The End of Modernist Approaches to School Funding Policy in Australia: a New Rationale for Funding with Inclusive Implications for All Australian Schools?

The Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee has been asked to examine the principles of Commonwealth Funding for schools, with particular emphasis on how these principles apply in meeting the current future needs of government and non-government schools and whether they ensure efficiency in the allocation of school funding. The Committee will also investigate accountability arrangements including through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. This paper provides a critical discourse analysis of recent developments, tracking two themes: the construction of 'efficiency and effectiveness' in the allocation of school funding in Australia, and the impact of such a construction on a discourse of inclusive education for all schools in Australia. Through this analysis the author argues that the current enquiry creates an opportunity for a substantial shift in focus – from funding government and non-government schools *in relation to* government schools, to both government and non-government schools – within a framework of presumptive equality and inclusion. It is also argued that extant policy, removing the substantial Catholic sector from its hitherto hybridised and separate funding position and bringing government and non-government schools into sector specific funding competition with each other, realigns and rearticulates federal involvement in school funding policy areas that have been the traditional preserve of state governments and territories. In the process, responsibility for instilling and supporting inclusive educational practices is currently solely that of the states and territories where, in many cases, funding as well as inclusive education policies and programs have been determined at local levels. The endorsement by the federal government of new principles in funding, as proposed in this paper, creates a space that potentially enables new strategies for inclusive education to be conjoined with funding allocation policy in Australian schools, to the economic and social benefits of all schools as well as the polity.

Introduction

Since the mid-Seventies Australia has seen an unprecedented expansion in provisions for the funding of non-government schools by the Australian state. Various state and territory-based surveys of needs influenced the Karmel Report, *Schools in Australia* (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1973) and subsequent quadrennial Commonwealth school funding allocations and the beneficiaries of such an arrangement were primarily resource-poor Catholic schools. Since then, various alterations to this policy, somewhat restricting the needs-based claims of the Catholic sector, which had resulted for several quadrennia in a tripartite system of schools in Australia, have succeeded in simplifying and unifying the non-government sector en route to bringing it into closer competition with the government sector for the efficient and effective allocation of school funds. It is this latest policy that is the focus of this paper. This analysis argues that the current Senate examination creates the opportunity for a dramatic improvement in needs-based funding in Australian schools, which has been the hallmark of a particular approach to the funding of Catholic sector that has dramatic implications for their identity and location in the non-government sector, and which is the basis for a perennial and troubling policy process as governments seek to rationalise their funding arrangements by bringing public and private schools into much closer competition with each other.

The success of such a policy has hitherto depended to a large extent on the capacity of the governments in power to convince the substantial Catholic sector of the benefits of their preferred policy. Usually such success has been determined by dispensatory needs-based funding arrangements for Catholic schools that have imposed a restraint to the optimal effects of policy. Through the critical discourse analysis provided in this essay it is suggested that, although a needs-based policy agenda that ensured the separate and advantageous treatment of Catholic schools funding may have been temporarily closed down, it will undoubtedly re-emerge, based on the strength of the Catholic claim. Accordingly, I argue that as a result of the Senate examination, a space has been created which potentially enables new strategies and accountabilities for a needs-based inclusive education funding policy for all Australian schools, bringing them into much closer competition with one another as well as requiring accountabilities across all sectors in respect of inclusive educational practices and requirements, without which funding would be forfeited and eventually relinquished by schools declining to meet such inclusive accountabilities.

All policy and quadrennial documents relating to funding are the product at the federal level of the Australian school funding policy process and, as such, are worked creatively on, through and around the complexities of federalism in Australian education (Lingard & Porter, 1997) as well as in the context of the claims of an increasingly diverse group of school providers. They are also pursued inside the Australian state by bureaucrats as well as politicians, especially in Treasury, with an interest in linking the funding of schools with school reform processes in Australia as well as an understandable

commitment to containing budgetary allocations in traditional areas of high government expenditure. Various attempts were made by the Hawke Government during the reform initiatives of the Dawkins education ministry to rationalise the funding of Catholic and similar other schools by bringing them into an 'integrated', fully-funded public sector partnership with state schools but this proposal was unacceptable to the Catholic sector for reasons that have been researched elsewhere (Furtado, 2001). The deregulatory agenda was consequently kept on the boil during the closing decade of the last century by neo-liberals with a strong commitment to economic reform but without an affinity for new constructions of social justice as equal opportunity that have come to inform the strategies and understandings of inclusive educators, whose discourses had not hitherto kept pace with those of neo-liberal contributors to the school reform and especially the school funding policy process (Slee, 2004; Allan, 2003).

