VOCATIONALISM REVISITED IN AUSTRALIAN SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THREE DEPRESSION DECADES - THE 1890s, THE 1930s AND THE 1980s -

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Introduction.

The present paper reviews patterns of policy in Australian secondary education at three crisis points, in two periods of depression - the 1890s and 1930s - and in the severe recession of the 1980s and 1990s. The purpose is to draw out similarities between government action in the three periods while also identifying important differences. The paper identifies special characteristics of the Australian economy and political framework during the three depression-recession periods before particular elements of educational policy are analysed.

The present paper focuses on depression responses to the role of post-compulsory education, exploring four related propositions: that traditional values in education have reemerged strongly in such crisis periods; that extensions to compulsory education which have accompanied such periods are driven mainly by economic considerations; that depression circumstances, by heightening the economic and national purposes of education, profoundly affect the general curriculum while also renewing state commitments to vocational education; and that this vocationalism, even when conceived in broadly humanitarian terms, presents a major challenge to liberal and general education. It is argued here that in the three periods of crisis, remarkable similarities exist between the general thrust of policy as well as in specific initiatives, although significant differences cannot be minimised. Policy and structural changes occurring in the 1980s and 1990s, while bearing such similarities, are more far-reaching and have wider political support than ever before experienced in Australian education.

This paper builds upon and complements earlier work by the author and also that by Allyson Holbrook and others. Independently of each other Judith Bessant and myself have indeed devoted special attention to the three depression periods. Where the 1890s are concerned there have been several challenging studies from Victoria and South Australia in recent years. But more generally the debate on policy relating education to the economy has been carried on with an almost total absence of historical perspective. This is unfortunate, since - as is explained in the present paper - much of what is touted currently as fundamental reform is neither new nor especially creative. It has also ignored lessons from experience in earlier decades, which might have tempered enthusiasm for the more extreme measures contemplated.

Three Periods of Financial Crisis in Australia.

There would be little disagreement about the severity of the
depressions of the 1890s and the 1930s, nor about their importance in the historical development of Australian society. For that matter, they were periods of financial crisis in most Western nations. As for the most recent recession, most would place its beginnings in Australia at the time of the oil crisis of 1974, with periods of worsening intensity till the stock market crash in Australia of 1987.

Economic conditions preceding the Australian crises of the 1890s and 1930s were depressingly similar. Relatively prosperous conditions before them both were accompanied by excessive overseas borrowing for land expansion and public works, and the banks had over-extended credit. At the same time the economies of the colonies before 1901 and the states after federation relied heavily upon agriculture and mining for export earnings.

When international trade dried up so did export revenue and international credit. Banks in London and in the colonial/state capitals called in loans; businesses collapsed; banks failed; farming properties closed; and unemployment spread quickly. In 1931, for example, a Premiers' Plan, devised by London banks imposed drastic expenditure cuts on state and federal governments. The only colony to escape the 1890s depression was Western Australia, then enjoying its first period of economic prosperity following the discovery of huge gold deposits at Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie.

Secondary industry in both decades, though relatively undeveloped, was protected by tariffs from overseas competition. This was especially true of Victoria though less so of other colonies in the 1890s, but a general feature of national policy in the 1920s. Manufacturing was hit hard in both depressions, when protection became a liability, but in the 1930s recovered quickly as conditions improved. Agriculture and mining took much longer to revive, especially in the 1930s.

Labour market conditions in Australia have historically unique features that need emphasis in this paper. While in general terms the nation follows a free-market approach to economic policy, this has historically been within the context of government interventions to fulfil economic development, welfare and other political objectives. Liberal policies in the 1890s, in spite of the economic conditions, favoured government intervention to resolve labour unrest and ultimately set minimum wages and conditions. The situation was partly the outcome of unions, badly affected by strikes and unemployment in the 1890s, combining to form the Australian Labor Party and seek to alleviate working class weakness through political intervention. In the first decade of the 20th Century, Australia provided something of a model for other nations in establishing arbitration courts which settled industrial disputes through court awards setting out work practices and conditions and
stipulating minimum living wages. At both state and Commonwealth levels, most of industry is covered by such awards. Industry protection linked closely with labour market regulation to provide in theory a fair wage for a fair day's work. Apprenticeship training, the main avenue to skilled work, became tightly controlled within the arbitration court awards.

