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Australian school funding and accountability: history imploding into the present

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Keywords

Australian, School, Funding, Accountability, History, Imploding, into, Present

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Australian School Funding and Accountability: History Imploding into the Present

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Abstract

This paper examines historical origins of accountability for public funding in the Australian school education system. Understandings of accountability have developed unique to the Australian context, embedding institutions and ideas from a colonial past. It is shown that the funding arrangements used to distribute and account for public education funds are political devices to mediate enduring historic relationships between government and non-government schools, while at the same time masking these relationships in the veiled rhetoric of a broader Australian cultural imperative of egalitarianism. It concludes the current funding and accountability of school education in Australia is a simulacrum of accountability. It reifies in a replicating simulated state the status quo of an historical education funding and accountability context that has no engagement with education, but does represent colonial funding arrangements and historical tensions between federal and states' governments.

Introduction

This paper examines historical origins and forms of accountability for public funding in the Australian school education system. Accountability has developed unique to the Australian context, embedding institutions and ideas from a colonial past. This paper takes the view that accountability is a cultural embellishment, socially constructed and socially constructing (Hines 1988).

Understanding the historical nature and constructions of accountability in current Australian school funding arrangements is important to this paper, as Australia has socially constructed a unique form of parliamentary accountability for its school education sector. Accountability is the essence of parliamentary responsibility (Funnell and Cooper 1998). Accountability implies an obligation of responsibility for authoritative decisions. “A fiduciary responsibility arises from a relationship of trust between two parties. When governments are given the privilege of raising money, they enter into a relationship of trust with the community to use the money honestly, wisely and fairly.” (Funnell and Cooper 1998, p32). The calculative technology that measures and discloses this relationship of trust, and facilitates the use of funding formulas, is accounting.

The focus of this paper is to explore the historical origins of the accountability of the funding relationship between the Commonwealth government and non-government schools, in an attempt to explain beyond a technical understanding, current practice. Current differential funding arrangements are systemic and their accountability requirements are an artefact of historic events, leaving the education sector with two distinct components; distinct not only in their funding, but also in their cultures, fostering a unique argument of accountability. This dual system is a legacy from colonial times where diverse schooling choices reflected the social and religious strata in society (Rudkin 2002).

The contribution of this paper is to offer from an historical perspective, an Australian context-specific cultural analysis of the development of accountability that goes beyond a technical understanding, using the theoretical lens of Baudrillard’s hyper-reality. The thesis of this paper is that the historical context-specific understanding of

accountability in the Australian school education sector reifies in a replicating simulated state the status quo of an historical education funding and accountability context that has no engagement with current education needs, but does represent colonial funding arrangements and historical tensions between federal and states' governments.

This paper contributes to extant accounting literature that uses a Baudrillardian framework. It aligns itself with the approach of Arrington and Watkins (2002), which argues for the importance of alternative ontological and epistemological stances in expanding the space for, and explaining political engagement with accounting. This view is also supported by Macintosh et al (2000, p. 45) who argue "Much more in Baudrillard's corpus of literature could be tapped to further our understanding of accounting and the issues facing standard setters". This paper takes up a theme of examining accountability as simulacra, as a contribution to similar literature of Macintosh et al (2000), Takatera and Sawabe (2000), Baker (2002), and Vollmer (2003). It is the contribution of this paper to advance an enabling and emancipating understanding of accountability in historical contexts. The author is unaware of any similar study applying Baudrillard's theory of simulacra to historical constructions of accountability across both the public and private sectors. This study uses past funding data from the Australian school education systems to explore Baudrillard's concept of simulacra, and in doing so directly challenges the technical understandings of accountability of funding models that utilize accounting data in their calculations. Additionally, this paper offers a new explanation of consumption of education funding models. While the author acknowledges the literature about the limitations of a post modern framework being applied to accounting (Cooper1997, Arnold 1988, Mattessich 2003), it is intended that this paper demonstrates through incorporating a political context, the limitations of traditional notions of accountability for the public interest, as called for by Roslender and Dillard (2003).

The first section of this paper will introduce Baudrillard's theoretical lens of hyper-reality. The second section will give an overview of current structural and funding arrangements of the Australian school system. The third section of his paper will recount the historical development of schools and school funding arrangements in Australia, exploring the social, political, and economic contexts that informed the

funding arrangements and their associated accountabilities. The fourth section will offer discussion to elucidate themes in the historic narrative.

Theoretical development.

Baudrillard is a French critical theorist who sees consumption, rather than production, as the basis of social order. Baudrillard's work is concerned with systems of representation, or signs. Each sign has both a signifier such as an image, sound, or word, and something signified that is its concept or meaning. An object becomes an object of consumption when it is liberated as a sign, with denotation and connotation. For example a swimming pool *denotes* its use as an object, for swimming in as exercise or recreation. The swimming pool *connotes* a degree of functionalism, wealth, prestige or comfort. The ownership (consumption) of a swimming pool implies a place in a wider social order (Horrocks and Jevtic 1999). The swimming pool is an object which circulates in society as meanings. In this way Baudrillard sees reality as being constituted by signs found in the use of language and text (for example accounting). He also proposes that objects and their signs such as associated values and events are constituted historically and discursively (Macintosh et al 2000).

Baudrillard goes on to argue that it is consumption that causes objects to be organised and differentiated as signs. Recognising that in capitalist societies all objects are given a value in exchange, Baudrillard added that they are also given in advanced capitalist markets, a symbolic value. A prestige car has both a value in exchange and a status or social distinction. It is the social role that the object plays that gives it a sign value. In this way Baudrillard sees signs as accomplices of capitalism. He argues that capital accumulates until it becomes image, and images mediate social relationships among people. Consumption is a new phase of capitalism for the affluent society. Objects are not just consumed for their function, but rather for their collective meaning as determined by a calculus or network of signs (Horrocks and Jevtic 1999).

