

Trends in education and government

After the social turn in policy

Terri Seddon

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This working paper is an attempt to clarify the implications of recent shifts in the character and practices of education and government. My aim is to try to work out what some of the implications of current trends are and what they might mean for the on-going politics of education. In other words, I want to ask the question 'Which way now for education?'

The paper is divided into four fairly schematic sections:

1. Trends in education;
1. Trends in government; and
1. An Australian Way in education and training?
1. Education: directions and challenges

Trends in education

Recent research in school, higher and vocational education indicate that contemporary neo-liberal reforms are driving significant changes in the nature of educational organisations, their practices of organising and managing, and the way they define and undertake their core business. While overgeneralised, it seems that educational organisations show an increasingly significant product orientation, alongside their traditional commitment to teaching and learning. In higher education, for instance, suggests this shift redefines the university from an organisation oriented to the promotion of national culture towards a globalised corporate dealing in knowledge goods and services - dead (products) or alive (students). Similar emphases are evident in vocational education and training, especially TAFE, but are somewhat less evident in school education.

My own research largely in the VET sector indicates that this pattern of change is evident as:

(a) pedagogic innovation: resource constraints have pushed educators to redesign their teaching work as means of ensuring individual and institutional survival. In a market context which stresses customer service, there has been attention to client needs and diversity, leading to the proliferation of off-campus workbased delivery, off-shore provision, technology applications, increased individualised self-paced learning and trends towards case-management of learning. While on-campus work persists, this deinstitutionalisation has facilitated a shift from a 'teaching' to a 'learning' orientation in educational work and redefined the role of the teacher as 'enabler of learning'. It has also encouraged a innovative and responsive mindset amongst teachers which encourages, and is encouraged by, increased lifelong learning for teachers.

(b) decreased system coherence: marketisation and decentralisation have increased system fragmentation. This occurs both at the level of State systems through the proliferation of

private providers alongside and in competition with traditional public providers (especially TAFE but also some community providers) and within organisations. Management have relayed marketising reforms down to create internal markets within larger organisations and setting departments and other service units in competition with one another. While vision statements proliferate, the emphasis is on localised innovation within organisations that builds on the diversity and responsiveness of particular sub-units and groups. Educational provision becomes targeted at particular clients in increasingly privatised relationships. This trend is accentuated by the increased significance of competitive tendering and contractualist arrangements that transform public service into monetarised transaction which give organisations their competitive edge. In these increasingly commercial relations commercial confidence becomes more and more important and binding. The upshot of this increasingly targeted and privatised client-oriented is a pattern of educational provision that is fragmented. Some learners get some kinds of learning opportunities, others fall through the cracks because they are outside particular market relations or represent an unattractive (ie. low income generation potential) market niche. Access and equity become serious issues.

(c) struggles over continuity and change: institutional re-engineering, particularly through manipulation of financial and regulatory frames, destabilises traditional attachments. This is particularly evident in the way many TAFE staff have distanced themselves from centralised bureaucratic organisation and are actively pursuing enterprise in relation to marketing their educational products and themselves. But such destabilisation plays out differently for advantaged and disadvantaged groups of staff within organisations. 'Modernisation' creates a context for practical politics in organisational life which centres on definition and assertion of detraditionalisation and retraditionalisation. In these struggles, advantaged staff who conform most closely, and are best positioned in relation, to traditional norms of management, important teaching, and capacity to generate income are better placed to reassert preferred patterns of continuity and change. This leads towards retraditionalisation of, for example, gender relations in the workplace.

(d) evidence of system failure: the pattern of system fragmentation that has developed with neo-liberal reform has fuelled a growing systemic critique which flags that the current pattern of education and training provision does not meet national requirements. In part this occurs because government has withdrawn from service provision and resorted to long-arm steering strategies in which the capacity for redefinition, for twisting to alternative agendas, is heightened. System failure is identified in relation to:

- access and equity: The Dussledorp Skills Forum (1998;1999), for instance, offers an array of statistics that indicates the failure of system reform. Specifically, they flag decreased retention, the growth of 'marginals' disconnected from education, training and the labour market, and the disadvantaging of entire cohorts of young people who now face difficult transitions to adult life because of the closing off of educational and labour market opportunities;
- market organisation: Markets are presented as inherently unequal in their effects, creating inequality as a natural by-product of their operation. Markets are also criticised for undercutting co-operation; encouraging slippage in standards; promoting anarchic development through opportunistic innovation; servicing some learning needs but not others; facilitating lack of probity and corruption; eroding the capacity for institutional renewal through cut-price staffing policies; and making it impossible for governments to ensure minimum provision for all at designated levels (eg. Bannikoff, 1999; . These developments make a nonsense of government 'responsibility' in both the short and long term;
- outcomes-based education, particularly competency-based education and training: CBT is criticised because of the way the outcomes which define success in

education are established within closed decision-making groups with particular sectional patterns of participation. These decision-making processes, it is argued, are backward-looking. They institutionalise old patterns of performance rather than emerging practices. At best, they are always out of date; at worst they enable a retraditionalisation of provision. These problems are accentuated by behaviourist assumptions which fail to properly grasp the interaction of theory and practice in mindful expertise.

