

WHAT DOES 'PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION' IN AUSTRALIA MEAN IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

Abstract

What does 'public school education' mean in Australia in the 21st century, with its past tradition of free, compulsory and secular schooling, and the present school sector policies urging the widespread use of digital technologies? This paper starts from the premise that histories and traditions underpin the provision of public school education in Australia. It is argued that the recognition of the nature of these histories and traditions is important to acknowledge for their sustainability: so they are not taken for granted; are subjected to investigation and are debated; and where appropriate can be maintained. In addition, acknowledging the role of certain traditions in public schooling enables us to ask questions about the taken-for-granted assumptions embedded within school education at a time when digital technologies are being advocated as a core policy requirement in the provision of universal schooling in Australia. The aims of this paper are to firstly, reflect on the sustainability of selected traditions in public school education by asking what does public schooling mean in Australia in the 21st century; and secondly, to contribute to the development of a stock of Australian literature based within and pertinent to the public schooling sector. This paper argues that the meaning of the phrase 'public school education' has altered over time, and that some traditions underpinning public school education are being lost and others are being reauthored. The paper concludes that with the ongoing inclusion of digital technologies into school education, interpretations of the meanings of 'public school education' ought to be reconsidered.

Introduction

Developing interpretations and understandings of the meanings of 'public school education' is a complex task. What a society means by 'education' is socially constructed (Forsey 2007). Histories and traditions underpin Australian school education and so contribute to that social construction. Traditions comprise assumptions, beliefs and practices that provide a background to current social and cultural practices (Gadamer 1975). Traditions represent the 'significant past' and decisions about what is important to maintain and to reiterate as 'the' version of the past, legitimises the present (Williams 1989).

‘Traditions of knowledge’ locate the rules by which our understandings of contexts are created (MacIntyre 1988). Traditions are shared by those recognising themselves to belong to a particular social group (Scruton 1982) such as those within a public schooling system. In this sense, traditions provide the background of assumptions and beliefs belonging to that group, and in this way, traditions are the processes that are handed down from one to another. Through these processes, the contexts within which actions occur, are defined.

Ricoeur (1984), MacIntyre (1985) and Pocock (1968) write about the dynamic nature of traditions. Pocock (1968) for example states that ‘the concepts which we form from, and feedback into, ... have the capacity to modify the content and character of the tradition conceptualised and even the extent to which it is conceived and regarded as a tradition’ (Pocock 1968: 210). He asserts that tradition is an essential feature of society, defining tradition as ‘the handing on of formed ways of acting, a formed way of living, to those beginning or developing their social membership’ (Pocock 1968: 209). He indicates that traditions are important for providing a sense of institutional continuity over time, and therefore can be considered as something handed from one to another, sometimes over generations. In this way he asserts that traditions include the transmission of ideas, statements, beliefs, rules and customs (Pocock 1968).

Meanings of public school education in Australia have histories and traditions that have developed over the past century or so, and influence policy developments today (Moyle 2003). The state Education Acts introduced into Australia, public school education that was ‘free, compulsory and secular’ (Hyams and Bessant 1972). As a result of these respective pieces of legislation, ‘public school education’ originally referred to primary and later, secondary level education, funded by the State through taxes, conducted ‘face-to-face’ at specified times of the day, in public buildings called ‘schools’.

Over the course of the past century ‘public school education’ has also included some provision for distance education including now, delivery via the Internet. The provision of distance education in part has been based upon the

assumption in Australia that public schooling systems should offer all the children in each state access to similar educational opportunities (cf Hyams and Bessant 1972). In the 21st century, all Australian schools are increasingly gaining the capacity to electronically communicate within and outside of a school's physical walls. The ways in which teaching and learning are conducted is changing with technologies, and these changes are contributing to what Australian 'public school education' means. Indeed with the Australian Labor Party (ALP) winning the November 2007 Federal election and the introduction of the *Digital Education Revolution* policy (Rudd, Smith and Conroy 2007), over the next few years all schools in Australia will be receiving broadband connections, and all students in years 9 to 12 will have individual access to computers in schools. We are on the brink then, of seeing the meaning of 'public school education' not only including compulsory education up to the age of 15 or 16 (depending on the state or territory), but to also see the public infrastructure of school buildings being equipped with computing and telecommunications infrastructure, that is intended to support teachers' work and students' learning.

