



LINK 6: REPORT OF ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS AND STATEMENTS:

KEY AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders included in this report:

Interviews:

- Chief Executive Officer, Christian Schools Australia
- Minister of Education, Training & The Arts, Queensland
- Director-General of Education, Training & The Arts, Queensland

Written Statement:

- Chief Executive Officer, Independent Schools Council of Australia.

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1. Introduction

This report draws on a series of in-depth interviews held with:

- Chief Executive Officer, Christian Schools Australia (Interviewee 1)
- Minister of Education, Training & The Arts, Queensland (Interviewee 2)
- Director-General of Education, Training & The Arts, Queensland (Interviewee 4)

The fourth set of data drawn on here comes from a formal statement provided in response to the interviewee questions – referred to below as Interviewee 3 – Chief Executive Officer, Independent Schools Council of Australia.

The analysis is provided in several sections. Firstly, it discusses, as seen by the four interviewees, what have been the main forces (influences, factors and so on) that have been impacting on, and shaping schools, particularly from a (public) purposes perspective. It then moves to their understanding of what these forces mean for schools; that is, what their impact has been. Discussion then moves to a focus about public purposes: the language interviewees used to denote public purposes, and what they perceive to be the public purposes of schooling. Finally the analysis considers the impact on, and responses by schools in relation to the identified forces and purposes, and raises some of the debates to emerge.

2. General summary comments

There are general commonalities between the responses of interviewees 2 and 4, and interviewees 1 and 3. Interviewees 2 and 4 are concerned with both state and non-state schools and seem to have a much broader conception of the public purposes of schooling than do the other pair of interviewees, who seem to have a particular interest in arguing the virtues of a particular type of school: viz. non-state as opposed to state schools.

3. Forces impacting on schools

Generally, interviewees tended to stress technology, globalisation and issues to do with parents/families, funding (especially federal government funding) as the main categories of forces that have impacted on schooling in recent times. It is of interest that while interviewees 1 and 3 agree that funding is an important issue, it is really in the context of the federal funding for the school sectors that they represent that has priority. Broad economic policy and the federal government agendas (previous and current, such as increased accountability) are also mentioned as significant forces impacting on schools. Interviewee 3 noted the issue of market share – the shift to non-state schools was, in part, seen as evidence that that particular sector was successful.

4. What forces mean for schools

With regard to ICTs, interviewee 1 stressed the need for professional development for teachers as he believed:

the re-equipping of the teaching service and the re-designing of the curriculum and re-learning about the process of teaching and learning ourselves is one of the most profound issues facing us all and that is across the board, irrespective of what system you are in.

Interviewees 2 and 4 also made reference to the importance of technology. Interviewee 4 argued that technology is having a huge impact together with the mobility of people, globalization, whatever we like to call it, we are going to be these modern day public purposes, or are they going to be similar to ... the citizenry, getting on with people?' (3-4).

Interviewee 1 noted that parents have been choosing to send their children to Christian schools because of the perception that these schools taught values explicitly whereas state schools do not. However, it was noted that these:

are schools that are established with a particular set of statements about faith, values and beliefs. Those schools that are established for other purposes, secular purposes and so on ... also have statements that govern such things". (But our values) assumes a certain set of values based on a religious view of the world. ... (parents) are concerned that in state schools there has been a stepping back from a values position to the point where if you adopt the post modern view that any idea is as valid as any other, that you never actually provide guidance to a student.

This seems to contradict in part his observations that "the public purpose is to produce outcomes, achieve social objectives, assist young people to become equipped to fulfil their own after school desires whether they be professional, technical and a range of other purposes."

Interviewees 1 and 3 seemed to consider this understanding as a fact. Interviewee 3, for instance, states that more parents, from all socio-economic groups, are sending their children to independent schools. His statement continued that these schools provide community focus – eg. Sunday church services, building up excellence in, e.g., music or Asian studies.

Interviewees 2 and 4 refuted the perception that private is better than public or that there is even a clear division between the two sectors. They argued that there are certain core (public) values that are taught by all schools regardless of which sector they belong to. Interviewee 4 noted that "Regardless of sector, regardless of ideology or faith, or orientation, what are some of the core values that ought reflect the schooling system, or ought underpin this system and be reflected by its practice?"