- funding: The simple problem is that governments are calling on education organisations to do more but with fewer and fewer resources. Resorting to private funding sources is limited by individuals capacity to pay and by industry's willingness to pay.

These complex dynamics that have accompanied institutional re-engineering in education create a problem for government. If education is to be redesigned to better attend to national learning needs in a globalising era, then the contradictions of pedagogic innovation, system fragmentation, retraditionalisation and system failure arising, partly, from lack of steering capacity by government is not a good policy outcome. The question of 'Which way now for education' hinges on the question of the role and character of government.

Trends in government

The neo-liberal policy framework currently informing the work of government has commonly been criticised in education literature on the grounds that government has moved away from tried and true ways of public educational provision. In political science and public policy, the emphasis is more on the way government has attempted to find a policy framework that would attend to the imperatives of globalisation but also accommodate powerful forces in national politics. From this perspective, the rise of neo-liberal agendas can be seen as outcome driven by shifts in the balance of political forces (ie. the ascent of the New Right) and as consequences of technicist decision-making by governments seeking to improve public administration for 'new times' by reinventing government in order to better manage global-national developments and reorient Australian society to new uncertainties and vulnerabilities.

Of course, these political and technical dynamics come together, creating distinctive patterns of social democratic and economic liberal governance which have been orchestrated by both Labor and Coalition Parties. For instance, Orchard argues that since the 1970s there have been three major catalysts of change which have each informed efforts aimed at public sector reform:

- social democracy that assumed a significant public sector dealing with social needs and problems, and sought to open and democratise existing approaches to policy and administration at all levels of Australian government;
- public choice theory that was used to attack bureaucracy and the public sector in favour of markets and privatisation;
- managerialism that advocated particular strategies for improving management which were said to be relevant for all sectors and reinforced the idea that public administration required reform oriented to increasing innovation and responsiveness.

These different impulses, Orchard argues, converged as a distinctive kind 'economic rationalism' in the policy frameworks promoted by Labor and Coalition governments. They shared common rationalist starting assumptions but differed in terms of social philosophy. Coalition parties espoused libertarian views about the importance of freedom and the need to reduce the role of government, whereas Labor recognised, to a greater extent, a continuing role for government in organising social affairs. With Coalition governments in office in Victoria and the Commonwealth, it is possible to see the long term trajectory of their

approach leading towards a virtual or 'hollowed out' state which depends upon a small staff which oversees extensive contracting out of public goods and services

Through the 1990s there has been an active critique of these economic rationalist agendas but, by and large, there is also a widespread view that some kind of change in public administration is necessary because of the effects of broader globalising imperatives. The limits of economic rationalism, the importance of social capital and the social and economic costs of increasing social inequality and social exclusion, have been flagged as a basis for developing alternative views of the work of government. Two broad approaches appear to be emerging, each diffracted by their different assumptions about institutions and institutional change..

Revising social democracy

Overseas, and more recently in Australia, there has been growing interest in 'third ways' in public policy ; . These approaches attempt to redevelop a social democratic agenda in the face of continuing pressures from globalisation, social change and detraditionalisation (arising from increased reflexivity, sub-politics and risk). The call is for (1) reform of state and government to enhance democratisation - including increased attention to social justice and cultural diversity - while also reasserting coherent national policies; (2) integration of the third (voluntary/community) sector into state and market, blurring the boundaries between these different kinds of agencies; and (3) welfare state reform aimed at creating a 'social investment state' that invests in human capital and redistributes the capacity to act. In these approaches, education is seen to be a core institution.

In Australia, there is also a counter movement that starts not from abstract analysis of globalisation and other social trends but from historical studies of state formation. This also seeks a revised social democratic approach to public policy but one grounded in Australian society and culture. The traditional story of Australian state formation presumes a Lib-Lab elite consensus which prescribed and legislated for an egalitarian social vision in which protection was paramount. In contrast to this story of elite management, the revisionist story emphasises the way the notion of an elite consensus obscures the intense debates and conflicts over public policy and the active participation of citizens and egalitarian social movements in the institutional and cultural making of Australian public values, institutions and policy.

