

BUILDING OUR NATION THROUGH PUBLIC EDUCATION

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Part A: The Current State of Australian Education.....	6
Inequitable educational outcomes	6
A socially stratified schooling system	7
How have we arrived at this point?	9
Free, compulsory, secular and socially mixed	9
Government funding of private schools.....	10
From public good to safety net: Entitlement trumps equity	11
The consequences: The financial impact	15
The consequences: Residualising and fragmenting public education	17
The consequences: Privatising public education	23
Establishing a context of privatisation in education	23
Privatisation and the concept of independent public schools	25
The public / private debate in Australian education	26
The contours of the public / private debate	26
Reformulating the debate.....	27
Part B: (Re)theorising Public Education	29
Public education as a public good: Towards an education commons.....	29
Free	31
Compulsory	32
Secular	33
Creating an education commons	34
Public education for the common good	35
The common good and education	36
Public education for the common good: The implications for policy and practice..	37
Quality	37
Links with the local community	38
Collaboration.....	38
Innovation	39
Equity	39
Diversity and cohesion	40
Democracy	40
Working to create public schools for the common good	41
Well-resourced public schools in every community	41
The Gonski story	43
Learning from Gonski.....	44
Towards a new funding model	45
Conclusion: Reinstating the publicness of education	47
References	50

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

By any measure, Australia has a high-quality education system. It compares well against other countries on a range of education tests and benchmarks. These results, however, mask the grim reality that Australian education is not equitable.

It is the large achievement gap between rich and poor that blights Australian education – and the gap appears to be widening. According to a recent report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Australia is near the bottom of OECD countries in terms of equity in education.

Apart from denying individuals the chance to develop to their full potential, there is now overwhelming evidence demonstrating the deleterious effects of educational inequality on social and economic outcomes and political participation. Productivity falls, participation in civic life is diminished, and social dislocation is greater. Since education is one of the most important determinants of levels of inequality, it is clear that there is need for urgent action to improve equity in Australian schooling.

This paper argues that over the past 40 years Australia has been following educational policy settings that have exacerbated this problem, and worked against progress being made to address it. In particular, successive governments have diminished the strength of public education and in so doing have widened the educational achievement gap, and fostered social and cultural division. A major contributing factor has been the increasing social stratification of Australian education.

Part A

After demonstrating the importance of social mix to educational outcomes, Part A of the paper tracks the path by which Australia has achieved such a high degree of social stratification in its schooling system. It describes how this stratification began with the introduction of systematic federal funding to private schools in the 1970s in an attempt to address need while maintaining the principle of universal public education. It then shows how funding policies began to neglect the concept of need and foreground the principle of entitlement.

This entitlement principle resulted in increasing amounts of public money being directed to private schools, with a consequent expansion of that sector at the expense of public education. Increasingly, public education has come to be seen as a safety-net provision for those who can't afford private education, rather than as a public good. The paper suggests that there are two dimensions of this process at work.

First, the exodus of enrolments from the public system has almost entirely comprised those from higher socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. The public education system is becoming residualised to the extent that it now carries over 80% of all students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. Of course, this pattern is uneven across the public system and so the public system is itself becoming increasingly fragmented with differences found between schools in resources and student backgrounds.

Such developments have a number of serious consequences for Australian education, such as widening resource disparities between schools, reducing educational outcomes particularly for students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, and diminishing

the social and cultural mix of schools and thus the capacity of schools to promote social and intercultural understanding.

Second, the discourse of choice and competition has created a policy climate where it is asserted that public schools must become more like private schools if they are to survive and flourish in an education market. In such an environment, public schools are pressured to imitate private schools and in the process jettison some of the characteristics that are so central to public education.

There is an urgent need to change the current inequitable approach to funding schools so that there is a fairer distribution of funds. In particular, additional public money must be directed to the most disadvantaged schools, most of which are in the public system.

A fairer funding model, however, is a necessary though not sufficient condition to reverse the drift to private schools. So while a new funding model may reduce disparities in resources between schools and sectors as a whole, it will do nothing about the privatisation of public education. Nor will it offer any guidance about the essence of public education that must be maintained.

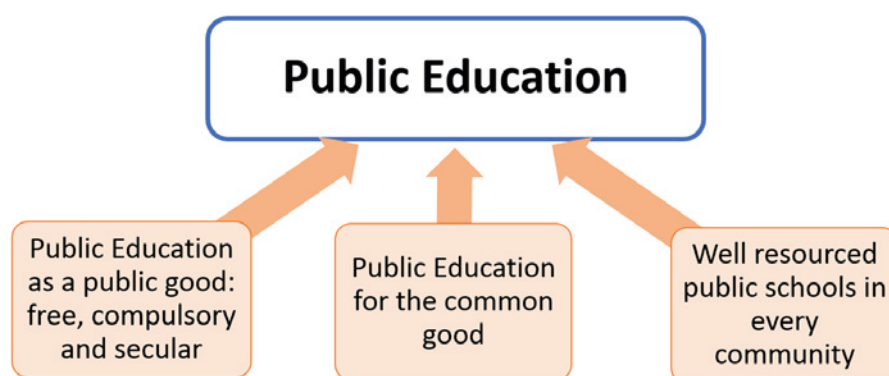
Part A concludes by arguing that public discussion about public education is being conducted in the absence of a philosophical anchor that articulates the essence of public education. That is, the secret to addressing the stratification of the Australian schooling system lies not in the current trend of making public schools more private, but rather in (re)emphasising their publicness. Part B of the paper explores what this means for policy and practice.

Part B

Part B of the paper is based on the conviction that there is need for a new conceptual framework that challenges the dominant discourses of choice, competition, entitlement and privatisation, and reimagines the possibilities for public education. Once the foundation principles of public education are (re)established, not only should they inform policy and practice, but they should also better frame the expectations that can be placed on private schools for the receipt of public funds. The dynamic of the public/private debate will shift as a result.

The paper proposes that there are three fundamental dimensions of public education as represented in the diagram below:

A framework for public education



The case is made that each dimension is a necessary but insufficient condition for a healthy system of public education. As the foundation stones of public education, these three dimensions must work together. To neglect one of them is to weaken the whole.

Public education as a public good

This dimension relates to 'ownership'. In this context, public education is the same as public utility: owned by the state, funded from its citizens' taxes, and managed by the state on the public's behalf. The idea of public education as a public good is a powerful dimension that must be protected in contemporary Australia. From this perspective, public education should be understood not as a commodity to be used solely for the benefit of individuals but as a community resource to which everyone has rights of access, and which is non-exclusionary – a kind of education commons.

The key principles of public schools as public goods within an education commons are that they are free, compulsory and secular. The paper explores each of these principles and concludes that in Australia today they are under threat and must be protected and promoted because without them the idea of universal public education will only be a mirage.

It is also argued, however, that free, compulsory and secular are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the operation of public schools. They give no guidance about the nature of the education on offer, a gap that raises the need for a second dimension in foregrounding the public purposes served by public schools.

Public education for the common good

The paper suggests that the lack of focus on the public purposes of public education has created conditions in which the idea of public education as a safety net can flourish. A rejuvenated understanding of public education within an education commons therefore demands attention paid to its role in advancing the common good. It is the second dimension of a framework for public education.

Building from AGPPA's previous research project on the public purposes of schooling, the paper explores the concept of the common good and the role of education in its promotion. It is suggested that there are at least two key aspects to consider. The first is to create and maintain a system of education which itself models a commitment to the common good. This includes ensuring that free education is available to all on both a comparatively equal playing field and on a non-exclusionary basis, and has policy and practices that are consistent with and promote the common good *in* education. The second aspect relates to the role of public education *for* the common good. This involves public schools developing the skills, dispositions and understandings of children and young people, such that they can engage with others – respectfully and thoughtfully – in deliberation about the common good in the broader society.

There are a number of implications for understanding aspects of education such as teaching and learning, culture, structure, organisation, funding and governance when they are viewed through the lens of its common-good purposes. In particular, it injects specific meaning into some important characteristics of public education, such as quality, links with local community, collaboration, innovation, equity, diversity and cohesion, and democracy. The

paper demonstrates how these characteristics manifest very differently in policy and practice when they are understood through a more 'privatising' lens.

Well-resourced public schools in every community

Dimensions 1 and 2 provide a philosophical framework for public education, but they are meaningless unless public schools are adequately resourced. So the third dimension of a three-pronged understanding of public education is that governments have an obligation to provide and maintain well-resourced, quality public schools, available to all, in every Australian community.

The foundation premise of this dimension is that, in a democratic society, education should be available to all on equal terms so that each child can develop to her/his full potential. Properly resourced public schools are the starting point for the achievement of this goal. It therefore follows that our society should make every effort to ensure that the differences between schools in such basic areas as equipment, teacher quality, buildings, class sizes and so on are reduced. And yet currently the schools with the greatest challenges are given the least amount of resources to deal with them. In the, main these are public schools.

Part A argues that the approach to funding schools in Australia has magnified rather than reduced resource differentials, and contributed to creating entirely unacceptable educational outcomes. Australia has developed a funding model that is complex, arbitrary, inequitable and dysfunctional. It privileges choice for some, at the expense of quality and equity for all. But given the self-interest at play in the education debate, this paper turns to the question of how it might be possible to engineer an approach that turns this trend around.

In recent times, the Gonski Review provided a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make radical changes to funding schools in this country. The fact that the current Coalition government has effectively rejected the major intent of the review does not mean it was wasted. There is much that can be learned from its processes, analyses, and recommendations, including what to avoid as well as what to pursue. This paper suggests that the Gonski Review can be perceived by public-education advocates as a staging post in the journey to a public education that serves the common good, rather than as a failed end point.

This paper traces the Gonski story and explores the strengths and limitations of the Gonski model. It used these insights to suggest the basis for the next version of a needs-based schools funding model – a sort of Gonski Mark 2 - comprising four levels of operation. These range from the key assumptions and purposes of schools funding; to the equity principles at play; to the technical features of a more streamlined model; and to accountability.

The four levels offer reference points or benchmarks against which approaches to funding can be assessed. Of course, after the exhaustive consultations and processes of the Gonski Review, there is no need to start again. Gonski has given Australia a model that addresses a number of issues outlined in Part A of this paper. The next version of a needs-based funding approach – one that a professional association like AGPPA might argue publicly – should seek to build on the Gonski model by retaining its strengths and removing its flaws. Such a model would promote a well-resourced public education system that builds the common good.

Conclusion

This paper is not suggesting that simply adopting a framework like the one proposed in Part B will precipitate automatic change to current policy or the dominant discourse. This can only happen through prolonged struggle. But it is suggesting that such a framework may assist public educators in that struggle in at least three ways:

- the framework offers a common language by which to talk about and promote public education in the community and to policy-makers;
- the framework provides a holistic public benchmark against which to judge many aspects of policy and practice, including funding, curriculum and governance. It also establishes priorities for campaigning;
- the framework suggests some approaches to regulating what is expected of private schools for receiving public money. That is, rather than public schools being expected to be more private, private schools should be required to be more public in their actions and make-up.

In these three ways, it is hoped that this paper will make a small contribution to the continued efforts of public educators in public schools to maintain and strengthen the great work they currently do. Public education is a precious community resource that is so essential to the life and wellbeing of our democratic society, and to the individuals and communities that live in it. It has never been as important as now for the whole community to support, nurture and strengthen our public schools and to celebrate the contribution they make to the common good.

PART A: THE CURRENT STATE OF AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION

Inequitable educational outcomes

By any measure, Australia has a high-quality education system. It ranks consistently above the OECD average in maths, science and reading in tests such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and compares well against other countries on a range of other education benchmarks. These results, however, mask the grim reality that Australian education is not equitable.

When PISA results are disaggregated, they reveal that Australian students in the lowest socioeconomic (SES) quartile perform much worse than all other students, while those in the highest quartile perform far better (OECD, 2013). It is the large achievement gap between rich and poor that blights Australian education – and the gap appears to be widening (Bonnor & Shepherd, 2014). According to a recent report from the OECD, Australia is near the bottom of OECD countries in terms of equity in education (OECD, 2015).

It is not just PISA results that highlight this situation. Every year Australia's NAPLAN scores show that the percentage of low-SES, indigenous and remote-area students below the standards in reading, writing and numeracy is between five to nine times greater than the percentage of high-SES students. By year 9, these gaps represent a difference of up to four to five years of learning (Cobbold, 2015a).

As shocking as these statistics are, they should not surprise. After all, for many years educational research has demonstrated the association between academic achievement and the SES of individual students. For example, the higher a student's SES, the stronger the educational outcomes, and the more likely the student is to complete secondary school and attend university (Sirin, 2005; Schmidt et al, 2015; Lamb et al., 2015). Such outcomes can't be ignored.

The consequences of educational inequality do not stop at the school gate. There is now overwhelming evidence showing the deleterious effects of educational inequality on social and economic outcomes and political participation. Productivity falls, participation in civic life is diminished and social dislocation is greater (Liu et al., 2015; Blanden & McNally, 2014; Janmaat, 2014; Abdullah et al., 2015; Li & Powdthavee, 2015). As Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) demonstrate so clearly, the greater the inequality in a society, the greater the social dysfunction. Since education is one of the most important determinants of levels of inequality, the need for action is urgent in order to improve equity in Australian schooling.

Of course the societal factors at work that produce this inequity can't be addressed by education alone. But to the extent that schooling is an important part of the response, then it is the responsibility of educators and policy makers to explore strategies to diminish the unacceptable achievement gap between high- and low- students. What can be done?

Equity policies in education have tended to focus on the individual in an effort to address the personal factors that produce educational disadvantage. Unfortunately, despite these best efforts, little headway has been made in improving educational outcomes for these students.

In this paper I will argue that one of the major reasons for this lack of improvement is that over the past 40 years Australia has been following policy settings that have exacerbated the problem and worked against progress being made to address it. I will argue that successive governments have diminished the strength of public education, and in so doing have widened the educational achievement gap and fostered social and cultural division.

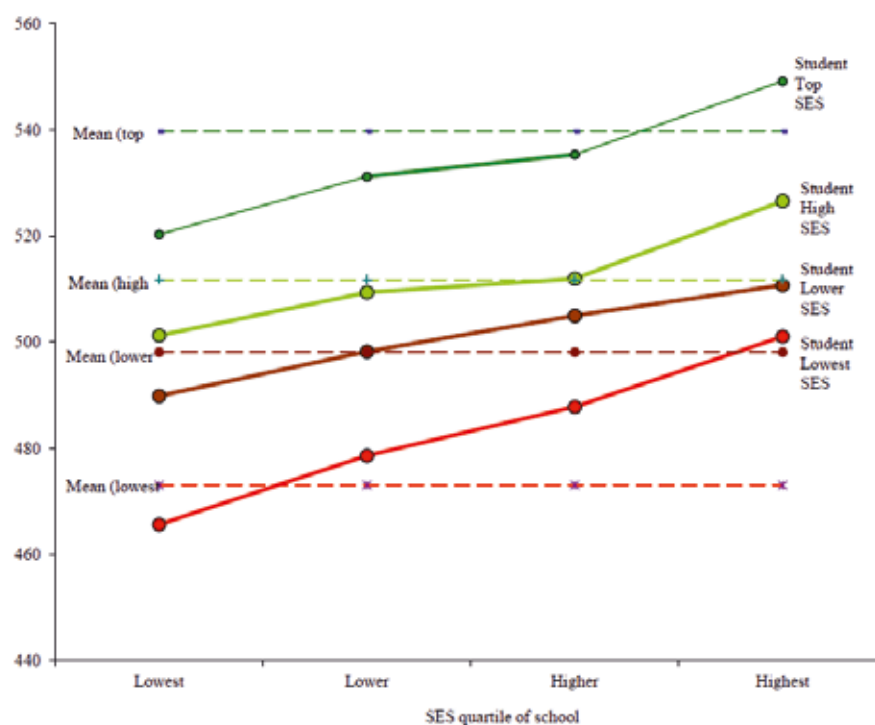
The ways in which this has happened must be understood if strategies to reverse this trend are to be developed. A major contributing factor has been the increasing social stratification of Australian education.

