Hogging and Coagulating the Australian Education Agenda
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Abstract:
This paper draws on a larger ARC-funded study of the Australian
Education Council 1987-1994 (Porter, Bartlett, Knight, Lingard)
to address some major changes in Australian educational policy
formulation from the 1980s and their implications. Central to our
discussion are the shifts in power and control associated with the
increasing ministerialisation of policy and the more recent shift to
direction from Premiers and Premiers Departments and the Council of
Australian Governments. We address in turn the restructuring

of state apparatuses and increasing political control of education at
State and Federal levels, and the consequent restructuring of education
policy making. The analysis modifies Offe's thesis that the internal
structure of the state mediates policy production and that policy is
the resultant of competing economic and democratic pressures, to take
account of the federal structure of the Australian state and the impact
of globalisation of the economy on the capacity of the nation-state to
balance these pressures in achieving policy settlements. Here, adapting
Lash and Urry, we
see a global/local reconstitution of Australian federalism which is
simultaneously under pressure from global developments and internal
fragmentation. In reviewing these developments, and in line with
Raymond William's conceptualisation of change, we recognise that the
changes are not totally linear but dynamic and overlapping,
simultaneously containing residual, dominant and emergent features.
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1. Silencing the Lambs: The Slaughterhouse State?

The point of departure for this paper is an observation by a past
DirectorGeneral of Education in one of the seven Australian States and
Territories. This person was one of the last of those "old-style" D-Gs
who had risen from the classroom to head office. Viewing the decisions
on curriculum, profiles, competencies and so forth which were made at
the Australian Education Council (AEC) in the late 1980s and early
1990s, they commented with some bitterness on the increasing distance
between the decision-makers and classroom teachers, and the former's
lack of any understanding at all of the nature of classrooms, students,
and teachers' work.
Why have the voices of teachers been silenced in current restructurings
and policy formulations? Too much of what has been written on the
1980s restructurings of educational systems in Australia, school-based
management, processes of devolution and the like provides an idealist
-- and overly idealistic -- formulation of teachers as professionals,

their current work processes and settings. Rhetoric becomes confused
with practice; terms such as "devolution", "school-based",
"empowerment", or "reflexivity" assume a
constant meaning; their histories, contexts and particularities are
ignored. In our view, work of this sort contributes to teacher
disillusionment, cynicism, disempowerment, and burnout. We argue,
instead, for a realistic appraisal of the possibilities and limitations
of action in the present condition.

In this paper, then, we address some major changes in the mode of
Australian educational policy formulation from the 1980s and their
consequences. Our argument is that the voices of teachers and

principals -the professionals from the field -- and of those who are
involved in teacher education and research on education, have been
marginalised and excluded from educational policy making by the
structural arrangements for such policy making and the increasing and
overt politicisation of the decision-making process. As Stephen Ball
says of the English situation, 'The teacher is increasingly an absent
presence in the discourses of education policy, an object rather than a
subject of discourse' (Ball, 1994:50). We argue further that the new
policy structures which have resulted in this 'decentring' of

teachers (Ball, 1994) index this nation's attempt to reposition itself
within the global economy and the related shift from a welfare state
towards what Cerny (1990) has described as a competitive state.
In a period of fluctuating global and local recession and relatively
high unemployment, the Federal government has been unwilling to make
the

electorally unpopular decision to increase the fiscal take. And in a
postKeynesian era, there are obvious limits to the degree that deficit
budgeting would be accepted by the markets as a solution. That given,
production from the private sector has not been sufficient to produce
an adequate fiscal surplus from which the state could provide an
extensive range of public services while also providing the conditions
in which the private sector could return to prosperity and wage justice
prevail (cf. Offe, 1984). In consequence, the Federal government has
given priority to economic and industry reforms, in which wage rises
are coupled to improvements in productivity, and to a more efficient
delivery of "public" provision of services, many of which have been
converted from universalist to user-pays approaches. Corporate
managerialist reforms (Yeatman, 1990) of the structures and processes
of the public sector have been set in place, and 'economic rationalism'
has become a driving force in the public sector (cf. Marginson, 1993;
Pusey, 1991).