To think about what are some of the dynamic traditions in Australian school education then, and to consider the sustainability of meanings associated with 'public school education', this paper identifies and reflects upon the following histories in Australian school education:

- The legislative responsibilities for the provision of public school education that is 'free, compulsory and secular';
- The roles of the Commonwealth and the states and territories in the provision of school education; and
- The policy impact of digital technologies in school education.

Legislating for 'free, compulsory and secular' school education

Between 1872 and 1895 the six colonies, which subsequently became the states of Australia, each proclaimed state education Acts of Parliament (Hyams and Bessant 1972). The first colony to do so was Victoria, with the acceptance of the Victorian Education Act of 1872 (Portus 1937; Spaul 1998; Turney 1975). Queensland followed with its Education Act of 1875 (Portus 1937; Turney

1975). South Australia proclaimed its Act in 1878 (Portus 1937); New South Wales established the Public Instruction Act in 1880 (Portus 1937; Spaul 1998); Tasmania proclaimed its Act in 1885; and Western Australia did so in 1893 and 1895 (Partridge 1973; Portus 1937; Turney 1975).

Each of the original state Education Acts was similar to each other (Hyams and Bessant 1972). Partridge (1973) observed that the states' Education Acts were alike noting that the 'variations amongst the colonies were relatively slight; it is in fact remarkable that six quite independent, self-governing colonies should have finally arrived at such nearly identical arrangements' (Partridge 1973: 31). Each of the Education Acts essentially outlined the State responsibilities in relation to the provision of school education. Drawing on the Victorian Education Act to illustrate, the following extracts selected from various sections of the Act demonstrate the commitment to the provision of a public school education system that was free, compulsory and secular.

In every State school secular instruction only shall be given and no teacher shall give any other than secular instruction in any State school building (Victorian Education Act of 1872: Section 12, in Turney, C 1975: 62). ...

The parents of children of not less than six years and no more than fifteen years shall cause such children (unless there is some reasonable excuse) to attend school for a period of sixty days in each half year.

Any of the following shall be a reasonable excuse: -

- (i) That a child is under efficient instruction in some other manner;
- (ii) That the child has been prevented from attending school by sickness, fear of infection, temporary or permanent infirmity, or any unavoidable cause;
- (iii) That there is no State school which the child can attend within the distance of two miles, measured according to the nearest road from the residence of such child;
- (iv) That the child has been educated up to the standard. ...

The parent of any child who neglects to send such a child to school as provided in the last section may be summoned by any person authorized by the Minister or the local Boards of Advice before a justice, and on conviction of such offence shall forfeit and pay a sum not exceeding five shillings for the first offence and twenty shillings for every succeeding offence, or in default may be imprisoned for a term not exceeding seven days (Victorian Education Act of 1872: Sections 13-14, in Turney, C 1975: 62-63). ...

For the free instruction of all children attending school in the subjects specified ... teachers of State schools shall be paid such salary and remuneration by way of results as shall be fixed by regulations (Victorian Education Act of 1872: Section 17, in Turney, C 1975: 63).

Apart from New South Wales where the New South Wales Public Instruction Act of 1880 included secondary schools, the intention of providing free, compulsory and secular education, was limited at the outset, to basic, elementary or primary education (Spaull 1998). Secondary education for all did not emerge as an issue until between the First and Second World Wars and continued to be so after the Second World War (Spaull 1998; Turney 1975). As Spaull (1998) indicates,

“free” state secondary education was introduced around 1920 but because of state financial emergencies, especially during the Depression, tuition fees were reimposed for most state students and remained in force in at least two states until World War II (Spaull 1998: 6).

There was an expansion of the provision of free secondary schooling after the Second World War however, as Australia became a more industrialised and affluent society (Spaull 1998). The provision of ‘free, compulsory and secular’ or universal schooling therefore, was constructed upon implicit beliefs and values that are now enshrined in Acts of Parliament: ‘the state must pay for the education of those children whose parents cannot afford to pay for it. That is not almsgiving but the principle of cooperation carried out to its fullest extent’ (Stephen 1872 in Spaull 1998: 4-5).

The Acts represented State intervention to ensure a basic educational provision to the children of the colonies, in order that they may productively contribute to the work of the colony. The following extract from a Parliamentary Paper tabled in 1884, illustrates this.