Most significantly, recuperative exclusivist funding ideas have successfully regained and now defend and maintain independent sectoral school dominance, occluded in the century between 1875-1975 when state aid to Church schools was cut off, in the face of major gains made by independent schools since funding to them commenced in 1975. Meanwhile, one of the major recommendations of the Karmel Report (1973), viz. to address and assess the needs of all Australian schools to provide educational access and participation through various initiatives undertaken by the Commonwealth Schools Commission, has been sidelined, initially by the closure of the Commission and its work, thereby mirroring the shift in funding policy emphasis from 'modernist hope to postmodernist performativity' (Lingard, 2000). Irredentist groups, consisting of an amalgamation of teacher unionists, social liberals and social justice public policy advocates are now focussing their efforts on attempting to repel the more simplistic claims of the recuperative private school exclusivists, while also seeking to recognise and consolidate the educational gains that have been made for several groups of non-participants in the Australian educational arrangements until 1975. Among these excluded groups were girls, indigenous Australians and some non-English speaking students (Bullivant, 1981; Kenway, Willis, Blackmore & Rennie, 1997; Arnot, David & Weiner, 1999; Parekh, 2000).

Thus, the engagement between inclusivists and the Australian state is now at a critical stage, with, in the words of Ailwood and Lingard (2001, p.10) 'feminists attempting to protect their claims in a climate of backlashes and recuperative men's politics that seek to constitute men as a disadvantaged group in need of supportive state action'. Similarly, the discourses of the independent school lobby, especially those influenced by Judith Sloan and others (1998), and as expressed in more recent times by the federal Education Minister, Dr Nelson, have tried to construct government schools as privileged majorities, devoid of values in their teaching, and squanderers of public wealth and opportunity. While indigenous educational achievement remains poor by global standards, and several of the gains of multicultural education in terms of second language acquisition now relinquished (Kalantzis, 2003), new essentialist discourses of education and social justice attach great importance to accountability and the erection and achievement of performance indicators, such as enhanced retention rates for individual schools with high proportions of Aboriginal and Islander students. Embroiled in this debate are the inheritors of a disparaged special needs education, who since the UNESCO Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education (Salamanca, 1994), are charged with responsibility for the development of an inclusive education discourse that, in the words of Baker (2002), seems to focus almost exclusively on 'the transmogrification of old to new eugenic discourses, (in which) disability becomes reinscribed as an outlaw ontology reinvesting eugenic discourse in a new language that maintains an ableist normativity' (p. 663).

Since the early nineties, discourses of special needs education have seen a shifting field of contestation and expansion in Australia as well as globally, between inclusivists on the one hand and the more technically and diagnostically inclined special needs recuperativists and various other groups committed to the provision of schooling in exclusivist or separatist modes. The Senate Committee in question must therefore confront one profound textual challenge: how to construct a hybrid, heteroglossic policy statement of school funding principles which knits together the above competing discourses. The hearings provide the Senate with an opportunity to scrutinise and influence the future school funding proposals of the government to ensure that they operate within a frame of reference that links economic deregulation and rationalist principles with others that support inclusive schools at the widest level of understanding and practical implementation of inclusive education policy.

Schools funding: A framework for Australian schools:
Two discursive strategies

> It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive of discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must

not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. (Foucault, 1990, p. 101)

In this essay I argue that the end is in sight for the multiple and shifting power relations and debates over state aid and educational advantage/disadvantage in Australian schools. I argue that one desirable outcome of policy examination would be a shift to a broad discourse of educational inclusion as a central focus for Commonwealth school funding policy. The analysis provided here consequently aims to promote this broad discourse of funding policy, specifically, as is evident from critical and poststructural approaches to education reform in the postmodern state (Ball, 1994), in the context of its location within broader social and economic discourses. In Foucauldian terms this analysis seeks to blend and accommodate apparently discontinuous and resistant or intentionally mutually opposed and fragile discourses of funding and inclusive education to reflect commonalities in the politics and power relations within which extant opposing discourses of school funding policy are produced.

For this to happen any examination of the principles of Commonwealth funding for schools must address two discourses and, by definition, show how these discourses influence the production of policy and of principles in relation to the allocation of school funds, viz. how these principles apply in meeting the current and future needs of government and non-government schools, and whether such principles ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the allocation of school funding. Let us call these two discourses Part A and Part B. Part A, referring to the current and future needs of government and non-government schools in relation to the apportionment of funding between class-differentiated schools, is already addressed in terms of widespread agreement on the use of SES scaling in the allocation of funds. With the agreement of the Catholic system to this arrangement, the last bastion of opposition to a uniform and standardised form of funding distribution *between* and *within* independent schools has been removed.

