australia", Banks agrees with Roskam on this point:

> *While greater uniformity should bring national benefits in some areas, it can have risks in others. The fact that so much is contentious about educational system design is cause for caution. The imposition of a uniformly bad approach can turn what might have been a local problem into a national one*. (Banks, 2005)

Roskam argues against centralising the curriculum through increasing Commonwealth control on the grounds that "if the curriculum was written at the national level, it would be a process eight times more complicated than now, and with eight times as many compromises". Roskam backs his arguments against Commonwealth control with specific examples of recent 'administrative blunders' by the Commonwealth (in areas other than education).

David Kemp, former Commonwealth Education Minister from 1996 to 2001, shares Roskam's opposition to state governments having "a monopoly over the school curriculum". Kemp, who served as Minister in the Howard Government from 1996 to 2001, argues that "the prospect of having a monopoly over the school curriculum is surely one of the great motivating forces that attracts the faddists and ideologues" (Kemp, 2007). In contrast to Roskam, he argues that the only government that can bring together the elements necessary to achieve a new high quality curriculum available for adoption around Australia is the Commonwealth Government. But he does not see any curriculum developed by the Commonwealth as being mandatory, arguing that parents should be able to pick the curriculum to be taught into their children's schools "*drawing on the best minds in each subject area and the best evidence-based teaching … There are real possibilities for the production of new high quality curriculums outside the historic institutional battles between school systems, teacher unions and universities … In principle, this can be done by private think tanks and organisations as well as (or better than) by government authorities*."

In Kemp's scenario, information and communications technologies would be used, not to aid collaboration among states to develop curriculum consistency against agreed standards, but to permit schools to select from a smorgasbord of curricula developed nationally and internationally. Kemp argues further that choice of curriculum from an international smorgasbord does not mean that "we have to accept lack of comparability across the country. The issue here is not curriculum, but standards and assessment."

These examples illustrate that, especially on the conservative side of politics, there is an ideological schism when it comes to federal arrangements for curriculum. On the one side, there are the 'culture warriors' seeking the reimposition of older forms of authority; and on the other side are those encouraging individualism.

In his book, *The War for Children's Minds*, Stephen Law argues that what we are seeing, in the form of the so-called 'culture wars', is a war between two ways of looking at the world. One is the idea that morality comes from an external authority – human or divine – and is imposed on the individual. The other is the view that values come from within and that individuals should be free to question and to think critically and rationally for themselves – to develop the capacity to think independently and rationally about how the world works and how things came to be the way they are and to take act in the ways they consider most appropriate – as long as they are not damaging others. This is a way of thinking traditionally associated with small 'l' liberalism. And, as Law points out, this idea of a 'culture war' cuts across traditional political allegiances, left and right.

In recent times, there has been a push by the Commonwealth Government to impose its own 'authorised' view of history on the states as the basis for curriculum. That being said, the national history summit which ensued provided a useful reminder of the potential benefits of bringing together some of our leading historians and educators for the purposes of debating approaches to curriculum.

The view that an 'authorised' curriculum should be imposed on all schools comes into conflict, however, with the political shift described by Don Aitkin (2005) as "the triumph of individualism over social solidarity". According to Aitkin, "*individualism has diluted the homogeneity of Australian identity. Conforming to socially prescribed models of behaviour and character, so heavily sanctioned in the past, has given way to the endless pursuit of*

authenticity to the self, creating a population much more diverse in aspirations than ever before …"

This is consistent with Kemp's argument that "*ending the monopoly of state curriculums will establish accountability by schools to parents for the curriculum they teach, an accountability parents would welcome and one very much in harmony with the federal Government's philosophy of choice in education.*"

Kemp's scenario simply shifts the imposition of authority from curriculum to assessment and reporting. He refers to examples of national and international assessments which "*assume that students have not studied the same curriculum. They are designed to find out what students have learned against common standards from the enormous variety of curriculum they have actually studied*." He goes on to argue that such forms of assessment are compatible with systems that "enable parents and the community to determine what and how well students have learned, and to compare the performances of schools and school systems".

This argument – that it is not desirable to prescribe even broad curriculum requirements at the national level – raises both practical and ethical questions of how it would be either possible or desirable to monitor the performance of schools or students at that level. What is the use or significance of information gathered in the absence of any explicit or agreed criteria as to what students were expected or required to be learning in the first place? And, if the acquisition of certain knowledge and skill is so central to the national interest and to "standards" as to require national monitoring, what can be the argument against requiring that it be taught in the universal curriculum?

As to informing parental choice among schools, does monitoring or assessment for this purpose really need to be done at the national level? Parents are, after all, generally seeking information in order to choose among schools in their local area, rather than sending their children away for their schooling or basing decisions about where to live on a national comparison of schools. And would the form of high stakes assessment advocated by Kemp not drive over time the development of a de facto national curriculum – to enable schools to teach to the test?

If, as Kemp and Roskam seem to be arguing, governments have no particular responsibility, acting on behalf of the states or the nation as a whole, for decisions about what values, knowledge and skills children and young people should be assisted to learn through schooling, then it is difficult to see what grounds governments would have for making schooling compulsory. If it is not because there is a body of valued learning to which all citizens should have access, then compulsory schooling is reduced to the status of child-minding. To reduce curriculum to a matter of individual parental choice is to ignore the fact that what students learn or fail to learn in a school has effects far beyond the interests of individual parents. At a very practical level, it can be argued that, having made schooling compulsory, governments were obliged to provide the resources needed, since few parents are able, even in today's affluent society, to meet the full costs of their children's tuition. Since society as a whole contributes heavily to the costs of schooling, public and private, it should be able, through its democratically elected governments, to express a broad interest in what schools teach.

Simply shifting the issue of monitoring standards from curriculum to assessment does not remove the question of the resources that must be brought to bear for individual students in individual schools to have comparable and fair opportunities to meet those standards.

Richard Teese draws out the ethical considerations linking curriculum to resources. "Curriculum is a political imposition whose moral authority rests on making adequate provision"; and, therefore:

> *If all Australian children, wherever they live and wherever they go to school, are to be set on the same broad course of values and ideas that will make them good men and women, government must remove the impediments thrown in their way by poverty, poor nutrition, ill health, ignorance, social distance, and poor or zero child care, to say nothing of conditions in schools.* (Teese, 2007).

In the current circumstances in Australia, it can be argued that the Coalition Government in Canberra couples an 'individualistic' view of schools funding with an 'authoritarian' view of curriculum.

The difficulties of separating the issues and tensions in relation to curriculum that are philosophical, political and ideological in nature from those that result from the constitutional arrangements in Australia have been evident over the past four decades. Caldwell and Reid, in their accompanying papers (along with Wilson and, by implication, Angus), see the current divisions in curriculum responsibilities between the states and the Commonwealth as outmoded and dysfunctional in light of the need for a curriculum to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Reid and Caldwell agree that the current Commonwealth Government under Howard has been pursuing an actively interventionist agenda, using the threat of loss of federal funding to achieve compliance with their goals, including common 'plain-English' report cards, national benchmark testing and nationally consistent curriculum in 'key' areas of learning. Caldwell sees the Commonwealth's initiatives as 'setting the pace', by adopting approaches in relation to issues such as simpler reporting to parents and the teaching of literacy that are more strongly aligned with community opinion. He also regards the use of funding to drive compliance as "part of the scene" in Commonwealth-State relations. Reid, by contrast, describes the nature of many of the Commonwealth's proposals as "a return to an educational past". And for this reason he finds the actions of the states, in resisting these proposals, as understandable, though not productive.

Reid (2007) maintains also that the arguments most frequently proffered as justification for national curriculum have produced a narrowly "technicist" response to national curriculum.

> *When the matter of national curriculum collaboration entered the educational landscape in the last third of the 20th century, the arguments (mainly put by successive Federal Ministers for Education) related to student mobility and the efficient use of resources. It was argued, for example, that the different state curricula disadvantaged children of military personnel when their parents moved states … This technical rationale rarely extends to broader philosophical considerations, such as the contribution of the school curriculum to nation building, and so invariably the debates about approaches to national curriculum have*

> *focused on the question of states' rights. That is, a narrow rationale has produced a technicist response.*

Reid points out in his longer *Re-thinking National Curriculum Collaboration. Towards an Australian Curriculum* (2005) that the needs of the 3 per cent of students who move interstate annually can be more sensibly met by other means than an entirely new curriculum edifice. He likewise rejects the metaphor of the 'standard railway gauge' which has often been invoked to support moving to a national curriculum on the grounds of efficiency. This was a metaphor frequently used by Minister Dawkins in the Hawke Government era, who conceived the need for greater consistency in education from the perspective of nation-building, as an aspect of micro-economic reform.

> *The complexity and ambiguity of the social, political, cultural and economic shifts that are shaping our world suggest that such an impoverished rationale is no longer adequate. The debate about approaches to national curriculum demands a richer rationale and set of responses.* (Reid, 2007)

As well as dealing with fundamental philosophical questions about the nature and purposes of curriculum, Reid makes the significant point that there is a need for an approach to curriculum nationally that would "provide the Australian government with a mechanism to directly influence the curriculum agenda". For one of the clearest sources of dysfunction in the current federal arrangements concerning curriculum policy development and decision-making is that the Commonwealth – the national government – has no formal standing. It can sponsor projects which generate curriculum materials. But it has no structure or process, other than MCEETYA and the leverage provided by its funding contribution, through which to express its interest, exert influence or exercise responsibility in a continuing way. When it comes to MCEETYA, the Commonwealth is technically outnumbered by the eight state and territory jurisdictions. Its position is especially apparent in the current circumstances, where all of these jurisdictions are governed by the opposing political party. The Commonwealth is, as it were, 'outside the tent', when it comes to curriculum. There is perhaps little wonder that it is behaving in ways commonly associated with this position and resorting to political opportunism and bullying.

It could be argued that the Commonwealth's funding role and the use of the funding lever to gain influence has been a hindrance rather than a help in gaining support from the states for curriculum collaboration. Especially given the lopsided nature of its funding role in schools, the Commonwealth dependence on dollars has arguably debased the national curriculum debate. Commonwealth requirements attached to funding have tended to be introduced in recent years as a means of confronting public school teacher unions and state authorities, despite the fact that they receive the much lesser share of Commonwealth funding than non-government authorities. Whether or not it funds schools, the Commonwealth Government should be able to make a case for its place in curriculum decision-making on the grounds of its responsibility for expressing the 'national interest'.

Instead, it has sought in recent years to intrude itself into curriculum through attaching an assortment of conditions to its funding. These include such requirements as: all children being taught Australian values and the dangers of drug use; national curriculum standards in numeracy, literacy, civics and citizenship, science and information technology; and minimum time in schools for physical education. The lack of responsibility for the implementation of curriculum in any school or system has proven conducive to political opportunism and to this scatter-gun approach.

While the Commonwealth remains outside the structures and processes where any real educational debate about the nature and content of curriculum is conducted, it will continue to launch sporadic raids. At the national level, debate about national curriculum is likely to remain largely grounded in the question expressed in Wilson's rhetorical question: "If we were designing a management structure for curriculum in Australia to meet current circumstances, is this the system we would devise?" (Wilson, 2007). His assessment of the current situation is that this system is denying to the nation as a whole "*the advantages of commonality, shared responsibility and economies of scale*".

> *Australian curriculum management is in about the state of mining exploration in this country a couple of decades ago. Mining exploration was then run by engineers and geologists, conducted for the benefit of those who ran it, and managed essentially without a rational analysis of need or cost or return on investment. That is how we do curriculum. We presently spend scandalous amounts of money exploring the deep geology of curriculum in every corner of the country, sinking numberless exploratory shafts, and building competing infrastructure to exploit the same resource base. It is time the exercise was directed to the benefit of its users, rather than its providers.* (Wilson, 2007).

For Geoff Masters, chief executive of the Australian Council for Educational Research, the fact that there is good deal of commonality among state curricula raises the question of whether there is unjustifiable duplication of effort at state level. He recently drew attention to the example of what is happening in the senior secondary school:

> *With a population less than some American states, Australia now has seven government authorities developing nine senior certificates … It has to be asked, in a country of 20 million people, do we really need nine senior certificates? As part of these nine certificates, the seven authorities develop 27 different mathematics courses and more than 20 history courses that can be used for tertiary entrance. They also develop other non-TER mathematics and history courses*. (Masters, 2007).

Some would argue that such course differences within state certificates often arise from the perceived need to differentiate and diversify learning programs even within the one discipline area to reflect the range of students' interests and abilities.

According to Masters, however:

> *The closer one looks, the more obvious the problem becomes. A recent ACER study showed that 95 per cent of the chemistry taught across Australia is common to all states and territories. In other words, the seven government authorities are busily developing essentially the same chemistry curriculum seven times. Despite this, each state has its own method for assessing students' mastery of this curriculum and its own system for reporting student results, making it impossible to compare chemistry results between any two states. This observation is not limited to chemistry: 90 per cent of advanced mathematics and 85 per cent of physics content are common to all states and territories.* (Masters, 2007)

The study to which Masters refers is the investigation commissioned in 2005 by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training and carried out by ACER. It culminated in a report on models and implementation arrangements for an Australian

Certificate of Education, *Australian Certificate of Education, Exploring the way forward* (ACER, 2006).

It is no accident that, in order to refute Masters' argument, Roskam also uses the example of science:

> *The claim that Australia as a country of 20 million people is too small to have eight different education systems is … flawed. If we really believed that a student in Melbourne should be taught the same science course as a student in Brisbane, then in theory there's no reason Australian students shouldn't get the same science curriculum as students in New Zealand.* (Roskam 2006)

Nor is it surprising that it was in the areas of chemistry, advanced mathematics and physics in the senior curriculum where the ACER study found the greatest convergence among the states and territories. These are areas of the curriculum that are less likely to be the battleground for waging political and ideological contests about what constitutes the public good. Masters would have had more trouble with his argument had he chosen, say, history, for his example.

At the same time, there are differences which are difficult to justify on educational grounds. Masters (2007) and Wilson (2007) concur that these real differences are exacerbated by a bewildering variety of terminologies, which render curriculum statements and guidelines difficult to understand and to use. As the ACER study revealed, there are as many different schemes for reporting Year 12 results as there are agencies responsible for doing this.

The history of Commonwealth-state relations in approaching national curriculum has consisted largely in attempts by the Commonwealth to affect state-based curricula. Reid's paper cited above provides an excellent guide to this history. He points out that over more than four decades, "a *key Commonwealth strategy has been to seek to influence the official curricula of the States by indirect means, such as funding curriculum projects that develop teaching resources in (nationally) strategic curriculum areas*" (Reid, 2005).

The Australian Science Education Project (ASEP) in 1969 was the first of these initiatives in national curriculum development. Then followed the establishment by the Commonwealth, in 1974, of the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC). It generated a significant discussion paper in 1980 on core curriculum for Australian schools and undertook such curriculum projects as the Social Education Materials Project (SEMP). This was a period where the imperatives for change were more grounded in educational concerns than approaches which were to follow, which were more influenced by political, economic and bureaucratic considerations. Even this gentle approach, which avoided challenging the states' curriculum autonomy, failed to avoid the destructive effects of what Reid aptly describes as 'shifting political whims'. The CDC was abolished under the Fraser Government and re-established as part of the Schools Commission by the Hawke Government until the Commission was itself abolished after the 1987 election.

The next period of development, under Labor Minister John Dawkins, Reid describes as one of full-on frontal assault – an explicit and determined push for a single national curriculum, while allowing for legitimate expressions of state differences. Cautious support from largely Labor states led to a great deal of activity, which included mapping existing curricula in states and territories as a basis for the development of national curriculum statements. For a time, New South Wales, where there was a Coalition government, played a leading role. But by the

time the writing teams based in the various states had developed the 'Statements and Profiles' for the agreed eight Learning Areas there had been a change in the political balance among the states and there was less willingness to surrender control over the curriculum. "*The most ambitious attempt at national curriculum collaboration in Australia's history had foundered on the old rock of State-Commonwealth suspicion*" (Reid, 2005).

In Reid's account, the 1993 to 2003 period "saw a return to the more indirect strategies for national collaboration that had characterised the first period". Most states adopted the eight learning areas, some in a modified form. The Curriculum Corporation (jointly funded by the States and the Commonwealth) began to play an active role in common materials production. Projects that were sponsored by the Commonwealth to influence state and territory curricula included the Discovering Democracy Program and the Quality Teaching Project.

Then in 2003, Coalition Minister Brendan Nelson attempted to achieve greater national consistency in curriculum through imposing conditions on Commonwealth funding. This attempt soon degenerated, according to Reid, into an exercise in consistency, "*a lowest common denominator approach that makes an official curriculum out of only those content elements that already exist*" (Reid, 2005).

On the basis of past experience, it is difficult to predict the outcome of decisions now being taken by the Commonwealth and states through MCEETYA to achieve greater national consistency in Australia.

Commonwealth and state Ministers for Education, meeting together as a Ministerial Council, have resolved to pursue a national approach to curriculum on a number of occasions. The most recent example was the decision of the April 2007 MCEETYA meeting to develop nationally consistent school curriculum. This decision was variously described in the major media releases following the meeting: The Commonwealth Minister Julie Bishop claimed that the decision was "a victory for commonsense as States finally agree to a nationally consistent school curriculum" (Bishop, 2007); while the Victorian Minister said that "it was pleasing to see that the proposal put forward by the states and territories was the one adopted by the Commonwealth" (*Daily Telegraph*, 2007).

Leaving aside the question of whether the Commonwealth or the states should get the credit for this decision – a perennial question at each Ministerial Council meeting – the practical outcome of the meeting was to continue with the model of a national working group of officials 'to determine the framework of a national curriculum' in core subjects. This process is also likely to consider options for the oversight of curriculum, assessment and reporting, including the possible establishment of a national body to do this.

The MCEETYA decision was subsequently overshadowed less than a fortnight after the ministers' meeting by state premiers, meeting without the Commonwealth as the 'Council for the Australian Federation', who issued their own report[20] and resolution to pursue nationally-consistent curriculum based on the traditional academic disciplines. This action indicates that, if necessary, states can exclude the Commonwealth from national collaboration on education if necessary, especially where no Commonwealth funding is involved.

[20] Entitled *The Future of Schooling*: Farrah Tomazin, "Back to basics: studies scrapped in curriculum revamp", *The Age*, 24 April 2004.

Although this kind of 'process' decision is typical of Ministerial Council discussions on curriculum, the tone of the media releases are perhaps more constructive and positive than previous announcements, given the ministers' acceptance of what they see is 'huge community support for a nationally consistent curriculum' and the reinforcement of this by state premiers. And the outcome is supported by both of the major parties at federal level. But it is still a long way from presenting a clear view of outcomes, timetable and structures.

The debate about federal arrangements for curriculum in Australia seems to be happening on two separate planes. Both Reid (2007) and Masters (2007) are impatient with the stance they see being adopted by states. According to Masters:

> *Each appears to consider its curriculum superior to those of the rest of the country, which are variously described as lacking in academic rigour, unresponsive to local and student needs, too rigid and bureaucratic, based on narrow and limited forms of assessment, and captured by educational fads. But a dispassionate analysis suggests that state curricula have much more in common than is often suggested*. (Masters, 2007)

Among ministers, what commitment there has been to national curriculum over the years has largely been grounded in utilitarian concerns, extrinsic to the curriculum itself. As the recent MCEETYA decisions demonstrate, this remains the case.

Reid and Masters argue, however, that the moves to national curriculum should not be an obsession with consistency or the more economic use of resources, but much higher order considerations:

> *… more important than removing unnecessary differences, minimising duplication and achieving comparability across states is the opportunity that now exists to re-think the school curriculum. This is a national priority and it requires a national response. For example, too few students are choosing to study advanced mathematics and science. Better teaching will be part of the solution, but bold new approaches to school curricula also are required. The answer will not be found in a return to curricula of the 1950s, but in new high-quality multi-disciplinary curricula that are grounded in contemporary issues such as global warming, salinity, nuclear energy, genetically-modified foods, cloning and stem-cell research.* (Masters 2007)

Reid also sees the need for a national, radical re-thinking of the curriculum rather than some kind of harmonising of states' existing programs of learning; and he sees an opportunity for curriculum debate in terms of nation-building. In similar terms to Masters, Reid maintains that:

Australian society, like the societies of other nation states, is undergoing a radical transformation, as established ways of organising and working and living are under challenge. In such an environment people have to adjust to new ways of understanding the world, doing things and living together. It demands moving well beyond the nation building phase of the 20th century and into a process of nation re-building, involving a reconsideration of many established practices and institutions. But how do people develop the knowledge and skills to meet these challenges? This is a curriculum question par excellence.

> *At a time of significant change in the nation-state, the curriculum presents itself as the major means by which the citizenry, collectively and*

> *individually, can develop the capabilities to play a part in the democratic project of nation re-building.* (Reid 2007)

Reid argues that a national approach to curriculum should be driven by curriculum concerns, based on: a clearly articulated rationale related to curriculum purposes; a theorised and articulated view of curriculum; and a strong research and conceptual base. He proposes a "capabilities-based" approach to national curriculum:

> *… one aspect of an official curriculum might be the development of those capabilities identified from a continuing **national** conversation, albeit ongoing, unfinished and tentative. But there would need to be another part of the curriculum – that is, the vehicles through which the capabilities are developed. These are traditionally known as subjects, Learning Areas or disciplines.*
>
> *These two parts of a capabilities-based curriculum could form the foundation of a national approach to curriculum. Thus, a set of richly described capabilities could be common across the country. Instead of the teaching OF subjects as ends in themselves, teachers would teach through subjects FOR the capabilities.*

Reid proposes that all states and territories would agree on the capabilities that would become the focus of teaching and learning in each jurisdiction, through a process perhaps led by the Australian Government and starting with a review of the National Goals of Schooling.

He also sees this approach as a possible means of encouraging the kind of debate about the public purposes of schooling and the curriculum, as a way of dealing with the divisive public-private debate from an educational rather than a funding perspective.

Simply changing federal structures and processes for the development of curriculum will not, of itself, affect the quality of curriculum or answer for us the questions about what, if anything, we want all our children and young people to learn. Moves towards national curriculum, taking as their starting point the broad framework provided by the National Goals for Schooling and the curriculum frameworks developed by the states, could provide the catalyst for curriculum debate and renewal driven by the ideals expressed by Reid and others. It is difficult to argue against the idea of a small nation pooling its experience and expertise in the curriculum theory and practice for the benefit of its students. And aspects of the recent history summit convened by the Commonwealth Minister provided glimpses of the educative potential of public debate about education itself and what we want our children to learn. Whether curriculum responsibility continues to reside with individual states or is shared nationally in the future, the approach to curriculum content and standards needs to be open and forward-looking and grounded in the relevant disciplines. As both Reid and Masters make clear, the complexities and the challenges of the modern world make obsolete any notions of using moves to national curriculum as a vehicle for imposing a once-and-for-all 'fixed' curriculum for schools across all jurisdictions.

If greater consistency and quality in learning programs can be achieved across the country, this has the potential to increase public understanding of and confidence in our school system nationally; and to provide a framework within which teachers can do their work with confidence. A national approach to curriculum could provide the basis for the development of a 'curriculum guarantee' to provide all schools with the resources needed for teachers to engage the students they serve in the agreed programs, taking account of the widely differing

circumstances in which schools work. This would require a national curriculum and assessment body bringing together those with expertise in curriculum policy and design from the stage of early childhood education through to the post-compulsory years, as well as academics and practising teachers; and with responsibility for consulting with parents and employers. Such a body would need the capacity to coordinate curriculum with all related forms of assessment and to provide advice on implications for professional development. This body would need to work within the resource capabilities of all schools. What needs to be avoided, as past experience is shown, is a reliance on bodies composed entirely of departmental officials, Commonwealth and state, which degenerate into members being driven to defend their own particular patch.

A national body would provide the Commonwealth with a formal avenue for pursuing its curriculum objectives. Such a body would need to be constituted in a way that allowed for openness and transparency in decision-making. This would mean that arguments for particular curriculum decisions would need to be justified in educational terms and in relation to any available evidence.

There is a real risk, however, that without careful alignment of curriculum, resources (the key resource being effective teachers and teaching) assessment and reporting, moves towards national curriculum have the potential for a negative effect. National curriculum could lay the basis for the development of an inappropriate yardstick against which schools, and the work done by teachers and their students is measured without regard to differing contexts of gross resource disparities. This is not to deny that crude forms of assessment can provide such an inappropriate yardstick whether or not they are underpinned by national curriculum.

Assessment and reporting

Federal arrangements for assessment consist in a combination of state-based tests in literacy and numeracy, and national tests for a sample of students in several other areas. Australia also takes part in an international assessment program for 15 year olds. Literacy (reading and writing) and numeracy are assessed annually through testing of all students in years 3, 5 and 7 in all states and territories, with tests equated to provide comparable reporting of student achievement data. MCEETYA is now developing its own national tests and from 2008 all students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 will sit the same tests. Science is assessed every three years through a national test of a sample of Year 6 students. Assessments though the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) are carried out every three years for literacy, mathematics and science for 15 year olds.

The progressive development of a national system of assessment as a basis for performance measurement and reporting has been driven through attaching conditions to Commonwealth funding since the Howard Government was elected in 1996. It is a condition of Commonwealth funding for schools for 2005-2008, for example, that education authorities establish common assessment standards in English, mathematics, science, civics and citizenship education and information and communications technology (ICT).

As noted previously, the Commonwealth is committed to introducing an Australian Certificate of Education as part of its program to increase national consistency in schooling; and has now received a report on options for doing so from the ACER.

Prior to 1996, the testing and reporting of literacy and numeracy was a state matter, and there were little national data on school outcomes and therefore limited scope for comparability of student achievement levels between states. Since then, led by the Commonwealth, key performance measures, benchmark standards and performance targets have been developed for the purpose of national reporting in an expanding number of areas. These developments have taken place through MCEETYA. The benchmark measures have been controversial. The minimum benchmarks are set at a level where any student failing to reach the standard would be at risk of making unsatisfactory progress at school. Banks points out that the MCEETYA benchmark approach focuses on an 'extreme' – those students who fail to reach even a minimum standards. "This design features means that the published results are unlikely to identify any major differences between jurisdictions, almost by definition … most jurisdictions consistently report around 90 per cent of students reaching the benchmarks … and that, even so, the MCEETEYA data are published with extensive qualifiers and caveats …" (Banks, 2005).

From the perspective of the Productivity Commission, Banks finds the process of reporting on national learning outcomes data deficient:

> *… data are usually well out of date by the time they are released … protracted delays reduce the usefulness of the data for comparative assessments, as well as reducing transparency and accountability. A second deficiency is that while non-government schools now participate in the national testing, MCEETYA only publishes data for 'all schools' (government plus non-government) on a nationally comparable basis. Not only does this make it impossible to compare the performance of government and non-government schools – it is not even possible to isolate the performance of government schools*. (Banks, 2005)

McGaw expresses similar professional irritation that the information distinguishing public and private schools in the Australian data is suppressed before it is submitted for international analysis and argues that the practice should be changed. He points out that, using the 2003 PISA data from OECD countries, there is no significant overall superiority of non-government schooling in any country. Any observed superiority of non-government schools in the base data appears to be due to the students they enrol rather than what they do as schools (McGaw, 2006).

But it is largely the relationship between public and non-government in Australia that leads to this suppression. No other country has created the same circumstances as Australia, of placing public schools in competition with private schools which are able to set their own private fees without affecting their entitlement to public funding and where progressive increases in public funding have brought with them no corresponding increases in public responsibility. There is widespread ambivalence within the teaching profession and the education community towards student assessment and reporting once this goes beyond the information that assists individual schools and teachers to analyse their own students' performance and to target assistance. This is giving way to arguments that empirical evidence is needed as a basis for policy; and that it can provide the evidence needed to support arguments for differentiated resource allocation to target resources to where they are most needed to improve achievement.

Resistance to 'league table' comparisons of schools is understandably strong in the circumstances that prevail in this country. It has come, on the one hand, from those

protecting the interests of the most socio-economically selective non-government schools. The release of apparently superior results from such schools tends to draw public criticism of the levels of public funding being provided to them. There is also resistance by those in the public sector to exposing results from those schools with a disproportionately high share of those students who are most costly and difficult to educate and a disproportionately low share of the resources needed to meet their needs.

Using evidence from recent research, George Cooney (2006) points out that large-scale assessment programs can result in improved student outcomes if they share the qualities of good classroom assessment tasks.

> *These qualities include a close relationship with what is taught and how it is taught, high quality items that allow the achievement of all students to be accurately determined against standards, and adequate and timely feedback to students and schools that supports their teaching and learning strategies.* (Cooney, 2006)

In our federal system, the most potent means available for dealing with such resistance has been the Commonwealth's resorting to making its funding conditional upon compliance with its own demands for reporting. This is hardly an indicator of a mature, professional education system.

The potential of federal arrangements for schooling for fostering political pettiness has been further demonstrated by the Commonwealth's decision to require reporting to parents on student achievement according to an A to E template or equivalent. While there was some resistance on educational grounds, most states complied with this requirement and deflected any public criticism by blaming the Commonwealth. If a national approach to reporting to parents is considered to be a priority, then better processes are clearly needed to avoid turning such matters into a political football.

It is one thing to agree that there are potential benefits to be gained through the development of a national curriculum, assessment and reporting system for Australian schools; and that the impetus for moving in this direction has been sustained over decades. Support for such directions ranges from arguments for the cost savings that greater consistency might bring, through to arguments that there is a national need for curriculum regeneration if our schools are to assist students to deal with the challenges of the modern world. There are tensions between these views, but they are not necessarily incompatible. What is irrefutable is that developing the structures and processes necessary to achieve the potential benefits of such a move will take time and will require delicate negotiations between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments.

The fact that progress towards the goal of a national curriculum and the related issues around assessment and reporting has been so halting may well be an indication that this is one of those goals that are valued in principle; and that there is a sense that it is a pity that it had not been put in place by now. But that is different from arguing that it is now, or has been over the past decades, the most pressing priority in terms of improving the overall outcomes of schooling. This question needs to be asked in the context of the challenge facing the nation as its experienced high levels of teacher turnover arising from the large numbers of the profession now retiring.

In our current situation, it is important to understand that the quality of teaching is, after all, what determines the quality of the curriculum from the point of view of students.

The Current Situation: Teaching and Learning

Teaching

Research clearly indicates that one of the best ways for governments to support the education of children and young people is to provide an adequate supply of effective teachers. The effectiveness of federal arrangements for schools in Australia in this area is critical, especially in relation to such key issues as: sustaining the balance between teacher supply and demand; the quality of initial teacher training; the quality and form of ongoing professional learning; and sustaining the conditions necessary to recruit and retain good teachers.

These conditions entail ongoing responsibilities for governments, Commonwealth and state. This is a time, however, when it is critical to the education of students now in our schools and future generations that governments marshal their resources to meet these responsibilities. Australia is facing the challenge of replacing the large numbers of teachers recruited to deal with the surge in the school population of the 1960s and 1970s. High retirement rates will be adding to the normal rate of teacher turnover for at least the next decade. Governments will need to have strategies in place to ensure that there is an adequate supply of new entrants to teaching to replace them.

Australia is not alone in this situation. Many other countries are facing the same significant demographic shift in their teaching forces, which means that there is an increasingly competitive international labour market for teachers.

This increase in teacher turnover arising from a sustained rate of retirements over the next decade entails risks of loss of the experience and expertise of those retiring. The high turnover also brings opportunities for renewing and reinvigorating the teaching profession, through investing in professional learning for new entrants, so that they can work effectively with students from their first days in the classroom.

By contrast with curriculum, where the responsibility ultimately lies with states, the responsibility for ensuring an adequate supply of quality teachers for Australian schools is more evenly shared between the Commonwealth and the States. The Commonwealth has a clear responsibility for ensuring an adequate supply of quality teachers for Australian schools arising from its responsibility for funding the universities where teachers undertake their initial preparation for teaching. States, with their direct responsibility for schooling, rely on the Commonwealth to supply the graduates needed to staff all their schools. These school authorities then have a responsibility for the ongoing professional learning of the teachers they employ. Responsibility is thus shared between both levels of government for providing the conditions necessary for trainee teachers to make the transition from university to employment in schools through provision for field-based experience prior to graduation and then for induction and mentoring processes. Responsibility for ongoing professional learning and growth is shared by governments, by public and private employing authorities and teachers themselves.

