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Editorial: Public, Private and Edu-business

John Graham

This edition of *Professional Voice* has three articles which look at the relationship between the public and private sectors. Two of them add to the growing research evidence busting the myth that the education offered in private schools is superior to that offered in public schools. The third one documents the alarming rise of edu-business in Australia through a case study of the largest and most influential of the companies involved – Pearson. Our other articles investigate the report of the national curriculum review and explore the complexities of VET in Schools. Finally we interview Jill Blackmore as the next subject in our unique interview series with influential educationists.

Does paying fees for private schooling pay off in the long term? The messaging from private schools on their websites, in newspaper and magazine display ads and on outdoor hoardings (only in the right sort of suburbs) is 'of course it does'. If the type of social selectivity portrayed in the ads (middle class enclave images) is all potential parents are looking for, it may well do so. For the doubting Thomases who want some hard data linked to academic success, such as NAPLAN results, VCE results, and university results the evidence is becoming less and less conclusive. In 2013 Chris Ryan, in examining Australia's decline in performance in reading and maths in the PISA testing program, concluded that "the declines appear to have been concentrated among private schools". Another recent study (2013) by Cardack and Vecci examining the academic advantages of students attending Catholic schools compared to attending government schools, concluded that they were "marginal" in terms of secondary school completion, and university commencement and completion. In fact they put forward the possibility that attending a Catholic school may have a comparatively negative effect on these student outcomes.

John Graham is a research officer at the Australian Education Union (Vic). He has carried out research in a wide range of areas related to education and training. He has had particular responsibility for the range of the issues impacting on teachers and teaching as a profession, teacher education, developments in public education in general and in schooling in particular, the organisation and funding of education and curriculum change. He has written extensively about all of these matters. This includes many articles, submissions to state and federal inquiries and reviews, development and analysis of surveys and various papers to seminars and conferences.

In this edition of *Professional Voice*, Barbara Preston compares the success at university of public school and private school students in Australia and England and finds that public school students outperform their private counterparts in both countries. By the end of their first year of university Australian public school students receive the same marks as private school students with tertiary entrance scores three to six points higher. The English research found that at each A-level standard, on average around 7 percentage points more graduates of state schools than graduates of private schools received first class or second class, first division (upper second) honours degrees from university. Preston's results for Australian students reinforce those described in a previous article in *Professional Voice* (Autumn 2013 edition) by Andrew Harvey and Catherine Burnheim. They reported on their study into the performance of public and private school students in their first year of tertiary education at Monash and La Trobe Universities. They concluded that public school students with the same ATAR as their private school counterparts both outperform them academically and have higher retention rates.

The second article in this edition querying the comparative value of a private school education is by Jenny Chesters from the University of Canberra. She examined the longer term outcomes of attending private schools and found that it is parents' education, rather than the proposal that private schooling is in some way superior to public schooling, that determines educational attainment and employment outcomes. Factoring in parental education removes the differences between public and private school student outcomes in terms of the completion of Year 12, the completion of a university degree, being in full-time employment and average weekly earnings. Preston also refers to the effect of parental background on educational achievement and quotes recent research into NAPLAN scores which shows that public school students tend to do better than private school students at schools of similar SES background. In other words, in terms of comparative value, private schools are not doing any better than public schools, and may be doing significantly worse than them, while coasting along on a public perception of superiority created by the very different parental cohort in each sector.

What are the implications of the research set out in these two articles? In the first place the higher education system should continue to be evaluated through filters such as SES profile to ensure its accessibility is based on potential and talent, rather than family background, and its entry processes should reduce the influence of ATAR scores as the principal means of identifying students who are likely to succeed at university. Governments should abandon the notion of the private school as the paradigm for public schools, for example as the outgoing Napthine Government did in its statement that "...there is a clear opportunity for government schools to learn from the approaches used in non-government schools." It would seem that a far stronger argument exists that it is time non-government

schools learned from the approaches used in the government school system regarding accountability, access, and the pedagogy of in-depth learning in non-differentiated classrooms.

If parents pay high private school fees for their children to get academic results above what they would get in a government school, then the evidence indicates they may be wasting their money. Present estimates of the cost of a child's education in a private school until they leave at Year 12 are around \$400,000 and rising. The argument being floated by a number of economists is that parents would be better off using government schools and banking their money to pay off the anticipated substantial higher education debt which will be accumulated if the Federal Government deregulates university fees. According to trends in the property market, many parents have already realised this. Real estate agents claim that the price difference between a home in a "desirable" government school zone in Melbourne and one outside the zone, even just a street away, can be hundreds of thousands of dollars. Houses in sought-after zones almost always outperform the median price for the suburb.

An odd sort of footnote to the findings by Preston and Chesters was provided by Australian private schools' most enthusiastic point man, Kevin Donnelly. After reading the earlier versions of these articles in *The Conversation* he stated that: *"Defining the value of a school education in terms of tertiary performance and employment outcomes ignores the fact that there are many other less utilitarian reasons why parents might choose a Catholic or independent school."* What a revelation! This comes from someone who has spent decades arguing that non-government schools are academically superior to government schools, and whose recently released national curriculum report for the Federal Minister for Education emphasised the use of literacy and numeracy outcomes as a means of measuring the effectiveness of school education. Now it seems that academic achievement is too "utilitarian", at least for private schools, and that "school culture" (the middle class enclave?) is a more important consideration.

There is cause for concern when a fundamental change to schooling systems in Australia occurs, yet it falls outside the awareness of many, possibly most, of those who are active participants in those systems. Anna Hogan, Bob Lingard and Sam Sellar identify this change as the growing role of edu-businesses in education policy. Their article focuses on the corporate empire of Pearson which earned over £4 billion in education sales in 2012 as it transformed itself from a print publishing business to a global integrated education company operating in over 90 countries. In Australia Pearson has moved beyond the production of textbooks to provide NAPLAN testing services for ACARA, including test item development, the printing and distribution of tests, NAPLAN test marking and analysis and reporting of NAPLAN results. The authors comment *"...this level of involvement in NAPLAN allows*

Pearson to function at both ends of the policy spectrum, working with education authorities in the production of education policy and with schools in the delivery of these policies (through curriculum resources and assessment services)." Pearson has positioned itself in a commercially lucrative relationship with education authorities which enables it to both constitute policy problems and then profit through selling policy solutions. Diane Ravitch has compared the influence of Pearson in American education to that of an octopus whose "tentacles have grown too long and aggressive" and predicts the corporation is reaching a point where it "will control every aspect of our education system".

The profits for edu-business in schooling have become increasingly obvious to corporations and entrepreneurs of all kinds. From 2005 to 2011, venture-capital investments in American K-12 education grew almost thirtyfold, from \$13 million to \$389 million. Investment banks, hedge funds and venture capitalists have flocked to this market and Rupert Murdoch recently pronounced US education "a \$500 billion sector waiting desperately to be transformed". The relationship between business and schools became a media issue in Australia in 2014 when Prime Minister Tony Abbott discovered P-Tech schools during his trip to New York. He was so impressed by his visit to an IBM-sponsored P-Tech school that when he came back to Australia he pledged \$500,000 in "seed funding" to open something similar in Geelong. The Federal Minister for Education, Christopher Pyne, was quickly on the bandwagon and stated that his vision of business-sponsored schools went far beyond the STEM-based school the Prime Minister saw and would include the participation of fast food companies such as McDonalds and mining companies such as BHP Billiton and Santos. If the Australian version of these schools followed the American prototype they would have McDonalds or BHP helping to develop the curriculum, identifying the skills industry says it needs, providing mentors and offering priority for available jobs in their companies. It is unclear how this would be in the educational, or even longer term vocational interests of secondary school students.

2014 saw hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on a pointless national curriculum review. It was pointless because the curriculum was so new it was only partially implemented, there was no outcry for a review from the teachers charged with implementing it in the classroom and no demand from the state-based and inter-sectoral authorities responsible for running schools. It became even more pointless when the Minister revealed his reviewers – two renowned conservatives, one of whom lacked any credibility in the education community - and when the reviewers themselves selected an odd assortment of subject "experts" to assist them, including a university academic with a penchant for sending racist emails.

Professional Voice features two articles picking apart the review report. Libby Tudball contrasts the rigorous and broadly-based process which produced the national curriculum with the narrow agenda and sources of evidence used by the reviewers. The report's recommendations are often self-contradictory and short-sighted – this particularly applies to its lack of support for, or understanding of, the idea of general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities. Tony Taylor compares and contrasts the "shambolic" Pyne review with previous curriculum reviews and inquiries held in Australia and the UK. The template for a credible review was there but Pyne chose not to follow it. Instead he carried out a review that was "ideologically driven and carelessly managed". Taylor finds the report is weak on evidence-based analysis, indulges in sloganeering, has a strong religious bias, and contains many trite conclusions [which makes it sound fairly pointless].

Our final article addresses the complexities of VET in schools. Kira Clarke outlines a series of issues which are central to any understanding of this important component of post-compulsory schooling. These include the use of VET in schools as a means of school completion, selection of an occupationally specific qualification at a young age, the conflict between educational and employment pathways and the quality of the relationships between the many different stakeholders.

In our interview, the renowned education writer and thinker Jill Blackmore speaks about equal opportunity, the effects of school markets, the nature of school improvement, the use and misuse of testing and the quality of Australian teachers. Part two of this interview will appear in a subsequent edition of *Professional Voice*.