Unless a child can read fluently, spell correctly, add up and multiply columns of figures with quickness and accuracy, he (sic) is mentally crippled, not merely in the ordinary business of life, but in the pursuit of higher scholarship (Parliamentary Paper 1884 in Ling 1984: 48).

Australia's compulsory education policies continue to justify education in terms of both contributing to personal benefit and as a societal good. These rationale have not changed substantially since the late 1880's as the following excerpts from more recent policies compared to the one above, demonstrate.

Firstly, the *Adelaide Declaration on the National Goals of Schooling* states:

Students should have...

attained the skills of numeracy and English literacy; such that, every student should be numerate, able to read, write, spell and communicate at an appropriate level (Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) 1999a: 1).

Secondly, the *Digital Education Revolution* policy states that

To have the best job and life opportunities in the future, Australian students must receive a world class education today. A world class education system requires significant government and private investment, quality subjects to study, well-trained and dedicated teachers, and the best classroom facilities such as computers, laboratories and workshops (Rudd, Smith and Conroy 2008: 5).

Thirdly, the overarching education policy statement by the Rudd Labor Government, the '*Education Revolution*' reiterates the importance of literacy levels in students' success at school and to the economy at large stating:

International research has shown a close relationship between higher literacy standards and economic growth, with a 1 per cent premium on

average literacy scores linked to a 1.5 per cent higher level of per capita GDP (Rudd and Smith 2007).

As can be seen from the excerpts above, taken from the late 20th and early 21st century education policies, and when compared with the legislative excerpt from the late 19th century, each reflect the value placed upon literacy and numeracy skills for individual benefit and for the collective wealth and well-being of the nation.

The respective Education Acts were also constructed specifically with clear divides between public, free and secular education, and that offered by the private sector, through the churches. As Spaul (1998) explains 'the constitutional basis of education was founded on a legal guarantee that the states should provide a minimum standard of education for the mass of children' (Spaul, 1998: 5). There was an assumption that 'a little education is good for all children but much education is good for only a few' (Butts 1964: 31). That is, in the late 1800's, State education operated much like a safety net; it was a way of providing schooling to those who could not afford a private education.

The initial purpose of public school education was to provide all children whether in rural, regional or urban areas with a primary education. As such, there was a public commitment to the provision of universal education managed through 'strong, centralised state-run educational bureaucracies' (Blackmore 1999: 69), which then generated the necessity for establishing the office of Minister of Education. The following extract from the Victorian Education Act of 1872, shows that school education was placed under a Minister of the Crown to administer education in the colony (cf Cleverley and Lawry 1972).

For the better carrying out of the provisions of this Act an Education Department shall be formed, to consist of a Minister of Public Instruction, who shall be a responsible Minister of the Crown, a Secretary, an Inspector-General, inspectors, teachers and such officers as may be deemed necessary (Victorian Education Act of 1872: 5, in Turney, C 1975: 61).

There has been considerable commitment over time then, to the provision of free, compulsory and secular, or universal schooling in Australia between the ages of six and fifteen or sixteen depending on the state or territory. While the details of the respective state Education Acts have changed over time, the Acts still traditionally cover the same sorts of responsibilities. The roles and responsibilities of teachers are outlined. Student attendance requirements have been a distinguishing feature. The ability to physically attend a school has been a requirement defining compulsory education and a differentiating characteristic between ‘face-to-face’ schooling conducted in government owned school buildings, and that delivered through ‘distance education’, provided by the State and conducted in the home. In this way, directly and by de facto these Acts and their subsequent revisions describe what we understand to be a school, and what is schooling.

Various authors (cf Butts 1964; Hyams and Bessant 1972; Partridge 1973; Portus 1937; Turney 1975) have argued that as a consequence of the proclaiming of the respective state Education Acts, and thereby placing the responsibility of school education under government departments of education, traditions have been established that last to this day: centralisation and uniformity. And it is the tradition of centralisation and uniformity that underpins the role of the Commonwealth and the states in the provision of school education, to this day.

Role of the Commonwealth and the States

The state Education Acts, established prior to Federation, remained in place when Australia became a Federation in 1901 (Birch 1975; Partridge 1973). According to Birch (1975), this ‘omission was intentional and caused no concern to those who brought the Federation into being’ (Birch 1975: 1). Nor was the issue of school education staying a state responsibility seen as a contentious matter (Birch 1975).