However the fact that this principle does not yet apply to the distribution of funds *between* and *within* government schools presents a serious challenge to the work of the Senate, unless some means can be found of ensuring that SES factors can be adopted in the allocation of funding to state schools. While *some* differentiating factors *do* apply in state and territory funding allocations to government schools it is generally assumed that the social and cultural needs of those schools are broadly similar and that because such schools are notionally open to all they should receive the same per capita funding. This is a naïve view, ignoring the fact that state schools, while technically open to all, operate in vastly differentiated and culturally distinct environments, including high and low SES, and also engage in educational practices that do not necessarily always promote inclusion, access and equal participation, because such values are not automatically met as a consequence of government directives but also depend for their successful enactment on attitudinal factors in state schools.

The prospect of state and territory administrations agreeing to SES-based funding allocations to such schools is unlikely, given constitutional jurisdictions that locate public education as a states' right, as well as the fact that non-government schools charge fees that constitute a restrictive practice and a stumbling block to equal funding treatment every bit as discriminatory as academic tests set by some state schools to determine entry and enrolment in them. This essay argues that it is precisely on these grounds, i.e. that some non-government as well as government schools are widely regarded as elitist and inequitable in their educational practices, that such practices should debar them from being funded by the Commonwealth. Thus, various degrees of conflict exist within the constraints of current policy, which need resolution *as part of* the examination, expression and endorsement of new school funding policy by the Senate Committee.

It is imperative therefore that the Committee locates the resolution of conflicts generated by current policy as central to the expression of new policy and expectations (Taylor, 1997), for the danger in occluding such a consideration is to risk a repeat of the vastly conflicting discourses that have contributed to extant policy, particularly from ideologically committed lobbies that have tended to colonise policy opinion in Labor and Coalition governments on the school funding question. What is argued for here, therefore, is not necessarily an end to a political construction of the terms of funding policy discourse, but a recognition that wisdom and light may not reside exclusively within one ideological camp or the other, and indeed, that the ensuing result, far from being a pragmatic and temporary solution to funding policy problems, can in fact reflect the triumph of an approach to policy that transcends the narrow confines of partisan approaches to solving complex educational problems that have typified the funding policy process until now.

For this to happen the Senate Committee must avoid a repeat of the use of policy platitudes that are used in enquiries of this nature to 'suture over...hide...(and) appropriate difference...(and instead to privilege)...those strategies which are deliberately polysemous, which can be read differently as referring to and operating in the interests of competing audiences' (Luke et al, 1997, p. 141). It is argued here that the Commonwealth has used such strategies in the past, in which from time to time, depending on the government in power, conservative and radical discourses of school funding have been sutured over and hidden through dual discursive strategies, often appropriating the Opposition's discourse and constructing government and non-government schools alternatively as equal victims of an imperfectly funded schooling system. These strategies have caused the framework of school funding policy in the past to be distorted in ways that have constructed state and independent schools at various times as disadvantaged, thereby concealing the power-knowledge relations that have underpinned past policies.

This analysis will therefore consider the discursive strategies through which funding policy has been constructed and, through a critical discourse analysis based on the work of Foucault (1978, 1990) will shed light on how dominant discourses emerge and shift within, around and through power-knowledge relations. These power-knowledge relations are reflected through the production of a particular discourse that is the outcome of a perennial struggle over different political meanings, through which extant policies have come under attack from factions opposed to the original dominant discourse. Critical to an understanding of how this has happened in school funding policy is an examination of what constitutes needs-based funding and its relevance in a post-statist social and economic context.

Constructions of needs-based funding

The construction of needs based funding was a conceptual focus throughout the Karmel Report (Schools in Australia, 1973) and, as such, is an integral theme in need of further scrutiny and discussion. Understanding the process of needs based funding and the various and sometimes contrary meanings invested in such a terminology should therefore be the first strategic direction of the Committee. The original impetus for needs based funding was inextricably based on Keynesian deficit-expenditure modelling, which privileged welfarist approaches to school funding, advantaging the poorest schools over those with a capacity to raise their own resources. The device employed to calculate such apportionments was the Education Resources Index, which soon came under criticism from both state and non-Catholic independent school providers as advantaging the Catholic sector over all others. The Catholics were thought to use the device as a mechanism for continuing to charge low fees while expecting the Commonwealth to pick up the tab for substantial Catholic schools costs. Meanwhile the largesse flowing to Catholic schools as a result of the ERI enabled the Catholics, without considerable financial commitment, to expand their network of schools. State schools sought to rein in the expansionary Catholic school aspects of this strategy, while independent non-Catholic schools, which usually charged higher fees than the Catholics, criticised it for rewarding profligacy in government expenditure, while penalising non-Catholic school providers for contributing substantially to the costs of operating their own schools.