A socially stratified schooling system

The Australian schooling system today is highly socially stratified. The proportion of students who attend a socially mixed school is lower in Australia than in most other comparable countries, including Canada, New Zealand and the UK (OECD, 2010).

This is not just an interesting sociological observation. This stratification of our schooling system is in fact adversely affecting educational outcomes, and confirms and maintains inequalities that stem from family background.

Recent research shows that when the individual child and the SES status of the school she/he attends are measured together, the aggregated SES of the school group has a significant impact on educational achievement (Liu et al., 2015). In particular, the more socially rich the environment, the more student performance increases. Students from low-SES backgrounds increase their performance as they access schools in higher bands of SES. Conversely, the lower the school is in the aggregate SES range, the lower the overall student outcomes. In Figure 1 below, Teese (2011) takes a year 5 example from the 2009 NAPLAN scores to demonstrate this process at work:



Source: Teese, 2011, p. 64

FIGURE 1: Year 5 students: Average performance in reading by student SES and school SES, Victoria 2009

As Perry and McConney (2010, p. 81) point out:

the segregation of schools according to SES provides further benefits for students whose economic circumstances allow attendance at high-SES schools, and also further handicaps students who lack this advantage. That is, schooling that is segregated by SES is most likely to benefit students who are already educationally privileged, but harm students who find themselves at educational disadvantage associated with low-SES backgrounds. Rather than mitigating or mediating educational inequality, school segregation exacerbates it.

This is an important insight. Since school segregation tends to make inequity worse, then equity policy must focus not only on individuals but also on the social make-up of schools. If better educational outcomes are to be achieved for all students, rather than just those from privileged backgrounds, then it is crucial to reduce the segregation of schools based on SES. It is all the more urgent given that the gap between the educational outcomes of students from high- and low-SES backgrounds has increased (Bonnor & Shepherd, 2014).

Of course ensuring a greater social mix across schools in Australia is not of itself sufficient to redress disadvantage: there are other crucial influences such as the quality of teaching and the calibre of the school environment. But the mantra that the quality of teaching is the most important in-school factor affecting student learning – a truism frequently asserted by commentators and politicians – fails to recognise that the concept of 'good teaching' can't be understood in isolation from the many variables that also influence quality student learning.

Stratification of schools in Australia is one of these variables, as are the significant differentials between high-SES and low-SES schools in funding, learning resources, facilities, and class sizes. The OECD estimates that Australia has the fifth largest resource disparity between socioeconomically advantaged and disadvantaged schools (OECD, 2013). These disparities in turn exacerbate achievement gaps. It is hard to believe that we have reached a stage in Australian education where the schools with the greatest challenges are given the least amount of resources to deal with them.

This paper will argue that the key to improving equity does not lie in providing more 'choice' and 'competition' that has been the dominant theme of successive governments over the past 20 years. Indeed, as I will argue, far from addressing the situation, these policies have created the problem, and continue to make the situation worse. A new policy direction is needed to create a greater social mix in our schools, and to reduce the resource disparities between schools by providing more appropriate and targeted funding.

Since public schools carry the bulk of students overall, including the vast majority of students who are most educationally disadvantaged – such as low-SES backgrounds, special-learning needs, ESL and indigenous students – then it is public schools that must be the focus of a new policy direction. In particular, the prime policy objective must be to ensure that the foundation of Australian education is a vibrant public education system where all students, no matter their socioeconomic background or location, have access to high quality, well-resourced and socially mixed schools.

This paper develops an argument for what is needed to achieve this goal. It starts by exploring the background of the current situation.

How have we arrived at this point?

Free, compulsory, secular....and socially mixed.

Up to the late 1860s, education in the various Australian colonies was provided by religious societies and private institutions for fees, with only minimal regulation by the state. Those children who attended school (and many working-class children did not) only did so long enough to obtain a basic literacy and numeracy. It was the children of the wealthy who completed secondary education at elite private colleges, with many proceeding to university.

The move to state-provided education that had occurred in most Australian colonies by the 1870s contained within it a weak democratic impulse. Public schools were established to cater for working class children whose families could not afford private education; and there was to be a strict separation between church and state, with public monies used to establish and run state schools only. In the first instance, however, compulsory public education was confined to basic or elementary schooling, the main aim of which was to 'gentle the masses' for purposes of social control (Miller, 1986). Secondary education, for which one paid fees at private colleges, was primarily for the children of the upper and middle classes who were seen as future leaders. In this way, the education system was highly stratified.

The history of education for the first 70 years after Federation can be read partially as an ongoing struggle to create educational opportunities for children and young people in all communities through public schools. Thus, slowly and unevenly across the Australian States, access to education was broadened by increasing the age of compulsion and expanding secondary education and making it free to all children. Although the dominant ideology of meritocracy masked the ways in which schooling structures and curriculum were used to maintain social class and gender divisions, public education gradually opened up opportunities for students from low-SES backgrounds.

In the post-World War II years, as people began to recognise the importance of education to an individual's chances in life, the public discourse about the purpose of education shifted from 'opportunity' to demands for 'universal provision and success for all'. This was accompanied by a sharp increase in the numbers wanting to stay longer in secondary schooling, with a consequent expansion of secondary education in the public system. During this period, private-school enrolment share began to fall, and in turn public schools became more socially mixed.

By the early 1970s, public schools that were funded entirely by State and Territory governments carried nearly 80% of school students, with a consequent high degree of social mix. All local communities – city, rural and remote – had public schools that were described as being free, compulsory and secular. Meanwhile, student numbers in the private sector¹ were declining and reached their lowest eb of 21.1% by 1977 (Watson & Ryan, 2010).

¹ In this paper, the term 'private' is used in relation to all non-government schools, including Catholic, elite Independent, low-fee Independent, and other systemic religious schools. Of course, in Australia, these schools are not genuinely private given the amount of public subsidy they receive. For this reason, they are usually referred to as 'non-government' schools. I have opted to call them 'private' schools to make the point that they still operate largely as private institutions (i.e. there are no limits to the fees they can charge, they can dictate which students are allowed entrance to them); and to contrast this with the important public characteristics of public (government) schools.

There was a dramatic change, however, from the late 1970s when the decline in private-school numbers began to reverse. From that time the Australian schooling system returned to a path of greater social stratification. How and why did this happen?

Government funding of private schools

The post-World War II increase in the numbers of students staying on well into the secondary-school years had placed an increased pressure on facilities and resources in both the public and private sectors. The private-school lobby began to argue stridently for public funds, prompting a decision by the Menzies government in 1964 to put Commonwealth money, for the first time, into private as well as public schools. At first the money was targeted for science laboratories and libraries, but in the ensuing decade private schools argued for an increased share of Commonwealth funds.

Following the Karmel Committee's report (Karmel, 1973), the Whitlam government decided to place Commonwealth funding for school education on a systematic footing with recurrent funding grants directed at the private as well as the public sector. This decision changed the face of Australian education. I will argue in this paper that it has resulted in a stratified education system as a whole, and an increasingly residualised public schooling sector. It did not, however, have to be that way. It was not the funding of private schools per se that has produced these outcomes but rather the funding strategies that have been adopted, as well as the values that have shaped them. Together, these have resulted in one of the most inequitable, opaque and dysfunctional education funding regimes in the world.

Today, people from other countries are amazed at the complexity of the hybrid funding and governance models of our schooling system. States and territories have responsibility for schools and largely fund public schools with a small but growing outlay on private schools; the Commonwealth government largely funds private schools, with a smaller outlay on public schools; and private school income is supplemented by fees, with very small income from fees from the public schools.

This funding complexity has created a fertile terrain for disagreement and debate. Unsurprisingly, it has been seen by the various sectors as the 'main game' and has consequently narrowed the public/private debate to being one about the funding of sectors rather than the purposes they are serving. Within the confines of the funding debate, it is possible to discern two competing discourses at work: funding according to need, and funding according to entitlement. I will briefly describe the funding² approaches that have been shaped by these discourses over the past 40 or more years, before looking at the consequences of the dominant approach.

² Since the Commonwealth became involved in school education, funding for schools has comprised three broad payments to States and Territories: general recurrent grants, capital grants and grants for targeted programs for government and private schools. Since the bulk of money is tied up in recurrent funding, I will focus mainly on that component in order to examine some of the philosophies informing funding approaches, instead of giving a detailed history of Commonwealth funding of schools. For a detailed history of schools funding, see the recent excellent report from Connors and McMorow (2015).

From public good to safety net: Entitlement trumps equity

The merging of universalism and need

As public education expanded in the 20th century, the broad settlement that emerged was based on the principle of universalism, which meant that it was the state's responsibility to provide free, compulsory and secular public schools in every community in Australia. There was a consensus that the primary responsibility of government was to direct taxpayers' money to public schools, not to private institutions. Private schools were seen as an alternative for those parents who might have a specific reason for opting out of public education and could afford the fees.

When the state-aid debate began in earnest in the 1960s, the principle of universalism was invoked by many who opposed taxpayers' money going to private schools. But as the debate wore on, and funding private schools became a fixture, it became apparent that the major political parties were not prepared to suffer the pain that would follow from the withdrawal of that funding. This caused many public-school advocates to modify their stance and concede that public money might be used to assist the poorest private schools. It was assumed, however, that such funding would not compromise public schools that, as public goods, would remain the main focus of funding policy.

The Whitlam government's decision to fund private as well as public schools merged the principle of universalism with the principle of 'need'. From this perspective, all students – public and private – are entitled to a decent standard of education and therefore a decent standard of resources, however these might be defined. The argument goes that public money should be used to ensure that all public schools achieve the agreed resource standard – and should be combined with private contributions to ensure that all private schools also achieve that resource level. The corollary of this argument is that public money should be used to support private schools on the basis of 'need' to enable them to achieve the standard, but it should not be provided to those private schools functioning well above it.

Having set the philosophy for Commonwealth funding of schools, the next challenge for the government was to construct funding mechanisms that would suit a federal system of divided responsibilities and deliver on the goal of providing a decent standard of education for all Australian students. This included setting a baseline for funding public and private schools, indexing the baseline, and allocating money within the private system.

The Whitlam government proposed a funding model that had an educational and an equity rationale. It used current resource use in schools to establish an index to assess funding needs, with average recurrent resource use in public schools expressed as 100. The government then set four-year-funding targets for public and private schools, which would reduce and eventually eliminate inequality of resources and educational outcomes between schools. The idea was that money would be distributed differentially to private schools according to need, as assessed against the index of resource standards.

Whitlam's model ran into trouble right from the start. In 1974, a conservative Senate bowed to the demands of the powerful private school lobby and refused to pass the initial funding legislation that excluded the wealthiest private schools (that is, those schools operating well above the resource standard) until the legislation was applied to all private schools. In the end, the government conceded, the legislation passed and the new model commenced.

The combination of needs-based general recurrent funding and a number of specific purpose equity programs resulted in an expansion of the Commonwealth contribution to schools by more than \$2.3 billion at 2011 price levels (Connors & McMorro, 2015) – with 65%

of the share of the total amount going to public schools. But it was short-lived. The position of the Senate in 1974 had been a harbinger of what was to come.

In 1976, the Fraser government abandoned Whitlam's resource standards for both sectors by introducing a basic grant for all private schools irrespective of need, with a smaller baseline grant for public schools. Fraser scrapped Whitlam's targets and instead indexed future increases in Commonwealth funding to the level of spending on public schools by State and Territory governments. The result was that by the end of the Fraser years, the share of Commonwealth funds for private schools had grown by 17%, with a commensurate decrease for public schools. What had brought about this dramatic shift in less than a decade?

The principle of entitlement

It did not take long for Whitlam's equity-based rationale for Commonwealth government funding of schools to be challenged, and eventually run over, by a new discourse based on the principle of entitlement. The consequences of this philosophical shift in discourse have been profound.

The principle of entitlement in education is based on the idea that since people who opt to send their children to private schools are taxpayers, private schools are just as entitled to receive money from the government as those parents of public-school children. On this basis, rather than being an opt-out alternative to public schools, private schools stand alongside public schools as a choice for parents, and public schools should not, in turn, get preferential treatment. It is choice that should form the basis of public policy, not the universal provision of public education.

The rationale for school choice has changed in emphasis over time. At first, it was a matter of individual freedom. But before too long it was being justified on the grounds that consumer choice in an education market will produce competition within and between sectors and that this, in turn, will lift education standards as well as save the government money. As this rationale took hold, the locus of policy-making and public discussion gradually shifted from the old state-aid question - should private schools receive any government money? – to questions about the amount of public money to which private schools are entitled. Indeed, the provision of government funds to private schools became so normalised that, over the years, private-school advocates have even begun to use per capita arguments, maintaining that the combined level of state and Commonwealth funding per student going to private schools is less than that of public schools (while conveniently omitting the fact that private school funds are heavily supplemented by fees).

The process of normalising funding to private schools has challenged the idea of public education being an essential public good to which private schools are an opt-out alternative. There is now a strong element in public discourse and policy-making that views public schools as a safety-net provision for those who can't afford to send their children to private schools. To understand the effects of this significant change, I will examine how the principle of entitlement was represented in funding strategies.

How entitlement trumped equity

The logic of Whitlam's needs-based resource standards for funding schools was at odds with the entitlement discourse. The former was premised on the idea that, on the basis of need, some schools should get more than other schools and that wealthy schools with resources well above the standard should get nothing. By contrast, the principle of entitlement insists on the rights of *all* private schools, no matter how wealthy, to receive government funding.

From Whitlam's legislation in 1974 to the present time, the entitlement principle has, whenever challenged, triumphed. For example, in 1984, the Hawke government proposed a 25% reduction in funds to the 41 wealthiest private schools in Australia, but was forced to back down in the face of their fierce opposition. And when the Labor Party took to the 2004 election a policy to increase the overall level of funding to both sectors (but redistribute funds within the private sector in favour of those schools with the most needs), both the wealthiest schools that would have received a funding reduction and those private schools that would have benefited from the redistribution successfully opposed the proposal on the grounds that it represented class warfare.