According to interviewee 4:

one of the unfortunate side-effects of running an education system with a demarcation between what is state and what is non-state, and the implicit and inherent view that independent schools push, that somehow you're more advantaged if you, you know, you attend an independent school, and that the independent school is really targeting an elite cadre of kids who are going to go to privileged futures and so, you know, unless it is faith-based where part of the sort of values frame and the curriculum is also about the heaters good ... then you run the risk of this notion of individual prosperity at the expense of the sort of social capital, social cohesion ... (p. 4).

Interestingly, interviewee 2 observed:

there has been a policy tug-of-war between whether we want education to actually build the person or build the economy; whether education is really

about the capabilities of the person or and their broad intellectual paraphernalia rather than just creating factory fodder to drive the purposes of industry. I think that tug-of-war will continue. Certainly, the whole idea of materialism and consumerism that emerged in the 70s has anything but abated. ... On the other hand, we haven't entirely lost a sense that we want a country where the public goods of fairness and equal opportunity are still part of our social fabric.

So I think education does have an important role in moderating the worst effects of an acquisitive self interest but that is what education about character and citizenship.

Here interviewee 2 referred to the Queensland Minister for Education's 'four pillars – the Four Cs'. The 4Cs are citizenship, creativity, character and competence. She asserted that that we need to have a set of core values that go across all school sectors'. These 4Cs and the Council of the Federation's 2007 document *Future of Schooling in Australia* were the central reference points for interviewee 4's discussion. Interviewee 4 also mentioned the importance of federal funding in leveraging and defining policy.

Increasing accountability on schools (particularly at a government level) was seen in different ways. Interviewee 3 saw some government regulation as excessive – "Regulatory measures ... are reducing the flexibility of schools ... schools are being driven to greater uniformity at a time when there is a demand for greater diversity." He goes on to note that "a significant pressure on independent schools is reconciling rising community expectations in areas such as curriculum ..."

5. Language, terminology

All four interviewees spoke of community. Interviewees 1, 3 and 4 referred to accountability and other government requirements. The greatest commonality between the names and purposes considered to be public was between interviewees 2 and 4. They referred to the articulation of a particular set of values that included social cohesion, tolerance, diversity, culture and understanding. Also referred to in the case of 2 was the notion of the 'fair go' and 'equality of opportunity' but for 4 this was expressed as addressing issues of disadvantage, especially that experienced by students from low SES backgrounds. Both interviewees 2 and 4 also referred to quality of life. Interviewee 3 also made reference to culture, diversity, social justice and community service. Citizenship was mentioned by only two of the four interviewees. Thus it can be argued that there is a common set of terms used to denote public purposes. However, Interviewee 1 from the Christian schools sector did argue that the underpinning values of those purposes were Christian (faith) based).

Interviewee 4 noted comments made by leaders in the Catholic school about some of the driving forces behind (some of) their schools:

When I talked about the issues of student disadvantage and the representation of kids from low SES in state schools and so on, to a person people on the Catholic Commission said "But look that's core business for us, that's where the Catholic education started ... we're actually seeing a market shift in some of our schools away from the low SES.

6. Understanding of public purposes

Some argued that public discussion and debate is what determines the purposes of schooling. All interviewees recognised the importance of the public funding/accountability nexus. Yet despite school curriculum being a state responsibility, Interviewee 1 stated that all schools were accountable to the Commonwealth in terms of the curriculum and finance. He argued that the community needed to have debates and discussions about the purposes of education. He defined public purposes as:

The public purpose is to produce outcomes, achieve social objectives, assist young people to become equipped to fulfil their own after school desires whether they be professional, technical ...

It is also a “way to positively mediate a culture”. However, it should be noted that his schooling sector would see this in a particular way as he argues that “parents who send their kids to Christian schools do so because they know a particular moral position will be promoted as the most beneficial. (he goes on to note that) By the way you will find the same moral position in an Islamic school or a Jewish school or lots of other schools that don’t call themselves Christian either.”