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The Comparative Advantage of Public School Graduates

Barbara Preston

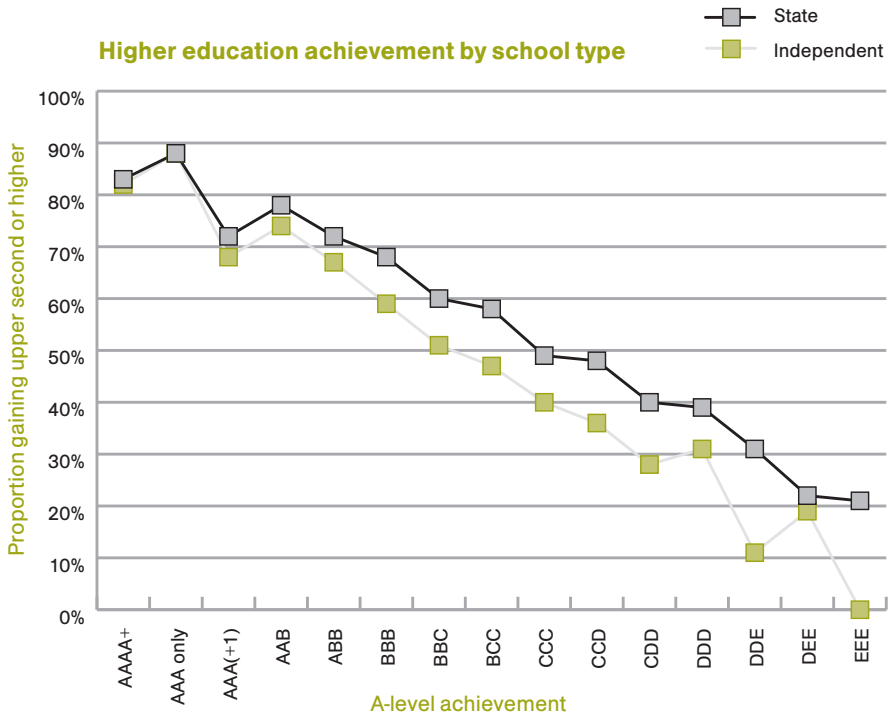
State school graduates do better at university than private school graduates with the same end-of-school tertiary entrance score. That's the clear finding in a number of Australian studies since the 1980s (Birch & Miller, 2007; Win & Miller, 2005; Dobson & Skuja, 2005; West, 1985), and in England since the 1990s (HEFCE, 2014; Smith & Naylor 2001, 2005).

The Australian research compared academic results at the end of first year at particular universities for cohorts whose entry was based on tertiary entrance scores (now ATAR) for the previous year in the same state. The most recent English research (HEFCE 2014) tracked all students who completed the end-of-school A-levels and went directly on to complete a full-time four-year degree course.

The differences between graduates of state and private schools were substantial (though less pronounced among those who did very well at university). The Australian research found that, on average, graduates of state schools received the same marks at the end of first-year university as graduates of private schools who had tertiary entrance scores around three to six points higher.

The English research found that at each A-level standard, on average around 7 percentage points more graduates of state schools than graduates of private schools received first class or second class, first division (upper second) honours degrees.

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Source: Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)

English results for graduates of independent schools and all categories of state schools, showing percentages that received an upper second or better degree by A-level achievement at the end of school.

Research in both Australia (Birch & Miller, 2007) and England (HEFCE, 2014) also found that with the same tertiary entrance scores:

- graduates of co-educational schools tend to do better than graduates of single-sex schools
- graduates of lower-fee private schools (in Australia, Catholic schools) tend to do better than graduates of higher-fee private schools (in Australia, independent schools)
- graduates of schools with lower average tertiary entrance scores tend to do better than graduates of schools with higher average tertiary entrance scores
- graduates of (English) state comprehensive schools do better (to a small extent) than graduates of state selective schools.

The general finding is that graduates of non-elite and co-educational schools do better at university than graduates of socially and academically elite and single-sex schools who achieved the same tertiary entrance score.

Share of enrolments in the final year of school

Country	School type		
	State	Catholic private	Independent private
Australia	58%	23%	19%
England	82%	0%	18%

Source: Author

Independent private schools have similar shares of enrolments in the final school year in Australia and the UK, but the state sector has a smaller share in Australia due to the large private Catholic sector (which at the secondary level has a socio-economic profile closer to the independent sector than to the state sector).

So what can explain this difference?

There are no definitive explanations for these findings, though there is some attempt in the literature, some indicative data, and much informed speculation. And there is, of course, great variation among individual students – and among schools, universities and university courses.

Explanations tend to focus on aspects of secondary schooling and on students' effort levels at university (associated with their cultures and aspirations), and any of these may be involved in particular cases:

- Preparation for the end-of-school assessments in private schools, relative to state schools, boosts tertiary entrance results above "underlying ability", and graduates regress to "underlying ability" level at university.
- Preparation for life and learning beyond school in private schools (and single-sex schools) relative to state schools (and co-educational schools) is poor, resulting in university performance below "underlying ability".
- Graduates of private schools make less effort at university because of perceived long-term advantages of their secondary schooling and other socio-cultural reasons.

It appears a reasonable assumption that tertiary entrance scores are boosted by a better quality of education at high fee private schools. Fee-based resources several times greater than those of state schools can fund smaller classes and other ways to enhance learning. In addition, selection and exclusion practices can ensure an academic atmosphere not disturbed by disruptive, difficult-to-teach students, or even students without high academic aspirations.

However, there appears to be contrary evidence: state school students tend to do better in NAPLAN tests than private school students at schools of similar socio-economic status

(especially at higher socio-economic levels), according to data on the My School website analysed by researchers Bernie Shepherd and Chris Bonnor for a forthcoming publication.

Thus other explanations are likely. One involves a narrow focus on tertiary entrance results at many elite schools. Tertiary entrance results are a central aspect of the status and marketing of high-fee private schools – supported by high-visibility league tables and human interest stories in the media. High pressure, close supervision and narrowly defined learning leave little room for independent, self-motivated learning, and developing the personal and social skills required for success at university.

Single-sex school cultures and practices may not prepare students well for university life. This is hinted at in the literature, but was “obvious” for a recent university graduate I spoke to who attended both single-sex and co-educational secondary schools and said many single-sex school graduates “do not learn to socialise at school, and when they get to uni they just party”.

Other possible explanations relate to cultural class assumptions around success and entitlement. Some private school graduates may have an explicit belief (whether reasonable or not) that just having attended such an elite school will lead to employment advantages after university. Thus the incentive to work hard at university is diminished.

Some may have a less conscious belief that they have innate superior intelligence that will get them through university without much additional effort. This sense is not properly tested in the hothouse atmosphere of closely supervised elite schooling, but is found wanting in the more open society of university.

There may also be a lack of a considered choice for university study among those from elite private schools where university is the norm. Those from state schools, where many different destinations are common, make a more deliberate choice for university.

What are the implications?

The government has set its sights on a highly differentiated fee and scholarship regime for higher education. Graduates of many universities are likely to have debts of over \$100,000 for popular and socially important courses such as science, and debts of over \$250,000 for longer courses such as veterinary science.

Universities with high-demand courses and high fees will need fairer criteria for access to all courses and for the awarding of all scholarships based on entry-level academic merit.

This is not just a matter of justice for individuals, but also for our future as a well-educated, productive and fair society.

English education commentator Nick Morrison suggested that the disparity between state and private school graduates' success at university "should provoke fee-paying schools to question whether they are doing all they can to equip students for university".

The *Australian Financial Review* recently urged people to "do the sums on the true cost of private schools". It's apparent that high private school fees may not be buying effective education. In the context of university debts upwards of \$100,000, families should "do the sums" on comparable expenditure on schooling.

Acknowledgement

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Private or public:

Does paying for private schooling pay off in the longer term?

Jenny Chesters

Abstract

Although private school students are more likely than government school students to complete Year 12 and to graduate from university, parents' education is a stronger predictor of these outcomes. Therefore, by having the option to select students, non-government schools are able to maintain the myth that private education is associated with long term benefits when, in reality, it is parents' education that determines educational attainment and access to the benefits associated with higher levels of education.

Introduction

During the past four decades, changes in funding arrangements for private schools have led to an increase in the number of, and diversity of, private schools in Australia. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 1970-2013) figures show that in 1970 there were 2180 private schools, and by 2013 there were 2732. During the same period, the number of government schools decreased from 7470 to 6661. Consequently, private schools now account for 29% of all schools, up from 23% in 1970. All of this growth has been in the Independent school sector, where the number of schools increased from 399 in 1970 to 1015 in 2013. The number of Catholic schools declined from 1781 to 1717.

Independent schools range from small community schools such as Steiner schools to elite/expensive grammar schools. Catholic schools are generally systemic being governed by an overarching hierarchy, however, there are some independent Catholic schools. Government schools can be differentiated into selective schools for which students need to pass an entrance exam; schools with defined catchment areas; and other government

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schools. Those with defined catchment areas are typically high performing schools which need to restrict the number of out-of-area enrolments.

Although Australia has a comprehensive secondary education system, there are qualitative differences within each level of educational attainment. Students select subjects from the range offered by their school, therefore, if there are differences between the curriculum offerings of particular schools, students will be advantaged or disadvantaged according to the school they attend. Subject offerings are dependent upon having suitable resources, both material and qualified teaching staff, available, therefore schools that are not able to attract specialist teachers will be restricted in the range of subjects they can offer. Families with access to higher levels of economic resources are able to select the area in which they live and thus their local school. Families that cannot afford to buy a home in a sought after area may be willing to rent in their preferred neighbourhood rather than buy in a less desirable neighbourhood. Apart from ensuring that their children are within the catchment area for the school of choice, parents are also investing in their children's peer group.