Further, Baudrillard proposes that the use of symbols and images as signs of reality has had a progression in history, which he terms *orders of simulacra*. The term "simulacrum" is traced to Plato, who used it to mean a false copy of something (Mann 2005). Baudrillard's orders of simulacra chart a progression of the use of signs in

language and text in society. Baudrillard argues that these signs first represented, then dominated and then replaced the societal objects that they represent. Signs move from being unproblematic to being “counterfeit” to “masking the absence of a basic reality” (Horrocks and Jevtic 1999, pp106-107). In a post modern culture dominated by media, it is argued all we have are simulations which aren’t any more or less real than a reality they simulate. Specifically, Baudrillard develops four orders of simulacra. These are phases of the image or eras of the sign, whereby differing “eras” of sign-referent relationships indicate different ontological stances. Simulacra are any image such as a sign or model that represents something else.

The symbolic order or feudal era of simulacra is the most simplistic, where a sign or image is the reflection of a basic reality. This is a “good appearance” in its truthfulness and transparency in representation. Society is organised with signs in a fixed order according to social position, e.g. a peasant could not become a King (Mann 2005). Ontologically there is an independent objective reality.

Secondly follows the “first order of simulacra” also called the counterfeit era. In this era a sign or image masks and distorts a basic reality, this being an “evil appearance”, because the image, rather than being true is distorted and “perverts” or undermines communicating the quality of the reality. Fakes or copies circulate at the same time as original objects. These fakes hope to transcend or set up as a utopian ideal the original.

Following is the production era called the second order of simulacra, or the order of sorcery. In this era the sign or image masks the absence of a basic reality. In this phase the sign is a form of smoke and mirrors, attempting to hide the true reality. It gives the appearance of a reality that is absent, and manufactures an appearance of reality. Objects produced are not counterfeits but are just many copies that are indistinguishable from their original prototype.

The fourth era termed the third order of simulacra bears no relation to reality and is simulacrum, where the image precedes the reality, and its existence does not resemble any reality. It is pure simulation (Baudrillard 1988). Simulations have no original or prototype (think of the computer generated images in movies). These simulations of

reality are termed hyperreality, and information replaces objects as a basis of production (Mann 2005). Hyperreality occurs when the image or the model anticipates and precedes the reality, and have no real referent but are completely detached (Macintosh et al 2000). Reality no longer has to be rational “since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance” (Baudrillard 1988). It substitutes signs of the real for the real itself. Simulation threatens the difference between reality and imaginary. A state of hyperreality exists where the image of the sign appears independent of any underpinning reality (Baudrillard 1981, 1983; McGoun 1997; Macintosh et al., 2000; Baker 2002).

Implosion occurs when the distinctions between the differing orders of simulacra become ambiguous. Implosion is inevitable when the boundaries between two ideas or concepts or images become blurred or collapse so that any differences between the two are no longer apparent.

The thesis of this paper is that a traditional Westminster notion of accountability for educational funding in Australia, while originally adequate, is now inadequate to explain all the orders of simulacra present in a postmodern society. Rather, new concepts of accountability are needed. This is illustrated through the historic narrative of education funding in Australia, specifically consumption of public funds on education. The evolution of funding models for Australian education, and accounting’s intrinsic complicity in their consumption are used as a device to explore Baudrillard’s orders of simulacra in an historic context.

The object education as a sign in society denotes learning, knowledge and a means of emancipation. Today the object education connotes status, power, privilege, a position in a civilized society, and an appreciation of culture. Education in contemporary Australia is an object of consumption with a value in exchange and a symbolic value. This paper will explore through the use of history, accounting’s complicity in constructing a changing symbolic value as well as a value in exchange.

Current structural and funding arrangements of the Australian school system.

Australia is a federation of six states and two territories, with a Commonwealth government operating at a federal level, and respective state and territory governments. Constitutionally the primary responsibility for providing and regulating school education in Australia lies with the State and Territory governments.

In Australia, due to historical factors a dual system of schooling exists, categorized into two categories, government schools and non-government schools. The category of non-government schools can be further divided into two sub-categories, catholic systemic schools and independent schools. Nationally, approximately 68% of students are enrolled in the government schools category, while 32% are enrolled in non-government schools. The non-government school enrolment comprises of 20% of students enrolled in systemic catholic schools, and the remaining 12 % in independent schools (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2004).

Government schools operate under the direct authority of the relevant State or Territory Minister. Non-government schools while not under the direct authority of the relevant States' or Territory's Minister, are still required to be operated in accordance with the conditions determined by the State or Territory government registration authorities. Policies and practices are regulated in the areas of curriculum, course accreditation, student assessment and certification, resource allocation and utilisation, teacher employment and professional development (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2004).

The Commonwealth government, through the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) provides funding to both government and non-government schools, to support agreed priorities and strategies, for example specific capital grants and disabled access grants. Overall government schools receive the majority of their government funding from their respective State and Territory governments, and less from the Commonwealth. On the other hand, non-government schools receive most of their government funding from the Commonwealth, and less from the relevant

State or Territory (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2004).

The Historical Development of School Funding in Australia.

Initially several unique Australian specific factors emerged in the construction of funding models and financial accountabilities for education in Australia. First there was a response to a struggle for literacy by poorer peoples and convicts in a colony. Later greater education funding was needed as a result of mass emigration and war. Both these imperatives have intrinsic to them a unique and long standing mix of educational politics between church and state. Also another cultural feature intrinsically informing the discussion of school funding accountability is the needs of a unique system developed to cope with a distinct and harsh physical environment (Fraser 1986, p416).

Education enabling egalitarianism

New South Wales was established as a penal colony of England on 7 February, 1788. By 1800 New South Wales had a population of 5,995 (Fraser 1986, p27). As such, during the earliest years of the penal colony and through the majority of the nineteenth century, any formal general education was initially provided by what resources were available. This included convicts, the churches or private individuals, and government supported schools. In the earlier years most benefited financially in a limited way by government funding.