But such an analysis, while accurate as far as it goes, masks the complex interaction that is needed between both levels of government for schools to be guaranteed the supply of teachers they need. States cannot simply rely on universities to ensure that there are sufficient teachers in the pipeline to satisfy their needs. Teaching is competing with demand for talented people

from other professions. Unless teaching is seen as a sufficiently attractive job by potential recruits, they will not enter universities to train as teachers. All governments have a capacity and a responsibility to contribute to creating a national culture and climate conductive to effect teaching, and to making teaching an attractive and rewarding career.

Responsibility for ensuring an adequate supply of quality teachers does not end with the Commonwealth's responsibility for the recruitment and training of sufficient graduates. It makes no sense to invest effort into preparing teachers if they leave the profession soon after they enter it due to the lack of the adequate induction and mentoring programs or other forms of professional support that beginning teachers need if they are to experience early in their careers the intrinsic rewards of their work that motivate teachers to stay on to become accomplished practitioners.

Teacher supply: the current national outlook

Australia now appears to be better placed to deal with the accelerating rate of teacher retirement than was predicted a few years ago. Supply has been affected by large increases in the numbers of completions of initial teacher education courses. There was an increase of 40 per cent in those completing their initial teacher education in Australia between 1999 and 2003.

Barbara Preston (2006) argues that while the most recent data from DEST appear to indicate sufficient growth in numbers going into teacher education to avert an imminent crisis in overall supply of teachers, this does not justify complacency. She points out that any labour market needs some degree of 'surplus' to allow for the matching of individuals to position. This process takes time and not all recruits will be able to be matched to a particular vacancy because of matters such as specialist qualifications or geographic availability. She argues that there will continue to be a need for expanding numbers of teacher education graduates for some years as the peak in retirements nationally may not occur until around 2012. Preston also points out that the progressive rejuvenation of the teaching force may well alter the resignation rate, as the proportion of all teachers who are in their twenties will be rising, and among teachers in their twenties there is a general tendency nationally for high separation rates, both temporary and permanent.

Within this general picture, there are serious and persistent shortages of secondary school teachers in important subject areas. This shortage is further masked by positions being filled with teachers teaching outside their subject areas in numbers of schools. This latter expression of 'teacher shortage' is unable to be quantified accurately. According to the recent National Beginning Teacher Survey Results for 2006 conducted by the Australian Education Union, 44 per cent of respondents reported having been asked to teach outside their areas of qualification and expertise.[21]

The report, *Science, ICT and Mathematics Education in Rural and Regional Australia*, confirms the severe shortage of secondary science, ICT and mathematics teachers in rural and remote areas of the country. In schools in rural areas described by the report as 'provincial' areas, teachers were twice as likely as those in metropolitan areas to report that it was very difficult to fill vacant teaching position in those subjects in their schools, while for areas

[21] Results available at: http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Publications/Btsurvey06.html (accessed 5/5/07).

described as 'remote' this was four times more likely. This report was prepared for DEST and released in 2006. It was based on a survey by the National Centre of Science, ICT and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia (SiMERR) based at the University of New England.

This highly detailed report comments on the dire consequences of the situation where a large proportion of those teaching in Years 7 and 8 in Australian schools do not having any university science in their professional qualifications. It reported the situation with mathematics as seeming "even more fraught". The report identifies the risk of a 'downward spiral' effect in teaching in these areas.

> *One consequence of requiring teachers to teach science and mathematics, despite their lack of suitable expertise and training, is the lower likelihood that they will be seen as enthusiastic role models. Further, such teachers may be ill-equipped to give advice on careers in science and mathematics … The net effect on students can be a negative image of science and mathematics that may become entrenched.* (*SiMERR*, 2006)

All the indications are that finding qualified professionals to teach mathematics and science is becoming more difficult in many countries; and that Australia's shortage of teachers of science, ICT and mathematics could well be made worse by other countries seeking to attract Australian teachers in an attempt to overcome their own.

The general picture also masks the significant inequalities arising from the fact that some schools are less attractive to qualified teachers. Even where there is an adequate supply of qualified teachers overall, some students – in challenging schools serving low socio-economic communities or in difficult locations, or both – will still be vulnerable to various forms of teacher shortage. This is a persisting problem in NSW, as well as in the education systems of the other Australian states and territories and of most other countries.

Wherever there is a shortfall in teacher supply, the brunt will be borne by those who are most vulnerable to poor outcomes from their schooling, with all that this implies for their future lives. This will apply whether there is a shortage overall or in specific areas such as mathematics or science; or of expertise as measured by qualifications and experience. A far stronger effort is needed to recruit and train teachers who are committed to spending the time needed to give students in poor and in remote areas of the state the quality of education taken for granted in schools in more advantaged and populous areas. This effort will require collaboration between states and the Commonwealth to develop incentives to recruit, retain and reward teachers who are prepared to serve in areas of shortage. A range of collaborative strategies is proposed in the report of a recent study undertaken by this author for the NSW Public Education Alliance in that state (Connors, 2007).

It would not be sensible to attribute these complexities, shortages and inequalities in access to quality teaching to Australia's federal arrangements for schooling. A recent report from the OECD, *Teachers Matter: Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers* (2005), makes it clear that these problems are not unique to Australia but are widespread among OECD member countries.

But this leaves open the question of whether or not current federal arrangements are effective in dealing with them.

Predicting future teacher requirements is less straightforward than may generally be realised. The OECD report cited above provides an excellent discussion of the complex web of influences on teacher supply and demand (OECD, 2005). These include influences well outside the control of education authorities, such as changes in the economy and the labour market more broadly, or changes to superannuation policies which may affect the age at which older teachers decide to retire.

The fact that there are not more serious problems in relation to the overall situation of teacher supply and demand in Australia could be argued, on the basis of evidence, to owe more to good luck than to good management of the planning process. It could be partly attributable to states' recruitment efforts; as well as to cultural factors outside the education sector itself.

The debate over the past decade and more about whether or not Australia would face a critical shortage of teachers has occurred in the context of a generally acknowledged national problem of insufficient data for the purposes of teacher workforce planning. This was the conclusion of the Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, which was set up by the Commonwealth with a focus on science, technology and mathematics. In its main report, the Committee stated that "moves now under way to strengthen data collection and analysis and research into conditions affecting teacher demand and supply will need to become more intensive to provide a basis for policy development" (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003).

In response to a range of such expressions of concern at the difficulties of forecasting teacher supply and demand nationally, DEST has also commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to undertake a survey to provide a descriptive picture of the teacher workforce and collect data relevant to attracting and retaining teachers to the profession.

Even then, it is highly likely that work of this kind will need to be backed by a more sophisticated and better coordinated approach to data collection and analysis by the states to meet their own workforce planning needs. This is because of the complex interplay between broad national and highly local factors and the need for school authorities to have the capacity to respond to local as well as state-wide needs. Even so, the range of MCEETYA working parties no longer includes one specifically for teacher supply and demand. Supply and demand issues now need to be considered through a working party on improving teacher and school leadership capacity.

Under current arrangements, the workforce needs projected by the NSW government, itself the country's largest employer of teachers, continues to have surprisingly little influence on shaping the teacher education programs run by universities. The Commonwealth presides over a higher education system within which universities continue to train larger numbers of primary schools teachers than secondary, despite a greater need for the latter. This problem is compounded by the flow-on effect for primary schools in the large NSW public system, where primary schools and teachers divert effort and resources into providing the school-based experience (known as the 'practicum') for many teacher education students who are not going to proceed to employment in teaching in schools in this sector, nor to teaching at all in the near future or even in the longer term.

The supply of university places is always influenced by student demand and course preferences. But recent years have seen the neglect of planning approaches designed to meet

the needs of the society for graduates in favour of a reliance on market-based approaches. What has this to do with federal arrangements for schooling? The answer is 'a great deal'. It is clearly easier for a government to adopt a market-based approach to universities when it can devolve the costs of market failure to another level of government. And that is precisely what happens in the case of the split between the Commonwealth which funds universities and the states and territories which are dependent upon those universities for an adequate supply of well-trained graduates to employ as teachers.

Faced with shortfalls in the supply of teacher education graduates in subject areas of current or anticipated teacher shortage such as mathematics and science, states need to find their own alternative source of teachers. New South Wales, for example, has introduced its own Accelerated Teacher Training (ATT) Program as an alternative source of teachers. The Program targets those with industry backgrounds and qualifications to undertake an 18 months retraining program to become teachers. The NSW Department of Education and Training also provides sponsorships for students enrolled in this program, with a view to placing them in hard to staff schools. Universities charge the Department at the rate which applies to full fee-paying overseas students for this alternative form of teacher education (New South Wales Parliament, 2005).

There may well be some benefits in such strategies. They do, however, represent a shifting of the cost of initial teacher education from the Commonwealth to the state. In New South Wales, this cost-shifting is compounded by the Fringe Benefits Tax liability imposed by the Commonwealth on the Department for the sponsorship and scholarship arrangements it offers to attract the teachers it needed to fill shortfalls.

Quality Matters, the report of the review of teacher education in NSW conducted by Gregor Ramsey in 2000, sets out the steps by which teaching became a 'federal' policy matter (Ramsey, 2000). Recruiting sufficient entrants to teaching and for their initial education and training was a matter for the states until 1973, when teacher education became part of the dual system of higher education and the Commonwealth took over responsibility for its funding either through universities or colleges of advanced education. No agreements were negotiated between the Commonwealth and the states to ensure that state need in terms of education quality and supply of teacher could be met. Then in 1998, higher education was restructured into a unified system of universities. According to Ramsey this led to a situation where "the internal funding decisions of individual universities have become a major determinant of the quality of the intake". He describes the position of the states in the following terms:

> *It is clear that the State has very limited influence in this arrangement between the Commonwealth and individual universities for the funding and education of teachers. The only sanction available to the State is to make clear its expectations of beginning teachers and to refuse employment of those graduates whose preparation falls short of these requirements. This is a weak power that comes too late. The State's ability to influence the graduate pool from which it draws, both in terms of numbers in particular fields and their quality, is extremely limited.*

Teaching quality and standards

Attracting well-qualified and committed entrants to teaching and providing them with an effective degree program are necessary pre-conditions for quality teaching in schools.

Teaching began to enjoy a resurgence of interest in the mid 1990s among well-qualified entrants, following concerns during the 1980s and early 1990s about the quality of entrants to teaching as measured by minimum university entry requirements. By the mid 1990s, minimum entry standards for teaching bottomed and began to rise, with this increase accelerating from around 2000. Most primary teaching courses now require far higher minimum entry scores than previously. Teacher education places are being filled by a growing proportion of entrants to teaching who easily exceed these minimum entry scores (Dinham, 2006). There is evidence that expansions in intakes to teacher education over recent years have not been accompanied by any apparent diminution in 'quality' of entrants; with the proportion of students commencing teacher education among the top 25 per cent of all higher education entrants having risen between 1989 and 2006 (Preston, 2006).

This resurgence of interest in teaching by well-qualified entrants to university has not been accompanied, perversely from an education standpoint, by a commitment to investment in higher education generally or to providing teacher education students with the quality of initial preparation they deserve. The Commonwealth's failure to index its grants to universities to keep pace with academic salary increases has had the effect of a cumulative cut to public funding for universities. This policy, which started under the previous Labor administration, has been continued by the Howard Government. This stands in stark contrast to the Commonwealth's policy for indexing its general recurrent grants to schools, which, as discussed previously, has delivered real increases, primarily to the benefit of schools in the private sector.

As pointed out recently by University of New South Wales Vice-Chancellor Professor Hilmer, Commonwealth spending on tertiary education as a share of gross domestic product places Australia in the bottom 20 per cent of all countries in the OECD (Hilmer, 2007). Melbourne University Vice Chancellor Professor Davis has drawn attention to the funding gap in universities between average course costs, on the one hand, and the funding available from the Commonwealth and student contributions on the other, stating that the system only survived because this shortfall was met with income from local and international fee-paying students and subsidies from high earning faculties (Davis, 2006).

Within the universities that supply graduates to teach in schools, teacher educators are working in the context of this significant decline in public investment. Academics, including teacher educators, are overburdened by pressures to publish research as well as to teach an increased student load, and much teaching is done by poorly paid casuals. From a state perspective, there are unacceptable variations in the experience of the practicum provided for teacher trainees, within and between universities, largely due to reduced capacity of university teachers to invest their time in engaging with their students beyond the confines of university-based studies (Ramsey, 2000; NSW Parliament, 2005). But it is not only teacher educators who are finding it difficult to make time to link students' professional experience in schools to the academic content of their programs. Many students have just as much difficulty in making time in their own schedules. The restricted and low level of government funded income support forces students into paid employment to finance their studies and to cover their living costs. Education faculties report that working long hours makes it difficult for many teacher trainees to make arrangements to spend the time and effort needed to engage in

practice teaching in schools at the same time as having to attend lectures and complete assignments.

The tensions inherent in the relationship between the Commonwealth Government, as funding provider, the universities delivering pre-service teacher training and the state and territory governments as primary employers of teachers are well documented in the chapter on pre-service teacher education in the report by the NSW Legislative Council's Standing Committee on Social Issues on recruitment and training of teachers (NSW Parliament, 2005). Recent attempts by the Commonwealth to raise the status of teaching through awarding it national priority status have had perverse results. There remain continuing disincentives for prospective teachers to undertake science and mathematics degrees; and the effect of additional funds provided by the Commonwealth towards meeting the costs of the teaching practicum was undermined by its failure to take the necessary steps required to ensure that the increase was actually applied to this intended purpose.

The persisting problems in teacher education outlined above are confirmed by the report and recommendations of the Commonwealth's most recent inquiry into teacher education. Conducted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, and informed by a wide range of submissions, its findings were set out in the report published in February 2007, *Top of the Class. Report on the inquiry into teacher education* (Parliament of Australia, 2007).

While criticism for funding shortfalls in and flawed policy decisions can be levelled at the Commonwealth, it is also the case that some states have been less active than others in recognising that their universities are a vital part of state infrastructure and in taking an active or sustained interest in their work. This appears to be the result of a political assessment that the Commonwealth's assumption of funding responsibility for higher education removed any rationale for a state interest in universities; and that when a state might be confronted by the failure of higher education policies to meet their needs in such fields as teaching and nursing, it could simply shift the blame to the Commonwealth.

What is now needed is a shared commitment by both levels of government, Commonwealth and state/territory, to achieving the conditions necessary to ensure that initial teacher education programs prepare student teachers as fully as possible to be able to engage their students in learning from their earliest days as teachers. The Commonwealth has taken on the responsibility for providing the resources to train teachers. Even if it were to commit to investing sufficient resources for universities to provide student teachers with the ideal preparation for teaching, this effort could be wasted unless schools and systems at state level accept their responsibility for providing the conditions conducive to the effective transition from student teacher to professional. But adequate and appropriate resources, including time in schools, are needed to fulfil this responsibility.

Teaching standards

If the plethora of reviews and reports on these subjects are any indication, there is no lack of interest by governments, Commonwealth and state and territory, in the issue of the quality of teacher education and teaching standards.

The recent decision of CoAG is the latest indication of the growing interest of governments in quality teaching as the key to improving outcomes, and their acceptance of the need to

recognise and accredit teaching standards and teacher education courses. At its April meeting, CoAG agreed , in order to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes, to develop a core set of nationally-consistent teacher standards for literacy and numeracy by the end of 2007, as well as a core set of nationally agreed skills, knowledge and attributes for school principals. By 2009, the Council agreed also to accredit university teacher education courses and register or accredit teachers to meet these national standards. Agreement was also reached to implement school diagnostic assessment systems for children starting school by 2010.

There is still more to be done, however, in determining how this would be given effect through Commonwealth and state and territory structures.

Since the Commonwealth assumed responsibility for the funding of teacher education in 1973 and became a partner in schools funding, it has provided funding in support of teachers' professional learning in schools through a succession of programs.

The Commonwealth interest in teaching was driven, during the terms of the Hawke and Keating Labor governments, by the inclusion of schooling and teaching in the broader micro-economic reform agenda under the rubric of 'the clever country'. There was a drive to improve teaching across the country through a National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning. Participating schools were encouraged to look at how the work of teachers could be performed more effectively in the interests of productivity gains and teachers were encouraged to join the search for ways to 'work smarter, not harder'. In the context of industrial award restructuring, a system was proposed for recognising 'advanced skills teaching', and an Australian Teaching Council was established which brought together governments, teacher employers and unions. None of these initiatives survived the change of government in 1996.

Under the Howard Government, Commonwealth funding for professional development is provided through the Quality Teacher Program. This allocates around $35 million annually to education authorities, government and non-government, for a variety of projects designed to improve teaching, leadership and management in participating schools.

In 2004, the Commonwealth set up the National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership, now known as Teaching Australia, to develop nationally consistent standards for teachers and principals as a means of promoting the profession. In addition to conducting professional learning and research, its agenda includes the development of a national policy framework and procedures for the accreditation of pre-service teacher education.

The establishment of Teaching Australia created a clear potential for duplication, if not conflict, with existing state and territory agencies, such as the NSW Institute of Teachers, which oversees teacher accreditation against its own professional standards framework and criteria. These were, in turn, consistent with the framework endorsed in 2003 by MCEETYA.

The interests of quality assurance in teacher education will not be well served by subjecting teacher education faculties in universities to two sets of accreditation processes, the voluntary process issuing from Teaching Australia as well as the processes based on statutory requirements and employment criteria already well-established in some states.

What is needed is an agreed national approach to assuring the quality of teacher education courses. This should build on the experience of states and territories. It should be an approach

designed to merit the confidence of the states and territories which are responsible for schooling, including as teacher employing authorities, and of the profession itself.

The development of such standards should be consistent with the national framework of professional teaching standards endorsed in 2003 by MCEETYA. The development of standards and criteria for recognising the quality of initial teacher education should not be undertaken in a resources vacuum, however. Standards should inform governments, universities and the profession of the resources required to enable graduates of approved teacher education programs to meet quality criteria. For governments, Commonwealth or state or territory acting independently or in partnership, to set standards while turning a blind eye to providing the resources needed for the achievement of those standards is not only unethical but will prove futile or lead to cynicism. Without steps to guarantee that all schools have adequate and appropriate resources that make the attainment of such standards feasible, the adoption of teaching standards will simply add to existing inequalities among schools, within and between the public and private systems.

The need for a concerted national effort to improve equality of access to quality teaching will include a commitment to greater public investment in teaching by the Commonwealth. The practical effects of shortfalls in Commonwealth funding available for initial teacher education are borne by students in schools. The time and resources of teachers in schools must be diverted from students to provide beginning teachers with aspects of training and with skills that could and should have been done during their initial teacher preparation in universities. But some schools and the students they serve are more vulnerable than others to this form of cost-shifting, or more accurately, this shifting of workload.

An adequately funded and planned initial degree preparation that includes meaningful periods spent in schools is of special importance for those teachers starting their careers in the schools that are doing more than their share of the 'heavy lifting' of universal schooling. These are the schools with a disproportionate reliance on beginning teachers, and where the demands on those beginning teachers are greatest.

Angus (2007) has drawn attention to the fact that Australia, once envied by educators from other countries for its commitment to the value of equality of opportunity and the equity of its school funding, is now at risk of becoming socially and educationally polarised. Providing for equality of access to high quality teaching is the most effective means by which governments can combat this risk.

When the Commonwealth first became a significant partner in schools funding, one of the programs it established was the Disadvantaged Schools Program. This program targeted schools serving concentrations of students from poorer families, where there are 'community' effects which amplify the effects for individual students, compounding their educational disadvantage. Variations of this program continue to exist in school systems, often supported through Commonwealth funding, though the program itself no longer exists as a Commonwealth program. But such programs have not been able to tackle the problems arising from the difficulty of attracting and retaining experienced staff in these schools and from the consequent over-reliance on less experienced teachers in these difficult-to-staff schools and the high teacher turnover.

This was how the current situation has been summed up by Lamb and Teese in the 2006 report of their review of equity programs in NSW public schools:

> *There are systemic or structural factors that seriously limit the potential impact of all of the equity programs and need to be addressed in any future equity framework … Staff turnover rates, averaging 35.3% in PSFP schools in 2004, continue to work against the impact of all programs. High staff turnover means that the benefits of professional development and capacity building, particularly delivered through new and innovative programs designed for disadvantaged students, do not stay with the school.*
>
> *It is this issue that continues to seriously undermine the whole equity effort in NSW. Fundamental to any framework of change will be the need to promote continuity in teaching staff in disadvantaged schools and the recruitment of quality teachers ….* (Lamb and Teese, 2006)

The SiMERR study (2006) reveals that school students in rural areas are achieving much lower standards than their city counterparts generally. One of the biggest problems is retaining staff in country areas. The study found that a 20 per cent per year turnover of staff is six times more likely in rural areas than in metropolitan areas.

Teese, in his paper "Condemned to innovate" goes beyond the argument that the interests of the students in the most hard-to-staff schools are simply neglected. He describes the way in which market and policy influences within today's school system not only fail to confer benefits on these schools but actually combine to exploit them and the students they serve for the benefit of others. He argues that many of these schools do a highly disproportionate share of the work of developing the professional skill base of a significant share of new entrants to the teaching force; and that they do this for the system as a whole. He describes the way in which our school systems work as a transfer system, taking resources out of – rather than sending them into – the schools that need them most.

> *Every year, hundreds of teachers move out of the poorest schools in search of professional advancement … we routinely remove the most important resources they need to promote student achievement – experienced teachers … They offer up to other schools the skills and capacity they have helped to build, without adequate recognition or remuneration for their work* (Teese, 2006).

The OECD has graphed data on student achievement in the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) according to the relationship between students' achievement and their socio-economic status in all participating countries. The flatter the line for a country, the less the difference in achievement between students from socio-economically disadvantaged and advantaged backgrounds. The OECD considers that a country has been more successful in providing students with equal opportunities in education if its line on the graph is relatively flat, showing that the range of scores between the highest and lowest scoring students is relatively small. Australia has a moderately steep curve, putting it among countries that are high on measures of quality and low on measures of equality of opportunity The PISA data also demonstrate that the links between low socio-economic status and low educational achievement and outcomes can be reduced through policy action (Masters, 2005).

Teese argues that, as a nation, we need to search for those policies that recognise and build upon the links between quality and equality … instead of opting for policies based on a false dichotomy between these two important attributes of any decent education system. He argues for priority to be given to providing schools serving disadvantaged communities with the conditions that would be needed to transform them into ideal sites for professional learning

for new entrants to teaching. With better initial teacher preparation, professional incentives to serve in and to stay in these schools, as well as the continuation of programs designed to deal with welfare and social needs, these schools and the early career teachers appointed to them can provide their students with the quality of schooling they deserve.

A comprehensive and coherent policy approach to raising school participation and achievement in those areas where it is currently low through investment in quality teaching and in teachers' professional learning is well supported by research evidence. What is needed is an agreed effort between Commonwealth and state and territory governments to make a start by increasing public investment in the preparation of those teachers who are willing to begin their teaching careers in schools serving our most disadvantaged communities and to stay long enough to make a real difference.

A nationally collaborative approach to the development of teaching standards is one strategy for providing Australia with a strong foundation for assuring the quality of teaching, rewarding effective teachers through professional accreditation and renovating the current overly flat structures for professional advancement. Providing career opportunities and recognition based on standards that have educational integrity and professional acceptance is a far better investment in the future quality and equity of schooling than populist strategies based on picking individual winners. This kind of 'performance bonus', which typically provides monetary rewards so insignificant as to be almost insulting, ignores the importance of building the teamwork in schools that produces results. In relation to performance-based rewards, the OECD concludes that "*research in this field is difficult and there are few reliable studies. The limited evidence suggests that there are some benefits from group-based performance pay programmes, but less so from individual performance pay programmes*" (OECD, 2005).

The Commonwealth has indicated it will include a requirement for states and territories to introduce performance pay for teachers as a condition for its funding for government schools in the next funding period from 2009. Whether and how those conditions would apply to Catholic and independent schools, which receive significantly higher funds from the Commonwealth, is unclear at this stage.

The proposal for imposing the introduction of performance pay suggests that there is a need for federal arrangements that provide the Commonwealth with greater access to advice from those directly responsible for the provision of schooling and better placed to identify genuine educational priorities and the strategies that are most likely to be effective in dealing with them.

Experience of federal arrangements in relation to teacher supply, teaching standards, and the initial and continuing professional education of teachers suggests that this is an area where it is difficult to cleanly isolate the responsibilities of the two levels of government. What is needed is a framework within which responsibilities can be shared to achieve agreed goals.

THE BROADER CONTEXT OF FEDERALISM

Federal arrangements for schools seen in their broader context

Questions of Australia's future as a federal system and of how the federal system could be made to work better for the benefit of Australians are now the subject of extensive public inquiry, reporting and debate. This makes clear that many of the dysfunctional aspects of federal arrangements for schools in Australia – the cost-shifting and the blame-shifting; the lack of comprehensive, consistent national data; the effects of unilateralism; the examples of duplication; and the tendency to political opportunism – are not peculiar to education.

Twomey and Withers (2007), for example, see the drift into political opportunism as a more general trend:

> *Recent trends in Australian federalism show a shift from competitive and co-operative federalism to a system of 'opportunistic federalism', where the Commonwealth uses its array of financial and legislative power to intervene selectively in areas of traditional State activity to make ideological or political points.*

They argue that this "*undermines the benefits of federalism and exacerbates problems such as duplication and excessive administrative burdens*".

The argument generally advanced for federal systems, particularly for a large and geographically diverse nation like Australia, is that they enable policy responsiveness to localised needs. Other arguments are that federalism provides for a dispersal of power which protects against an over-powerful centre and can dilute the impact of poor policy decisions at any one level, and for governments to be exposed to cross-jurisdictional comparisons among the diverse service providers, which can which can stimulate competition and innovation.

Twomey and Withers point out that international comparisons do not support the assertion that federalism is an old-fashioned system that is not competitive in the modern world. They argue that: "*of the G8 nations (the countries with the eight largest economies in the world), four are federations, seven have at least three tiers of government, and all still manage to compete powerfully on the world stage … In the last 50 years, federations have consistently out-performed unitary states in economic terms. The more decentralized the federation, the better the performance*." They maintain that governments share a responsibility to make the federal system work better, to harness its advantages and to reduce or eliminate problems. Their report also sets out evidence of the growing consensus across politics, business and the community that there needs to be rethinking of roles and responsibilities in the federal system to provide greater clarity and to avoid the problems of cost-shifting and buck-passing (Twomey and Withers, 2007).

Yet federalism also presents significant challenges. If poorly managed, federalism can lead to fragmented regulatory structures. The allocation of responsibilities between levels of government in federations is frequently contested, and ambiguity can reduce accountability and lead to poorly coordinated services with duplication or gaps in provision.

The Warren Report (2006) argues that the benefits of federalism are maximised and the downsides contained when a number of measures are in place. These include: matching taxation powers with expenditure responsibilities at each level of government; genuine autonomy in state/territory decision making; clarity and transparency regarding respective roles in policy areas where responsibility is shared; and regular review of the operation of the federal structure.

Warren and others have argued that Australia's federal system performs poorly on all of these counts. Australia's taxation system is marked by an exceptionally high degree of "vertical fiscal imbalance", whereby the states retain control over relatively few, mostly inefficient tax bases (such as from gambling and stamp duties) and rely heavily on funding allocations from the Commonwealth. Revenue-raising is hence detached from spending, obfuscating responsibility and reducing the ability of states to adjust spending levels in accordance with localised priorities. This top-heavy system of revenue-raising is accompanied by a poorly understood formula for the distribution of centrally collected taxes to the states as general payments, one which provides distorted policy incentives to state treasurers. Further, the extensive and expanding use of special purpose payments by the Commonwealth impinges on state autonomy (Allen Consulting, 2004; Productivity Commission, 2006).

Centralising tendency

The increasing influence of the Commonwealth in education since the 1960s is partly a result of education having become an increasingly important element of economic and social development. States and territories themselves, as well as various other interest groups, have looked to the Commonwealth to meet growing demands for education. Schools funding has now become a shared, though an unequally shared, responsibility of the two levels of government. The public funding of non-government schools, in which the Commonwealth plays the major role, is now an integral element of the provision of schooling in Australia. Despite these developments, the Commonwealth is a minor partner in the overall financing of schooling, with states and territories annual spending around three times that of the Commonwealth.

The move of the Commonwealth to play an increasingly significant role in schooling, starting from the latter half of the last century, is consistent with a general tendency towards centralisation in Australia's federal system and internationally. In Australia's federal system, this tendency has been strengthened by a range of influences. These include: the states' ceding of their income taxing powers to the Commonwealth in World War II and its progressive financial dominance; interpretations of the Constitution in the High Court; the increasing centrality of national economic policy; and the need for national responses to international pressures.

Education has been caught up in this tendency, partly through the drive for greater economic productivity and in recognition that successful management of the Australian economy requires development of human intellectual potential to add value through the improvement and diversification of services. All this has only underscored the importance of education as a government responsibility.

But government responsibility in education is not just a macro-economic exercise. For the individual in the new, dynamic labour market, educational attainment has become the most reliable determinant of life-long welfare. Poor investment by government in a child's education is likely to lead to extensive and expensive reliance on remedial safety-net programs later in life. Education policy today is so important because it is as much a tool of economic and welfare policy as a portfolio in its own right. Governments also find that they are increasingly under pressure from their constituents to provide public services that cater for diverse needs and aspirations. These improvements to educational outcomes must occur, however, in a context of ongoing budgetary pressures coming from downward pressure on taxation and upward pressure on expenditures in other areas, notably, health care; and, as is increasingly accepted, on dealing with the effects of environmental change.

Schools funding and fiscal federalism

The problems embedded in federal fiscal arrangements include the mismatch between the Commonwealth's revenue raising powers in Australia's federal system and the states' obligation for providing basic services; and the use of special purpose payments which impinge on states' power to make their own decisions about the best way to deliver services. These general problems and the shortcomings in federal arrangements for schools funding are now part and parcel of each other.

In its report to the Victorian Government, *Governments Working Together? Assessing Specific Purpose Payment Arrangements* (2004), the Allen Consulting Group cites the Schools Quadrennial Funding Agreement as a prime example of this problem from a state government perspective:

> … *the Schools Quadrennial Funding Agreement is inflexible, imposes prescriptive and burdensome administrative requirements out of proportion to the funding received, is focused on inputs and processes rather than outcomes, and makes funding conditional on matters unrelated to education*. (Allen Consulting Group, 2004, quoted in Twomey and Withers, 2007)

Warren (2006) noted that Australia was unique in the degree to which responsibility in major policy areas, such as health and education, is shared between governments. Yet the sharing mechanism is poorly delineated. This problem is even greater in education than in health according to an overview report prepared by University of Melbourne's Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning for the Department of Premier and Cabinet in Victoria. The report, *A New National Agenda for Education and Training in Australia*, identifies schools funding and, as a consequence, policy and planning as the areas in which the roles of the Commonwealth and states and territories are least well delineated, integrated or clearly assigned. It states that:

> *Decisions on funding levels for the schools sectors are made independently by the Commonwealth and the States and not through a joint planning and resource allocation framework, which is common in other portfolios, such as health.* (Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning**,** 2004).

Public schools are largely dependent for their funding on the states and territories, where they compete with a range of other costly services and the growing bill for health, in particular; and where they have an obligation to educate all-comers. Private schools, in addition to their

private sources of income and the public funding they receive from states, receive the bulk of their public funding from the Commonwealth with its significantly greater financial power.

The Commonwealth now accounts for 80 per cent of taxation revenue raised by governments and 54 per cent of all government expenditure, while the states raise 16 per cent of taxation revenue but spend around 40 per cent (Business Council of Australia, 2006). This problem of 'vertical fiscal imbalance' lies at the heart of the persistent and divisive debate about the public funding shares allocated to public and to private schools.

In his accompanying paper, Caldwell (2007) refers to claims that this problem has been reduced if not removed by the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), and that the revenue they receive from this tax provides the states with the financial capacity and security they need. That is, according to this argument, the states' capacities to meet any shortfalls in resources in their own public school systems have been strengthened by the GST revenue and that any failure to do so is a failure on their part. Caldwell argues that the states have been guilty of a deplorable neglect of infrastructure, "with hundreds if not thousands of schools long past their use-by date in terms of quality of construction and suitability for teaching and learning in the 21st century". He refers also to the fact that in the context of the last Federal election, the Commonwealth made available more than $1 billion over four years for refurbishing existing facilities in both government and non-government schools.