Analysis

This paper focuses on differences in outcomes according to type of school attended controlling for the effects of parents' education, age cohort and sex. Using data from the 12th wave of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) project, I examine the longer term outcomes of attending private schools. For the analysis, I select one respondent per household aged between 25 and 54 years (prime working age adults). Previous research shows that parents' education is a strong predictor of type of school attended (Chesters & Watson 2013; Pfeffer 2008), therefore, the highest level of education of either parent is included as a control variable. The four categories of parental education are: school; VET; university; don't know/missing. Respondents are divided into five age cohorts: 25-29 years; 30-34 years; 35-39 years; 40-44 years; 45-49 years and 50-54 years. Sex is coded 1= female.

The relationship between age cohort and type of school attended is shown in Table 1. The percentage of respondents who attended government schools declined from 79% of those aged between 50 and 54 years to 71% of those aged between 25 and 29 years in 2012.

Table 1 Association between age cohort and type of school attended

	Government	Catholic	Independent	Total
n=	4267	871	615	5753
Age	%	%	%	%
25-29 years	71	17	12	100
30-34 years	68	18	14	100
35-39 years	70	16	14	100
40-44 years	77	14	9	100
45-49 years	79	13	8	100
50-54 years	79	13	8	100

Type of school attended is associated with level of parental education, with highly educated parents being more likely to send their children to private schools compared to lower-educated parents.

Table 2 reports the relationship between type of school attended and parents' education

	Government	Catholic	Independent	Total
n=	4,267	871	615	5,753
Parents' education	%	%	%	%
School	81	13	6	100
Tech/TAFE/other	78	15	7	100
CAE/IT	70	16	14	100
University	59	18	23	100
Missing	72	16	12	100

Having established that both age and parental education are associated with type of school attended, in the next section of the paper, I examine the association between type of school attended and educational attainment. Table 3 reports the results of a logistic regression model predicting the odds ratios for completing Year 12 at school according to type of school attended, controlling for age and sex. The odds ratio represents the change in the odds of completing Year 12 relative to not completing Year 12. An increase in the odds of completing Year 12 is indicated by an odds ratio of greater than 1 whereas a decrease in the likelihood of completing Year 12 is indicated by an odds ratio of less than 1. Only statistically significant results are discussed here. Statistical significance indicates that the same result would be achieved using data from the whole population rather than from a sample of the population.

Those who attended a Catholic school were twice as likely to complete Year 12 and those who attended an Independent school were five times more likely to complete Year

12 than those who attended a government school, net of the effects of age and sex. As expected, those in the older age cohorts were less likely to have completed Year 12 than those aged between 25 and 29 years. The second model includes parental education and shows that those with at least one university-educated parent were four times more likely to complete Year 12 compared to those with low-educated parents, net of the effects of type of school attended, age and sex.

Table 3 Likelihood of completing Year 12 by type of school attended

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Odds ratio	Standard error	Odds ratio	Standard error
School type				
Government (reference)				
Catholic	2.21***	0.18	2.10***	0.18
Independent	5.18***	0.62	4.03***	0.49
Age				
25-29 (reference)				
30-34	0.99	0.10	1.03	0.11
35-39	0.80*	0.08	0.88	0.09
40-44	0.48***	0.05	0.55***	0.05
45-49	0.35***	0.03	0.39***	0.04
50-54	0.34***	0.03	0.40***	0.04
Sex				
Male (reference)				
Female =1	1.21***	0.07	1.23***	0.07
Parent's education				
School (reference)				
VET			1.28***	0.09
CAE/IT			3.10***	0.40
University			4.16***	0.39
missing			1.16	0.17
Constant	1.65***	0.12	1.02	0.09
n=	5753		5753	
Pseudo R2	0.0825		0.1224	
*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05				

The second measure of educational attainment is the completion of a university degree. Logistic regression models are constructed to examine the association between type of school attended and completion of a university degree. In the first model, I control for the effects of age and sex and in the second model, I add in parental education. The results for the first model show that those who attended a Catholic school were almost twice as

likely, and those who attended an independent school were almost four times as likely, to complete a university degree compared to those from government schools, net of the effects of age and sex. When parents' education is added into the second model, having at least one highly-educated parent increases the likelihood of completing a university degree. Those with a university-educated parent were almost five times more likely to graduate with a university degree compared to those with low-educated parents, net of the effects of school attended, age and sex.

Table 4 Likelihood of completing a university qualification by type of school attended

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Odds ratio	Standard error	Odds ratio	Standard error
School type				
Government (reference)				
Catholic	2.11***	0.17	1.97***	0.16
Independent	3.98***	0.36	2.98***	0.28
Age				
25-29 (reference)				
30-34	1.26*	0.13	1.37**	0.15
35-39	1.14	0.12	1.31**	0.14
40-44	1.05	0.11	1.33**	0.14
45-49	0.93	0.09	1.18	0.13
50-54	0.91	0.09	1.26*	0.13
Female =1	1.29***	0.08	1.31***	0.08
Parent's education				
School (reference)				
VET			1.45***	0.12
CAE/IT			3.89***	0.47
University			4.72***	0.41
missing			1.50*	0.24
Constant	0.27***	0.02	0.13***	0.01
n=	5753		5753	
Pseudo R2	0.0473		0.1043	
*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05				

Table 5 presents the results of a logistic regression model predicting the likelihood of being employed on a full-time basis according to type of school attended. Type of school attended was not associated with an increased likelihood of being full-time employed, net of the effects of level of education, age and sex. Level of education is a strong predictor of full-time employment.

Table 5 likelihood of being in full-time employment in 2012

	Model 1	
	Odds ratio	Standard error
School type		
Government (reference)		
Catholic	1.09	0.09
Independent	0.99	0.10
Level of education		
<Year 12 (reference)		
Year 12	1.75***	0.18
VET	1.86***	0.16
Bachelor	2.69***	0.27
Postgraduate	3.52***	0.40
Age		
25-29 (reference)		
30-34	0.78*	0.08
35-39	0.83	0.09
40-44	0.97	0.10
45-49	0.84	0.09
50-54	0.89	0.09
Female =1	0.17***	0.01
Constant	2.38***	0.24
n=	5753	
Pseudo R2	0.1380	
*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05		

Next, I examine the association between type of school attended and occupational prestige using linear regression analysis and present the regression coefficients in Table 6. The regression coefficients represent the average change in occupational prestige that can be attributed to type of school attended, net of the effects of highest level of education, age and sex. The occupational prestige variable is derived from the AUSIE06 index of occupational prestige (McMillan et al., 2009) which ranges from zero (low status) to 100 (high status). The scores are assigned by the HILDA project team. The results presented in Table 6 show that having attended a Catholic school is associated with, on average, a four point increase in occupational prestige, net of the effects of highest level of education, age and sex.

Table 6 Occupational prestige by type of school attended

	coefficient	Standard error
School type		
Government (reference)		
Catholic	4.03***	0.97
Independent	1.84	1.14
Level of education		
<Year 12 (reference)		
Year 12	12.65***	1.18
VET	13.50***	0.96
Bachelor	35.68***	1.13
Postgraduate	43.37***	1.26
Age		
25-29 (reference)		
30-34	0.14	1.19
35-39	-0.66	1.17
40-44	1.83	1.15
45-49	1.61	1.24
50-54	1.70	1.18
Female = 1	-4.63***	0.68
Constant	24.43***	1.14
n=	5750	
Adjusted R2	0.2530	
*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05		

Finally, I examine whether the weekly earnings of those employed on a full-time basis differ according to type of school attended controlling for the effects of level of education, age and sex. Due to the skewed nature of the weekly earnings variable, I take the log of weekly earnings. One of the assumptions underpinning linear regression analysis is that the variables are normally distributed, thus having a skewed distribution would violate this assumption. Table 7 presents the results of the linear regression model. The regression coefficients indicate that after controlling for highest level of education, age and sex, type of school attended had no effect on weekly earnings. As expected, higher levels of education were associated with increased earnings as was being in an older age cohort. Women reported lower earnings than men, net of the other factors.

Table 7 Weekly earnings (log earnings) by type of school attended if employed full-time

	coefficient	Standard error
School type		
Government (reference)		
Catholic	0.02	0.02
Independent	0.002	0.03
Level of education		
<Year 12 (reference)		
Year 12	0.18***	0.03
VET	0.16***	0.03
Bachelor	0.42***	0.03
Postgraduate	0.53***	0.03
Age		
25-29 (reference)		
30-34	0.15***	0.03
35-39	0.20***	0.03
40-44	0.19***	0.03
45-49	0.21***	0.03
Male (reference)	0.19***	0.03
Female = 1	-0.26***	0.02
Constant	6.86***	0.03
n=	2801	
Adjusted R2	0.1855	
*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05		

Conclusion

Summing up, the strongest predictor of employment status, earnings and occupational prestige was level of education. Type of school attended was not associated with employment status or weekly earnings. Parents' education was the strongest predictor of both the completion of Year 12 and of graduation from university suggesting that by having the option to select students, private schools are able to claim credit for the premium attached to parental education and maintain the myth that private education is an investment with long term financial benefits.