In the private sector, industry was to become more efficient and more competitive in the global marketplace. At the macroeconomic level, this was sought through a process of deregulation, with a substantial reduction of tariffs, the floating of the currency, and freeing up the banking sector. At the microeconomic level, it meant industry by industry restructuring of organisation and production processes on post-fordist lines, with flexible multi-skilled workers. There was a concomitant shift in industrial relations from the centralised domination of the Industrial Relations Commission to workplace-based enterprise bargaining in order to support increased productivity much more directly. Union amalgamations, on an industry basis
rather than the old groupings by trades and skills, were intended to facilitate these changes. Microeconomic reform, then, required changes of regulation, restructuring and a degree of devolution. It also required particular forms of educational "reform".
New forms of control were also developed, focussing on a high-level, managed consensus between the state, business and workers. Thus, in typical neo-corporatist form, Federal Labor developed consultative forums and councils with peak employer and union groups. Examples include its close relationship with the ACTU (Australian Council of Trade Unions) and the series of Accords (agreements) over wages and conditions struck with the ACTU, and EPAC (the Economic Planning Advisory Council), which draws on government, business and union sectors to advise the Prime Minister on matters related to economic policy. Similar structures have been developed in other policy areas. In this process, the importance of the ACTU as the peak body representing Australian workers, was greatly enhanced as also were

industry and employer associations (bodies ironically created in response to Labor's policy regime) such as the Business Council of Australia and the Confederation of Australian Industry.
In 1987, there was a major restructuring of the internal organisation and functions of the Federal bureaucracy for three purposes: greater ministerial control and direction over the bureaucracy; a more efficient and effective system of governance; and a better articulated and more effective approach to improving the economy. This was sought through the adaptation of

management structures and processes for improved productivity from the private sector. The consequence was, for example, such mega-departments as Employment, Education and Training (DEET) and Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Similar restructurings on a 'corporate managerial' basis have been undertaken by the States (Lingard, 1993). The rise to prominence of a Senior Executive Service [SES] meant that competence in management was prioritised over professional knowledge (Pusey, 1991). Hence Chief Executive Officers were routinely shifted to manage Departments of whose particular functions and services they had little specific knowledge. New processes of accountability using performance

indicators were installed. The consequences have been a substantial loss of "institutional memory" and a discursive and material shift to a post-welfare state.

This period also saw the increasing prominence of intergovernmental

councils and attempts at "a new federalism" as a means of rationalising the provision of services between the States and the Commonwealth; they also became sites for contesting the nature of Federal/State relationships (eg. States Rights vs. Commonwealth control). Thus long-standing ministerial councils such as the Australian Education Council (AEC) changed from their prior role as "talk-fests" for ministers while their Directors-General

conferenced, to peak councils at which policy issues of major significance were resolved and matters of funding and long-term planning at the national level were addressed. In this process, the power and influence of senior public servants was considerably reduced. In a further related development, the earlier Heads of Government (HOGs) meetings were likewise transformed into the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). The consequence has been an increasingly centralised exercise of power and decision-making, at a greater remove from the "work-face" where services are delivered (eg, schools, hospitals, The Commonwealth Employment Service). Here we would draw

attention to the formation of the Senior Executive Service, whose members are on contracts and distinct from the rest of the bureaucracy, the "politicisation" and "ministerialisation" of decision-making, and a further shift in authority from ministers to heads of government, where decisions affecting a range of portfolios are now made (cf. Knight & Lingard, 1995).

Given the Federal government's commitment to microeconomic reform and wage justice in the transition to a postindustrial and internationally competitive economy, the development of human skills for a "clever country" and a flexible and post-fordist workforce became crucial. Thus education was to be harnessed "in the national interest" to the cause of economic recovery.

Equally, it was to operate more efficiently in achieving more precisely specified outcomes; that is, for the Minister and for DEET, it was itself the target for microeconomic reform. For all these reasons, then, the period from the early 1980s has seen the establishment of a

narrower, more tightly focussed policy agenda and a strengthening of the policy authority of State and Federal politicians over senior bureaucrats. In this period also, teachers' voices have been silenced through the restructurings of the States' systems of education along corporate managerialist lines and the concomitant top-down politicisation of educational policy-making.

