

Comprehensive Secondary Schools in Australia: a View from Newcastle, New South Wales

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Abstract

The two most significant events in government secondary schools in Australia between the end of the Second World War in 1945 and the cultural revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s were the vast expansion in enrolments and the curricular changes entailed, in part, by these. Between 1953 and 1964 four of the six states introduced comprehensive high schools. In the ten years after 1974 the other two states followed suit. In all states the internal structure of comprehensive schools also changed. The examination system, the curriculum, and the provision for higher ability students all came under public scrutiny. This epoch closed with the reforms of 1989-93. Thereafter, comprehensive schools existed in name but lost their dominance and changed their character yet again.

The following analysis focuses particularly on New South Wales. After discussing the concept of comprehensive secondary schools, it surveys the long-established system of secondary schooling to which the early comprehensive high schools offered an alternative. Their progress in the six states between 1953 and 1984 is then examined. The cultural transformation of the late 1960s and early 1970s is seen as reshaping the context and nature of comprehensive schooling. The final section examines in some detail the comprehensive system as it operated in Newcastle, New South Wales, from 1953 onwards and the conversion in the 1970s of the specialised secondary schools in the inner city into comprehensives. The study closes with a general survey of the reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s which relegated comprehensive high schools to a relatively minor position in New South Wales secondary education.

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The Concept of Comprehensive High Schools

In the United States from about 1918 onwards a new form of secondary school began to come into favour: the 'cosmopolitan' or 'comprehensive' or 'omnibus' (i.e. for all) public high school. These secondary schools were open to all boys and girls in a given area and aimed to provide a variety of courses suited to their wide range of interests and abilities. America was the first country to identify adolescence and a new type of schooling to cater for this age cohort, largely because at least some regions were sufficiently prosperous and technologically advanced to dispense with the labour of teenagers. America's wealth and democratic spirit created public comprehensive high schools charging no fees and open to all.¹

In the United Kingdom interest in comprehensive secondary schools developed during the Second World War as an element in post-war educational reform, and it became Labour Party policy in the 1950s. 'Secondary education for all' seemed a necessary compensation for the sufferings of wartime. Many liberal-left reformers believed that democracy required the provision of secondary education in local co-educational comprehensive schools. The first four comprehensive high schools opened in London in 1946. The New Education Fellowship widened its programme of progressive, child-centred education to include co-educational comprehensive secondary schools alongside activity methods, social studies, the abolition of external exams, and the use of short-answer ('objective') tests. Following an international New Education Fellowship [NEF] conference in Australia in 1937, an Australian NEF was established with branches in all states.

In England, the reduction of class divisions in education provided a strong motivation for comprehensive schools, but Australia, with its more egalitarian social structure, put less emphasis on the eradication of social class. Moreover, in Australia education was less important as a means of social mobility. Consequently, the debate over comprehensive schools was not as heated in Australia as it was in England.

The suitability of comprehensive secondary schools for Australian conditions was discussed as early as 1935 by two contributors to *The Education of the Adolescent in Australia*, edited by P. R. Cole of Sydney Teachers' College. Frank Tate, a former director of education in Victoria, compared specialised single-purpose schools with 'omnibus' schools offering several courses. European practice favoured the former and American high schools and junior high schools the latter.

It is claimed such a system is more in keeping with democratic sentiment than one under which the choice of a school with a vocational bias must be made at an early age. On the other hand, American writers often attribute the low standards of their secondary education to the flooding of the high schools with pupils of greatly differing mental ability, vocational aims, and social background. In such a system it is assumed that the teaching staff is qualified to give the guidance necessary, a great assumption even in a country believing so strongly in mental tests and measurements.²

The American high school sought to give an education to fit students for any business or station in life and consequently offered many vocational courses. But, said Tate, the Australian high school emphasised 'the elements of a general education liberal in character, and is suspicious of premature specialization.'