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Edu-businesses and education policy: the case of Pearson

Anna Hogan, Bob Lingard and Sam Sellar

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War and related changes in processes of globalisation, the nation-state has gone through various restructures, often underpinned by neo-liberal economic ideology that, in its ideal typical form, seeks privatisation and marketisation of everything. First, the bureaucracy was restructured according to new public management principles and more recently according to new forms of what have been called network governance (Ball and Junemann, 2012), which combine vertical hierarchies with more horizontal networks. Education policy has been seriously affected by this epochal change. Think of the way human capital theory now frames education policy: the purpose of education has become focused on producing the human capital necessary for a globally competitive national economy. Think of new test-based modes of top-down educational accountability and so-called independent public schools. Think of the increased policy impact of international tests and of the marketisation of schooling through parental school choice policies. All of this restructuring and weakening of common good concerns in schooling policy has occurred at the same time as inequality has grown in Australia and globally, as Thomas Picketty's bestseller (2014), *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*, unequivocally demonstrates.

Another central element of these fundamental changes in schooling systems in Australia and across the globe has been the growing role of edu-businesses in education policy. In this paper, we focus on one of the most powerful and influential of these edu-businesses, Pearson plc (see Ball, 2012, pp.124-128). We argue that Pearson is now involved in policy

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processes in education around the globe. This involvement stretches across the policy cycle from agenda setting to policy text production, through to implementation and policy enactment, including research for policy. While Pearson has a very strong foothold in advanced nations, it is now also seeking to strengthen its involvement in education policy in the developing world, particularly in Africa, the Middle East and China.

Pearson: always learning, always earning?

Pearson is the world's leading edu-business, with a motto of 'always learning', and is currently operating in over 90 countries with an extensive portfolio that includes textbooks, testing, test analysis, statistical services, online learning and software solutions, as well as a range of customisable and integrated services. Heading more than 100 different education brands, Pearson is the most profitable international player in the global education market, reporting over £4 billion in education sales during 2012. There has been a global explosion of edu-businesses over the past decade seeking to capitalise on a burgeoning industry with high profitability (Burch 2009). Pearson has recognised this new context and have worked to transform the company from a print-publishing business – through high-profile acquisitions, mergers and tradeoffs – to a global integrated education company.

With this transformation almost complete, Pearson's corporate mission is 'to help people make progress in their lives through learning'. Pearson argue that the company has a responsibility 'to support educational improvement' and to actively share their 'experience on models that work and those that do not' (Pearson, 2012, p.38). There is a tension, however, between Pearson's claims that their 'commercial goals and social purpose are mutually reinforcing' (Pearson, 2012, p.34) and the reality of a for-profit private company that ultimately has to be accountable to shareholders, not the students, teachers, schools and systems they aim to help.

Pearson's education strategy

Learning is a life-changing opportunity - and a great education should have a measurable, proven impact on learners' lives. That's what Pearson's efficacy programme and tools are all about.

Pearson, 2014

In November 2013, Pearson released their *Efficacy Framework*, which is introduced in two publications, *Asking more: The path to efficacy* and *The incomplete guide to delivering*

learner outcomes, as well as an associated website and efficacy tool. Pearson has committed to report on audited learning outcome measures and targets by 2018, alongside its financial accounts. The press release announcing the launch of the *Efficacy Framework* explains:

The company's ambition is to ensure that its work is driven by an ever-clearer understanding of how it can maximise and measure its impact on learning outcomes, drawing on the lessons of the healthcare industry to invest in research and development and build new partnerships that will address the most pressing unmet needs in education... Efficacy now moves from a pilot programme in Pearson to the centrepiece of its global education strategy.

Pearson, 2013, para. 3

Pearson's efficacy strategy can be understood as a key technique of new management, in which performative mechanisms are employed to drive an organisational focus on improvement and effectiveness. However, the *Efficacy Framework* is also tied to Pearson's aim to 'do good' through its education products and services, reflecting its particular approach to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Pearson explain that the term 'efficacy' was adopted from the pharmaceutical industry (a case of the medicalisation of educational research) and is defined as: 'A measureable impact on improving people's lives through learning' (p.12). The *Incomplete Guide* states:

Note that, with this definition, it is the learning outcome that we are pursuing. Passing a test or an exam is good, but it is not an end in itself: what we really want to see is the benefit of doing so in someone's life... We realise that by including the ultimate outcome in the definition, we are setting a high bar for what we mean by efficacy. We are inspired by the medical profession, but aim even higher. Often in medicine there are high rates of readmission and recurrence, and some doctors are incentivised by procedures performed rather than outcomes achieved. We want to hold ourselves to a standard based not on the potential of our products, but on the ultimate outcome for the learner, on how an individual's life is measurably improved.

Barber and Rizvi, 2013, pp. 12-13

Thus, for Pearson, efficacy means that their education products and services come with an evidence-based guarantee of improving outcomes – much like a prescribed drug from your local GP is expected to cure what ails you. In this sense, efficacy is both a mode of public accountability and of corporate social responsibility.

When an edu-business is as successful as Pearson, with its dominant market position and considerable global influence, one may raise the question: Why are such accountability processes necessary? Pearson's answer is that with the level of responsibility they assume, given their global reach in education, they must ensure that their services have the desired effect. Pearson's efficacy framework can thus, in part, be considered a reaction to public criticism. Transnational corporations such as Pearson have faced increasing amounts of public criticism from various groups. In the case of education, there seems to be a fear that for-profit edu-businesses like Pearson might undermine the sovereignty of national education policy practices, contribute to a democratic deficit and in the process, contribute to undesirable consequences associated with the increasing privatisation of the provision of public goods. There have also been conflict of interest claims in the US concerning Pearson's sponsorship of travel for senior policy makers who have responsibility for contracting edu-businesses to develop and administer tests and to manage test analysis. This concern is picked up in the way opponents of Pearson have changed the company motto of 'Always Learning' to 'Always Earning' in their protest slogans.

The popular and influential education policy actor, Diane Ravitch, who was the former Assistant Secretary of Education in President George W. Bush's administration, has been particularly outspoken about what she sees as the 'Pearsonisation' of American students and schools. In a blog post titled 'The United States of Pearson' (2012) she writes:

It is widely recognized by everyone other than the publishing giant Pearson that its tentacles have grown too long and too aggressive. It is difficult to remember what part of American education has not been invaded by Pearson's corporate grasp. It receives billions of dollars to test millions of students. ... With the U.S. Department of Education now pressing schools to test children in second grade, first grade, kindergarten – and possibly earlier – ... the picture grows clear. Pearson will control every aspect of our education system.

In Australia we can observe a similar trend in Pearson's growing involvement in education, beyond the production of textbooks. For example, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) contract Pearson to undertake aspects of NAPLAN testing. This includes item development for the tests, the printing and distribution

of tests for every State and Territory (other than Queensland and South Australia), marking NAPLAN tests in Victoria, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, and analysis and reporting of NAPLAN results (see Hogan, forthcoming). We would argue that this level of involvement in NAPLAN allows Pearson to function at both ends of the policy spectrum, working with education authorities in the production of education policy *and* with schools in the delivery of these policies (through curriculum resources and assessment services). In effect, if we look at the situation globally, we see that Pearson is involved in all stages of the policy cycle in many schooling systems, what has been referred to as the privatisation of policy processes (Mahony et al., 2004). As a result, Pearson is increasingly able to constitute policy problems to which they are able to profit through selling policy solutions.

A similar effect can be seen on a global level when we look at new Pearson programmes like *The Learning Curve* (TLC). *TLC* is a fifty page policy report, associated website and data bank launched by Pearson in November 2012 (associated with its *Efficacy Framework*), which synthesises a pool of international comparative performance data and analysis in the context of the rise of 'evidence-based', or more properly 'evidence-informed', policy making. *TLC* condenses well-established data sets – like the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data – into an easy-to-read format with clear policy prescriptions. The *TLC* report offers five key lessons for education policy makers:

1. There are no magic bullets
2. Respect teachers
3. Culture can be changed
4. Parents are neither impediments to nor saviours of education
5. Educate for the future, not just the present (TLC, 2012, p.11)

Despite the broad nature of these statements, *TLC* is effective in presenting nations with a succinct statement of policy problems to which Pearson can potentially sell solutions. Indeed, in a more comprehensive paper on this issue, we have argued that the data analysis presented by *TLC* has the potential to become an influential policy device in the contemporary context of 'evidenced-based' policy.

Implications and conclusion

We would argue that through Pearson's various activities, which range from the local to the global, they are working to strengthen and legitimate their role across all aspects of the education policy cycle, from agenda setting, through policy production and implementation to evaluation. We are seeing a blurring of boundaries between Pearson as corporation and Pearson as a network of interests and objectives spread beyond corporate boundaries and

into spaces of policy, academic research and philanthropic discourses. Indeed, Pearson is utilising a new kind of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy. In the past CSR may have been considered a matter of philanthropy, with corporations investing some of their profits back into the community to make a positive contribution to society and as good public relations for the company. This is still one element of CSR for Pearson. For example, its philanthropic arm, the Pearson Foundation, works with partners (such as the OECD) to promote 'literacy, learning and great teaching' (Pearson Foundation, 2014). However, CSR is also a discourse that has been adopted to support the broader activities of Pearson. Through their *Efficacy Framework*, Pearson is seeking to communicate with external stakeholders by anticipating how their actions are being evaluated by the public and positioning themselves as accountable and responsible for the outcomes of their services and products. The company is making substantial efforts to portray itself as a good 'corporate citizen', and furthermore is able to position itself as an entity apparently responsible for the public good and with a role to play in public policy.