Caldwell goes on to argue that any case that might exist for a more powerful role for the Commonwealth is made even stronger "*if one accepts the view that the states and territories have failed to make good use of the additional funds that have come from the Goods and Services Tax. While the GST is collected by the Commonwealth, all revenue is delivered to the states and territories, and the amounts distributed to date exceed initial projections by a considerable margin*".

In support of this claim, Caldwell cites a report of the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) (Nahan, 2006) which refers to a "reform bonus", being the amount by which revenue from GST exceeded projections. The IPA paper argues as follows:

> *In the main, the States have squandered their reform bonus. While there is variation among individual States in terms of fiscal performance, through a combination of sloppy budgeting, failure to control public service wages, and a propensity to throw money at problems, they have, in aggregate, consumed their reform bonus without undertaking reform or investing in infrastructure.* (Nahan, 2006)

Evidence that the GST has done anything to reduce the problem of vertical fiscal imbalance generally is disputed by those who argue that the GST has done nothing to change the increasing concentration of financial power in the hands of the Commonwealth, along with the shrinking capacity of the states and territories to fund their spending responsibilities.

Twomey and Withers (2007) argue that it is disingenuous to suggest that the states are failing in their responsibilities because they require Commonwealth funding and that the Commonwealth should therefore take over state policy functions:

> *The impression is often given that the GST funds were granted in addition to existing State funding, providing the States with a great windfall. In fact, the GST was designed to replace a range of existing State taxes plus the former general Financial Assistance Grants from the Commonwealth. The States*

> *remain reliant on the Commonwealth for substantial continuing funding through Specific Purpose Payments (SPPs). The ability of the States to raise their own revenue has been reduced by the requirement that States abolish certain types of State taxes. The Commonwealth remains in full and effective control of the amount of funding received by the States, because it can reduce the amount of new SPPs at its discretion as the amount of GST transfers grow.*
>
> *Moreover, if one takes into account the abolition of State taxes required by the GST inter-governmental agreement, the grants received by the States from the Commonwealth in 2006 amount to 5.5 per cent of GDP – exactly the same percentage as in 1996. Indeed, the (net) payments to the States over the entire post-GST period remain at levels below the pre-GST average of 6 per cent of GDP for the whole period of the 1980s and 1990s. During the same period, the Commonwealth's revenue rose by a further 2 per cent to 20 per cent of GDP. This is a $20 billion windfall for the Commonwealth well ahead of State and Territory gains both absolutely and proportionately.*
>
> *Therefore, it cannot sensibly be argued that the States are now 'financially independent' because they receive funding from GST revenue. If the Commonwealth had been serious about giving the States fiscal autonomy, it would have ensured that the States had access to revenue that covered, and eventually exceeded, the loss of State taxes plus the combination of Financial Assistance Grants and the SPPs. It did not do so. Instead, it ensured that the States remained dependent upon Commonwealth funding. It is disingenuous to suggest that the States are failing in their responsibilities because they require Commonwealth funding and that the Commonwealth should therefore take over State policy functions, when this is the system that the Commonwealth deliberately created.*

In relation to schooling, even if it were accepted that the GST had provided states with greater capacity to increase their expenditure on their public school systems, the net effect of Commonwealth (and state) indexation arrangements is such that the flow-on effects of those increases would be far greater to schools in the non-government sector, numbers of which already have far higher resource levels than government schools.

Within current federal funding arrangements, there is no rationale for the Commonwealth's contribution to public and private schools.

The lion's share of public funding for schools is the amount states and territories provide for public schools, through processes that are readily able to be understood. The level is determined annually through state/territory budget processes. Such decisions reflect the budgetary and political pressures and priorities of the time. To that extent, it is not surprising that the decisions are heavily influenced by the timing of state/territory elections, such as recent and expensive election commitments to reduce class sizes in the early years of schooling – even if sometimes offset by savings in other areas of the education portfolio at other stages of the electoral cycle.

On the other hand, flexibility around state and territory budgetary decisions on schooling is heavily constrained. Providing resources for the education portfolio represents around one-quarter of all state budget outlays. Schooling is compulsory and funding for the delivery of primary and secondary education in public schools cannot be denied. The fundamental cost

driver for this obligation is the set of assumptions on the number of teachers required to meet the school-aged population, including the public sector's share of projected enrolments. These assumptions are built into staffing and school budgeting formula, which are the starting-point for annual negotiations around each year's budget allocations.

The other major cost driver is the price of delivery, which for public schools is centred on the assumed salary levels for teachers and other school staff. Setting the final salary outcomes for teachers is often hard-fought in political and industrial arenas, but has to be accepted by government as a financial staple in the budgetary process.

Demographic changes are also an important part of the mix for determining state budget outlays on schooling. Trends in the school-aged population over the budget period, including the projected number of students overall and the blend of primary, junior secondary and senior secondary students, are fundamental in setting the base for government spending on schools. Similarly, budget outlays on staffing are affected by demographic changes in the teaching force, where fluctuations in teachers' age profiles, such as the growing proportion of beginning teachers on lower salary scales are balanced with increasing pressures for teacher support and mentoring, for rewarding outstanding teaching and for meeting pension commitments for retired teachers.

Almost all of the fundamental influences on state budgets for public schools, then, leave Treasury with little room to move. State capital works programs have traditionally been the target of budget changes, but these programs have been under considerable political pressure in recent years to attend to urgent renovation and maintenance needs, as well as to provide new facilities in local areas of population growth. State and territory governments have been as unwilling as the Commonwealth government to face the political cost of finding savings in their commitments to non-government schools, including the expensive student transport programs in some areas. Population change and the leakage of enrolments and teachers to the private sector can provide options for savings from the closing of existing schools, but this has been notoriously difficult to achieve and in many cases is offset by other commitments to provide enhanced school facilities and programs in other areas.

What this discussion demonstrates is that there is an underlying set of formulae and commitments for the level of state and territory budget resources provided annually for public schools. Most of these are predictable or outside the control of state/territory treasuries. This is the case, despite the relatively haphazard appearance of annual state and territory budget decisions in media releases and analysis, which emphasise the political story of the day.

These 'givens' for state and territory budget outlays on public schools, however, stand in contrast with the Commonwealth's funding arrangements for private schools.

How did the reversal of the Commonwealth's funding shares for public and private schools reach the situation where the minimum general recurrent grant the Commonwealth provides for a student in the non-government sector is now so far above the grant provided in respect of any student in the public sector? And why have other countries, comparable to our own and subject to the same political and ideological influences, not produced such an extreme circumstance?

According to the Commonwealth Gazette of 18th October 2006, which sets out the schedule of grants for the *Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement through Choice and*

Opportunity) Act 2004, this minimum level of grant for non-government schools is 13.7 per cent of AGSRC. If we examine the situation as it affects NSW schools, for example, it appears that there is only one private school in NSW for which the Commonwealth scheme finds this minimum level of funding to be adequate. This is a school whose recurrent resources from its fees alone are well above the average resources of NSW public schools. All other such private schools, including those whose grants from the NSW government take their resources levels above the average resources of public schools, draw an even higher grant from the Commonwealth.

The levels of Commonwealth grants to schools for each student in the NSW public system are, by comparison, 8.9 per cent of AGSRC for primary and 10 per cent for secondary, both significantly less than the 13.7 per cent of AGSRC per student that is the minimum attracted by any private school. If every child in a NSW public school were to attract the same minimum grant from the Commonwealth as it provides to the private school it ranks as least in need of funding support, then this would represent an annual funding increase for public schools across Australia of over $750 million.

The reversal of the Commonwealth's funding shares for government and non-government schools – from the 70 per cent of its total funding outlaid on government schools in 1974 to around 34 per cent in 2007 – has a long history, arising from the changing policies and priorities of successive governments.

Key changes to the Commonwealth's general recurrent grants program over that time help to explain the peculiar arrangements whereby the formula for general recurrent grants for government schools calculates those grants at 8.9 per cent and 10.0 per cent of AGSRC for primary and secondary schools respectively; while the grants for non-government schools range from a minimum of 13.7 per cent of AGSRC to a maximum of 70.0 per cent, for both primary and secondary schools in that sector.

When the general recurrent scheme was introduced by the Whitlam Government in 1974, they were paid in the form of block grants to government and Catholic school systems, and to independent schools ranked into eight categories on a needs basis. The Fraser Government implemented long-standing Liberal Party policy to provide a 'basic per capita grant' for non-government schools set at 20 per cent of the average 'standard' cost in government schools; 'needs' grants of 30 per cent and 40 per cent were set for two other categories of non-government schools. The dollar amount arising from this 'basic grant' of 20 per cent of 'standard' cost became a benchmark for subsequent policies and schemes. The per capita mechanism also provided a formula for matching funding with growing enrolments in the non-government sector from that time. But the Fraser Government did not extend the per capita mechanism to the government schools sector, which continued to receive block amounts unrelated to any particular resources standard. Commonwealth general recurrent funding for government schools over the time of the Fraser Government turned out to be around 7 - 8 per cent of total funding of government schools, but this was an artefact of the Commonwealth's block funding, not the driver of the amount as in the non-government sector.

The Hawke Government extended the per capita mechanism to government schools. It provided real increases in the per capita rates for government schools and, at a lesser rate to most non-government schools, for almost a decade. The dollar rates for government schools have been maintained since that time, with annual adjustments for indexation. Funding for

non-government schools was differentiated over twelve funding categories from 1984, with the minimum grant set at 12 per cent of the funding standard at that time (for schools with private sources of income of 88 per cent or more of that standard).

With the introduction by the Howard Government of its socio-economic scheme (SES) for general recurrent grants in 2001, all per capita general recurrent grants were expressed as a percentage of primary and secondary AGSRC. When the dollar amounts for government schools were expressed in these terms, the figures were the 8.9 per cent primary and 10.0 per cent secondary outlined above. For non-government schools, the minimum per capita grant turned out to be the equivalent of 13.7 per cent of the AGSRC. All grants for non-government schools were distributed over a 'continuum' of 46 subsidy levels from a minimum of 13.7 per cent to a maximum of 70 per cent of AGSRC. The bulk of non-government schools, including the large Catholic systems, cluster around the 50 to 60 per cent of average government school funding levels.

The outcome of this piecemeal and arbitrary development of the general recurrent program for government and non-government schools – the bulk of Commonwealth funding for schools – is that any rationale for those funding levels has disappeared.

There is nothing unusual or sinister in the fact that these trends and directions in schools funding have been influenced from the very start by the differing ideologies of successive governments and their political manoeuvrings. It would be naïve to think that this will not continue to be the case. But what is clear is that the non-government school sector in Australia since the 1970s has been protected from bearing the financial costs that often accompany changes to funding programs and entitlements, namely the costs of the inevitable redistribution. Negative implications for schools in the non-government sector from changes in their relative entitlements to Commonwealth general recurrent grants, the mainstay of their total funding, have been able to be smoothed over because the Commonwealth has the nation's revenues at its disposal. There has been no need to smooth over changes to relative entitlements within the public sector and therefore no political imperative to ratchet up grants. Ownership of public schools resides with the states and these schools bear the brunt of states' disciplines to meet any need for frugality. This difference is seen most starkly where states and territories close educationally 'uneconomic' schools in order to make the most effective use of the education dollar, while small or poorly located schools are fortified by public funding in the non-government sector with no regard to their educational or economic viability.

Any attempts by states and territories to match the rate of increases to public schools to keep them competitive with the private schools receiving more favourable rates of increase from the Commonwealth have proven to be futile in closing resource gaps because of the flow-on effect to private schools in the Commonwealth's indexation arrangements and, in many instances, their own.

The view that current federal arrangements for schooling are dysfunctional is widely shared across the school community; and not simply confined to the public school community. These views were widely reflected in submissions to the Senate Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools in 2004, including from the non-government sector:

> *The general statement I would like to make is that we recognise that our society needs quality schooling for all children. We are a supporter, not an opponent, of state schooling. We support the call for adequate - and, indeed,*

> *better - funding for state schools. We are often portrayed as opponents, but that is far from the truth.*
>
> Association of Independent Schools of NSW, Senate Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools, Hansard, 27 July 2004

> *… the Catholic community and the Catholic school community share the concern of the Australian community as a whole and the educational community as a whole that the present mechanisms we have in this country for funding public and non-government schools – that it is partly Commonwealth, partly state and, especially in the case of non-government schools, private income – have reached a point of dysfunction. It is a system that lets governments and other groups blame each other for inadequate resources or inadequate responsibilities.*
>
> *We think the national goals provide the basis for a long-term solution in determining the resourcing levels of Australian schools and our need to find some mechanism to measure resources and changes in resources over time.*
>
> NSW Catholic Education Commission, Senate Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools, Hansard, 26 July 2004

This situation is made the more dysfunctional by the fact that non-government schools are now drawing their students disproportionately from higher income families – a change from the circumstances which existed when the Commonwealth took on a significant funding role. This affects the share of the work that each sector accepts, with public schools now generally recognised as being asked to accept more than their share of the 'heavy lifting'. This disparity in the conditions placed upon public funding between the sectors is also an outcome of politics, but it can also be attributed in part to the split between the role of the Commonwealth as funder in our federal system and the role of the states and territories as regulators.

The fact that federal schools funding arrangements have evolved in the absence of any agreed educational rationale, as argued by both Angus (2007) and Watson (2007), and without any fundamental consideration of the respective roles of the participating governments, is not remarkable in the Australian context. According to Warren (2006):

> *One of the most striking failures of Australia's federation is our disinclination to re-examine the terms under which the federation operates. While other federations regularly review their inter-governmental relations (such as Austria), or have recently undertaken far-reaching restructures (Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Canada), Australia has not had a serious discussion about the assignment of functions and responsibilities between its different tiers of government since prior to federation in 1901*. (Warren 2006)

But in relation to schools funding, in particular, the stealth made possible by the vagaries of our federal system has enabled cumulative policy and administrative decisions to be taken in the absence of public information or understanding about their combined and cumulative implications – in the absence of informed consent.

In a federal system with an extreme case of 'vertical fiscal imbalance', where the financial power is concentrated at the Commonwealth level, Australia has positioned private schools so that they draw on the Commonwealth coffers for the large part of their public funding while the public schools rely for their funding on the states and territories. There are no educational resource standards to guide the level or allocation of Commonwealth expenditure on schools;

or against which to justify measures of resource 'need'. No account is taken, in funding decisions, of the share of responsibility for the delivery of universal schooling that the different school sectors bear. Increases in funding to the public sector, where the students who are most costly and difficult to educate are increasingly concentrated, flow on to all schools in the private sector through the inappropriate use of indexation as a political and policy tool.

No federal mechanism exists to sort out educational priorities and to match Commonwealth funding to them. With growing amounts of Commonwealth funding now locked up in quadrennial cycles, there is a disconnection between national debates, such as those now taking place around curriculum and teaching, and Commonwealth funding. This creates a climate conducive to political opportunism by governments at the Commonwealth level.

A further by-product of Australia's federal system is that Commonwealth and state elections are held at different times, with the result that the country is, in a sense, permanently in election mode. This makes it difficult to find the political space within which to deal with politically sensitive issues.

Schooling itself, and schools funding, in particular, raise complex and sensitive issues. They are inextricably linked to some of the key themes in our country's political and constitutional history. As well as issues relating to inter-governmental relations within Australia's federal system, these include considerations of what is public and what is private in our society and the respective roles of governments, communities and parents in the education of young people; and the relationship between church and state, religious and secular affairs. The balance in public policy and funding between public and private schooling is arguably not the kind of issue that can best be dealt with in the political heat of election campaigns, but rather the kind of matter that many politicians try to keep off the political agenda where possible.

The electoral cycle also makes it difficult to achieve an alignment of inter-governmental policies, which may involve securing national agreements for a specified period, in these circumstances. For example, there could be good sense to having federal funding arrangements for schools cover a five year period, so that they could be linked to census data. This would, however, be difficult to achieve politically where there is no common electoral cycle among states or between states and the Commonwealth. As a result many decisions are based on grossly outdated data.

The Constitution

When it comes to schooling, the Constitution offers little assistance in resolving the difficulties that have evolved in relationships between the states and territories and the Commonwealth. The constitutional position is that education is a responsibility of the states and territories. Commonwealth involvement in schooling is based primarily on section 96 of the Constitution which allows the Commonwealth to make payments to the states and territories, and to impose conditions on the purposes for which those funds must be used.

Political attempts to justify the Commonwealth's having taken on the role of primary funder of private schools with reference to the Constitution are, however, profoundly misguided. The Constitution provides no basis whatsoever for claims that either level of government has a special responsibility for funding non-government schools. Such claims have been put forward in recent years in an attempt to explain and justify the level and the rate of growth in

Commonwealth funding to private schools compared with public. One minister claimed that the imbalance had its origins in a long-standing agreement between the states and the Commonwealth that the latter would take principal responsibility for public funding of non-government schools, despite the fact that there is no evidence of any such agreement (Kemp, undated). His successor, Brendan Nelson, then made the claim that the term 'state school' which has been traditionally used for public schools in some states but not others, meant that the funding of these schools was the responsibility of the states and not the Commonwealth. This either reflected or exploited a lack of understanding of the generic use of the term 'state' in this expression, as well as of the fact that this expression was in use well before federation and has nothing whatsoever to do with the rationale for the current division of funding responsibilities for the sectors between the two levels of government. The division of funding responsibilities between governments for the two sectors, public and private, is politically and not constitutionally produced.

The Commonwealth's role

Problems with the relationship between the Commonwealth and states and territories in policy, planning and funding can be seen across all sectors of education and training: from pre-school and early childhood education and primary and secondary schooling through to vocational education and training and higher education. But the problems are not identical. They reflect the historical differences among the circumstances and the timing that led to the entry of the Commonwealth, with its entry to schooling being by far the most politically charged.

The states were running schools before federation and retained this responsibility through the Constitution. This history has placed the Commonwealth in a difficult relationship with the states as a partner in schooling. The Commonwealth has been cast, in a sense, in the role of a wealthy relative, invited in by the states from time to time to fix periodic problems. The Commonwealth's presence is not always welcome; and it is sometimes regarded as almost an interloper or intruder.

It is widely accepted in the Australian community that the Commonwealth should create a sense of national cohesion and identity by ensuring that all Australians have access to the basic minimum conditions that governments can provide to enable their citizens to live productive and rewarding lives, both as individuals and as members of the nation. Australians want services to reflect local needs and circumstances, but they do not expect their more significant entitlements and obligations as citizens to be vastly different when they cross state borders. So it was that one of the principles that underpinned the expansion of Commonwealth funding to schools under Whitlam was that it had a role in ensuring that the educational opportunities available to students were not simply determined by which state they happen to live in or be condemned to inferior or inadequate resources by dint of their parents' choice of suburb.

Equality of educational opportunity was one of the principles that underpinned the Commonwealth's decision to become a more active partner in schooling. Commonwealth general resources programs complemented the funding provided by states to both sectors of schooling and, in the case of non-government schools, by non-government school communities, to assist in bringing schools up to specified resource standards.

The Commonwealth has, for example, taken on a large share of responsibility for indigenous education. This was consistent with its assumption of the right to make laws for the benefit of Aboriginal people following the 1967 referendum which gave them citizen rights. It was not a necessary consequence of the referendum, and stems from the time of the setting up by the Commonwealth of national advisory bodies on indigenous education. The National Aboriginal Consultative Group was established in 1974 to undertake an investigation into the enormous educational problems facing indigenous people, a study recommended by the Interim Committee for the Schools Commission. This was replaced in 1977 by the National Aboriginal Education Committee, established to advise the Commonwealth on the educational needs of indigenous Australians. Commonwealth funding for indigenous education and training (across the schools and Technical and Further Education sectors) will amount to $2.2 billion for the 2005-2008 quadrennium.

The Commonwealth also accepts the obligation, arising from its particular responsibility for immigration, to assist school authorities in the states by providing funding for intensive English tuition. This contributes to the education of newly arrived students of school age to the point where they can gain the benefits of participating in mainstream schooling and the English as a Second Language teaching provided in mainstream schools.

Another role and responsibility of the Commonwealth has been to coordinate the national action needed to further our international interests and to meet our international obligations.

National social and economic policies rely for much of their success on national effort through education. The Commonwealth has, for example, funded the expansion of vocational education and training in schools as part of the response to dealing with skills development and shortages.

The former Commonwealth Schools Commission (CSC) took the view that the Commonwealth's role went well beyond its funding role or its direct involvement in particular programs. Its views were articulated, for example, in its 1985 report, *Quality and Equality* (CSC, 1985). The Commission saw the Commonwealth's role as being to play a supportive role in the provision of general resources for schools, complementing the resources provided by the authorities directly responsible for the operation of schools: the states and non-government school authorities. It also saw the Commonwealth as having a role in providing educational leadership through specific purposes program and through sponsoring nationally collaborative education initiatives.

The Commission also expressed the view, in this report, that:

> *the Commonwealth has an obligation to create a national climate for schooling which contributes directly to its quality ... Creating a supportive national education climate involves:*
> - *The co-ordination and dissemination of educational information and statistics necessary to national planning and progress;*
> - *Constructive support for the endeavours of teachers, students, parents, the work of systems and schools, and for underlining the importance of schooling in general;*
> - *A serious and responsible interest in the quality of the school curriculum, resource provision and outcomes from schooling;*

- *A reliable commitment to funding and involvement in programs to supplement or expand provision by the government and non-government school authorities directly responsible.*

(Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1985)

The Commission was not formally a 'national' agency, but its membership brought together representatives of state and non-government authorities and interest groups around the table. In its report, *Quality and Equality*, it made the statement that in creating a supportive national climate for schooling: "*It is especially for this support to be provided for public schooling, which is susceptible to fluctuations in educational climate arising from a range of social and economic circumstances and to criticisms which result from the fact that, like all public services, it is available to all.*"

This report does not endorse the view that governments should attempt to relegate to such agencies their own responsibility for making political decisions about the relative priority to be given in funding and support for public or private schooling, and it can certainly be argued that tensions over this very issue contributed to the political demise of the Commission. But it did provide a forum for those with experience and expertise across the different parts of the Australian school system to come together in an attempt to arrive at consensus and with the obligation to explain the reasons for their advice to government. The discipline of producing public reports where members have to sign their names to their shared views and opinions was, in this author's experience as a member of that Commission, an incentive to be rational and fair-minded.

Because it operated at arm's length from the Commonwealth, the Commission had a capacity to play an 'honest broker' role in consulting with states and territories to inform its policy advice. It was in this role that the Commission assisted the Commonwealth to negotiate genuinely national policy, such as the National Policy for the Education of Girls. Through the Schools Commission, interest groups such as teacher and parent organisations were able to press the Commonwealth to exert pressure through its programs for their inclusion in the operation of its programs at state level. For a time, Commonwealth programs operated by the Commission were managed by educators rather than public servants with no educational experience or expertise. These programs provided a vehicle for professional collaboration and development across state borders; and in some cases brought together educators and authorities from across the public and private sectors. The discretionary funding provided through numbers of Commonwealth programs, though modest in comparison to the education budget overall, enabled schools to engage in experimentation and innovation.

Political changes have, as would be expected, changed the emphasis in Commonwealth funding over the years. But as early as 1976 it was becoming clear that not only were increases in Commonwealth funding being consumed by the growing recurrent expenditure on non-government schools, but that this was also being funded through reductions to other programs, including capital grants to government schools. The Commission concluded in 1984 that the large increases in Commonwealth general recurrent grants to non-government schools over the decade since the introduction of the major schools programs in 1974 "*may have had the practical effect of restricting the Commonwealth's capacity to provide for expansion of other program areas, including general recurrent grants to government schools*". If anything, this situation has intensified.

As noted previously, however, one of the most valuable roles played the Commonwealth's education commissions was the publication and analysis of data to inform policy debate and development. This, of course, became politically sensitive when the spotlight was turned on the Commonwealth's own programs.

Where the Commonwealth became an active partner in schooling it was widely seen as a champion of equity, particularly through programs such as the Disadvantaged Schools Program and a range of other programs designed to improve education for those whose families were poorly placed to protect or advance their interests.

The report by the Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning discerns a quite different tendency that has developed in the role of the Commonwealth across the sectors:

> *The Commonwealth has now largely assumed funding in relation to higher education and non-government schools – sectors where private contributions are growing most strongly, which are most highly valued by the community and from which the highest student outcomes are obtained. However, these sectors are the least accessible and least comprehensive in terms of their student profiles.* (Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning**,** 2004)

The Commonwealth is now a significant partner in schooling in Australia for philosophic, politically pragmatic, economic and financial reasons. Its influence goes beyond its direct funding contribution to schooling, through its role in controlling the way revenue raising is matched to responsibilities for services.

The challenge now is to make that a role that is grounded in an explicit understanding of the objectives it is designed to achieve. For this role to have integrity, there is a need to ensure that the centrepiece of the Commonwealth's effort – the responsibility it has taken on to provide public funding for the operation of schools, public and private – reflects a serious and proper interest in the educational purposes of schooling. There are lessons to be learned from looking at the Commonwealth's changing role over the years. The Commonwealth is now locked into a contribution to federal funding arrangements which offends the principle of equal opportunity to a high quality education for all. In the context of broader problems that have developed in Australia's federal system generally, public funds are being used to widen the gap between the resources available to those already best served by schooling and the opportunities these resources bring; and those locked into a persistent pattern of under-achievement. Through a combination of policy and market forces, schools are caught up in an uneven competition for resources, students and teachers.

Recent action by heads of government to reform the federal system

The Council of Australian Governments is now the arena for attempts to deal with the ailments of federalism. Schooling is being caught up in the CoAG agenda.

In 1991, premiers and chief ministers adopted four principles to guide a review of Commonwealth, state and territory roles and responsibilities, in the course of a 'new federalism' initiative launched by then Prime Minister Bob Hawke. These principles recognised the need for cooperation to ensure that national interests were resolved in the

interests of Australia as a whole; and that "responsibilities for regulation and for allocation of public goods and services should be devolved to the maximum extent possible consistent with the national interest, so that government is accessible and accountable to those affected by its decisions" (the principle of subsidiarity). The third principle concerned structural efficiency and the need for increased flexibility and competitiveness in the Australian economy, and the fourth concerned the accountability of government to the electorate. The process was formalised by the establishment of the Council of Australian Governments (CoAG) in May 1992.

The work currently being undertaken through MCEETYA described earlier in this report is taking place under the aegis of the broad goals in education set by CoAG as part of its National Reform Agenda adopted in 2006. These include significant improvements in the level of participation in formal education as well as in student achievement. Under the CoAG processes, states were recognised as significant players whose policy input was crucial, and the Commonwealth accepted that policy by unilateral decree was ineffective and that it had to work through the states to achieve many of its policy goals (Twomey and Withers, 2007).

This appears to confirm that policy by unilateral decree, so evident in Commonwealth schools policy over the past decade, is not confined to education. It remains to be seen whether the commitment to this process will be sufficient to address the kinds of problem this paper has already identified; and to enable genuine educational priorities to receive the attention from governments that they deserve.

The approaches being taken to date by MCEETYA to its responsibilities under the aegis of the National Reform Agenda are conservative in the sense that they are working well inside the existing structures of federalism and the shared responsibilities of the Commonwealth and states and territories for schooling. There is an emphasis on harmonising the efforts of authorities to achieve greater consistency, rather than any sign of a more radical approach to clarifying responsibilities. The next section of this paper examines whether or not this approach is likely to prove the most effective option for moving forward.

The fact that a recent MCEETYA decision on curriculum was subsequently overshadowed less than a fortnight after the ministers' meeting by state premiers meeting as the 'Council for the Australian Federation' (see pages 49-50), is a reminder that national collaboration need not necessarily require participation by the Commonwealth.

This development also raises the question of whether this capacity for collaboration is greatest where there is no Commonwealth funding involved. Would the Commonwealth be better placed to fulfil a 'higher order' role in schooling if it were not a funding partner and were free from the temptations to use its funding to achieve political leverage? Would states and territories seek to deal collaboratively with politically sensitive issues in education, on the grounds that there is safety in numbers, if they were unable to shift the blame for problems so readily to the Commonwealth? While relationships between the Commonwealth and states and territories are complex and currently, in many aspects, dysfunctional in relation to schooling and beyond, what recent history demonstrates is that they are far from fixed.

Both by political design and default, Australia's federal system has contributed to producing a great 'disconnect' between the distribution of the total workload of schooling among schools and the allocation of resources from governments to enable them to do that work.

Some argue for the abolition of states altogether and the abandonment of federalism. But the weight of argument appears to lie with those who argue for the need to make our federal system work better rather than with those who would abandon it in favour of a unitary system.

Many of the problems outlined so far in this report are not unique to schooling. The options we develop for dealing with them through changes to federal arrangements must, however, be driven by an explicit understanding of what we believe our schools need to achieve for the students they serve and for the nation as a whole.

OPTIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

As has been argued in this report, federal arrangements for schools, and for funding in particular, have militated against the conditions needed for formulation of rational policy options and public understanding of and debate about them. Federal decision-making has been obstructed by the absence of a shared and serious inter-governmental commitment to policy-related studies and research, to information gathered through reputable methodologies, and to gathering and analysis of information on: patterns of educational participation, attainment and achievement; the learning environments in schools; schools resourcing; and attitudes and expectations. In these circumstances, the Australian community has been denied the information and understanding that is a condition for democratic engagement in rational decision-making. The extent to which current national trends and directions in schools policy, planning and funding are the product of informed debate or consent in this country is open to question.

Key priorities in schooling

There is widespread acceptance in Australia that greater effort is needed to improve the conditions necessary to raise achievement levels overall and, in particular, among those students who are gaining least from their schooling. Given the lengthy period of economic growth, Australian governments could have done more to put these conditions in place. But this would have required, and continues to require, more effective collaboration between the two levels of government: Commonwealth and state and territory.

In terms of its expenditure on schools as a proportion of GDP, Australia now ranks in the middle of OECD countries. This does not suggest that the entry of the Commonwealth as a direct partner in schools funding from the middle of the 1970s has had any sustained stimulatory effect on the level of public investment that might be expected of a relatively affluent nation.

But the artefact of federal arrangements that is most difficult to justify on rational grounds is that the Commonwealth's major function in education is now the public funding of private schools. Among federal systems of government, this is unique to Australia. Australia's investment in schooling is internationally noteworthy due to the fact that increases in public (and private) funding are being directed to non-government schools at a rate that far exceeds the increase in the enrolment share by that sector. This policy direction has become entrenched, despite the lack of evidence that it can be justified as a strategy for improving educational achievement or outcomes overall. As set out on page 14, the only conclusion that can be drawn from analysis of the 2003 PISA data from OECD countries is that any observed superiority of non-government schools in the base data appears to be due to the students they enrol rather than what they do as schools (McGaw, 2006).

In no other country does the provision of public funding for non-government schools dominate the agenda of the national government. In Australia, the primacy of this program, in turn, contributes to what is now a significant mismatch between real priorities in schooling and those matters that occupy the federal policy agenda. The Commonwealth budget (along

with state and territory budgets) for the coming years are locked into funding formulae that appear to preclude more than scant attention to some of the most significant issues.

Debates about federal arrangements for curriculum, assessment and reporting are taking place in response to pressures for greater consistency and accountability. They are proceeding, however, without due regard to the costs and benefits in terms of students' learning; and in the absence of proper concern about the level of resources schools need and the professional preparation and support teachers need to implement curriculum or to meet specified standards.

There has never been a time when it was more critical for governments to marshal their resources to recruit and retain able and effective teachers. And yet, there exists no proper framework for the federal collaboration that is needed in relation to teacher supply, teaching standards and initial and continuing professional education of teachers. In the absence of such a framework, 'quality teaching' is being reduced to a set of simplistic, managerialist issues, epitomised by proposals for crude and populist forms of performance pay that ignore the complexities of teachers' work in engaging their students as active learners.

From an educational standpoint, it is clear that the most important factor in overcoming patterns of poor participation and under-achievement in schooling, our nation's first priority, is high quality teaching. The research evidence for this conclusion is overwhelming. Maintaining an adequate overall supply of highly educated teachers is a necessary condition for providing all students with access to high quality teaching. For the evidence is also overwhelming, both nationally and internationally, that the brunt of any form of teacher shortage will be borne by those students whose life circumstances make them most vulnerable to failure.

As noted previously, Australia is caught up in an international challenge to replace the large numbers of teachers recruited to deal with the surge in the school population of the 1960s and 1970s. A wise nation would turn this challenge into an opportunity for renewing and reinvigorating the teaching profession.