The first school established in New South Wales in 1789 was a school for girls run by a convict, Isabella Rosson. The children were taught reading, some writing and arithmetic (Fraser 1986, p216). By 1792 there were three schools in operation, all conducted by convicts at penal settlements, one in Sydney, one at Norfolk Island and one at Parramatta. In this same year the first church school was established by Rev Richard Johnson in Sydney. By 1797 there were six schools in New South Wales, and all were now under the control of two chaplains, the Rev Richard Johnson and the Rev Samuel Marsden. They were funded by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. In 1798 missionaries from the London Missionary Society began work as

teachers. This commenced the beginnings of the Church State dichotomy still present in existing funding models and accountabilities.

The first attempt by the state to fund education occurred on 10 October 1800 when Governor King imposed an import duty on goods. This duty was intended solely to establish a fund for education in the colony. Fines were also to be paid into this fund. It was from this point that education including that provided by both religious bodies and private individuals began to be partially funded by the state. Shortly after this in 1806 the first formal Catholic education began with an Irish convict priest. It was this fund that set the precedent for state funding of a dual system of education.

On the 24 February 1810 in the *Sydney Gazette* an announcement was made indicating the first free public school. It stated “Having with much regret seen a number of children about the Town of Sydney who appear to be wholly neglected in their Education and Morals, His Excellency (Governor Macquarie) is hereby pleased to signify that a Public Charity School will be established for the education of Poor Children” (as quoted in Fraser 1986, p216).

Schools began to spring up in an ad hoc manner reflecting a diversity of social and religious strata, pedagogical methods and political intentions. Private schools served the middle classes, for example the Lancastrian monitorial system was introduced by Rev Crook at the Sydney Academy. Such private schools flourished. A typical example is the opening on 26 July 1819 of Dr Laurence Halloran’s Establishment for Liberal Education in Sydney “for the Education of a select Number of Young Gentlemen in the various Departments of Classical, Mathematical and Commercial Learning, and Lettres” (Fraser 1986, p417). Poorer non-denominational schools came to be established by the government. An example of this is the Newcastle East Public School, which was founded for the children of convicts banished from Sydney, its headmaster also a convict. In 1821 the first Marist Brothers’ College was established at Parramatta by Father John Therry. He was the first Catholic chaplain to New South Wales. By 1833 there were ten catholic schools that were established by the catholic church and serviced the lower classes, attempting to overcome illiteracy amongst them.

This diversity of schools first came under the influence of regulation in 1824 when Governor Brisbane appointed the Rev. Thomas Reddall as Director General of Public Schools in New South Wales. Reddall was authorised to introduce the form of monitorial system of Andrew Bell, which was exclusive to the Church of England. The selection of this system was seen as partial. However under this system Rev Thomas Hobbes Scott of the Church of England hierarchy established the Church and Schools Corporation, and although it was dissolved in 1833, it succeeded in increasing the number of government-aided schools (Fraser 1986, p417). Around this time in 1831 the Rev Dr John Dunmore Lang, a Presbyterian, opened the Australian College in Sydney for youth of all denominations. In 1832 Church of England schools named The King's Schools, were opened at Parramatta and Sydney to service the upper class sons of wealthy colonists. Governor Bourke protested against this at the time, claiming "The children of the poor are educated in mere hovels under Convict School Masters" (Fraser 1986, p417). The social class divide was being replicated and enforced through the educational opportunities emerging. In response to this ad hoc development of education in these early years, and in an attempt to get some accountability into a burgeoning system, Governor Bourke was in favour of national schools similar to those of the Irish National System.

This early establishment of schools in the then colony exemplifies a symbolic order of simulacra. The education provided from different groups signifies a true reflection of a basic need at the time, and reflected honestly the societal strata at the time.

Governor Bourke's proposal for national schools met with fierce resistance, especially from the Catholic Archbishop Ullathorne, who organised a procession of religious pageantry to protest against the continuing demand for national schools. In 1844 the Lowe Committee recommended to Governor George Gipps that New South Wales adopt the Irish system of education, but rather than establish a decentralised system of school boards, it was recommended that the scheme be administered through a central body. Following on from this, in 1848 Governor Fitzroy appointed a Board of National Education to establish government schools based on the Irish National System. Government funds were allocated for this purpose, and a Denominational School Board was appointed to administer government funds and operate church

schools. Thus began the dual system of state and church based education in New South Wales.

In July 1849 George William Rusden, an agent for the Board of National Education, began traveling throughout New South Wales to help colonists to establish national schools (Fraser 1986, p417). This set in place a structure that delivered an efficient system of inspections that facilitated schooling results that were both uniform and satisfactory (Mumford, J. 1994, p53). This overcame the difficulties foreshadowed by the Lowe committee that recognised early establishment of administration at the local school level was difficult because of the prevailing primitive colonial conditions. There was a predominantly illiterate, disinterested and geographically dispersed settler population that were unwilling to donate the time and finance necessary to develop effective local school support (Mumford, J. 1994, p62). Additionally poor communications and large distances created travel hazards and great expense. Such environmental conditions encouraged the establishment of a centralised education system. Despite this, government administration regarded the idea of local school boards as used in the Irish system favourably, though not practical during the period 1844 to 1866 (Mumford, J. 1994, pp54-55).

While initially schools were established in areas of settlement, from 1848 government schools were established to service expanding pastoral districts in the colony, entrenching further the emergence of the dual system of state and church schools. By 1880 this had grown to 1265 New South Wales state board run schools in operation (NSW Department of School Education 1988, p7).

In 1866 the Denominational School Board was replaced. The New South Wales Public Schools Act established a Council of Education to control state schools. Henry Parkes was the first president. This can be construed as a political appointment, as at this time Parkes was part of a ruling coalition that lasted nearly three years (Fraser 1986, p284). The act permitted the appointment of itinerant teachers where the population was scattered.

Conflict was endemic in the dual system as also around this time of the 1870's to 1880s. There were parish catholic schools established by bishops, in order to

counteract secular “godless” schools as well as other private schools. This established the beginnings of the catholic systemic system in New South Wales. These catholic schools with the endorsement of the catholic clergy drew a high enrolment and were very effective, with pupil attendance at any one time being on average 81% of enrolments, compared to pupil attendance for government schools at the same time being 70% of enrolments (Burke and Sprull 2001, p2).