These developments arguably presage a new policy settlement for

Australian education. In saying this, however, we would stress their
shifting, contested and contingent character, and the lack of any
single logic in their outworkings. In line with Raymond William's
(1981) conceptualisation of

change, we recognise that these changes to policy-making structures
have not been totally linear but dynamic and overlapping,
simultaneously containing residual, dominant and emergent features.
Thus while the restructurings of the State and Federal apparatuses can
be treated in three conceptually and
temporally distinct parts -- ministerialisation,
"supraministerialisation", and the setting up of SPCs and COAG for HOGs
-- the reality is much messier. Yet
it is the confluence of these factors which has led to our
characterisation of the hogging and coagulating of the Australian
education policy agenda. Hence

despite the rhetorics of devolution and school-based management,
educational policy formulation has now been moved even further from
schools and teachers. Indeed, the current constructions of
school-based management have
distanced teachers from the new managers of schools. And if "steering
from a distance" (Marceau, 1991) is increasingly the new form of
control, it proceeds at best clumsily and with many corrections. We now
turn to address these issues in detail.
2. Restructuring the State Apparatuses and Increasing Political
Control:
a: Ministerialisation: At State and Federal levels of government there
have been substantial changes in relationships between ministers and
their bureaucracies. In general, ministers now take a much more
prescriptive and "hands on" approach to policy and departmental
direction. This shift, which is a concomitant of the new managerialism
and the increasing strength of executive government, has seen the
creation of a Senior Executive Service with Chief Executive Officers
for each Ministry. Typically, members of the SES are now on employment
contracts, rather than having permanency of tenure as in the old
bureaucratic structures.
Typically, also, the new system prefers that its SES is composed of
 officers with generic skills (generic competencies?) in management or a

background in economics rather than specific professional content and
experience (eg, in education, transport, communication...). Such
managers can be moved from Ministry to Ministry, bringing their
(content-free) skills
with them. They are not so much involved in the production of policy
-- which is the business of the Minister -- as in overseeing its
development and implementation. The risk of "producer capture" is also

thereby diminished; such CEOs do not know enough, nor will they remain
long enough to identify with interested groups and constituencies
within and beyond the particular domain which they currently manage. At
the Federal level, this
ministerialisation is amplified by the physical separation of ministers

and their advisers from their departments.
The use of political advisers ("minders") and their increasing

prominence in each Minister's office is now assumed. Their role in the
policy process can be substantial. But as with the SES, their knowledge
of the technical and professional issues germane to the Ministry may be
minimal. Their interests are the welfare of the Party they serve and
the image and performance of their Minister.
The result of all this has been tighter political control over a
 narrower agenda, and a quasi-market emphasis on efficiency in delivery
 of services, product accountability and outcome measures. And the
 demise of the values

and traditions of the "public service" (cf. Pusey, 1991).
b. Supra-ministerialisation: Across this period, the central agencies
of government have increased in power and influence over the line
departments. In the Federal government, this has been the case for the
Prime Minister and Cabinet, and Treasury and Finance (Pusey, 1991).
The process of managing policy direction across a range of ministries
has been made easier by the restructuring of the Federal bureaucracy,
the rearticulation of departments into new and fewer "super ministries"
such as the Departments of Employment, Education and Training, and
Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the mobility across portfolios of the
new breed of generic managers. The continued recruitment of economists
to senior positions in service departments has also helped to ensure
that metapolicy prescriptions from the central agencies take precedence
(Pusey, 1991).
In the States, the Premier's Department, or the Office of Cabinet, and
 Treasury (Painter, 1987) have risen in authority; however this has been
 to a
considerable degree contingent on the various cultures of different
States, the modus operandi of various Premiers and their attitude to
and perception of ministers (eg, Arnold/Bannon in S.A. compared with
Goss in Qld). As with