Another contributor to Cole's edited volume, Dr K. S. Cunningham, Chief Executive Officer of the recently-established Australian Council for Educational Research [ACER], put the choice differently. The comprehensive view was that education beyond the elementary stage should be general; it was given verbal expression in the slogan 'Secondary Education for All'. Those favouring a selective type of secondary education presumably believed that it should be limited to a few 'who are likely to be called upon to act as leaders in social, political and economic affairs.' He argued that the academic secondary school was also vocational because it was 'practically the only channel through which the "higher" professions and occupations can be reached.'³

This rather harsh view overlooked the fact that most state governments had abolished fees or set only low fees; that admission on academic merit was arguably a democratic mode of selection; and that it was the non-state, independent colleges which offered an exclusive avenue to the professions or social power.

The wartime mood of social reform generated debate on the future of education. The ACER published a series of pamphlets on education, the second of which, *A Plan for Australia* written by the ACER staff, was the most controversial. Amongst other things, it was suggested that education should be compulsory to age 16, co-educational, free, and, at the secondary level, conducted in multi-lateral non-selective schools for four years, followed by two-year specialist schools.⁴

In fact, the structure of state post-primary and secondary education remained unchanged for at least a decade. Its character needs some consideration.

The Old System: Specialised Schools

When the first comprehensive schools appeared in Australia in the early 1950s post-primary state schools retained a structure and a curriculum which closely resembled that devised at the beginning of the century. In the decade before the First World War a new era opened in Australian education, marked by the expansion of the state into secondary education, the introduction of a humanist-realist curriculum in primary schools, and the establishment by the state of various types of post-primary schools: junior technical schools, commercial schools, home or domestic science schools, rural or agricultural schools, and academic high schools. Entry to these schools was largely determined on academic merit, as measured by performance in public examinations. But most Australians did not seek an extended education. The majority of pupils left at the end of primary school; others left half-way through secondary, on reaching the minimum school leaving age of 14; and a minority stayed to the end of secondary school before departing for the university, teachers' college or world of work. In a young, pioneering society it was possible to do well in the world without much formal education. 'Fair average quality', a term used in the grading of wheat, also applied to education. Extremes of excellence or ignorance were relatively rare.

The system was hailed as providing 'equality of opportunity' and welcomed as providing an 'educational ladder' stretching from the small bush school or the urban infants' school to the high or intermediate high schools and thence on to the university or teachers' college. There was also a second ladder, leading via junior technical, commercial or home science schools to technical colleges.

The academic state secondary schools, along with some Roman Catholic and other denominational corporate colleges, prepared adolescents for the professions. The original three 'learned professions', law, medicine, and the Church, were enlarged in the early twentieth century by the 'new professions', notably architecture, agriculture, veterinary science, engineering, dentistry, pharmacy and teaching.

The new academic secondary education provided by high schools and independent corporate colleges was a *type* of education, with a distinct

curriculum centred on English, Latin, history, French, mathematics, science, and physical education, with German or geography as minor alternatives. This liberal education persisted for a while even though the growth of secondary education for all, often in comprehensive schools, widened the curriculum and weakened academic standards. This style passed away in the late 1960s, with the collapse of liberal humanism, and secondary education became a mere *stage* or *level*, intermediate between primary and tertiary.

The post-primary 'continuation' schools, the junior technical, home science and the commerce schools, were mainly two-year schools. Sometimes their pupils moved on to training or technical colleges.

In some Australian states multilateral high schools, in which pupils were streamed into distinct courses, such as academic, commercial, technical and home science, appeared in rural areas. The main reason for this arrangement was financial; it was cheaper than providing separate schools. Financial considerations also ensured that these schools were co-educational. Although they recruited their students from the local area, entry was determined by academic performance in primary school; hence they were not truly comprehensive. But they provided a hint of an alternative type of high school.⁵

Establishing the Comprehensives

In the 1950s Tasmania, New South Wales, and Western Australia replaced a variety of high schools, academic, junior technical, junior home science and commercial schools with comprehensive secondary schools. These were multilateral, consisting of three 'sides': academic, technical, and commercial, though New South Wales diverged from the multilateral pattern after 1962. About this time Queensland adopted the comprehensive system. South Australia and Victoria officially retained their dual systems of separate high schools and technical schools. In the late 1960s, however, many of these schools broadened their intake and their curricula, becoming *de facto* comprehensive.