In an attempt by the Parkes and Robertson coalition government to establish uniformity and authority over the New South Wales education system, the Public Instruction Act of 1880 saw the New South Wales government assume responsibility for all school education in the colony. This included education provided by both independent schools and Catholic schools. It enabled the formal establishment of a state school system administered through a new Department of Public Instruction (Scott, B. 1989(b), p1). A Minister of Public Instruction was appointed, and the department and the minister were answerable to the parliament of New South Wales. Initially the department provided a primary school instruction, but this was soon expanded to include secondary education. The Department of Public Instruction took responsibility for 1,265 schools. Of these 150 were denominational, 705 were public, 313 were provisional, and 97 half time (Fraser 1986, p420). Initially a narrow and uniform curriculum was provided, but in later years this was expanded to include accommodation for different learning needs and rates, and different student interests. By the end of the nineteenth century, New South Wales had embraced and almost implemented universal education at a primary school level (Burke et. al. 2001, p1).

The introduction of the New South Wales Public Instruction Act in 1880 must be seen in its context. The act followed immediately after the publication on July 25 1879 of the Joint Pastoral Letter by Roman Catholic Archbishop Vaughan and three of his bishops. The letter castigated state schools for neglecting Christian religion, stating “they are seedplots of future immorality, infidelity and lawlessness, being calculated to debase the standard of human excellence, and to corrupt the political, social and individual life of future citizens” (as cited in Fraser 1986, p420). The effect of the act was that by 1893, state aid was removed from all Catholic and other religious schools. This decision was intended to abolish religious schools and give the government a monopoly over educational services. This was countered by the charging of fees by

private religious schools. The Catholic system subsidised these schools of the poorer classes by staffing them almost entirely with religious. By 1910 the Catholic religious teaching workforce comprised of over six thousand (Canavan, 1998, p46).

The movement towards government control of education in the form of the New South Wales Public Instruction Act 1880, and subsequent removal of state aid to non government schools, can be aligned with Baudrillard's first order of simulacra, or the counterfeit era. At this time in history, "fakes" or "copies" of state education uniformity were circulated and consumed in the form of private and religious schools. While these were "copies" of the state system, the removal of funding from non-government schools was an attempt by the state to exercise authority and demand accountability, to cause non-government schools to transcend to the Utopian ideal of the state education system. Education was being consumed, and began to signify the Australian national value of egalitarianism.

From these earliest colonial beginnings, it is seen that education was always provided in the context of a wider partisan struggle for power between churches and state. This was no different with the onset of federation. By 1901 the state public school system and private schools were well established. Both public and private schools were regulated through the New South Wales Public Instruction Act of 1880. The public school system was a significant part of community life. At this time the state school system had 9,353 schools with a total enrolment of 887,137 pupils, the majority of which attended fee free public state schools. However, most of these schools were one-teacher schools with enrolments between ten and thirty pupils (Burke et al. 2001, p2). These were governed by an absolute centralised state education system. At this time of federation, education was not included in the Commonwealth powers, and consequently the state education system remained in place. Compulsory attendance was required for students six to thirteen years of age, however regulation was not strictly enforced, and did not apply to indigenous peoples. At the time of federation in 1900 state schools remained open for 220 days a year, which was high for a non-industrialised country at the time (Burke et al. 2001, p2).

As a response to the new federal economic aspirations to be derived from education, the New South Wales government established in addition to the free state primary

schools their own fee paying state secondary schools in the early 1900s, increasing more the competition between the public and private sectors. It was agreed initially that the public secondary schools would not be allocated in the private school catchment areas. These new selective high schools appealed to the new middle classes, and came to educate those who intended to enter professions. These academic high schools were gender differentiated in capital cities, though their fees were less than fully private schools. Entrance examinations were given, though their culture was similar to existing private grammar schools. These selective schools for twelve to fourteen year old students were justified by arguing they offered curricula to meet the different abilities and expectations of a unique group of students (Burke et al. 2001, p3).

Public secondary education came to dominate the provision of state schooling between World War I and World War II. However during this period and especially during the depression of the 1930s, the economic cost of education became a political concern. Tuition fee amounts were constantly debated for secondary education. The government noticed that when fees were increased for state secondary schools, enrolments decreased especially during the worst years of the depression. Government secondary schools were attracting large enrolments with retention rates high from primary schools because of a lack of work available to the students, and also low fee state secondary schools attracted and retained students from private schools whose enrolments fell 20% between 1930-1934 with decreasing family incomes. The public purse was suffering badly during this time and the New South Wales government reintroduced across the board secondary school fees as an emergency measure because there were not enough secondary school places to accommodate the large growth in demand. This was seen as a way of capping the economically unsustainable retention rates between the depression years of 1931 and 1936 (Burke et al. 2001, p5).

This economic context changed dramatically in the post World War II period with full employment and relatively high rates of economic growth and a high level of immigration to the state. In August 1947 Australia launched an immigration policy (only for immigrants who were white) aimed at increasing the population by one per cent a year. These settlers were British or displaced persons from the refugee camps

in Europe after World War II (Fraser 1986, p71). Support for public education was strong and large amounts of state economic resources were allocated to it. State government abolished entrance examinations for high schools, extended the leaving age and increased school scholarships and subsidies for school transport. At the same time the school curriculum was liberalised (Burke et al. 2001, pp7-12).

At this time the demand on Catholic schools was unprecedented. This arose because bishops declared that state education was unacceptable, and those parents who provided their children with state rather than Catholic education were denied absolution in confession, a serious matter for a catholic. This changed catholic perceptions of state education, and saw a huge influx to the catholic system, especially from the new immigrants, many of whom were catholic. Enrolments in catholic schools soared, with increases of one hundred per cent not uncommon (St Mary's Catholic Community Ipswich, 2001 p 4). But catholic schools, despite the free labour of their teaching religious, were unable to provide adequate resources.