Interviewee 1 argued that:

when you define what the purposes of education are, can they be achieved through a variety of means and the answer to that in my view is yes they can, provided that you have appropriate accountabilities in place, accountabilities for the expenditure of public money, accountabilities to the wider community for curriculum outcomes, curriculum objectives and so there needs to be a wide public debate about what is in the curriculum and what the syllabus looks like. So provided you have got openness and transparency the delivery can be in a variety of methods and increasingly, technology itself makes a nonsense of all these arguments because it’s going to drive massive changes to the way we structure and deliver to the expectations of those that we educate. And unless we go with that and understand it we are going to miss the revolution that has taken over the world.

In defining the specifics of public purposes interviewee 1 asserted that, in the context of Christian schools, public purposes for both Christian and secular schools were:

To respect and tolerate belief systems and a secular belief system is part of that mix. ... [For Christian schools] The way the community interacts assumes a certain set of values based on a religious view of the world, so the school celebrates the way it creates peer group structures or pastoral care. ... In our school we theorise that the role of the teacher as being a guide and a mentor and to use a sort of biblical phrase – a disciple of Christ – who shares their expression of their religious faith in the way in which they interact with their students, in the way in which they interact with their peers in the staff room, the way that they interact with parents. We don’t compartmentalize faith and life. ... So if the teacher is a guide, mentor and a co-disciple then as they bring technology into the classroom, just as in a previous generation they would have brought a newspaper clipping into the classroom, and they speak with students about that creates meaning in our community’s life or in their lives

individually they are going to be reflecting on that in a way which doesn't shut out questions of belief and faith..

Interviewee 1 continued that 'We want our schools to be affordable' as do the Catholic systemic schools because 'folk' want to raise their children and send them to schools that give 'some perspective and meaning to life'. This argument suggests that state schools are values-free, a perspective that is stringently rejected by interviewee 4.

On the issue of private versus public benefit, Interviewee 1 noted that for some parents, "there are those that say yes, they just want to get economic advantage for their children. You can't deny that that is a possibility that some parents think that way but it is not the rationale for why this school sector exists, the Christian school sector".

Interviewee 4 observed that it is very clear that schools and teachers are not values-free zones. While Catholic schools have a faith-based curriculum and are values-based in that sense, there are core values that transcend an individual school sector and are common to all. For interviewee 4, 'a community based on values of tolerance and ... celebrating diversity and understanding that's critical to new ideas and experiences, and the culture and the ... quality of life' (p. 5). To quote interviewee 4 in full:

the curriculum is not values-free, nor are teachers values-free, nor are students in classrooms values-free, so how do we articulate the diversity of values and the shared values held by those who interact in state school settings. We think that articulating a core set of values that reflect the philosophy and practice of schools across the sectors is a challenge. ... As you know more recently state schools have been accused of being values-free zones, and my argument is that this ought not lead to transplanting a set of values that have been discretely generated by schools systems that are faith-based into state school settings. It's about looking at a broader vision for Australian education, for Australian schooling, and saying "Regardless of sector, regardless of ideology or faith, or orientation, what are some of the core values that ought reflect the schooling system, or ought underpin this system and be reflected by its practice.

The view articulated by interviewees 2 and 4 draw in part on the current Queensland Education Minister's '4 C's':

'... competency, creativity, character and citizenship ... Competence is in effect academic knowledge and technological skills ... creativity is the new limb of knowledge or skill capability ... Character picks up on a whole heap of things - everything from values education to interpersonal skills, conflict resolution ... Citizenship is that sense of shared social responsibility and a sense in every individual that they can actually contribute positively to the world around them; that they can make a difference and that they are not without power to make a difference" (interviewee 2). Interviewee 2 continued that "Schools are a great environment within which to cultivate a sense of shared purpose" and that "there is a whole range of learning activities which might primarily be about knowledge sets but which subliminally cultivate these attributes that are fundamental to a full and rounded education.