The alternatives of specialised versus comprehensive schools aroused very little public debate. The case for comprehensive schools was voiced by academics or educational administrators but the main arguments were social or political, for instance, that the wartime sacrifices must be justified by building a better world through education, or that in a democracy different social groups should mix in the one school. The educational justifications were less obvious, though opposition to

vocational subjects in high schools and the difficulty of selecting pupils for appropriate schools might fall into this category. But several driving forces which received little public mention were operating. Demography or rising numbers, was one. The fall in the age of marriage which started in 1941 and the increased birthrate in a more prosperous community produced in the early post-war years a pressure of numbers, first in infant schools, then in primary, extending in the early 1950s, to secondary. Furthermore, in the early 1950s the 'persistence' or retention rate in secondary education started to rise, increasing the proportion of pupils staying to the end secondary school. Post-war immigration was a third factor boosting school rolls. Two less emphasised but equally important considerations were administrative convenience and the belief that large, and therefore, fewer schools might save money.

The rising 'persistence rate' reflected socio-economic change. Growing prosperity enabled more families to keep their children at school longer, and provided governments with sufficient funds to build large secondary schools. And for the first time in Australian history education was becoming a significant pathway for a large number of adolescents to achieve socio-economic advancement. The pressure of rising numbers in primary schools also led to automatic promotion as the method of progression based on age rather than academic attainment. This was facilitated by the abolition of the external examination at the end of primary school. As a consequence the size of each cohort seeking some form of secondary education grew, but the overall academic quality declined.

Tasmania had a long-established egalitarian tradition. In 1943 a Committee on Educational Extension had asserted that homogeneity in social factors was a better principle of grouping children than homogeneity in ability or attainment. Between 1944 and 1947 the Department adopted the policy of placing all children of the same age in the same grade. This also ensured that all children transferred from primary to secondary school at approximately age 12, so that they would obtain either a 'modern' or a 'liberal' curriculum before leaving at age 16. At Burnie in 1952 and Devonport in 1953 technical courses were added to existing academic and commercial courses to create three-stream multilateral high schools. When Ulverstone High School opened in February 1953 it also offered a variety of courses. In November 1955 the Director of Education, D. H. Tribolet, presented a report to his Minister entitled *Observations on Secondary Education in England, Scotland*

and the U.S.A. While overseas he had encountered the debate as to whether the school should reflect or initiate social change.

Supporters of the comprehensive school see the school as a powerful social instrument by which both educational and social objectives can be realised as an indivisible whole. The school is not merely a selective scholastic institution . . . a funnel for the upward ascent of the intellectually superior. They claim for the school a broader social purpose. It is not merely a mirror of society, not merely a passive object on which the pressures of society work. It is not the function of the school merely to react to, or to reflect, or to adjust to the environment. Its proper function is also to improve and to create . . . We must avoid complacency with the status quo.⁶

In Australia the longstanding egalitarian spirit and the new welfare state were both likely to favour comprehensive high schools, but other forces were also at work. Indeed, comprehensive high schools had already started to emerge, born by departmental fiat rather than public debate. Tribolet recommended that Tasmania experiment further with comprehensive schools. The first new-style comprehensive opened at Taroom in 1957 and within a further three years Tasmania had abolished its selective academic and technical high schools.⁷

In *New South Wales* post-primary (i. e. 'secondary') enrolments in government schools, which had been falling since 1944, started to rise from 1949 by roughly four thousand annually, becoming still higher after 1953. The first multilateral high schools opened in 1953 at Corrimal, on the northern outskirts of Wollongong, and at Belmont, a southern suburb of Newcastle. Later that year the Minister for Education appointed a committee to investigate secondary education, chaired by the Director-General of Education, H. S. Wyndham. The *Report of the Committee Appointed to Survey Secondary Education in New South Wales* (October 1957) accepted the principle of the neighbourhood secondary school and recommended that 'on completion of the primary school course and, in general, about the age of twelve years, all pupils should proceed, without examination, to secondary education.' The schools were, in general, to be co-educational. Some features of the new system were implemented immediately; specialised vocational secondary schools were abolished, though a limited number of academic selective highs survived in metropolitan areas. Other reforms had to await enabling legislation. Finally, between 1962 and 1967 the secondary course was extended to six years and the multilateral structure of comprehensive state high schools was replaced by a single common

curriculum in which pupils had an increasing choice of subjects. Each subject was offered at three, and sometimes at four, levels and a system of 'setting' allowed pupils to take different subjects at different levels.⁸