As argues, the old story fails to grasp the 'Australian Way' as 'a dynamic historical concept ... [which] has grown out of the Australian experience, and presumably, will continue to do so'. This Australian Way, she emphasises, developed on foundations in which 'the inclusive ethics of citizenship and social democracy' were in the ascendant. What emerged was: 'a middle way' - a mixed economy; 'a narrow way' which emerged pragmatically as an outcome of conflicting ideological debates pursued in a participative fashion through open democratic institutions and procedures; 'a fair way' characterised by a 'system of entitlements that were universal in principal and selective in practice' (p.75) based on 'categories' of recipients who were all equally entitled to take up their benefits; and 'a flexible way' because a categorical system can respond to changing conditions by increasing the number of categories. It also offers scope for collective action by members of any category to pursue grievances or seek redress for mistreatment. Finally, she notes, such a system of universal citizen entitlements which are both targeted and responsive 'commands virtually unassailable moral ground. Not many are prepared to deny assistance to the truly needy or to lay themselves open to the charge that they think the poor should be left to die in the streets' (p.75).

Understanding institutional change

These two revisionist approaches to social democratic government differ in their view of the process of institutional change. As Linder and Peters (1995) argue, there are two traditions of institutional design: a decisional and a dialogical approach.

The former decisional approach assumes that the moment of decision is the moment of change and that cultural change depends upon getting the decisions right. This is a rationalist approach, like economic rationalism, in which management is seen to entail management of decision-making in line with abstracted models of economic and social development based on indicators of various types, and implementing those models, in part, by managing or regulating debate and dissent. The stage management of the 1999 UK Labour Party conference was a classic illustration of managing in-party debate so that a 'can-do' profile was maintained. The trajectory is toward an increasingly moral authoritarian managerialism. Campbell (1999) argues, for instance, that Blair's government has become increasingly authoritarian in its approach, taking a particular conception of 'middle England' as a social norm and defining non-conformity as dangerous and deviant. Levitas argues, that the cosy language of social inclusion, community, stakeholding obscures fundamental conflicts about inequalities and poverty. Instead it constructs a normative imagined community that remanders those who don't fit the mould.

The dialogical approach attends to politics and relationships in pursuit of culture change. As the theorists advocating reinvention of the Australian Way in welfare indicate, institutional change is a complex political process in which different values, views and positions vie for authority and endorsement in public affairs. From this perspective, institutional change entails a participative approach to governance, seeking to rebuild an energetic public sphere in which democratic dialogue and debate can shape the future of public institutions. But then, they are not in office.

argues that, through the 1990s, Labor and Coalition Parties have espoused basically similar public sector reform agendas partly because they adopted rationalist approaches, in both focus and methodology, to institutional redesign. They shared the notion that individual behaviour can be modelled and predicted in terms of the utility-maximising, self-interested, rational actor. And they both started from rationalist assumptions rooted in a 'methodology that seeks to understand economic life in abstract deductive terms through the use of formal, rule-like models.'. This approach provides a way of approaching real life problems without addressing their complexities.

The advocates of revisionist social democracy appear to have moved some distance away from the assumptions of the rational actor and adopted a view of institutions as having a normative as well as instrumental aspect. This is a strength of the current social turn in governance and policy and is in keeping with argument that institutions have a dual nature. To be deemed successful they have to socialise participants into particular ways of working and inculcate duties, and they also have to generate outcomes which meet, at a passable level, the purposes for which they exist and within the resource levels which can be made available. Institutions therefore have to pass a double test of "'making sense" and "being fit" for their mission' .

But, particularly in third way policy, there is still a strong rationalist orientation which seeks to manage the normative aspects of society irrespective of complexities of difference and inequality. This fails to recognise that the normative aspects of institutional life are the infrastructure that enables instrumental purposes to be realised. It acts as a cultural code that delimits how individuals behave by encouraging 'good' behaviour and a sense of loyalty to the institution which embodies those particular normative standards. The implication is

that institutional change requires attention to the normative codes that guide institutional action. Institutional change depends upon 'renorming' institutional life. It cannot be mandated or created by administrative fiat because it depends upon redeveloping the shared meanings that institutional actors both create and endorse in their day-to-day work with one another.

