

## ***State Secondary Schooling for All***



**Barry Down**  
*Edith Cowan University*

*This paper explores the major reasons for the rapid extension of state secondary schooling in Western Australia after 1945. The first part of the paper will elaborate the inherent contradictions and tensions facing liberal democratic states and the implications for understanding why there was such a rapid and dramatic shift to an education system that saw secondary schooling as the right of all children. The second part will consider the arguments surrounding the emergence of the comprehensive high school and the consequences for secondary school organisation and reform.*

*If we believe in democracy, and really do want our children to have equal opportunities, then our answer lies in the comprehensive school.<sup>1</sup>*

### ***Introduction***

This paper explores the major reasons for the rapid extension of state secondary schooling in Western Australia after 1945. It is not my aim to provide a detailed narrative account as others have done elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> Rather, the intention is to examine four major propositions emerging from a critical understanding of the role of the state in structuring and shaping the reproductive functions of schooling. Firstly, state secondary schooling in Western Australia attempted to facilitate the process of capital accumulation and at the same time, satisfy the social demands of all citizens for greater equality of opportunity. Secondly, the growing middle class formed an alliance with progressive sections of the ruling bloc who could see the advantages of an expanded secondary school system. Thirdly, the task of satisfying the contradictory functions of capital accumulation and social democracy was always precarious given the inequities in Western Australian society. Finally, the state through the provision of mass secondary schooling sought to establish its own legitimacy.

For the purposes of this paper, the state refers to 'a set of organisations with the authority to make binding decisions for people ... and to implement these decisions using, if necessary, force'.<sup>3</sup> Carnoy believes state

theories are of particular importance because they are 'in fact theories of political men and women and how they interact, as individuals collectively'. Importantly, he says 'they are also the basis for understanding the role of institutions in a society and their interrelation, including ... the role of education and its relations to the society at large'.<sup>4</sup> There are two general views of the nature and function of the state. One in which the state expresses the common interest of all members of society to provide social goods such as education for the benefit of the majority, and another view, which argues that the capitalist state is a major site through which the dominant classes reproduce the forces of production and social relations of production.

While this paper takes as a major problematic the question of social reproduction, it does not posit a view that state secondary schooling mechanistically reproduces unequal class, race and gender relations. Rather, state secondary schooling is seen as a site of struggle with the potential for intervention and change.<sup>5</sup> This means that while socio-economic relations limit state structures and activities, the state is also shaped by social and political processes.<sup>6</sup> In short, people are not simply the product of predetermined structures or puppets acting outside subject thoughts, desires and actions but active agents who carry out their daily routines within a structured totality that is both enabling and constraining. Such a view draws on Giddens' notion of the duality of structure whereby 'structure is both medium and outcome of the reproduction of practice'.<sup>7</sup>

Drawing on these theoretical ideas, the first part of the paper will elaborate the inherent contradictions and tensions facing liberal democratic states and the implications for understanding why there was such a rapid and dramatic shift to an education system that saw secondary schooling as the right of all children. The second part will consider the reasons for the rapid expansion of the comprehensive high school in the decades after the Second World War. While the motives may have varied a consensus gradually emerged that a comprehensive secondary school system was desirable.

### ***The Contradictory Role of the Liberal Democratic State***

According to Hyams and Bessant public opinion changed so markedly in the late 1930s and war years that opposition to state secondary schooling for all virtually disappeared. People took for granted that children should receive a post-primary education.<sup>8</sup> In the decades after the Second World War state secondary schooling expanded rapidly. Although the timing and pace of the expansion varied between the States, the overall pattern of growth reflected the Western Australian experience. Beginning with six high schools in 1945 the number rose to 129 in 1979, the year marking the 150th anniversary of

Western Australia's foundation as a colony. In the period 1945 to 1982 the total number of secondary students rose from 5,995 to 68,257. The number of secondary teachers jumped from 136 to 5,153 and the educational budget increased from £52,394 to approximately \$178 million in the same period. By any standards this is a remarkable picture of growth.<sup>9</sup>

While the push for the democratisation of secondary education had positive moments and possibilities, the evidence continually shows that the social democratic principles underlying state intervention have not always been realised.<sup>10</sup> To understand the nature of the post-war social democratic settlement, this part of the paper focuses on three major questions. Why did the state intervene in the provision of secondary education? Whose arguments justified state intervention? Who benefited?

While the ideals of liberal democracy justified ever increasing levels of state intervention in the provision of secondary schooling contradictions soon emerged. On the one hand, liberalism encourages the market place ideology of individualism, free enterprise and minimal state intervention, and on the other hand, the logic of democracy calls for greater equality of opportunity.<sup>11</sup> In short, two interconnected and contradictory discourses emerged to justify the expansion of state secondary schooling for all. One centred on social efficiency and the desirability of the principle of meritocracy and the other, the ideals of democracy and equality of opportunity.<sup>12</sup>