With limits placed by Labor on Catholic school expansion, as well as by the Coalition on the ERI because the latter disadvantaged schools operated by the Coalition's natural constituency, the ERI was eventually abandoned and replaced by an arrangement, which allocated funds on the basis of school clientele SES positioning. This arrangement has finally been accepted by the Catholics in 2004 and will form the basis for needs-based differentiated funding for the next quadrennium. At the same time the Commonwealth introduced an Enrolment Benchmark Adjustment, in operation during the current quadrennium, which rationalises public expenditure on all schooling by monitoring and re-allocating school funding between the public and private sectors on the basis of substantial evidence over the past decade of parental decision making to withdraw children from one sector, generally the public, and enrolling them in the other (although, notionally, the EBA is intended to operate both ways).

The effect of the above has been to bring schools into much closer competition with one another, in keeping with dominant market-based principles of budgeting that are intended to reward schools attracting high enrolment and divest those with falling enrolments of substantial amounts of government funding. Unfortunately, such an arrangement does not take due account of parents with little or no capacity to pay fees, or, for that matter, of the absence of choice for many students in rural or non-metropolitan areas, where state schools are frequently the only available means of education and are therefore monopoly providers. Consequently a diminution of systemic funding for these schools means that they end up with a large proportion of students with special needs, which independent schools are under no specific and universal obligation to meet. It is not hard to see that the principles of needs based funding are not met by current arrangements and that a better policy solution has to be devised to cater for schools in the open education market that are inclusive. By this it is understood that

they enrol everybody who seeks to enrol in them, without regard to their capacity to pay fees. Under my proposal, therefore, all government funded schools will engage in the task of educating to serve the needs of a society that is diverse and consequently will honour and respect the principles of equal opportunity, access and participation in all aspects of their curriculum.

The Committee is therefore asked to enunciate principles similar to the above in relation to ensuring that all schools in receipt of government funds are prepared to dispense with fees as a condition of receiving such funding. Schools that decline to do so will lose their funding, and schools failing to attract enrolment of sufficiently large numbers of students will similarly lose their funding. Thus, inclusive education requirements, far from being a drain on public expenditure, will help the Commonwealth meet its inclusive education requirements, lock such requirements into education reform mechanisms (such as productive pedagogies) and hasten the closure through withdrawal of funds from those schools that fail to attract substantial enrolments.

Discourses of Inclusive education

Although potentially positive, the language of inclusive education is generally utilised within a generally conservative and apolitical discourse of charity: its deployment by liberals and free-marketeers could be a case of 'co-opting the opposition's discourse' (Mehan, Nathanson & Skelly, 1990, p.137). Foucault (1990, p. 100) also describes such discursive strategies as 'the shifts and reutilizations of identical formulae for contrary objectives'. It seems that this device is often used in inclusive education, especially given the former history of special needs/learning support education in which withdrawal and deficiency have been regarded as normative, while the impact of new radical integrationist and inclusive constructions have yet to register in any major way on the mainstream teaching profession and its pedagogic practices.

Appropriating the opposition's discourse can also serve a hegemonic function, in that hegemony operates within 'points of greatest instability between classes or blocs to challenge, negotiate and sustain alliances (Fairclough, 1992, p. 92). If poststructuralist discourses of inclusive education are considered a challenge to the more hegemonic discourses, this dominant discourse becomes unstable and negotiation is necessary to re-establish and sustain inclusive education practices. An example of this hegemonic function would be the oft-expressed view that there are many ways of being inclusive. Considering inclusivity as multiple is part of understanding that it is socially constructed. However, to understand such a thing and to accept it can be two very different matters. Who is to accept and understand these many ways of being inclusive? Low SES students whose parents do not have the income to exercise school choice? Indigenous students in rural areas who have little chance of learning alongside European Australians, large numbers of whom attend city-based boarding schools?