At the time of the 1890s depression, emergent Australian factories (most heavily represented in Victoria) adopted Taylorist style workforce measures under which mechanisation was wedded to specialisation and deskilling. For most firms this was simply a matter of adaptation to ensure economic survival, although in other interpretations the changes are viewed as standard capitalist strategies to minimise wages by replacing skilled workers by machines and reducing the power of organised labour through recruitment of semi-skilled workers, particularly women, to perform limited tasks. Similar conditions applied during the 1930s, by which time manufacturing was a more prominent feature of the Australian economy. Arbitration settlements in Australia have also been depicted in quasi Marxist terms, though most would hold the more liberal view. The ideological debate is not pursed in the present paper.

Without the benefit of Keynesian economic theory, the classical response to depression in the 1890s and 1930s was to slash government expenditure and cut wages and employment, the very measures that deepened the crisis. Following the 1930s depression, however, it became a matter of government priority to foster secondary industry as a counterweight to Australia's over-reliance upon agriculture and mining and provide employment in the cities. Under war conditions, secondary industry development became a matter of national survival whereas in the post-war years factories, sheltered by heavy tariff protection, benefited from generally prosperous conditions and population increases fuelled from the birth boom and immigration. Population increases, concentrated in the cities, were matched by a growth in service (tertiary) employment. Agriculture and mining, concentrated outside the cities and subject to free market competition, are technologically sophisticated and highly productive sectors of the Australian economy.

There was wide agreement in the 1980s that Australian industry, cossetted behind trade barriers and outdated work practices and union awards, became complacent and increasingly uncompetitive. All this rendered the nation vulnerable to technological changes and the internationalisation of trade, as well as the international recessions of the 1970s and 1980s. Australian industry adjusted too slowly during the 1970s, lacking a workforce culture awake to productivity through worker flexibility and technological innovation. Moreover, prosperity was still carried on the backs of sheep, the harvests of farmers
and the wealth of mining companies, none of which functioned in a protected trade environment. When the 1980s recessions bit hard, Australian was saddled with outdated technology and workforce rigidities which needed massive adjustment. Meanwhile, overseas trade balances worsened, national budget deficits increased and unemployment began to rise.

Unemployment during the three periods under scrutiny was extremely serious. In the years 1892 and 1893, possibly the worst in the 1890s, unemployment of adult males reached beyond 30 per cent of the workforce. In the 1930s the comparable figure was between 18 and 30 percent for adult males, around 45 percent for males between 15 and 19 years of age and probably about 80 percent for young girls. The lack of sophisticated statistical services, however, meant that nobody really knew how bad the situation was. During the halcyon post-war years unemployment in Australia was as low as 2 percent, and began rising only in the 1970s when it reached 4 percent after 1974 and rose to 7 percent in 1982. By 1992 the proportion out of work was more than 11 percent. Youth unemployment went from virtually nil in the early 1970s to 7 percent in the 1970s, rising to 18 percent between 1982 and 1985, and topped 30 percent in 1992. In the earlier depressions, employment recovered to pre-depression levels fairly quickly. Not so in the 1980s and 1990s, however, when the problems were more deep seated and technological changes had fundamentally altered industry and workforce organisation.