Overall, the principle of entitlement has resulted in a significant increase in the amount of Commonwealth money going to private schools. Thus, once the baseline funding going to private schools was substantially increased by the Fraser government, it was almost impossible for future governments to cut it back. Instead, mechanisms developed to index funding have not only protected but enhanced the amount of public monies going to private schools. For example, the Keating government revived a Fraser government strategy by establishing a resource standard known as the Average Government School Recurrent Costs (AGSRC), which distributed per-student funding to private schools as a percentage of that standard.

The percentage linked AGSRC formula, which remained in place for the next 20 years, favoured the private sector. It ignored the fact that public schools carry the majority of students with significant educational disadvantage. Cohorts of students in the public and private systems were treated as though they had the same resource needs. So when State governments decided to spend extra on public schools to address a specific issue, such as class size, private schools also benefitted, even when it wasn't an issue for them. Funding approaches, therefore, moved from being based on a known standard with an education and equity rationale, to being percentage linked to variations in State budget allocations³. All the while, the percentage share of public money going to private schools increased.

Certainly there have been mechanisms used to ensure a fairer distribution of money *within* the private sector, such as the Education Resources Index (ERI), which was introduced by the Hawke government. This involved ranking private schools on the basis of the private income each school received from all sources, and then distributing public funds proportionate to the category into which the school fell. It was an attempt, albeit unsuccessful, to equalise resource differentials within the private sector – but it did nothing to reduce the growing gap in resources between public and private schools. And it did not last.

By the turn of the 21st century, entitlement was trumping equity in education policy. But it was nothing compared to what was to come. The individualistic ideologies of choice and competition were taken to another level by the Howard government that stated its intention to expand the private school sector. One of its first acts was to abolish the Hawke government's 'New Schools Policy', which had placed a check on unrestrained parental choice of schools by ensuring that new schools could only proceed in localities where there was a clear demographic need. Now the way was clear for low-fee private schools to spring up in areas already adequately serviced by public schools and apply for Commonwealth funding, again encouraging parents to leave public education.

³ It should be noted that the Victorian Labor government has recently revived this approach at the State level, delivering a '...hidden windfall of nearly \$200 million' to private schools in Victoria (Cobbold, 2015b)

Then, in 2001, the Howard government changed the way in which money was distributed within the private sector. Instead of using the level of private resources available to private schools as calculated by the ERI, schools were ranked according to the SES of the individual families they served, and money was then distributed across a number of categories, each representing a percentage of AGSRC. In other words, rather than being based on the actual resources and income a school received, assessment of need was to be now calculated on an estimate of parents' capacity to pay. The SES scheme benefitted wealthy private schools in a number of ways.

It gave large sums of taxpayers' money to those schools that drew students from socially mixed or low-SES areas. For example, wealthy boarding schools that enrolled students from affluent families living in depressed rural areas benefitted from the funding associated with the low-SES area; or private schools could accept high performing students from less affluent areas and so claim the low-SES rating they brought with them. In these ways, private schools gained extra funding from the SES model, but did not have to spend money on any of the challenges that educational disadvantage brings with it.

More than this, where private schools would have received less money as a result of the application of the SES formula, the new policy enabled them to maintain their existing funding levels. The Catholic system even signed a separate agreement that not only maintained but increased their funding. In other words, the Howard government ensured that no private school would lose a dollar under the new scheme.

Commonwealth funding for schools doubled in real terms over the period of the Howard government – and three quarters of that growth was directed to the private sector (Connors & McMorrow, 2015). This accelerated the drift from public to private schools and confirmed the status of public schools as being a safety net. Entitlement had trumped equity.

The period of the Rudd–Gillard governments from 2007 – 2013 brought a lull in this development rather than a reversal. Equity certainly returned to policy centre-stage through the introduction of national-education agreements that rolled together recurrent funding to public schools and targeted programs supporting low-SES schools. However, the Howard government's SES formula was retained for much of the period of the Rudd–Gillard governments, along with all of the inequities it produced.

In April 2010, then education minister, Julia Gillard, announced the long promised review of schools' funding, headed by influential businessman David Gonski. Given the Labor government's stated intention to replace the Howard government's inequitable approach to funding with a fairer and more transparent model, there was some hope that the review would result in significant change. The story of the Gonski Review and its aftermath will be told in Part B of this paper. Suffice to say that the election of the Coalition government in 2013 put an end to any possibilities for change. The funding inequities remain.

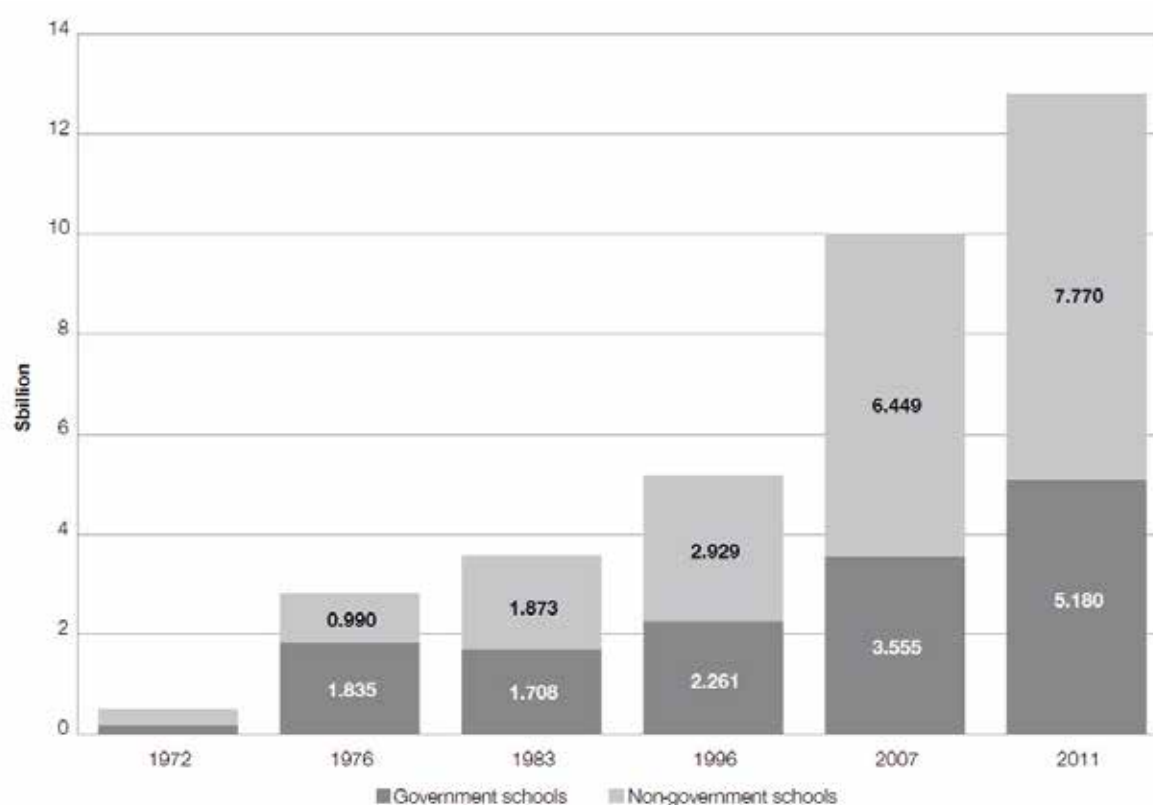
In summary, since the Whitlam government made its landmark decision to provide significant public funding to private schools as well as public schools, the discourse has gradually changed from one where the funding of private schools was justified on the basis of need, to one where private schools are entitled to government funds on the same basis as public schools. As the discourse has changed, so too have public schools moved from being

understood as a public good for all to a safety-net option for those who can't afford private schools⁴.

In the next section of the paper, I will explore three dimensions of the consequences of the shift in discourse: the financial impact, the residualisation and fragmentation of the public system, and the privatisation of public education.

The consequences: The financial impact

Accompanying the changes described above has been one common theme: from 1973 to 2015, the share of public money going to private schools has steadily increased, with a commensurate decrease in the share for public schools. In 1976, public schools had a 65% share of Commonwealth funding for schools, with private schools having a 35% share. By 2007, that had almost totally reversed, with public schools receiving a 36% share of Commonwealth funding and private schools having a 64% share. Connors and McMorow (2015) calculate that between the years 1973–2011, the Commonwealth increased its funding for schools by over \$10 billion, with \$6.8 billion of that increase going to private schools (see Figure 2 below).



Source: Connors and McMorow, 2015, p.30

FIGURE 2: Trends in Commonwealth recurrent funding of schools, by sector, selected years

⁴ This view appears to span the political divide. At the time of writing, the federal Labor Opposition leader Bill Shorten has justified penalty rates for workers on the grounds that they 'are the difference as to whether or not (workers) can afford to send their kids to a private school' (Bourke, 2015).

During the same period, State and Territory governments continued to provide the bulk of funds to public schools. But the change in Commonwealth funding over a period of 40 years slowly reduced the difference in the expenditure of public money on public and private schools. Using the most recent figures provided to Senate Estimates by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)⁵, Bonnor and Shepherd (2015) calculate that in 2013 State and Federal governments spent an average of around:

- \$11,865 in recurrent funding on each government-school student;
- \$9548 per Catholic-school student (80.5% of the government student figure);
- \$7791 per Independent-school student (66% of the government-student figure)

Taking an average expenditure per capita on private-school students, the difference with the expenditure of each public-school student is now about \$3100. The expenditure differential is used by some private-school advocates to argue that it reveals how funding formulas are weighted in favour of the public system. Apart from such arguments demonstrating the extent to which the entitlement principle has taken hold (they are *private* schools after all!), they ignore some important facts.

The figures represent an average of the funding across all sectors. Bonnor & Shepherd (2015) argue that the only way to really understand the differences in government funding is to compare the funding of *similar* schools across the sectors. Using ACARA's Index of Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA), they show that the differences in public funding between the sectors shrinks significantly when comparisons are made between schools in specific ranges such as lower educational advantage or higher educational advantage. For example, in the lower educational advantage range (ICSEA 900-949), Catholic schools receive 94% of public school funding, and Independent schools receive 83% (Bonnor & Shepherd, 2015).

Moreover, when school fees and charges are included, the total income of private schools within these ranges exceeds the total income of public schools. This is a crucial point. It makes little sense to only compare the amount of public money each sector receives, when it is the total income from all sources that makes the difference to the quality of the resources and facilities available to students. In 2013, the average total income of Independent schools (\$18,590 per student) was nearly 50% higher than for public schools (\$12,576 per student); with Catholic schools (\$13,118 per student) receiving slightly more than public schools (Cobbold, 2015a).

Even if it is only the public contribution figures that are used, the picture is still grim with the continuing downward trend in public funding for public schools. Cobbold (2015a) estimates that in the period 2009 – 2013, adjusted for inflation, Commonwealth and State funding for public schools fell by \$224 per student, while funding for Catholic schools increased by \$716 per student and \$574 per student for Independent schools. This reduction was due largely to an overall decline in funding for public schools in all State and Territories. At the same time, Commonwealth funding increases per capita for private schools have been four to five times greater than for public schools (Cobbold, 2015a).

⁵ In their recent report, Bonnor and Shepherd (2015) show how claims about schools' funding often give a misleading picture of the statistics for different sectors when dated information is used, averages are reported, or different accounting conventions are employed. They address these deficiencies by using ACARA's My School data, which is the most recent and most consistent data in relation to school funding.

And the funding share for public schools will continue to diminish. Bonnor and Shepherd estimate that when current levels of funding are projected into the next four years, the combined per-student amounts paid to private schools by State and Commonwealth governments only will equal or exceed the amounts provided by governments to similar public schools (Bonnor & Shepherd, 2015).

The decision in the 1970s to provide recurrent funding to private schools didn't just rescue the private schooling sector at a time when many schools were going under – it gave it such a boost that the face of Australian education altered dramatically. In 2016 Australia has reached the point where many private schools receive as much government money to run their schools as similar public schools receive. This has created significant disparities between schools, with many public schools in particular being severely under-resourced. Given the fact that it is public schools which serve the vast majority of educationally disadvantaged students, such resource disparities are a matter of a national concern.

The consequences: Residualising and fragmenting public education

It was not long after the flow of government funds to private schools started in the mid 1970s that these schools began to steadily increase their share of student enrolments. While student numbers in the public sector stayed much the same, the school population in the private sector doubled in the same period. As Table 1 shows below, from 1972 to 2011, the share of enrolments in the public system fell by 13 percentage points from 78% – 65%, with the enrolment loss being picked up by the private schooling sector, the share of which jumped from 22% to 35% (Connors & McMorrow, 2015, pp. 30)⁶

Sector	1972		2011	
	n	%	n	%
Government schools	2,228,941	78%	2,303,782	65%
Non-government schools	612,010	22%	1,225,737	35%
Catholic schools	492,914	17%	724,319	21%
Independent schools	119,096	4%	501,419	14%
All schools	2,840,951	100%	3,529,519	100%

Source: Connors and McMorrow, 2015, p.30

TABLE 1: Students enrolled in Australian schools, by sector, 1972 – 2011

⁶ Between 1970–2013, the number of public schools declined by 809, and the number of private schools grew by 552 (all in the Independent sector) (Figures derived from Chesters (2015) using ABS data from 1970–2013).

In the 1970s, some private-school advocates argued that state aid would enable private schools to maintain and then reduce their fees, thus opening up school choice to a greater number of families. In general terms, this is not what happened. After a brief fall in private sector fees (Williams, 1985), since the mid-1980s (apart from a short respite during the recession of the early 1990s) fees in the Catholic sector have risen by 5% per annum in real terms; and over 2% per annum in real terms in the Independent sector (Watson & Ryan, 2010). In other words, the growth in fee levels has not affected demand for private schools. As fees have risen, so have enrolments.

People have many reasons for choosing to send their children to private schools – such as family tradition, religion and networking (Campbell et al., 2009) – but of course these reasons existed before Federal funds were directed to private schools. So what caused the spike in private school enrolments from the late 1970s?

A significant consequence of state aid is that it enabled private schools to improve their position in the education market by making private schools attractive relative to public schools. As competitive pressures accumulate in the schooling system, aspirational parents begin to look for market advantage. Greater pressure for places in high-status university courses, for example, have flowed down the schooling system with parents searching to provide their children with a head start in the academic competition.