the Commonwealth, this process has been assisted by departmental
restructurings, generic managers, and a more "hands-on" control by
Premiers (and their special advisers) and Treasurers.
c. Hogging and coagulating policy agendas: The development of Special
Premiers' Conferences under Prime Minister Hawke from the prior Heads

of Governments (HOGs) meetings, and the subsequent development of the
Council of Australian Governments (COAG) under Prime Minister Keating,
has seen a further shift of power from line departments to the central
agencies of government and the contested development of "collaboration"
"in the national interest" between States and the Commonwealth.
Major aspects of the context of these changes at the national level
included the continuing globalisation of the Australian economy; the
concomitant increasing dominance of market liberalism; the resultant
pressures on and reconstitution of the nation-state; the move from the
keynesian welfare state to the post-keynesian competitive state; and
(related) the corporate managerialist restructuring of the policy
apparatus of government.
Within that framing, the SPCs and then COAG were used to: reconstitute
Federal-State relations in finance and policy terms; reconsider and
rationalise the division of roles and responsibilities between the two
tiers of government (including rationalising intergovernmental
agencies) with consequent reductions in cost to government; develop an
efficient national economic infrastructure; and produce a range of
national (rather than Commonwealth) policies (Lingard, 1993).

Hawke's vision of "New Federalism" was central to the development of

the SPC process and probably important in its focus on financial
relations and the appropriate distribution of roles and
responsibilities between the dual jurisdictions. In this process Hawke
raised the possibility of addressing the vertical fiscal imbalance
between the Commonwealth's greater revenue raising
capacities and the States' constitutional responsibilities for a large
and expensive set of services, in which schooling and health in
particular are major budget items.
However, after Keating became Prime Minister, the SPC process was
 replaced by COAG. Important in this move was Keating's stronger support
 for vertical fiscal imbalance which slowed down many aspects of Hawke's
 agenda. Keating's Press Club speech of Oct. 1991 just prior to his
 successful challenge for the Prime Ministership, is an important
 signifier of this shift. Recent developments include the use of the
 Industry Commission to review the efficiency of a range of industries
 at the national level and attempts to implement the recommendations of
 the Hilmer Report regarding monopoly provision of State services.
 While Keating remains committed to the establishment of an efficient
 national economic infrastructure, this remains within his conception of
 'One Nation' (Keating, 1992). Thus he has insisted that Commonwealth
 fiscal authority is crucial to continued national coherence and the
 national government's capacity for policy steering in the context of an
 emerging global economy. The issue remains contested; the States have
 even sought to develop cooperative relationships and rationalise
 services without reference to the Commonwealth. They continue to seek
 a greater proportion of Commonwealth funding and (as against targeted

funding) they assert their right to determine the uses to which
Commonwealth allocations are applied.
3. Restructuring Education Policy Making.
As noted above, these developments are dynamic and overlapping, and the

same can be said for changes in the domain of education from the 1980s.
Nevertheless, the processes of ministerialisation and politicisation,
supraministerialisation and centralised prescription, and hogging and
coagulating have significantly altered the balance of power in
educational policy making so that policy is now steered at an
increasingly vast distance from schools. The consequence, in terms of
disempowering teachers and the silencing of their voices is clear. We
turn to address these matters in more detail.
a) The ministerialisation and politicisation of the education agenda:
This period has seen the peak intergovernmental ministerial council,
the AEC, substantially increase in significance to a major policy site
for Australian education. It has also seen attempts (mediated by
political realities) at amalgamation of cognate policy domains in
training and youth affairs, first with the informal and then formal
addition of MOVEET (Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and
Training) to form AEC/MOVEET and then with the formation of the
Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth
Affairs [MCEETYA] (Lingard, Porter, Bartlett, Knight, 1995). This
increased policy significance was at the expense of other agencies,
including the Conference of Directors-General, State Departments or
Ministries of Education, and NBEET (National Board for Employment,
Education and