Australian federal and state governments in the 1980s, predominantly Labor, tackled the worsening economic situation with considerable vigour. Perhaps surprisingly, they adopted the "New Right" and corporatist policies of deregulation and privatisation with almost as much enthusiasm as the Thatcher and Reagan administrations. Macro- and micro-economic reform was promoted, however, from within the context of an industrial relations accord to ensure union cooperation in productivity improvement across the whole of the economy. The union movement, indeed, took something of a lead with publication in 1987 of a report entitled Australia Reconstructed, which outlined the findings of a joint union- government inquiry into structural change in the major European nations. Where industrial relations, skills development and workforce organisation are concerned, the union movement has cooperated with government by marrying acceptance of structural change, enterprise agreements on productivity and the acquisition of skills and flexibility to wage and salary awards under the existing though modified industrial arbitration systems.

The Elements of Crisis Policy Making.
Element 1: Public Inquiries into Education.

The 1980s are littered with the reports of federal and state governments that examine the performance of Australian education in relation to economic conditions. Most drew heavily upon what
was happening overseas. To illustrate, some of the major inquiries and government programs could be summarised in the following way:


**Schools:** Learning and Earning (AGPS, 1982).
- The Participation and Equity Program, 1983.
- The Quality of Education in Australia (the QERK Report) (AGPS, 1985).
- The Participation of Young People in Post-Compulsory Education in Australia (The Finn Report) (AGPS, 1991)

**Technical Review of TAFE Funding** (AGPS, 1985).
**Education Australia’s Industrial Training System** (AGPS, 1988).
- Priorities for TAFE in the 1990s (AGPS, 1989).

**Higher** Review of Efficiency and Effectiveness in Education (AGPS, 1986).
- A Plan for Higher Education in Australia (AGPS, 1988).

**Training** Labour Market Programs (The Kirby Report) (AGPS, 1985).
- Australia Reconstructed (ACTU, 1987).
- Industrial Training in Australia - Need for Change (AGPS, 1988).

The above represent only the more significant federal government inquiries and programs. At state levels, there are almost as many major inquiries, most of them following similar themes.

Economic conditions in the 1890s also produced major inquiries, which were similarly influenced by overseas experience. At the time, Australia was still made up of separate colonies; federation came only in 1901. The two most important inquiries were directed initially towards technical education, but inevitably widened to embrace the whole education system. In Victoria, Theodore Fink was appointed to head a royal commission on technical education, which was published in several parts over the period 1899 to 1901. New South Wales followed with a royal commission on technical education conducted by G.K. Knibbs and J.W. Turner, which published several progress reports between 1900 and 1905. The two inquiries were avidly read in the other states, being translated into their particular circumstances.
What is more important, they heralded further inquiries into the state school and university systems that preceded a complete transformation of Australian state education in the years prior to World War I.

Dire financial circumstances and a recurrence of political criticism of inefficiency opened the way to a similar spate of educational inquiries in the 1930s. In New South Wales there were the Report on technical education (1935), various aspects of education (Drummond Report (1936), and the Badderley Report on technical education in 1940. Although these were heavily oriented towards technical education and the apprenticeship system, they also dealt at length with the effectiveness of the primary and secondary schools in relation to youth employment. In Victoria, comparable reports were by a Board of Inquiry into Certain Matters Concerning the Education Department (1931) and a report on technical education in several overseas countries by E.P.Eltham (1936). Western Australia produced a parliamentary committee report into state education (1937) and royal commissions into youth employment and the apprenticeship system (1937) and into the administration of the University of Western Australia (1941-42).

Element 2: Re-Assertion of Conservative Values.

Throughout the years leading to the recession of 1987, Australian education was assailed on all fronts for having failed the nation's children where basic competence in numeracy and literacy was concerned. Industry was particularly critical, citing cases where functional illiteracy was a key factor in the exclusion of youth from jobs. During the 1980s the words "literacy" and "numeracy" appear with monotonous regularity in nearly all the inquiries and policy statements of Commonwealth and state governments. Policy implications have been far-reaching, commencing with demands to reform teacher education and curriculum, to devote special attention to the core subjects, and to introduce national and state level testing in the core areas for accountability and diagnostic purposes. On testing, whereas earlier attempts to introduce forms of national testing had foundered in 1981, owing to teacher union opposition, similar measures late in the 1980s fared much better.