The process of institutional change therefore grows out of antecedent conditions which have impaired institutional operations. These preconditions may not trigger institutional breakdown but, rather, stimulate instrumental decision-making oriented towards institutional survival. Such decision-making can either promote and 'sell' an alternative by encouraging participants to take it up as their own and as an outgrowth of what went before, or must substantially discredit the old arrangements and assert an alternative on - or in consultation with - the participants. As puts it, institutional redesign suffers either from hyperrationality or from 'the long arm of the past'. Institutional designers can either address the former by embarking on a process of institutional gardening, where there is 'no explicit *engineering* ... but where there is a rich vegetation of inherited institutional patterns which already enjoy the allegiance of relevant actors -- an allegiance that can be further cultivated'. Or they can tackle the 'the long arm of the past' by undercutting the validity of old routines in an effort to create a kind of *tabula rasa* as a prelude to winning the loyalty of constituents to the newly designed institutional arrangements. Quite clearly, this is the strategy of those who assert the need to reinvent an Australian Way, regrowing institutional norms through participative and democratic processes but oriented to the challenges of 'new times'.

An Australian Way in Education

According to the Australian Way in welfare entailed the following developments:

- From the first decade of the twentieth century until the latter part of the 1980s a centralised wage-fixation system set minimum wage rates and through an awards system established a floor of minimum wages and conditions. It worked by means of negotiation and mediated contestation, in which employees were expected to be collectively represented by trade unions.
- From the end of World War 2 until the mid-1970s, historically low levels of unemployment were made possible by Australia's system of industry protection behind high tariff walls, by high growth rates as an essential outcome of Keynesian public investment policies, by the industrial dominance of the First World, and by the relatively low participation of adult women in the workforce.
- A categorical and flat-rate system of social security, tested against income and (sometimes) assets, redistributed essential resources to low-income individuals and their families when they were excluded from the labour market through old age, unemployment, sickness or disability, or the obligation to care for vulnerable and dependent family members (predominantly children).
- Very high rates of home ownership in the period from World War 2 provided the major form of asset and savings for working and middle-class households through the life-course, and substantially reduced the experience of poverty for the aged.
- The entrenchment of the male breadwinner model in all aspects of public policy, social and political culture, including employment policies, wage fixation and social security. All the planks of Australia's system of social

protection in the period after World War 2 were predicated on this model, particularly in wage fixation (from 1907 until 1972-75), the taxation system, the social security system, and the paucity of provision of maternity and parental leave and child care. However the changes in women's labour-force participation since the mid-1970s have made significant inroads into the social validity of the model and have had far-reaching effects on social policy changes. ... changes in income support and employment and family policy shows severe cracks in the male breadwinner model as a result of women's increased labour-force participation in the formal market economy and their struggle to combine the responsibilities and pleasures of employment and intimate life as mothers and partners. Nevertheless, at the level of social and cultural norms in gender relations and in many public policies, except some key aspects of social security, Australian arrangements could best be described as a 'modified male breadwinner model', characterised by deep ambivalence.

As this account suggests, education is not considered in this history of Australian welfare formation. However, I would argue that this absence of education in the broader history of public policy is an artefact of the separation that has existed historically between education and welfare. Drawing on Roe's perspective on Australian history, the social organisation of education would seem to have developed within and alongside process of social and state formation. The disconnection of educational formation and public policy formation in time (educational bureaucratisation developed earlier than other welfare initiatives) and in jurisdiction (education remained within State bailiwicks whereas welfare initiatives moved, to some extent, to the Commonwealth) partly explains their differentiated approaches and the fragmentation of research into separate fields education and public policy.

Yet there are practical articulations and common themes between the Australian welfare state regime and education. Public education was influenced by traditions of collective organisation and industrial relations in education, the character of teachers and their work as public servants, interrelationships between schooling, welfare, health and criminology and the role of skills in credentialled training. The provision of education has also been marked more qualitatively by:

- An institutionalised commitment to equality or fairness which endorsed and realised principles of mutuality in social affairs;
- Regulated and, by the existence of free public education, decommodified educational markets which ameliorated social division;
- Guaranteed 'flat-rate' residualised provision for all students;
- Differentiated provision targeted toward different student populations; and
- Support for individuals to acquire assets (learning and credentials) that would provide security in their adult lives.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, many of these common themes in education and welfare provision have been eroded by both increasing social expectations and advocacy of market relations. At the same time, there has been a growing integration of education into the broader frames of public policy through, for example, changes in industrial relations, the integrated administration of education and employment in DEETYA, the proliferation of youth policy which creates networked strategies in relation to employment and unemployment, education and training, welfare and youth support.

In the 1990s, these articulations appear to have new significance in processes of educational formation. It is these linkages between education and work, welfare, criminology and governance which are central to the reconfiguration of education and public policy. the

growth of interest in lifelong learning is just one instance of this importance. Overseas and in Australia there is a growing recognition that, in a globalising world, education - understood as lifelong learning - is crucial not only for national economic development but also for the renewal of social capital and the ties that bind us as a distinctively Australian imagined community. Education is therefore not just about dealing with children but about the social infrastructure that sustains learning in all social contexts. The challenge is to build the values, institutions and policies that enable learning across the population and can sustain a confident yet creative community.