Decentralisation of education administration in New South Wales began in 1948 when the first regional office was opened at Wagga Wagga (Fraser 1986, p424). Further reorganisation was afoot with the Wyndham Report on Secondary Education in New South Wales recommending a major reorganisation of secondary education in 1958, including a common core of subject activity and electives at three levels. This was formalised in 1961 with the New South Wales Education Act that took up the recommendations of the report in 1962.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s the catholic schools were in dire circumstances given the absence of any state funding. Post war population increases and a strong demand for places in catholic schools required more lay teachers to staff these schools, all of whom required a salary, unlike the religious that taught in the catholic school system. In 1965 there were 1628 lay teachers in New South Wales catholic schools, compared to 3654 religious. By 1975 there were only 2530 religious and 5343 teachers employed (Canavan 1998, pp46-48). The employment of lay teachers in the early 1960s was placing a large financial burden on schools and parishes. A political campaign for funding equity was commenced. Bishops issued statements encouraging the lobbying of political parties and individual politicians.

This political activism culminated in the Goulburn school strike in 1962. The flash point occurred when government health inspectors insisted there were insufficient toilets at Our Lady of Mercy Preparatory School. The parish was without funds to undertake the required upgrade, and received no government funding. With the approval of Goulburn's bishop John Cullinane, parents of approximately two thousand school students attending four catholic schools voted to close their schools and enrol in the local state schools (Canavan 1998, pp48-49). These students flooded the local state schools and on Monday 16 July 1962 one thousand extra children attempted to enrol at the already overcrowded local state school. State schools were accommodating where possible, but many children could not be offered places (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1997). The strike lasted one week, but it set in place a precedent of setting funding formulas that is still contested at a local school level industrially and politically today.

The strike led to the founding of a national lobby group, and state funding to all schools became a national issue. A National State Aid campaign and catholic lobbying of politicians began in earnest (Luttrell 1996, p39). In 1963 the New South Wales Labor Government led by Bob Heffron promised money for science labs at all non-government schools. However, that decision was overturned by the Australian Labor Party Executive. Political opportunism never far away, the Prime Minister Mr Menzies took the opportunity to call a snap election promising State Aid for science blocks and Commonwealth scholarships for students at both government and non-government schools. While couched in the egalitarian imperative to provide equal resources in both systems, this was a significant offering of funding by a Commonwealth government that had no constitutional responsibility to provide funding for school education. It was seen as an attempt by the Menzies' government to separate catholic voters from their traditional support of the Labor Party (Hogan as quoted by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1997). This questions the accountability of the Commonwealth government to the parliament for use of funds on something for which it had no constitutional authority, yet set an enduring precedent. The Commonwealth government began to pay grants to assist with the ongoing funding of all non-government schools in Australia. Also in response to the campaign, in New South Wales, the State government introduced grants of \$27 for

every primary school student and \$36 for every secondary school student attending a non-government school (Cavanan 1998, pp 48-49).

The commitment of Commonwealth funds to state school funding

This commitment of Commonwealth funds to state school funding was a watershed development in the provision of state education. The only Commonwealth funding provided previously resulted from increases in Commonwealth revenue when in 1941 the Commonwealth began funding tertiary schools and universities in the states. Now in the early 1960's this had also widened to include Commonwealth funding of schools, though in a limited way in both the public and private sectors in the states, through various programmes. This can be aligned with Baudrillard's second order of simulacra, known as the production era or sorcery era. In this era the image masks the absence of a basic reality. The Commonwealth government in "consuming" education funding by committing public monies to the provision of state education creates the image of Commonwealth responsibility for education. The consumption of public funds of the Commonwealth directed towards education connotes for such funding a sign of control and authority and economic responsibility towards education. It masks the absence of any Commonwealth constitutional authority or responsibility for education. The Commonwealth copies this role from the states, not in a way that is "counterfeit", but in a way that replicates the state's function. At this point it is questionable whether a traditional form of Westminster accountability is sufficient, that is a check only on the exchange value of Commonwealth public monies spent on education. Any accountability for the sign value is questionable, that is *why* are funds spent.

Given that the Australian Constitution reserves education as a responsibility of the states, the motive for the provision of Commonwealth school funding to the states can be questioned. Financial reliance on the Commonwealth by New South Wales governments for school funding has enabled successive federal governments to actively participate in key policy initiatives of the states, including New South Wales (Cuttance et al. 1998, p1). The mechanism for such policy intervention is various funding formulas to state public and private schools, and began initially with the Menzies government's attempt to win the votes of Catholic labour supporters. Not

only did the provision of Commonwealth funding to state education have the advantage of appearing benevolent and thus politically expedient, it also gave the Commonwealth a means through which to influence state economic policy. Historically there has always been a strong relationship between education and economic needs of a society. Education is a strong contributing factor to economic well-being (Caldwell, B. 1898, p5). Indeed this is a synchronous relationship with a statement by the Commonwealth Education Minister in 1999 demonstrating that economic goals are intrinsic to public education policy.

Governments set the public policies that foster the pursuit of excellence, enable a diverse range of educational choices and aspirations, safeguard the entitlement of all young people to high quality schooling, promote the economic use of public resource, and uphold the contribution of schooling to a socially cohesive and culturally rich society”

(Kemp, D. 19991, p1)

Burke et al. (2001, p1) suggest that it is important to look at key policy changes to expose the underlying political agenda of changing educational funding policies.

The first major alteration of funding arrangements came during the 1970s. The Karmel Report (1973) was a national report commissioned in response to the recognition of the “individual rights” movement of choice in education, as was promoted by the National State Aid campaign (Burke et al. 2001, p14). The Karmel Report was released for the Australian Schools Commission and represented the Federal Government’s first significant intervention in primary and secondary education (Fraser 1986, p428). It outlined reforms and the expansion of Commonwealth funding for schools. During this period of the writing of the report in 1973, funding to the states was determined by the Gorton and McMahon Coalition governments on a flat per capital grant that varied only by the level of education. However, the following Whitlam Commonwealth Government in 1976 expanded the availability of Commonwealth funds for both public and private education, and in the spirit of the Karmel Report once again resuscitated Australia’s dual education system (Burke et al. 2001, p14). The Whitlam Government’s funding formula greatly favoured low resource, mainly Catholic schools. In fact it was during this period of the 1970s that the greatest Commonwealth expansion in funding occurred. Outlays increased by ten per cent of gross domestic product in one year when the Whitlam

Commonwealth contributions and the New South Wales state government funding were combined (Burke et al. 2001, p7).