The Commonwealth government exerted irresistible pressures on the states after 1987 to turn the "basics" debate into a national program. The minister, Dawkins, worked through the Australian Education Council to achieve agreement on the introduction of national curricula in the basic subject areas. The same body gave birth to the Finn and Mayer Reports, which have received national endorsement. These reports have spelt out
a national program of teaching and assessment in what have been termed Key Competencies for the world of work. National agreement to implement the main thrusts of the Carmichael Report (1992) means that national curricula and national competency testing may accompany the introduction of a national vocational training certificate system.

Economic conditions in the 1890s produced almost identical preoccupations about competence in the three Rs as occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. During the 1890s, however, elementary education had barely moved beyond this core in most colonies. In Victoria, government policy allowed these subjects to remain free of tuition charges, but imposed modest fees on all "extras". There was some apprehension at the time about permitting the working classes to grow "bigger than their boots" by broadening their education to encompass the liberal arts and science, which were deemed to be the province of grammar schools in the private sector. It was important, however, that instruction in these basic subjects should not only be efficiently done; it was necessary core for young working class boys and girls to move into the lowest industrial occupations.

In the 1930s criticisms of achievement in the three Rs were perhaps more akin to those of the later decades. Western Australia's captains of industry made no bones about their perception that standards had fallen, attributing this to the time devoted to "cultural" subjects. But similar concerns are interwoven through the pages of most of the reports of committees of inquiry that are mentioned above.

In all three depression decades there was a strong moral dimension to concern about the basic subjects and the educational role of state schools. The introduction of cultural content (history, geography, literature and science) into the elementary curriculum was viewed as detracting from competence in basic skills as well as having the potential to lure young people, largely from the working class, away from industrial occupations in the cities or from farming in the rural areas. This attitude underpinned support from industrial and commercial leaders for the majority of school children to receive a strongly utilitarian-vocational curriculum. Calls for a firmer hand in school discipline were another manifestation of this same line of attack. During the 1980s concern about discipline in state schools appears to have been a factor influencing a drift of enrolments from state to private schools. Over the decade, the proportion in non-state schools rose from around 23 per cent to nearly 30 percent.

Element 2: Extending Compulsory Education.

High levels of youth unemployment in the 1980s lay behind government policy to raise the levels of participation by
Australian young people in post-compulsory education.

International comparisons from the 1970s on placed Australia rather low on the list of advanced nations where participation at this level was concerned. More alarming was that up to 22 per cent of the age group left school without any training whatever. Two factors influencing the policy are easily identified. One was that groups most at risk invariably left school early; for them a longer schooling was intended to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for employment. Keeping young people at school longer also reduced pressure on youth labour markets, thus opening up opportunities for those most in need of jobs. Less creditable was the view, attributed to cynical politicians, that if young people were at school they did not appear in the unemployment statistics or on dole queues. Government policy in Australia, notably following the "Learning and Earning" report of 1982 but more particularly after the Finn and Carmichael reports of 1991 and 1992, is to lift participation of 15-19 year old youth to 95 per cent.

It is less easy to superimpose this concern with participation upon conditions in the 1890s, although something akin to it was present. At the same time as the captains of industry opposed extending the cultural riches of general education to the working classes, the liberal middle class parties and labour movement combined to pass legislation to ban child labour and sweating in apprenticeships and step up compliance with compulsory clauses of the various education acts. In Victoria the school leaving age was raised by legislation to 14 years of age and in other states truancy was severely dealt with during the decades either side of 1900. Keeping children at school for longer also meant, of course, relieving pressure on employment markets for older workers.