Over one hundred years since Federation, the constitutional responsibility for public schooling remains with the state governments. This has been reiterated

over the past century. For example, in 1958 the federal Member of Parliament Gordon Bryant stated 'I realize that the Constitution mentions education not at all' (in Birch 1975: ix). Prime Minister Menzies also in 1958 stated 'the fact is that education, except in Commonwealth territories, remains a function of the States' (in Birch 1975: x). In 1971 the Minister for Education and Science stated

so far as the taxpayer is concerned, Australia is a Federation under which certain powers have been given to the Federal Government and the remainder have been left with the State governments. The responsibility for education was a power exercised by the States ever since they took over responsible government in Australia and a power which they retained after Federation. ... The States have the constitutional power for education, and in the foreseeable future they are likely to continue to have it (in Birch 1975: ix).

This position continued to be indicated by MCEETYA in the late 1990s: government schools operate under the direct responsibility of the state or territory school Education Minister of the Crown (MCEETYA 1999b). But with the change of Federal government in November 2007, there is in evidence an ascendancy in the role of the office of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC) at a Commonwealth level, associated with the establishment of several Council of Australian Government (COAG) Working Groups (cf Arthur 2008). These bureaucratic rearrangements are seeing a re-ordering of the way Commonwealth-State school education policies and processes are managed and conducted. There is movement in the education sphere, away from the primacy of MCEETYA processes to central COAG processes coordinated through the office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Section 51 of the Constitution outlines the powers of the Commonwealth government but it does not mention school education (Lingard and Porter 1997). While the Constitution, as with any Parliamentary Acts can be changed, contested or the associated traditions redefined within the existing laws, changes to the Constitution to mention school education are unlikely. As Summers, Woodward and Parkin (1991) remind us however, the Federation of

Australian states is not static; 'it is the product of a complex interrelationship between the legal, economic and political capacities of the states and the commonwealth' (Summers, Woodward and Parkin 1991: 73). Partridge (1973) has observed similarly, that policies and financial arrangements are contested and negotiated between the Commonwealth and the states. He explains that since legislation was passed in 1942-43 to address financing problems associated with the Second World War, the states in essence have been unable to directly collect income taxes. This has been the providence of the Commonwealth government, and has raised the strength of the Commonwealth in relation to school education policy matters (Partridge 1973; Spaul 1998; Summers 1991).

Lyndsay Connors (2000) indicates that the role of the Commonwealth in the provision of schooling was legislatively increased in the 1946 referendum where it gained the power to provide 'benefits to students'. She asserts that this power added authority to the Commonwealth's right to provide financial assistance to the states under the 'States Grants Legislation' (Connors 2000). With the introduction of the Goods and Service Tax (GST) in 2000 the role of the Commonwealth in providing funds to the states was further increased. It was argued by the (then) Prime Minister that the extent of this tax collection and associated provision of financial grants to the states for education would increase (Howard 2001).

Since the 1942-43 legislation then, the Commonwealth has collected income taxes and then provided financial grants back to the states (Summers 1991). Partridge (1973) argues that this process has extended the power of the Commonwealth over the states, since the states in effect, are financially dependent on the Commonwealth government. The extent and nature of the financial grants made by the Commonwealth to the states historically has been a matter of political negotiation and usually a matter between the Prime Minister and the state Premiers (Summers 1991), where the process and outcomes are accepted or contested, traditionally at Premiers' Conference meetings (Summers 1991).

As such, while states and territories are responsible for the provision of schooling, which is an expensive budget item, they have been ‘vulnerable to the exigencies of Commonwealth funding’ (Lingard and Porter 1997: 2). That is, while the states and territories have financial responsibility for the provision of school education, they are dependent on the receipt of funds provided through the Commonwealth government. In relation to taxation and its implications for education policy development and implementation then, the Commonwealth has dealt itself a significant role to play. It will be seen shortly though, that while the relationships between the Commonwealth and the states and territories traditionally have, to lesser and greater degrees over time been contested, they nonetheless continue to ‘morph’.