While there might be some positives in this new form of CSR, it can also be seen as central to what has been called contemporary 'philanthrocapitalism'. We need to ask in whose interests does this philanthropic work function. One of the reasons for Pearson's increased policy significance is that it has analytical capacities that make it attractive to governments and policy makers, who increasingly rely on policy as numbers. The danger is that instead of democratically agreed upon goals driving education policy, technical considerations and de-contextualised facts will increasingly define these goals. We are now seeing individuals with various kinds of technical expertise move backward and forward from private sector to government sector employment in education, in turn legitimating this phenomenon. There is a great risk of a democratic deficit here as the restructured state and networked governance enables this quasi-privatisation and technocratic rationalisation of education policy and policy processes.

Notes

This paper is derived from Hogan, Sellar and Lingard (in press).

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A sad case of slogans in and slogans out

Tony Taylor

A national act of collective boredom broke out on Sunday October 12 2014 when Coalition education minister Christopher Pyne, in uncharacteristically subdued mode, announced the publication and the gist of his review of the national curriculum. This review had been carried out in the first half of 2014 by two controversial appointees, Kevin Donnelly and Ken Wiltshire, both men with connections to the Liberal party and both columnists for *The Australian*.

Pyne's Sunday-best dress and demeanour was that of a serious and sober politician who had taken on board Liberal Party director Brian Loughnane's August speech to his parliamentary colleagues to back off on the ideology. Backflipping on his previous position, Pyne commented that, "Politics is too trivial for getting the curriculum right". Journalists, mostly caught by surprise (not so much *The Australian* which has a pipeline to Coalition governments), scrambled to get Sunday quotes from their contacts. The subsequent Fairfax press consensus was that the Donnelly/Wiltshire document marked the end of the culture wars. Unusually, the Oz agreed with Fairfax and was also pleased that their boys had done so well. *The Guardian* however went out on a limb, and thought the review would provoke a new bout of the history wars.

Minister Pyne had promised that the review, which would search out leftist infiltration, would be balanced. However a simple word count revealed some interesting biases in the document itself. There were 111 cited or authored references to "religion" or "religious", 57 references to "spiritual", 63 to Christianity, 26 of which are references to the mythic "Judeo-Christian heritage", 123 references to "values", 55 references to "moral" and 93 references to "Western". In contrast there are only 73 references to "pedagogy" (how we teach and learn) and 42 references to "inquiry" (scathingly referred to as "privileged").

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Further, the review demonstrated a lack of comprehension of modern educational practice by confusing inquiry questions with inquiry-based learning (teacher-guided investigation) and with student-centred learning and constructivism (engaging students by starting with their interests and experiences). Not only that but, at times, the review incorrectly assumed that a curriculum framework is a prescriptive syllabus.

In that context, Donnelly and Wiltshire criticised the national curriculum's three cross-curricular priorities (Indigenous/Asia/ Sustainability). Prior to the review, these priorities had already been flagged by Pyne for close attention and as a bit of an artificial and an unrealistic construct, they were always a large target.

Did the review find any leftist infiltration? Well, actually, it didn't. All it could say was that while an unstated number of submissions argued that the Australian Curriculum was balanced, the reviewers received an unstated number of submissions saying that, "the Australian Curriculum did not pay enough attention to the impact of Western civilisation and Judeo-Christianity [sic] on Australia's development, institutions and broader society and culture". There was no evidence or analysis offered, just a note that some people thought the history curriculum was balanced and others thought it wasn't. These competing commentaries led Donnelly and Wiltshire to their pre-ordained conclusion, "History should be revised in order to properly recognise the impact and significance of Western civilisation and Australia's Judeo-Christian heritage, values and beliefs [sic]". The major failing of this approach is that the review summarises two sides of an argument and favours one over the other without any analysis.

To summarise so far, the review was a sad case of slogans in and slogans out. By this I mean that the review simply repeated the political slogans that have been bruited about since 2006 by culture warriors The Oz, the IPA and Christopher Pyne.

For instance, following the IPA line, Pyne and Donnelly had, prior to the review, argued for more emphasis on Australia's "Judeo-Christian heritage/tradition". This advocacy of a seemingly benign phenomenon blithely ignores (and this is an unintended irony) the historical background to the phrase, first as a 1980s Cold War anti-Soviet slogan and more recently as a Tea Party anti-Islam propaganda chant.

Lo and behold, and ignoring the accepted professional view that the study of real history at whatever level is about investigation not about indoctrination, the review then argued that students need to spend more time on Australia's "Judeo-Christian heritage". There is another irony here. If students did spend more time on Australia's "Judeo-Christian heritage", it would be a very short project. They would quickly discover that it is a neoconservative Christian

myth. And it is a myth that ignores the substantial contribution of (pagan) Greek philosophy and politics as well as the huge contribution of (also pagan) Roman law, civic policy, architecture and literature to our cultural heritage.

As for the rest, geographers were told to spend less time on evidence-based human geography (too controversial, perhaps?) and more time on the physical stuff which includes, by the way, the study of glaciers (melting), ice caps (melting), coast lines (receding) and weather (getting more catastrophic). Donnelly and Wiltshire seemed to have missed something there. And civics education should really be about patriotism. Oh dear, back to the 1950s then. With literacy, phonics (a Donnelly obsession) was back with a bang and the literature canon (a Donnelly/Wiltshire obsession) was also back. There were no surprises there.

In a more general way, the review found that the national curriculum is overcrowded. We knew that already. For example, the secondary history curriculum Years 7-10 was originally designed with an indicative figure of 80 hours a year. As the design process went on the figure dropped from 80 to 70 to 60 to 50 hours and eventually disappeared into an already overcrowded curriculum. This gave every state and territory and every timetabler in every secondary school the opportunity to bury history in an obscure corner of the curriculum. Indeed, one Victorian high school has compressed history into 20 timetabled hours a year. That's not a good look for a subject that was originally intended to be one of four core disciplines and which arouses so much interest and passion.

This shambolic Pyne review differs totally from my own experiences when working with a pre-Abbott Coalition government as a history education consultant (1999-2007). The way the system then worked (more or less) was as follows.

The minister wants a review. In this case, MP David Kemp's 1999 history inquiry. The review is based on some kind of preliminary evidence that something needs fixing. Its terms of reference are then couched in relation to the public good. A non-controversial inquiry team with solid professional integrity is tendered for and appointed. One or two middle-ranking public servants from the minister's department ride shotgun on the process. Two ministerial advisers keep track of things from a political point of view and to make sure that the minister will not be surprised. It will be the advisers' job, in consultation with the inquiry team and the public servants, to check the process and to keep an eye on those involved. The minister agrees to, and signs on, the involvement of all paid consultants. The review arrives at its set of conclusions and, with a measure of credibility, is placed before the public and the stakeholders.

Pyne's review did not follow this standard Australian template. Criticised at the outset by respected members of the education community as premature and as a political stunt, the process attracted yet more criticism for its appointment of two opinionated Liberal supporters as reviewers.

Adding to the perception of Coalition bias, that same list suffers from an over-representation of the private school system (only one government school individual), has no indigenous representative, and no multicultural representative (standard for federal, state and territory reviews). The list also includes three academics, two of whom (Greg Melleuish and Alex Robson) have close links with the Institute of Public Affairs, and a third (Tony Makin) whose paper attacking the Rudd/Swann handling of the GFC was launched by Mathias Cormann in September 2014. And, of course, there's the egregious and problematic review specialist Professor Barry Spurr and his emails.

Pyne could even have looked overseas for a better model. Much is made in the Australian review of England's current national curriculum (one of four in the UK) implemented by the Thatcher government in 1992. The UK's approach to a national curriculum in the early 1990s faced a great deal of hostility from the teaching profession (workload, assessment, overcrowding, politicisation and Eurocentrism). In 1993, under a Conservative government, the curriculum was reviewed by a team led by eminent, impartial and universally admired civil servant Sir Ron Dearing, who was at that time chair of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority. Dearing issued an interim report in 1993 and a final report in 1994 with slimming-down suggestions that were largely implemented by a Conservative government in 1995, spending 744 million pounds on the amendments. The whole review process took two years, not a mere seven months as has been the case with the Pyne review.

Pyne did not do this. As we have seen, he announced that there would be a review of the national curriculum because he thought it contained leftist bias, a manifestly absurd idea. Next he appointed a controversially partisan inquiry team. Then came the Pyne-approved subject specialists, many of them chosen for published or an otherwise known predisposition to the Pyne/Donnelly/Wiltshire point of view but none apparently checked for excruciatingly inappropriate views before they were signed on. In the review itself we get a document that eschews evidence-based analysis, has a strong religious bias and plumps largely for the conclusions that Pyne thought of first (leftist bias undetected though). Ludicrously, the review then argues for two differing conclusions. Unsurprisingly, the document has been met with a mixture of apathy and derision. That's a pity because in among the ideology, there's some good stuff. In my area of expertise alone for example, geography subject specialist Alan Hill

has good things to say, as has history specialist Clive Logan. Both are working teachers, by the way.

Pyne may now have a hard job convincing state and territory education ministers of the credibility of the overall curriculum review process, of its findings and of its desire to have a curriculum suffused with Christianity. The Dearing review was altogether different in style as was the Kemp history inquiry, with both investigations achieving a measure of acceptability and success mainly because of the visible integrity of the process. In sponsoring a review so ideologically driven and so carelessly managed, Pyne's 2014 version could well be hoisted by its own partisan petard.

Note:

This article is a condensed and revised edition of articles appearing in three other publications.