Rather than understanding or accepting, many inclusivists should be concerned with problematising and challenging inclusion, especially the dominant or more obvious forms, which emphasise in the main the inclusion of disabled students. Such problematising and challenging reveals the social, historical and contextual constitution of inclusion (Mills, 2000). A clear understanding and acceptance of the importance of inclusive education is more closely linked to its poststructural linguistic discourses than former classist and structuralist discourses emphasizing 'challenge' or 'disruption'. This use of 'understanding' and 'acceptance' is indicative of the contested nature of the inclusive educational policy process, which actively seeks to erode conservative positions of yesteryear and to expand them drastically.

However a glance at inclusive education policy documents from across the polity shows that action plans, rather than debate to establish what exactly constitutes inclusive education, take precedence over deep thoughtfulness and reflection on the part of the inclusive community. This user-friendly focus is aimed at teachers and schools that implement inclusive education policy on a day-to-day basis. What emanates is a watering down of inclusive practices and a more pragmatic and generic discourse of equity. Moves that challenge are silenced, most obviously in the above examples through the deletion of class, gender and ethnic aspects of the discourse of inclusion, and by removing opportunities for such groups to challenge and widen extant discourses of inclusion as disability discourses. The specific need for schools to consider the gendered, culturalist and classist nature of educational practices is also understated by comparison with ableist discourses. Furthermore, there is a marginalizing of the need for school-based institutional support for students whose identity and need force them to subscribe to less dominant forms of inclusion, or who respond to non-traditional pedagogies.

Despite the construction of inclusion in terms of diversity being a dominant theme, radical discourses of inclusive education are always careful to consider ableist issues, rather than other issues in relation to disability. This shift in focus from diversity issues to disability matters is fundamental to the discourse of

inclusion and is reflective of a new contested context for inclusive education policies. The attendant loss of a broad discourse of inclusion and a shift to a narrower paradigm is not necessarily negative, especially if the various categories of inclusion are dealt with in non-essentialist ways and all discourses are considered to have points of resistance. For some educators, however, ableist discourses provide authoritative justification for action programs in learning support for disabled students and the potential of the concept of inclusion as a tool for working towards more equitable access for all students is overshadowed by the dominance of ableist discourses, which still tend to focus on solutions based on diagnosis, syndromic identification and pathologised identities. At the same time ableist forces can be forgiven for insisting on a special inclusive space of their own for fear of the inclusive education agenda being hijacked yet again by able-bodied advocates. The following discussion will consider some solutions to this dilemma.

Inclusion: A discourse of education for all

Discourses of inclusion are peculiar things, not necessarily reflecting the fashion of the moment, nor in the sense of gender equity discourses seeking to oust each other, but an accumulation of ideas built on an increasing awareness and an attempt to link areas of need under an ever larger equity umbrella. As such discourses of inclusion can be unwieldy and cumbersome but there is never a sense that they seek to replace one another. Instead the nature of the discourse is to find more room for another cause that may have come to light in but recent times. Their origin can be traced back to the great reform acts of early nineteenth century Britain, when successive socially liberal governments passed legislation to abolish slavery, emancipate Catholics and non-Conformists and generally achieve social advancement for sundry groups hitherto debarred from equal participation in the British polity. These events simply marked the start of a series of landmark decisions by parliament and the courts to lift restrictions on other groups in relation to the rights of women, trade unions and citizens of the colonies to equal representation. Discourses of inclusion have therefore been a major contributor to liberal democratic developments and have influenced them and worked in tandem with them to identify as well as reflect changing public perceptions of excluded groups with entitlement claims to equal treatment in the polity. The most recent example of the development of this discourse is in its treatment of the claims of gay people to equal legal entitlement in respect of the civil laws of marriage and inheritance.

It is not as if inclusive discourses are somehow preordained to line up and take their turn to step into the limelight in an orderly fashion. While this sometimes happens, as with the great reform legislation of the British parliament in the nineteenth century, it sometimes takes a catalyst to project issues onto the front page of public opinion and these can be accidental as well as carefully planned and executed. Undoubtedly the Stonewall Riot was an example of the former, when somehow a group of people accustomed to meeting illegally in private were arrested and spontaneously resisted. The passage of legislation to permit the marriage of gay and lesbian people in San Francisco is an example of the latter. When the first cards fall the entire pack can follow and it appears that such an event will mark a milestone for the emancipation of gay people in their quest for equal treatment under the law. At other times it takes an international body, such as the United Nations or one of its agencies to promote the discourse and to nurture its development in global contexts: this is evidently what has happened in respect of the Salamanca Statement and its aftermath. And connected with this is an awareness that discourses relating to inclusion have multifaceted and wide-ranging dimensions and effects, such as the educational, political, cultural and economic. Thus, inclusion in terms of the discussion undertaken in this essay, while primarily educational, has dramatic correlative influences in social and economic policy and, under the banner of philosophy and ethics, even has a theological component. The discourse of inclusion is the contemporary vernacular employed to articulate and valorise the claims of the unrecognised and the excluded.