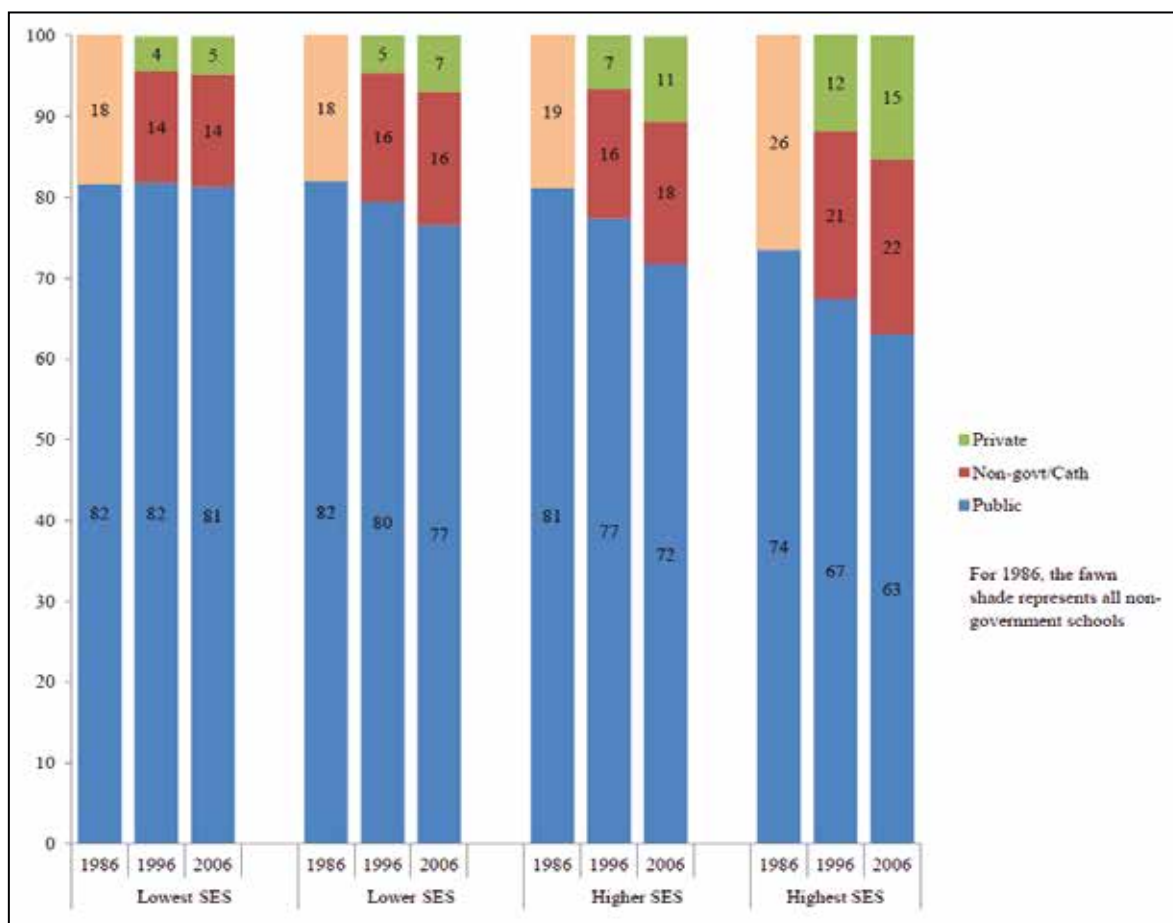
Private schools responded by creating an image of being well resourced, academically rigorous, well disciplined and promoting the right values. The injection of public money covered the essentials, which then allowed them to direct parent fees or fundraising revenue to enhance their market appeal. For example, since the 1980s, Independent schools have been able to use the money to steadily improve (and publicise) their student:teacher ratios, relative to student:teacher ratios in public schools. Similarly, the additional funds have enabled private schools to develop 'state-of-the-art' facilities. Recently the principal of an elite Sydney private school is reported to have justified a multi-million-dollar facility development on the grounds that parent expectations about facilities have grown:

The days when a decent education was good enough are over...We need to have an orchestra pit because our girls are developing those skills...We need to re-develop our water-polo pool because we have water polo players playing for Australia that can stand in our pool (Bagshaw, 2015).

Factors like this have convinced many with the means that they should move to the private sector despite increases in fees (Watson & Ryan, 2010). At the same time, the fee structures of private schools present natural barriers to entry for students who are most educationally disadvantaged and therefore require the most resources; while private schools are able to 'cream-off' the most able children from the same background through scholarships.

But the drift of enrolments from the public to the private sector did more than simply change overall enrolment share – it also had a dramatic impact on the social mix of Australian schools. In the 1970s and 1980s, taking the public and private sectors as a whole, the proportions of low-SES and high-SES students were much the same across both sectors, albeit with differences within sectors based on fees (private sector) or academic selectivity or location (public sector) (Preston, 2013). Twenty-five years later that had all changed.

The drift from public to private schools has come largely from the higher SES families. Teese has done a revealing analysis of the drift from 1986 – 2006 in Figure 3 below:



Source: Teese, 2011, p.32

FIGURE 3: Shares of SES bands of primary students by sector, 1986-2006 (%)

In terms of primary-school students, the public sector share of the highest quartile SES students declined from 74% in 1986 to 63% in 2006; and in the next highest SES quartile its share dropped from 81% in 1986 to 72% in 2006. Over the same time period, the public primary school share of the lowest SES quartile remained almost the same. That is, none of the share of the lowest socioeconomic group was transferred into the private sector in the 20-year period from 1986 – 2006. As Teese points out:

while both public and private investment in non-government schooling rose substantially over the period, this supported a transfer of students largely from the upper end of the socio-economic spectrum, leaving the public sector to manage with over four-fifths of all children from the poorest backgrounds (Teese, 2011).

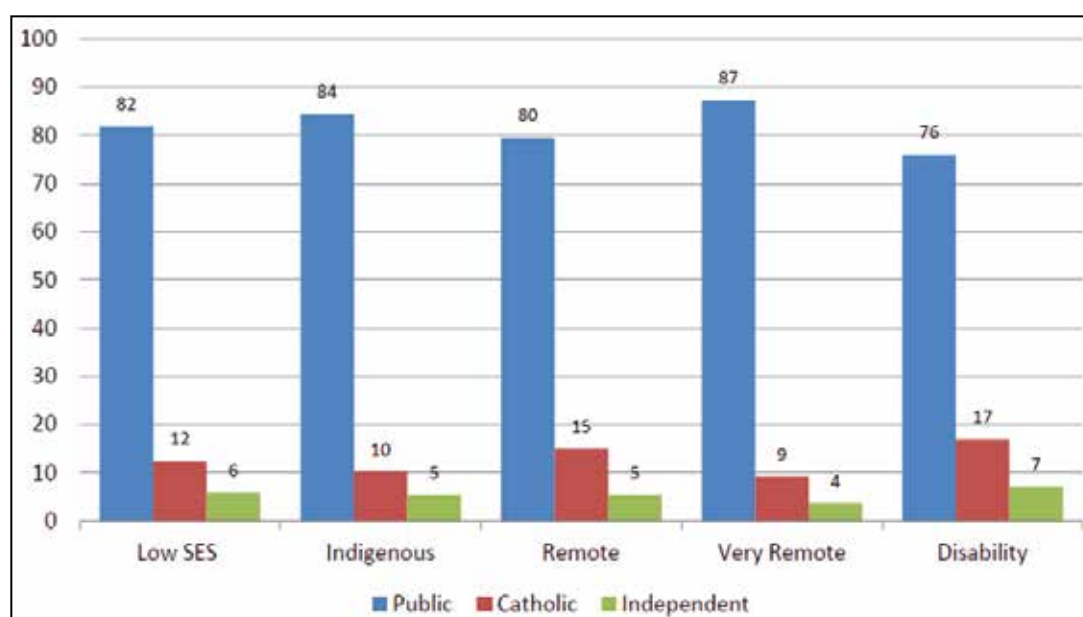
The extent of change is even more dramatic in the secondary sector. As Preston points out, by 2011:

the government sector has almost twice the proportion of secondary students from low income families relative to the proportion from high income families, and on current trends this ratio will be reached by the next census in 2016. The nongovernment sector has the reverse – in the Catholic and other nongovernment sectors combined the proportion of secondary students from low income families is less than half the proportion from high income families (Preston, 2013, p. 7).

The term that has been coined for this process is 'residualisation', a concept that focuses on the relationships between sectors (Preston, 2013). The drift described above has involved a gradual loss of support for public schools, particularly from the affluent section of the community. As the overall share of enrolments in the public sector declined, there has been a social consolidation, with lower SES groups being concentrated in public schools in certain areas and higher SES students in private schools. Sometimes these homogenous groupings exist in the same communities. In essence, successive policies have '*funded parents from socially advantaged backgrounds to withdraw their children from public schools*' (Teese, 2011, p. 12).

Using ACARA's Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA), the Gonski Review (2011) showed that in 2010, 47% of all students in Independent schools were drawn from the highest quartile of socio-educational advantage, while public schools drew just 22%. Conversely, only 13% of all students in Independent schools came from the lowest quartile of socio-educational advantage, while public schools had 36% of that quartile enrolled. Catholic schools fell between these two extremes⁷.

As Figure 4 starkly demonstrates, the drift to private schools means that public schools now overwhelmingly shoulder the challenges associated with having 82% of low-SES students. More than this, public schools carry the vast majority of other groups of students who bring with them various forms of educational disadvantage and challenge, including 84% of indigenous students, 87% of students in very remote areas, and 76% of students with a disability (Cobbold, 2015a). It is public schools that are doing the heavy lifting in Australian education.



Source: MySchool 2014, quoted in Cobbold,T (2015a), p.8

FIGURE 4: Enrolments of disadvantaged students by school Sector, Australia, 2013 (% of group total)

⁷ Another way to look at this is to use the average ICSEA of schools. Bonnor & Shepherd (2015) estimate that in 2014, the average ICSEA for schools in the public system was 983; for schools in the Catholic system it was 1040; and for Independent schools it was 1071.

These bold statistics are accompanied by a range of consequences that must be understood if strategies are to be fashioned to turn around the residualisation of public education. The consequences include the following:

- As argued in the first section of this paper, the increasing social stratification of schooling has a deleterious impact on educational outcomes. In particular, it most affects those schools with the largest percentage of low-SES students who lose the educational ballast and energy that comes from a genuine social mix. Meanwhile, those who are already educationally privileged continue to prosper. It should come as no surprise that students from low-SES backgrounds are recording educational outcomes that are up to four years behind their peers from wealthy backgrounds (Cobbold, 2015a).
- Along with SES, the Australian schooling system is also increasingly stratified along ethnic and cultural lines. For example, Christina Ho (2015) has found that there are significant differences between sectors in terms of the numbers of students who have language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) or non-LBOTE backgrounds in particular sorts of schools. Thus, in the public sector in New South Wales, the vast majority of selective academic high schools have LBOTE student populations of over 80%; while in the private sector, high-fee schools have less than 20% of these students on average. Segmentation of this kind is evident in other schools from both sectors, although less dramatically.

Clearly such cultural segmentation has serious negative effects on the central role of education in promoting the understandings, skills and dispositions of our future citizens to live harmoniously in a multicultural society. Such capacities require an understanding of and respect for difference. Schools are surely the key arenas in our society within which children and young people can rub shoulders with others from vastly different cultural, religious and social backgrounds. They can never fully develop these capabilities when they are marooned in cocoons of sameness.

- The families lost to public schools are those with economic, social and cultural capital. This has a devastating effect on the capacity of those schools to raise additional funds for school resources. Of course many of these schools – the very schools with the greatest challenges and thus the need for most additional resource assistance – are already saddled with inadequate facilities and large classes. Meanwhile, they watch affluent schools supplement their school incomes with bequests and parent fundraising bonanzas. High-SES schools have substantially better facilities than low-SES schools, and these disparities are exacerbated by current funding policy.
- Many low-SES schools have a far more limited range of secondary curriculum offerings in, for example, high-status academic subjects than schools in high-SES areas. For example, Perry and Southwell (2014) show that only 10% of low-SES schools in metropolitan Perth are able to offer an advanced curriculum in the traditional core subjects of literature, maths and science, which are the standard offerings in private schools. Inevitably, this effects educational outcomes. Indeed, a recent research study demonstrates that Australia has one of the highest disparities in access to rigorous mathematics subjects, resulting in the large achievement gap in mathematics between rich and poor (Schmidt et al., 2015). Such outcomes cause

many parents with the means to look well beyond their local public secondary school to find a curriculum offering that better meets the aspirations for their children.

These examples are sufficient to demonstrate the negative effects of a funding policy that is producing a residualised public education system in Australia. And, of course, as the advantages garnered from the policy by private schools are converted into tangible assets, which in turn attract more anxious parents from the public sector, so the gap between wealthy and poor schools continues to widen.

At the same time the public system is becoming residualised, it is also becoming fragmented. There are, of course, still a number of socially mixed and comparatively well-resourced public schools, usually in the more affluent suburbs – although their numbers are diminishing. And some jurisdictions have tried to stem the drift to private schools by establishing special purpose schools and selective schools. This has tended to divide the public system into a three-tiered system, with a minority of well-resourced schools at one end, a growing number of poorly resourced and residualised schools at the other end, and groups of schools at or just below the ICSEA average trying to retain students and maintain an acceptable standard of resource provision. This degree of fragmentation erodes the cohesion and the sense of collaboration and collectivity that is so important to a healthy system of public education.

In short, the face of Australian public education system is changing. Increasingly public schools are educating populations of educationally disadvantaged students, and having fewer resources to deal with all the associated challenges they bring. As Richard Teese observes:

the exercise of choice by some parents erodes quality for others. The concentration of advantage in some schools concentrates disadvantage in others (Teese, 2011, p. 14).

The irony is that governments are presiding over a funding regime that stratifies schools with associated negative consequences, while creating equity schemes designed to compensate for these consequences.

The 20th-century hope that public education would decouple educational success from social background is clearly under threat. It is not that public schools can't do the job. Indeed, when educational outcomes are compared across public and private schools within the same SES group, public schools do at least as well and often better than private schools (e.g., Ryan, 2013; Nghiem et al., 2015). But when public schools are expected to carry the vast bulk of educationally disadvantaged students and not be given the extra resources required to undertake the job, then Australia is on the path to a segregated schooling system, which simply confirms existing inequalities and social divisions.

It is not too late. But, as with climate change, we will as a society have to act quickly. And there is another broad dimension to what is happening to public education that must be understood and acted upon if the nature of the current policy direction and public debate is to be reversed. Sitting alongside, and in an uneasy relationship with residualisation and fragmentation, is a trend to the privatisation of public education. It is to this phenomenon that I will now turn.

The consequences: Privatising public education

Establishing a context of privatisation in education

As the principle of entitlement became a central feature of the public/private debate, so too did the concept of choice shape a public discourse about education, which was to have just as significant an impact on public schools as funding policy. Since the election of the Howard government in 1996, choice of schools began to be justified on the basis of raising education standards; and certainly the Coalition government has maintained and extended this rhetoric. The argument goes that greater choice enables the creation of an education market in which schools compete for 'custom', which in turn will have a positive effect on educational outcomes.

The discourse of the education market was further fuelled in the 1990s by Australia's involvement in international tests such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Over the past decade, despite the narrowness of the tests and its many technical shortcomings, the mainstream media and education policy-makers have taken seriously Australia's slide a few rungs down the international league tables and have begun to create a narrative in the community that Australia's public system of education is in crisis⁸.

Suddenly commentators were proposing solutions to the 'crisis' such as copying the policies of some of the 'successful' Asian countries, introducing performance pay, and going 'back to basics'. Between 2007–13, the Rudd–Gillard governments picked up on this atmosphere, proposing a range of accountability mechanisms including NAPLAN and MySchool, and flirting with the intrusive (and failed) models designed to lift standards being introduced in places like New York.