Economists during the 1930s were more forthright in arguing the case for extending the compulsory leaving age to 15 years. Falling birth rates during the early depression years created favourable demographic conditions, while an additional compulsory year - it was believed - would delay by one year the appearance of young people upon the labour market. Leaders in commerce and industry were not convinced of the value of this extra year; but they were sure about what curriculum would be appropriate: it would be heavily vocational in orientation and based upon a solid grasp of the 3 Rs. Most states legislated for a leaving age of 15 during the 1940s, but waited till the 1960s before implementing it. Most also reshaped lower secondary school public examinations to give more equal standing to vocational-style subjects.

Raising the age of compulsion, although considered during the 1970s and 1980s, was hardly necessary since jobs for unprepared youth had largely disappeared from the economy. Indeed, the poor labour market for young people in the 1980s virtually forced them to stay at school in increasing numbers,
lifting participation to around 65 percent in 1983. Current policy, seeking a 95 percent participation in education, training or employment by 2000, is linked to a complete overhaul of institutional and curriculum arrangements at this level.

Element 4: The Vocationalisation of Secondary Education.

The role of education as a selection instrument for the world of work attracts attention from revisionist historians, who describe the process as fitting working class people into the capitalist organisation of industry. It is nevertheless true that social policy from the 19th Century has sought to equalise working class access to elementary and later secondary schools not only through extending compulsory education but also by delaying selection into vocational streams and widening the general education base of compulsory schooling.

In times of depression, however, this general curriculum has attracted criticism in relation to employment. The reasons are many, including the charge of irrelevance and lowered academic standards coupled to poor cultural preparation for the realities of working life. Those resisting the excessive emphasis on employment preparation in schools stress the humanitarian and social-egalitarian purposes of general education and in particular the comprehensive school. Resolving this dilemma presents a moving compromise heightened by the pressures of high youth unemployment.

During the 1980s and 1990s the utilitarian thrust of educational reform dominated federal and state government agendas. At the national level, the Labor Government and peak industry and union organisations have led the movement, drawing heavily upon findings of the Australia Reconstructed report of 1987. Indeed, Lawrence Carmichael, a key union leader for more than twenty years, became a dominant figure associated with award restructuring in industry. The ideas of skills development and competency accreditation permeate the whole education reform movement, from support for national curricula and testing and the reorientation of teacher education to the creation of a National Training Board (and more recently the Australian National Training Authority - ANTA) responsible for spelling out in competency terms a national system of industry standards, at eight levels, that integrates with formal education, on-the-job training and mixtures of both. Far-reaching changes to existing forms of apprenticeship and other forms of training are anticipated. Federal government support for the introduction of a National Vocational Certificate Training System linked to key competency testing, National Training Board training standards and industry wage awards promises to effect the most thorough-going transformation of upper secondary education that Australia has ever witnessed. All this is tellingly reflected in the
restructuring and renaming of most departments of education as departments or ministries of employment and education, with "training" also added in the case of the federal department concerned.

Under national policy in the 1990s Australian governments are restructuring higher secondary education to focus heavily upon the skills required for work, albeit in a society reliant upon high technology and a more sophisticated organisation of industry. Between the ages of 15 and 19 Australian youth in the 1990s are intended to undergo an education that includes instruction and assessment in Key Competencies besides finding a planned pathway of education, training and work experience that will lead to job-entry skill levels or further education and training. All this is to be integrated with different approaches to secondary and technical education (including the establishment of "senior colleges") as well as planned work experience and training in industry. It is a scheme on the grand scale which challenges the perennial status of academic preparation for higher education while retaining it for the students concerned, seeks to balance general education with preparation to entry level jobs and technical education for others and superimposes over all a national system of key competency assessment and vocational qualifications. Selection of suitable "pathways" implies detailed planning, guidance and advisement in schools.