Digital technologies in school education

With the election of the new Australian Labor Government technologies are being positioned as a fundamental part of school education. Technologies have been viewed by many policy-makers in Australia and overseas as able to assist with issues such as improving literacy levels, increasing student engagement in their learning, and equipping students with the skills to be productive members of the workforce (cf Apple 2004). Indeed, each of the state school education jurisdictions in Australia over the past decade have advocated in core policy statements the use of digital technologies in school education (cf (then) Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Community Services 1998; New South Wales Department of Education and Training 2000; (then) Department for Education, Training and Employment (South Australia) 1999).

The introduction of the *Digital Education Revolution* as an Australian Government policy in 2008, has seen the Commonwealth government commit through Federal Budget processes, to the provision of over \$1 billion in funding until 2012 for technical information technology (IT) infrastructure requirements in schools, including bandwidth and computer hardware and software (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2008). To handle a national approach to the incoming Government’s education policies and the associated distribution of funds for

the purchase of IT infrastructure in schools, has required the rapid establishment of national working and advisory groups. The arrangements for these have been put in place in 2008. Such arrangements, in the current configuration, have not been seen in Australia before. The new Commonwealth Government prefers to use COAG rather than individual Ministerial Council processes for the working mechanisms of government. As such, to deal with the *Digital Education Revolution*, the COAG Productivity Agenda Working Group has established a Schooling SubGroup to prepare the strategic plan for its' implementation (Arthur 2008). At the jurisdictional level, these arrangements mean that the states and territories are dealing with the Commonwealth on policy matters through their respective Departments of Premier and Cabinet, as opposed to the traditional route via individual Ministers of the Crown.

In 2008 then, Commonwealth and state relationships are being reauthored with the introduction of policies such as the *Digital Education Revolution*. These changes are bringing with them a re-emergence of a 'new federalism' (Lingard 1996) or corporate managerialism, evident through the current centralised, federal approaches to education policy-making. These approaches to policy-making are now including for the first time, the identification and provision of specific computing and telecommunications goods and services, and is requiring the states and territories to identify the physical requirements for telecommunications facilities and IT equipment and services to schools and within schools, but funded by the Commonwealth.

In part these arrangements are new because the states and territories have traditionally held responsibility for the provision of IT infrastructure to their schools. Now the Commonwealth is entering areas of responsibility that have previously been the purview of the states and territories. The intention of the Commonwealth is to translate the policy rhetoric into practice with the provision of appropriate and adequate telecommunications facilities and services. But in the states and territories there are already policies and practices in place concerning technologies in schools.

There is the potential then, for tensions to arise at the ‘boundaries’ of Commonwealth-State policy responsibilities in education. The potential for tensions to arise can be considered to be about the traditions in education policy-making. Traditions develop in depth, as understandings about certain reasons for actions also develop, and require an understanding of the traditions of the culture in which they are embedded. Thus traditions can provide an attachment to a time, place and to social and institutional arrangements that bring the past into the present (Scruton 1982). The Commonwealth-State debates can be considered to be concerned with attachments to time, place and institutional arrangements, but they also can be seen as part of the ongoing discourse about how previously taken-for-granted traditions are changing in the field of Australian school education policies. MacIntyre (1985) refers to such discourses over time as ‘... an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition’ (MacIntyre 1985: 207).

If we place previous understandings about how traditionally, Commonwealth-State relations in the field of education have been conducted, against the arrangements currently in place in 2008, it can be seen that the Commonwealth is reauthoring the bureaucratic mechanisms of government, while at the same time providing additional IT infrastructure, thereby crossing the boundaries of the state and territories own approaches to IT provisions to schools. These changes mean that the dynamism of these traditions requires the activity of people having shared understandings about certain actions or practices that they can then hand down from one to another (Scruton 1982; Williams 1976). ‘When a tradition is in good order it is always constituted by an argument about the goods the pursuit of which gives to that tradition its particular point and purpose’ (MacIntyre 1985: 206). It is posited here then, that the meaning of the phrase ‘public school education’ is altering over time, and that some traditions underpinning public school education are being lost and others are being reauthored. But in the current context, the broader question remains, ‘what does public schooling mean in the 21st century in Australia?’

Free, compulsory and secular?

In order to reflect upon the meanings of Australian public education in the 21st century, it is now time to return to the premise of this paper: that histories and traditions underpin the provision of public school education in Australia; and that the recognition of the nature of these histories and traditions is important to acknowledge for their sustainability: so they are subjected to investigation, are debated, are not taken for granted, and where appropriate, are maintained. A backdrop has been painted thus far in this paper that outlines some of the histories and traditions underpinning school education in Australia.