This atmosphere accelerated the drift to private schools and generated a privatising dynamic in public education. The ingredients of this dynamic are an education market; education data that appears to show that one part of the market (private schools) is producing better educational outcomes than another part (public schools); aspirational parents looking to position their children advantageously in the market; a media that assumes that education standards in Australia are in decline; and governments searching for a way to improve Australia's standing in the international league tables.

The heady mix of these ingredients has suggested an obvious answer to the policy makers: if standards are to lift, and if private schools are the market leaders, then public schools must become more like private schools. British education researchers Ball and Youdell (2008) draw a useful distinction between two different ways in which public schools can be subjected to privatisation tendencies – one overt, the other more subtle:

- *Exogenous privatisation* (privatisation of public education), which involves opening up public schools to be run by private individuals, corporate companies or organisations for-profit, or not-for-profit.

⁸ In the 2012 PISA tests involving 65 countries, Australia was ranked equal 8th in Science, equal 10th in reading, and equal 17th in Maths. The average scores of Australian students in the three domains of maths, science and reading were significantly higher than the OECD average.

- *Endogenous privatisation* (privatisation in public education), which involves importing ideas, techniques and practices from the private sector in order to make the public sector more business-like and 'independent' of government systems.

While developments in Australia have mainly been consistent with endogenous privatisation, it is important to note that a high profile conservative think-tank in Australia, the Centre for Independent Studies, has recently produced a report arguing that '*for-profit schools can boost public education*' (Jha & Buckingham, 2015). Similarly some of the key education advisors to the current Coalition government have been enthusiastic supporters of exogenous overseas models, such as Charter schools in the United States, which involve handing over public schools to private companies to run them (eg Donnelly, 2014).

Yet it is the more covert forms of privatisation in public education that currently pose the biggest threat. Over the past 20 years, public-school systems have been awash with the language and concepts of the corporate sector – key performance indicators, vision and mission statements, branding and so on. Accompanying this language have been private sector management and organisational models, such as the self-managing school, which seek to create public schools as independent units operating competitively in an education market.

This tendency to privatise public education has picked up pace recently through the growth of edu-business, as the Commonwealth government ushers through large private corporations into the education policy space (Hogan, Lingard, & Sellar, 2015). One example concerns the multinational company Pearson – previously a print-publishing company based in the United Kingdom, now a global company that integrates education services in over 90 countries. In the United States, Pearson is not only producing education texts, but is also developing, implementing and marking standardised tests in a number of States, conducting teacher certification and promulgating 'evidence-based' research on what constitutes good-teaching practice.

Pearson now has a toe-hold in Australia, having been engaged by ACARA to design and conduct the NAPLAN tests in a few States. There are many dangers inherent in a private company, set up to serve its shareholders and make profits, having so much say about the key aspects of public education. Not the least of these is the privatisation of a public good as more control over key education tasks is handed over to private interests.

Another example is the 2014 announcement by then Prime Minister Abbott that the government would put \$500,000 into pilot programs turning two Victorian public schools into Pathways through Technology (P-Tech) schools. This was based on a model in New York where the multinational firm IBM sponsors technical high schools, involving IBM in assisting with curriculum development, the teaching program, targeted resources and job placement. The idea is to make students 'job-ready'. When announcing the program, then Education Minister Pyne suggested that future programs could have '*McDonalds or IBM or BHP Billiton or Iluka or Santos or manufacturing businesses involved in their local schools...*' (Pyne, 2014). Apart from being unproven, the model presents a very real danger of students being pushed into narrow vocational programs too early, at the expense of experiencing a broad and comprehensive education. It also portends the possibility of a large corporation exerting a significant degree of control over public schools.

Privatisation and the concept of Independent public schools

It is in this privatising context that then shadow minister for education, Christopher Pyne, in the lead-up to the September 2013 election, promised that:

if elected, we will approach the education system on the basis that ... we make government schools more like non-government schools (Mannix, 2013).

Five months later, as the new Federal Education Minister, Pyne explained how this would happen when he announced that \$70 million would be allocated to help 1500 state schools – 25% of Australian schools – become 'Independent public schools' (IPS) by 2017, with an aim to make all public schools 'independent' eventually. To access the money, States and Territories would have to sign an agreement with the federal government.

It is important to note that some of the current versions of IPS, such as those in Western Australia and Queensland, amount to little more than increased flexibility for schools in the area of finances and decision-making. However, it is the language accompanying the policy that signals the government's ultimate intention – and sounds warning bells for those who are concerned about the privatisation of public education. With endogenous versions of privatisation assuming that parents and students are consumers making educational choices in a free-market, principals and school boards are therefore charged with the task of maintaining and increasing market share. Such an arrangement, it is argued, fosters competition between schools as they vie for custom, so promoting educational quality.

Apart from the fact that various versions of public-school privatisation in many parts of the world have not resulted in enhanced educational outcomes (indeed, there is much evidence to suggest that they have adverse effects), the key point is that such an agenda alters the central essence of public schools for a number of reasons:

- It establishes public schools as businesses that compete against each other. The most successful are rewarded, and the least successful – invariably those with the least cultural and financial resources – go to the wall. In this way, the privatisation agenda confirms and exacerbates inequalities between schools.
- A lot of time and money is spent on publicity and marketing at the expense of educational outcomes. This sets up principals as surrogate employers, marketers and business managers, rather than as educational leaders seeking to involve teachers and the wider school community in curriculum discussions.
- It destroys the sense of local community engagement with each school, where the school uses the community as a learning resource, and the community uses the school for community activities. When parents choose schools far away from the local community in which they reside, it both weakens the link between public schools and their local communities, and it encourages parents to simply leave a school when there are perceived issues, rather than stay, work through the issues, and help to build the school.
- It promotes each school as a stand-alone entity rather than as belonging to a system. This then allows governments to escape accountability by giving schools greater responsibility and by reducing resources while setting performance targets, only to blame schools if they are not achieved.

The fact is that true public schools aren't Independent, they are networked, and they cooperate to build a quality public system overall, rather than compete to create a system where there are shining beacons of success sitting alongside schools that are struggling or failing. True public schools are fuelled by a sense of mutual obligation, not self-interest. In this sense, the term 'Independent public school' is an oxymoron.

The point is that the privatisation dimension of the public/private debate will exacerbate the stratification of our schooling system and change the nature of public schools. It is as important for public education advocates to focus on the dangers of the privatisation agenda as it is to argue for an increase in funding to the public system. After all, there is little point in winning more money for public schools if the schools being funded are just pale replicas of private schools.

The public/private debate in Australian education

In the first part of this paper I have described the current state of education in Australia, arguing that an inequitable funding regime has resulted in the stratification of Australian education as a whole, as well as the fragmentation, residualisation and privatisation of public education. These negative consequences present serious challenges for Australian society. How have they been understood and addressed in public and policy discussions?

The contours of the public/private debate

For over 40 years, most of the discussion in the public sphere about public and private education has concentrated almost entirely on funding approaches. This has allowed private-school advocates to engage in the debate on their own terms using the entitlement principle to argue that the existence of private schools saves significant amounts of public money. They bolster that argument by maintaining that private schools have better educational outcomes than public schools, therefore proving that money is well spent and that public schools should operate more like private schools.

Public-education advocates, on the other hand, have looked at funding through the prism of educational disadvantage and need. They make the case that public schools carry the vast bulk of students with educational disadvantage, and the poorest facilities, and therefore deserve a much greater share of government funds than most private schools. This is an important defence, but the problem is that, far from convincing aspirational parents to stay in public education or shift back, it is more likely to deter them.

In response to these concerns, public-education advocates point to the increasing body of research evidence that demonstrates that public schools perform as well as or better than private schools, once socioeconomic status (SES) is taken into account (e.g., Nghiem et al., 2015). There are, however, a few issues with this defence. For a start, like most of the research that explores comparative educational outcomes, it is based almost entirely on standardised test results such as NAPLAN and PISA. Leaving aside some of the serious technical issues associated with these tests themselves, they offer a very narrow basis upon which to make judgements about educational outcomes. By legitimating these statistical measures as the gold standard for measuring what constitutes quality education, the many powerful outcomes that public schools can deliver, precisely because they are public, are ignored.

In addition, the argument can be taken to mean that the differential educational outcomes produced by different SES groups are acceptable, so long as SES is used to mitigate the results. That is, it implies that the best results achieved by lower SES groups are the limits of our

expectations, rather than signalling that the gap between high- and low-SES students is constructed not by ability but by social circumstances and must be bridged.

In the meantime, the mainstream press continues to ignore the impact of SES on educational outcomes, and promotes – intentionally or unintentionally – the image of private schools as the quality providers. A recent example of this is the supplement of the *Weekend Australian* (June 20–21, 2015) entitled 'Your School', which unashamedly listed the 'top' schools in various categories, as measured by raw NAPLAN data. The resultant league tables almost entirely comprised wealthy private schools, with most of the very few public schools on the list being selective schools. Rather than this being the trigger for national outrage, the then Federal Education Minister used it as an opportunity to trumpet the success of government policy (Pyne, 2015); and private schools took it as an opportunity to advertise their wares. To make matters worse, the advertising copy accompanying the supplement came entirely from elite private schools, replete with colour pictures of superb facilities and smiling, uniformed students.

In such an environment, it is easy to assume that the answer lies in making public schools more like private schools. That message is confirmed repeatedly in the mainstream media and bolstered by policies such as Independent public schools or selective public schools. It can even come from public schools themselves when (usually in more affluent areas) they adopt the veneer of private schools in order to retain or attract aspirational parents. While privatisation approaches like this may turn out to be successful for these schools, they invariably create an unequal tier of public schools, and impoverish the public system as a whole.

In the current environment, the public system is beginning to fragment: the most disadvantaged public schools are being residualised and the most affluent public schools are staying in the competition by becoming more privatised. Either way, it is a recipe for the further stratification of the Australian schooling system, with a consequential decrease in the educational outcomes of the most educationally disadvantaged young people. The big question for Australian society is how to break this vicious cycle.

Reformulating the debate

As this paper demonstrates, there is an urgent need to change the current inequitable approach to funding schools for a fairer distribution of funds. In particular, additional public money must be directed to the most disadvantaged schools, most of which are in the public system. In Part B, I will analyse the extent to which the proposed needs-based Gonski model might deliver on this aspiration.

Coming up with a fairer funding model, however, will not alter the tenor of the public/private debate on its own and, until that can happen, any new approach is destined to founder on the rock of entitlement. So while a new funding model may reduce disparities in resources between schools and sectors as a whole, it will do nothing about the privatisation of public education. Nor will it offer any guidance about the publicness of key aspects of education, such as whether the focus of the curriculum should be narrow or comprehensive in the years of compulsory schooling, or whether public schools should cooperate with each other or compete for 'custom'. Increasing funding to public schools is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to reverse the drift to private schools.

It is clear that discussion about public education is being conducted in the absence of a philosophical anchor. As a result, the public/private debate continues to be staged on a

terrain that favours private education. The discourses of choice, competition and entitlement go unchallenged. A new framework is needed to reshape public and policy discussion, and the key to this is a reformulation of the understanding of the role and purposes of public education. Without it, policy and practice will continue to tilt towards the private sector.

A new conceptual framework that reimagines the possibilities for public education is needed to alter the dominant discourses of entitlement and privatisation. A rejuvenated understanding of the essence of public education will show that the secret to addressing the stratification of the Australian schooling system lies not in the current trend of making public schools more private, but rather in (re)emphasising their publicness. In Part B, I will explore what this means for policy and practice.

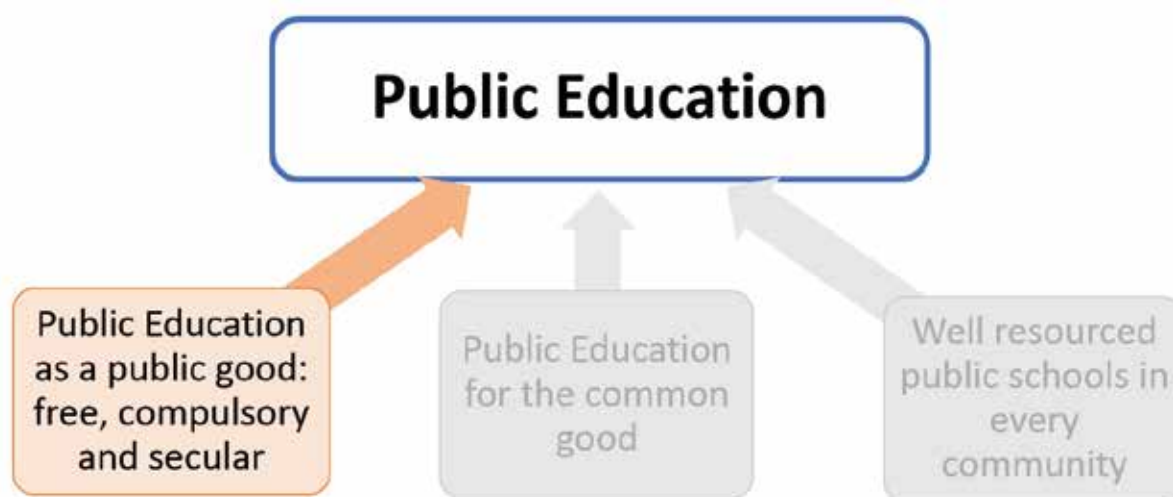
PART B: (RE)THEORISING PUBLIC EDUCATION

In Part A, I analysed the current state of public education in Australia, and concluded that, as a nation, we have lost sight of its essence. The public/private debate is largely conducted on terrain that favours the private sector. It follows, then, that the first step in defending and rebuilding public education is to return to the foundation understandings upon which public education has been built and ensure that these inform policy and practice in Australian education, as well as being preserved and strengthened, rather than ignored or diminished.

Only from a sturdy theoretical foundation will it be possible to really contest the dominance of the entitlement principle and the various attempts to privatise public education. More than this, once the foundation principles of public education are established, public policy can begin to better frame the expectations that can be placed on private schools for the receipt of public funds. The dynamic of the public/private debate will shift as a result.

In Part B, therefore, I will outline three fundamental dimensions of public education: public education as a public good; public education for the common good; and well-resourced public schools in every community. The case will be made that each dimension is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a healthy system of public education. As the foundation stones of public education, these three dimensions must work together. To neglect one of them is to weaken the whole edifice. I will deal with each in turn.

FIGURE 5: Dimension 1



Public education as a public good: Towards an education commons

The first and most prominent dimension – public education as a public good - relates to 'ownership'. In this usage, public education is the same as a public utility: owned by the state, funded from taxes provided by the public, and managed by the state on the public's behalf. It is this meaning that is dominant when public education is discussed in the public sphere. The question of 'ownership' defines the sector, such as when public schools are referred to as 'state' or 'government' schools. I will argue that the concept of public education as a public good should convey a much richer meaning.