Parts of this article have been published as:

"Curriculum review a ho-hum effort on history", *The Age*, 15/10/14

"Pyne curriculum review prefers analysis-free myth to history", *The Conversation*, 20/10/14

"Pyne's curriculum review should have learnt from history", *Crikey.com*, 23/10/14

After the review: Professional concerns about what's next for the Australian Curriculum

Libby Tudball

Educators across the nation are expressing a range of concerns about the recommendations from the *Review of the Australian Curriculum: Final report* released by the Australian Government, October 10, 2014. The thirty recommendations provide little hope that schools will be able to settle into a full curriculum implementation phase soon. The report suggests actions that could lead to major changes, including "a forum of community and education participants to consider the purpose and goals of education and the aims, values and principles of a national school curriculum." This sounds like a back to the drawing board approach, in spite of the fact that we already have *Educational goals for young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008), that established the overall goals for schooling agreed to by all Ministers of Education. One recommendation suggests the end of the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in its current form, so it may "be reconstituted, possibly as a company that is at arm's length from education ministers and the education departments that serve them." In fact, the reviewers themselves are divided in their future curriculum structure recommendations (see Australian Government, 2014, p.143 and 145), as are many organisations consulted during the review, so the educational and political debates will continue.

Members of professional associations, school leaders, teachers and teacher educators are expressing their fear in many forums, including the media, that the review outcomes will disrupt progress in the implementation of the Australian Curriculum already in place across schools and higher education sectors. Responding to the review outcomes may require major revisions to published resources and could derail the endorsement of phase two learning areas. Overall, it can be concluded that a complex period of negotiation between education authorities and the federal government lies ahead.

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Dr Kevin Donnelly and Professor Ken Wiltshire, the reviewers commissioned by Minister Pyne to conduct the review, were asked to consider the "*robustness, independence and balance of the Australian Curriculum.*" They concluded that "*the curriculum should be reduced, rebalanced and restructured,*" with the aid of "*fresh disciplinary and curriculum experts.*" Given the already robust and widely consultative process across the nation involving 1000's of curriculum experts, academics, education bureaucrats and teachers, in the development of the Australian Curriculum so far, there has been widespread questioning of the review. These concerns have focused on who was employed to undertake it, who was involved, and its timing (before the curriculum was fully developed, endorsed and implemented). The development of the curriculum involved careful reflection on the *Educational goals for young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) and key international research on learning needs for the 21st century. There was an extensive period of shaping and writing achieved by competitively selected national experts, and then revisions based on detailed feedback from key stakeholders. So the review process recommending substantial change, particularly in learning areas, has not been well received by all stakeholders.

At a meeting of the Australian Alliance of Associations in Education (AAAE) in Melbourne, (November 8, 2014) national presidents and representatives from 25 peak education associations including literacy, maths, science, the arts, geography, history, social and citizenship education, health and physical education, music, and many other organisations across fields of learning, expressed common concerns. They question the selection of 'new' 'subject specialists' to comment on the curriculum, who in many cases have no demonstrated track record of involvement in curriculum development, school education, links to the profession or to education research. The meeting questioned the representativeness and value of these new views. The privileging of their opinions and the notion that these 'subject specialists' could override those involved in the lengthy and complex writing and development process, is also of concern.

In the report, the reviewers admit to strong support and appreciation across the country for what has been achieved by ACARA in developing the Australian Curriculum, in spite of some initial doubts and resistance. But they cannot agree on the way ahead for schools. They argue the curriculum needs to be pared back, but also that it should have more depth, so it will be difficult to know how to resolve these contradictory views. There is even a possibility that the states and territories could decide to go in their own directions in deciding what's next for curriculum in their own contexts.

Professor Wiltshire recommends that the focus in the early years of primary school should be on literacy and numeracy. This ignores a wealth of international early years education research that argues for approaches to early years pedagogy emphasising play

based learning and stimulating children's creativity, curiosity and engagement across a range of learning areas that is planned in an integrated way. On the one hand, the reviewers recommend a 'back to basics' and a reductionist view that emphasises the core learning areas of English, maths and science in the primary years. But they also admit they are "... *persuaded that the lack of integration of the curriculum in the primary years – particularly in the humanities and social sciences – has exacerbated the issue of an overcrowded curriculum.*"

The report recommends that a more parent-friendly version of the Australian Curriculum should be developed. While parent information about their children's learning is clearly important, there is some debate about what form this should take, given that the report also encourages schools to take into account local context, so that approaches to curriculum implementation could take varied forms, "*with some flexibility in the manner in which it is sequenced and delivered.*" Schools have a long tradition of providing parent forums and information nights to help them to understand and support their children's learning in partnership with the teachers in schools.

There is an argument that schools should include a "*more holistic approach, with emphasis on values, morals and an increased emphasis on spirituality*" and student wellbeing. But these goals are already included in the general capabilities, for example through the expectation that through the Personal and social capability, "*students learn to understand themselves and others,*" and develop "*a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity, that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing.*" In addition, the Ethical understanding capability "*involves students in building a strong personal and socially oriented ethical outlook that helps them to manage context, conflict and uncertainty*" (ACARA 2014a).

So while there is evidence that the general capabilities do play an important role in young peoples' learning, the reviewers recommend that, "*with the exception of literacy, numeracy and ICT that continue as they currently are in the Australian curriculum, the remaining four general capabilities are no longer treated in a cross- curricular fashion.*"

They undermine the general capabilities further in the recommendation that: "*Critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, and intercultural understanding should be embedded only in those subjects and areas of learning where relevant.*" These important understandings for young Australians cannot be developed in a lock step way in a lesson or two. This learning is achieved through planned approaches to educating the whole person beyond subject based learning, across many aspects of programs in schools.

The reviewers state that curriculum priority areas "*must not be just the subject of political, social or economic whims*" and they also express the view that "*there is a lack of an educational justification or foundation*" for the cross curriculum priorities. But clearly, the opinions of enough educators they consulted in the review process held sway, to convince them to conclude that the three cross curriculum priorities; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, and Sustainability should be retained. The report states for example, "*that the Independent Education Union of Australia sees them as providing flexibility – especially in the way teachers address contemporary issues through their teaching and learning programs in a manner that addresses local student needs.*" However, the reviewers say that the "*majority of opinion is that they should simply have been included in the basic structure and content of learning areas, but only where relevant.*" This creates problems for schools, since these priority areas are often embedded in interdisciplinary or cross curriculum ways.

Learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their deep knowledge traditions and holistic world views should be developed in multiple ways, through studies of history, social education, citizenship education, art, literature, English, science, geography and other subjects. Similarly, studies of Asia require cross curriculum learning in order to develop depth and breadth of understanding of the rich traditions and cultures of Asia. In Australia, the development of knowledge, skills and understandings to create an Asia literate citizenry is seen to be of national importance, not political whim, since the nations of Asia are our nearest neighbours, our most important trading partners, and an increasing source of Australia's immigrant population (Australian Government 2012). 'Asia literacy' has been defined as the acquisition of knowledge and understanding about the societies, histories, cultures, beliefs, politics, geographies, art and literatures of the diverse countries of Asia, and the development of the skills and dispositions to connect, communicate and engage with the peoples of Asia in order to effectively live, work and learn in the region (AEF 2012), so again, this learning requires a cross curriculum approach.

Donnelly and Wiltshire say there is "*a question for the future as to whether it is sound educational practice for politicians and policy makers to be continually ordering contemporary themes into a national curriculum.*" But surely the Sustainability priority is of vital importance to help students "*develop the knowledge, skills, values and world views necessary to act in ways that contribute to more sustainable patterns of living*" (ACARA 2014 b). The conclusions recently published by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2014) provide a wake-up call about the importance of including sustainability in the curriculum that is well beyond political expediency. The IPCC's dire warnings are based on new evidence on the impact of climate change. So what do we need to do now? Instead of questioning education that focuses on sustainability 'themes',

governments must support and extend efforts already underway in schools across the nation that are empowering students to form Green teams, teachers to develop whole school approaches to reducing, reusing and recycling, and helping students to know how to make better choices for the future. The findings signal the need for drastic action globally at all levels of society including among governments, businesses, communities and schools. This includes educating students across all age groups and levels of education, to prepare them to be able to live more sustainable lives. It requires a focus on deepening students' understanding of our physical and social world, giving them the chance to get involved in community action and citizenship education programs and valuing indigenous knowledge as a way of learning to live more sustainably.

The IPCC concludes that strategies for reducing and managing the risks of climate change can still lessen its impact. Its report argues that "*Education can play a key role in innovation and investments in environmentally sound technologies and infrastructure, sustainable livelihoods and behavioural and lifestyle choices.*" Students need age appropriate teaching and learning that is informed by research on the most effective programs in this field. Instead of questioning this focus in the cross- curriculum priorities, as a nation we need to roll up our sleeves and get on with this important learning.

Stewart Riddle, Lecturer in Literacies Education, University of Southern Queensland draws the conclusion that, "*it seems the whole curriculum review, from its announcement through to release, has been little more than a political distraction from addressing serious concerns about equity in our schools*" (Riddle 2014). He comments that "*the review highlights the importance of addressing educational needs for students with a disability, while the government is cutting \$100 million from disability programs.*"

In a letter to the reviewers in March, 2014, from the ACARA Board chair, Professor Barry McGaw said that,

"The school curriculum expresses a nation's aspirations for its next generations. The curriculum must strike a balance between developing young people's understanding of their national history and culture and preparing them for a future that is increasingly global and largely unpredictable. What constitutes essential school learning will always be contested because behind it is a debate about what knowledge is of most worth. Curriculum stirs the passions – and that is a good thing. Curriculum is never completed. It is never perfect and should always be a work in progress. As responsible citizens, we are obliged to provide our future generations with the best possible learning opportunities and outcomes.