A clear priority for assuring the quality of schooling for the current and future generations of Australian students is, surely, to increase public investment in schooling to the level necessary to guarantee equality of access to high quality teaching from the earliest years. This will require a more direct and rational relationship between public funding and this objective. It will also require a better alignment between the public funding available to schools and the share of public responsibilities for schooling overall that they are required to accept.

Priority must also be given to meeting the need to improve the quality of school buildings and infrastructure, to provide students with learning environments fit for the purposes we expect schools to serve in contemporary society.

There remains a significant mismatch between these priorities, the issues occupying the federal policy agenda, and funding trends and directions. Current federal arrangements do not assist the real priorities in education to surface; and even provide the means for obscuring and repressing them.

As has been acknowledged previously in this report, Australia's school systems perform at a high level for most students, according to some international indicators, and provide good

value for the level of resources invested by governments. While there may not be an overall crisis in schooling, there is no denying that urgent action is needed on behalf of a significant number of our schools and the students they serve, whose needs and entitlements are not being met. There are both ethical and practical reasons to deal with the serious flaws and deficiencies that have persisted for decades in federal arrangements for schools.

The current federal agenda

Any coherent, comprehensive program for dealing with the priorities identified above has yet to emerge from the various federal structures and processes that bring heads of government together within the Australian federation.

The Commonwealth's own priorities for schooling can be deduced from its formal funding documents. According to its administrative guidelines and related legislation,[22] "a fundamental principle underlying the Australian Government's role in school education is support for the right of parents to choose the educational environment which best suits the needs of their child, whether this be in the government or non-government sector" (DEST, 2007). Funding conditions for Commonwealth programs include legislative requirements that spell out the Commonwealth's current priorities as announced by the Prime Minister and then Minister Brendan Nelson in the months prior to the 2004 election, in its *Australian Schools Agenda*. These priorities include: "an enhanced performance framework with strengthened accountability and reporting requirements which include providing parents and the wider community with clearer information on school and individual student performance" (DEST, 2007); greater autonomy by school principals over the running of their schools, including staffing decisions (with an exemption, it would seem, for Catholic schools); national consistency in the delivery of school education, including a common minimum school starting age, the description of the pre-schooling provided in the two years before Year 1 primary, and curriculum and testing standards; the educational outcomes of Indigenous students; values and citizenship, including a requirement to display the Commonwealth's 'values' poster and to fly the Australian flag on a 'functioning flagpole'; commitment to at least two hours of physical activity a week; boys' education; and transition from school to the workplace.

The Commonwealth's funding conditions relate to its total funding for schools, which amounts to more than $30 billion for the 2005-2008 quadrennium. Negotiations with state and territory ministers on the above issues, however, relate to around $10 billion for the public schools for which they are directly responsible – compared with a further $90 billion over the four years provided by the states and territories themselves. The Commonwealth holds separate discussions with non-government school authorities about arrangements for the $20 billion for their schools. Those authorities, of course, have no responsibility for some of the key issues on the Commonwealth's agenda, such as school starting age and nationally-consistent curriculum and credentialing.

Other Commonwealth 'priorities' have come to light from time to time, mainly in the form of media releases from the Minister, and occasionally the Prime Minister. These have included: concerns about curriculum standards, with a recent emphasis on history; the possible development of an Australia-wide Year 12 credential (Masters, 2006); and performance-based

[22] Department of Education, Science and Training, *Quadrennial Administrative Guidelines – 2007 update*; *Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act* 2004.

pay for teachers. These issues have been raised by the Commonwealth without specific funding commitments or requirements for the current funding quadrennium to 2008, but with their implications for the next funding period beginning in 2009 as yet unclear. The Commonwealth has also introduced new programs for tutorial vouchers for students who fail to meet minimum national literacy benchmarks and a school chaplaincy program.

Because of their funding implications, many of these issues have dominated the agenda of the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in recent years. Some states have raised issues of concern about the inadequacy of Commonwealth funding, such as for English as a Second Language programs for new arrivals, but these have so far fallen on deaf ears[23].

Heads of Commonwealth and state and territory governments, meeting as the Council of Australian Governments (CoAG) have played a more direct role in shaping national priorities in recent years. From the CoAG 'human capital' agenda, it would appear that governments' priorities in education include early childhood development, literacy and numeracy skills and related teacher standards, transition from school to work and school leadership skills (CoAG, 2007, 2006). Although states and territories have produced 'action plans' in the areas of early childhood education and literacy and numeracy, the Commonwealth is yet to do so and no additional funding has been committed for these 'priorities'. The lack of a substantial financial commitment beyond existing programs and strategies is unlikely to provide the impetus for the kind of progress that a genuinely national priority would require.

The CoAG agenda is also relatively narrow, despite the significance of the above areas. State and territory heads of government, meeting as the Council for the Australian Federation (CAF), have produced a more substantial statement of schooling priorities, including commitments to work towards a national curriculum based on nationally-consistent content and standards, more comprehensive national testing of student achievement, reporting on school, student and state and territory performance, and strategies for the recognition and rewarding of quality teaching (CAF, 2007). But even this statement omits or underplays some of the more obvious questions for policy development in Australian schools, such as the persistent inequities in school participation and educational outcomes, the future of public school systems in Australia, criteria and arrangements for the public funding of the growing non-government schools sector and the need to replenish and modernise school buildings and infrastructure.

None of the national forums – CoAG, CAF and MCEETYA – has been able to produce a coherent program for dealing with the full range of these issues. In particular, there is a need for more explicit recognition of the range of actions that will be required to reduce the links between a student's socio-economic circumstances and school performance. This will require action well beyond schooling to deal with the growing geographical stratification between rich and poor in many areas of the country and the pockets of concentrated and severe social disadvantage that have become entrenched across rural and remote as well as suburban Australia (Vinson, 2007). One effect of this geographical divide has been to apportion the total workload of schooling in an increasingly unfair way among schools, between the public and the private sectors of schooling, as well as within both sectors. This means that many schools, mainly public schools, are now being asked to deal with the educational challenges and costs that others can avoid and without the commensurate share of resources. These

[23] MCEETYA information statements for the meetings of 24 May 2005 (18th meeting), 6 July 2006 (20th) and 12 April 2007 (21st). Available at: http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/default.asp?id=11402 (accessed 6/5/07).

issues cannot be reduced simply to questions of literacy, numeracy and teaching standards, important as these are.

Can the recent CAF statement be seen as a harbinger of actions designed now to produce a genuinely collaborative and national (as distinct from Commonwealth) effort? Despite omissions, the statement does appear to signal some greater unity of purpose than has been evident for some years. This is a reminder of the unity of purpose among states which preceded the entry of the Commonwealth as a significant partner in schooling during the 1960s.

It is not surprising that federal processes have proven cumbersome. Quite apart from the need to find ways to mediate political differences among the jurisdictions, they are all protective of their autonomy and of the arrangements in which they have already invested their resources and in which they have earned political capital. Even more significantly, the educational issues with which federal arrangements need to deal are intrinsically complex.

In terms of federalism itself, the position being taken at this stage of our history in the national forums of CoAG, CAF and MCEETYA can be described as cautious. Their emphasis is on harmonising the work of the separate jurisdictions, rather than on any radical realignment of responsibilities among them.

By contrast, a pure federalist would argue for codification of separate responsibilities for the states and territories and the Commonwealth to resolve flaws and deficiencies in current arrangements for schools. The current caution is possibly informed by the fate of the few serious attempts in recent decades to recast the jurisdictions' responsibilities for education.

One of the more radical proposals to realign responsibilities for schooling was put forward in the later years of the Hawke Government. That government's key objective was to control vocational education and training, particularly the operation of TAFE systems, as part of their overall policies for economic growth, skill development and productivity. Negotiations with sympathetic states, especially the Coalition Greiner Government in New South Wales, included options for the exchange of responsibilities for all schools, to the states and territories; and for TAFE to the Commonwealth. These discussions also considered the possible limiting of state and territory responsibilities to compulsory education (up to Year 10), and the transfer of all funding and regulatory responsibilities for post-compulsory education and training, including senior secondary schooling, to the Commonwealth.

Other options for Commonwealth funding for schools were considered at that time by a working party of officials reporting to ministers meeting as the then Australian Education Council. Their advice included recommendations to transfer funding responsibilities for the general recurrent and capital programs to the states and territories and to limit Commonwealth funding to streamlined specific purpose and targeted programs.

These proposals did not survive the ensuing political backlash, however. Regional and community support for the network of TAFE colleges around Australia made it difficult for state and territory governments to surrender their historical links with technical and further education. Education interest groups successfully argued the artificiality of separating compulsory (K-10) and post-compulsory (Years 11-12) schooling. The Catholic and independent school sectors strongly objected to removal of the Commonwealth Government as their principal source of funding. Disagreements among the states about the financial

implications and possible changes to Grants Commission formulas prevented any state consensus about the possible transfer of funding and related responsibilities.

In the wake of these experiences, there has been no significant discussion in national forums of the realignment of funding and other responsibilities for schooling. Instead, successive Commonwealth governments have preferred to act unilaterally and lever their policies and priorities through funding.

State governments have from time to time initiated considerations of more radical options for federal and state responsibilities for schooling, often with leadership from their central agencies. The Victorian Government, for example, sponsored a major review of Commonwealth and state relations in education and health by the Allen Consulting Group. The reforms it proposed gave priority to resolving the anomalies and inequalities in current arrangements for public funding of public and non-government. The review proposed reforms to bring all government schools, most Catholic schools and 'many' independent schools into a new integrated sector (Allen Consulting Group, 2004). Under their proposals, public funding would be provided to all schools, government and non-government, within the 'system' on a student basis, with adjustments for school and student needs. Schools within the system would be permitted to continue to charge fees, but government funding would be reduced as fee income rises and "as the capacity of parents to pay fees rises". Tellingly, no public funding would be provided to those schools operating outside the system.

There are serious weaknesses in the Allen proposal, including: absence of fee regulation to ensure access to all schools within the proposed system; reinforcing the tiered nature of the resulting system, by modulating access regulations according to fees charged and the financial capacities of school communities; financing an enhanced new 'system' by student-centred grants that do not take account of system finances (such as economies and diseconomies of scale); exclusion of private income for capital and other purposes from any assessment of need (a feature that discredited Commonwealth funding arrangements from 1974 to 1984); apparent lack of planning criteria; and an absence of criteria for the employment of teachers in government and non-government schools.

The report estimated the annual cost of the proposed system to be up to $2.5 billion, in 2004 price levels. Of this amount, around $2 billion would have been provided to increase public funding to those Catholic and independent schools that choose to enter the system. These increases would have been offset by reductions of up to $0.4 billion to "wealthier independent schools" – more than *eight times* the savings proposed in Federal Labor's policy for the 2004 election (which provided a 'basic grant' to all non-government schools, not the phasing out of funding put forward by the Allen group). Although not made explicit in the Allen report, it appears that the Commonwealth Government would have had to pick up this bill, effectively increasing its four-year funding package for schools by over one-third, or $10 billion (in 2004 price levels).

It is clear that much work would be needed to bring this kind of proposal to fruition, and to meet the educational, equity, financial and planning issues it raises. But the key point here is the need for a genuine national partnership to deliver the proposed outcomes. The Allen report envisages that the Commonwealth and the states and territories would: "define the framework and rules for participation in the system and set national objectives and strategies. The Commonwealth would be best placed to operate a national system of performance measurement and reporting." (Allen Consulting Group, 2004) A key feature is that the states

and territories would take responsibility for the management of the integrated school system. A new Commonwealth-state body would implement the reforms and oversee the coordinated system, and report to a ministerial council. These structural suggestions are worthy of further consideration.

The Allen report looks to "integration" as a means of dealing with the problems relating to public funding of government and non-government schools, whereby public funding might be available only to schools that are prepared to operate within a common, public, regulatory framework. Watson, in her accompanying paper, also canvasses the possibility of this kind of system for integrating public and private schools in a common funding system. Watson acknowledges as a disadvantage, however, the significant costs to government of replacing private sources of income for those non-government schools joining a common system. She also notes the political realities:

> *One disadvantage of this scheme is that it is likely to be resisted by private schools. A similar scheme was floated by the Commonwealth Schools Commission in the late 1970s, but it received little support from the private sector stakeholders. This is probably because the power to select students is a key advantage appreciated by private schools, and one which they would be reluctant to relinquish for an obligation to become more socially inclusive. Private schools have also demonstrated their capacity to thrive in a market where parents are prepared to pay fees for increased social selectivity … over the past three decades, independent schools – which tend to be more selective and charge higher fees – have grown at a faster rate than Catholic schools, which are more inclusive*. (Watson, 2007)

A contrary approach to dealing with these problems could be termed "dis-integration", where all public funding is provided in the form of individual vouchers for presentation to their schools of choice, public or private. Where such proposals have been put forward in Australia in recent times, such as in a report for the Menzies Research Centre (Caldwell and Roskam, 2002), they have advocated a system where schools would compete for the voucher in a lightly regulated or largely unregulated market.

If there is common ground between the proponents of "integration" and the proponents of government-funded vouchers, judging by recent proposals, it lies in the astronomical costs of their respective proposals to the public purse, mainly to fund non-government schools. This is despite the fact that it is widely recognised that it is in the public sector that significantly increased expenditure is needed.

But, significantly, there is also agreement between the reports produced by the Menzies Research Centre and the Allen Consulting Group that the current system is unsatisfactory, where the Commonwealth's primary role is the funding of non-government schools while government schools are the responsibility of the states and territories; and that there is a need for a framework of agreement between the two levels of government. The Menzies Centre report suggests that one way to achieve this might be through a legislated agreement between the levels of government.

In relation to the impact of market competition on schools, Watson (2007) argues that both levels of government have failed to acknowledge this, including within the public sector; and that this failure has contributed to inequities between schools in terms of their social composition and relative levels of resources. Watson further argues that it may be necessary

to accept that schools now have to operate within a market environment and turn government policy towards maximising equity within that market. She canvasses the option of "*a new system of funding for both public and private schools that effectively compensates for the inequities generated by a market environment … a scheme weighted for student SES and school income would promote both educational equity (in terms of equality in educational outcomes) and resource equity (in terms of the more equal distribution of resources between schools)*" (Watson, 2007). It seems likely that the scheme Watson outlines would also run into political resistance – from both the public and the private sectors. Within the public sector, there is a reluctance to confront openly the influence of market forces as well as resistance from those school communities that are strong in the market to any measures likely to curb their power. This resistance is even stronger in the private sector, where proposals to realign public funding (however slightly, to achieve greater resource equity among schools even within that sector) frequently evokes recourse to such rhetoric as the 'politics of class envy'.

Any attempt to move forward from the current unsatisfactory stasis in federal arrangements for schools will need to identify the most educationally and politically practicable approaches to dealing with the persistent and divisive policy contradictions and discontinuities in governments' policies for funding the public and private school sectors. In that context, it is worth including reference here to the option of designing a school system governed by a public policy framework in which there is complementarity rather than competition between the two sectors; while preserving their distinctive characters. There will, of course, always be elements of collaboration and competition among schools within and between the sectors as school communities pursue their various interests.

The concept of the 'dual system' that underpinned the policies of the Hawke Government, was an attempt by the Commonwealth, at least in philosophical terms, to balance the values of particular communities in schooling against the need for a high quality public school system open to all; and the claims by individual parents for public subsidies to enable unfettered choice of school with the responsibility of democratic governments to enable equality of access by all to well-resourced schools. Such an approach has greater potential, in the author's view, to gain a workable consensus than market-based policies that lead to levels of inequality hitherto unpalatable to Australians, or attempts to merge religious schools into a secular, public system.

The difficulties of recasting Commonwealth and state and territory responsibilities for schooling are also acknowledged by the contributors to this project, in their accompanying papers.

In relation to funding, Watson argues that "it would not be impossible to establish a common funding scheme administered by a Recurrent Funding Agency, although detailed negotiations would be necessary to establish a workable institution owned jointly by the Commonwealth and the states and territories" (Watson, 2007). Watson uses the example of a scheme of grants weighted for student SES and school income to argue that such a scheme would need to be administered by an Agency owned jointly by the Commonwealth and state/territory governments, and established under MCEETYA.

> *Such an agency … would need to have the power to receive and distribute financial resources to schools and systems. Under the failed ANTA model, states and territories never allocated their share of the resources to ANTA, so the agency relied on the Commonwealth for its budget. This scenario*

> *would have to be avoided in the schools sector for a common funding model to work.*
>
> *On establishing the Recurrent Funding Agency, Education Ministers would need to agree not to reduce their annual financial contributions to the scheme below the level at establishment ... Decisions regarding the distribution of resources to schools and systems … would be overseen by the Board of the Agency. The Board would be comprised of representatives from each state and territory and the Commonwealth.* (Watson, 2007)

Watson provides a more detailed explanation in her paper of how such a system of governance might work and how the distribution of voting rights may encourage jurisdictions to join the agency and to maintain the level of their contributions to the budget.

Angus (2007) expresses doubts that, on the basis of experience, the Commonwealth and states and territories, for the time being, see it as suiting their political interests to agree to an alignment of funding that would achieve a proper complementarity. As a practical first step towards creating the conditions in which the Commonwealth and states might reach such an agreement, he proposes that steps should be taken to achieve to achieve transparency.

> *Although there may be little appetite … to cede to a bureaucracy on the scale of the former Schools Commission responsibility for advising on government funding, it may be possible to achieve a less ambitious outcome, namely setting in place a mechanism that enables independent reporting of the total government funding of individual schools … Hence, I think that a possible way forward is to push for greater transparency of funding.*
>
> *There is a risk involved in that it would put into the public arena information that provokes debate that might not be helpful to the public sector, or all sections of it, especially if the debate is poorly managed but it is a risk that needs to be taken. Eventually the facts would compel political action.* (Angus, 2007)

Caldwell, in his accompanying paper, argues that ideally it should be only one level of government that sets the framework and that should be where constitutional powers lie. He refers to the system of government as it affects schools in England.

> *If the experience of England is a guide, it is possible to have a national system of self-managing schools, with local government having a limited regulatory role and constituting just one of several sources of support to ensure effective delivery*. (Caldwell, 2007)

While conceding that it is unlikely that there will be constitutional change to make education the responsibility of the Commonwealth, Caldwell argues that "*all with an interest in ensuring a world-class system of education should press for constitutional change in favour of the Commonwealth, with states and territories becoming service providers in a market of providers in a national system of self-managing schools*".

For Caldwell, the fall-back position is "the possibility of a continuing relatively high level of cooperation through the agreement of governments in forums such as the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) or CoAG" (Caldwell, 2007).

Furtado (2007) like Caldwell, reflects on the British situation in relation to the capacity to resolve anomalies in the public funding and responsibilities of public and private schools; and likewise sees difficulties in proposals for replication in Australia:

> *The states and territories already operate a system of schooling that honours considerable aspects of diversity and devolution. It may be that in future years the locus of such ownership and authority will be transferred into local council hands as in the UK, where the original reasons for doing so under the 1944 Education Act were to preserve them from the disturbing effects of political change and party political influence as well as to safeguard the community and public ownership of schools. However, there is no compelling reason to do this as yet, principally because the changing nature of the state has made it impossible to quarantine UK schools from ideological influence and change. Also, colossally different Australian demographic conditions and constitutional arrangements would not in any case permit an easy transfer and replication, at undoubtedly considerable expense to the polity, of similar or any other arrangements.* (Furtado, 2007)

Furtado does argue, however, that one way for Australia to deal with its problems would be for the Commonwealth to take far greater responsibility for regulating private schools. In return for guarantees of access and inclusion and agreement to ending private fees, Furtado proposes that the Commonwealth provide full funding and legislation to preserve their special (for example, religious) character. This proposal would create a category of schools called Commonwealth Integrated Schools. Furtado further proposes that all public funding be removed from those private schools that choose to operate outside this arrangement. This proposal does represent a significant realignment of federal responsibilities for schools funding and regulation, although Furtado does envisage that, under this proposal, states and territories would retain constitutional responsibility for schools and would continue to contribute to the public funding of the Commonwealth Integrated Schools.

In relation to curriculum, Reid proposes the development of national curriculum through processes that provide for states and territories to retain their curriculum responsibilities and that also provide the Commonwealth with a formal avenue for influencing curriculum. Reid argues the need for a mechanism that allows for "*curriculum practices that reflect the complex, fluid and interactive relationships between local, state, national and global contexts*" (Reid, 2007).

Wilson proposes a single entity to develop and manage curriculum. This would be permanently constituted, to move beyond reliance on taskforce and committee structures. Wilson proposes an entity that would have the following characteristics:

- *it should be independent, probably formed as a company, with a clear statutory authority to develop and manage curriculum nationally;*
- *it should be funded according to a formula by the Commonwealth and states and territories, and should report to a board representing them, as well as representation from Catholic and independent sectors;*
- *it should operate according to clearly stated criteria for its responsibilities, including those specifying the kind of curriculum to be developed … as well as criteria for timeliness; and*

- *it should operate according to clearly stated rules for process, including a requirement that it consult widely, but should accept responsibility for decisions about the form, content and quality of its products.*

(Wilson, 2007)

A starting point for change

Considerations about the merits of proposals for reform of federal governance of schooling raise prior questions. What are the objectives of governance arrangements from the standpoint of education? And what kind of school system do we want for this country?

These matters need to be considered before consideration of whether the work of teaching and learning and the educational well-being of students in schools are likely to be enhanced by carving key governmental functions either vertically or horizontally, with a view to reallocating roles and responsibilities between the Commonwealth and the states and territories.

As Twomey and Withers (2007) state, not all areas of government are susceptible to 'clean lines' divisions, where either the Commonwealth or the states and territories could agree to vacate the field. There will always be a need for areas of shared responsibility. Earlier discussion in this paper does suggest strongly that schooling is not an area where key aspects, such as funding, curriculum and teaching can readily be isolated from each other. It can certainly be demonstrated that some of the problems being experienced in terms of achievement and participation arise precisely because decisions about curriculum, for example, are taken without proper regard to the resources and the teaching necessary to translate curriculum into classroom learning programs and opportunities.

It is not possible to describe what makes a good school system without confronting the question of values. So this paper will assume that the ideals and principles on which Australian schools are based are broadly set out in the agreed National Goals for Schooling and reflective of the basic tenets of an active democracy.

For purposes of policy analysis and development, we can take a number of yardsticks to analyse and describe the broad characteristics of 'good' school systems: systems that are capable of delivering what their countries want them to deliver. We can take useful definitions of the kind employed by the OECD and others:

> *A successful education system is one in which the top tenth of the students compare favourably to the top tenth in any nation in the world, and the bottom tenth is very close to the top tenth.* (Codding and Tucker, 2000)

We can draw on research evidence and on the accumulated experience of the outcomes of past policy directions. There is overwhelming research evidence, for example, of what common sense might also have told us, that successful education systems place a premium on having an adequate supply of qualified and committed teachers, who can engage their students in learning. Good schools and systems create the conditions in schools that maximise the time students spend on explicit tasks with these effective teachers. For learning to take place, students and teachers have to be in a state of readiness to engage with each other. Good student support or welfare systems help students to engage in learning free from negative distractions and good professional learning helps teachers to engage with their students.

As confirmed in the OECD report on *What makes school systems perform?* (2003), effective schools and systems neither ignore social and cultural differences, nor do they engage in a restless search for students groupings designed to produce artificial pockets of homogeneity. They embrace the challenge of social and cultural realities and use such differences to drive educational innovation and improvement. According to this report, "*strong basic education systems tend to succeed by providing good quality support for students, teachers and schools in the context of an integrated rather than differentiated school structure*".

Some school systems are far better than others in requiring collective responsibility for participation, achievement and outcomes. For example, Codding and Tucker (2000) reported that legislation in Denmark at that time required municipalities to search out young people who had dropped out of school prematurely and to enrol them in an appropriate program designed to re-engage them in education.

On the basis of evidence it would be difficult to disagree with Codding and Tucker when they report that the most effective schools systems had at their centre what they describe as "an aligned instructional system". This was a finding of studies begun in 1989, comparing the systems of the USA, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Ireland, Singapore and Japan. An "aligned instructional system" was one in which there was a standard curriculum, where standards for student performance in that curriculum were clear and widely known, where assessment tools were matched to those standards, and where curriculum was supported by instructional materials.

Within such a well-aligned system, as some of the accompanying papers point out eloquently, there is need for an emphasis on students as active learners and for teachers to have the freedom and responsibility required to exercise professional judgment about how best to engage their students in vastly varying circumstances.

No good purpose is served by wasting resources on schooling. It is quite evident in Australia, from comparing those schools within the public and private sectors that serve comparably advantaged students, that there is a level of resources in schools beyond which the law of diminishing returns operates in terms of student achievement and outcomes. For schooling to be effective, governments need to provide support outside as well as inside schools, if students are to come to school able and willing to work with their teachers to gain the benefits.

If Australia is to have a system where the key factors that contribute to the effectiveness of schooling are well-aligned, this may make it advisable to abandoning the 'pure federalist' position. There would be significant risks in: separating compulsory from post-compulsory schooling; detaching funding responsibilities from decisions about teacher supply and quality or curriculum; separating further responsibilities for constructing the public policy framework governing the relationships between governments and public and private schools; or drawing artificial lines between general and vocational education.

Rather than attempting to allocate discrete or clearly defined responsibilities for key aspects of schooling between the two levels of government, it would make more sense from an education standpoint to accept that the two levels of government have a set of shared responsibilities; and to define their respective roles in managing those shared responsibilities. This approach would necessitate "*better mechanisms for co-operation to avoid 'border*

issues', to ensure the coordination of government services and to avoid cost-shifting" (Twomey & Withers, 2007).

There are sound arguments for opting for the 'partnership' approach

Policy development rarely enables the luxury of turning back the clock and starting again. The art of successful policy formulation involves starting from where we are now and progressing to a better position. The facts are that the Commonwealth and the states and territories have already become partners, even if they are at times reluctant partners, and that the experience in the past decades confirms that each level of government has strong and legitimate interests in schooling.

Schools are clearly a key institution in all states and territories, where they are part and parcel of the social fabric of the state as a political entity. The discussion of the role of the Commonwealth earlier in this report (see pages 76-79) leaves no doubt that the Commonwealth has strong and legitimate interests in schooling; and has the capacity for constructive partnership. It can also clearly be seen that real problems have arisen where there have been no proper avenues for the expression of legitimate interests by the Commonwealth in, for example, curriculum decision-making.

The costs and benefits of more radical proposals for reform need to be carefully weighed. There would be huge costs in the structural changes that would be needed, for example, to realign federal financing, whether generally or more specifically, for schools. Evidence would be needed that the costs of such efforts would be significantly outweighed by the benefits to students in our schools.

There are also significant political barriers to taking up options for radical realigning of responsibilities for schooling between the Commonwealth and the states and territories. Parents and the wider community are demonstrably conservative about their children's education. There is likely to be little support for any proposals to use the school sector as the laboratory for innovations or experimentation in the name of reform of federalism.

There would be predictable resistance from those representing the interests of the non-government sector to any proposals to remove these schools from the benefits they enjoy of reliance on the coffers of the Commonwealth rather than of the states and territories. There would also be, if past experience is any guide, strong resistance to assigning entire responsibility for public funding of private schools to the Commonwealth. The political effect of such a move would be to expose the full funding picture more directly to the light of public scrutiny, without the filtering effect provided by the complexities of the current unevenly shared funding roles and responsibilities. It is hard to see what benefits there might be for the public sector, symbolic or real, to be dropped completely by the Commonwealth in terms of funding, especially were the non-government sector to remain directly attached to the Commonwealth as its major source of funds.

The option of transferring all or key responsibilities for schooling from states to the Commonwealth would entail massive disruption, risk loss of expertise and experience, and almost certainly lead to increased layers of bureaucracy as the Commonwealth sought ways of compensating for its distance from the action. The option of greater involvement in schooling

by local government in Australia would involve much the same increase in bureaucracy, given the need to, again, compensate for the lack of tradition, experience and expertise in schooling at that level of government.

A reduced role for governments?

It is only fair to acknowledge here that there are those who challenge the reliance on governments to create the conditions within which schools work; and who would opt for a much reduced role for governments in schooling in Australia.

Examples were provided earlier (see pages 42-43) of opposition from both Kemp and Roskam (Kemp, 2007; Roskam, 2006) to government monopoly of curriculum. In his accompanying paper, Caldwell (2007) argues that the primary responsibility of government should be to provide support for schools, but that "*a government provider is just one of many sources of support for schools in the public and private sectors when schools become self-managing*".

Clearly, schools in Australia do receive support from community and other sources, both in relation to funding, curriculum and other aspects of their programs. But it is also undeniable that recent decades in Australia have brought a growing reliance on government, with private providers of schooling increasingly dependent on governments for their funding, curriculum and a range of other provisions. It seems reasonable to assume that, if there were prospects of greater support for schools from corporate or community sources than from government, then non-government schools authorities would have been turning to these since the 1970s rather than to governments. Moreover, the market-based options proposed by those who argue for a reduced role for governments in schooling almost invariably rely on being underwritten by public funding.

The assumption in this report is that schooling is a public as well as a private good and that governments have a critical role in and responsibility for creating a framework of policies within which schools can do their work, and which protect the public interest in their doing that work effectively.

The conclusion here is that, in relation to schooling, there is a need to find ways to make the current federal arrangements for schools a means for enabling the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to do their own work more effectively and efficiently.

Next steps

There is a need for action that is not reliant on major structural changes or radical realignments of responsibilities that could, therefore, begin without delay. Such action would need to have benefits, even if radical options for the reform of the federal system were to be adopted in the future. It would need to be action that would create capability to resolve current problems with federal arrangements already outlined in this paper, and to deal with the setting of educational priorities.

There is a number of promising achievements and developments on which to build such action. These include, for example, the National Goals for Schooling, which can provide the basis for explicit values and principles and the formulation of broad policy goals.

The Council for the Australian Federation has developed a credible set of priorities grounded in evidence. These avoid, however, the prickly problems of the relationships between governments and the public and private school sectors, which must be addressed as a prior condition for dealing with a range of other priorities. If governments were prepared to collaborate in developing ways of dealing with this chronic and politically divisive issue, they might find that there is some political safety in numbers. It would be especially useful if solutions could be found that address this ongoing issue in ways that contribute to improving equality of access to high quality teaching and to clarifying the role of the Commonwealth in schools funding generally.

In relation to dealing with the need to set resource standards and targets to underpin the quality of teaching and curriculum in all schools, the work of the MCEETYA Schools Resourcing Taskforce, noted on page 32, is another promising building block. Its work is to establish the actual costs of schooling across the spectrum of operational contexts, the impact of resource levels on student learning outcomes and the level and mix of resources needed to enable all schools to support their students to meet the National Goals. Work of this kind is critical to providing governments with a guide to planning schools' resource needs and entitlements.

Watson (2007) and others underline the need for action to deal with the problems of schools funding, particularly those relating to Commonwealth funding of non-government schools, through mechanisms that enable some kind of pooling of public funding from all jurisdictions; or enable, at least, the 'pooling' of decisions about allocation. While there are differences in funding provisions across the states and territories, these are not so great as to make any attempt at 'harmonisation' futile. There is scope for finding means to even out these differences over a decade or so.

There is also a clear need, emphasised by Reid (2007) and others, for more open and informed national debate about curriculum; and for means to provide the Commonwealth with a role and a responsibility in curriculum decision-making as a proper alternative to the current recourse to political opportunism and grandstanding.

The need for closer collaboration among jurisdictions to provide an adequate supply of able and committed teachers is also widely recognised, and has been the subject of a growing number of reports.

Having considered the various options available, the best option seems to begin by improving the complementarity of Commonwealth and state and territory arrangements for the planning, funding and operation of schools through a process for harmonisation that can proceed without formal referral of powers. This could build on approaches now being taken through CoAG, MCEETYA and CAF.

The objective of any changes to federal arrangements should be to create a better framework for government decision-making. This framework should be designed to provide the greater transparency needed in policy formulation to enable public engagement in the process and, by that means, to increase public understanding of and confidence in our school system nationally.

Given the action already in train among governments nationally, there are strong arguments for giving greater authority to federal arrangements for schooling through 'heads of government' machinery. This would provide clear direction and authority for implementation by the relevant ministerial council.