The two most distinctive features were 'setting', sometimes referred to as 'cross setting', and the external School Certificate examination at the end of Form IV. 'Setting' was the grouping of students in separate classes in each subject according to their levels of ability in that subject. While this gave the schools a more integrated structure than in multilateral schools where students were streamed, it imposed a heavier burden on teachers. Because all classes in a particular subject had to be timetabled simultaneously, to allow for regrouping, it was no longer possible for a teacher to take several classes in the same Year, providing much the same lesson for each. The external School Certificate examination served multiple purposes: it helped restore standards; it ensured control over the junior secondary curriculum by the Secondary Schools Board, which issued syllabuses; it provided a motive for students to work; and it underlined official policy that it was not necessary for the majority of students to proceed beyond Form IV to the Higher School Certificate examination conducted by the Board of Senior School Studies at the end of Year 12.

In *Western Australia* an internal departmental Committee on Secondary Education (1952-54) recommended the introduction of comprehensive schools as a means of tackling the rising school population. Some years later the Director of Secondary Education, David Mossenson, attributed the jump from 11,936 secondary pupils in government schools in 1951 to 27,552 in 1960 to general population increase, awareness of the value of higher education, changing employment patterns, and the introduction by the Education Department of chronological promotion through the primary grades.⁹

The Education Circular of December 1958 proclaimed the emergence of 'the co-educational, comprehensive community high school.'

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. As vocations become more and more specialized, the school stands as the last bastion between the insistent demands of commerce and the broad, general needs essential to a well-educated citizen.

The first comprehensive high school was established in 1959 and the last 'Scholarship Exam', governing access from primary to secondary schooling, was held in 1960. Between 1959 and 1962 the selective Perth Modern School became comprehensive. In 1964 the realm of secondary education was expanded when the minimum school leaving age was raised to 15.

The new comprehensive schools were multilateral, with various 'tracks' or 'streams': professional, commercial, technical. As they were large institutions, they achieved economies in the use of specialist staffs and facilities. The Secondary School Curriculum Committee (1958-64) emphasised 'that the basic curriculum was to be designed, not primarily for academic students aimed at entry to tertiary institutions nor for handicapped children who required special education, but for the great mass of students.' Accordingly, the education department condemned the practice of streaming and from 1965 gradually introduced a work unit scheme into its high schools, permitting pupils to take different subjects at different levels. The external Junior Certificate examination was also abolished, but it soon became clear that academic students also needed special provision. When Mossenson became Director of Secondary Education in 1967 he sought ways of 'retaining or resurrecting the reputation of the state system' by introducing special centres into some comprehensive schools to cater for gifted and talented students.¹⁰

Queensland retained many of the features of nineteenth century Australia. It was a pioneering, rural and decentralised society, which had ignored many of the educational reforms of 1902-14 adopted in the other states. The transition from primary to secondary school at age 14 coincided with the minimum leaving age; this ensured that high schools were academically selective. Following a Committee of Enquiry into Secondary Education (1960-61) the age of transfer from primary to secondary education was lowered to 13 and secondary education for all was implemented by abolishing the Scholarship Examination, which governed entry to state high schools. These schools now became five-year comprehensive high schools. In Brisbane the Industrial High School closed in 1961, and the Domestic Science High School and the State Commercial High School at the end of 1962. The Education Act of 1964 ensured that all pupils had at least two years of secondary education by raising the minimum leaving age to 15. Following the New South Wales model, the first year at secondary school became a general

one with a wide curriculum. In second and third year the pupils took certain core subjects and a group of electives.¹¹

South Australia did not officially introduce comprehensive schools until 1975. However, from the late 1960s a remarkable widening of the curriculum in the various types of government secondary schools established some of the features of comprehensive education. Imitating well-established Victorian arrangements, South Australia established in 1940 a system of junior technical schools, some for boys, some for girls, which soon quickly received a status equivalent to that of the academic high schools. Features of this dual system survived for more than thirty years. In 1961 South Australia had 51 government high schools and 23 separate boys' and girls' technical schools. The curriculum was also expanded. In 1961 the technical schools sent their boys into three streams: a four-year course leading to tertiary education, a three-year course leading to apprenticeships, etc., and an alternative course which catered for lower-ability pupils. In 1963 the minimum school leaving age was raised to 15. Within three years the basic secondary school course was extended from three years to four, at which point the external Leaving Certificate examination was held; the Matriculation examination was now held at the end of fifth year.