As such, discourses of inclusion represent the ever-continuing human quest for equal treatment, although it is quite possible that these discourses will increase to advance the claims of non-human animate species. The discourse is in that sense endless and reflects the constantly replenishing and inevanescent nature of human entelechy and intelligence, being of its very nature drawn into reflection and self-examination and spurred on to new animation and action in support of change and improvement to inclusive global conditions. Sometimes such changes are in response to setbacks and new conditions such as the emergence of new economic times in which collectivist solutions to meeting the claims of emancipists by the enforced or voluntary redistribution of wealth have collapsed and been replaced by panaceas and other approaches more attuned to the global economic project. Whatever the ideologies driving the discourses, some of them mutually opposed in terms of methods and prescriptions, it is their intention that they share in common, which is the liberation of all groups and identities so that all may be equal, even though it is sometimes possible to see the conditions of particular groups set back by new social arrangements promoting their inclusion: there can be little doubt that the integration of disabled learners is partly driven by the expense of making separate

educational provision for them or that in the current post-colonial period some economic conditions are worse off for decolonised people.

Thus inclusion is a particular discursive representation of policy compromise and struggle, with processes of implementation and practice that are greatly watered down in relation to what is ultimately desirable. An analysis of this theme reveals that, in many ways, such a broad discourse of inclusion is in reality a metadiscourse of equity, which can be seen as negating or diminishing progressive effects of equity policies in other areas. However, it is also necessary to acknowledge that without the incremental nature of inclusive discourses, extant metadiscourses of equity may have been extinguished or inhibited: broadened policy approaches deflect regressive stands towards equity that are part of the ebb and flow of policy development and stagnation in relation to inclusion.

The broadening of inclusive education policy objectives to include diverse groups beyond those with a disability is a response to diversity lobby groups that are not just diversified with reference to target groups, but which are also profoundly committed in educational settings to widening pedagogic repertoires that provide access to successful learning strategies and outcomes for marginalised groups. This has resulted in the continued construction of pedagogy as a technical discipline and its co-option as a social justice strategy for accessing learning to historically underperforming groups and excluded learner categories. This practical and instrumental focus on outcomes represents a materialist construction of inclusive education to which secular and government operated systems are universally committed. In several parts of the world in which confessional schools systems operate, especially within the vast network of Catholic schools globally, it is possible to observe the existence of spiritual discourses of inclusion in those polities in which Catholic schools are large in number and rely on considerable amounts of public funding for their survival. The inclusive effects of such schools are optimum, where they are free and fully-funded and also have access to a strong spirituality of inclusion, but weak where students attending such schools must pay fees.

Among other critical approaches to inclusive education is one that casts doubt on the use of diagnostic mechanisms for funding costs and other strategies related to the inclusion of special groups within mainstream classrooms (Baker, 2002). This kind of critique takes issue with subjectivist and arbitrary norms around which 'otherness' can be classified and which are intended to attract funding support for the inclusion of students in such categories in mainstream classrooms. Baker (2002) shows how the continued use of psychologistic and especially psychometric testing with the extraordinary interpolative power to categorise and negate the value of diverse learners, far from supporting the aims and intentions of inclusion, may contribute to profoundly separatist educational discourses and privileged pedagogic practices. This diagnostic aspect of inclusive discourse is profoundly problematic because for a presumptive equality to be achieved inclusion must develop out of ideas of normalcy that privilege some achievements and practices over others. The removal of such aggregated and standardised assessment, while dealing a severe blow to unilateralist and primitive assessment and ranking models, is not without its own particular set of problems for education systems that invariably act as conduits for access to meritocratic appointments in economic liberal societies, in which achievement is rewarded strictly according to criteria based on success and failure. Thus, presumptive equality, based as it is on norms and values of what is desirable to learn and how best to teach it, potentially marginalises the multiple and varied factors that intersect to define inclusion, while ignoring the complexities of structural, historical and political power relations that lend potent support to this critique.