ACARA is mandated to set high expectations for what is taught to students in schools throughout the country. I am convinced the vigorous processes we have adopted, drawing on our country's best expertise and talent, have allowed us to establish a curriculum that is high-quality."

It is the hope of professional educators, that the outcomes of the recommendations arising from the review will be resolved soon and that they do not compromise the independent and rigorous approach that has informed this work. As McGaw concluded; "*we have not yet seen the true benefits of a national curriculum, but we are confident that young people and the nation will be better off as a result of the work done by tens of thousands during the last few years.*"

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Aspirations, expectations, experiences: VET in Schools for young Australians

Kira Clarke

Underlying a discussion of the role of Vocational Education and Training (VET) for young people in Australian senior secondary education is a broader discussion about the role of school completion and the architecture of Australian transition systems. While there are numerous post-compulsory pathways that young people follow, within policy and research we often group these into four types or categories of activity – higher education (e.g. university), VET (e.g. TAFE), employment-based training (e.g. apprenticeships) and the labour market, either working or unemployed.

There are different metaphors that can be used here, but in much of my work in this space, I have adopted an architectural or landscape based conceptual approach. The question I frequently ask when examining the effectiveness of different pathways approaches is – what sort of bridge does school build for young people aspiring to these different destinations? Is it a strong bridge? A predictable bridge? Is it easy to navigate? Do we expect all our young people to cross a single bridge regardless of the post-school futures they imagine for themselves? Or are we moving towards customising and adapting the bridges to match the different outcomes and futures to which young people aspire?

In seeking to understand the efficacy of VET in Schools for providing strong transitions to the different types of post-school outcomes, it is important to examine factors at the policy level, regional level, school level and individual level. Through a program of VET in Schools research over the last several years, my colleagues and I have spoken with policymakers, trainers, teachers, employers and young people in a number of different settings.

At a system level, across the various states and territories, VET is being increasingly used as a means for young people to complete school. There is a significant degree of variation between the states and territories in regard to the amount and type of VET that

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can contribute credit or points towards the senior secondary certificate. At a regional level, there are different markets for provision of VET, with some schools having access to a range of providers, both public and private, and others in more rural and isolated areas struggling to access and sustain appropriate VET delivery. Within schools, the role of VET is conceptualised in different ways, often influenced by school culture or a perception of where a school exists within an education market. Young people who use VET in Schools as a means to complete school and gain occupationally specific skills and qualifications, have expectations of the efficacy and currency of those skills and qualifications that are not always realised in the volatile Australian labour market.

Before I explore the factors impacting VET in Schools across these four levels, I want to start by painting a picture of the VET in Schools landscape. In setting that scene, let's think about who participates in VET in Schools.

In 2012 there were 242,312 young Australians undertaking some form of VET in Schools program (NCVER 2013). Participation in VET in Schools varies by state and by the level of Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) qualification levels in which students participate. While some states, such as Queensland and Victoria, have larger numbers of students undertaking training at Certificate III and above, the majority (72.9%) of VET in Schools students undertake qualifications at Certificates I and II level (NCVER 2013).

VET in Schools forms just one part of the broader role played by VET for 15 to 19-year-old Australians. While VET in Schools students and school-based apprentices and trainees account for only 14 per cent of the total Australian 15 to 19-year-old cohort (ACARA 2011), if we look at 16-year-olds, the age of the last year of compulsory schooling in most Australian states and territories, VET in Schools students and school-based apprentices and trainees make up 27% of the age cohort.

There is currently no systematic tracking or evaluation of the outcomes for VET in Schools students. Tracking of school completers in Victoria and Queensland indicates that outcomes for VET in Schools graduates continue to be weak by comparison with their non-VET in Schools peers (Rothman et al. 2011; Department of Education and Training Queensland 2010).

One of the stated benefits of VET in Schools is that it plays a role in retaining young people in school. If the retention is simply delaying direct entry to the labour market, the question must be asked – to what extent is staying on to complete school strengthening the opportunities and outcomes for VET in School students? The foundational nature of VET in Schools does not effectively support student transition directly into entry-level occupations. A

key reason for this is the weak currency of entry-level certificates (e.g. Certificates I and II) in the Australian labour market.

And without the benefit of higher level qualifications, we need to ask ourselves, to what extent are the third of young people undertaking VET in Schools, being effectively prepared for their post-school lives?

Policy context

Federal Assistant Minister Sussan Ley is currently leading a review of VET in Schools, with a view to developing a new national statement in the near future. In the meantime, the current national statement on VET in Schools is from 2001 (MCEETYA). VET in Schools within this national statement, is seen as a mechanism ideally “enhancing [student] transition to a broad range of post-school options and pathways” (MCEETYA 2001, p11). To what extent does this vision hold true?

VET in Schools occupies different spaces within the architecture of each senior secondary certificate (e.g. VCE, HSC, QCE, SACE, WACE). There appears to be a consensus that VET in Schools is a core part of a modern senior secondary curriculum. Despite this in principle support for VET in Schools, teachers, providers, policy makers and other stakeholders have expressed concerns about the existing models of VET in Schools delivery. One key concern is the demand placed on students to select an occupationally specific qualification at a young age, often with limited exposure to or understanding of their chosen industry or occupational area. As one stakeholder put it, *“students are forced to choose – they either commit to VET and cut off [any] chance of a university rank, or they do a bit of VET on the side which doesn’t really amount to much and will be pretty well useless for a job.”*

Regional level

Many VET in Schools stakeholders we have consulted with at the regional level speak of the disconnect between the education pathway model of VET in Schools and the community expectation of VET in Schools as an employment pathway. As users of VET in Schools, students, and their families, have expectations that the vocational skills and qualifications they attain while still at school, will be building blocks for entry to sustainable employment and further and higher level study.

What our research in this space has revealed is a lack of transparency and/or knowledge of how VET in Schools enables post-school VET pathways. As changes to VET funding at state and territory levels have impacted the breadth and depth of VET in Schools provision

available at the regional level, stakeholders have also expressed concern about how schools access quality provision that will provide the best outcomes for their students.

School level

Despite the declining currency of VET in Schools as a pathway to sustainable employment, it is viewed by many teachers we spoke to as a work preparation program. VET programs were seen as building skills for those students perceived as unsuited to an academic curriculum. The impact of students being labeled or identified as a particular type is evident from student quotes such as, "They didn't give us a choice, I was just told I was doing Retail", "This is the only [VET] they offer. They are just training us for the factories" and "They [careers counsellor] saw me as a hands on person and they didn't see me completing the [senior certificate], so I ended up in VET".

What we have seen throughout our research is almost a continuum of student entry to VET in Schools – down one end of the continuum we have those students who choose VET in Schools subjects based on information as part of a plan to explore an occupational area, support their disciplinary learning or provide specific skills for a job outcome. We might call this an empowered choice. Down the other end of the continuum we see students being assigned to particular curriculum streams through a deficit view of their aspirations and capabilities held by their schools. This could be viewed as disenfranchisement of those students and their role in determining the direction of their learning.

Student level

VET in Schools is also often seen as the pathway for our poorest students. The pathway of the working class. More than two thirds (44.8%) of VET in Schools learners are from the two lowest socioeconomic status (SES) quintiles (NCVER 2013).

In speaking with young people about their motivations for choosing VET in Schools, we sought to understand what they expected VET in Schools to provide. Where did they intend to go post-school? And how could a VET program support their transition? While large numbers of young people we spoke to identified wanting a job in the industry area as their main reason for doing VET in Schools, there were some gender differences. Young women were more likely to choose the subject because it was enjoyable, whereas their male peers were more likely to describe having insufficient marks for subjects they wanted to do or seeing VET in Schools as a good pathway for someone like them. This self-identification as a particular type of learner, capable of certain levels of study or achievement, plays an important role in shaping how young people imagine their futures.

Another dominant reason for choosing VET in Schools subjects was exploration – not knowing yet what they would like to pursue and wanting to try something out. Several young people also described VET as part of a longer-term career path.

Conclusion

Earlier, I spoke of bridges and our questioning of the type of bridges that school provides for young people. When talking about the efficacy of VET in Schools – we are talking about 220,000 young people. VET in Schools is used by these young people not only as a means of school completion but more importantly as a pathway to their post-school lives. What sort of foundation is VET in Schools providing to support transition from school?

VET in Schools is an inherently cross-sectoral endeavor, requiring collaboration and understanding between schools, VET providers and employers. It involves and relies on many different stakeholders for its success. Despite this, there appears to be a lack of awareness of the role, contribution and needs of other stakeholders on all sides.

VET in Schools can provide young people with an opportunity to learn about and develop skills for a range of vocational occupations while they complete their senior secondary certificates. It can provide a coherent pathway between school and higher-level VET or university and it can provide a strong foundation for entry to apprenticeships and traineeships. VET in Schools can provide access to authentic workplace learning and can enable synergies between different disciplinary and applied subjects. It can provide a robust learning experience that informs and inspires career development and aspirations.

Put simply, VET in Schools can provide a strong foundation for meaningful vocational careers. It can do these things, but unfortunately, there is currently great diversity in the efficacy and quality of VET in Schools provision. With such significant numbers of young people engaging in VET in Schools programs, it is imperative that we endeavor to make VET in Schools work in the best possible way, for all students.