Education: directions and challenges

The trends that are emerging suggest that the developments and contradictions arising out the politics of state formation since the 1970s, through both social democratic and economic rationalist policy processes, press education towards:

- A focus on learning rather than teaching;
- A concern with lifelong, not front-end, learning;
- Learning for adults not just for children and youth;
- Continued deinstitutionalisation of education to enhance and generalise learning opportunities;
- Increased targeting of provision to different categories of learners;
- Enhanced linkages between education, work and welfare;
- Greater attention to the diversity of provision and learners; and
- Broadening of credentialled learning or recognition procedures.

Most of these trends are already evident. The challenge for education is to work out how to move within these trends in order to pin down and not undercut the core social responsibilities of education. Specifically, education is the social institution that ensures appropriate learning from one generation to the next. This is about conserving cultures as much as reinventing them. It means teaching - transmitting the wisdom of the past to today's people - is critical. It means serving society in its entirety by enabling learning for all.

These kinds of social values and responsibilities must be maintained but, in the current conditions, this means reinventing the institutions, policies and procedures through which they are realised. Growing such institutional renewal within the frames of the Australian Way presents a variety of questions, such as:

What is an appropriate relationship between teaching and learning? Who is taught and who has their learning facilitated? When does teaching occur? What is taught and under what circumstances?

Given the trajectory towards lifelong learning and its realisation through more deinstitutionalised provision which permits greater access to greater numbers, what are the roles and responsibilities of public education?

How can system fragmentation, evident as an outcome of economic rationalist reforms, be addressed in ways which ensure universal access to supported learning and necessary teaching, particularly in the context of deinstitutionalisation?

How might education and training be integrated more effectively into the wider domain of public policy so as to enhance social protection for citizens without undercutting its crucial social contribution?

How can universal provision of education and training be accomplished without increasing private costs beyond individual's and industry's capacity to pay?

These, and other, questions raise large issues about the place of education within the emerging welfare regime in Australia, its relationships with government and communities, and the challenge of recreating an effective public sphere. This is the terrain that is being tackled in public policy debates which take up issues of social inclusion and exclusion, social capital and community development. But these issues will not be addressed if social capital and new modes of governance are seen simply in micro-economic terms (Fine, 1999). Solutions to these social issues will not be achieved by simply pursuing 'investment' in social capital through a 'social investment state'. They require a much deeper reworking of the social mulch - using institutional gardening strategies to reconfigure values, institutions and policies for new times.

In education I would identify three key agenda:

System coherence in provision that is deinstitutionalised and diversified requires some kind of regulatory frames. Formal rules and policies will provide some aspects of this regulation. Critical questions concerns whether flat-rate provision is appropriate and what kind of rate should be set for different levels of provision (school, TAFE, universities, other adult education). How it relates to privately provided and funded education and training. But there is also a need to rebuild the normative base of education and training so that institutional action is reconfigured towards preferred ends, irrespective of where that teaching and learning is occurring. Above all, this requires a re-formation and renewal of the teaching workforce - not just in terms of managed standards and accreditation - but in terms of the way teachers are formed normatively as well as instrumentally. Teacher education is a pressing issue.

The role and responsibilities of public education must be renegotiated. If universal provision is to be achieved through some mix of user-pays and tax benefit scheme, I would argue that public education should be a tax benefit and free. This decommodifies education so that it is not something that is sold between providers and consumers. Instead, it reinstates the notion that education is a gift from the adults of one generation to the young and other adults in their national imagined community. This will reinstitute mutuality and intergenerational support as significant social values. Moreover, such free public education should be the infrastructure within which teachers are formed, making universities, schools and TAFE - in various partnership arrangements - the sites of teacher education and the sources of systematically formed teacher supply to both public and private education and training organisations.

The preparation of teachers, and the renegotiation of roles and responsibilities within public and private education and training provision, provides a basis for seriously rethinking what needs to be taught as well as learned, when and where. It provides a basis for reasserting the importance of foundational education, conducted in schools, universities and TAFE institutions - conducted, that is, in public education facilities that are provided through the mutual contribution of adults to the construction of a sustainable, creative and sociable society. It also provides a basis for turning public educational provision, as well as provision through private, industry and community providers to the important work of creating an infrastructure that sustains the learning required in the knowledge economy. The implication is that alongside foundational learning, there must also be support for learning in other contexts that supports broader community development and industry reform and innovation.

References