In market economics, public-good theory has a long tradition (Samuelson, 1954). It refers to goods that we all enjoy. Typically, a public good is described as being non-rivalrous in consumption, in the sense that its use by one citizen does not detract from its benefits for others; and non-exclusionary, in the sense that it is available to all under the same terms and conditions. However, transferring an economic concept to a social practice like education can be problematic. The concept of an education commons is perhaps a better metaphor for education as a public good and might be a starting point for reconfiguring the public/private debate.

The commons is a spatial metaphor for community resources that are held in common and are able to be used or enjoyed equally by anyone in the community without the need to obtain anyone else's permission. Most resources held within the commons are free, but where fees apply, these are neutrally and consistently applied (Lessig, 2001). Buck (1998) describes commons as '*resource domains in which common pool resources are found*' (p. 5). Usually the term is applied to natural phenomena. Thus fish are a natural resource found in an ocean resource domain. The key is that no single individual exercises the core of a property right – that is, the exclusive right to determine whether the resource is made available to others – with respect to these domains and the resources within them. It is a community resource and all users are subject to the same rules of use. What determines the commons is the character of the resource and how it relates to the community:

In theory any resource might be held in common. But in practice the question a society must ask is which resources should be, and for these resources, how?' (Lessig, 2001, p. 21.)

The concept of the commons can be applied to social resources like educational institutions. In practical terms, it would be possible to see education as a public resource domain (the commons) that contains a range of public-education resources – schools, universities, community learning facilities and so on. Resources in the education commons would be non-exclusionary and 'rights' to these resources would apply equally to all. Preserving and enhancing the health of the education commons would be the same as caring for the environmental commons and a number of the ideas for environmental sustainability could be applied to it.

How is this different from traditional understandings of public education? The commons metaphor is largely a spatial idea that moves away from metaphors that construct education as a commodity available for purchase by consumers in an education marketplace. It suggests a space that functions through, and is bounded by, a set of community-established principles relating to the wellbeing of the society as a whole. This brings into play the concept of the common good, which is explored in the next section, as the second dimension of public education. It is agreements about education's role in advancing the common good that help to determine how the 'rules of engagement' in the education commons should operate.

But I am jumping ahead. In this section I will remain contained to the first dimension of public education as a public good and in particular focus on some foundational principles for public schools in the education commons. Since the 1870s, although the form and nature of public schools have changed, three famous concepts have been used to define public education – free, compulsory and secular. These words capture the settlement around public schools in Australia: that every local community in Australia – metropolitan, rural and remote – should have public schools available to all at no cost. That is, they are non-

exclusionary and secular places – schools for the public – where children and young people from all social backgrounds can mix and learn.

These three central tenets are consistent with the concept of the education commons and so should remain as key touchstones of this first dimension of public education. I will briefly explore each in turn.

Free

If public education is to be a major mechanism for decoupling educational success from social background, and if it is to be consistent with the concept of an education commons, then public education must be free.

The idea of free public education has been represented more in principle than in practice since the Education Acts of the 1870s. In some States, elementary schooling was free from the start; in others, school fees continued until early in the 20th century. State provision of secondary education developed slowly during the 20th century, and fees have applied at various stages. For example, free secondary public education was abandoned for a few years during the Depression in the 1930s, but reintroduced in the postwar years.

In 2015, public schools in most States exact some form of compulsory parent contribution for texts, resources, excursions and materials; and also invite voluntary contributions. The compulsory contributions vary, usually depending on the SES area in which the school is located, and there are exemptions for families who do not have the means to pay. Unfortunately, public schools always need this additional income to provide a quality education.

The problem with allowing schools to exact compulsory fees from parents is that it widens the resource disparity between public schools. It means that public schools with a greater percentage of parents with the capacity to pay are able to charge fees that far exceed those charged by schools from less well-off areas. This only serves to exacerbate the differences that already exist between schools on the basis of the funds they can raise through voluntary contributions and fundraising activities. In my view, the battle for the principle of free public education is one that must continue to be fought. It is important that proposals threatening it are vigorously resisted.

At the time of writing, a draft of the 'Reform of the Federation' Green Paper (GPRF, 2015), which proposes a number of funding options, has been released. Connected to an option that makes the Commonwealth the dominant funding provider for school education is a proposal that wealthy parents should pay fees to send their children to public schools. And while the government may have dismissed this idea following a community outcry, it is clear that such a policy notion is alive and well. It sometimes even masquerades under the guise of being an equity measure. In fact, such a strategy would only provide further incentives for those with the means to shift to the private sector, thus increasing the stratification of Australian schooling and the residualisation of public schools.

If public schools are a community resource in an education commons, then all users must be subject to the same rules of use. They should be free, and public educators must continue to campaign for an approach to properly funding public education such that it obviates the need for compulsory fees at public schools. In other words, such a campaign must recognise that all public schools would need to be funded to a level at which fees are not needed. It

would be counter-productive to withdraw from public schools the capacity to charge funds without compensating them for the funds foregone.

Compulsory

Prior to the Education Acts of the 1870s, many children from poor families attended low-fee 'dame' schools for very short periods, or not at all. These families needed their children to bring income into the family home, and so could not afford to support them for extended periods of schooling. A major motivation for the provision of public schools was to address this issue. Colonial governments wanted to 'gentle the masses' by ensuring that children from poor backgrounds were provided with basic skills for the workforce and instilled with sound 'moral' values. Establishing public schools was an important first step in achieving this aim, but it also required students to be at school, and so school attendance was made compulsory up to a certain age.

So we can see that compulsion was an important element of public education right from the start. Since that time, as the purpose (and promise) of public schooling has broadened, the age of compulsion has also slowly risen. But the general principle of compulsion, and the implications flowing from it, remains the same.

Of course, compulsion applies to students attending private as well as public schools. But there is an important difference. Students from more affluent backgrounds have always been able to access schooling. On the other hand, the most disadvantaged students can only comply with the law related to compulsion if governments provide schools free of charge. As a result, compulsion has a special connection to the concept of public education for at least three important reasons.

First, it conveys the message that *all* children and young people deserve the benefits of education as individuals, just as the community needs their skills and talents as active and productive citizens, workers and community members. It is not something that should be left to chance through circumstances of birth or luck. Public schools have a special responsibility to look after those students who would not be able to access education unless there is a local public school. Compulsion benefits individuals and the community.

Second, compulsion can't be enforced unless the conditions are present to enable the purpose of the compulsion to be realised. This means the principle of compulsion places a special obligation on governments to ensure that they provide the best possible educational opportunities, resources and environments for all children and young people – especially those who could not experience these if public schools did not exist.

Third, compulsion means that public schools are obliged to take all comers. That is, it would be inconsistent to compel children and young people to attend school up to a certain age, and then either make it difficult for them to attend because they can't afford it, or because they do not belong to a particular religious or cultural group. Public schools enable the principle of compulsion because they exist in every community in Australia and take all comers.

In summary, compulsion is not simply a legal requirement. It carries with it a number of values and obligations for which governments have a clear responsibility. The creation of the public school as a public good is the state's response. A robust theory and practice of public

education must recognise the ways in which compulsion links to the essence of public schools, and clarify what this means for policy and practice.

Secular

Australia is defined as a secular state, implying the strict separation of church and state. But there have been a number of areas of social policy that have blurred the boundaries, such as in education. As I described in Part A of this paper, the federal government has, since the 1960s, given funds to private schools, many of which are formed on the basis of a specific religion. Usually, however, the term 'secular' is used in relation to public education, and it is this usage that I will explore here.

The debates that led to the Education Acts of the late 19th century in the various Colonies were fiercely contested, with one of the central issues being the idea that the new, fully funded public schools should be secular. Before that time, governments had given some support to denominational local schools, but this ceased following the formation of public systems, and the concept of secular became one of the three defining characteristics of public education.

Like the concept of public schools being free, however, the idea of secular public schools was more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Thus religious clergy were permitted and even encouraged to visit public schools on a regular basis to provide religious instruction; aspects of the official curriculum and some of the textbooks contained strong religious messages; and students were encouraged to live according to Christian moral values.

Such a state of affairs has continued to the present day. As a result, it is fair to say that public schools have been less secular in practice than they have been in rhetoric, even though in most States secular education is enshrined in law. Indeed, there is a growing concern among many public educators about the extent to which religion is permeating a number of aspects of public schools. I will give three examples:

- In all States and Territories, special religious instruction (SRI) is offered by ministers of religion. Although parents can generally make the decision about whether or not their child can attend, this is an 'opt-out' rather than an 'opt-in' provision. Concerns have been raised about the content of some of the instruction, as well as about the fact that the SRI is largely conducted by unqualified volunteers;
- In 2006, former prime minister, John Howard, announced the National Schools Chaplaincy Program (NSCP) as a three-year program costing \$165 million. Although the Rudd Labor government expanded the scheme to include funding for secular welfare workers in 2011, three years later the Coalition government abandoned that option in its first budget, and gave \$250 million to continue a chaplains-only scheme. Concerns have been raised about the fact that chaplains are used as counsellors despite many being untrained for that role; and the danger that some chaplains will use the position to proselytise a particular faith;
- Questions about religious teaching being part of the official curriculum periodically arise, with the most frequent being attempts to teach creationism. Most recently, the two government appointed reviewers of the national curriculum have argued the case for religious instruction to be part of the official school curriculum, and conflated the important distinction between religious instruction and religion education (Wiltshire, 2015; Donnelly, 2015).

These three examples raise the question about whether, in contemporary Australia, the line between the state and religion needs to be much sharper. In particular, is it time to (re)assert the secular nature of public schools? There is clearly an important place for religion education in public schools. As Australian society becomes more culturally and ethnically diverse, it is crucial that future citizens learn about the role and place of religion in any society, and about the beliefs and practices of religious groups. This is fundamental to developing a tolerant and cohesive society. But such education should be contained within the formal curriculum and taught by trained educators. It should not be the province of untrained religious personnel with a focus on conversion rather than open-minded learning.

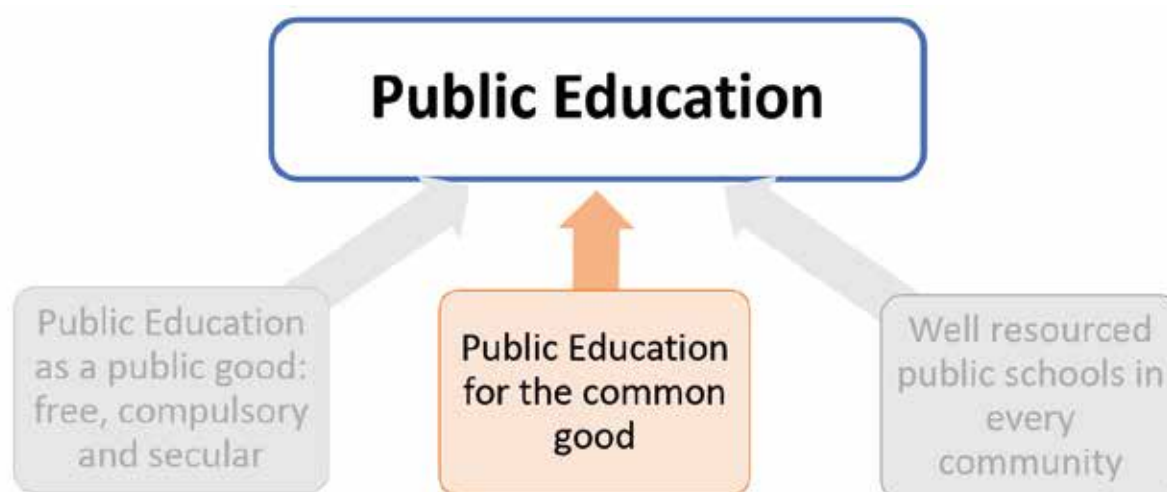
Creating an education commons

I have argued that the idea of public education as a public good is a powerful dimension that must be protected in contemporary Australia. It has been suggested that a fruitful way to conceive of this dimension involves public schools being part of an education commons to which everyone has rights of access, and which is non-exclusionary. The key principles of public schools as a public good within the education commons are that they are free, compulsory and secular. These principles have always been at the heart of the rhetoric about public schooling, without ever being fully realised.

In Australia today these three principles are under threat and must be protected and promoted – without them the idea of universal public education can only be a mirage. Just as there is general concern now about the impact of human activity on the environment, so too should Australians be concerned about the health of our education commons. Confining the definition of public education to the concept of the public good and the principles of free, compulsory and secular, however, doesn't help to answer questions about the kind of education that should be offered in public schools. Nor does it help identify what community expectations there might be of private schools receiving public funds, or how much public money these schools are entitled to expect. As a result, questions about the share of funding between public and private schools, or about the type of accountabilities that should be in place when private schools receive public funds, are answered idiosyncratically. The answers depend on the context of the time or the interests of the responder, rather than on any understanding of the essence of public education.

I think that this gap has created the conditions within which the idea of public education as a safety net has been able to flourish. A rejuvenated understanding of public education within an education commons therefore demands attention being paid to its role in advancing the common good. It is the second dimension of a framework for public education.

FIGURE 6: Dimension 2



Public education for the common good

In the previous section, I suggested that since public education is a public good, it should be understood not as a commodity to be used solely for the benefit of individuals but as a community resource within an education commons. I also argued that the three traditional characteristics – free, compulsory and secular – are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the operation of public schools. They give no guidance about the nature of the education on offer, a gap that raises the need for a second dimension foregrounding the public purposes served by public schools. This dimension puts the philosophical meat on the bones of public schools as public utilities. It demands a clear understanding about the essence and purpose of public education. How is this determined?

The previous AGPPA research report (Reid et al., 2011) argued that educational practice is always informed by its purposes – explicitly or implicitly. We suggested that there are three broad purposes of education that intersect in different ways. They are:

- *Individual purposes*: to enable individuals to develop their abilities to the fullest so they can reach their potential, live enriching lives, pursue opportunities and further their lives' ambitions;
- *Economic purposes*: to prepare young people to be competent contributors to the economy as workers;
- *Democratic purposes*: to prepare all young people to be active and competent citizens in democratic life.

These purposes are not hermetically sealed from each other. At any historical moment there will be a mixture of purposes in a public-education system, although usually one will be more dominant than others. Regardless of the mix at a particular time, it is the lens through which they are viewed that determines whether or not they serve primarily public or private purposes.

I will argue that the frame of reference for making these decisions about the purposes of public education should be shaped by a commitment to education serving the common

good. This view is not an abandonment of the role that public education plays in enabling individuals to develop to their full potential. Rather, it enriches the individual purposes of education by placing these within a broader societal setting: a commitment to the common good breaks free of isolated individualism by recognising the importance of relationships between people, and the need to understand that there is a collective common good that goes beyond self-interest.

If public education makes an important contribution to the common good, it follows that the policy and practice of public education must be founded on a deep understanding of what constitutes the common good and the role of education in achieving it.

The common good and education

The word 'public' means more than a collection of individuals. It assumes that as an entity, the public has an interest in the collective good – that is, the benefits that the group derives as a whole, and not just individual interests. Of course individual benefits can affect more people than just the individual who makes a decision. But such benefits are collateral and serendipitous. They are not derived from a whole group consideration of what is in the interests of the group as a collective entity. This is not to deny individual rights. It is to emphasise that since individuals are also members of communities then the purposes of communities are central to us as both individuals *and* as a collective. That is, individual rights and the common good must coexist.