The Karmel Report 1973 is a strong example of the treatment of education as an object for consumption. Proffering support for freedom of choice in education signifies consumption choices associated with societal values, place, opportunity and privilege. This signification is more than production of education to satisfy a need. This signification in support of choice of education masks the absence of the basic reality of education, to acquire learning and knowledge. When public money is spent offering choices, accountability beyond value in exchange, to accountability for symbolic value is missing.

Stagflation of the late 1970s and early 1980s led to restrictions on education expenditure, and the emergence of a new rhetoric for efficiencies in the use of educational funds (Burke et al. 2001, p7). The liberal coalition Commonwealth Fraser Government during the period 1975 to 1983 also favoured the education funding policy of choice in schooling. They shifted Commonwealth recurrent funds away from the state public education system run by the state Labor Wran Government, to the Catholic schools and better resourced private schools (Burke et al. 2001, p14). At the same time the notion of academic excellence emerged as a Commonwealth education goal. In 1983 the then Fraser Commonwealth Government expanded Commonwealth funding, proportionately increasing high income non-government school funding the most, but also increasing in absolute terms the funding to low resource schools (Burke and Spaul 2001, p9).

There was a distinct change in education policy at both the Commonwealth and state levels during the mid-to-late 1980s. During this time, the provision of state public education was caught up in the movement of public sector reforms, and was put under pressure for increased accountability for effective performance and an efficient use of resources (Dimmock and O'Donoghue 1997, p149). The delivery of public education in New South Wales was caught up in a public sector movement that saw concepts of public service and administration move aside for concepts of public management. The Federal Labour Hawke government in particular saw public sector management as crucial to drive overall economic policy for change (Abraham 1992, p1). From this

time onwards Commonwealth policy has concerned itself with the setting of standards to measure the effectiveness in both education systems and schools individually.

The public sector reforms were not unique to the Commonwealth, but also found their way into the New South Wales State Government. In 1988 a conservative liberal state government was elected, the policies of which set in train significant challenges and changes to the public education system. The view was established that the notion of a self-managing small business should be applied to public schools. The ideology of this policy was corporate managerialism (New South Wales Teachers Federation 2001, p2). From this state government, the then Minister for Education and Youth Affairs Dr Terry Metherell announced in April 1988 the appointment of a management review to examine all aspects of the portfolio. This included the efficiency and effectiveness in achieving the government's goals for education (Abraham, 1992, p2). The prime purpose of the reform was to make schools educationally effective and efficient organisations (Scott 1989, p6). Such an approach was not unique to New South Wales at the time, but as basic to the emerging educational administration throughout North America, Europe, the USSR and New Zealand at the time (Schools Renewal Task Force, 1989, p1).

The treatment of individual state schools as businesses can be aligned with Baudrillard's third order of simulacra. In this case an image precedes the reality. Schools are fundamentally not businesses, yet the images connoted in the signification of the funding model for schools are commercial images of consumption, that is efficient and effective consumption of scarce resources. The original symbolic order simulacra are learning, knowledge, and emancipation. There is no prototype for this image in education, the sign now precedes the reality. Such a use of the funding now enters hyperreality because it has no real referent in the consumption object education. Signs and meanings of education and business are imploding.

During the late 1980's the New South Wales Department of School Education was not immune from the wave of public sector reforms and managerialism of the day. In April 1988 the then New South Wales Minister for Education and Youth Affairs Dr Terry Metherell announced the appointment of a management review of the department. Dr Brian Scott, a leading business person and management consultant

was selected to head the review, which received over four hundred submissions (Scott 1989, p1). Subsequently the impetus came from the Scott Report of 1989 for a policy named *Schools Renewal*, a management review for change that proposed the challenge of creating a system of self-managing schools. This proposed a huge cultural shift from an historically established centralised system to a devolved one. Essentially this was a change to self-management by schools that allowed schools to operate within a regional, state or national framework (Abraham, 1992, pp2-3). At the time, the *Schools Renewal* policy was seen unfavourably by the New South Wales Teachers' Federation. It was regarded as a UK Thatcher product to undermine public education, in which "rich schools in affluent, favourable areas will thrive through lucrative corporate sponsorship deals and through the capacity of parent communities to subsidise the school budget" (Zadkovich 1992, p6). The Scott report took a different view.

A self-managing school is a government school which is managed within a framework of centrally-determined goals, priorities and requirements for accountability but otherwise has the authority and responsibility to devise an educational programme and to allocate resources to meet the particular, unique needs of its community.

(Scott Report 1989, p1)

The Scott Report put forward five fundamental principles. First, the schools and not the system hold the key organisational element providing teaching and learning. Secondly, every school is different and has different needs. Thirdly the best judge of those needs is usually the individual school's teachers and its community. Fourthly, the schools will best meet their needs if they are able to manage themselves in line with general guidelines. Fifthly, the role of an effective system is to focus on providing support to schools and their teachers (Caldwell, B. 1989, p9).

However, these five fundamental principles have an accompanying economic agenda. Scott wrote

The achievement of planned outcomes depends on both the effectiveness of provision and the efficient use of resources. One of the Review's basic objectives is to ensure the best possible educational value is achieved for each educational dollar spent. This means establishing systems and procedures which allow

schools to provide quality education under optimum conditions at least cost”.