Australia's penal origins and the harsh realities of its geography and isolation, created a strong state presence in all spheres of Australian life. With the desire to minimise the excesses of the British class system, the state played an active role in economic and social life. As the unbridled consequences of *laissez-faire* capitalism unfolded during the 1890s depression and the First World War, pressure mounted for increased levels of state intervention. McCallum argues that the failure of the capitalist economy to merge the interests of capital with the demands of labour required the intervention of the state to act as a source of 'rationality and amelioration'.<sup>13</sup> After the Second World War, the idea of 'welfare statism' became the fully articulated policy of the labour movement.<sup>14</sup> According to Gollan, the wartime experience and Keynesian economic theory came together to provide a vision of a modified capitalism that would provide services to fulfil needs not provided by the market. This meant providing job security, increasing the standard of living, social security against unemployment, old age and sickness and education.<sup>15</sup> What emerged, according to Wolfe, was a two-headed form of government. On the one hand, there was the quiet, rational and efficient state that maintained social order in the interests of the elite. On the other hand, the public face of the state acted as 'a spectacular and theatrical one for the masses'.<sup>16</sup>

According to Ely, the socially mobile used three interrelated arguments to persuade the economic elite of the desirability of expanding educational provision—the economic and political dangers of ignorance, the necessity of keeping abreast of other nations in educational developments, and the usefulness of a trained and industrious workforce.<sup>17</sup> Even though the exclusives and the upwardly mobile disagreed on many matters, they both agreed on the desirability of maintaining social consensus. In the words of Ely:

Social turbulence and disorder was to be superseded by co-operation and coincidence of interest between the upwardly mobile and the classes above them. Those on the tracks closest to the privileged centre had most to gain from a quiet transition and little to gain from direct class conflict.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the provision of state secondary schooling acted as a safety valve in tempering the potential for social unrest. The ruling class by conceding to the demands of the middle class and working class, had most to gain from a stable political environment. It was their desire to forge compromise and social harmony that allowed the state to increasingly intervene in matters such as industrial arbitration, social welfare and education. Education for the aspiring middle class was the means for attaining further ascendancy and privilege. For the working class, education offered hope and a chance of social mobility.<sup>19</sup> Through diligence, self-discipline and hard work everyone could succeed in life. No longer would class, gender or race prevent children from succeeding in life. Rather, individual merit would determine how far and high a child could rise through the ranks.

In Western Australia, state-building educators such as James Walton, Cyril Jackson, Cecil Andrews, Murray Little, Thomas Robertson, Harry Dettman, and David Mossenson played a crucial role in articulating these liberal progressive arguments.<sup>20</sup> It was the educational administrators who assembled, articulated and persuaded the decision-makers that the expansion of state secondary schooling was crucial to the future of democracy and the state's economic well-being. In this scenario, mass secondary schooling, democracy and the cultivation of individual merit went hand in hand.<sup>21</sup> McCallum summarises the liberal progressive point of view in the following manner:

Thus schooling was an important arm of contemporary liberal political theory. It offered a rational approach to social organisation and to the problem of social order because it represented the school as a socially neutral institution permitting all the resources of the nation, represented by the talents and energies of individuals, to be liberated—a broad stairway for all children capable of climbing it.<sup>22</sup>

After the Second World War, the debate surrounding the expansion of state secondary schooling in Western Australia reflected the ruling blocs concern with social efficiency. N. E. Sampson, President of the State School Teachers' Union of Western Australia, cited evidence from the National Bank to support the argument of secondary schooling for all. In his 1955 annual address Sampson claimed that:

To meet the future needs of Australia's rising generation, vast programmes for national developments are envisaged. The many public works projects, at present no more than recorded ideas, will require engineers and draftsmen. The rapidly growing population will need doctors, dentists, lawyers, architects and accountants. Trained scientists will be necessary to study the country's economic and production problems and to apply technological developments from abroad to both primary and secondary industry.<sup>23</sup>

The arguments for state involvement at the secondary level consistently referred to the themes of international survival, national efficiency and the need for a trained workforce. According to Ely and Hyams and Bessant, the Directors-General were able to effectively muster the argument of national interest to appeal to the governing elite.<sup>24</sup> Despite some high-minded talk about culture and enlightenment the secondary school, according to Crittenden, has largely been an instrument of economic and political ends.<sup>25</sup> After the Second World War, the instrumental logic of human capital theory drove the expansion of state secondary schooling.

Human capital theory effectively forged a link between industrialisation, progress and schooling. According to Crittenden, the assumptions of human capital theory—the higher the level of the education in a society generally, the richer the society would be; the better educated an individual was, the better his or her income was likely to be; as more people attained higher levels of formal education, the economy generated an adequate number of appropriate jobs; as the general level of formal education in society rose, inequality in the range of incomes tended to fall—gained widespread support.<sup>26</sup> Human capital theories emerged in the 1950s with a clear agenda to realign the education system with the emerging requirements of the new international division of labour.<sup>27</sup>

So strong was the faith in human capital theory that politicians, educators, parents and the media assumed a direct connection between education and national and individual wealth. There was a strong presumption that the key to growth was the rate at which educational investment of a country increased or decreased. In 1960, industry responded by launching the Science Fund in Sydney to advance scientific education in schools. The fund aimed to increase the number of scientists and technologists, increase scientific awareness in the community and increase productivity.<sup>28</sup> In Western Australia, a £12,000 fund helped to forge closer

links between schools, usually boys' schools and industry.<sup>29</sup> On a visit to Perth in January 1963, the New South Wales Director-General of Education, H. S. Wyndham confirmed the nation building role of education when he told a gathering of teachers that young children in this age could no longer afford to be ignorant of science.<sup>30</sup>