Training -- an advisory body for DEET and the Federal Minister) and its
various councils. Thus the AEC: produced the Hobart Declaration
(Common and Agreed Goals for Australian Schools, 1989); established the

process of annual National Reports on Australian Schooling (though the
degree of their detail was contested by the States); supported but
fought over the development of National Curriculum Statements and
Profiles; developed the National Strategy for Equity in Schooling
(somewhat uncomfortably aligned with DEET's Commonwealth-funded
National Equity Program for Schools); appointed the Finn Committee to
address post-compulsory education and
training, participation rates, key competencies, etc. and the Mayer
Committee to Mayer Committee to further develop key competencies for
schooling; endorsed (with some unease) the Carmichael Committee's
proposals for an Australian Vocational Certificate training system;
appointed the Ebbeck Review of teacher education; and established the
National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning.
Spaull (1987) claims that from 1972, with the Commonwealth Minister
becoming a full member of the AEC, the AEC ostensibly became a site at

which the States responded to the Commonwealth agenda. In our view,
there has
been a subsequent shift accompanying the process of ministerialisation
so that the AEC became a site where ministers contest Commonwealth
policies and negotiate national policies. What we have seen, then, is
an ongoing

contestation between the Federal and State and Territory ministers for
control of this "national" agenda. This is not to say that "State's
Rights" has lost its appeal, rather that all of the States accept the
need for a common position on national issues, or (for the most
extreme) a national agenda without Commonwealth participation.
Contention more often centres on the division of
roles and responsibilities, and financial relations, particularly the
issue of tied versus untied grants. In the Dawkins' era, with a
majority of the States under Labor governments, Dawkins and DEET
established a general ascendancy.

Since that time, the political pendulum has swung to State Coalition
governments, and even Labor States (Queensland and New South Wales)
have been known to oppose Commonwealth prescriptions. The use of
ministers only
sessions to reach consensus outside the bureaucratic and public gaze,
and the increased frequency of AEC meetings are also indicative of the
shift. In consequence, as noted previously, AEC meetings became a major
site of national policy formulation rather than, as previously, more of
a talk-fest.
Later, in the process of the shift from AEC to MCEETYA the following
developments indicate increased politicisation and even greater
ministerial control: the attempted elimination of all AEC working
parties; the Standing Committee of Directors-General has been
abolished; sunset clauses are set for all new working parties; all
agenda items to be considered in the ministerial meetings rather than
their prior culling by the Standing Committee (Bartlett, Knight,
Lingard, Porter, 1994). None of these shifts have diminished the
general commitment to education restructuring and the microeconomic
reform process.
Within the States, considerable systemic and organisational
restructurings have also taken place. There has been a shift from the
pyramidal structure of the traditional bureaucracies to a flatter
("coathanger") form of administration with fewer functions. The
consequence, however, is not the end of bureaucracy, but its
reformulation for (postmodern?) hard times. The relationship between
the centre (Head Office) and the periphery (regions and schools) has
been greatly changed.

Curriculum frameworks and testing have been centralised while

implementation processes and accountability procedures, reporting, etc have been devolved to schools. Funding similarly is moving to a "one-line budget" system with

accountability provisions. That is to say, schools are told what to do; they are now responsible for how they shall do it. This is at best a travesty of professionalism. As Hargreaves (1994) has pointed out of the Canadian

context, the work of teachers and school administrators has intensified in kind and extended in range, the relationships between teachers and administrators have been problematised, and pressures for efficiency have been counterproductive for real school effectiveness. In short, despite glowing promotions of the "self-managing school" (eg, Caldwell and Spinks, 1988), the reality is less pleasing (cf. Smyth, 1993; Angus, 1994). As Ball (1994:78) observes, 'self-management is a mechanism for delivering reform rather than a vehicle for institutional initiative and innovation'. What we have, indeed, is schools as the object of the State's steering from a distance. Here is the new form of governmentality for the post-industrial age. Management joins assessment as the de facto fulcrum of schooling. And now, in Victoria for example, self-management means doing more with less. Unfortunately, this

does not equate with working smarter, not harder.
b) HOGging and COAGulating the education agenda: Attempts by HOGs at SPCs to reconstitute federalism in terms of financial and functional relationships impacted on aspects of education. This is the beginning of a trend in which decisions with consequences for education are increasingly taken at sites even more remote than the AEC and MCEETYA from the usual