In 1965 the Labor Party came to power in South Australia, after thirty-two years in opposition. It sought to replace the dual system of high schools and technical schools with a single comprehensive co-educational high school system, but change proceeded slowly. In the Labor Government's first term the only decision made was to reorganise the structure of the Department, in the process bringing both types of school under the Director of Secondary Education instead of two separate Superintendents. This move facilitated a revision of the junior secondary curriculum as a common but varied course for both types of schools.¹²

Victoria retained its system of parallel academic high and technical schools even longer than South Australia; their official demise was deferred till the 1980s. This prolonged division doubtless reflected the state's firm social class divisions. A strong middle class ensured the strength of an extensive system of independent corporate colleges providing an academic education. There were only three state selective high schools. Victoria widened the pathway to secondary education for all when, in 1947, a Labor government abolished the Merit Certificate. Where two or more types of secondary schools existed, i. e. district high schools, technical schools, or girls' secondary schools, district inspectors

organised placement committees. The main differences in curriculum lay in the absence of a foreign language in technical schools and in most girls' secondary schools, and the requirement of technical drawing and practical subjects in the boys' technical schools.¹³ Victoria also experienced the same pressure of rising enrolments and curriculum uncertainty as in the other Australian states. The Liberal Party, which commenced a long period in office in October 1947, initially revealed little interest in educational reform, however, in 1958 the Minister for Education asked the Director of Education, A. H. Ramsay, to chair a wide-ranging investigation.

The Report of the Committee on State Education in Victoria, known as the Ramsay Report, was submitted in February 1960, one month before Ramsey retired. The Report was uncertain about co-education in post-primary schools, which was often a feature of comprehensive high schools. While it applauded the principle of comprehensives it did not recommend them. If we were considering the organisation of a system *ab initio*, said the Report, 'we would consider that there is merit in a system whereby all children should pass from the primary school, at about age twelve, into a common secondary school.' But the state had inherited a complex system 'which satisfies many, and there are strong arguments in favour of continuing the present system rather than scrapping it in favour of a uniform system of comprehensive secondary schools.'¹⁴

The arguments over the relative merits of comprehensive and specialist schools and the appropriate internal structure of comprehensive schools (streaming of classes; identifiable 'sides'; courses offered at different levels) were both related to the problem of the curriculum, but in Victoria the various secondary schools were widening their curricula. The number of district high schools (179 in 1962) grew, while the number of girls schools (16 in 1962) and junior technical schools (74 in 1962) declined.

Before considering the further development of comprehensive high schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it is necessary to note the limited nature of the debate on the theory of comprehensive education in Australia in the 1950s and early 1960s. The fact that I contributed in small part to this debate may account for some of the views expressed in this article.

A Muted Debate

In their recent historical survey of *The Comprehensive Public High School*, Craig Campbell and Geoff Sherington note that in Australia the socialist left was neither as strong nor as vocal as in England. They could not match the English defence of comprehensive schooling by a number of author-activists. On the other hand, university lecturers in education tended to have liberal-left sympathies and to support comprehensive schools. The more numerous teachers' college lecturers were more conservative; but being public servants rarely spoke out. Teachers' unions tended to favour comprehensive high schools. Most of the public discussion arose from the defence by supporters of selective high schools threatened by the march of the comprehensives. The only example Campbell and Sherington give of such debate was the joust in two *Current Affairs Bulletins* between Dr George Howie (The Case for Comprehensive Schools) and John Mackie (The Case for Selective Schools), both senior lecturers in education and philosophy respectively, at Sydney University.¹⁵

Howie drew moral support from the New Education Fellowship, a strong advocate of progressive education, while Mackie looked to the Department of Tutorial Classes which, together with the Workers' Educational Association, strongly supported liberal education. The New South Wales Government Department of Education published the *Current Affairs Bulletins*, while Owen Harries, a member of the Department, edited the WEA journal, *The Australian Highway*. Conflicting views of comprehensive schools appeared in the journal in December 1959, April 1960, and June 1960.