(Scott 1989[b], p31)

The policy of decentralisation recommended could only be economically enabled if there were several systemic changes. Up until then a centralised system existed in which the department financed and administered staffing, curriculum, planning, buildings and maintenance (Cuttance et. al. p1). Under a policy of decentralisation the old system of school inspectors was abolished, and cluster directors were appointed to state designated regions. Caldwell (1989, p14) argues that the position of cluster director should not be equated with the previous position of school inspector who was more of an educational auditor. Rather, the cluster director’s role was a managerial one to aid the policy of devolution. The cluster directors were to be responsible for the overall education and management performance of all schools within their boundaries, including school budgets.

The Scott report found that the education budget was framed and administered in ways that inhibited effective financial and operational management by head office, regions and schools because it was input-oriented and not closely related to educational needs or outcomes. This resulted in an inhibitive practice of giving priority to reconciliations of financial appropriations that focused on operational matters and functioned in an ad hoc way, and did not support program implementation. The Scott report recommended each school was responsible for managing their own budget, and local governing school councils were established at each school (Scott 1989[b], p30).

Following the Scott report and embracing its recommendations, *Schools Renewal* was introduced to the New South Wales state school system in 1989. The policy of *Schools Renewal* required new skills, knowledge and attitudes of teachers and schools. As their schools were required to be run along the lines of a small business, they now needed the capacity to prepare a strategic or corporate plan, an ability to enact a framework of accountability, and a self-managing capacity (Caldwell, B. 1989, p12). This was foreshadowed by Scott, who suggested principals would need to acquire appropriate management and clerical support, and intensive training and development in order to upgrade financial and other management skills (Scott,

1989[b], p11). Such a new managerial approach had new implications for schools. This included implications for their funding, new requirements for greater accountability in terms of performance measurement and financial accountability especially in the area of budgeting at a school level, devolution of responsibilities and authority especially via the introduction of school boards, and the introduction of quality control measures.

Prior to the introduction of *Schools Renewal*, funds were allocated to schools following a traditional Westminster accountability approach. Monies were supplied on a line-item, specific purpose basis according to across-the-board funding allocations (Scott 1989[b], p10).

This changed with the introduction of program budgeting, when, to enact economic principles of efficiency and effectiveness, budgets were tied to education performance measures. Literacy and numeracy programs were put into a single funding bucket. No longer were special budget lines specified for students with special needs and disabilities, as this was to be funded from the single funding bucket at the discretion of the local district and school management. It became mandatory for schools to sign up for Commonwealth set performance targets that were not disclosed specifically in the funding bill, as a condition for funding. This applied to both public and private school systems (New South Wales Teachers Federation 2001, p10). This change in budget allocation was viewed by teachers as significantly impacting on the resource levels made available to those students, disadvantaging students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, English as a second language students, and aboriginal students. The literacy funding-model was regarded as a punitive approach disadvantaging those with the greatest need. It was also observed that the literacy and numeracy benchmarks are of an arbitrary nature, and have the effect of reducing support for students most at risk. It was regarded as an economic rationalist idea of “most profitable” gone crazy, with those achieving the best literacy and numeracy rates being rewarded in funding (New South Wales and ACT Independent Education Union, 1998, pp1-2). The new budgeting method assumed school accountability for monies spent was deemed to be met by measuring and reporting outcomes of schooling in terms of literacy and numeracy by comparing these nationally (Kemp,

1999, p2). This was interpreted as desirable when accountability in the education sector was explicitly linked to global competition.

The Government's main objectives for schooling derive from our belief that the quality of our education is the surest guarantee that Australia will meet the challenges of competition in the global economy and provide our citizens with jobs and opportunities in the years ahead.

(Kemp, 1999, p1)

Lonegran and Dunne go further in suggesting that the ideas of efficiency and effectiveness have substituted for adequate funding of school goals, with expenditure on schools being regarded as an expense rather than an investment (2001, p7). Also the implementation of the Schools Renewal policy was not cost free. There was an increased need for ancillary support staff in schools, requiring the state budget to make available 33,750 days work funding on the basis of 225 days work per cluster area per year. This equated to an additional position per cluster (Schools Renewal Task Force 1990, Number 14, p3).

Schools Renewal has seen the economic rationalism catch-cries of efficiency and effectiveness emerging as dominating narrative in the construction of accountability for schools. Accountability of schools is generally concerned with quality, school effectiveness, equity and its implied value of excellence, and efficiency (Caldwell, B. 1989, p4). Dimmock et al. (1997, p149) argue that under this policy schools are more accountable in two ways. First, academically, schools are individually accountable through the instigation of uniform external tests and monitoring and evaluation through the mechanism of external exams, especially for literacy and numeracy. Secondly, schools are held accountable for their performance to parents and school communities via their school councils and parent bodies. The tone of these accountabilities is an emphasis away from accountability to individual parents and students, to a tighter accountability of the school overall to the school system. Schools have been made more accountable overall to the system as a unit because of the introduction of decentralisation, devolution of finance and decision-making and the introduction of school-based management (Dimmock et al. 1997, p149). However, in many respects this attempt at decentralisation was cosmetic, or a form of smoke an mirrors reminiscent of Baudrillard's second order of simulacra, the

production order. The department is still centrally dominated by financing and administering staffing, curriculum, planning, buildings and maintenance. Despite the reforms for devolution the reality is one of policy being dominated by issues of central education bureaucrats and politicians, what Cuttance et al. refer to as the “ministerialisation” of education policy (1998, p1).

By 1992 the New South Wales Department of School Education’s new Director-General, Dr Ken Boston, established a quality assurance system to review schools and evaluate systemic programs as a basis for public accountability. Mr Cuttance was appointed as head of a newly established Quality Assurance Directorate at the senior management level of assistant director general (Cuttance et. al. 1998, p4). This meant that the Quality Assurance Directorate was given the same senior status as other traditional education arms of the management structure of the department, establishing a new structure in which to privilege the accountability goal. Indeed, government state schools run by the Department of School Education in New South Wales today are headed by a career civil servant given the title of Director-general of Education (Cuttance et al. 1998, p1).