There will be a need for new structures to enable a more effective and transparent decision-making process. Such structures must be designed to serve educational purposes, to set goals and priorities and to enable their achievement across different jurisdictions. Structures and processes will need to provide governments with the capacity to negotiate agreed program outcomes among the partners and their respective roles in achieving them, to reduce the temptation and the scope for cost-shifting and blame-shifting.

Changes to federal arrangements would also need to be reviewed periodically to ensure that they are capable of dealing with contemporary challenges.

To meet these conditions, any process of harmonisation should be a formal process. This is necessary to move beyond the reliance on the unsatisfactory forms of agreement that have too often characterised past approaches. These include: reluctant agreement, for example to particular funding conditions; agreements clearly entered in bad faith; or agreements to satisfy the vested interests of powerful groups negotiated behind closed doors. There is a number of ways to formalise shared undertaking among governments. Examples include broad or specific memoranda of understanding, or formal resource agreements where funds are applied to meet agreed program objectives.

Proposal for the development of complementary federal legislation

What is being proposed here is that reforms to existing federal arrangements be achieved through the development of complementary legislation. This is an appropriately formal and comprehensive means that is justified by the depth and breadth of the issues that require attention.

This proposal for the drawing up of complementary legislation does not preclude processes of the kind outlined, for example by Reid (2007) in his accompanying paper, which include research projects to shed light on different aspects of new models for national curriculum. It is a proposal for a way forward which could be assisted by national forums to enable informed debate. The rationale for proposing the development of draft legislation is that this would enable debate around a concrete and practicable proposal. Moving in this direction does not preclude other options being put forward, and may indeed provide the catalyst for further options. This proposal for complementary legislation is also a useful means for testing the waters. If it proves too ambitious, then efforts can be directed at achieving more specific forms of agreement. But if such an approach proves too ambitious, it would surely indicate that there is little or no hope in the short to medium term of success for proposals that entail even more radical realignment of responsibilities.

Complementary legislation is also a means of engaging all parties and interests in Commonwealth and state and territory parliaments. This would assist in producing an enduring outcome that could outlast the inevitable changes in governments and ministerial responsibilities over time.

The more important rationale for proposing the development of draft legislation to govern federal arrangements for schools is that good school systems should be backed by the authority of governments, through good, clear legislation. On this issue, we might do well to take seriously the advice of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr that it may be true that the law cannot change the heart, but that it can restrain the heartless.[24]

Complementary legislation would mean that all the parliaments in the Australian federation would consider and commit to a genuine national partnership on the purposes, goals, priorities and strategies for advancing the quality of schooling for all Australians. It would also mean that all governments have a common legislative foundation for the performance and accountability of their responsibilities for all students in all schools.

The form and language of the legislation in the different jurisdictions could vary to take account of their specific circumstances and traditions, but it would need to be drafted to ensure that all governments have clear and explicit responsibilities based on a common and agreed framework. For illustrative purposes, the elements of such a framework are set out below, with descriptive comment.

[24] "Social Justice", address delivered at Western Michigan University, December 18 1963 (the first in a series of three lectures on the topic "Conscience of America"). Transcript available at http://www.wmich.edu/library/archives/mlk/transcription.html (accessed 9/5/07).

Framework for Proposed Complementary Legislation

Purposes

The overarching purpose of the legislation would be to establish a vehicle for achieving a genuine national effort to provide the highest possible quality of schooling for the nation's children and young people.

In practical terms, the legislation would need to establish a structure and a process for governments to agree on how to coordinate their actions so as to marshal the nation's resources for this purpose.

Principles

National agreement on a common set of principles would guide Commonwealth and state governments in their policies and programs. Examples of such principles might include:

P1 An explicit set of commitments by all governments to the key parties with a direct stake in schooling. The *Statement on the Future of Schooling in Australia* that has been endorsed and distributed by the Council for the Australian Federation (CAF, 2007) could provide a useful guide for this purpose, namely commitments in the following areas:

P1(a) To 'the future of Australia', including delivery of equality of opportunity, economic prosperity, knowledge in an information-rich world, environmental challenges, social cohesion and global citizenship

P1(b) To students, including an acknowledgement of the obligations of governments to provide all students with the schooling resources, services and educational opportunities they need to maximise their learning; and to ensure that "… all students have access to high quality schooling that is free from any discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability, and of differences arising from students' socio-economic background or geographic location" (p29).

P1(c) To parents, so that they can have confidence in the quality of schooling for their children and access to the information they need to support their children's schooling.

P1(d) To the development and delivery of high quality curriculum standards in the key areas of learning, for all students.

P1(e) To provide all schools and students with access to quality teaching, through coordinated strategies for teacher education, recruitment, professional development and recognition.

P1(f) To collaborative federalism, that "… encourages and supports the development of best practice through rigorous innovation and enables

governments to share and apply these practices" and ensures that "… all governments, States, Territories and the Commonwealth, share the costs and benefits of reforms to give every student a realistic chance of meeting the national goals for schooling" (p30).

P2 The adoption of processes for the defining and implementation of policy objectives and priorities that are transparent and generate widespread public confidence in their educational integrity.

P3 An explicit acknowledgement of the need to achieve a balance between the benefits of planning, consolidation, collaboration and the sharing of resources and information, on the one hand, and the flexibility to respond to the needs of particular students and groups of students, on the other.

This kind of statement would also need to balance the principle of 'subsidiarity', where the role of a central authority is limited to "… those tasks which cannot be performed at a more immediate or local level" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, fifth edition), and the responsibility of government for the wider community.

P4 Governments should also be explicit about their responsibilities for policies and programs that are both efficient, including for the economic use of resources for the whole community, and effective, including the use of educational and technical expertise in the development of those policies and programs.

Goals and Priorities

The kind of legislation envisaged here would incorporate both a process for the setting of agreed goals and priorities and a vehicle for their expression.

The *National Goals of Schooling*, as endorsed by Education Ministers first in 1988 (the 'Hobart Declaration') and then in 1999 (the 'Adelaide Declaration') have provided a useful framework for governments over the past few decades. They have provided a format for national reporting and a reference point for agreements with the Commonwealth over funding arrangements. The process for reviewing the national goals appears to have been taken over by the Council for the Australian Federation, as set out in their April 2007 statement. Any final statement for the purposes of complementary legislation would, of course, require the Commonwealth to participate in negotiations and to commit to the agreed outcomes.

The Council's statement has also outlined a range of suggested national priorities, including the quality of teaching and school leadership, early childhood education, school retention and transitions, curriculum, accountability, Indigenous student outcomes and the building of a partnership between schools, parents and the community (CAF, 2007).

The definition of goals and priorities for the proposed complementary legislation should build on these and other national developments. They would also need to be informed by a genuine process of consultation with key professional and community groups and with relevant authorities. They would extend the 'commitments' outlined above in the discussion of proposed principles for the legislation, such as ensuring an adequate supply of quality teachers for all students in all schools, the development of nationally-consistent curriculum

and teaching standards and the efficient and effective use of resources that provide educational returns on the nation's investment in education.

The legislation itself would probably include a general provision in the body of the Act, with reference to an accompanying schedule that sets out the goals and priorities in more detail. This would facilitate any agreed amendments that might be needed from time to time.

The legislation should also include a specific timescale, such as ten years for the goals and five to seven years for the priorities, and a process for consultation and review to their further development after those times.

Functions

Federal arrangements for schooling would need to make provision for the following kinds of function to be performed:

F1 Advice to Ministers on national goals, policies, priorities and programs, and the achievement of these through collaborative action.

F1(a) As noted above, this should incorporate a legislative requirement to consult with relevant groups and authorities, and to report to ministers on this. Such consultation would provide a strong emphasis on the openness of the national process to public involvement and scrutiny.

F2 Development and management of the action plans and implementation strategies required to achieve the agreed goals, policies and priorities, following endorsement by ministers.

F3 Design and maintenance of the data that would be needed to monitor progress in the above, including a national approach to educational statistics – resources, funding, participation, attainments and outcomes – and review of related research.

F4 Regular analysis of data trends and relevant research outcomes, for reporting to ministers and to the public.

F5 Periodic evaluation of national policies and programs, and the preparation of advice to ministers on future policy development and priorities.

F6 Negotiation of goals, priorities and criteria for the distribution of all public funding – Commonwealth and State – for government and non-government schools.

F7 Coordination of national collaboration on key aspects of schooling, including but not limited to: curriculum; assessment and credentialing; teacher education and teaching standards; development of school resource standards, for all schools and students, for schools serving concentrations of students with special needs, and for students in all other schools who have special needs; Indigenous education; educational technologies; and innovation and design in school buildings and infrastructure.

F8 Development and stimulation of research and innovation in priority areas.

The final legislative instrument, of course, should also provide flexibility for ministers to require other functions to be performed, consistent with the Act's purpose, goals and principles.

Structure

Performance of the above functions would require a structure and a clear set of processes. These would need to be described in the proposed legislation.

The centrepiece for these would be the vehicle for bringing together representatives of Commonwealth and state and territory governments – the ministers with direct responsibilities for school education. Their role would be to give authority for the performance of functions, to receive advice on these and to take responsibility for strategic decisions. The current ministerial forum, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), could be written into the legislation for these purposes. But there is a strong argument for Ministers for School Education to meet as a separate Ministerial Council to meet their responsibilities under the proposed legislation, to concentrate meeting agendas and to clarify their role.

The day to day functions, however, would need an executive body serviced by a secretariat with educational, administrative, policy development, data management and analysis and research expertise.

The policy responsibilities of the executive body could be structured along the lines set out below. All appointments to the body, including the secretariat, should be subject to open recruitment processes which involve professional groups and school authorities as appropriate, prior to formal endorsement by Ministers.

S1 A *National Board of Schooling* could be established with overarching responsibilities for policy development, analysis and coordination, comprising persons with a range of expertise to cover the functions set out in the legislation, with a mix of full-time and part-time appointments. It would have specific responsibilities to oversee all aspects of the national compact on schooling, under the leadership of a full-time Chair. The Board would authorise the work program of the secretariat and the commissioning and receipt of advice from two other groups chaired by two full-time members:

S1(a) A *National Commission for Teaching and Learning in Schools*, with expertise and responsibilities relating to the 'educational' elements of the national compact, including curriculum, assessment, credentialing and teaching. This Commission should have direct linkages with existing national structures, including the Curriculum Corporation, the Australian Council for Education Research and Teaching Australia (which may need restructuring to meet criteria for a 'national', rather than a 'Commonwealth' body), to ensure a coherent and coordinated approach to the agreed national compact.

S1(b) A *National Grants Commission for Schools*, with responsibilities for advice to ministers on the resources required to meet the agreed national goals and priorities and the distribution of public funding – Commonwealth and state and territory – to government and non-government schools and systems. As far as possible, this Commission should operate at 'arms' length' from government, but do so under the auspices of terms of reference determined by ministers. These should include at least the following four principles for the allocation of public funding:

- *The further development of public school systems as a national priority, and to meet the primary obligation of governments for providing all students with access to high quality public education.*
- *Priority in funding for those schools operating below national resource standards and for students with special needs.*
- *Protection of the public investment in schools, by assuring the quality of the education funded by that investment and, as set out in the principles outlined above, by the efficient and economic use of those resources for the benefit of the whole community.*
- *The assessment of 'need' for increased public funding to be comprehensive, including the educational needs of students and the resources (assets and income) from all sources: Commonwealth; state and territory; and, in the case of non-government schools, private.*

In addition, appointments to this Commission should have strong backgrounds in financial management and federal financial arrangements, but also understand the ways in which funding and resources are used to deliver the educational outcomes required by the national compact.

The proposed Board and its two Commissions should also be required to establish consultative mechanisms It may be desirable for these to be structured at both national and state and territory levels, while avoiding unnecessary bureaucratic complications. At the same time, building a network of professionals and others around the nation could allow for a wider reach of expertise than would be possible on a strictly 'unitary' system. This could be achieved by enlightened leadership and the fostering of a broader sense of ownership of the agreed educational goals and priorities that extends beyond the purview of ministers and their officials.

The legislation should also provide for regular reporting by the Board and its Commissions to ministers and, probably on an annual basis, to Commonwealth and state and territory parliaments.

CONCLUSION

The strategy of developing a draft bill, or a set of draft complementary bills, is proposed in this paper as a means of stimulating debate and action to make federalism work better for our schools. It does not require that the first steps necessarily be taken by governments themselves. Action to draw up proposed legislation can be taken by concerned citizens. They would need to include, or to have the assistance of those whose interest in schooling is long-term, direct and purposeful, and well-informed by experience, study and reflection; as well as those with legal experience and expertise. Such a strategy is a practical way of confronting the problem of a slide into populism, a political reliance on public opinion as a definitive guide to education policy. Such a reliance on public opinion, in the words of a former NSW Minister for Education, "will, by definition, give undue weight to those whose interest in schooling is uninformed, incidental, and indirect" (Cavalier, 1988).

This report concludes with the above proposal for action to develop draft complementary legislation. Such action may, of course, stimulate a range of additional or alternative options, but that only strengthens the arguments for this course of action.

This proposal for drawing up draft legislation is put forward as a means of providing for the due process and transparency in federal arrangements for schools that are necessary conditions for reform. National policy trends and directions shape the learning experiences and opportunities of our children and young people in schools. We owe them national policies that have, and that are seen to have, the full and informed consent of the Australian people.

REFERENCES

ACT Department of Education, Youth and Family Services, (2003) *Inquiry into ACT Education Funding.*

Aitkin D., (2005) *What was it all for? The Reshaping of Australia*. Allen & Unwin: Sydney.

Allen Consulting Group, (2004), *Governments Working Together: A Better Future for All Australians*. Victorian Government: Melbourne. Available at: http://www.allenconsult.com.au/publications/view.php?id=287 (accessed 8/5/07).

— (2006) *Governments Working Together? Assessing Specific Purpose Payment Arrangements*. Report to the Department of Premier and Cabinet (Victoria). Available at: http://www.allenconsult.com.au/publications/view.php?id=315 (accessed 9/5/07).

Audit Office of NSW, (1999) *The School Accountability and Improvement Model (Performance Audit Report*). Audit Office of NSW: Sydney. Available at: http://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/publications/reports/performance/1999/schoolimp/contents.html (accessed 9/5/07).

Auditor General Victoria, (2000) *Grants to non-government organizations: Improving accountability*. Melbourne.

Australian Bureau of Statistics, (2006) *Australian Social Trends 2006*. Cat.No.4102.0.

Australian Council for Educational Administration and Australian College of Education, (2001) *A National Declaration for Education 2001. A Report on the Findings.* Melbourne.

Australian Council for Educational Research, (2006) *Australian Certificate of Education, exploring a way forward*. Available at: http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/profiles/australian_certificate_education.htm (accessed 9/5/07).

Banks, G., (2005) "Comparing school systems across Australia", address to ANZSOG conference: *Schooling in the 21st Century: Unlocking Human Potential*, 28 and 29 September 2005, Sydney.

Bishop, J., (2007) "Victory for commonsense as States finally agree to a nationally consistent school curriculum", *Media Release*, 13 April 2007.

Blackburn, J., (1996) "A lesson in school funding", *The Australian*, 16/07/96, p. 13.

Burke, G., (2002) *The Evolution of School Funding*. Centre for Economics of Education and Training, Monash University. Paper prepared for Inquiry into ACT Education Funding.

Business Council of Australia, (2006) *Modernising the Australian Federation. A Discussion Paper.* Available at: http://www.bca.com.au/Content.aspx?ContentID=100278 (accessed 9/5/07).

Caldwell, B. and Roskam, J., (2002) *Australia's education choices*. The Menzies Research Centre: Canberra.

Cavalier, R., (1988) "One Way to get Poll-Axed", article in the *Australian Financial Review*, 20 December 1988.

Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, University of Melbourne, (2004) *A New National Agenda for Education and Training in Australia.* Prepared for the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Victoria.

Cobbold, T., (2003) *Estimates of Future Funding of Non-Government and Government Schools*. A Paper Prepared for the Australian Education Union. Available from: http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Publications/Papers/Papers&Submissionindex.html (accessed 9/5/07).

Codding, M. and Tucker, J., (2000) "Building a World Class Education System in the United States", paper presented at the 2000 Curriculum Corporation Conference, 18-19 May 2000, Melbourne.

Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, (2003) *Australia's Teachers: Australia's Future – Advancing Innovation, Science, Technology and Mathematics. Main Report*. Available at: http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/policy_initiatives_reviews/reviews/teaching_teacher_education/review_of_teaching_and_teacher_education_home.htm (accessed 9/5/07).

Commonwealth of Australia, (2006) *Gazette*: *General Recurrent Grants to Non-Government, Non-Systemic and Systemic schools*, No.7, Wednesday 18th October 2006.

Commonwealth Schools Commission, (1985) *Quality and Equality. Commonwealth specific purpose programs for Australian schools.*

Connors, L., (2007*) Time and Tide.* A report prepared for the NSW Public Education Alliance on the need to invest in the renewal of the public school teaching service. Available at: www.nswtf.org.au/media/latest_2007/files/20070212_time.pdf (accessed 9/5/07).

Cooney, G., (2006) *Review of Statewide Assessments in the Context of National Development. Interim Report.* Available at: https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/newsroom/yr2006/jun/nattestreport.pdf (accessed 9/5/07).

CAF: Council for the Australian Federation, (2007) *Federalist Paper 2. The Future of Schooling in Australia*. Available at: http://www.education.qld.gov.au/publication/production/reports/pdfs/2007/federalist-paper.pdf (accessed 9/5/07).

CoAG: Council of Australian Governments, (2007) *Communiqué* of 13 April 2007, available at: *http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/130407/index.htm* (accessed 6/5/07).

CoAG: Council of Australian Governments, (2006) *Communiqué* of 10 February 2006, available at: http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/100206/index.htm (accessed 6/5/07).

Daily Telegraph, (2007) "Schools get national curriculum", *Daily Telegraph*, 13 April 2007.

Davis, G., (2006) "Uni plans radical rise in fees", *The Age*, 01/11/2006, p. 12.

DEST: Department of Education, Science and Training, (2007) *Quadrennial Administrative Guidelines – 2007 update*. Available at: http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/23B2372D-2A78-452A-83CE-C7B767EB6FF9/16356/Quad_Admin_Guidelines_2005_2009.pdf (accessed 6/5/07).

Dinham, S., (2006) "New formula needed to solve problems in schools", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31/8/06.

Grimshaw, W., (2002) *Review of Non-Government Schools in NSW: Report 1*. Sydney: NSW Government.

Hilmer, F., (2007) "For a good uni system, someone will have to pay", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8/1/07.

Kemp, D., (undated) *Building up Government Schooling. What the Howard Government is doing for Government Schools.* A Background Briefing, document circulated by previous Commonwealth minister.

— (2007) "David Kemp: Curriculum would force reform", *The Weekend Australian*, 10/10/06.

Lamb, S. and Teese, R., (2006) *Equity programs for government schools in NSW. A review.* Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, University of Melbourne.

Law, S., (2006) *The War for Children's Minds*. Routledge: New York.

Masters, G., (2005) "Raising the question: are we world class?" *ACE Perspectives, Education Review*, 16/2/05.

— (2007) "Time is right for a common curriculum", *The Advertiser*, 2/3/07.

Masters, G., Forster, M., Matters, G. and Tognolini, J., (2006) *Australian Certificate of Education: exploring a way forward*, ACER. Available at: www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/profiles/documents/aust_cert_edu_doc.htm (accessed 9/5/07).

McGaw, B., (2005) "Achievement and equity: Where is Australia at?" Paper presented to 2005 Curriculum Corporation Conference: *Curriculum and assessment: closing the gap*, Brisbane 2-3 June, 2005.

— (2006) 'Schooling'. Paper presented to Economic and Social Outlook Conference 2006, *Making the Boom Pay*. (Sponsored by *The Australian* newspaper and the University of Melbourne.

MCEETYA: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, (1999) *The Adelaide Declaration on national goals for schooling in the 21st century*. Available at: http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/nationalgoals/index.htm (accessed 9/5/07).

— (2005) Annual National Report on Schooling in Australia (ANR). (yet to be published in hard copy) Statistical appendix available at: http://cms.curriculum.edu.au/anr2005/index.htm (accessed 9/5/07).

Nahan, M., (2006) *Opportunity Squandered: How the States have wasted their reform bonus. IPA Backgrounder, Institute of Public Affairs*, Vol. 18, No. 3, June.

Nelson, B., (2004) "Learning Together: Achievement through Choice and Opportunity", Media Release by Australian Government Minister for Education, Science and Training, 11 May 2004.

New South Wales Parliament, (2005) Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues**.** *Inquiry into the recruitment and training of teachers*. Available at: http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/PARLMENT/Committee.nsf/0/0b3853846bf60107ca2570a5000b44a5/$FILE/Recruitment%20and%20training%20of%20teachers%20report.pdf (accessed 10/5/07).

NSW Public Education Council, (2005) *New South Wales Public Schools. Building on Strong Foundations*. Available at: https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/reports_stats/index.htm (accessed 9/5/07).

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, (2003), *What makes school systems perform? Seeing school systems through the prism of PISA.* Available at: http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/30/24/33858946.pdf (accessed 9/5/07).

— (2005) *Teachers Matter. Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers.* Available at: http://www.oecd.org/document/9/0,2340,en_2649_34521_11969545_1_1_1_1,00.html (accessed 10/5/07).

— (2006) *Education at a Glance*. OECD Indicators 2006. Available at: http://www.oecd.org/document/52/0,2340,en_2649_34515_37328564_1_1_1_1,00.html (accessed 10/5/07).

Parliament of Australia House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, (2007) *Top of the Class. Report on the inquiry into teacher education.* The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. Available at: http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/evt/teachereduc/report.htm (accessed 10/5/07)

Preston, B. 2006. Notes of discussion with Lyndsay Connors, November 2006.

Productivity Commission, (2006) *Productive Reform in a Federal System: Roundtable Proceedings*, Productivity Commission: Canberra.

Ramsey, G., (2000) *Quality Matters. Revitalising teaching: critical* times, *critical choices.* Report of the review of teacher education in NSW, NSW Department of Education and Training. Available at: https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/teachrev/reports (accessed 10/5/07).

Reid, A., (2005) *Re-thinking National Curriculum Collaboration. Towards an Australian Curriculum*. Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training.

Riordan G (2006). Article in *The Daily Telegraph*, 21/6/96.

Roskam, J., (2006) "A single curriculum is not the answer", *The Age*, 11/10/06.

Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee, (1995) *Report of the Inquiry into Accountability in Commonwealth-State Funding Arrangements in Education*, Canberra.

SiMERR: National Centre of Science, ICT and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia, University of New England, (2006), *Science, ICT and Mathematics Education in Rural and Regional Australia. The SiMERR National Survey. A research report prepared for the Department of Education, Science and Training.* Available at: http://simerr.une.edu.au/national_survey/index.html (accessed 10/5/07).

Teese, R., (2006) "Condemned to innovate", *Griffith Review*, Edition 11 – *Getting Smart: The battle for ideas in education*.

— (2007) "Danger stalks Canberra in the blackboard jungle", *The Age*, 5/3/07.

Twomey, A. and Withers, G., (2007) *Australia's Federal Future: Delivering Growth and Prosperity.* A Report for the Council for the Australian Federation. Available at: http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/CA256D800027B102/Lookup/FederalistPaperAustralia'sFederalFuture/$file/Federalist%20Paper%20Australia's%20Federal%20Future.pdf (accessed 10/5/07).

Vickers, M., (2005) "In the common good: the need for a new approach to funding Australia's schools", *Australian Journal of Education*, 49(3), 264-277.

Vinson, T., (2007) *Dropping off the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia.* A report by Professor Tony Vinson for Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia.

Warren, N., (2006) *Benchmarking Australia's Intergovernmental Fiscal Arrangements*, Sydney: NSW Government.

Watson L., (1998) *Intentions, Opportunities and Outcomes. The Impact of Commonwealth Involvement in Australian Schooling.* Unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University.

— (2004) *The total operating resources of Australian private schools in 2004*, Discussion Paper No.4. Lifelong Learning Network, University of Canberra.

NOTES ON THE AUTHOR

Lyndsay Connors was appointed to the Commonwealth Schools Commission as a full-time commissioner in 1983 and, in that capacity, as Chair of the Curriculum Development Council. In 1988, she was appointed to chair the Schools Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training.

In the early 1990s, she served as Deputy Chair of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Board of the Open Learning Technology Corporation and was a member of the Australian Children's Television Foundation.

She subsequently worked in the NSW Department of Education, first as director for inner city schools, then as director of equity programs and, later, of higher education. When the NSW Public Education Council was set up in 2002, she was appointed as its chair by the NSW Government.

She is currently a fellow of the new Centre for Policy Development; and has recently been appointed as an honorary Adjunct Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education and Social Work by Sydney University.

Her work in education has led to honorary doctorates from the Universities of Canberra and South Australia; an outstanding service award from the Australian Council of Deans of Education; the Annual Medal of the Australian College of Education; and appointment as a Member in the general division of the Order of Australia.

Lyndsay Connors: *Making federalism work for schools: due process, transparency, informed consent*

PART TWO ACCOMPANYING PAPERS

CONTENTS

Max Angus: *Commonwealth-State Relations and the Funding of Australia's Schools* **112**

Richard Bates: *Public Education and Social Justice* **117**

Brian J. Caldwell: *Options for a New Federalism in Australia* **125**

Michael Furtado: *Public Education in New Times: Possible Futures for Commonwealth-State Relations in Sustaining and Improving Australia's Schools* **130**

Alan Reid: *Putting the Public Back into Curriculum* **136**

Louise Watson: *Possible Futures for Commonwealth-State Relations in Sustaining and Improving Australia's Schools* **142**

Bruce Wilson: *The politics of curriculum* **151**

Notes on the authors **156**

Commonwealth-State Relations and the Funding of Australia's Schools

Max Angus

ABSTRACT: Current funding arrangements for schools are unhelpfully complex and opaque. This paper calls for both Commonwealth and state and territory governments to make full public disclosure about school resource allocations, verified by an independent body, as a necessary first stage in the process of developing an equitable national system of school funding.

Introduction

The present federal system in which the Commonwealth government assumes leadership for providing an overarching policy framework through a ministerial council has been a positive force over the years, particularly in regard to the brokering of agreement about the national curriculum framework. However, the current school funding arrangements employed by the Commonwealth and the states constitute a notable and highly significant exception.

There is no agreed federal framework for determining the resource needs of all schools, nor a national system of accounting for government funding, nor a non-partisan agency that is able to ensure that funding from both levels of government is being allocated fairly and effectively to schools. In this vacuum, there is the risk that Australian education, once envied by experts from other countries for the equity of its school funding, is at risk of becoming socially and educationally polarised. There are cases where schools serving well-off families are operating with considerably higher resource levels than schools with concentrations of socially disadvantaged children. Current school funding policies appear to be extending this trend and widening the differentiation.

One of the reasons why the problem of school resource differentiation is so hard to establish or refute is that there is a paucity of information about the actual quantum of resources acquired by individual schools from government and private sources. In the absence of this information, discussions about school funding are necessarily based on system or sectoral aggregates and averages, or on the funding of particular programs where the program funds constitute a minor proportion of the total school resource allocation. Neither provides a satisfactory basis for making public policy.

In this paper, I argue that the starting point for sorting out school funding problems that arise from the shared responsibility of the Commonwealth and the states is the commitment by both levels of government to provide comprehensive information about individual school resource allocations, information that is placed in the public arena and verified by a small expert body authorised by governments though independent of them.

You would be mistaken if you thought that I am proposing a modest first step. To achieve these outcomes would be technically challenging and politically difficult. Nevertheless, decisions about Australian school funding will be better made if they are informed more by the facts of school resource allocation than by ideological arguments and media spin.

Reducing the complexity of school funding

In a national study of primary schools, my colleagues and I showed how the resource allocation mechanisms for primary schools are unhelpfully complex and exceedingly opaque (Angus *et al.*, 2004). The problem arises from the variations among states, the different funding arrangements for sectors, the different resource allocation policies for the various categories of schools, the multiple government and private sources of funding, the variable conditions that apply in regard to access to the funding, and services which are provided but not costed at the school level.

Most primary school principals in systemic schools have a general appreciation of the total resource inputs to their schools. However, few are in a position to establish the dollar value of the total allocation, including the portion retained on their behalf by central authorities to provide central services. Some systems have moved towards providing global allocations but staffing in most systemic schools is centrally controlled and the staff costs are not made explicit in the school's accounts. The same is most likely true of secondary schools. This means that principals and their parent councils are unable to compare the global per capita allocations for their school with other like schools.

The result is that principals cannot calculate the real cost of their educational provision. While they may be aware of the formula that determines their school grant over which they have some discretion, and can determine whether it is larger or smaller than the grants to other schools, they would be hard pressed to determine whether their total per capita resource allocation is greater or less than other government and non-government schools in their district. This complexity explains the anomalies and likely inequities that we found when we examined the total resource allocations in the sample schools. As we indicated in our report, dissatisfaction and ineffectualness arise from not knowing as well as not having (Angus *et al.*, 2004: 88).

The federal system is only one of the complicating factors. Much of the complexity arises because of arrangements established by system authorities. The arrangements are often deeply embedded in administrative practice and in the case of staffing, the largest school recurrent cost, held in place by industrial agreements. Simplifying the process would require public debates about new formulae, especially if the adoption of simplified funding models meant that some schools received less because the new formula advantaged others. Mark Witham has shown that it is theoretically possible for a large state system to replace the plethora of existing allocation mechanisms with a simple and transparent model without necessarily changing the funding outcomes for schools (Witham, 2001). However, there would need to be a strong political will on the part of state governments to make this happen.

On the other hand, it should be borne in mind that state governments make per capita resource allocations to private schools, some states using weighted resource indexes based on need. The case could be put that if it is appropriate for a state government to use a relatively simple index to allocate hundreds of millions of dollars to private schools might not a similar index be used to distribute funds to government schools?

Hence, I contend that the complexity of funding arrangements is the initial stumbling block for further school finance reform. It is hard to carry any argument forward that some categories of schools need more funds than others while at the same time arguing that it is

better not to know the facts. The paucity of our knowledge of the facts of school funding leads advocates of particular courses of action to base their arguments on conjecture or hyperbole.

Increasing transparency and fairness

The second step is to push for more transparent accounting of the resources. I have already alluded to the challenges that arise from making public individual school allocations.

Most people accept that the resource needs of schools are dependent on the kinds of students they enrol and the programs they run. For example, it is no secret that small schools require higher per capita funding than large school to provide comparable programs. It is also the case that the per capita allocations for schools that enrol students with medical disabilities or schools that offer highly specialised programs, such as agricultural high schools, require much higher levels of resourcing than typical schools, in some cases by a factor of four or five. In addition, all school authorities build into their funding formulae extra provision for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds though the basis of this extra provision has been harder to determine, varies among system authorities, and is therefore more controversial. However, the actual additional amounts are not always disclosed and it is arguable whether the additional funds are sufficient.

It is hard to reach a conclusion about whether an individual school is being fairly funded without knowing the total resources at its disposal and being able to compare the school's resource levels with schools serving similar communities. In the absence of this individual school data interested parties are reliant on average per capita costs which are computed by simply dividing the total government allocation to a system or sector by the number of enrolled students. The dispersion of allocations is not able to be calculated using this approach. In other words, the average is not the average allocation received by individual schools but an average based on centrally held global figures divided by the number of students in the whole system.

In some ways it is remarkable that that there is so little pressure on governments to disclose the per capita costs of providing educational services to individual schools. Debates over the fairness of funding have usually been based on the average government primary or secondary per capita recurrent cost and the proportion of that figure allocated on average to the non-government sectors. While officials can see the good sense of having information systems that can track costs to the individual school level, they also recognise that, if made public, there would be considerable pressure on them to explain the variations among schools. This would be hard to accomplish with any degree of precision because of the complexity. Ministers and their officials are constantly dealing with petitions for more resources; providing a precise explanation of each school's funding might open Pandora's box.

Schools are increasingly expected to disclose the performance of students on national benchmarking tests as part of the general push towards greater public accountability. Yet their performance is being judged without any real regard to the resources, government and private, that schools have at their disposal. There should be much higher performance expectations of schools with selective intakes and per capita allocations two or three times the size of other schools. Disclosure of student performance results without disclosure of resource levels is unfair and misleading.

There is a final point to be made in regard to the transparent calculation of individual school costs. This form of reporting has the potential to shift the debate away from the stalemated

arguments about relative contributions of the state versus the Commonwealth and the historically divisive debates about public versus private provision towards analyses of whether individual schools have sufficient resources to produce the results expected of them.