Speaking about the British experience Rubinstein and Simon argue that the demands made on the education system largely reflected technological and economic advances. They claim that long term technological changes connected with automation (the second industrial revolution) encouraged a greater emphasis upon science and skill specialisation in the education system. In their view, education was important because it produced adaptability and raised the education level of the population as a whole to suit the needs of capital.<sup>31</sup>

According to Crittenden, the evidence indicates that the initial faith placed in human capital theory was wrong. He argues that there was no sound evidence that productivity and wealth in the economy increased by extending general education beyond basic schooling. On the contrary, Crittenden claims that increased expenditure on education is 'an effect rather than a cause of economic prosperity'.<sup>32</sup> Human capital theorists assumed that more schooling would offer people the chance to obtain better paid jobs and social mobility. However, the evidence cited in the *Fitzgerald Report* (1979), among others, shows that it was class, race and gender and not length of schooling, that determines a person's wealth and status in society.

Interconnected with the economic efficiency argument was the principle of selection by merit. Human capital theorists believed that ability and talent rather than privilege were more desirable criteria for developing the nations human capital. Young made the point that whereas 'the family was the guardian of the individual, the state was the guardian of collective efficiency'.<sup>33</sup> According to Ely, the threat of international competition, the 'forcing house for merit' led to the belief in the value of providing educational opportunities for children irrespective of social background.<sup>34</sup>

Previously, the hierarchy of secondary schools (academic, professional and vocational) differentiated the school population. Now a new science of social allocation was necessary. According to McCallum, educational theory put aside the emphasis on moral philosophy in favour of a scientific methodology in teaching and school organisation. It adopted a psychological emphasis on the individual child to explain social differences. For McCallum this meant:

Particular monitoring and scrutinizing procedures, particular categories for understanding different sections of the population, their educational 'needs and abilities', and particular techniques of allocating reward and 'merit'.<sup>35</sup>

The problem of developing an objective standard with which to select and promote merit in the comprehensive secondary schools became the cornerstone of the science of education. In the words of McCallum:

The rationality of the system depended on the school as a neutral agency of selection (now provided by the state and formally open to all) and its efficiency to recognize talent. It called to prominence a more scientific approach to education to oversee this neutrality and efficiency and to concentrate attention on the individual child.<sup>36</sup>

According to McCallum the naturalisation of social differences helped to legitimate the efficient allocation of people. He believes that the insertion of the pre-social individual into established social institutions and practices reflected the social power and political influence of the traditional users of secondary education, the elite private schools.<sup>37</sup>

Closely connected to the social efficiency argument was the often contradictory discourse of democracy. Professor Freeman Butts, a visiting American educationalist outlined the democratic principles underlying the push for mass secondary schooling:

I assume that in a democratic and complex society education should be available freely and equally to all people. In general I believe in more education for more people rather than a little education for the many and a great deal of education for the few. The educational base of a democratic society should be broad and generous. I believe in equality of educational opportunity rather than in a stratified dual system of education whether that dualism be along lines of race, religion, economic status, social class, or sheer intellectual ability... The goal should be not only to permit but to encourage every child to climb up the educational ladder as far as his talents will take him. The dull, the normal, and the brilliant all deserve special attention.<sup>38</sup>

Under the influence of the Second World War a consensus emerged around the desirability of state intervention, planning and social provision. While the conservatives wanted to maintain restricted access and subordinate education to the requirements of employers, a new alliance argued the need for post-war reconstruction, social harmony and modernisation. Increasingly, the discourse surrounding the push for secondary schooling stressed the notions of democracy, social harmony and equality of opportunity.

After the Second World War, the proponents of state secondary education argued that only a free, compulsory and secular secondary school system could maintain the democratic ideals of democracy and offer all citizens the opportunity of social advancement.<sup>39</sup> During the boom decades of the 1950s and 1960s people believed that education was a vehicle for social reform and democratisation. Parents and children alike believed that

the new comprehensive high school would fulfil their aspirations for social mobility.<sup>40</sup> In the post-war era, the rhetoric of social democracy directly shaped the administration and provision of state secondary schooling. Unfortunately, the rhetoric of equal opportunity did not match the reality of a highly differentiated education system.

The advocates of an expanded secondary school system successfully intertwined the ideals of democracy with the economic value of extra schooling. Central to the arguments of educational administrators', union officials', politicians', and teachers' was the view that the survival of democracy was interdependent with a comprehensive secondary school system. *The W.A. Teachers' Journal* advocated the view that all people living in a democracy should be educated.<sup>41</sup> The Education Department officially encapsulated the relationship between secondary schooling and democracy in 1958:

As a community we have accepted a policy of education for all and as a democracy the separation and stratification of our youth is neither necessary nor desirable.<sup>42</sup>

If democracy was going to work, it required loyal citizens. Faye argues that young Australian children were increasingly the objects of state intervention with a view to producing the self-governing individual.<sup>43</sup> The influential *Box Report* (1952) expressed concern about the education of adolescent children and the unique problems they posed for society. Of the adolescent child, the report said:

He is becoming more individualistic in pattern than in his earlier years, more independent in thought. He commences to question authority, to seek reasons for what is right and what is wrong. In short he is no longer willing to accept the judgement of others—of his parents, his teachers and of others in authority ...<sup>44</sup>

