

School autonomy reform and social justice: a policy overview of Australian public education (1970s to present)

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This presentation provides an overview of the policies of school autonomy reform in Australian public education from the Karmel report in 1973 to the present day. The key focus is on the social justice implications of these reforms. Understanding the relationship of inequities between and within school systems and school autonomy policies, including accountability measures and school choice, is critical in working towards socially just education systems. We heed Lingard's (2021, p. 1) call to look back in time, in order to 'understand ... present and possible futures', in order to consider how the complex history of school autonomy reform in Australia has supported and constrained socially just outcomes in Australian public education. We track the tensions between policy moves to both grant schools' greater autonomy and rein in this autonomy with the increasing instatement of external forms of regulation. We draw on Nancy Fraser's concepts of dis-embedding and re-embedding markets to track key policy moments in three Australian states (Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales) together with increasing federal intervention into schooling. *Embedded markets* are enmeshed in noneconomic institutions and subject to non-economic norms offering social protection through state regulation, while *dis-embedded* markets, associated with the devolution and decentralisation of state control, become open and subject to unfettered marketisation (Fraser, 2013). The *re-embedding* of markets, occurs when there is a social impetus through political intervention (which can be both progressive and reactionary) to control rampant marketisation (Fraser, 2013). The dis-embedding/re-embedding of markets can be seen in the ebbs and flows of autonomy reform in the granting and reining in of freedoms to schools within public systems. We draw attention to the redistributive and representative justice implications arising from these policy moments as occurring within a consistent trajectory towards a market agenda, and we argue that future policy needs to consider the effect of past policy.

Fraser, N. (2013). *Fortunes of feminism: From state-managed capitalism to neoliberal crisis*. Verso.

Lingard, B. (2021). Multiple temporalities in critical policy sociology in education. *Critical Studies in Education*, 1-16.