Another conflict in inclusive education policy arises out of a kind of competing victims' syndrome, in which it is not uncommon to find sharply differentiated and mutually exclusive discourses, such as in relation to boys' and girls' disadvantage that arise out of the fact that unlike other inequities some are the result of quite different processes at work in their construction. While it is possible to argue that some analyses of boys' disadvantage reveal this to be a product of feminist and profeminist discourses, which is also the context in which most critiques of girls' disadvantage are contained (Lingard & Douglas, 1999), the existence of contestational masculinist discourses (Fletcher & Brown, 1995) account for a kind of recuperative policy that creates a set of competing polarities and discourses within inclusive education that often gives rise to and promotes compromise as a characteristic of inclusive education policy development (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry, 1997). This lack of resolution to the debate between competing discourses also accounts for the retreat into essentialised categories, such as 'girl' and 'boy' or 'public' and 'private', that reflect the long-term unresolved but temporary solution to the perennial need for immediate funding policy expression.

Such a state of affairs is evident in any reading of several submissions to Commonwealth reviews of school funding in recent years or even the gender equity policy process in which generalisations are made of girls and boys or private and public schools that are simply essentialist assertions rather than based on any authentic attempt to define commonalities rather than polarities. Furthermore, where

these do exist, such platitudes and generalities often hide the complexities of power and knowledge that operate within and around discourses of equity and inclusion. Such crudities often reflect the kind of commonsense notions of equity that are employed in varied contexts, for example in many media treatments and popular psychology texts, but reveal an enforced and inapplicable interpolation that become established as normalised regimes of truth through popular social and institutional discursive practices (Luke, 1995). A discursive strategy such as this enables the text to 'assume a taken-for-grantedness that hides the politics of what is being taken up' (Yates, 1997, p. 340). Thus, the discourse of equity found in inclusive education policy 'often ignores underlying power-knowledge relations and the politics of who is being granted the authority to speak, to name and to be heard' (Ailwood and Lingard, 2001, p. 17).

Within educational policy in Australia the constitution of the educationally disadvantaged subject has enabled the mobilisation of funding and resources, and provided a legitimating framework for teacher action on inclusive education issues. That this has been the result however of an accumulation of competing victims syndrome there can be little doubt, because, as Hayes (1998) points out, if the constitution of the educationally disadvantaged subject has not limited disadvantage for some groups, it is hardly likely that it will do so for others. Considering the discursive shifts in past policy development in some areas of equity, diversity and inclusion, it is possible to argue that current ubiquitous shifts to discourses of inclusion have more to do with power relations than with a desire to eliminate disadvantage. Thus, current shifts in inclusion policy are a reflection of the political struggle for discursive representations between ableist/disableist as well as various recuperative special needs factions and federal, state and territory governments.

In the major discursive shifts of the past decade that have contributed to the construction of inclusive education, various interplays of power and knowledge have enabled a discourse of inclusion in schools to make its way onto governments' policy agenda. For example, international pressure in the form of the Salamanca Statement, combined with various government initiatives globally, enabled a positive response to inclusivist concerns regarding the segregation of some learners from others in schools. This positive social and political environment also constrained and silenced extant ableist discourses in schools. These political contexts and power-knowledge relations are challenged by economic discourses in other areas, driven by trends in the deregulation of school funding, allocating increasing funds to non-government systems with no commitment to the inclusive education policies and practices of public providers and some of whom are committed to discursive shifts that attach more importance to spirituality than to the actual provision of inclusive facilities for cohorts traditionally barred from schools or located in separate learning environments because of the expense associated with enacting inclusive policies and practices.

Because mainstream schooling and ableist practices, including behaviours and expectations in relation to disadvantage need to change in order for inclusive educational experiences to be enhanced, it is necessary for inclusivists to see the need to change hegemonic exclusive practices as part of the inclusivist political project. That this inclusivist theorising insists upon a recognition that hegemonic groups depend for their exclusion on arbitrary and speculative ableist assumptions is important here, since if privilege is invisible only ableist protagonists have the luxury to pretend that inclusion does not matter. Consequently, the standard objections to inclusion, as these relate to school facility costs and associated inclusive provision, cannot be ignored enroute to widening and enhancing inclusive discourses and addressing the concerns of those who either cannot afford to provide inclusive practices and who choose instead to spiritualise their discourses. This can only be done by inclusive educators engaging in discourses of school funding policy to ensure that school providers receive funding commensurate with their obligation to be inclusive or otherwise be debarred from receiving the same.