Directly related to the concern with adolescent children's behaviour was the fear of Communism. Supporters of state secondary schooling argued that an education emphasising the right attitudes and habits was the best insurance against any potential political and social agitation.<sup>45</sup> In reducing the potential threat of Communism one commentator argued that 'the surest way to be rid of a bad idea is to replace it by a better idea'.<sup>46</sup> Thus, state secondary schooling became a major site in training future citizens to desire 'the right thing'.<sup>47</sup> Secondary schooling sought to produce children of a 'high moral standard' who would obey the spirit of the 'Golden Rule'.<sup>48</sup>

In conclusion, the expansion of mass secondary schooling served the dual function of maintaining the process of capital accumulation in a reasonably harmonious environment and at the same time, perpetuating the myth of egalitarianism.<sup>49</sup> Despite the provision of mass secondary



schooling for a greater number of children, the evidence shows that state secondary schooling rather than providing greater equality tended to reinforce existing social inequalities characteristic of Western Australian society.<sup>50</sup>

### ***The Coeducational, Comprehensive Community High School***

Historically, the push for comprehensive secondary schools dates back to *Andrews Report Upon Educational Organisation* (1912). Thereafter, as Tully explains, a number of influential advocates supported, developed and refined the arguments in favour of the provision of state secondary schooling. In 1935, Little, who later became Director of Education in 1940, proposed that all children should attend primary school for six years before moving onto post-primary school for another four years after which they would follow a two-year vocational or academic course in the secondary school.<sup>51</sup> The State School Teachers' Union of Western Australia (SSTUWA) Annual Conference in 1940 supported Little's proposal. Robertson, who succeeded Little as Director of Education moved a resolution in 1951 for the Education Committee to investigate the reorganisation of government secondary education. Robertson favoured the introduction of a multilateral high schools policy consisting of a three-year junior secondary section and a two-year senior secondary section. The Education Committee justified the establishment of multilateral five-year high schools in the following terms:

As all types of children and all grades of intelligence are included within this school, it more closely resembles adult society than do the one or two course schools. Future workers of all types rub shoulders so that a child is receiving a real social education. Selective secondary schools for the intellectual elite are apt to give an artificial concept of society and develop castes. Similarly, one course junior technical and commercial schools, by their segregation, breed a sense of inferiority.<sup>52</sup>

In 1945 Robertson produced *A General Outline of Proposals for the Amalgamation of Post Primary and Secondary Education* in which he outlined a plan for universal secondary education, the aim of which was:

... to remove the differences between that type of secondary education which is given in High Schools and other types—technical, commercial, agricultural, etc.—differences which have tended to cause High School education to be considered a superior type and the other types as inferior types.<sup>53</sup>

In the years 1951 to 1958 secondary school enrolments increased by 241.59 per cent from 9,190 to 22,178 students.<sup>54</sup> As a result, the Western Australian government faced two choices.<sup>55</sup> On the one hand, it could continue with single-sex, separate stream schools that provided different

sorts of school knowledge for different classes of children. On the other hand, it could opt for the comprehensive school model that offered a more socially ameliorating solution to the problem of educating the state's children.<sup>56</sup> The Education Department opted for the latter policy to make all high schools coeducational, comprehensive, and community based.<sup>57</sup> On the recommendations of the *Box Report* (1952) the Education Department argued that the idea of coeducational schools would better reflect the reality of living in a democratic society. Dr. James Conant, Chairman of the American National Association of Secondary School Principals, outlined the nature of the comprehensive high school:

It is called comprehensive because it offers, under one administration and under one roof (or series of roofs), secondary education for almost all the high school age children of one town or neighborhood. It is responsible for educating the boy who will be an atomic scientist and the girl who will marry at eighteen; the prospective captain of a ship and the future captain of industry. It is responsible for educating the bright and the not so bright children with different vocational and professional ambitions and with various motivations. It is responsible, in sum, for providing good and appropriate education, both academic and vocational, for all young people within a democratic environment which the American people believe serves the principles they cherish.<sup>58</sup>

Following the American experience, the Western Australian Education Department argued that students should mix with a range of children with different backgrounds, interests and abilities. The *Box Report* (1952) was eager to avoid the stigma of a socially differentiated education system. Citing the elitist Perth Modern School and Perth Junior Technical School as examples, the report claimed that streaming accentuated a 'caste system' and reinforced in children the notion of superiority and inferiority.<sup>59</sup> The comprehensive high school aimed to provide a wide range of courses to cater for individual interests and abilities. To offer a satisfactory range of subjects, the Education Department recommended a minimum of 1,000 students to achieve efficiencies in operation and cost. Cost was a vital consideration given Western Australia's natural increase in population and the Federal Government's desire to attract more immigrants. Departmental advice indicated that as enrolments exceed 1,000 the cost per student starts to drop rapidly.<sup>60</sup> The Education Department's official policy statement on secondary schools assumed that democracy and schooling were mutually co-existent. It argued that the selective school was a vestige of an old-fashioned and irrelevant educational policy. According to the Education Department:

Segregation of the sexes, isolation of the intellectually gifted, promotion by examination, subject-centred curricula and education for an elite, not for all, have their roots in educational policy laid down in a society over 100 years

ago. Secondary education in our time should be completely different, just as society today is completely different from society of the 1850s. We cannot afford to have a new nation built around an old educational system.<sup>61</sup>