It has been demonstrated here that through the respective Education Acts, 'free, compulsory and secular' education was legislated so that all children of compulsory age could attend school. While it has been seen that individualistic and economic motivations underpin these legislations, and that the phrase 'public school education' has included meanings of 'free, compulsory and secular' education, there has also been the tradition underpinning universal education in Australia, that public schooling is central to the operation of a democratic, civil society (Reid 2000). That is, the phrase 'public school education' has included the meaning that it is a necessary public good (Reid 1998). The physical places called 'schools' have been places where young people have shared common experiences and undertaken the social, emotional and ethical development required in order to participate in society. Schools in Australia then, have been places where democratic values of our society have been taught.

Along with 'public school education' referring to the use of public funds for its provision, this meaning has also included that at least in terms of tuition costs (ie the cost of teachers), that public schooling in Australia be provided free of charge. Also linked to the tradition of providing 'free, compulsory and secular' schooling has been the provision of distance education. That is, the meaning of public school education being 'free, compulsory and secular' has included an interpretation based on access to and equality of provision of schooling to all students, irrespective of location, that are under the age of compulsion.

Traditionally, distance education has been provided to those students located too far away from public school buildings to physically attend school. As such, there have been clear purposes for using digital technologies in Australian school education to overcome the barriers presented by distance in time and space. Therefore, the provision of both distance education as well as ‘face-to-face’ schooling in Australia is reflective of an understanding that equality of provision of school education to all students, has underpinned one meaning of ‘public school education’.

Policies advocating the universal use of digital technologies in public schooling, where the meaning includes equality of provision however, have also resulted in the development of complex sets of inter-relationships between policies within and beyond schooling. The provision of an IT infrastructure requires public schooling to be dependent, in unprecedented ways, upon the private sector and on the efficiency of the telecommunications and other commodity markets (cf Kenway 1998; Moyle 2003). Companies in these markets have as their primary aim to make profits rather than to ensure the best interests of all students. Such motives are at odds with public schooling being ‘free, compulsory and secular’, and are also at odds with an interpretation of the meaning of ‘public schooling’ that includes the principles of democratic education. Indeed it has been shown previously by authors such as Lingard (1996) that when public school education becomes more corporatist, the democratic values that have previously underpinned public school education, begin to be eroded.

Policy-makers in Australian school education then, have a dilemma: the provision of ‘free, compulsory and secular’ school education in Australia is now dependent upon the provision of an IT infrastructure, and without the necessary infrastructure, schooling is not accessible to all, but in so doing it opens up public school education to corporatist forces. Traditionally the infrastructure for public schools has been the school buildings, or where the access by students to these buildings has not been possible, distance education as been provided (Moyle 2003). But with the advocacy for using digital technologies in school education, the provision of the necessary facilities now

includes access to telecommunications, electricity, computers and local and wide area networks. The definitions of what constitutes 'public school education' then, are widening. But while there are dilemmas arising from the Commonwealth moving to make IT infrastructure a universally available part of school buildings, at the same time it also broadens the definitions of what we mean by 'public school education', and thereby broadens the nature of the provision of public schooling in Australia. These dilemmas then, challenge policy-makers to reconsider what public school education means in the 21st century.

Conclusion

This paper set out to question what does public school education in Australia mean in the 21st century. The paper started from the position that histories and traditions underpin Australian school education and inform our understandings of what universal or public school education in Australia means. Since the proclaiming of the respective Education Acts in the later part of the 1800's, the meanings of the phrase 'public school education' have varied over time. It has been argued that the inclusion of digital technologies in school education is redefining and reauthoring what has previously been understood by 'public school education' and that there have been complex reasons for this.

The new Australian government has introduced the policy, the *Digital Education Revolution*, and this policy is arguably broadening our understandings of what is 'free, compulsory and secular' education, given the widespread introduction of technologies into school education represents. It can be seen throughout this paper though, that the introduction of the *Digital Education Revolution* is presenting the school sector with several dilemmas and is challenging previously held traditions. It is time then, to reconsider what 'free, compulsory and secular' education in Australia in the 21st century means to each of us, both individually and collectively.

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