['The Aims of Education', the title of an analysis of the Howie and Mackie identified a core issue of the debate; this appeared in the journal in January 1961; it favoured Mackie's position.] CLARIFY

The fact that I had attended a leading state selective school, Sydney Boys' High, doubtless gave me an initial bias in favour of specialised schools. Stories of the lowering of academic standards in American comprehensive schools reinforced this prejudice.

When Newcastle Teachers' College opened in 1949, to train primary school teacher, I also arrived as lecturer in history and history method. I was a member of the Labor Party from 1948 to 1953, but I soon realised that the Labor movement in Australia was not strongly committed to quality in education. The Liberal party was no better — indeed, it was hard to see any difference in the education policies of the major parties. I

also realised that the NSW Teachers' Federation (of which I was a member) lacked any real commitment to quality. It was dominated by primary teachers with limited knowledge of secondary schooling. It also suffered from an inherent tension between its industrial interests as a trade union and the professional responsibilities of an educational association. Its leadership included communists who, seeking to imitate the Soviet Union, opposed progressive education but favoured comprehensive schools.

When the Wyndham Committee held hearings in Newcastle, I and my colleague and fellow-lecturer in history, Des Long, presented a joint submission. Our statement, presented to the Wyndham Committee in the City Hall on 1 June 1955, summarised the gist of our evidence thus:

We are of the opinion that students entering tertiary educational institutions are now less mature intellectually and socially than in previous years. We believe that something may be done to correct this situation by attention to the place of History in the curriculum, as well as by modification of the structure of formal education given to these students at the pre-tertiary level.

We sought the restoration of standards by recommending that the Intermediate Certificate examination be externally set and assessed as formerly, and by increasing the secondary school course by one year. We did not address the major issue: that secondary education for all meant that the schools now had to cater for a large group of pupils of limited academic ability.

Harry Eddy, Senior Tutor in Newcastle of the Sydney University Department of Tutorial Classes, which provided adult education courses in co-operation with the Workers' Educational Association, invited me to be one of three speakers at a Newcastle WEA Forum on 'Are Our High Schools Failing to Educate?' held on 21 August 1955 in connection with Education Week. Eddy, who was President of the Hunter WEA, had a strong commitment to liberal education. I subsequently wrote up my talk for *The Australian Highway*. I identified four crises: in material provision, in teaching techniques, in the content of the curriculum, and in standards. I remarked that 'not since the 1939-45 war has there been such public discussion of an educational crisis in this country.' My comments on comprehensive schools were limited to (a) remarking on the tendency to bring together 'large masses of children in the one building' and to provide parallel courses at different levels, 'i.e. the "comprehensive" or "multi-lateral" high school', and (b)

suggesting that the task of the Committee on Secondary Education was to approve this development.

I offered five suggestions for reform: history should replace social studies, even if at a simple level for some students; more attention should be given to literature, especially English literature, which can help develop a philosophy of life; the high school course should be extended, either by adding a sixth year or by introducing a Leaving Certificate at Year 4, followed by a two-year junior college course; if the Intermediate Certificate was retained it should be an external examination; and all high school teachers should be university graduates over the age of 21 (if non-graduates were employed, they should be three-year trained, not two, and over the age of 21).¹⁶

In the 1950s I was concerned more with the growing threat to the traditional university and with defending the place of history than with comprehensive schools *per se*. Late in 1950 a meeting of citizens formed a Newcastle University Establishment Group, with Harry Eddy as secretary, to press for the establishment of a local academic university. A year later, the establishment of a college of the NSW University of Technology, by no means a traditional university, muddied the waters. I accepted an invitation to join the NUEG Committee. In secondary schools history was increasingly under threat after disappearing in government primary schools across Australia in the early 1950s. The Wyndham scheme mandated social studies in Form 1, partly to provide work for an over-supply of commerce teachers. History, geography and French were deferred to Form 2 to make it easier for all Form 1 students to take a common course. Fortunately, this blow to a liberal curriculum was soon corrected. Nonetheless, Des Long and I were happy to establish a branch of the History Teachers' Association in Newcastle in the early 1950s.