In a society founded on unequal economic and social relations the task of satisfying political democratic rights was always going to be a difficult proposition. Social democracy provided a push from below and forced the ruling elite to make significant concessions or face the possibility of social disharmony. Official educational policy statements recognised the contradictory role facing the state:

It is imperative to the well-being of democratic society that the school acts as a unifying process, at all times holding together children of diverse aptitudes, emotions and interests, whilst at the same time encouraging individual differences to be utilized for the common good.<sup>62</sup>

Concern for equality of opportunity dominated the debate in the parliament, media and Education Department itself. In 1958 William Hegney, the Minister for Education in the Hawke Labor Ministry stated that:

Selection and segregation of talented students no longer fitted into state policy which was now to provide the opportunity for secondary education for all children. With three new five-year high schools in the metro area there was no need to concentrate the ablest children in one school.<sup>63</sup>

In establishing a more equitable state secondary school system, a number of barriers existed. Included were the scholarship examination, the problem of wastage, the public examination system, and the financial crisis of the 1960s. The remainder of the paper will address each of these issues in turn.

### ***Letting the Dumb Kids in: Removal of the Scholarship Examination***

A major barrier to educational reform was the scholarship examination. In 1955 an Education Department document argued that the government scholarship system was undemocratic as the few winners enjoyed privileges that were not available to everyone. These children received an annual book allowance and had their fees for the Junior and Leaving Certificate Examinations paid by the government. For the same reasons the Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme came under attack for the disproportionate number of scholarships granted to children attending independent schools. In the Legislative Council in 1968, the Hon. J. Dolan cited Professor G. Reid's comments on the scholarship anomalies:

If you wish to enjoy the highest odds in the scholarship competition you must seek to be a member of the upper income brackets ... Competitive scholarships

created an elitist society. The Commonwealth government appeared to be fostering an educated middle-class elite.<sup>64</sup>

Supporting this view was a growing body of sociological evidence on the direct relationship between social class and educational opportunity. Evidence coming out of Britain showed that a boy had a greater chance of entering a grammar school if he came from a middle class rather than a working class home. Gregory's research on the social background of children attending Perth Modern High School reached the same conclusion.<sup>65</sup> Summarising the British research, Floud argued that there was a substantial reserve of uneducated ability in the offspring of the working class.<sup>66</sup> The Western Australian Education Department acknowledged that the child who came from an educated home had a distinct advantage over a child of equal ability who came from a comparatively uneducated family. Children from middle class families often performed better in the scholarship examination due to extra tuition paid for by their parents. On democratic grounds and in the interests of the good unsuccessful child the Education Department proposed that the scholarship examination should be replaced by a promotion system based on chronological age.<sup>67</sup>

Public reaction to the abolition of the scholarship examination and the selective Perth Modern School was minimal. The exception being the Old Modernians Association which pointed to the outstanding men and women who passed through Perth Modern School to become prominent professional and community leaders.<sup>68</sup> There was a feeling amongst the Old Mods that the school performed an important social function for the community. Any attempt to open-up the school would retard the brighter students. The Teachers' Union also opposed the attempt to turn Perth Modern School into a comprehensive high school. The annual conference of teachers' in 1958 passed a motion calling on the government to retain Perth Modern School and its special function of educating prospective university students.<sup>69</sup> The Minister for Education argued that it was inconsistent to continue with a selective secondary school when comprehensive high schools were available to all students. The Minister claimed that equally strong academic courses existed in the new comprehensive high schools.<sup>70</sup> Under Robertson, himself an Old Modernian, the selective role of Perth Modern School ended. In his initial submission to Cabinet in 1958, the Minister for Education Hegney argued that secondary education was no longer the privilege of a few, but a right for all children. On Robertson's advice, Hegney argued that the money saved could provide two year scholarships at the post Junior level. Although Cabinet delayed a decision for twelve months, Robertson was eventually successful in having the scholarship scheme abolished in 1960.<sup>71</sup>

***Dropping Out of School: The Problem of Wastage***

An increasing concern of the Education Department was the rate of wastage in the school system. In 1955 the Superintendent of Research and Curriculum, Walter Neal prepared a report showing wastage in secondary schools at various levels. Of all the twelve year old children in government schools almost 40 per cent left by the time they were fourteen years of age. By the time they were fifteen years or older the original enrolment had decreased by 73 per cent. In the period 1950 to 1955, 91.9 per cent of children who started first year remained at the beginning of second year; 43.9 per cent began third year; 8.5 per cent fourth year; and only 7.1 per cent commenced fifth year.<sup>72</sup>

While these figures provide some general indications about the nature of the wastage problem, further analysis exposes exactly who left school early. Whereas 50.9 per cent of boys completed three or more years of secondary schooling only 38.7 per cent of girls stayed on to third year. Besides gender, those children from the homes of the unemployed and unskilled who presumably had most to gain from the benefits of an education, comprised the bulk of early-leavers.<sup>73</sup> Further differentiation occurred depending on whether children attended a private or state secondary school. Neal's statistics show that a much greater proportion of the pupils who began a high school course in non-government schools completed the fifth year compared to the original first year intake in government schools. On this basis, the holding power of the non-government schools was more than three times as great as the government schools. Significantly, the government schools catered for about three quarters of the first year scholars. At each grade level this difference in actual numbers decreased until at the third year level the government school enrolments were only slightly more than those of the non-government schools. However, in the final two years the emphasis changed and there were more fourth and fifth year pupils in private secondary schools than in government schools.<sup>74</sup> Studies in Australia and overseas consistently showed that a disproportionately high number of students failing to complete their secondary education came from lower socio-economic groups.<sup>75</sup>

The problem of wastage and the selective nature of the scholarship examination were effective arguments in the case for opening-up the secondary school system. However, the educational reformers found that the public examination system was a major obstacle to the expansion of mass secondary schooling. The University of Western Australia maintained control and influence over the Junior and Leaving Examinations and syllabi. The task of breaking down the academic emphasis of secondary education proved difficult given the established hegemony of the elite private church secondary schools over the competitive academic curriculum.