The most telling aspect of this intended reform, given the constitutional difficulties in a federal system, is the surprising support it has won in the state legislatures of all political colours and among the opposition parties. The Australian Education Council, as mentioned before, cooperated with the Commonwealth to achieve state agreement to the reform program, although hitches developed in the plan during 1993. During 1991 the Commonwealth stirred debate about its taking over financial responsibility for technical and further education in the states. Although the proposals failed in the face of state resistance, the scheme if introduced would have permitted national dominance of the vocational and training systems beyond secondary school along lines already functioning in higher education, which since 1973 has been totally funded from the Commonwealth purse.

Peak industry bodies and the union movement are in general agreement with the reforms, and the Liberal-National Party Coalition built the system into its (unsuccessful) election policies for 1993. Coalition policy, if anything, went even further than Labor's in favouring a market-driven, vocationally oriented, competency-based system that added a voucher approach to funding that was intended to replace existing bureaucratic methods of budgeting, fund allocation and accountability.

All parties concerned have accepted the "human capital"
doctrines underpinning "Australia Reconstructed", while the terms "skill" and "competency" have achieved a remarkable grip on political imaginations. The new pressures threaten to swamp the wider aims of education at all levels. School systems struggle to retain elements of the liberal tradition in secondary education, while universities have balked nationally at the push for competency assessment in the professions. They may be fighting a losing battle.

Controversies about selection and vocational preparation were not so acute in the 1930s, when the movement towards universal secondary education was in its infancy and separate tracking beyond the elementary school excited little controversy from the political left. Educationists facing criticism about the general curriculum nevertheless argued strongly against denying children access to the wider cultural subjects that were deemed necessary to good citizenship, intellectual liberation and class mobility. They also opposed premature specialisation, which was deemed unsuitable for job preparation in a quickly changing economy.

On the other hand, during the 1930s vocational guidance gained almost motherhood status as the bridge between education and jobs. State initiatives, however, were largely overpowered by the sheer magnitude of youth unemployment and lack of resources although conditions improved somewhat later in the decade. Meanwhile, philanthropic and community bureaux for care, training and placement of young people, which proliferated during the depression, experienced a measure of success. In Queensland, government employment bureaux in various regions appeared to work especially well. A lesson from the depression experience, but not capitalised upon in the post-war boom period, was that guidance and placement needed the vigorous involvement of local communities and industry.

In the first decade of the present century doctrines of utility and national efficiency were driving forces behind reforms to state education, although tempered to a degree by humanitarian features of the "New Education". While reactionary views about the state's role in universal elementary (primary) education did not ultimately prevail, extension beyond that level in state education was heavily influenced by utilitarian ideals. Highly selective institutions were established that separated state academic high schools from post-primary classes with agricultural, industrial, commercial and domestic science biases.

In Victoria, junior technical schools were introduced as a separate system intended for early school leavers needing pre-vocational training, while Tate won the battle for state high schools by clothing his intentions in propaganda emphasising their value for agricultural education in rural centres. In most states, the new academic high schools adopted a "modern"
curriculum, which was intentionally contrasted with the "classical" traditions of the independent (private) grammar schools. Whether these reforms were a capitalist plot is another matter, which demands closer analysis than can be attempted here.

The main liberalising forces in state education, it needs emphasising, have come in more affluent times and especially in response to the experience of two world wars. Although this theme lies outside the scope of the present paper, it demands passing attention since economic crisis has tended to overshadow the humanitarian goals of general/liberal education. The humanising purposes of education, however, reasserted themselves following widespread repulsion at the carnage of war and the tyranny of totalitarian regimes. Egalitarian imperatives also have resurfaced in such circumstances. It is not surprising that the cultural importance of general education and its value in a democracy revived in post-war years, although periods of relative affluence were probably necessary to finance the reforms.

Element 5: Education and Training for the Disadvantaged.