The emergence of a discourse of funding has been neither a recent nor a simple process. Discourses have emerged in between and around existing discourses, involving struggle, compromise, conflict and resistance (Hayes, 1998). However, so far no discourse of inclusion has been introduced to impact on and lead direction towards a new discourse of funding, allowing both discourses to sit alongside, in-between and in conflict with each other, making an uneasy partnership within an incomplete and inchoate resulting discourse of equity. As pointed out earlier, discourses of funding have been conducted in surprisingly conservative and narrow paradigms, usually pitting the private and public sectors against each other. What is now needed is a broader discourse of equity that attempts to focus on the needs of inclusive education across both sectors. Not only would such a policy be preferable to addressing the separate needs of public and private schools, it would enhance the potential impact of funding policy in terms of the ongoing need to resolve the range of issues facing the excluded in both sectors.

Conclusion

As discussed throughout this essay, funding discourses lack an engagement with inclusive education discourses, which involve major shifts for all Australian schools. The most obvious of these shifts is the transition from privileging ableist discourses to treating all students within a framework of presumptive equality. This shift can be enabled through the discursive strategy of co-opting inclusive education concerns about how funding is spent in independent schools so that funding policy takes on a broad discourse of inclusion. Such a strategy can be utilised and directed towards enabling a stance of presumptive equality to underscore the discourse of school funding. Within this discourse, both public and independent schools can be existentialised and named in ways that address the many complexities and inequities within as well as between public and private schools in terms of how inclusive or otherwise they are.

Such inclusive strategies point towards the end of policies specifically for school funding and reconstruct them in terms of inclusive education policy, which is incontestably the responsibility of the nation state at this stage of the evolution of the liberal democratic polity. This discussion provides an opening for progressive inclusive education programs, through which there is potential for a consideration of school funding which acknowledges its situatedness and challenges its privileged and dominant ableist preoccupations and foundations. Such a classist and structuralist focus, generally underpinning current policy, and especially that component of it dependent on socio-economic status considerations, is not always necessarily negative, but provides an inadequate basis for proceeding with the rational development of a just and equitable funding policy for the future with an understanding of the complexities discussed in this essay.

Moreover, since the closure of the Commonwealth Schools Commission, the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Technology is too close to the centre of executive and legislative decision making to do much more than enact changes in ideology as reflected by the political parties and their particular sets of policies that have colonised government. When set against the complex mediations of federalism, inclusive educational requirements as a condition of receiving funding would enhance the role of Treasury in promoting the economic rationalist/free market project in schooling and the withering of the increasingly artificial public versus private binary that continues to dominate school funding policy and its Australian discourses. The withering of such national imperatives in postmodern, poststructural times would do much to end bitter rivalries of the past and to focus attention on the quality and inclusivity of all Australian schools, bringing them into funding parity with several other school funding systems overseas (Caldwell, 2003). The focus would then be on public *and* independent schools, with the policy space devoted to investing in schools with inclusive educational programs and equal opportunity practices. Such a policy transition would devolve the enactment of the policy to individual rather than systemic school sites, where media representation of inclusion and its complex and far-reaching consequences for the quality of schools have hitherto been absent with a focus and analysis of school outcomes that has hitherto privileged exclusive practices.

The current Senate examination of the principles of Commonwealth funding for schools, with particular emphasis on how these principles apply in meeting the current and future needs of government and non-government schools; and whether they ensure effectiveness and efficiency in the allocation of school funding cannot afford to ignore the shifting politics and power relations that enshrine global trends in inclusive education. Although its focus is on funding, such an examination provides a clear signal as well as an opportunity that policies of funding based on the interminable and increasingly unsustainable and antediluvian politics of class have no part in a predominantly publicly funded school context in which an inclusive and level playing field for all is the only just and economic foundation for funding schools. This is particularly so given that its timing parallels the recent release of research and several school reform projects around the globe, but especially in Australia as in several OECD countries, linking inclusive education policies with renewed and productive efforts to improve pedagogic effects in schools (Luke & Luke, 2000). It is the inclusive effects of current and future initiatives within school funding policy, which will determine whether or not the discursive practices of inclusion have provided a starting point for the improvement of all Australian schools and the endgame for old-fashioned and dated constructions of school funding policy.

Keywords

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Acknowledgement

Author

Michael Furtado operates a consultancy in inclusive education called 'Discovering Disability and Diversity'. His website is www.discoveringdisability.com.au. He has a recent doctorate in policy sociology from The University of Queensland.