### ***A Testing Time: Loosening the Control of Public Examinations***

Public examinations in Western Australia date back to 1895 when independent schools sat their students for the University of Adelaide entrance examination.<sup>76</sup> This practice stopped with the opening of the University of Western Australia in 1913 and the establishment of the Public Examinations Board in 1915. The Public Examination Board membership included the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Western Australia, seven representatives of the University, three State Education Department representatives and five representatives of the private schools. For private schools to elect a representative, they first required approval from the university's Professorial Board.<sup>77</sup> The Public Examination Board created the Junior and Leaving Certificates and remained an integral part of the secondary school system until replaced by the Board of Secondary Education in 1969. The Junior and Leaving Examinations assumed a disproportionate influence over the secondary school system. Increasingly, the civil service, business, industry and professional bodies used the examination results for employment and training purposes. According to White, secondary schools were 'wedded to the external examination syllabuses and excessively conscious of examination successes'.<sup>78</sup>

Many schools used the Junior Examination to select potential university candidates. Semi-tertiary educational institutions such as the technical colleges, schools of mines, teachers' colleges and agricultural colleges also employed the Junior Examination for their own particular purposes. Students who passed their examinations at the end of the twelfth year received the Leaving Certificate. Both certificates provided a measure of employability to potential employers in government, commerce and industry.<sup>79</sup> Students wishing to gain entry into the university, sat a university matriculation examination. From the beginning, the Public Examination Board (PEB) set admission requirements to the university.<sup>80</sup> While the public examination system continued to serve only the elite private church schools and a few academic state schools, the system worked satisfactorily. Despite some noise from the State School Teachers' Union (SSTU) in the 1920s and 1930s over the universities control and influence on the curriculum there was little impetus at this stage for change.<sup>81</sup>

However, the sheer weight of numbers entering the secondary school system after the war dramatically challenged the elitist assumptions of the public examination system. Dr. J. Gentili, from the University of Western Australia, collated some revealing statistics on the number of students sitting for the public examinations. In the period 1957 to 1961, the number of Junior candidates increased by 59 per cent from 4,814 to 7,642. Leaving Certificate candidates rose by 65 per cent from 1,452 to 2,391 in the same

period. The number of 15 year-olds at school grew by about 18 per cent and 17 year-olds by 26 per cent. The estimated proportion of all 15 year-olds sitting for the Junior examination in 1957 was 43 per cent. By 1961 it had risen to 61 per cent. The percentage of 17 year-olds sitting the Leaving increased from 15 per cent to approximately 20 per cent in 1961. Between 1957 and 1961 the Junior candidates trained at private secondary schools increased by 39 per cent and those in government schools increased by 72 per cent. In the same period the Leaving candidates from private secondary schools increased by 45 per cent and those from government schools by 91 per cent.<sup>82</sup>

Whilst the explosive increase in the number of candidates was of concern, the high failure rate eventually forced a reassessment of the role and function of public examinations. In 1957, 1,146 of 4,814 Junior candidates who sat the Certificate failed. In 1961, 1,845 of the 7,642 candidates did not pass. Thus, approximately one candidate out of every four failed.<sup>83</sup> This posed the question of what to do with the academically less able 'by-product' who had no desire or intention of going to university.<sup>84</sup>

One unsuccessful attempt to provide an alternative to the Junior Certificate was the less academic High School Certificate course introduced in 1954. The High School Certificate (HSC) aimed to assist those 'non-academic' children who required an education 'better suited to both their abilities and to their future needs'.<sup>85</sup> The Education Department anticipated that a very large proportion of the school population would elect to undertake these courses. Instead, the course enrolled the bottom 15 to 20 per cent of the second year population.<sup>86</sup> Despite some effort by the Minister of Education, Arthur Watts, to talk-up the popularity of the High School Certificate, there was little support from parents, students or employers.<sup>87</sup> The Superintendent of Guidance and Special Education claimed that the Junior Certificate had greater prestige in the community and opened up more employment opportunities than the High School Certificate. Children who did not have the Junior Certificate were ineligible for permanent employment in the State Public Service, banks and insurance companies.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, it was not surprising that in 1957 only thirty students were awarded the certificate. Even though the numbers increased to one hundred and sixty in 1960, the attempt to differentiate the school population into academic and non-academic students proved unpopular.<sup>89</sup>