Affirmative action to assist the disadvantaged - women, people in isolated districts, migrants, aborigines and the physically handicapped - was built into all schemes for employment-related education and training in the 1980s. Participation and equity were the twin pillars of all policy to promote access to education and jobs, with a special emphasis on women and girls. Studies show, however, that even in technical education, females are heavily represented in traditional "women's" occupational training programs and are virtually excluded from all apprentice trades (except hairdressing). The isolation of aborigines from normal access to employment is an on-going and intractible problem in Australia. Migration generally, especially from Asian regions, poses fewer problems though it has been a feature of all debates about the levels and composition of annual migrant intakes.

By this time, Australia had become a more diverse society than before World War II, owing to post-war migration from Europe and subsequent waves of refugee intakes from Asian countries. In the 1930s and the 1890s Australian society was predominantly white and drawn from the British islands (including Eire). Aborigines were even excluded from the census, and so not counted among the general population. Legislation, moreover, had excluded non-European migrants (the so-called "White Australia" policy) on both industrial and racial grounds. Equity issues in the 1930s therefore focussed on access to education and training in isolated districts (which was mostly covered by the extension of correspondence training) and the special problems facing unemployed youth.

One interesting feature concerned the employment problems of women and young girls. The then infant women's movement effectively spelt out all the employment disadvantages faced by
women in the 1930s, which read surprisingly like their disadvantages in the 1980s. Only 21 percent of the workforce then comprised women, however, as compared with nearly 50 percent in the 1980s. Even so women in employment were blamed for the high level of youth unemployment, especially among boys.

In principle, however, as employment opportunities for women could not be denied, the various inquiries surveyed ways to improve the situation. Though the women's leadership identified barriers against women and girls entering male-dominated fields (especially apprenticeship), they focussed on domestic service and homemaking for appropriate occupational training. Notable achievements at the time included expansion of the Emily McPherson College of Domestic Economy in Melbourne and the introduction of domestic science (later home economics) courses in Western Australia. In New South Wales, however, E.M.Simmons, Manageress of the Women's Employment Agency, identified the basic problem: 'The Australian girl', she concluded, 'is not domestic minded!' and wherever possible preferred factory work with regular hours to the degrading conditions of employment in homes and kitchen.

As for the 1890s, women's voices were seldom heard, since traditional attitudes placed females as wives, mothers, domestic servants and (increasingly) production line workers in factories. In the post-primary grades and in technical education, the only new developments involved the introduction of domestic and commercial (typing and shorthand) courses and training in such other areas as millinery and dress-making. They were barred from apprenticeship under award agreements reached in the new arbitration courts, though admitted to training as "improvers" in the textile industry for example and paid half the male rates of pay.

Element 6: Labour Market Training.

Concerns about the employability of about 22 per cent of young people who left school early and sought entry to the workforce without suitable training lay behind a national survey of labour market training in 1985 (the Kirby Report). This pinpointed one of the key issues: that in Australia, traditional apprenticeship was virtually the only form of such training, and it was old fashioned and rigidly structured to suit industries that were stagnant or of declining significance. At the same time, specially targeted training programs which had been intended for unemployed youth suffered from their ad hoc and highly specialised character. Following the Kirby report, the Commonwealth introduced the Australian traineeship system under the banner "Priority One", which aimed to provide job-entry training for boys and girls located under contract in industry but supported by periods of vocational education in technical
colleges. The scheme developed more slowly than anticipated, however, being absorbed into the national vocational certificate training scheme intended to introduction in 1993.

In the meantime skills development in industry became a national priority following the "Australia Reconstructed" report. Commonwealth leadership to rectify the deplorable condition of industry-based training in Australia targeted the culture of training in a two-pronged attack. One involved restructuring the whole area of industrial relations, to link wage settlements to productivity gains achieved through enterprise agreements on flexible work practices and skills development. The other was to introduce, in 1990, the Training Guarantee Act under which industry was required to invest a small proportion of the sum expended on wages for approved training. This training in turn was tied into award restructuring and productivity bargaining.

The rigidity of Australian apprenticeship training dated from the 1890s depression when, as already described, it was pulled into the arbitration award system and tied to Taylorist industrial organisation. Technical education became involved to supplement on-the-job training with theoretical instruction, a practice which eventually became compulsory by industrial law in most states by the 1920s.