Improving the complementarity of Commonwealth and state funding

Even if it were possible to reform school funding in the ways suggested above there is no guarantee that the problem of 'differentiation' would be ameliorated. Governments are now less inclined than before to address this differentiation because there has been a sea change in public attitudes towards notions of 'the market', 'choice', 'user pays 'and 'competition' (Argy, 2006; Saunders, 1999). Both sides of politics are courting 'aspirational voters'; these typically include parents who are prepared to make the necessary sacrifices to send their children to a 'good' school rather than the 'school of convenience'. Belief in the value of choice of school is so deeply entrenched that no government for the foreseeable future is likely to oppose it. Choice is good from both Commonwealth and state perspectives.

The tacit support of market and user pays principles has meant that there is a much weaker commitment by governments to central planning of educational provision or interest in curbing the level of fees that a school receiving government subsidies is entitled to charge. During 1974-1987 the Australian Schools Commission played an important role in monitoring per pupil expenditures and advising the Commonwealth on school needs and other funding matters. In fulfilling this role the Schools Commission provided national leadership. Its reports on school funding are unsurpassed for their comprehensiveness, tough-mindedness and detail. Their authors were able to be provocative because the Commission was at arms' length from government. For example, it was able to float in the late 1970s a discussion paper on funding models, including the controversial issue of vouchers and back up its arguments with high quality data analysis (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1978).

While the Schools Commission may have run its course and merited abolition in 1987, its demise has left a vacuum. Nearly 20 years on it is clear that MCEETYA cannot fill the void. MCEETYA has achieved some success. All education ministers have agreed to a set of national goals for schooling, a national curriculum and assessment framework and various national policies on important educational matters. What is needed is a national system of school funding that underpins these educational frameworks. However, attempts to produce such agreement through MCEETYA have made almost no progress. This is partly a result of the habitual distrust between the Commonwealth and states over financial matters but is also due to the fact that neither side feels compelled to reach an agreement since an agreement would impose some constraint over spending priorities. The Commonwealth seems content to position itself as the principal provider for the non-government sector and the states are obliged to provide principally for the government sector. Neither side recognises any impending crisis and there is no circuit-breaker in sight.

The need to act

The negative consequences of the current funding arrangements are a bit like concrete cancer in a large building, or changes to the ozone layer in our atmosphere. The degradation is slow and almost imperceptible. The net effect is a growing differentiation between those government and non-government schools that serve the families on high incomes and those who are not well off (Angus *et al.*, 2004). Since the Commission's abolition the total government (Commonwealth and state) per capita funding has been growing at a faster rate for non-government than for government schools (Productivity Commission, 2006). The

Australian education system, taken as a whole, is evolving into something but we don't know what.

These deficiencies affect all school sectors. However, while the present funding arrangements remain in force it is hard to be optimistic about the longer-term future of public education as we know it. When I talk on an off the record basis with senior educators who throughout their professional life have been staunch supporters of state education systems, they are invariably pessimistic.

While the issues described above are inherently political and properly resolved by state and Commonwealth ministers, without adequate information and public scrutiny the resolutions are likely to be driven by political point scoring. One side of the debate makes a claim based on one set of figures and the other counters by drawing on different data. Hence, I doubt whether for the time being the Commonwealth and the states will agree to an alignment of funding so that there is a proper complementarity. It does not suit their political interests to do so. Although there may be little appetite, therefore, to cede to a bureaucracy on the scale of the former Schools Commission responsibility for advising on government funding, it may be possible to achieve a less ambitious outcome, namely setting in place a mechanism that enables independent reporting of the total government funding of individual schools.

Hence, I think that a possible way forward is to push for greater transparency of funding. There is a risk involved in that it would put into the public arena information that provokes debate that might not be helpful to the public sector, or all sections of it, especially if the debate is poorly managed but it is a risk that needs to be taken. Eventually the facts would compel political action. There is now a great opportunity for our political leaders to show true statesmanship as well as political acumen.

References

Angus, M., Olney, H., Ainley, J., Caldwell, B., Burke, G., Selleck, R., & Spinks, J., (2004) *The sufficiency of resources for Australian primary schools*. Canberra: DEST.

Argy, F., (2006) *Equality of opportunity in Australia: Myth and reality*. Discussion paper No. 85, Australia Institute, ANU, Canberra.

Commonwealth Schools Commission, (1978) *Some aspects of school finance in Australia.* Canberra: Schools Commission.

Productivity Commission, (2006) *Report on Government Services*. Canberra: AusInfo.

Saunders, P., (1999) *The perception of equality*. Social Policy Research Centre Newsletter, No. 75, 1, 4-6.

Witham, M., (2001) A fair go: Cutting the cake and closing schools. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland.

Public Education and Social Justice

Richard Bates

ABSTRACT: Principles of equity and inclusion are fundamental to education which builds autonomous individuals and well-functioning communities. This paper analyses the practicalities of social justice in education, calling for educational policy which provides equitable distribution of educational access and resources, encourages inclusiveness and discourages exclusiveness, and democratises educational leadership.

> *The call for freedom to build a personal life is the only universalistic principle that does not impose one form of social organization and cultural practice. It is not reducible to laissez faire economics or to pure tolerance, first, because it demands respect for the freedom of all individuals and therefore a rejection of exclusion, and secondly because it demands that any reference to a cultural identity be legitimised in terms of the freedom and equality of all, and not by appeal to a social order, a tradition or the requirements of public order*. (Touraine, 2000:167)

Markets, Cultures and the Autonomy of Public Education

At the bottom of the paddock where I live is a pile of rubble – all that remains of the first primary school to be established in the area in the 1850s. It belonged to Wormbete Station and was provided by the Station for the children of farm hands and itinerant workers: fencers, shearers, carters. They were an impermanent bunch, subject to the vagaries of the farming economy and the school soon folded under the instabilities of pupil non-attendance and teacher supply. Over the next fifty years attempts were made to establish four other primary schools. Land was given by farmers, public subscriptions paid for the materials, public effort built the schools, and public payments employed the teachers. But public education in this part of rural Victoria, as elsewhere, was uncertain and insecure – as uncertain and insecure as the teaching profession. Schools opened and closed unpredictably as populations rose and fell, as teachers came and went, as the depression of the 1890s destabilised rural Victoria. It was not until the 1920s that the state government ensured that Modewarre got its first grand bluestone school and a guaranteed supply of teachers – some of whom even had the benefit of training at Melbourne Teachers' College.

Secondary education was an altogether different, private, world. The only secondary schools remotely within striking distance of Moriac in the early days were Geelong Grammar (an Anglican foundation tied into the British Public School network and serving the Western Districts Squattocracy), Geelong College (a Presbyterian foundation serving the local commercial elite trading in and exporting agricultural products: the Strachans and Dalgetys of the wool stores down by Cunningham Pier) and late on, in the 1930s, St Josephs (a Catholic foundation committed to the development of a Catholic middle class in the face of the Protestant Ascendancy). These schools were all private and exclusionary. Class, gender and religion were the barriers. No one from Modewarre Primary School Number 406 ever went to one of these schools. Private girls' secondary schools: The Hermitage (Anglican), Morongo (Presbyterian), and Sacred Heart (Catholic), were also established but, with the exception of

Sacred Heart, failed to achieve the status and permanence of the main, masculine, foundations. Public (government) secondary schooling was late in coming and was by law prevented from establishing itself anywhere near the private secondary schools. Geelong High School was put well away to the East (although Matthew Flinders Girls' High School was by some anomaly established in central Geelong).

The post-war period saw an enormous expansion of public education, primary as well as secondary. Primary schools were built in large numbers in order to cope with the population boom. But within this expansion secondary education was transformed with government technical and high schools being established in large numbers – some five new public secondary schools in Geelong alone. Students from Modewarre Primary School started to get a secondary education. Public access to public schools transformed life chances for a significant proportion of this generation, many of whom also passed on to university – the first in their family to gain both secondary and tertiary education – and to gain access to the professions.

We should not forget this enormous achievement – the establishment of secondary education as an overwhelmingly public enterprise that offered and continues to offer both access and opportunity to the overwhelming majority of Australian students.

What drove this transformation was a general political commitment to the egalitarian principle of equity of opportunity within the context of a nation-building state.

It is, of course, true, as Richard Teese (2000, 2003) and others have shown, that there are hierarchies of access in both secondary and tertiary education associated with the continuing exclusionary practices of private schools. Moreover in the broader political governance of education, wealth, religion, values, choice, markets, competition, individualism and hierarchy appear to have displaced the principles of equity and opportunity in a nation-building state which were the foundation for our post-war success. A very post-modern situation!

Indeed we seem to be in a curious political situation where politics is characterised by ministers and governments railing against post-modernity while adopting it in policy and practice in a totally uncritical fashion: for what could be more post-modern than the adoption of such values?

And what is one to make of the idea of public education in a time when, on the one hand, claims are made that anything paid from the public purse is, ipso facto, public (Caldwell & Hayward, 1998) and, on the other hand, that there is not one public but many (McKee, 2004)? Is the notion of the public sphere, and hence the notion of the public school, to be subject to modernist interpretation (and advocacy of a single public sphere so as to ensure social and cultural integrity) or post-modernist interpretation (and advocacy of multiple interacting public spheres so as to acknowledge social and cultural diversity)? Is public schooling (however conceived) to be subject to a single authoritative declaration of an Australian curriculum based upon Australian knowledge and Australian values, or is public schooling to recognise a wider responsibility to an emerging global society and a broader set of voices within a changing Australian culture? The answers we give to these questions have profound implications for policy and practice in Australian education.

Bob Connell, writing in 1982, defended an education that was more than an agency of social reproduction:

> *The education we are speaking of is plainly more than a mere reflection of social life; it bears on its reconstitution … Education has fundamental connections with the idea of human emancipation, though it is constantly in danger of being captured for other interests.* (Connell, 1982: 207-8)

In 2006 there seem to be two sets of interests that are particularly dangerous for education. The first is articulated by those who would see education simply as a mechanism for producing the human capital required to respond to the increasingly competitive global economy; much contemporary educational policy is driven by such interests. But as Touraine (2000) and Luttwak (1995) point out, the result is an education that defines the essentials of learning as the (temporary) mastery of an ever-changing repertoire of skills under conditions of risk, uncertainty and competition. "Markets take the place of community in such a society where continuous strategic action frustrates the development of self and community alike" (Bates, 2006a). This dark side of modernity brings about a dissociation of personality from system, sociability from production and the dissolution of culture in the solvent of market society (Touraine, 2000, Bates, 2006b, 2006c).

The second set of interests is articulated by those who see education simply as a means of preserving a tradition, or indeed of imposing a particular notion of community. Here, as Peshkin (1986) suggests, while schools may serve as an integrative mechanism for particular communities, they are also quite restrictive of individual autonomy and inevitably in conflict with other communities that embrace a different doctrinal, nationalist or ethnic foundation.

> *A communal school serves an internally integrative or community-maintenance function. That is, it simultaneously links believers together and separates them from non-believers. In its defensive capacity, the academy shields its students and beliefs from competitors by promoting dichotomies of we and they, but also of right and wrong. We follow God's truth in God's preferred institution; they are the unfortunates of Satan's dark, unrighteous world*. (Peshkin, 1986: 282)

So it seems that neither market society nor the appeal to tradition will provide adequate guidance for public education.

What, then, are the principles that should guide public education in contemporary society?

Clearly public education is inevitably shaped by the context in which it operates. Within the post-war period the Australian context was one of state-driven expansion in both material and cultural arenas, in which, for example, the Snowy River project was iconic in terms of both water and energy infrastructure and in terms of integrating diverse cultures. This was nation building in both economy and culture. The current context is somewhat different as local economies and local cultures become globalised.

Australia has always suffered the 'instability of a dependent economy' (a phrase used by the Historian Bill Oliver to describe New Zealand, but equally applicable to Australia's dependence on the vagaries on international markets for agricultural and mineral resources), as well as the tyranny of distance. But the revolutions in transportation of physical goods by sea and air and symbolic goods and information by electronic means are transforming what David Harvey (2001) calls the "spaces of capital". That is, the separation of conception from execution in both ideas and products now allows simultaneously the concentration of control and the dispersal of production over vast geographic distances. Again, the move towards knowledge-based economies built around real time transfers of vast amounts of intellectual

and financial capital rearranges temporal relationships in quite profound ways. The economic context for Australia is therefore transformed from that of a somewhat distant, insulated economy to one where outward flows of resources can be, as at present, overwhelmed by inward flows of manufactures and symbolic goods resulting in a massive current account deficit – despite our selling off large parts of Australian industry to foreign buyers.

Such a situation contains within it quite new uncertainties and their accompanying risks and demands quite new economic and industrial strategies. Some of these are local but many of them are part of the growing global articulation of production and consumption and the attempt to shape and control such changes through bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements as well as through participation in international agencies. The dominant metaphor and mechanism for these changes is that of the market where multiple players compete through mechanisms of efficiency, cost and technical innovation. However, as is obvious, some players are more equal than others. Markets are always structured. Frequently benefits are concentrated through agreements or market power towards dominant agencies and states, sometimes artificially and fictionally as in the case of Enron as well as our own failed 'entrepreneurs'. The main conclusions here are that, on the one hand, the strategic risks in this new environment are significantly transformed in both temporal and spatial senses, and that while markets are structured through differences in power, those power relationships can be disturbed by innovation (creative destruction?) and by market failure – especially where the norms of honesty, fairness and transparency (upon which markets depend, but which they cannot generate) are traduced. The main mechanisms of the market control however are the generation of profit and the concentration of wealth. Both are mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion.

On the other side of the ledger, globalisation is speeding up what Huntington (1996) so crassly called "the clash of civilizations". In fact, what we are currently experiencing in the realm of culture is significant and rapid cultural transformation both within existing states and between them. Very few states in the modern world are coincidental with a single cultural tradition. States and their boundaries are, in their modern form, very much a product of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. State boundaries are far from stable in many circumstances, as evidenced by European, Middle Eastern and African history in the twentieth century, and indeed in Australia's current redefinition of its boundaries for refugee purposes. It has to be recognised that most states contain within themselves different cultural traditions, often associated with ethnicity, religion or geography. In addition there are cultural differences that result from class and gender differences. As well there are social movements of a global kind built around issues such as the environment, the protection of biodiversity, women's rights, gay and lesbian rights and so on. The result is that 'traditional' cultures within societies are constantly in the process of negotiating with each other, transforming themselves and the society into new social, cultural and legislative forms. Add to this the physical and virtual migration of people and their cultures across state boundaries and the pressures for continuous and increasingly rapid cultural transformation are intense. But cultures are by their very nature mechanisms of conservation, despite Fazal Rivi's (1997) acute observation that they are also mechanisms for managing change.

Cultures, like markets, are structured in their relationships both within and between states. They are, fundamentally, concerned with the realm of values and questions of how those values through which we relate to each other are to be played out in the forms of social organisation through which we shape our relationships. Loyalty to particular values is often

the condition of participation in culture. Indeed, if the mechanisms of the market are profit and wealth then the mechanisms of culture are loyalty and belief.

What we are faced with in contemporary Australia, as elsewhere, is the power of two great steering mechanisms: on the one hand, markets and money with all their associated strategies, risks and uncertainties; on the other hand, cultures and values, with their competing demands for loyalty and belief.

What, then, does this new context mean for public education? Not, I think, that we should abandon our commitment to equity and access in the face of the increasing energy of markets and the market metaphor; nor that we should abandon our commitment to the integration of diverse cultures into a reformed Australian culture. Rather that public education must seek a degree of autonomy from both spheres in order to do its work.

On the one hand, public education must be committed to enhancing the ability of students to develop the skills that are required to actively participate in, understand and adapt to the continuous transformation of production, distribution and consumption that characterises emerging global markets. Students need this in order both to earn a living within this context and to participate in the shaping of these processes through political action. But they also need access to a public education that allows them to develop an autonomous relationship with such processes.

On the other, public education must be committed to extending the principles of equity and inclusion in the cultural sphere in ways that encourage the abilities required to actively participate in, understand and adapt to the continuous transformation of cultures and the negotiation of cultural differences around issues of our common humanity (McKnight, 2006). But students also need access to a public education, which defends their autonomy in relationship to various cultures.

These two principles allow the defence of public education in the face of onslaughts from both markets, which would seek the subservience of human capital to the strategic uncertainties and risks of 'market forces', and from cultures, which would seek the subservience of believers to particular incorrigible traditions. They also provide the basis for the articulation of a public space in education which is in some degree autonomous from both markets and cultures, for it is only in such a space that the 'sources of the self' (Taylor, 1989,1991) can be found that will enable the development of the autonomous individual.

That such an autonomous individual may not be wished for by either markets or cultures does not deny the responsibility of public education to support her development. Nor does it deny that the defence of such autonomy by public education on behalf of autonomous public students is the only appropriate basis for a socially just education. Even the graduates of Modewarre Primary School number 406 deserve that.

Public Education and Social Justice.

In a sense, of course, the graduates of Modewarre Primary school got at least some of what they deserved – access to secondary education and improved life chances. Some degree of social justice was achieved through the 'vision and realisation' of the advocates of public education in Victoria. But the question of social justice and its relationship to education is an issue that needs to be re-thought in these new times.

Nancy Fraser, in her long-standing pursuit of the notion of social justice in the contemporary world, argues that there are three main components of social justice that need to be taken account of (Fraser, 1998, 2000, 2005). Firstly, and corresponding roughly with our previous discussion of markets, is the relationship of social justice to the *distribution* of economic rewards and possibilities. Secondly, roughly corresponding with our previous discussion of culture, is the relationship of social justice to the *recognition* of cultural value. But there is a third dimension to social justice that is essentially political, in that it refers to the opportunity for participation, or what Fraser in her later work (2005) calls *representation*.

If these three dimensions of social justice are related to education it is not too difficult to see that there are difficulties in each dimension.

Firstly, there is currently a pernicious maldistribution of resources in the provision of adequate schooling in Australia as Richard Teese (2003) has convincingly shown in his case study of access and performance of secondary education in Victoria. There is no reason to believe the situation is better elsewhere. And while such maldistribution, and thus denial of social justice, exists within both state and Catholic systems, the most extreme form of maldistribution is achieved by the concentration of both private and public resources on private schools. As I have suggested elsewhere

> *… the physical and the social location of private schools and their determination to concentrate social and cultural as well as financial resources in segregated facilities devoted to consolidating positional advantage against other schools and individuals denies the possibility of their serving the public interest or the common good. Were private schools interested in serving the public interest or the common good we would see them following the Catholic schools and directing their public funding to the establishment of campuses in areas of greatest need: Footscray, Broadmeadows, Sunshine, Preston – where their claimed educational and managerial expertise would be put to the test. In areas of greatest need, private schools are notably absent*. (Bates, 2005:16)

Fraser, following Rawls (1973) argues that social justice is achieved where public resources are directed towards the least advantaged. We do not currently have such a system in relation to education in Australia.

Secondly, in relation to the issue of *recognition*, Fraser argues that social justice is served by the redress of social misrecognition. By this, she refers to the 'constitution, by socially entrenched patterns of cultural value, of culturally defined categories of social actors – status groups – each distinguished by the relative honour, prestige and esteem it enjoys vis-à-vis the others' (Fraser, 2000:117). If we look at Australian education systems, we again can see that such misrecognition occurs through practices of exclusion. While such practices can be subtle, it is not difficult to see that some schools practice quite blatant exclusion on the basis of wealth, gender, sexuality, religion and geography or in the attempt to serve particular exclusionary communities. Inasmuch as misrecognition refers to institutionalised patterns of exclusion and unwillingness to engage with others across cultural boundaries, the public pursuit of social justice can only be served by supporting schools which practice recognition and inclusion and withdrawing support from those that do not. Indeed,

> *The moral basis of the school as an institution must … be a defence of the individual rights of all pupils to freedom and equality, and to cultural, political and economic rights to the development of those capabilities*

> *through which they can create their selves and contribute to the wider society. This moral basis cannot be established in any school that practices exclusion, nor in any school that fails to provide the basis for communication between individuals pursuing diverse and defensible ways of life.* (Bates, 2006b: 182)

Thirdly, the issue of *representation* is crucial in the linking of education with social justice and public policy: 'justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life. Overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalised obstacles that prevent people from participating on a par with others, as full partners in social interaction' (Fraser, 2005:73). The problem here is that schools and school systems are typically run as enterprises on principles of business organisation, or as cultural organisations devoted to partisan cultural replication rather than as social institutions run on democratic principles. That they could be otherwise is demonstrated by Gandin and Apple in their discussion of the reorganisation of schooling in Porto Alegre, Brazil, around the principles of 'democratisation of management, democratisation of access to the school, and democratisation of access to knowledge' (Gandin and Apple, 2002: 266). These ideas keep on surfacing in the educational literature from Dewey onwards and are represented in the educational principles that underlie, for instance, Productive Pedagogies with their emphasis on Intellectual Quality, Connectedness, Supportiveness and Engagement with Difference (Lingard *et al.*, 2003). In effect the principle of representation insists on the substitution of educational for administrative leadership of schools: educational leadership that is linked to the requirements of a democratised Learning Society.

> *While educational leadership has traditionally been conceived as the administration of curricular, pedagogical and assessment practices devised elsewhere, a fully professionalised form of educational leadership would be based on educational rather than administrative principles. Moreover, these educational principles would be based themselves upon a conception of a Learning Society which took the development of capabilities centred around ideas of human agency, well-being and freedom as central, thus claiming that the development of a truly democratic and free society should be the purpose behind human activity: one to which the economic development of societies should be directed.* (Bates, 2006a)

The requirements of educational policy based around principles of social justice therefore require three things: the redress of *maldistribution* of educational access and resources through the redistribution of public resources to areas of greatest need; the redress of *misrecognition* through the implementation of policies of inclusion and the withdrawal of public support from institutionalised forms of exclusion whatever its basis; and the redress of *misrepresentation* through the democratisation of educational leadership and the development of those capabilities that will facilitate the participation of all in the Learning Society and the creative enjoyment of its complex technical and cultural diversity.

References

Bates, R., (2005) "On the Governance of Public Education", *Curriculum Perspectives* 25(1) 13-21.

— (2006a) (forthcoming) "Developing Capabilities and the Management of Trust: Where educational administration went wrong", in M. Walker and E. Unterhalter (eds*) Sen's Capabilities Approach and Social Justice in Education*. London: Palgrave.

— (2006b) (forthcoming) "Educational Administration and Social Justice", *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice* 1(2) 171-187.

— (2006c) (forthcoming) "Culture and Leadership in Educational Administration: An historical study of what was and what might have been", *Journal of educational Administration and History* 38(2) 155-168.

Connell, R., Ashenden, Kessler S. and Dowsett G., (1982) *Making the Difference*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Caldwell, B. J. and Hayward, D. K., (1998) *The Future of Schools*. London: Falmer Press.

Fraser, N., (1998) *Social Justice in the Age of identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition and Participation*. The Tanner Lectures in Human Values, Salt Lake City. Available at: www.tannerlectures.utah.edu (accessed 10/5/07).

— (2000) "Rethinking Recognition", *New Left Review* No 3 May/June107-120.

— (2005) "Reframing Global Justice", *New Left Review* No 36 November/December 69-90.

Gandin, L. A. and Apple, M. W. (2002) "Challenging neo-liberalism, building democracy: creating the Citizen School in Porto Allegre, Brazil", *Journal of Educational Policy* 17(2) 259-279.

Harvey, D., (2001) *Spaces of Capital*. New York: Routledge.

Huntington, S., (1996) *The Clash of Civilizations*. New York: Free Press.

McKee, A., (2004) *The Public Sphere: an Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McKnight, D., (2006) "All in the Same Boat", *Australian Universities Review* 48(2) 2-5.

Peshkin, A., (1986) *God's Choice*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Rawls, J., (1973) *A Theory of Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rizvi, F., (1997) "Beyond the East-West Divide: Education and the Dynamics of Australia-Asia Relations", *Australian Educational Researcher* 24(1) 13-26.

Taylor, C., (1989) *Sources of the Self*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

— (1991) *The Malaise of Modernity*. Concord, Ontario: Anansi Press.

Touraine, A., (2000) *Can We Live Together*? Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Options for a New Federalism in Australia

Brian J. Caldwell

ABSTRACT: Federalism is failing to delivery optimum education for all Australian school students. This paper examines options for revitalising the federal system, calling for the states and territories either to take a much more accountable and efficient role in school education or relinquish their constitutional control to the Commonwealth.

In a widely reported presentation at a luncheon to celebrate 'The Top100 Most Influential Australians', as identified by *The Bulletin*, federal treasurer Peter Costello speculated on the kinds of people who would be so recognised in 2100. He identified five fields where achievement will be important. The first was the resolution of 'the problem bedevilling Australian political life in every area, the problem of federalism'. He explained in this way:

> In 1900 federation was a great success, the coming together of colonies in a customs and economic union within an empire. But the empire has faded and the nation now has a consciousness of itself. We are no longer dealing with self-governing sovereign colonies. I believed that by giving the states a revenue base – a financial free kick – we would restore that sense of sovereignty. It was a failed hope. States are moving towards the role of service delivery more on the model of Divisional Offices than sovereign independent governments. Legally, constitutionally and practically we must fix the problem of federalism. (Costello, 2006)

Education is one field where it is fair to say that the problem of federalism is bedevilling the nation's efforts to meet the needs of all students in all settings. There are simply too many disparities between high performing and low performing students on several dimensions, including Indigenous – non-Indigenous, rural – urban, boys – girls, and low socio-economic – high socio-economic. Moreover, considering the field of education as a whole, it is evident that skill needs for continued economic success are not being met to the extent that is desirable or possible. Acknowledgement of these problems transcends the boundaries of party politics. The issue raised by Peter Costello is the extent to which different arrangements of Commonwealth-state relations will help redress the situation.

Before turning to an analysis of the possibilities, it should be noted that the other four fields identified by Peter Costello have implications in education. These were solving problems concerned with water, fertility, and the needs of Indigenous people, as well as building a stronger democracy within the framework of a republic.

Peter Costello does not come down on the side of any particular solution, although there is more than a hint that, if things continue as at present, the Commonwealth might as well provide the policy framework within which states deliver certain services, including education. Unless there is a change in the constitution, such an outcome could only be achieved by agreement among the states.

There is evidence to support such a possibility. For example, it can be argued that the Commonwealth has set the pace in respect to setting targets for improvement in literacy and numeracy; adopting a form of reporting to parents in language that is understandable and helpful; funding of programs to enhance teaching and learning in technology, mathematics and science; addressing concerns in relation to the education of boys and, for the next quadrennium, requiring the states and territories to give more authority and responsibility to schools. Such initiatives have been part of the scene in Commonwealth-state relations since the implementation of recommendations of the Interim Committee of the Australian Schools Commission (The Karmel Report) in the early 1970s. In each instance, state governments have had to comply with Commonwealth requirements in order to receive funds, as have systemic and independent non-government schools.

None of the foregoing denies the accomplishments of states and territories over the years. However, despite their claims to be more responsive to community needs, on many of issues, the Commonwealth can argue that it is more strongly aligned with community opinion than the states and territories, as demonstrated recently for literacy and reporting student progress.

Advocates of a more powerful role for the Commonwealth could also point to the failure of the states to deal effectively with issues where they have had the opportunity to assume control. Two states have been forced by public and professional opinion to abandon their new 'essential learnings' curriculum and others have made major modifications. While some states are now addressing the problem for new schools, there has been deplorable neglect of infrastructure, with hundreds if not thousands of schools long past their use-by date in terms of quality of construction and suitability for teaching and learning in the 21st century. The Commonwealth claims it has stepped in to redress the situation, with more than $1 billion made available since the 2004 election for refurbishing existing facilities in both government and non-government schools.

The case is even stronger if one accepts the view that the states and territories have failed to make good use of the additional funds that have come from the Goods and Services Tax. While the GST is collected by the Commonwealth, all revenue is delivered to the states and territories, and the amounts distributed to date exceed initial projections by a considerable margin. A report of the Institute of Public Affairs (Nahan, 2006) refers to a 'reform bonus', being the amount by which revenue from GST exceeded projections. Nahan contends that:

> In the main, the States have squandered their reform bonus. While there is variation among individual States in terms of fiscal performance, through a combination of sloppy budgeting, failure to control public service wages, and a propensity to throw money at problems, they have, in aggregate, consumed their reform bonus without undertaking reform or investing in infrastructure (Nahan, 2006: 6).

Recurrent expenditure (as a result of the 'reform bonus') exceeded planned expenditure (before the 'reform bonus' was received) in every state, ranging from 32 percent for Tasmania to 12 percent for South Australia. While there was an increase in capital expenditure, the larger part came from existing cash reserves or borrowing rather than from the 'reform bonus'. Best performing states in this regard were Queensland (32 percent from the 'reform bonus') and Victoria (21 percent).

Nahan contends that "the main focus of the States' spending spree has been public service salaries". He cites data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics that shows that, in education

across the nation from 1999 to 2005, there was an increase in the number of professional workers of 56,100 (an increase of 11.2 percent). Across all public sector services, there was an increase of 44,000 in administrative staff ('bureaucrats') (an increase of 30.5 percent). He argues that these increases were not matched by improved outcomes, and cites trends that show that the number of students in government schools declined by 20,000 over this period, with most of the 'reform bonus' allocated to more and higher paid teachers. During the same period there was a steady increase in the number of students attending non-government schools (Nahan, 2006, p. 7). He concluded:

> If the States fail to improve their standing with the public, which must include leadership in reform of their own areas of responsibility, the federal system is likely to remain in name only and the States to become little more than administrative units of Canberra. (Nahan, 2006: 3)
>
> The solution lies with rebuilding the functioning of the federal system. This must include more intense scrutiny of the performance of the States and their citizens holding them politically accountable for their actions. (Nahan, 2006: 10)

There is clearly resonance in the recommendations of Nahan and the priorities put forward by Costello, who was likely drawing from the same body of data and a similar analysis. While there has been some thoughtful work on the issue by Victoria, in a report prepared for the Council of Australian Governments (COAG, 2006), there is clearly much to be done in the months and years ahead.

Before comparing arrangements for education in Australia with those in other countries, it is important to acknowledge developments and debates in matters related to the funding of non-government schools. This is one of the main areas where federalism appears dysfunctional. The state aid issue seemed to be resolved in the late 19th century with the withdrawal of public funds in support of private schools and there was little change in the first half of the 20th century. However, commencing with the support of science laboratories in government and non-government schools by the Menzies Government in the early 1960s, there has been a steady increase in the amount of funds and the range of support for non-government schools, especially from the Commonwealth, but also from the states and territories. A parallel development has been the steady drift of students from the government to the non-government sector to the point that the percentage of students in the latter ranges across the nation from about 30 percent in primary to about 40 percent in senior secondary. The concept of choice is embraced by both major political parties and it is unlikely that there will be a retreat from the funding of non-government schools regardless of which party is in power, either at Commonwealth or state and territory level. The main issues are the amount of support and how the concept of need is applied.

As far as federalism is concerned, the major portion of state aid to a non-government school comes from the Commonwealth, with the states and territories providing very much the minor share. On the other hand, most of the funding for government schools comes from the states and territories, with a small but nevertheless significant portion coming from the Commonwealth, with stringent conditions attached to each grant. It is fair to say that the Commonwealth's contribution to non-government schools has the higher profile in the public mind, even though the states and territories have constitutional responsibility for all forms of education in their jurisdiction.

Various proposals are made from time to time as to how the issue is to be resolved. These include pooling the funds of the Commonwealth, states and territories for the support of both government and non-government schools and then disbursing the funds through application of an agreed framework, with per capita and needs-based components. There are signs that a common framework is emerging to the extent that the Commonwealth and states and territories have established similar approaches to accountability for both government and non-government schools, in an educational as well as financial sense. The needs component of funding for both government and non-government schools is moving toward one based, either directly or indirectly, on the socio-economic status (SES) of families (government) or communities (non-government). It is too soon to speculate on what may emerge in the years ahead, but an important determinant will be where constitutional powers for education will lie. It is in this respect that some international comparisons are noteworthy.