Opposition to the system of public external examinations steadily mounted. The Public Examination Board expressed concern about its ability to cope with the wave of candidates. It expressed concern about the availability of suitable examiners, payment, the changing emphasis on the non-academic curriculum, the need for additional administrative staff,

and the desirability of having a body with autonomy relating to matters of secondary education.<sup>90</sup> The Interstate Conference of Superintendents of secondary schools held in Perth in September 1960 expressed dissatisfaction with the general restrictions imposed by external examinations. Instead, they argued for a broad liberal education.<sup>91</sup> The Standing Sub-Committee of the Australian Education Council (AEC) on secondary schooling also expressed concern about the high degree of specialisation at the university level and the dangerous implications for a liberal education at the secondary level.<sup>92</sup> As far back as 1935 the New Education Fellowship supported the abolition of written examinations.<sup>93</sup>

On top of these pressures the *Robertson Inquiry* (1963) into the secondary school curriculum favoured the abolition of the Junior Certificate. The inquiry proposed a certificate showing a child's cumulative record of achievement.<sup>94</sup> In the same year, the University Senate on the advice of the Public Examination Board commissioned Dr. J. A. Petch of the Joint Matriculation Board of England to report on the public examination system in Western Australia. The major impetus for the inquiry was the dramatic increase in numbers of public examination candidates. In the period 1956 to 1963 the number of candidates rose from 7,566 to 16,138. Naturally, the Public Examination Board was anxious to find a solution to the problem. However, the *Petch Report* (1963) favoured modification rather than any radical change to the existing examination system. Petch claimed that the Public Examination Board was the only reliable bulwark against privilege and patronage. He opposed internal cumulative assessment and advocated the need for an examination at the end of a student's secondary schooling.<sup>95</sup> According to White, the *Petch Report* (1963) was the climax of the restrictive and elitist attitude toward university admission. He argues that from this point 'a fundamental revision of public examination policies could be delayed no longer'.<sup>96</sup>

The major problem facing secondary education was the rigidity imposed on schools by the Junior and Leaving Examinations that catered for the needs of a very small percentage of students who wished to enter university. The *Neal Report* (1964) argued that the selective Junior Examination may have been a valid mechanism in the past but it was no longer relevant to the needs of contemporary society. For Neal, the greatest problem facing secondary education was the lack of flexibility.<sup>97</sup> The report claimed that the Junior Examination suffered certain fundamental deficiencies. Firstly, it emphasised academic subjects to the detriment of the so-called non-academic subjects. Secondly, pupils made a choice of subjects too early in their secondary schooling. Thirdly, the Junior Certificate failed to provide sufficient detail on a child's performance at school. Finally, the public examination system went against established findings in the field of



educational learning.<sup>98</sup> As a result, the report recommended a major reorganisation of the first three years of secondary education. It recommended a research project involving a limited number of government (Applecross, Bunbury, Busselton and John Forrest) and non-government secondary schools to trail the content and organisation of a cumulative certificate.<sup>99</sup>

In May 1967, Harry Dettman, the Director-General of Education, recommended that yet another committee be established to report on the future organisation, structure and courses in Western Australian secondary schools. The major aim of the Dettman Committee was to review the changes occurring in assessment procedures throughout the rest of the world, to evaluate Achievement Certificate trails and to assess the function of external examinations.<sup>100</sup> The *Dettman Report* (1969) referred to the arguments of the Scottish *Fyfe Report* (1947) on secondary education to support its recommendation to abolish external examinations:

The influence of examination is three-fold. It affects the treatment of the examinable subjects themselves, tending always to exalt the written above the spoken, to magnify memory and mastery of fact at the expense of understanding and liveliness of mind. It depresses the status of the non-examinable, so that the aesthetic and creative side of education, with all its possibilities for human satisfaction and cultural enrichment, remains largely undeveloped and poorly esteemed. And lastly, the examination which began as a means, becomes for many the end itself. In the atmosphere created by this preoccupation with examination success, it is difficult to think nobly of education to see it the endless quest of man's preparation for either society or solitude.<sup>101</sup>

The *Dettman Report* (1969) recommended that:

Because of their fallibility and the restraints which they place on curricula and teaching methods, external examinations should be discontinued and replaced by internal school assessments. The Junior examinations should be conducted in 1971 and the last Leaving examination in 1973.<sup>102</sup>

In 1971, First Year students in all Western Australian state secondary schools except two embarked on courses leading to the Achievement Certificate. The Board of Secondary Education established in early 1970 monitored the secondary curriculum and administered the Achievement Certificate.<sup>103</sup> The Tertiary Admissions Examination (TAE) that replaced the old Leaving Examination, operated under the supervision of a joint committee from all tertiary institutions in Western Australia. After the first year, school based assessment contributed 50 per cent toward the Tertiary Admissions Examination grade.

### ***Who Pays? The Karmel Report and Equality of Opportunity***

In the 1960s, demographic factors and the growing inability of the States' to finance the necessary expenditure on secondary schools created a financial crisis in education. Mathews shows that in the period 1952 to 1962 enrolments in government primary schools increased by 37 per cent and secondary schools by 139 per cent. In addition, participation rates were also higher.<sup>104</sup> This crisis manifested itself in increasing shortages of teachers, classrooms and other essential facilities.<sup>105</sup> As a result, the Federal Government was under pressure to solve the problems facing both government and non-government schools.<sup>106</sup> The Nationwide Survey of Needs (1960) highlighted the seriousness of the financial crisis. In a four year period from 1964-65 it recommended that an additional \$208 million should be spent on education.<sup>107</sup>