In the 1930s apprenticeship became a particular concern since the older craft-based training had been undermined by mechanisation and the assembly line, yet industrial arbitration preserved the institution inviolate. All the major inquiries in the 1930s advocated substantial reform of the system, with industry favouring a less structured industry trainee system (as in New South Wales). Others thought it should be abandoned completely. In the event, the industrial relations implications of change were so daunting that governments preferred to strengthen the existing apprenticeship system. It was viewed as an antidote to youth unemployment and as preparing a pool from which trained young people might be drawn when the depression lifted. Most states used the Commonwealth grants for youth employment after 1937 to support apprentice or trainee training.

Conclusion

The present paper has focussed upon educational policies forged in the heat of economic adversity and implemented in a climate of utilitarian and reformist ideology driven by industrial crisis and high levels of unemployment. In the Australian setting it has been argued that there are elements of such policies associated with the economic depressions of the 1890s and 1930s, and the severe recession of the 1980s, that are remarkably similar in essentials though occurring within historical contexts that differ in important ways. In
particular, attention is drawn to the far-reaching impact of the recessions of the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the all-encompassing nature of educational reforms associated with industry restructuring in this more recent period.

Six elements of crisis policy making have been identified: the holding of major public inquiries into education; the reassertion of essential subjects and conservative moral values; pressures to lengthen the period of compulsory education; a resurgence of public support for employment-related forms of education; concern for the training of disadvantaged groups in society (especially in this case women); and renewed commitments to labour market training.

In concentrating upon the characteristic educational policy responses in such periods of crisis, the paper consciously focusses on aspects of policy making in Australia that have only recently attracted the attention of historians working in the field of education. The major part of historical work has singled out the periods of growth and development, which lend themselves to liberal and expansive policy-making, and has virtually ignored technical education and industrial training.

As a final and related comment, it appears true that even while contraction, economy and utility dominate attention in the crisis periods, the liberal and progressive themes dominant in other periods are always poised to reassert themselves. Two world wars widened the visions of policy makers beyond the limited horizon of work. There are contradictions anyway within many of the policy elements chosen for special emphasis here, and they ultimately tend to reinforce the more liberal purposes in education and training. In better economic times it does not take long for these purposes to infuse once more with humanity the utilitarian structures and institutions created in adversity.

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Gregory, The Fiscal Justification for Retrenchment of Victorian Education in the 1890s, op.cit.


McMahon, op.cit.

One of the more explicit statements is in Western Australia, Royal Commission into Youth Employment and the Apprenticeship System, evidence of Professor Bernard Fisher, cited in White, op.cit.. See also Walker, op.cit., pp.104-112 and Report of Select Committee upon the Employment of Youth in Industry (in New South Wales), op.cit. The matter received a great deal of attention throughout the world at this time, for instance in the deliberations of the International Labour Organisation.


Inquiry into Labour Market Training, op..cit., p.50.

Finn Report, op.cit., chapter 3.


Britain's experience with the comprehensive secondary school
policy are a clear case in point.

The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System, op.cit.

Fight Back (Liberal Party of Australia, 1991) - Supplementary Papers: "World Class Schools, Universities and Training.

Typical is the view of James Nangle from New South Wales, in Commission on Technical Education, Report, op.cit., pp.86-87.

Holbrook, Slotting them into the right niche, op.cit.


McMahon, op.cit. provides a useful survey of provision for women and girls in the 1890s in Victoria.


See Birman, W. and M.White, "The apprenticeship training system in Western Australia - a history" Melbourne Studies in Education, 1981, pp.156-183 provides one of the only comprehensive historical studies of apprenticeship in Australia. Though restricted to one state, the story is very similar in most Australian states.

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The topic receives a thoroughly Marxist treatment in McMahon, J.P., op.cit., Chapter 1.