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Interview (part one): Jill Blackmore

On equal opportunity, accountability and school improvement

Interview by John Graham

JG I understand that you have a family tradition of furthering the ideals of equal opportunity in teaching and schools?

JB Well, I come from a family of teachers; my mother and father were both secondary teachers. My father taught maths, English and history and my mother taught maths, science and French. Coming from that family I think I always wanted to be a teacher. When I started to teach in the 1970s I saw education like the new religion; it was what was going to change the world.

But I had that practice already in my family. My mother, having experienced discrimination because she was a married woman (which existed then) took her case up to the Teachers Tribunal and won it. She joined what was then the VSTA and she was on the VSTA executive for many years. In 1970 she put the equal pay for women case, and she won that case.

JG To what extent do you believe that those equal opportunity ideals have now been substantially realised?

JB Australia's state-funded public education system is very good and has always had a good reputation overseas, despite what the present Federal Government says. What is disappointing is that we haven't achieved the greater equity we thought back in the 1970s we would have achieved by now. There is a growing inequality between students and between schools, and there is a push towards the privatisation of public education and what I think will be a more elite university education.

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Whereas education was very much a national public good in the 20th century, in the 21st century it's becoming much more like a business. It's being privatised and based on contracts so people can make money out of it.

JG One issue I'd like you to comment on in the same area is the continued increase in the proportion of women in teaching (eg 73.7% of all Victorian government school teachers in 2000 rising to 76.6% in 2013) at a time when there are supposedly many more employment opportunities for women and a greater push for women to enter less traditional occupations and professions. Do you have any explanations for this trend?

JB Well, given what was happening in the 70s, 80s and 90s when women were being encouraged to go into leadership positions, it is disappointing that we don't have as many women in these positions, certainly at the secondary level, as one would have expected. I think that you cannot look at the education labour market without looking at what's happening more broadly within the wider labour market.

Generally in Australia we are seeing a casualisation and feminisation of the service sector and when this occurs, those professions or those industries are devalued and men do not tend to go into those jobs as much.

So the issue may not be as much about why women are going into teaching but why men are not. Teaching does not have the status and it doesn't have the security that they are looking for and also when men do go in, they get what I call the glass escalator. They rise rapidly through the system, so rather than the glass ceiling for them it's more about rising quickly to the top, particularly in primary schools. It's like nursing, if a male nurse goes in they say "what are you doing in the ward, you should be running it?"

At the same time that this casualisation and feminisation is occurring, there is also an intensification of labour right across every workforce and what that means is that women have to find balance in their working lives because they still do most of the home domestic labour in Australia. They still see that teaching is probably offering them a little bit more flexibility and more time with their children than other jobs.

I think the concern for women at the moment is the intensification of labour, particularly if you are going to go into leadership. A lot of women now say they are not going to go into leadership because of that. Teaching is not different to science and other occupations. Women are pulling out of science for the very same reasons around the expectations of the job and how difficult it is to progress in their career. I think it is

about choices they make in a very rapidly changing globalised labour market. You can't isolate teaching; it's happening in all of the professions.

I actually see the professions in general endangered. I see Australia sitting here placidly thinking that the professions are going to be secure. We are training students here who are going to go back to India and they are going to offer the same services online for half the price. That applies to all the professions, engineering, definitely IT, but also teaching.

A lot of women go into teaching of course because they are passionate about it. They do like to teach. We still find in studies that women are encouraged to do something they like and men are encouraged to do something that will give them a more secure career, even though nearly everybody expects women to work for their life-time.

JG Schools are presently under great pressure from conservative state and federal governments to improve their performance through competitive market mechanisms (My School, Independent Public Schools etc) and increased "accountability". What is your view about this approach to school improvement? What effect do you think it has on the public education system?

JB We know that selectivity is the key to outcomes where you have greater choice. Quite simple really, it's a no-brainer! You can select your student population through fees, through disciplinary measures, through curriculum, through uniforms - there are multiple ways to encourage or discourage students. The research on My School indicates that parents actually don't use it that much. They look at it, but make their decisions at the local level on reputation within the local community; it's mainly people who come from outside, not locals who use it.

The notion of Independent Public Schools is that a school will do better if it has more autonomy. Victorian schools have been autonomous for a long time relatively speaking. We know that what happens is the principal doesn't get autonomy over the things they want. The onus of accountability falls on the school and not on the system. Indeed the system devolves risk and responsibility down to the individual school and principal and teachers so they can get blamed and the system can cast off any sense of responsibility for outcomes. So it's not a mutual form of accountability.

JG What effect do you think the use of standardised test scores such as NAPLAN as the only measure of success, and the basis of accountability, has on the public education system?

JB People don't understand that actually it's context that counts, it's student population that counts, it's selectivity that counts, it's where you are geographically that counts. Your outcomes depend on multiple factors that are not in the control of the school principal or school. All of those factors matter yet all a school gets measured on is their outcomes and we know that state schools in Australia have 85% of the students with low socio-economic background, disability, indigenous kids – all of the equity groups.

Showing what the population is in each school allows some parents to make decisions about wanting to be with people "like us" – they exercise their "school choice". These parents can then go off and create their own little havens for people like themselves.

The upside of My School's transparency is when it showed that private schools, the really top ones, were not doing nearly as well as they claimed to. Thanks to pressure from the Union all of the assets and fees were put on the website and this showed that a lot of these schools get huge amounts of money yet they do not do as well as highflying government schools.

In general however, My School encourages parents to think that schools can be judged by a very simplistic measure. It has a corrosive effect and just adds to the general discourse about public schools that the government is promoting.

JG School improvement can be a difficult and complex process using up a lot of staff time and energy, particularly when schools are constantly buffeted by the short-term political cycle at Commonwealth and State levels. How do you sustain genuine school improvement over an extended period?

JB School improvement is all about context, it's all about who your students are and where the school is located and we know that school change is not a continuous thing, it goes up-and-down. We also know that there needs to be a recognition that it takes up to seven or eight years for any fundamental change to have an effect.

How do you sustain it? Well it's the politicians who cause the problem. You need an enabling set of government policies sustained over a period of time. If you don't have that it's really down to the school and the principal to set up good democratic processes, to educate the community about what you're doing and get them involved and you have to get the staff on board as much as you can

It's about encouraging teachers to innovate and to work together in teams and not to dig down into one classroom and end up in a little hole. I think it's about setting

up processes and saying we can achieve certain things and having quite realistic measures to meet the outcomes. It's up to the principal to buffer the staff as much as they can. Some principals rush in and want to do everything and when a new policy comes in they rush around trying to implement it. The really good ones go "no, we won't do that, we're going to stay on course where we want to go".

JG Do you think you also need programs for principals to develop an understanding of their leadership role in sustaining improvement?

JB I think a lot of these programs are about getting principals to respond and react to things, rather than saying "this is what we are going to do", and "how do we fit within the broader framework and at the same time keep the long term in view?" Fundamental change is most likely to occur when principals engage with the staff and get them to think about what it is we really value here and why and how are we going to make changes, and then to support the staff to constantly review that. It is very hard to engage staff in this process when they have been buffeted by multiple changes and beaten up in the press.

The better research on teachers' work has shown that you need to have good peer review relationships, a trust in the principal to do the right thing, and a focus on getting teachers working with each other, either in small groups or through some sets of processes that are not highly judgemental but really help them to think about their practice in ways that would lead them to do something different. We know that effective internal peer review is going to make a greater difference than any strong external accountability.

JG The "internationalising" of student performance through growing media and political interest in international testing programs such as PISA and TIMSS has become ever more prominent in Australia. Governments are increasingly justifying their latest policy "reforms" by citing results in these tests and the need to arrest Australia's "decline". Both Labor and Liberal Governments have also described their major educational goal as a "top 5" finish in these testing programs. What do you think about these developments and calls, for example, for Australian schools to be more like those in Shanghai or Singapore or Finland?

JB First of all PISA and TIMSS were never meant to be used as a means of comparing countries. Lots of countries don't get involved in PISA and TIMSS because they know the damage that is done. PISA and TIMSS tests are really about comparing the same group of students over time; that is what they should be used for. Australia by the way,

still does pretty well in those tests and the only reason we have dropped in the rankings is because more countries have come in.

With many of these new countries you have to ask, do we really want to copy that? Countries like Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan and China all realise that they are not preparing kids for the 21st century. Their teachers are teaching to the test and they are actually worried about this. So I can read you plans that have now been in place for five years in those countries which say that the 21st century learner must develop intercultural understanding, must have a capacity for critical thinking, must be innovative, must be creative etc etc. We have it all in our own National Statement. So the paradoxical scenario here is that we are being told to be more like them and they want to be more like us.

Finland shows that you can have a successful school system where people value education, where teachers are well-paid, where teachers have Masters degrees and where they have a 30 year reform plan. People there don't really care about PISA - the government doesn't care about it, the parents don't care about it, the teachers don't care about it. They have got a consensus among parents, business, government and teachers about the need for professional development and about allowing schools to work on the basis of what they need for their students.

The issue is which country do we want to copy? The Asian countries are trying to copy us and they think we have terrific teachers. Australian teachers in international schools are really valued because they are risk taking, they know about curriculum, they are autonomous in what they do, they are creative and just don't do rote teaching.

JG Unfortunately you don't get that impression from some of our more prominent politicians who repeat the catchcry that student performance will only improve when we have "better" teachers. A lot of people would say the real issue is getting better politicians.

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