education policy communities and by people with little specialist or professional knowledge in the area. Thus in the minutes of the AEC there are reports of,

for example, the Special Premiers' Conference Schools Working Party, the Higher Education Working Party, Training and Labour Markets Working Party, and so on. And MCEETYA itself was created and the AEC/MOVEET working parties abolished in response to a COAG decision to reduce the number of inter-governmental councils. Similarly, it was COAG (rather than MCEETYA) which agreed to the National Asian Languages/Culture Strategy. Interestingly, this was an issue initiated by the Premiers Department and Office of Cabinet in Queensland, and thus an example of the intersection of

supra-ministerialisation and coagulation. COAG also instructed the Industry

Commission to examine and advise on the efficiency of the service provision in Australia's eight government education systems, to

determine best practice through benchmarking, and to develop a set of performance indicators to enable a comparison between them. While this policy intention has been deferred by a prompt response from, inter alia, the ACER, the Australian Council of Deans in Education, the National Schools Network, and the Australian Education Union, the threat remains and the overall push from the
top for efficiency in schooling will continue. In short, decisions to rationalise inter-governmental relations and to clarify roles and responsibilities between the two jurisdictions made by HOGs at COAG impact in an ill-informed and counterproductive manner on the structure of policy-making and the nature of the policies.

4. Steering at a Distance: The Dead End?
While there have been substantial shifts towards national frameworks in education, parallelling shifts in other social policy domains (eg, transport, housing, health, law), they have been increasingly distanced from those (eg, teachers, students, school administrators, parents) who have to deliver or

who are most directly affected by these policies. While these shifts are justifiable within the Westminster system, their topdown character reduces the potential for more participatory modes of policy production involving the broader education policy community. Their consequence for implementation is problematic if there is little support from State systems and teachers, parents
etc. at the local level. Put another way, the distance between the site of policy production and the sites of practice means a greater likelihood of the refraction of the original policy intention.
Given that the Commonwealth is a major player in this emerging
 settlement, and given its responsibility for managing the economy and ensuring efficient delivery of services, it is likely that this new frame will strengthen the human capital framing of educational policy and the emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of education. Such reductionist pressures may well restrict the forms and processes of education to a low-cost, narrow training provision. To the extent that this occurs, the desired goal of flexible, multiskilled workers and a clever country will fail.
While Offe's thesis that the internal structure of the state mediates
 policy production and that policy is the resultant of competing
 economic and democratic pressures is clearly confirmed by this account,
 his work needs modification to take account of the federal political
 structure of the Australian state and the impact of the globalisation
 of the economy on the capacity of the nation-state to balance economic
 and democratic pressures in the achievement

of policy settlements (cf. Pusey, 1991, Lingard, 1993).
In another sense, what is going on can be seen in terms of the

continuing tension between the modern and the postmodern (Lyotard, 1986; Giddens, 1989). In this global/local reconstitution of the nation-state, Lash and Urry's (1987) account of the nation-state as simultaneously under pressure from global developments and internal fragmentation can be applied to the contested and uneven but continuing press towards national frameworks within the federalism operating within Australian education.

The developments described above can be subsumed under the rubric of 'steering at a distance' (now described even more colourfully as 'steering not rowing' Osbourne and Gaebler, 1992), where autonomy to deliver services specified by the central agencies is balanced by tighter accountability measures. In this framing, professionalism in the traditional sense is largely discarded for the competent technician in the education industry, and practitioners as well as knowledge are commodified.

But whether such forms of steering at a distance, which have as yet not substantially challenged the traditional structures, content and processes of schools and classrooms, will be effective in meeting the demands of the (socalled) post-industrial and post-modern "societies" (if indeed society in the conventional sense continues to exist) is moot. What is certainly the case is that steering at an increasing distance, as currently defined, is a long way from the democratic, community-based and participatory forms of devolution which were idealised in the 1970s. The older tensions between central bureaucracies and peripheral professionals have been compounded with

the increasing politicisation of education and training, and the growing hegemony of ministers, HOGs and COAG.

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