Understood in this way, the issue becomes how the public arrives at decisions that benefit the society as a whole rather than only individuals or special interest groups. What constitutes the common good, however, is not fixed – it is arrived at through a process of discussion in the public sphere and so it changes over time. This means that the prior question in any consideration of the common good is how it is determined.

An approach that privileges individual self-interest involves little more than seeing public decision-making as a simple aggregation of individual desires and aspirations. Such a 'majority' view approach is a very weak version of arriving at the common good because it starts with individual interests, and public benefits are derived only coincidentally. The public is simply a group of individuals who make individual choices.

When this approach is applied to education policy there is an emphasis on choice in an education market where parents and students are consumers seeking to maximise individual benefits from the education system. In this environment, education becomes a commodity. This, in turn, fosters competition between schools as they vie for custom. In Part A, I argued that this approach has increasingly informed education policy over the past 40 years and has resulted in the residualisation, stratification, fragmentation and privatisation of public education.

The more powerful approach is based on the idea that the public good is greater than the sum of its individual parts, and is arrived at through rational, respectful and critical deliberation among the public. Individuals, therefore, are involved in public discussion but their contributions go beyond self-interest to considerations about how to maximise the benefits for society as a whole.

The quality of participation by the public in discussion in the public sphere is a function of the skills, understandings and dispositions that the public can bring to bear in that arena. And

how is this quality assured? Our systems of education are the primary mechanisms through which the public is renewed (Feinberg, 2012). If they place a greater emphasis on the individual purposes of education than they do on its public purposes, then the public sphere can only be weakened as people lose the capacity to exchange views respectfully with each other and to think beyond individual interests. From a common-good perspective, the role of education is to maintain and improve the conditions for deliberation and debate in the public sphere.

It is this role that has been most neglected in educational discourse. The prevailing neo-liberal ideology emphasising choice in an education market has downgraded education to a commodity largely benefitting individuals. As a consequence, it has reduced public education to being perceived as a safety net. This paper argues that a push-back against this dominating trend requires a clear articulation of what it means for public education to serve the common good. This will provide a reference point for policy and practice that foregrounds the public benefits of public education, and resists the trend to privatise public education.

There are at least two key aspects to consider. The first is to create and maintain a system of education that itself models a commitment to the common good. This includes ensuring that education is available free to all on a comparatively equal playing field and on a non-exclusionary basis, and has policy and practices consistent with, and promoting of, the common good *in* education. The second aspect relates to the role of public education *for* the common good. This involves public schools developing the skills, dispositions and understandings of children and young people, such that they can engage – respectfully and thoughtfully – with others in deliberation about the common good in the broader society.

What are the implications for understanding public education – teaching and learning, culture, structure, organisation, funding and governance – through the lens of its common-good purposes? In the following section I propose a number of characteristics that may help to answer that question.

Public education for the common good: the implications for policy and practice

There are a number of characteristics of public education based on a pursuit of the common good. The key point is that each characteristic can be interpreted through a 'public' or a 'privatising' lens, and the interpretation has a real impact on the nature of educational policy and practice for public education.

In this section, I will propose some possible characteristics and offer a brief outline of how each can be understood from the perspective of its 'publicness'. It is important to stress that the characteristics, and my descriptions of them, can only scratch the surface. It is crucial that in any public-education system there is ongoing discussion about the characteristics needed for public schools to promote the common good, and about the policies and practices required to sustain them.

Quality

If public education is central to the health of a democracy, it follows that it should be the best it can possibly be for all students to develop the capabilities needed to live full, productive and contributing lives as citizens, family and community members and workers. In

a public system, the failure of even one student is a tragedy, not just for the individual and the school but for the public-education system and the community as a whole. Put another way, the relentless pursuit of the highest quality education for all is a central tenet of public education.

There are too many implications of this quest for quality to outline here. It relates, obviously, to such matters as the curriculum (including teaching and learning), the structure and organisation of schools, and resources. It is crucial, therefore, that public-education systems constantly keep what constitutes quality under review, using the common good as a reference point.

For example, the common good in education would mean that there should not be great disparities in resources between schools and that all students should have equal access to a range of curriculum opportunities. It would not be a quality public system if some students had access to a greater range of learning resources and curriculum choice than others.

Similarly, public education for the common good would be based on a clearly articulated view of the capabilities that all students should develop to maximise their individual potential and their contribution to society. In my view, a hierarchical curriculum – which prepares students for different and pre-ordained post-school futures, or a narrow and standardised curriculum taught using a single didactic pedagogy – would work against a quality public education for the common good.

Links with the local community

Connection to community is a central ingredient in a public education serving public purposes. From a common good perspective, there is a symbiotic relationship between the school and its local community, where public schools are seen as *our* schools – working on behalf of the whole community to develop citizens, workers and community members for the benefit of all.

This means there are close links between public schools and their local communities, with the facilities and resources of the public school being used by the community to enhance community life. Conversely, public schools will use the resources of the community in their learning programs.

By contrast, in a more privatised public-education system with stand-alone and competing Independent public schools, parents and students will travel past other public schools to get to their school of choice. This results in the school community not being drawn from the local community, making it more difficult to establish a mutual relationship.

Collaboration

The common good demands that people not only coexist peacefully, but actually work together to achieve benefits for the whole community rather than only individual or special interest groups. This makes collaboration a central feature of a public-education system.

In a public system focused on the common good, schools collaborate to achieve success. In such a system, the failure of one school diminishes all schools. This means that rather than hiding good practice or ideas in order to preserve market advantage, the emphasis is on disseminating and sharing within and across schools. Such an approach also models to students how and why to collaborate for the common good.

By contrast, a system of stand-alone and competing autonomous public schools where relations between schools are determined by the invisible hand of the market can result in fierce competition between schools, creating winners and losers. In such systems schools are often differentiated by unequal resource distributions.

Innovation

One of the biggest challenges facing educators today is how to develop a curriculum (including approaches to teaching and learning) that meets the individual needs of students by personalising curriculum, as well as ensuring that all students are prepared for the demands of the contemporary world. The challenges include the rapidity of technological change, the creation of new economies, the increasing mobility of people, and the fact that communities are more culturally and ethnically diverse than they have ever been.

The scale and pace of this change means that schools must constantly adapt to meet the new demands, making creativity and innovation in designing for the future important aspects of education. As a result, approaches to innovation need to be more systematic and extensive than they have ever been.

Given that public schools serve the vast bulk of students in our community (including the vast majority of students who are educationally disadvantaged), it is the public sector that must take the lead in developing, trialling and implementing innovative practice in such areas as teaching and learning, school organisation, and community interaction. That is, public systems should be at the cutting edge of innovation in educational practice, while also seeking to develop capabilities for innovation in students.

A more privatised public system is less likely to promote innovation. The pressure of market competition can often lead to a culture of copying those schools that appear to be successful, which leads to homogeneity and conformity of practice.

Equity

Education is the most fundamental of human rights – it cannot be apportioned according to parents' financial capacity. While there will always be differences in educational outcomes, these should not be as a result of differences in parental wealth or influence. This means that there must be a relentless focus on addressing equity in education in public systems.

A public education for the common good must create the conditions in which all children and young people can flourish. In particular, there should be strategies that accommodate those children and young people who have arrived at school from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds and require particular forms of support in terms of resources, teaching and learning. This support will often be additional to that offered to more advantaged students in an effort to establish an environment where educational outcomes are determined by effort and capacity, not birth.

In a public system promoting the common good, issues would always be looked at from the perspectives of the least advantaged by giving them a genuine say in developing the policies and practices of schools. And a key goal of education would be to develop in students the capacities and dispositions to work throughout their lives, in the economy and the civil society, to create a fairer society.

In a more privatised public system, there would not be the same concern to ensure equity in education, not least because an education market measures success in a different way. Students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds can be perceived as a hindrance to school image; there are often significant resource disparities between schools; and education is seen as something that can benefit the individual rather than also having a significant social benefit.

Diversity and cohesion

A key challenge for a multicultural society is to ensure that its citizens are able to communicate productively across, as well as within, cultural groups. This requires citizens with intercultural understandings: people who are comfortable with difference and who enjoy and celebrate diversity. The development of such capacities and dispositions can't be left to chance – they need to be nurtured, and public schools are one of the major sites in which this can be achieved, not least because their diversity offers the experience of interacting on a daily basis. It is not something that is learned at one remove from the action.

Diversity does not, however, itself ensure that people will learn to peacefully coexist. The conflict that is created in the wider community through difference does not disappear when children and young people enter a public school. It plays out in a range of ways. When racism or bullying emerge in education settings, there are professional educators on-hand to work through the conflict, seeking not only to eliminate such behaviour but also to use it as an educational opportunity where students can analyse its causes and consider ways to address these both in the educational setting and the wider community. Such opportunities are less likely to arise in settings where learner groupings are more homogenous.

In brief, public schools provide spaces in our society where young people can be inducted into a civic culture of recognising and vigorously engaging with their differences. Rather than simply educating individuals, they turn a group of people with a host of differences into a civic entity called a public. They are, therefore, an important lever in pursuing a crucial public good: the creation of a cohesive and harmonious multicultural society.

Democracy

As one of the key sites in Australian society for the development of capabilities for active participation in civic life in a democracy, public schools must exemplify and practice democracy at all levels by ensuring that there are structures and processes that give an authentic voice to all. Democratic structures and processes should maximise the voices of those in the school community who are most marginalised. This commitment to democracy should also permeate the classroom and curriculum so that students develop the capabilities to play active roles in decision-making in civil society.

In a privatised public system, which is seeking to make public schools more like private schools, the focus of governance is on School Boards – which invariably comprise the most powerful in the community in order to maximise the market clout of the school. That is, the focus is on advancing the position of the school in an education market, rather than on developing democratic practices.

Working to create public schools for the common good

I must stress again that the characteristics described above are possibilities only. There may be many others more crucial to establishing a public-education system for the common good, and those that have been named certainly need to be described in greater detail and depth than has been possible here.

My purpose has been simply to demonstrate the argument that if a public system aims to promote the common good, then it should do so in ways consistent with that aspiration. That means identifying key characteristics and then ensuring that they are realised *in* the public system through its policies and practices, and *through* the public system by valuing and implementing particular approaches to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. In each example, I have tried to show that the same characteristic can be turned to different effect when the public education system is subject to privatising tendencies.

Dimensions 1 and 2 provide a philosophical framework for public education. They are meaningless, however, unless public schools are adequately resourced – a third dimension to which I will now turn.

FIGURE 7: Dimension 3



Well-resourced public schools in every community

The third dimension of a three-pronged understanding of public education is that governments have an obligation to provide and maintain well-resourced quality public schools, available to all, in every community in Australia. The foundation premise of this dimension is that in a democratic society education should be available to all on equal terms so that each child can develop to her/his full potential. Properly resourced public schools are the starting point for the achievement of this goal.

A key aspect of the education debate is therefore a sophisticated understanding about the meaning of the concept of a 'well-resourced' public school. This should cover all of those elements that contribute to quality education. Students have the right to learn in buildings that are conducive to learning, in spaces that allow them to socialise and interact with peers, in classes that are not so large that they prevent teachers from individualising learning,

with teachers who have content knowledge and pedagogical expertise, and so on. It follows that the goal of providing well-resourced public schools costs money⁹.

And yet, over the past few years, some commentators and politicians have ignored the resource differentials between schools and claimed that spending more money doesn't necessarily help to raise standards (e.g., Swan, 2013). Unfortunately, the argument suffers from being a logical fallacy. How is it possible to achieve better teaching without spending money on decent teacher salaries, professional development, teaching resources, adequate facilities and so on? The argument also ignores the question of how funding is distributed.

As I demonstrated in Part A, it is students from low-SES backgrounds who are performing most poorly in international tests, and yet it is those from the highest SES background who benefit most from current funding policy. The issue is that there are significant differentials between high-SES and low-SES schools in funding, learning resources, facilities and class sizes. Indeed, the OECD estimates that Australia has the fifth-largest resource disparity between socioeconomically advantaged and disadvantaged schools (OECD, 2013). These disparities exacerbate achievement gaps.

If the human and material resources of a school make an important contribution to education quality, then it follows that our society should make every effort to ensure that the differences between schools in such basic areas as equipment, teacher quality, buildings, class sizes and so on are reduced. And yet we have a situation where the schools with the greatest challenges are given the least amount of resources to deal with them. In the main, these are public schools.

In Part A, I argued that the approach to funding schools in Australia has magnified rather than reduced resource differentials, and contributed to creating totally unacceptable educational outcomes. We have developed a funding model that is complex, arbitrary, inequitable and dysfunctional. It privileges choice for some, at the expense of quality and equity for all. But given the self-interest at play in the education debate, how is it possible to engineer an approach that turns this around?

In recent times, the Gonski Review provided a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make radical changes to funding schools in this country. The fact that the current Coalition government has effectively rejected the major intent of the review does not mean it was wasted. There is much that can be learned from its processes, analyses and recommendations, including what to avoid as well as what to pursue. The Gonski Review can be seen by public education advocates as a staging post in the journey to a public education that serves the common good rather than a failed end point. It is a good place to start the search for ways to provide well-resourced public schools in every Australian community.

⁹ In this paper I will deal with the funding issue as it affects public education as a whole. I will not address the significant issues relating to the distribution of that funding within the public system, such as the differential levels of funding going to primary and secondary schools. These are important matters that demand separate and detailed analyses.

The Gonski story

In April 2010, then Prime Minister Gillard appointed businessman David Gonski to head a review into funding of schools. It did not take the Review Panel long to recognise that the funding model was totally broken and largely responsible for the gross inequities in Australia's education system. As a result, the Gonski Review brought equity back to centre stage of considerations about funding.

Echoing Whitlam's short-lived policy in the 1970s, Gonski proposed a needs-based approach to funding schools. It comprised a common Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) that set a minimum level of funding for every primary and secondary student, based on the resourcing level of consistently successful schools. And it added loadings for students with specific educational disadvantage, such as students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students with disabilities, indigenous students, remote and isolated students, and students with English as a second language.

This model would have resulted in the public sector getting a larger increase because it carries the bulk of students with educational disadvantage. Upon the release of the report, there appeared to be broad support from the three education sectors. Indeed, for a time it seemed that the old-style, public/private debate had been consigned to history, and that Australia had found a way to reconcile the demands associated with funding different systems of education inside a cumbersome federal arrangement.

After sitting on the report for an inordinately long time, in April 2013 the Gillard government eventually responded with a policy based on Gonski. There was to be an SRS of about \$9000 per primary student, and \$12,000 per secondary student, plus loadings for disadvantage. The plan represented an increase in the overall expenditure on education over a six-year period from 2014 – 2019 of \$7.3 billion in real terms over 2013 prices, with a 69% increase for public schools, and 42% increase to the private sector (Connors & McMorrow, 2015). Annual amounts were to be indexed, with the bulk of the additional money scheduled to appear in the fifth and sixth years, by which time all schools should be operating at the school-resource standard.