Australia is one of only three nations in the 21 member APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) consortium where constitutional powers do not lie with the national government, the others being Canada and the USA. The problems of federalism seem to be more acute in Australia because, unlike the other two countries, the states and territories do not have the power to levy an income tax. Apart from members of APEC, most other countries with which Australia traditionally compares itself have education as a responsibility of the national government. Notable examples include the United Kingdom and much of Europe. In most cases, education is administered at the local level through municipal governments or authorities, but there is a range of approaches. In The Netherlands, education is a national responsibility and it is unconstitutional and therefore illegal to differentially fund state and non-state schools. However, schools are virtually autonomous. In England, more than 90 percent of schools are state schools and the central government provides the framework for more than 25,000 schools that are now self-managing, that is, most of the public funds are decentralised to schools for local decision-making, as is the case in Victoria. The once powerful local education authorities (LEAs) have limited regulatory roles and are now mainly service providers.

What are the options for Australia if a new or re-invigorated form of federalism is to emerge? If the experience of England is a guide, it is possible to have a national system of self-managing schools, with local government having a limited regulatory role and constituting just one of several sources of support to ensure effective delivery. However, it is unlikely that there will be constitutional change to make education the responsibility of the Commonwealth. It is also unlikely that all levels of government will agree to such a shift, even if there is no move to change the Constitution. Few stakeholders are in favour of such a development. However, this does not rule out the possibility of a continuing relatively high level of cooperation through the agreement of governments in forums such as the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) or COAG.

Given expectations of all governments that there should be high levels of achievement for all students in all settings, there is a strong case for maximizing the amount of funding and decision-making at the school level, reflecting the fact that there is a unique mix of needs at a given school. This is the principal argument in favour of self-managing schools within a centrally-determined framework. There is an equally strong case that the primary responsibility of government should be to provide support for schools although, as is now evident in developments across this country and others (Caldwell, 2006), a government provider is just one of many sources of support for schools in the public and private sectors when schools become self-managing.

Ideally, there should be only one level of government that sets the framework and that should be where constitutional powers lie. In the absence of constitutional change, this calls for states and territories to take up their responsibilities and demonstrate a much higher level of accountability than is presently the case, but with a streamlined administration. As Michael Keating, former head of the Australian Public Service and Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet has argued in *Who Rules?*: "the goal of government should be to build stronger communities, not bigger bureaucracies" (Keating, 2004, p. 5).

However, should the states and territories not take up what Peter Costello refers to as "that sense of sovereignty", all with an interest in ensuring a world-class system of education should press for constitutional change in favour of the Commonwealth, with states and territories becoming service providers in a market of providers in a national system of self-managing schools.

References

Caldwell, B. J., (2006) *Re-imagining Educational Leadership*. Camberwell: ACER Press.

COAG, (2006) National Reform Initiative Working Group's Report to COAG, available at: www.dpc.vic.gov.au (accessed 10/5/07).

Costello, P., (2006) Address to *The Bulletin* Top 100 Most Influential Australians Luncheon. Machiavelli's Restaurant, Sydney, 26 June, available at: www.treasurer.gov.au/tsr/content/speeches/2006/012.asp?pf=1 (accessed 10/5/07).

Keating, M., (2004) *Who Rules? How Government Retains Control of a Privatised Economy*. Sydney: The Federation Press.

Nahan, M., (2006) *Opportunity Squandered: How the States have wasted their reform bonus. IPA Backgrounder, Institute of Public Affairs*. Vol. 18, No. 3. June.

Public Education in New Times: Possible Futures for Commonwealth-State Relations in Sustaining and Improving Australia's schools

Michael Furtado

ABSTRACT: Postmodern analysis of the current state of school education in Australia demands renewed understanding of the concept of public education, reflecting the demands and contributions of all members of the schooling community, government and non-government. This paper proposes the establishment of Commonwealth Integrated Schools: schools which are currently private which would be brought under the umbrella of government-funded schools, able to retain their distinctive character but open to all. Non-government schools unwilling to be integrated in this way would be denied all public funding.

This paper explores some of the difficulties inherent in articulating the case for a public education in a social and cultural context that promotes balkanisation and exhibits all the tendencies and characteristics of a postmodernity that favours an intensification of an individualised and privatised education-world. The paper proposes that concepts of what constitutes the public good have changed remarkably in response to historical circumstance, especially in relation to education and its provision, and that a further rearticulation of the public education concept is needed in order to maintain relevance and restore primacy for public good principles in Australian school education. The paper explores how this can be done through resort to the common good, a notion not dissimilar to the public good, but enabling the participation of a variety of partners in the provision of public education with statutory accountabilities to both the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments, within a framework of minimal jurisdictional change. In specific terms the paper argues for the integration of non-government schools into the public sector, as happens in New Zealand and several other polities, offering full Commonwealth funding[1] *of integrated schools in return for accountabilities exactly similar to those of State and Territory schools, while protecting the special character through legislation, of integrated schools. The paper does not deal directly with the situation of those independent schools that choose not to become integrated, assuming that these will be very few*[2]*, as in other polities, and therefore without major reliance on the public purse for their sustenance.*

[1] My proposition is to employ the appellation of Commonwealth Integrated Schools to integrated schools on the understanding that it will be the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government to make up the difference between states funding for such non-government schools and states funding of government schools. The states would still continue to exercise constitutional jurisdiction over all schools, including continued responsibility for some funding of integrated schools, while the Commonwealth would extract guarantees of access and inclusion from such integrated schools in return for enacting legislation to preserve their special character.

[2] In mathematical terms this works out to about 5% of all schools, as well as a cut to about 5% of the independent school budget. The first figure is not particularly significant, and compares easily with the figure of independent non-state-aided schools in other OECD polities. However, in reference to the second figure, this opinion recognises that integrated schools will cost more than marginal budgetary savings (from funds

Introduction

In his controversial but riveting analysis of teachers' work and culture in the postmodern age, Andy Hargreaves (1994) posited that the rules of the world were changing and that it was therefore time for the rules of teaching and teachers' work to change with them. Hargreaves argued that the structures and cultures of teaching needed to change even more if teachers were not to be trapped by guilt, pressed by time and overburdened by decisions imposed upon them. The book, and contributions to the genre by Fullan (1993) and others, was provocative yet influential, displacing a generation of teacher educators and education researchers committed to the socially critical project in education studies, and replacing it with a phalanx of change agents now highly influential in Australian school reform, school funding policy and school provision.

In particular, Hargreaves and his confreres concentrated important aspects of their strategy on attacking the anti-individualistic discourses of education, predominant since the sixties, and in destroying the hitherto sole foundation for teacher solidarity that constituted the mission of the school and which until then had provided the cornerstone upon which educational leaders customarily built a constituency of loyalty, commitment and confidence in their school community. Citing Szasz (p.163), Hargreaves devastatingly and skilfully advanced a case for the new heresy of individualism to replace the collective mission of the school, with its foundations in an ethic of personal care, teacher autonomy and solitude. He concluded his critique by excoriating school systems for their propensity to punish excellence in pursuit of collegial norms.

Since then solidarity and the pursuit of the public good have been interpreted in popular cultural terms, especially in the education industry, as the defence of mediocrity, failure and provider-capture education, while the benefits of individualism, itself at least partly the result of an unleashing of restraints on the market, have become associated with the pursuit of excellence. More than ever, education is now the site of a new phase in a battle between deregulators, with a view to promoting possessive individualism and self-regard as the proper basis for the provision of educational services, and others, such as Connors (1999), concerned that the love of strangers, and resulting in mutual losses by the public and private education sectors, has disappeared from our school funding arrangements.

Narrating Public Education: An Imagined Cultural Community

Public education, like private schools, is composed not only of cultural institutions, but of symbols and representations. As such, it is a discourse or way of constructing meanings which influence and organise the identity and actions of those concerned with promoting and defending a public education; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it. As such public education constitutes an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991).

The "imagined community", according to a founder of the British school of cultural studies, Stuart Hall (1996), is a cultural construction, reliant on the creation of myths and generally geared to perpetuating a foolhardy and ephemeral optimism. Behind the scenes, the "imagined community" hides a multiplicity of identities based on social difference. As nationalism

---

withdrawn from high fee schools to fully support integrated schools). Nevertheless, some of such costs would naturally come from redirected budget allocations to state schools that relinquish a share of their public responsibilities to integrated schools under the terms of common good expectations, such as evidence of enrolment, without a fees impost, of all who subscribe to the distinctive ethos of an integrated school.

wanes and globalisation takes over, its homogenising effects tend to seclude a far more obvious reality, which is an unleashing of combative social differences on a global scale. As global processes reduce the sway of the nation over the hearts and minds of people, they return to and uncover the traditions that have long been suppressed by the ideal of the national community.

Hall's argument, although focussed on the emergence of ethnic identity politics, is compelling: as the public education system collapses, it gives way to a balkanisation of schools, many of which seek and indeed establish an identity unique to their localised constituency. Often the schools adopt a warlike competitiveness towards one another. Hall's proposition is hardly farfetched in the Australian context: the foundation of Australia's national identity was largely predicated on the establishment of its public schools.

What a non-existent war of independence failed to do was achieved in Australia's public school classrooms as much as on the battlefields of Gallipoli and Flanders. Since then, but especially since the 1990s, the waning of such myths has meant that several groups and individuals have withdrawn their allegiance from public schools in order to stake their claims on the prior identities of their respective pressure groups. Some groups, such as Catholic education, always maintained such an identity, and, having survived a century of exile once state aid was cut off, successfully managed to re-establish their funding claims once it became clear that the provision of a public education could not be the preserve of government schools alone. (It has also to be said that institutional religion and its schools are subject to the same stresses and transitional forces).

The cultural imperative of nationalism, from 1870 onwards, giving dramatic impetus to the rationale for state schools, has long since gone, to be replaced by a global imperative, in which, while all subscribe to some forms of global identity, they actually succumb to a kind of fragmented identity based on ethnicity, gender, religion and class. Most of these identities are readily reflected in the variety of schools that have emerged since the funding dispensations to non-government schools commenced from 1975 onwards.

Once the nationalistic imperative wanes, such a phenomenon cannot be contained within the ambit of one public school system, especially in a post-statist context, in which the very role of the state is to assist the reform agenda and actively disengage from the task of being a fair and just arbiter of educational provision in the polity other than to ensure that the conditions of the market economy, and especially the principles and practices of equal opportunity and inclusion, are upheld.

Moreover, once collectivist and therefore compensatory constructions of social justice in education, so closely associated with the notion of the nation, are forsaken, the challenge is to define what constitutes a public identity for schooling, and therefore a public education in postcollectivist, global new times. The tendency when this happens is to hearken back to a nostalgic past and batten down the hatches to defend it against the tide of cultural change that has swept aside the rationale for one public education system – a process of inevitability that cannot be resisted and which obscures the many opportunities to reconfigure and rearticulate the need for a public school system that postmodernity needs and indeed craves. Instead of imagining a public school system that is unitary, postmodernity reveals several examples of what Clough (1997) and Fraser (1990) call "subaltern publics".

"Subaltern publics" are groups, rather than individuals, that have emerged after a long period of being suppressed (as can be argued to have happened through the White Australia Policy at the time of federation) with the decolonising and civil rights movements of the 1950s and 60s. In Australian terms, and because of our negligible imperial identity, this transformation occurred a little later, reflecting the emergence of the reformist Whitlam government in 1972, and transported to ascendancy through the events of the Vietnam War and the cultural revolutions, triggered largely through telecommunications and e-technology, that have swept across the globe since.

New social and cultural movements, with a focus on recovered group identity, have proven a potent force for social change, through savvy use of the media to gain access to wider audiences, thus allowing them to shape new cultural understandings to suit their new identities and accordingly shape new public attitudes. That these attitudes are undeniably public, there can be little doubt, for they demonstrate all the characteristics of a public culture in their search for recruitment, solidarity, meaning and collaborative action to achieve common goals. That this phenomenon, while fragmentary, is also anti-individualistic, there can be no question at all, as a consequence of which it is a misreading based on nostalgic origins as well as of catastrophic proportions to call it private or opposed to the aims of a public culture or education.

The Dialectic of Public Identities and the Common Good

The fragmentation of a once unified public education system, which excluded many, particularly on the basis of Spenserian eugenicist beliefs that are now laughable, as well as many other characteristics not reflective at the time of a socially representative postmodern public school system, need not be a threat but an opportunity for reimagining and reconstructing new modes of public schooling that cater for the diverse identities that Australians now portray.

To regard a diversity of school arrangements that reflect Australian cultural plurality as private and to insist on its funding from private sources with some public support is to perpetuate a public education system that is not only out of touch with economic reality but also with the phenomenon of cultural transition to new identities. Moreover such an attitude would continue to impoverish the public system at the expense of those very privatised education forces, who, in Hargreaves' compellingly Calvinistic and ultimately deeply socially exclusive terms, deem education a private activity, conducted exclusively for the positional advantage of individuals and without proper regard for the public good.

One solution to the phenomenon of cultural transition is to explore aspects of the public good that enable the establishment of strong ties between those providers from the non-government sector who propose strong anti-individualist educational modes and state schools. The common foundation for such a strategy is to rearticulate and reinterpret the public good in new postmodern times as the common good. In other words, the purpose of a public education in new times is to promote the common good of the polity rather than the positional advantage of individuals.

A major challenge confronting contemporary postmodern democratic theorising of this kind, and inter alia the notion of the public good, is the politics of resistance, according to the postmodern theorist, Foucault (1976), and his cultural studies ensemble. The problem with the politics of resistance, which has typified the response of those who sit Canute-like to ward off the encroaching tide of individualism and the market in school funding, is that it does not

contain a critique, a vision, or an inspiring image for organised collective efforts to sustain. "Resistance goes nowhere in particular, has no inherent attachments and hails no particular vision." (Brown, 1995: 49)

In light of this inadequacy, Brown calls, just as Connors must now do as part of this project, for the politics of resistance to be supplemented by apolitical practices aimed at cultivating political spaces for posing and questioning political norms and for discussing the nature of the common good. The creation of such democratic spaces for discussion, Brown argues, will contribute to teaching us how to have public conversations with each other and enable us to argue from our diverse perspectives about a vision of the common good, for example: what I want for us, rather than from some assumed common identity, such as who I am. There could be no other response to Connors' 1999 plaint and subsequent challenge to those of goodwill in the polity to address.

Brown thereby shows how postmodernism can accommodate and uphold the importance of the common good in post-statist times as the only means of contributing to the maintenance of a public culture precisely because there are multiple identities and cultures, especially as portrayed by the diversity of schools, that occupy the democratic space. To act as if this were not the case and therefore to impose one version of the public culture is to revert to the 'one size fits all' construction of public education that is currently under sustained attack from so many quarters.

It follows that because there are so many 'publics' (similar in size and identity to the republics of the Graeco-Roman world) the common good becomes the lived expression of several public goods and the task of the polity is to preside over conditions that will bring the common good to fruition while respecting the diversity of forms of public education within one common, equal and fully funded school system. It further follows that an invitation to support the common good in school funding is likely to evoke a far more fruitful and positive response from the Catholics and similar others, than a resort to Foucauldian resistance.

A Suggestion, a possible Beginning and perhaps a Conclusion

The states and territories already operate a system of schooling that honours considerable aspects of diversity and devolution. It may be that in future years the locus of such ownership and authority will be transferred into local council hands as in the UK, where the original reasons for doing so under the 1944 Education Act were to preserve them from the disturbing effects of political change and party political influence as well as to safeguard the community and public ownership of schools. However there is no compelling reason to do this as yet, principally because the changing nature of the state has made it impossible to quarantine UK schools from ideological influence and change. Also, colossally different Australian demographic conditions and constitutional arrangements would not in any case permit an easy transfer and replication, at undoubtedly considerable expense to the polity, of similar or any other arrangements.

As a result of the UK state school settlement (with minimal difference relating to regional jurisdictions), the vast majority of Catholic and now similar other religious and ethnic schools are state schools and provide the public with a choice that does not depend on its capacity to pay fees. This integrated arrangement occurred earlier in some polities, like the Netherlands and Belgium, as a result of a solution to sectarian warfare about the precise delineations of the public and private regimes of education as well as of Church and State, and later, for a variety of other reasons, in New Zealand and the Eastern Provinces of Canada.

It makes sense therefore that the same transitions occur here to form a category of schools called Commonwealth Integrated Schools. Their accountabilities, in respect of equal opportunity, access and inclusion, being intended as no different to those of state schools, while their special character would be protected through legislation, there is no reason why Australia cannot proceed to create such a category of integrated public schools that charge no fees, while simultaneously dispensing with the need to fund private schools. In the scenario outlined in this brief proposal, private education would thereafter become the anomaly that it is elsewhere in the OECD, explicitly supportive of Hargreaves' positional advantage argument and at the service of possessive individualist views of education that can have no further claim on a public purse that is properly committed to supporting the common good.

References

Anderson, B., (1991) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso.

Brown, W., (1995) "Postmodern Exposures, Feminist Hesitations" *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Princeton: Princeton University.

Clough, P., (1997) "Cultural Criticism and Telecommunications" in Lemert, C. (ed) (1999) *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings*, South Yarra: Macmillan Education.

Connors, L., (1999) *The Radford Address,* Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education.

Fraser, N., (1990) "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", *Social Text*, 8: 56-80.

Foucault, M., (1976) "Power as Knowledge" in *The History of Sexuality*, (1990), New York: Vintage Books, pp. 92-102.

Fullan, M., (1993) *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform*, London, Routledge: Falmer.

Hall, S. (1996) "The Meaning of New Time"' in Morley, D. & Chen, K-H. *Stuart Hall*: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies, London: Routledge.

Hargreaves, A., (1994) *Changing Teachers, Changing Times: Teachers'Work and Culture in the Postmodern Age*, London: Cassell.

Szasz, T., (1976) *Heresies*, New York: Anchor-Doubleday.

Putting the Public Back into Curriculum

Alan Reid

ABSTRACT: This paper advocates the development of a capabilities-based national curriculum extending throughout the school years. In addition to facilitating student mobility and ensuring uniformly well-rounded citizens, this would broaden and deepen professional debate about education in Australia and open discussion to community members, thereby including curriculum development in the process of nation rebuilding.

Introduction

When public monies are expended on education, it is assumed that such expenditure will function in the public interest. Since what constitutes the public interest is contested, then public engagement in debates about the ways in which education policy contributes to the public good should be an important part of the democratic life of any society (see, for example, Carr, 1998). Curriculum lies at the heart of the education enterprise and should therefore be a key focus of these debates. And yet what passes as contemporary curriculum debate at the national level is impoverished by a lack of vision partly produced by the constitutional arrangements in Australia.

Since school education is constitutionally the responsibility of the states, for most of Australia's history curriculum debates were conducted inside state boundaries and were largely dominated by education professionals. This history of state-based curriculum 'ownership' meant that when, from the 1970s onwards, the Australian Government began to express an interest in curriculum matters there was a tendency for the states to protect their curriculum turf, by overtly or passively resisting attempts to engineer national approaches, or by trying to control the process (see, for example, Piper, 1997).

Thus the question of collaboration between the Australian Government and the states/ territories about national approaches to curriculum development and reform in the 21st century has always been as much a political as it is a curriculum and educational question. Since 2003, the Liberal federal Government has been pursuing an increasingly interventionist agenda, proposing a national certificate of education, compulsory (narrative) history at every year level, common 'plain-English' report cards, national benchmark testing, nationally consistent curriculum in 'key' areas of learning and so on. Predictably the states have either resisted on the grounds of local autonomy, reluctantly agreed (especially where they have been threatened with the loss of federal funding) or compromised by taking a lowest common denominator approach, such as adopting 'national' approaches that identify what is already common in state curricula. Given the nature of the federal proposals, many of which herald a return to an educational past, these responses are understandable. But they are not productive.

In my view, if Australia is genuinely to become a knowledge society in the 21st century then it must move beyond limiting curriculum development to a demarcation dispute based on geographical boundaries drawn up in the 19th century. In short, I support the idea of a national

approach to curriculum. However, the ways in which the concept of national curriculum has been conceptualised so far, the strategies which have been proposed, and the processes that have been employed, must change if Australia is to achieve a national curriculum approach that genuinely meets the challenges of the 21st century. This will require changes to the ways in which we think about approaches to national curriculum.

Towards a new approach to national curriculum

When the matter of national curriculum collaboration entered the educational landscape in the last third of the 20th century, the arguments (mainly put by successive federal Ministers of Education) related to student mobility and the efficient use of resources. It was argued, for example, that the different state curricula disadvantaged children of military personnel when their parents moved states. Such arguments continue today as the official justification for a national curriculum. This technical rationale rarely extends to broader philosophical considerations, such as the contribution of the school curriculum to nation building, and so invariably the debates about approaches to national curriculum have focused on the question of states' rights. That is, a narrow rationale has produced a technicist response.

The complexity and ambiguity of the social, political, cultural and economic shifts that are shaping our world suggest that such an impoverished rationale is no longer adequate. The debate about approaches to national curriculum demands a richer rationale and set of responses. What might this look like, and can the constitutional constraints to national approaches be overcome?

Australian society, like the societies of other nation states, is undergoing a radical transformation, as established ways of organising and working and living are under challenge. In such an environment people have to adjust to new ways of understanding the world, doing things and living together. It demands moving well beyond the nation building phase of the 20th century and into a process of nation re-building, involving a reconsideration of many established practices and institutions. But how do people develop the knowledge and skills to meet these challenges? This is a curriculum question par excellence.

At a time of significant change in the nation-state, the curriculum presents itself as the major means by which the citizenry, collectively and individually, can develop the capabilities to play a part in the democratic project of nation re-building. As Edwards and Kelly (1998) argue, the curriculum should:

> cater appropriately to the growth and development of every capacity ... promote the acquisition of those understandings which will facilitate intelligent participation in democratic processes … offer genuine social and political empowerment, and … in general enrich and enhance the life potential of every individual. (Edwards and Kelly, 1998: 16)

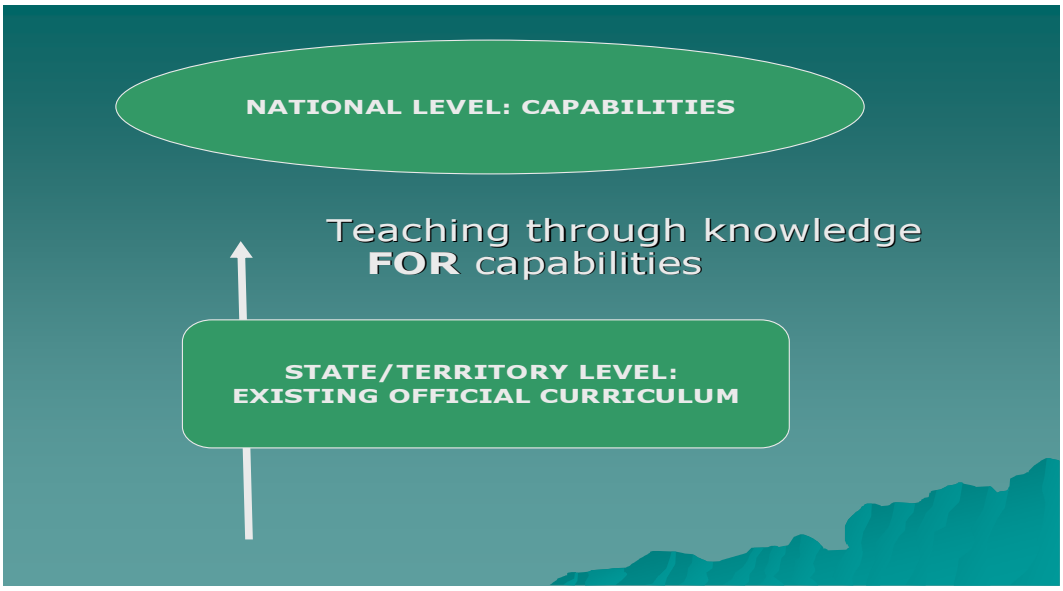
Edwards and Kelly are suggesting that the key role of educational institutions is to work with young people to develop these capacities or capabilities so that they can live enriching and productive lives in the many arenas in which they will function, as citizens of the Australian nation-state and as global citizens; as workers in regional, national and global economies; as contributors to local and national cultural life; and as family and community members. Thus, it includes capabilities for communication, civic participation, health, well-being and personal development, work and so on. Although these capabilities will be brought to bear differently in different geographical, cultural and social contexts, they are capabilities that all citizens will need to live productive and enriched lives.

If this analysis is correct, then identifying these capabilities is an ongoing task for any democracy. Given that the national arena is the common denominator for Australian citizenship, then the question of what capabilities we want our young people to develop is one that is pre-eminently a *national* question, being one that goes right to the heart of Australian democracy.

If it is accepted that educational institutions are key sites for the development of these capabilities in a democracy, then the argument for a national approach to curriculum starts to take shape. From this perspective, one aspect of an official curriculum might be the development of those capabilities identified from a continuing *national* conversation, albeit ongoing, unfinished and tentative. But there would need to be another part of the curriculum – that is, the vehicles through which the capabilities are developed. These are traditionally known as subjects, Learning Areas or disciplines.

These two parts of a capabilities-based curriculum could form the foundation of a national approach to curriculum. Thus, a set of richly described capabilities could be common across the country. That is, all states and territories would agree on the capabilities that would become the focus of teaching and learning in each jurisdiction, through a process perhaps led by the Commonwealth Government and starting with a review of the National Goals of Schooling. However the vehicles through which the capabilities are developed would be the province of the various state/territory jurisdictions. Thus the other part of a national curriculum would be the existing official curricula of the states and territories (that is, Learning Areas/subjects/disciplines) organised in a manner agreed within each jurisdiction. Instead of the teaching OF subjects as ends in themselves, teachers would teach through subjects FOR the capabilities. This proposal for a national approach is represented in diagrammatic form below.

An Australian national curriculum approach



Now before suggesting what some of the advantages of such an approach might be, I want to make two points of qualification. First, I am advocating a set of capabilities that are different, in a number of ways, from those proposed in the recent report commissioned by DEST (Masters *et al*., 2006) relating to an Australian Certificate of Education. The model above

relates to all years of schooling, not just the final year; comprises a broader set of capabilities than the four suggested in the Master's report, and is based on cumulative and authentic assessment rather than on a single on national test.

Second, given the speculative nature of this proposal, it would be important to establish some research projects on different aspects of the model as it developed. These might be funded through the Australian Research Council's Linkage Grants Scheme, involving partnerships between Universities, Departments of Education and teachers. The outcomes of these research projects would feed back into the development process. Once the approach has been conceptualised it would be crucial to consider such matters as the implications for teacher education, professional development, resource and materials development, processes for sharing experiences and insights within and across jurisdictions, forms and processes of accountability and so on. The strategies developed for each of these should be consistent with the philosophy of the overall approach.

The advantages of a capabilities-based approach to national curriculum

The proposal offers a practical approach to national curriculum collaboration because it takes account of many of the political impediments that have hitherto hampered national initiatives. In particular, by using the existing curriculum architecture (such as: state/territory frameworks, and National Goals of Schooling), it doesn't threaten the curriculum autonomy of the states/territories – indeed, the existing curriculum frameworks of each jurisdiction are central to the approach. They are not under challenge.

At the same time, the capabilities provide the Commonwealth government with a mechanism to directly influence the curriculum agenda, and for there to be a common national approach. This has a number of practical consequences. For example, it dissolves the state versus Commonwealth binary that has for so long impeded national collaboration. In this model, the official curriculum is not a single entity – it involves an interaction between different components in different arenas. This is far removed from thinking about national curriculum collaboration as it was conceptualized in the late 20th century – either as a single overarching and universalist document that takes the place of official state/territory curricula, or as the maintenance of separate state/territory curricula with an identification of what is common. Rather it reconceptualises the official national curriculum to be both a commodity and an interactive process. It is a mechanism for nation re-building, emerging through open discussion at the national level, whilst allowing for curriculum practices that reflect the complex, fluid and interactive relationships between local, state, national and global contexts.

The model also provides a mechanism for resolving the student mobility issue that for so long has been the argument for national curriculum consistency. No matter the jurisdiction, all students will be developing the same sets of capabilities, albeit using different strategies. Students who move from state to state might carry with them portfolios that describe their achievements in relation each of the capabilities.

The capabilities-based approach also provides a way to deepen and broaden professional discussion and debate. National curriculum collaboration can only succeed if participation in the conceptual issues is open to many, not just a selected few making decisions behind closed doors. It is crucial therefore that consideration is given to the process that will be employed in its development. In relation to the concept of a capabilities-based curriculum, the Commonwealth Government could sponsor an initial broad-ranging professional discussion

about the nature and type of capabilities. This could start with a re-examination of the National Goals of Schooling, but would obviously extend much beyond these.

More than this, a capabilities-based approach suggests a way to deepen the *publicness* of curriculum, by resolving the tension between the involvement of the general community in discussion about curriculum and the fact that curriculum-making demands professional educational expertise. Thus the capabilities part of the curriculum could be the subject of general community debate and discussion, not least because it offers a focal point for ongoing discussion about the kind of society we want and the 'primary goods' that are needed for all citizens to live productive and enriching lives. These are democratic questions that should involve the citizenry of a nation-state, not be confined to professional educators. At the same time, the knowledge-content (subject/discipline) part of the curriculum, and the associated pedagogical issues including the selection and organisation of content and models of teaching and assessment, are clearly matters that are the province of professional educators who have the expertise to make judgments in relation to these matters. Thus, the two part nature of a capabilities-based curriculum offers a natural way to encourage democratic involvement in the curriculum of schools whilst preserving the professional integrity of educators.

The publicness of this process also suggests that the capabilities approach might advance the public-private debate. In my view, what has been missing from the public-private debate, with its inevitable preoccupation with funding, has been robust dialogue about the role of all schools in pursuing public purposes via the formal and informal curriculum. By default, in a neo-liberal inspired education market, the individual (private) benefits of education have become the lingua franca of educational discourse. Elsewhere (Reid, 2003) I have argued that the grid-lock in the public-private debate in Australian schooling could be addressed by reasserting the importance of the public purposes of education. I suggested the metaphor of an education commons, a public space in which there is diversity and choice of schools, but where all schools receiving public funds are required to operate according to a charter comprising a number of public principles. To be part of an education commons, 'private' schools would need to demonstrate how they are achieving these public purposes if they are to receive public funds. A publicly agreed capabilities-based curriculum provides a mechanism against which to make such judgments. For example, if intercultural communication and understandings were an aspect of a capability, then in order to receive public funds, schools advancing single world views, or with homogenous student communities, would be required to demonstrate how their students are experiencing a range of cultures and backgrounds.

Finally, since a number of other countries are identifying similar generic skills and understandings as being central to the official curriculum – for example the competencies approach in New Zealand and the capacities approach in Scotland – the approach provides an ideal vehicle for focusing global conversations about such fundamental questions as the skills and understandings for being cosmopolitan citizens (Held, 1996).

Conclusion

This paper is based on the belief that national curriculum collaboration is crucial to the future of Australia as it seeks to grapple with the complexities of globalisation, the speed of knowledge production, and the challenges of diversity. A national curriculum is a matter of national importance. But approaches which produce a stand-off between states and the Commonwealth Government and result in a lowest curriculum denominator will not serve Australia well in the 21st century.

I have proposed a model that seeks to address the issues and tensions that result from the constitutional arrangements in Australia. There are of course many other possibilities. The challenge is to make such proposals the focus of rigorous public debate. Only in this way can Australian education develop a curriculum that will deepen democracy by developing a citizenry with the capabilities to engage productively in the polity, the economy and the civil society.

Note: This article is based on a section of a DEST project which is published as Reid (2005).

References

Carr, W., (1998) 'The curriculum in and for a democratic society", *Curriculum Studies*, Vol. 6. No. 3: 323-340.

Edwards, G. and Kelly, A.V., (1998) *Experience and Education – Towards an Alternative National Curriculum*, London: Paul Chapman.

Held, D., (1996) *Models of Democracy*, 2nd Edition, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Masters, G.N., Forster, M., Matters, G., and Tognolini, J., (2006). *Australian Certificate of Education: Exploring a Way Forward*. Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training.

Piper, K., (1997) *Riders in the Chariot: Curriculum Reform and the National Interest*, 1965-1995, ACER: Melbourne.

Reid, A., (2003) "Public education as an education commons", Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) *Discussion Paper*, pp 1-20.

— (2005) *Re-thinking National Curriculum Collaboration. Towards an Australian Curriculum*. Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training.

Possible Futures for Commonwealth-State Relations in Sustaining and Improving Australia's Schools

Louise Watson

ABSTRACT: One of the consequences of the split between Commonwealth and state/territory funding for school education has been the lack of an overarching educational policy, causing increased social stratification between schools and between school systems. This paper explores possible remedies to this, including: public funding only for schools open to all students within a particular locality; school funding weighted according to student socio-economic status and school income; and the establishment of a national funding body.