The call for Commonwealth intervention in the funding of schools was not new. Drummond, the Minister for Education in New South Wales stressed the necessity of Federal aid at the first meeting of the Education Council in 1936. The question re-surfaced when the Commonwealth Government called on Technical Departments to launch a National Fitness Campaign. As noted, the extraordinary growth in secondary school enrolments after the Second World War posed a serious funding shortfall in the education system. In submitting a case to the Commonwealth Grants Commission in 1945, Little the Director of Education in Western Australia argued that education was a national and not a provincial instrumentality. He argued that equalisation measures were necessary to assist the States most in need.<sup>108</sup>

With the election of Menzies' conservative Liberal-Country Party coalition in 1949 there was a backlash to the view that primary, secondary and technical education was a State responsibility. Nonetheless, between 1963-1972 the Commonwealth's role expanded through a series of programs announced by Prime Ministers Holt and McMahon. These programs included the establishment of the Commonwealth Department of Education and Science in 1966; the Commonwealth Secondary Schools Libraries Scheme in 1968; the Commonwealth Programs of Aboriginal Secondary Scholarships (1969) and Child Migrant Education (1970); general purpose capital grants for government and non-government schools (1971); five year programs of capital assistance to both types of schools (1972); and in 1972 Gough Whitlam's promise to establish a Schools Commission to provide financial assistance to schools on the basis of needs. According to Smart, the period 1963 to 1975 witnessed an 'unparalleled expansion of the Commonwealth government's involvement in Australian education at all levels'.<sup>109</sup>

In December 1967 the State School Teachers' Union and Parents and Citizens' Association of Western Australia publicly voiced their concern

about the 'schools chaos'.<sup>110</sup> The Minister for Education H. M. Lewis, reacted to this situation by requesting that Dettman be selective in providing information to either the Parents and Citizens' Federation or the Teachers' Union. He believed that these organisations would distort information to create a negative public image of the education system.<sup>111</sup> In response, the secretary of the W.A. Federation of Parents' and Citizens' Association urged the Premier John Tonkin to instigate an independent inquiry in Western Australia as the forerunner of an Independent National Enquiry in 1970.<sup>112</sup> The findings of the 1970 survey of needs indicated a shortfall of some \$1,443 million existed for the coming five year period. In response, the Australian Teachers' Federation orchestrated a nation-wide campaign to demand Commonwealth funding of schools. In Perth, the State School Teachers' Union and the W.A. Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations organised a mass meeting in the Perth Town Hall on the 22 June 1971 to demand Commonwealth action.

Before the 1972 election a great deal of public concern over educational inequality existed. Kennedy highlights the nature of the perceived connection between education and equality of opportunity:

Inequalities can be abolished only by a deliberate policy of social and economic change and by an education policy aimed not merely at giving opportunity to those whose needs are greatest.<sup>113</sup>

Increased public awareness of education guaranteed that it would be a key election issue in 1972. The Australian Labor Party developed a policy that was committed to increased Commonwealth involvement in education. It recommended that a Schools Commission be responsible for assessing the needs of both primary and secondary government and non-government schools. To defuse the controversial issue of state aid the 1969 Labor Party Conference developed the idea of needs funding.<sup>114</sup> This particular approach had two distinct advantages for the Labor Party. Firstly, it brought some unity within the Party over the state aid issue.<sup>115</sup> Secondly, it helped to overcome the concerns of the non-government sector, in particular the Catholic Schools, about their low resource levels.<sup>116</sup>

At the heart of the Labor Government's education policy was a concern with equality. The *Karmel Report* (1973) argued that 'there are good reasons for attempting to compensate to some extent through schooling for unequal out-of-school situation'.<sup>117</sup> However, the Committee concluded that equal provision 'might still result in unequal outcomes between social groups'.<sup>118</sup> As a result, the Committee focused on the idea of equality of outcome. Within this framework the Committee defined needs in terms of resources to schools and school systems and the degree of disadvantage to groups of pupils in particular schools.<sup>119</sup>

The Report of the Interim Committee recommended expenditure of \$694 million in 1974 and 1975. Of that amount \$466 million would be for government schools and \$198 million for non-government schools. A further \$30 million would be available for joint programs in both sectors. These figures represented a dramatic increase in expenditure on primary and secondary schools.<sup>120</sup> According to Kim Beazley the Minister for Education, 'it was the aim of the Labor party to carry through a revolution of access to education'.<sup>121</sup>

### Conclusion

The social democratic ideology of the post-war period guaranteed the right of every child to a free education suited to their ability and interests. The provision of comprehensive high schools, the abolition of the scholarship examination and public examinations, increased retention rates and the massive injection of Commonwealth funds all lend support to the democratisation thesis. Common sense and the rhetoric of equality of opportunity tend to reinforce the belief that everyone irrespective of class, race and gender 'can make it'. However, the expansion of state secondary schooling for all was not without contradiction and tension. In particular, the wider struggle between the forces of democracy for greater equality and the ruling elite's desire to further differentiate the school population in the interests of social efficiency. The economic recession of the 1970s amplified the state's contradictory role as it attempted to meet the needs of a changing economy and at the same time, meet the demands of subordinate groups in society for greater equality of opportunity.<sup>122</sup> By acknowledging the historical struggles over the emergence of the comprehensive high school in Western Australian society this paper might hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the current debates surrounding the nature, content and purpose of secondary schooling and the broader social and political issues at stake.

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