Interviewee 4 added that:

schools are essentially accountable for producing clever, happy, well-adjusted young people who are confident in themselves and optimistic about their futures, and energized to create knowledge and generate wealth and opportunity for themselves and for the community in which they live. In a narrow sense we say schools are about producing intellectual properties, social ... or intellectual capital, social capital, and human capital, and the two ... they're not mutually exclusive, but we ought to be producing as we said, optimistic, happy children who are able to innovate and create and generate new knowledge in an applied sense as well as ... but there is something about producing citizens who are able to contribute to the sort of social cohesion and tolerance or diversity that characterize Australia

She argued that “regardless of sector, regardless of ideology or faith, or orientation, what are some of the core values that ought reflect the schooling system, or ought underpin this system and be reflected by its practice”. She warned against running the risk:

of advocating for individual prosperity at the expense of the social capital and community cohesion. Barry McGaw's work says that schools are great at social bonding, so they leverage the peer relationship in a way that builds an intensive sort of cohesion within the school, but they're not good at social bridging, so where you have like groups of kids together, they actually learn from each other and they model on each other, and so you create, potentially, depending on the population in your school, residualised or privileged populations of kids who learn from each other's disadvantage or advantage. Neither can be healthy for social capital in Australia.

She finished by arguing that “we’re not having to trade off an investment in the individual strengths of kids with the sort of community and society that we choose to live in and wish to perpetuate. We want to create a society based on values of tolerance and which celebrates diversity and embraces new ideas and experiences.”

For interviewee 4, the public purposes of schooling “is really about the uniqueness of every child and the capacity of every child, and the right of every child to a pathway ... every child ought to exit a schooling system feeling absolutely positive about themselves and optimistic about the future, and then there’s social capital”.

Interviewee 3 saw “education as both a public and private good. ... individual and public benefits are not mutually exclusive”. Rather, “current prevailing view of education as a means of underwriting national economic and productivity goals depends on individual academic achievement”. “Independent schools ... make a significant contribution to the public good”.

Interviewee 3 saw non-state schools as providing parents with choice and diversity of schooling. “In particular, the independent sector gives families the choice of a school that teaches values – including religious values – that reflect those taught at home; they extend the choice of single sex schools; and boarding facilities are vital in providing access to quality education for students in rural and remote regions.”

Re-enforcing the argument that non-state schools contributed significantly to diversity and equity, Interviewee 3 noted that:

The diversity of the independent sector, as noted above, is a reflection of independent schools responding to societal support for empowering parents in determining the kind of education they receive. This diversity is reflected by the fact the independent school community constitutes a broad cross section of families from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and socio economic circumstances. For instance, the independent sector has a higher proportion of students from a non-English speaking background than the other school sectors, in part a reflection of the high value migrant families place on education. The independent sector in Australia draws families from all socio-economic groups. One in six children in an independent school is from a low-income family and around 10 per cent of students get some kind of fee relief in the form of scholarships or bursaries.

To be noted is that some of the schools then cited as illustrating the diversity argument could in fact be argued to be some of the wealthiest schools in Australia eg MLC, NSW, Caulfield Grammar, Vic- indeed, the examples provided of diversity warrant examination! On a curriculum level, the interviewees noted that the independent sector was making an important contribution because “It is now very difficult to study Latin at school level outside of the independent sector.”

Interviewee 3 also argued that independent schools made significant community contributions, illustrated by making “their facilities available to the wider community, for example playing fields, theatres, halls, accommodation in boarding houses for interstate sports teams during vacation periods.” He also rejected that notion that such schools were “creating ‘social enclaves’ that undermine social cohesion. There is no evidence for this, although a growing body of evidence to prove the contrary”. “Pastoral care programs also help to make independent schools good examples of caring communities.” He also argued that this sector contributed to public purposes by enrolling international students – “including enhanced cultural awareness, diversity and also an understanding of citizenship”.

Interviewee 2 noted that “some of our public investments (in education) generates private benefits and some of it generates public benefits ... it is legitimate ... that education does both”. He illustrates, when referring to the Rudd government’s education policy:

his concept of education being at the centre of economic policy has both public and private benefits. The public benefits are national prosperity in economic terms. The private benefits are micro-economic or firm level profitability and global competitiveness and I think all that is fine. If the bottom line of education or its ultimate purpose is about improving the quality of life of a whole community and all individuals in it, then positioning our national intellectual infrastructure to be competitive globally is I think an important part of that general nationwide economic prosperity from which we all benefit. We also know of course that education is fundamentally linked to individual life outcomes and there is loads of data now showing how a person’s career and employment prospects are almost doubled if they stay at school to completion rather than leave early. So there is much empirical

evidence now about the value of education to individual prosperity as well as broader community prosperity.