A curious feature of Australian education policy is that government funding for private schools is provided on the basis of financial 'need' alone, rather than the goal of maximising educational outcomes for all students. As a consequence, private schools receive public subsidies without any consideration of the impact of subsidised private schools on the public school system. There has been little interest – at either the state or federal level – in properly defining the role and purpose of public schools alongside a subsidised private system, or in regulating the public and private sector to maximise student outcomes overall. Instead, for three decades, private schools have been funded on a mass basis, under their own funding scheme, with few limits placed on their enrolment growth.[1]

In the absence of an overarching educational policy objective, private schools receive government subsidies free of any regulatory constraints that might serve to maximise student outcomes. The state and federal governments expect no specific 'dividends' from private schools in return for a substantial public investment. Subsidised private schools are not subject to regulation over the tuition fees they charge, nor are they subject to any expectations regarding access or equity for students.

Trends in school enrolments

Australia's inadequate policy framework has permitted – and possibly facilitated – the expansion of its subsidised private school sector with little regard for the consequences of this expansion on public provision. The only period in which governments showed a policy interest in the impact of subsidised private schools on public schools was during the implementation of the New Schools Policy between 1986 and 1996. Introduced by the Commonwealth Schools Commission, the New Schools Policy aimed to support "planned educational provision" by placing some limits on the establishment and expansion of private schools in areas of stable or declining student populations.

[1] Some limits on enrolment growth applied between 1986 and 1996 during the operation of the New Schools Policy.

It is difficult to ascertain whether the New Schools Policy had an impact on restraining the growth of subsidised private schools. One way of examining this question is to look at the change in the proportion of students enrolled in private schools. Between 1975 and 1985, the non-government sector's enrolment share had increased to from 21.3 to 25.8 per cent – an increase of 4.5 percentage points over 10 years. During the decade of the New Schools Policy, the private school enrolment share increased from 25.8 per cent in 1985 to 29 per cent in 1995 (3.2 percentage points). Between 1995 and 2005, the private school enrolment share increased from 29 per cent to 32.9 per cent. Thus, during the decade in which the New Schools Policy was in place, the private school enrolment share increased at a slower rate than during the previous decade. However over the decade after the policy was abolished, the private school enrolment share increased by 3.9 percentage points, only slightly higher than during the decade under the Policy (Table 1).

Table 1: Private schools' enrolment share, 1975, 1985, 1995 and 2005

1975	1985	1995	2005
21.3%	25.8%	29.0%	32.9%

The New Schools Policy operated during a decade when the total size of the student population increased by only 3.43 per cent, similar to the previous decade (1975-1985). By contrast, during the last decade (1995-2005), the total number of students increased by 7.68 per cent. When the total size of the student population is taken into account, it appears that the New Schools Policy had an effect in slowing the expansion of the non-government sector between 1985 and 1995. As shown in Table 2, the size of the non-government schools sector increased by only 16.27 per cent between 1985 and 1995, when the policy was in force, compared to over 25.09 per cent over the previous decade and 22.25 per cent between 1995 and 2005 (after the policy was abolished). The government sector lost enrolments during the first two decades, and experienced a slight increase in enrolments in the last decade, in the context of a much bigger increase in the size of the overall student population.

Table 2: Change in student enrolments by sector, over three decades 1975-2005.

Decade	Non-government	Government	All students
1975-1985	25.1%	-2.6%	3.3%
1985-1995	16.3%	-1.0%	3.4%
1995-2005	22.2%	1.7%	7.7%

Government funding for private schools has been provided during a period of relatively low growth in overall student enrolments. Over the three decades 1975-2005, the number of students attending school in Australia has increased by an average of half a per cent per year. The 78 per cent growth in private school enrolments over the three decades has been achieved at the expense of government schools, where student numbers have declined by 2 per cent, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Number of students enrolled in schools by sector, 1975 and 2005

	Independent		Catholic		Total Non-government		Government		All schools
	Number	Enrol. share	Number	Enrol. share	Number	Enrol. share	Number	Enrol. share	
1975	124,193	4.3%	495,647	17.0%	619,840	21.3%	2,290,426	78.7%	2,910,266
2005	429,070	12.8%	672,982	20.1%	1,102,052	32.9%	2,246,087	67.1%	3,348,139
Change 1975-2005	245%		36%		78%		-2%		15%

Traditionally, private school enrolments have been higher at the secondary level, and this trend has continued, with the non-government sector's share of secondary school enrolments climbing to 38.2 per cent of the student population in 2005, as shown in Table 4. But the strong enrolment growth in private schools has not significantly changed the socio-economic composition of the private school sector. A recent study examining the "drift" of students from public to private schools between 1975 and 1998 revealed that the average socio-economic status of students enrolled at government secondary schools fell by 2.9 percentage points over the period, while the average socio-economic status of students in private secondary schools fell by only 1.1 percentage points. Thus the increase in enrolments in private schools has had minimal impact on the average socio-economic status of students in the sector, which remains higher than the average SES of students in government schools (Ryan and Watson 2004).

Table 4: Full-time secondary students in government and non-government schools, 1985, 1995 and 2005 (number and enrolment share)

	Government		Catholic		Independent		Total non-govt	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1985	910,392	71.2%	242,968	19.0%	124,912	9.8%	367,880	28.8%
1995	846,566	66.4%	260,610	20.4%	168,480	13.2%	429,090	33.6%
2005	875,703	61.8%	304,137	21.5%	236,130	16.7%	540,267	38.2%

Impact of funding policies

Ryan and Watson (2004) suggest that private schools have used public subsidies to position themselves in the market for high SES students (ie: by maintaining or increasing tuition fees, rather than using subsidies to reduce their tuition fees). This outcome has had a significant impact on the social composition of private schools (and thus public schools). The increasing numbers of secondary students transferring from public to private schools since 1975 have been drawn from the higher end of the socio-economic distribution, leaving public secondary schools to cater for a student population of lower average socio-economic status than in 1975.

This trend has implications for both the cost and outcomes of public schooling. The impact of student social composition on learning outcomes is under-investigated in Australia, but international research suggests that a student body drawn predominantly from lower-SES backgrounds leads to less than optimal peer group effects on learning. Poor peer group characteristics can have a negative effect on student academic performance and thus increase the overall cost of educating students in public schools (Hanushek *et al.*, 2001; Murnane, 1990; Summers and Wolfe, 1977).

Increased social stratification between schools (with its consequences for peer effects) is a typical outcome of government policy environments that – directly or indirectly – support parental choice in schooling. Professor Henry Levin argues that policies aiming to improve educational outcomes through supporting parental choice are undermined by the strategies that both schools and parents adopt to maximise peer group effects. Reviewing the empirical literature on school choice in England, Scotland, Belgium, and the USA, Levin concluded that schools will inevitably respond to a market environment by trying to select more high performing students ("cream-skimming"). Given the evidence that peer groups play an important role in student learning outcomes, it is obvious why schools would respond in this way. Parents also tend to seek out schools with more favourable peer group effects, and the parents most likely to exercise choice are themselves more likely to be better educated. Levin concluded, "those who exercise the choice option are more likely to be of higher SES and to have higher school achievement scores than those who continue to attend their assigned schools" (Levin, 1998: 379). Even when voucher programs are restricted to families of low socio-economic status, the families who exercise choice are more likely to be of higher SES than those who do not choose. If high SES parents prefer to send their children to schools where the majority of students are from a similar background to their own and schools prefer to choose higher SES students, social stratification between schools is likely to increase when schools are permitted, or encouraged to compete.

In summary, when governments create a market environment for school education, schools can be expected to become more selective in terms of who they enrol and parents with higher levels of education are more likely to be active choosers of schools with more selective student populations. In introducing public subsidies for private schools, the Australian government did not explicitly state that its policy objective was to increase competition between schools. The policy rationale for funding private schools was to bring disadvantaged private schools up to the resource levels of public schools as well as to support the right of parents to choose a school for their child. But as the policy omitted to place any limits on the scope of publicly subsidised choice, the introduction of recurrent subsidies for private schools had the effect of supporting the growth of a school education market in Australia, with the inevitable consequences for increased social stratification between schools.

Role of Commonwealth and States

The absence of a coherent policy framework governing schools funding is partly a product of the division of responsibilities for education within the Australian federal system. In Australia, state and territory governments retain financial and policy control over public schools while the federal government is primarily concerned with funding private schools. Although the federal government provides a token amount of funding to public schools, and the states and territories provide the equivalent of roughly half the federal subsidy to private schools, the governance arrangements for public and private schools are entirely separate. In practice, the federal government controls the funding and policy environment for private

schools, while the states and territories control the funding and policy environment for public schools.

Australia is unique in the world for its policy divisions between federal and state governments with respect to public and private schools. In other federations (eg: the USA and Canada), funding for all schools remains the responsibility of state governments – so any decision about funding private schools is taken by the government that is also responsible for the public system. However it is unlikely that either the Commonwealth or the states and territories would withdraw from their role in funding schools for the sake of placing Australian schools within a single policy and funding framework. A more realistic approach might be to try to develop a single policy framework for funding both public and private schools which is agreed to and jointly administered by the commonwealth and the states.

Possible future policies

If private and public schools cannot be funded by one level of government, they should be funded on the same basis, so that a common set of principles apply to both types of schools, and the funding system is designed to maximise equity in both educational outcomes and financial resources. Two possible policies are canvassed below.

Public Funding for Public Responsibilities

One system of funding public and private schools together would be to offer public funding in return for public responsibilities. This would mean that (full) public funding would only be offered to private schools who agreed to implement a public enrolment policy – ie: to accept all students living within a particular locality. They would however be permitted to give preference (within agreed limits) to families of particular religious or ethnic affiliations, such as Catholics or Armenians. These schools would not be permitted to charge fees, but could accept voluntary contributions on the same basis as public schools. Any private schools that did not agree to a public enrolment policy and voluntary contributions would be excluded from receiving any public funding.

The advantages of this type of funding scheme are that: 1) it would support some diversity in enrolments; and 2) that public funding would only be directed to schools which were publicly accessible. It would address one key inequity of the current arrangements – where taxpayers' funds are distributed to many schools where taxpayers' children could be denied entry (on financial, academic, or religious grounds).

One disadvantage of this scheme is that it is likely to be resisted by private schools. A similar scheme was floated by the Commonwealth Schools Commission in the late 1970s, but it received little support from the private sector stakeholders. This is probably because the power to select students is a key advantage appreciated by private schools, and one which they would be reluctant to relinquish for an obligation to become more socially inclusive. Private schools have also demonstrated their capacity to thrive in a market where parents are prepared to pay fees for increased social selectivity. As illustrated in Table 3, over the past three decades, independent schools – which tend to be more selective and charge higher fees – have grown at a faster rate than Catholic schools, which are more inclusive. A second disadvantage of this scheme is that it would involve a significant increase in government expenditure, as governments would be replacing significant private sources of income for schools (tuition fees) from the public purse. At the same time, schools with the capacity to do so would probably continue to raise income from parents on a voluntary basis.

Grants weighted for student SES and school income

It may be necessary to accept that schools now have to operate within a market environment and turn government policy towards maximising equity within that market. Such a policy would recognise that since the 1980s, public schools in most parts of Australia have been given more autonomy and have been encouraged to compete with each other as well as with private schools. It would also recognise that some public schools enjoy the benefits of positive peer effects, due to their geographical locations, and that other public schools are permitted to be academically selective. It would recognise that high levels of private resources are now contributed to education and that market competition is now an accepted feature of the educational landscape. We should therefore be looking for a new system of funding for both public and private schools that effectively compensates for the inequities generated by a market environment. A scheme weighted for student SES and school income would promote both educational equity (in terms of equality in educational outcomes) and resource equity (in terms of the more equal distribution of resources between schools).

Australia already provides grants to private schools which are weighted according to the socio-economic status of the student (measured by the SES of their home address). A grants system weighted for student SES and school income would provide a recurrent grant to all schools – both public and private – according to the average socio-economic status of the school's student population, as measured by the student's home address. Other measures of socio-economic status could potentially be used, such as the educational attainment of the students' parents[2]. Measures of direct taxable income should be avoided, given that high-income earners have extensive scope to minimise their taxable income. Under this formula, the highest overall level of funding would go to schools with the lowest average SES, and the lowest level of funding would be awarded to schools with the highest average SES – in both the public and private system. This weighting would acknowledge that the average socio-economic status of a school's student population has a significant impact on the school's educational outcomes. Schools should be subject to occasional educational equity audits, to ensure that resources are distributed within the school in a way that maximises educational outcomes.

All schools would be permitted to charge annual tuition fees under the voucher scheme, though in public schools, the fees would be voluntary. But all schools would be required to report by the end of each financial year their total level of private income from all sources (eg: tuition fees, extra-curricular charges, books and materials charges, investment income) as well as capital income. These data would be published in the form of an annual report[3] and schools would be subject to regular financial audits of their accounts. These data could then be used by governments (and philanthropic organisations) to provide supplementary resources to schools with relatively low levels of private income.

Some school systems may argue that they should receive funding as a system rather than on the basis of individual schools. This should be permitted under the scheme, provided that the

[2] Parents' level of education is highly defensible as a measure of socio-economic status for educational purposes, as education level is strongly correlated with income, but more importantly, indicates the level of educational "capital" that the student is likely to experience at home. Using a measure of parental education level would also help to alleviate the "country region" bias identified in Watson (2003).

[3] The publication of these reports should be within of an agreed, accessible template that enables the reader to make comparisons between institutions, like the annual reports provided by Universities.

system is funded on the basis of the average socio-economic status of its student population[4] and is subject to the same financial reporting requirements as other schools. Systems funded in this way should also be required to report publicly on the mechanisms they use to promote educational and resource equity between their schools, and should also be subject to educational equity audits. There should be some leverage on the part of the funding body to impose school-based funding and reporting on systems where there is evidence of inequities in the internal distribution of resources.

In summary, a grant scheme weighted for student SES and school income would be based on a recognition that all schools now operate in an education market and that private income accounts for a substantial proportion of schools' resources. The scheme would comprise two critical elements to minimise the inequities of market competition:

- It would promote *educational equity* by awarding grants to public and private schools weighted according to the average socio-economic status of the school's student population.
- It would promote *resource equity* by permitting all schools to charge fees (voluntary in the public sector) and by publishing data annually on schools' private income from all sources.

Governance issues

In a federal system, issues of governance threaten to undermine any proposal to implement a common scheme of funding for public and private schools. Previous attempts – such as the Australian National Training Authority – have failed to successfully bring together the states and Commonwealth in a joint funding role. A scheme of grants weighted for student SES and school income would need to be administered by an Agency owned jointly by the Commonwealth and state/territory governments, and established under MCEETYA (the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs). Such an agency – called, say the Recurrent Funding Agency – would need to have the power to receive and distribute financial resources to schools and systems. Under the failed ANTA model, states and territories never allocated their share of the resources to ANTA, so the agency relied on the Commonwealth for its budget. This scenario would have to be avoided in the schools sector for a common funding model to work.

On establishing the Recurrent Funding Agency, Education Ministers would need to agree not to reduce their annual financial contributions to the scheme below the level at establishment, and to supplement their contributions annually in accordance with movements in the Schools Prices Index (SPI) determined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Increases in budget-sourced contributions to the scheme above the SPI would be determined by individual Ministers. Decisions regarding the distribution of resources to schools and systems (ie: along the SES scale) would be overseen by the Board of the Agency. The Board would be comprised of representatives from each state and territory and the Commonwealth but voting rights would be apportioned according to the financial contribution made by each State to the scheme. For example, if the Commonwealth contributed a 10-15 per cent share of the total budget, it would hold 10-15 per cent of the vote. Larger states would be likely to hold more of the vote due to their higher contributions. This distribution of voting rights may encourage jurisdictions to join the agency and to maintain the level of their contributions to the budget.

[4] Under the current Commonwealth scheme, the Catholic education system is not funded on the same basis as other private schools, but negotiated its funding level with the government (see Watson 2003).

Jurisdictions would remain free to supplement schools' income beyond the scope of the Recurrent Funding scheme, for example, to compensate for financial disadvantages, or to promote specific policy goals. Capital funding would remain outside of the agency's scope, unless MCEETYA determined otherwise.

This brief discussion of governance issues suggests that it would not be impossible to establish a common funding scheme administered by a Recurrent Funding Agency, although detailed negotiations would be necessary to establish a workable institution owned jointly by the Commonwealth and the states and territories.

Towards equity in schools funding

In examining possible futures for schools funding in Australia, we need to acknowledge the inequities created by Commonwealth and state/territory funding policies over the past thirty years. The failure of both levels of government to acknowledge the impact of market competition on schools has contributed to inequities between schools in terms of their social composition and relative levels of resources. A better-designed framework may have fashioned the subsidies to contribute to the public policy goal of achieving higher quality schooling for all students – in both public and private schools.

We now need a policy framework for both public and private schools that works with the realities of the current educational environment and remedies some of the more extreme outcomes of market competition and of the separate funding arrangements implemented by the commonwealth and state/territory governments. To this end, we propose that all schools – both public and private – be funded on the same basis under a scheme that promotes educational and financial equity between schools. Such a scheme would award grants to both public and private schools weighted according to the average socio-economic status of the school's student population, and would permit all schools to charge fees (voluntary in the public sector). By requiring schools to publish annual data on their private income from all sources, governments and other agencies would have a sound basis on which to compare schools' private income and to compensate those who remain financially disadvantaged. If the governance issues involved in operating a joint funding agency can be resolved, such a universal funding scheme would provide the best possible future for all Australian schools.

References

Hanushek, E. A., Kain, J. F., Markman, J.M. and Rivkin, S. G., (2001) "Does Peer Ability Affect Student Achievement?" *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 8502.* Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Levin, H. M., (1998) "Educational Vouchers: Effectiveness, Choice and Costs", *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 17(3), 373–392.

Murnane, R. J., (1990) "Family Choice", in W. Clune and J. Witte (eds.), *Choice and Control in American Education. Vol 1. The Theory of Choice and Control in Education*, New York: Falmer Press: 332–336.

Ryan, C. and Watson, L., (2004) *The Drift to Private Schools in Australia: understanding its features.* Discussion Paper No. 479, Centre for Economic Policy Research. Canberra: Australian National University.

Summers, A. and Wolfe, B.L., (1977) "Do schools make a difference?" *American Economic Review* 67(4), 639–652.

Watson, L. (1998). *Intentions, Opportunities and Outcomes. The impact of Commonwealth involvement in Australian schooling.* Unpublished PhD Thesis. Canberra: Australian National University.

Watson, L. (2003*). A critique of the Federal Government's recent changes to private schools funding.* Lifelong Learning Network Discussion Paper No. 3. Canberra: University of Canberra.

Watson, L. (2004). The *total operating resources of Australian private schools in 2004*. Lifelong Learning Network Discussion Paper No. 4. Canberra: University of Canberra.

The Politics of Curriculum

Bruce Wilson

ABSTRACT: Despite two attempts to negotiate national curriculum goals, school education curriculum in Australia is a mess of incompatible and frequently incomprehensible documents. This paper offers a framework for the development, management and ongoing review of a national curriculum, which provides clear direction about the fundamentals for each subject area while leaving room for schools to make decisions about extended learning appropriate to their students.

Curriculum in Australia is a dog's breakfast. Despite recent attempts to achieve greater consistency, it is one area of Australian school education in which practice across the nation is utterly incompatible.

Each state and territory has its own structures for developing, implementing, supporting and assessing curricula. Characteristically, these responsibilities are divided between a statutory authority and an education department. Each jurisdiction adopts its own approach to the structure of the curriculum, while claiming to operate within a set of national goals which have been painfully negotiated twice. The goals do not impose unreasonable constraints on curriculum development. Indeed a comparison of the curriculum frameworks of any two states will reveal that adherence to the same goals can produce startling variety, suggesting that the national goals impose no constraint at all. Those are the kinds of goals you want if the outcome you seek is complete autonomy with an illusion of commonality. The curriculum documents produced by, for example, Tasmania and New South Wales are demonstrably not of the same family. An independent observer might regard them as different species.

Such variety is extraordinary in a relatively small nation with a mostly common language and a strong sense of a shared culture. It is even more remarkable that the species-level variation in curriculum documents produces no equivalent difference in school practice: it would mostly be difficult to identify the state in which a specific school was located based on curriculum and teaching practice alone. One reason for this is that the variety in curriculum is not only evident between states and territories, but within them. A longitudinal study of curriculum documents in some states will reveal dramatic changes of direction, reversals of former practice, recantations and fresh starts. Teachers in most systems respond to this intellectual flightiness by hunkering down and acting on the assumption that they will survive most innovations, an assumption which proves empirically well-founded. There is not much point in putting scarce resources and energy into a demanding initiative that will not survive a change of government, director-general, director of curriculum or wind direction.

To some extent, the variety in curriculum across the nation would be less significant if the documents themselves were outstanding. One argument advanced by supporters of the current arrangements is that competition and variety improves the quality of our curriculum documents. If Australia's experiment with Darwinian competition in curriculum produced productive adaptation and a strengthened gene pool, it might be worth the difficulties it causes consumers. But despite considerable variations in quality across states and territories, at some times in every jurisdiction (and consistently in some) it is notably anti-intellectual: it rejects

structures of knowledge and formal ways of doing intellectual work in favour of an amateurish approach based on a poorly understood theory of constructivism. It is usually sloppy conceptually and ragged structurally. It generally offers its writers a relatively free hand to express their ideological prejudices, and they take enthusiastic advantage of this opportunity. At its worst, it betrays the fact that its writers and managers would prefer not to intrude on schools by telling them what to teach. As a result, many Australian curriculum documents consist of lengthy lectures to teachers about how to teach and what to believe, with relatively little advice about what to teach. Our curriculum documents, taken collectively, are like the audience response to a radio competition to write the worst opening line, except that they go on for hundreds of pages.

Why have we come to this pass? In part it is due to history. Our management arrangements for curriculum look like what they are: a political accommodation designed to meet the needs of a large continent with a dispersed population and poor communication systems at the end of the 19th century. If we were designing a management structure for curriculum in Australia to meet current circumstances, is this the system we would devise?

In part, however, it is because curriculum has become a black art. When curriculum jobs in schools are advertised, they attract few takers: teachers are anxious that they don't understand curriculum, feeling that somewhere out there is a cohort of devilish competitors who are expert in this stuff. How embarrassing to apply for a curriculum job, and not be able to define the field. Curriculum experts have managed to establish a cabbala, defined by mastery of arcana. No-one from outside is sure that they know enough to challenge the experts. This difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that many of the most senior bureaucrats in education systems are outsiders, brought in because they are outstanding managers, but lacking the background knowledge or confidence to challenge curriculum specialists. When they are told that an incomprehensible 300 page document filled with overlapping frameworks and written in a special mysterious dialect is just what teachers need, they are unlikely to read the document, let alone ask questions about the nature of the emperor's sartorial arrangements. It is the view of the present writer that most curriculum documents are produced by curriculum experts for other curriculum experts, and are designed as battle markings showing the strength of the writer's theoretical credentials.

So Australia now has a body of curriculum documents in each jurisdiction which is essentially incompatible with those in all other jurisdictions (and in some cases with earlier documents in the same jurisdiction). These documents are arguably of poor quality and usually difficult to understand and use. The point has been made repeatedly that state variation (not only in curriculum, of course) disadvantages and confuses mobile families. This issue may be less significant in practice than it seems, but it is certainly true that in a wide range of ways, the nation is failing to gain the advantages of commonality, shared responsibility and economies of scale.

The Commonwealth has usually played a marginal role in all of this. It has sometimes identified a specific area of focus (literacy, science) and has put resources into that area. While these initiatives have sometimes been effective, they have often been co-opted at the state level and turned to local purposes. In broad terms, the Commonwealth has been more influential in pressing for the establishment of collaborative arrangements (statements and profiles, benchmarks, curriculum consistency initiatives), although the outcomes of these initiatives have been hamstrung by their collaborative nature, and the need to satisfy the

competing interests of state-level curriculum personnel. Such initiatives have usually been managed by committees and undertaken with no independent authority.

The Commonwealth has also funded a range of programs and projects which have impinged on curriculum, but without ever achieving a broad national coherence in approaches at the state level. Most recently, it seems likely to be more effective in seeking changes in approaches to the teaching and assessment of literacy and numeracy, culminating in the use of Quadrennium funding to require national assessment of literacy and numeracy, an initiative which is considerably sharper-edged and more demanding than earlier approaches. But even this does not directly affect curriculum, and is unlikely to have a significant effect indirectly. The relationship between the Commonwealth and states and territories in the area of curriculum remains one in which states jealously guard their autonomy and control, and reluctantly agree to Commonwealth initiatives in marginal areas of consistency, commonality and cooperation.

No immediate practical solution presents itself. There are, however, solutions. This paper suggests that these fall into three areas: curriculum development, curriculum management and curriculum review. The approach proposed seeks to achieve three outcomes:

- to improve the quality of curriculum documents in Australia;
- to simplify our systems for curriculum development and management; and
- to redirect energy away from unproductive but constant curriculum redevelopment into those areas which would make a real difference to students and teachers.

Curriculum development

Developing curriculum is easy: we already have eight of them in Australia, and more are developed or redeveloped each year. There are no technical or capacity obstacles to doing so: the smallest education systems manage to develop a full curriculum framework with all its implementation paraphernalia. The difficulty lies in developing a curriculum which is clear, simple, explicit and useful to those who are obliged to teach or learn it.

What is needed is one written official curriculum for the nation, which states in simple clear language what we expect young Australians to be taught. Such a curriculum should:

- focus on depth of learning rather than breadth;
- state the essential knowledge and skills for all students in terms which are so clear and explicit that they would be difficult to misinterpret;
- cover much less than the scope of learning which a student will gain from their time at school: certainly less than 50% – that will allow schools to make decisions about the other half; and
- cover dramatically less than current curriculum documents – it might cover about 20% of a typical set of outcomes, to the extent to which it is possible to say what outcomes now cover.

The most profound development we could achieve is to write this curriculum in English, rather than in the odd dialect that is presently in use in Australian curriculum forums. It would also assist if the resulting document was more like 60 pages than 300, and avoided telling teachers how to teach, since we are pretty clear that written documents don't work as a means of professional development or organisational reform. A written curriculum of this kind would do what curriculum ought to do: state clearly, but in outline, what we expect teachers

to teach, and leave it to the profession to work out how to ensure that all students gain the benefit of that learning.

Curriculum management

How should such a curriculum be developed and managed? There is no single answer to this question, but there are criteria by which possible answers can be evaluated. The management arrangements should meet these criteria:

- a single entity should develop the curriculum and manage its redevelopment;
- the entity should be permanently constituted, rather than taking the form of a taskforce or committee structure;
- it should be independent, probably formed as a company, with a clear statutory authority to develop and manage curriculum nationally;
- it should be funded according to a formula by the Commonwealth and states and territories, and should report to a Board representing them, as well as representation from Catholic and independent sectors;
- it should operate according to clearly stated criteria for its responsibilities, including those specifying the kind of curriculum to be developed (see above), as well as criteria for timeliness; and
- it should operate according to clearly stated rules for process, including a requirement that it consult widely, but should accept responsibility for decisions about the form, content and quality of its products.

Curriculum review

In order to ensure that the work of this agency is subject to quality controls, its work should be regularly subject to independent review by individuals with expertise in curriculum development, including those with international experience. The review process should focus on these matters:

- most critically, the usefulness of the written curriculum to teachers;
- the comprehensibility of the documents to an intelligent lay reader;
- the extent to which the documents satisfy formal criteria established as part of its remit; and
- the extent to which the documents are effective in outlining a version of well-established contemporary knowledge which is appropriate to students at different levels of schooling.

The proposals in this paper are based on the view that the official curriculum is appropriately a national responsibility. If that national responsibility is to be carried out effectively, it will be by an organisation which has the authority to avoid the creation of a curriculum camel.

We should do this because by allowing us to do once what is now done eight times, it would save us substantial amounts of money, which could be redirected to the improvement of some of the other areas that need attention. Further, a common statement of our curriculum goals could underpin shared approaches to other serious matters: teaching, resource development, assessment and reporting and the presentation of Australian school education internationally. Most importantly, it is a way of achieving a sustainable improvement in the quality of our official curriculum. I would support a national curriculum even if we were already very good at developing curriculum. But we're not.

An improved curriculum, and a better process for developing and reviewing that curriculum has many advantages for public education. One of those advantages, however, dwarfs the rest in significance. The schools which see themselves as formally a part of the Australian commitment to public education deal with those students who are most disadvantaged by our current curriculum arrangements. Their task of offering a rich, substantial education to the whole population without exception is presently made harder by curriculum documents which are fuzzy, inexplicit, bloated and impenetrable. Curriculum should assist teachers in our schools to understand what we expect of them and to plan and deliver high quality teaching. Our documents now largely fail in those roles. In the process, they devolve the substantial public responsibility for what students learn to the school and the teacher. The proposals in this paper have the potential to see a resumption of effective public responsibility for curriculum, and the development of documents which would clarify, simplify and support the work of those teachers in public education who carry the real moral burden of compulsory education.

What will trigger the outcomes I am proposing? I think the process is already under way. There has been a series of significant Commonwealth interventions in school education over the past 20 years which suggest that momentum is building, albeit at a characteristically glacial pace. Starting with John Dawkins' action to initiate national discussions about curriculum in the 1980s, and touching on David Kemp's literacy and numeracy initiatives, and Brendan Nelson's interventions in promoting national testing, consideration of an Australian Certificate of Education, national reviews of senior years' curriculum and Australian Technical Colleges, this process seems to be moving inexorably towards a stronger and more unified set of management arrangements for school education in Australia. The curriculum has been a cultural battleground for several decades in this country. It may be that we are close to seeing a political attempt to win the war.

Australian curriculum management is in about the state of mining exploration in this country a couple of decades ago. Mining exploration was then run by engineers and geologists, conducted for the benefit of those who ran it, and managed essentially without a rational analysis of need or cost or return on investment. That is how we do curriculum. We presently spend scandalous amounts of money exploring the deep geology of curriculum in every corner of the country, sinking numberless exploratory shafts, and building competing infrastructure to exploit the same resource base. It is time the exercise was directed to the benefit of its users, rather than its providers.

NOTES ON THE AUTHORS

Max Angus is Professor of Education and Head of School at Edith Cowan University. He is a former Executive Director of Schools in the West Australian Ministry of Education. He has been interested over a number of years in school governance issues, including school funding and school reform within public education systems.

Richard Bates is Professor and Dean in the Faculty of Education at Deakin University. His scholarly work has been concerned with the sociology of education; educational administration; and teacher education. He has been President of the Victorian and Australian Councils of Deans of Education and of Australian Association for Researchers in Education. He has played a leading role in debates about the challenges facing teacher educators; on education and social justice; and on the governance of public education.

Brian J. Caldwell is managing director of Educational Transformations and a professorial fellow at the University of Melbourne where he served as Dean of Education from 1998 to 2004. He was chief consultant to an APEC project on best practice governance in education and an author of a forthcoming history of state aid to non-government schools in Australia. His recent book entitled Re-imagining Educational Leadership was published by ACER Press. He has served as a teacher and school administrator in state (public) schools in Australia and Canada.

Michael Furtado undertakes research and advocacy in public policy, school funding and educational inclusion. He has worked in Catholic and public education in the UK and in Australia. He co-ordinated the Teaching for Human Rights Project (Qld) and has taught Education Studies at the Universities of Southern Queensland and Newcastle. His qualifications are from London, Oxford, Strathclyde, Edith Cowan, Western Australia and Queensland Universities.

Alan Reid is Professor of Education at the University of South Australia. His research interests include educational policy, curriculum change, social justice and education, citizenship education and the history and politics of public education. He has published widely in these areas and gives many talks and papers to professional groups, nationally and internationally. In 2002-3 he was the DEST National Research Fellow based in Canberra.

Louise Watson is Principal Researcher of the Lifelong Learning Network at the University of Canberra where she undertakes research in education and training policy. She has published numerous articles and reports in the field of schools funding, training and work in the new economy, early childhood education and lifelong learning.

Bruce Wilson is Director of the Education Business, and former CEO of Curriculum Corporation. He has been a significant contributor to virtually every major curriculum project undertaken nationally in Australia over the past two decades and is a regular writer and speaker on educational matters.