Gillard's plan involved the federal government providing two-thirds, and the States one-third, of the additional money needed. The SRS would be used to determine baseline funding; and each private school would receive between 20–90% of this amount depending on the 'capacity of parents to pay' based on a modified SES formula.

By the time of the 2013 federal election, all States and Territories except Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory had signed agreements. Since the federal Coalition had promised a 'unity ticket' on Gonski – albeit with a funding commitment that spanned four years rather than six – it was presumed that no matter what party was elected, the broad principles enunciated by Gonski would survive.

It was not to be. After a number of changes of position, the new Coalition government made it clear that Gonski was effectively dead. When the Coalition government's first budget was released in May 2014, the funding for school education was loosely based on the first four years of the agreements with the States and Territories, with the addition of funding for the non-signatories.

Crucially, however, the agreements for years five and six, which comprised the bulk of the additional funds, were torn up. Instead, from 2018, federal funding is to be increased at the rate of CPI (about 2.5%), rather than on the basis of any educational justification. The loss of the promised funding in the final two years – the large percentage of which would have gone to public schools – resulted in a significant reduction in the amounts agreed to by the States. More than this, the federal government is going to wash its hands of ensuring that the States allocate their money on the basis of need within a consistent framework of understanding and monitoring educational disadvantage.

Under the Coalition government, the increase in Commonwealth funding for private schools by 2019 will be nearly double that of the public sector, despite the fact that Gonks had made it clear that most of the schools requiring additional funds are in the public sector. Connors and McMorow point out that the percentage increase in funding for public schools over four years will be 23%, well short of the 69% increase that would have been injected if Labor's years 5 and 6 commitments had been retained. Private schools, on the other hand, will receive as much as they would have received under the previous SES scheme (Connors & McMorow, 2015, p. 47/8).

So, after an exhaustive and ground-breaking review that promised to address growing inequalities, Australian education has returned to the starting point. Just as it appeared there was a resolution to the endless public/private debates, the federal government's approach signals a return to old jealousies and self-interested lobbying. Meanwhile, the inequities that produced the current system continue to diminish public education. Nonetheless, the fight for greater fairness will continue and public education advocates have been greatly strengthened by what has happened.

Like the Karmel Report before it, the Gonski Review will take a deserved place in the pantheon of Australian education history. It has changed the nature of the funding debate to the extent that it will now be more difficult to ignore the equity issues at stake. There is now a much greater public awareness about the inequalities in Australian education. The review, however, was not perfect. Its legacy will be sold short if those committed to public education do not learn from it with a view to building the next model, rather than treat it as the last word on the subject.

AGPPA is well placed to participate in, if not lead, the next stage of the funding debate. My intention in the next section is to flag some of the issues that might be considered in an ongoing discussion about how to ensure that we enjoy well-resourced public schools in every community in Australia.

Learning from Gonski

In my view, there are a number of aspects of the Gonski model that should be retained in any future funding proposal. First, the concept of a Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) offers a focused, transparent and educational reference point for baseline funding, and gets away from allocations simply based on population. It may be necessary to undertake research into the best way to arrive at a standard, but the proposal to use 'successful' schools as the benchmark is a reasonable start. In addition, if implemented as intended, the SRS presents an in-built indexation mechanism relating to the actual changes in costs of schooling within the reference-group schools, rather than the idiosyncratic decisions of the various States and Territory governments represented in approaches such as the AGSRC.

Second, the equity loadings as proposed by Gonski recognise and provide appropriate resources to schools – mostly public – that do the heavy lifting when it comes to working with the most educationally disadvantaged students. They also inject some predictability into equity funding, which has been hampered over the years by the disparate short-termism of specific purpose equity programs.

Third, the proposal to create an independent agency, the National Schools Resourcing Body (NSRB) – to research, establish, monitor and review the SRS and establish the amounts for loadings – would largely remove the self-interest that is so evident in the current public/private debate by replacing it with an independent arbiter making decisions based on research evidence.

There are also some aspects of Gonski that are far more problematic. Some of these were contained in the original report, such as the proposal to use a modified version of Howard's SES model for determining the amount of public funds that private schools should receive. As I pointed out in Part A, this approach is based on parents' presumed capacity to pay rather than the actual level of school resources, and so retains all the inequitable outcomes inherent in the original SES mechanism and should be rejected.

Most of the problematic issues, however, were either imposed on the Gonski Panel before it started work, or have been created by decisions taken since the report was released. For example, in responding to the Gonski Panel's recommendations, the Gillard government widened the number of schools eligible for equity loadings – a decision that diluted the amount of money mooted to go to the most severely disadvantaged schools (again, mostly public schools).

But the most egregious example of government interference occurred before the Review began, when the Labor government imposed a requirement on the Gonski Review that no private school should be worse off in terms of public funds received as a result of its recommendations. This no-losers policy hampered the Review from the start. It meant that private schools operating well above the SRS would receive at least their current level of funding. Public funds would still be directed to resource-rich schools, thus widening rather than reducing resource disparities between wealthy and very poor schools, and adding to the total cost of the reform package.

Given the current federal government's determination to dismiss the Review's findings – previous Shadow Education Minister Pyne referred to it sneeringly as the 'Conski' review – it is clear that those committed to a vibrant public-education system in this country must continue to fight for a fairer funding model. The Gonski Review proposed a model that addresses a number of the issues described in Part A of this paper and provides a framework that can be used as the basis of an alternative approach. But the review was not perfect, and should not be treated as a sacred text. The challenge is to reload the Gonski model in a way that removes the compromises insisted on by the Gillard/Rudd governments, adjusts those elements of the recommendations that dilute the needs-based approach, and confirms the equity focus.

Towards a new funding model

Often discussions about funding begin with the technical aspects, assuming the notion of entitlement as a basic element. I want to suggest a different starting point. Since the debate is about the public funding of schools, surely it must be based on foundation principles that

express the aspirations our society holds for public education. Using the first two dimensions of public education – public education as a public good and public education serving the common good – I suggest that the foundation assumption could be:

Every local community in Australia should contain well-resourced, secular public schools, which belong to a public system, provide a quality education, and are free and open to all.

This public-first approach recognises that public education is the mechanism our society uses to make universal provision of opportunities for all. It follows that there must be equity across the system; and that the commitment is to provide uniformly high standards of achievement in these schools. Having established the foundation philosophy, consideration can then be given to the public-funding responsibility for schools set up outside the public system for parents who choose not to use the public provision.

In other words, priority should be given to the concept of the universal public provision of schooling. Such a shift in the discourse would, in my view, establish the importance of need-based funding when considering the public funding of private schools. It would raise a number of supplementary questions, such as the extent to which the government has a responsibility to fund already very well resourced private schools.

My argument suggests that there are at least four levels of any funding approach, understood in descending order:

- *Level 1:* the model should be based on the key assumption that every local community in Australia should contain well-resourced, secular public schools, which belong to a public system, provide a quality education, and are free, compulsory and open to all. It demands a well-articulated philosophy about the purposes of public schools and the role and place of publicly funded private schools. AGPPA is well placed to lead this debate given its participation in the ARC research project on the public purposes of education (Reid et al., 2011).
- *Level 2:* the model should contain features that promote the characteristics of publicly funded education consistent with its purposes. These include that schools are equitably resourced, with additional funds for schools that have high numbers of students with various forms of educational disadvantage; provide high quality education; are socially and culturally mixed; operate democratically; innovate to enhance educational outcomes for all; and have strong and mutually responsive links with their local community.
- *Level 3:* the model should reflect the functional aspects that enable it to achieve the purposes, characteristics and outcomes identified in Levels 1 and 2. These include a recognition that:
 - public-education authorities have system-wide obligations;
 - there is transparency of process and the approach provides consistency and certainty;
 - there is clarity of operation – such as it is easy to understand with no jurisdictional overlap or duplication;
 - there are mechanisms to enable funding to maintain value in real terms;
 - the model promotes flexibility within a system-wide approach;
 - there are monitoring and adjustment processes.

- *Level 4:* the model should ensure that all publicly funded systems and institutions (public and private) are accountable for the achievement of agreed outcomes through the same processes.

These four levels offer reference points or benchmarks against which approaches to funding can be assessed. Of course, after the exhaustive consultations and processes of the Gonski Review, there is no need to start again. Gonski has given Australia a model that addresses a number of issues outlined in Part A of this paper. It has an equity focus, is based on an educational rationale, and gives more money to public schools through its needs-based loadings. It also has broad community acceptance. When assessed against the benchmarks, however, it has some flaws, some of which I outlined in the previous section.

The next version of a needs-based funding approach – one that a professional association like AGPPA might argue publicly – should seek to build on the Gonski model by retaining its strengths and removing its flaws. Such a model would promote a well-resourced public education system that builds the common good.

Conclusion: Reinstating the publicness of education

In Part A of this paper, I analysed what has happened to public education since the decision was taken in the 1960s to commence federal funding of private schools. It was argued that the decision has resulted in a highly stratified education system as a whole, and produced tendencies for public education to become, at least in part, residualised, fragmented and increasingly privatised. I suggested that it did not have to be that way. If the public funding of private schools had been organised around a needs-based model as was originally intended by Whitlam, the outcome would have been very different. But it wasn't, and slowly the funding debate came to be dominated by the philosophy of entitlement alongside an ideology of choice and competition in education markets.

Apart from reducing the funds going to the most disadvantaged school communities (mainly public), and fanning the drift of higher SES students to private schools, the consequence has been to widen the gap in educational outcomes between high-SES and low-SES students, and to lower educational outcomes overall. And yet the policies have been maintained and extended, even while governments assert that they want to lift educational standards.

Public education advocates have not been mute in the face of this onslaught, and for many years have been pointing out the inequities produced by Australia's dysfunctional approach to funding schools. At one point, it seemed that the Gonski Review might be able to turn things around, yet its demise under the current Coalition government has dimmed that hope. The response of public educators has been to argue vociferously for a return to Gonski, in the event that a change of government might revive it.

I have argued that the Gonski campaign is an important but not a sufficient condition for the rejuvenation of public education. The problem is that as the current funding regime became entrenched, other influences had begun to affect the education climate – notably, a shift away from the public essence of public education. Key policy-makers began to talk about making public schools more like private schools, and there was a gradual move to privatise aspects of schools and the public system. This subtly changed the terrain on which the education debate was conducted. As a result, increased funding to public schools will not

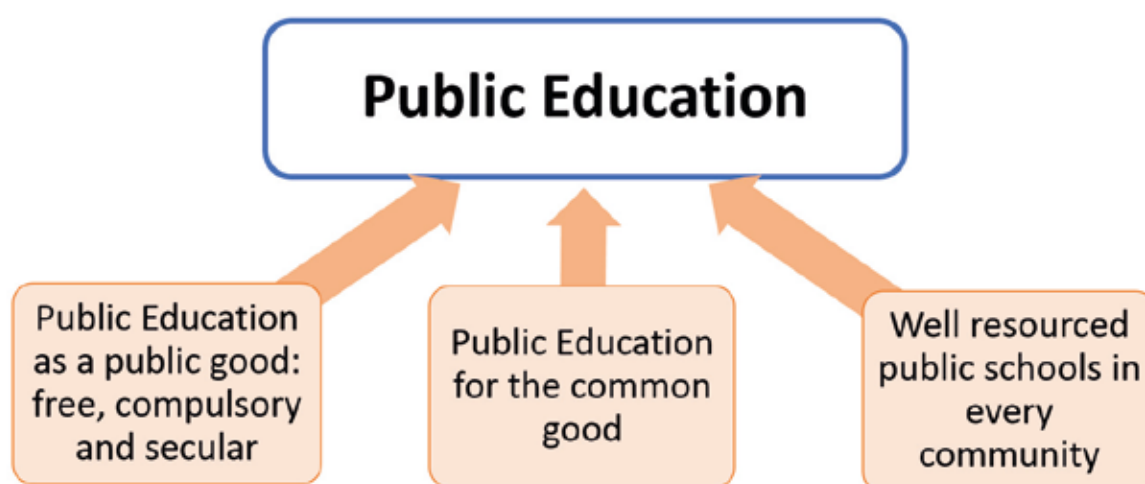
be enough on its own. It needs to be accompanied by a renewed effort to revive the publicness of public education.

The first step in defending and promoting public education is to return to the foundational understandings upon which public education has been built, to ensure that these inform policy and practice in Australian education, and that these foundational understandings are preserved and strengthened, rather than ignored or diminished. That task demands a sturdy theoretical foundation, which includes a fairer funding system, but is not confined to it.

In Part B, I have explored a tripartite model of public education as represented in Figure 8 below. My argument is that if this version is used as the prism through which to develop and analyse policy, there could be a very different scenario for Australian education than the one outlined in Part A.

Of course, I am not suggesting that simply adopting a model like this can change current policy or the dominant discourse. That can only happen through prolonged effort. But I am suggesting that it may assist public educators in that endeavour. I think that there are at least three ways in which such an approach can be enlisted in the campaign to defend and promote public education.

FIGURE 8: A framework for public education



First, the framework offers a common language through which to talk about and promote public education in the community and to policy-makers. Only when public educators are on the same page can there be a consistent and powerful message spelling out the importance of public education to the successful functioning of a healthy democracy. In particular, it highlights that the essence of public education is its publicness that must be maintained and strengthened. In this way, the framework can help to challenge the individualism and self-interest that permeates the neo-liberal view of education as a commodity to be bought and sold.

Second, it provides a holistic public benchmark against which to judge many aspects of policy and practice, including funding, curriculum and governance. It will also help establish

priorities for campaigning. It is hoped that AGPPA will use it to inform its responses to policy, to conduct its campaigns, and to widen its influence.

Third, the framework suggests some approaches to regulating what is expected of private schools for receiving public money. That is, rather than public schools being expected to be more private, private schools should be required to be more public in their actions and make-up. I am not suggesting that private schools are currently escaping their responsibilities. They can serve the common good, although they are not, and can never be, public goods.

Nonetheless, private schools are currently in receipt of public money with little discussion about matters such as whether there should be restrictions on the level of the fees they can charge, the amounts they can pay staff, the rules they have to select and exclude students, and so on. And the framework also suggests some of the issues that might be considered in an approach to public accountability for private schools that foregrounds the common good.

For example, if our society expects schools to develop intercultural understandings, and the capacity to understand and respect people from different social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, how this might occur in education settings that are largely homogeneous in their student groupings is a reasonable question. In order to receive public funds, should such schools be required to demonstrate how they are addressing this issue practically? I am sure there are ways by which this can happen – but the point is that considerations like these may cause the tenor of the debate about education funding to change from an accountancy headset to a society-wide commitment to the common good.

In these three ways, it is hoped that this paper will make a small contribution to the continued struggle by public educators in public schools to maintain and strengthen the great work they currently do. Public education is a precious community resource. It is so essential to the life and wellbeing of our democratic society, and to the individuals and communities that live in it. It has never been as important as now for the whole community to support, nurture and strengthen our public schools and to celebrate the contribution they make to the common good.

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