In summary he argued that:

Well, one of the great public purposes of education is to build a civilised society in which people learn how to relate and contribute in ways that are prosperous both economic and social terms.

Responses

In considering the responses of schools in meeting their public purpose requirements within the new or future environment, interviewee 1 focused on the use of public monies received by non-government schools and the professional development of teachers in relation to ICTs. Interviewee 1 argued that, 'if you are looking at the public purposes of education we shouldn't rule out the use of capital in vastly different ways that we thought of before in order for non-government schools to be able to build facilities or even pay teachers'.

Interviewee 2 took a complete different track in answering this question, referring to changes to the Queensland school system with the addition of Prep and to potentially reorganising the work of teachers so that they work more flexible hours and their stress levels are reduced. He also noted that:

The training institutions need to get teachers up to speed with imparting social and emotional skills. Teachers actually have to become part-time fast track parents for a lot of these kids. McDonald's hands out fast food; some of our teachers are going to have to get into the skills of fast parenting to bring kids up to speed. Why? Well, because a lot of these social and emotional capabilities are in fact a precondition for being able to start thinking and learning.

He then observed that:

So I think there is a whole issue around the building of character that becomes a legitimate role for schools to play. The subliminal or secondary effect of building all these attributes of character is that you actually have a society of people who are capable, can relate and care as between one human and another. ... There is an enormous shift in overall affluence and social aspiration in this country. There is a very strong individualism running through people's personal pursuits and aspirations. On the other hand, we haven't entirely lost a sense that we want a country where the public goods of fairness and equal opportunity are still part of our social fabric.

While operating from a similar framework to interviewee 2, interviewee 4 focused on policy, intergovernmental relations and the relationship between the state and non-state (especially the Catholic) systems in meeting the needs of citizens in the twenty-first century. Interviewee 4 made mention of a number of relevant points:

- Combating the racially-based fear pushed by the former federal government
- Combating the preference giving to new independent schools by the former federal government, particularly in relation to the fact that these schools were set in relation to the values debate, funding issues, pushing the view that

independent schools produced more in terms of individual outcomes for students and parental choice.

7. Some summary comments

- While at one level there tended to be broad agreement between interviewees 1, 2 and 4, interviewee 3 presented a case for the independent sector as being better than public schools – or at least presented a defensive case along these lines.
- Indeed, for Interviewees 1 and 3, many of their arguments could be seen as focusing around public v private schools and not about deeper issues of public purposes – this is certainly the case for interviewee 3.
- Parts of interviewee 1's case strayed along these lines in terms of arguing that Christian schools taught particular values that were attracting parents. There was an implication that state schools, at least in some parents' eyes were not values based.
- Although they recognised that Christian schools have the right to teach Christian values, interviewees 2 and 4 concentrated on a set of core public values that transcend the public/private divide and were essentially about the type of community or type of citizens we want. Indeed they saw the demarcation between the state and non-state sectors as either 'unhelpful' (2) or having 'unfortunate side-effects' (4).
- Despite the debates over the relative merits of non-state schools over state schools, there was a general consensus that all schools in receipt of public monies were accountable for the use of that funding. And that they had public purposes to pursue. It is what these public purposes might be where some disagreement was evident.
- All interviewees nominated technology as having a major impact on schooling today and in the future. Several interviewees pointed to the impact of federal funding and legislation on school policy, and thus on the purposes of schooling. Here interviewee 2 was attentive to the negative impact of managerialism on the public purposes of schooling and that government policy was constraining the degree of choice parents had in schooling for their children.
- There was agreement across the interviewees that developing community-mindedness remains a key public purpose of schooling. Interviewee 4 reminded us that curriculums, schools, teachers and students are not value-free. This fact was seen as a reason that public purposes for schools must include citizenship, respecting diversity, social justice, tolerance, awareness and understanding of culture. These purposes lead school systems being used to address disadvantage and assist future citizens to gain a quality of life.
- It is noted that this wider view of what constitutes the public purposes of schooling was only held by the two interviewees who considered all school sectors in their discussion.