By the later 1990’s, many schools were promoting a new service-focused image with the idea of the client dominating and a focus on student and parent empowerment and choice a key factor. This is a market-driven environment for education, oriented on outcomes and requiring accountability reporting to facilitate this (Dimmock et al. 1997, p150). This ideology still prevails, though not comfortably. Dr Boston, the New South Wales Education and Training Director-General, criticising the then Federal Minister of Education Dr Kemp in the statement “this government must understand that public schooling is of a profoundly different order from public hospitals, or public transport or public housing” (New South Wales Teachers Federation 2001, p1).

The effect of economic rationalist managerialism on education by the end period of implementation of Schools Renewal saw education spending by both state and Commonwealth governments as a percentage of gross domestic product fall considerably. An amount of 4.9% cent in 1992-1993 had dropped to 4.4% by 1997-1978 (Australian Bureau of Statistics as cited in Lonegran and Dunne 2001, p6). New

technological advances have also impacted upon the provision of education, for example the use of computers, but the cost of government funding has not kept up with massive increases in the costs of schooling because of these developments (Lonegran and Dunne 2001, p7).

The differential current funding arrangements as described above are an artefact of historic events, leaving the education sector with two distinct components; distinct not only in their funding, but also in their cultures. There are government funded schools, and non-government funded schools. Non-government funded schools comprise of two sub-categories, independent schools (which may or may not be catholic), and catholic systemic schools. The distinctions and tolerance in funding differences arise from an ideological rhetoric of consumption, have a democratic freedom of choice in the education they receive, and that education is a right of all and is for the common good as it achieves social equity. Thus public subsidisation of non-government schools has been tolerated in Australia for over 50 years (Buckingham 2000 p2).

Individual schools' funding is a complex and non-transparent combination of funding received from both federal and state or territory sources. Funds may be tied and untied, recurrent grants and capital grants, or a targeted programme grant such as a language seeding grant. Intrinsic to this funding process is acrimony and conflict between the public and private education sectors, and the process is not student centred and not accountable or demonstrably equitable to the ideals of education, but rather to commercial ideals.

Discussion

The funding and accountability arrangements of Australian school education work as the fourth order, pure simulacra. First it offers an explanation of the detachment of the school funding today from traditional educational aspirations of an egalitarian education system. Accountability in this sense is pure simulacra, as its image of egalitarian education rather than its materiality (dual systems with different levels of funding) is its essence (Baudrillard *Mirror of Production* p138 as cited in Connor 1989, p.52). The accountability is not an immediate inscription or assurance of a

present reality. Being accountable to a dual system of funding is simulacra of an historical aspiration of egalitarian education.

Secondly, the accountability negotiated historically by different tiers of government does not permit any asymmetry of power in its representations. The notion of government accountability to the parliament is a collection of symbols of funding that evenly diffuse and neutralise the power of any of its referents. The power relationships between the varying school systems have been modulated into signs to give the appearance of a distorted vision of egalitarianism between government and non-government schools that arguably have no basis in reality, and so are untouchable by the rigors of rational analysis. Rather, the accountability offered is a sign of an historical aspiration and funding history.

The schools today for which funding governments are accountable, are driven back into the funding crises, becoming the simulation model for all schools *before funding*. The schools are reified beyond the model in their existing state. The model has entirely reinvented schools indebtedness to funding by the Commonwealth for still being schools. They are “protected” by the model, forcing them to become referential simulacra, playing with the sign-to-referent relationship. In this way the school is primarily accountable to the government for needing funds, rather than a traditional notion of government accountability for its use of funds for the public good. This is a unique distortion of traditional accountability born out of a unique Australian context.

The funding and accountability arrangements have been constructed in history to now be a hyperreality of community. The historical construction of accountability providing a system of egalitarian education opportunities under a dual system is reproduced in facsimilie. The historical construction of dual system accountability attempts to manufacture the object of school funding experiences as more real than the reality itself. This form of hyperreality will “collapse of all real antagonisms or dichotomies of value, especially in the political sphere” (Connor 1989, p57). The effectiveness of accountability debates of Commonwealth and state are annulled by the dependence of one upon the other. There are no antagonists in the system that are demonstrably privileged or emancipated by the model. Because of this dependence, they cannot destabilize and accountability is therefore unchallenged. The power

relationships in the sector no longer asymmetrical as was the case over the past two hundred years, and the different school systems implode in a funding sense, negating their boundaries. The power in the system has been so evenly diffused that it is neutralized. The power relationships have been modulated into signs in the model, re-imagining a distorted vision. This state of hyperreality is the extinction of all referentiality and is the implosion of the discursive polarities (public schools and private schools), sustaining meaning in the context of model (Baudrillard 1987, p. ii).

The idea of accountability for school funding by the two governmental spheres is also hyperreal because it bears no relation to chronological time (Eliade 1963, pp18-19). It describes the past dual systems and their egalitarian aspirations for the future. This reification and distortion of chronological time allows what is physically transient to become permanent in simulacra (Kolakowski 1972, p5). Present accountability is derived from accountabilities of the past in the form of multiple funding systems, and is used to reify the premise of the funding allocations in the future. There is no alignment in a chronological sense of accountability. There is no alignment with a physical reality. History is seen to implode into the present.

Conclusion

With respect to school education funding, accountability represents investment in some idealised shared images of education such as education is a right in an egalitarian society, education should be of an acceptable standard of quality, and education to be of quality needs to be well resourced physically so that it is not the domain of purely a privileged “leisure” class. These shared historically inspired images are symbols (Day 1984, p11). Symbols are ambivalent and generate rich and perplexing meanings.

There is no evidence that today’s funding for education and the accountability for that funding is pedagogically driven has any relation to any educational reality or traditional Westminster style accountability. Rather, it is its own pure simulacrum. The reality of the school funding is redundant in a state of hyperreality, in which calculations of funding allocations are derived from earlier representations of historical circumstances applied to earlier social and political structures of education,

without reference to reality or meaning within the education function. In this way the simulacrum is a nullification of an educational reality (Appignanesi and Garratt 1999, p55). There is a willing suspension of disbelief so that the “accountability” is believed as a meaningful way.

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