Newcastle Teachers' College was soon training teachers for the junior secondary school because of the shortage of university graduate teachers. I spent 1958 in London, where I taught in three contrasting types of secondary school. Before being appointed to Newcastle, I taught at Crown Street Central Secondary School, Bega Intermediate High, Parramatta High, and North Sydney Boys' High. In London I taught at Bromyard Avenue Secondary Modern School at Acton, a boys' comprehensive at Forest Hills, and at Poplar Junior Technical School in the East End. As I wrote in an article after my return, I discovered that English schools lacked pupils of middle ability. They were either of lower ability or higher, with little in between. Conceivably,

comprehensive schools could bridge the gap. I believed that most Australian government schools had a large middle group of pupils with relatively few pupils at the extremes. The secondary modern school at Acton was co-educational. Whenever possible the teachers started each day by combining all the forms in a Year for a run three or four times round the oval to work off the pupils' surplus energies. Forest Hills, situated in a leafy, middle-class suburb, was a 'small' boys' comprehensive school. The 1500 boys took 20 minutes to 'filter' into the assembly hall, to the genteel tones of the music master at the piano. They were very anxious to learn. The pupils of Poplar Junior 'Tech' were nice East End, working class boys but they had no intention of doing any school work, preferring instead to enjoy themselves by regularly disrupting class procedures. Individual boys would deny they needed any help with their mathematics but they were grateful if you forced some on them.¹⁷

I then spent three years as a postgraduate scholar at the Australian National University in Canberra, writing a thesis on 'Opinion, Policy and Practice in New South Wales Education, 1833-1880', which strengthened my appreciation of liberal education. I returned to Newcastle Teachers' College to lecture in history in 1962, and the following year started to lecture part-time at the University College in the history of education. I moved full-time in 1968 to what was by then the University of Newcastle. It was thereafter, when the Wyndham system was fully implemented and I had more time and freedom as a university lecturer, and when the impact of the cultural revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s on education had become clearer, that I turned my attention to the problems associated with comprehensive high schools.

The Cultural Revolution and Comprehensives

The cultural revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s encompassed a crisis in education. The terminal sickness of liberal humanist culture and the advent of neo-progressive and radical education helped transform comprehensive secondary schools. Across Australia 'open education', the abolition of inspection, the abolition or dilution of most external examinations, the weakening of academic standards, the adoption of school-based curricula in place of compulsory syllabuses in primary and junior secondary grades, and the abandonment by most teachers of planning of lessons by the maintenance of daybooks and lesson registers all modified comprehensive schooling. The loss of such external

controls over the school programme hastened the decay of liberal humanist subjects, especially in the junior years. The raising in some states of the minimum leaving age to 15 years also increased the proportion of reluctant students in many comprehensive schools. School-based curricula in the junior secondary years and the reluctance of many teachers to tolerate specifically vocational subjects further undermined many comprehensive schools. The variety of subjects offered expanded to cater for an increasing 'variety of interests' thereby generating a smorgasbord type of curricula which replaced traditionally-defined liberal or technical subjects.

A vital justification for the early comprehensive secondary schools had been their role in mitigating class divisions and, to a lesser degree, a narrow interpretation of gender roles. The cultural revolution diminished the school's concern with problems of social class and heightened interest in the feminist movement; social class was transmuted into one of a number of disadvantaged social groups — students from poor socio-economic circumstances — for whom the school must cater, alongside girls, Aborigines, students from non-English-speaking backgrounds, intellectually handicapped or physically disabled students, and geographically isolated students. Some comprehensive schools also began to reflect varying ethnic or Aboriginal concerns in response to the concentrated geographical location of different ethnic groups.¹⁸ South Australia, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory were the most enthusiastic in embracing the new educational order whereas New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia were more conservative in their reaction.

The main agent for reform in *South Australia* was A. W. Jones, Deputy Director-General from 1967 and Director-General from 1970. He worked harmoniously with the Labor Party Minister for Education, Hugh Hudson. The Director-General's Memorandum of August 1970, *Freedom and Authority in the Schools*, conferred a wide range of freedoms, including the ability to vary courses and ways of assessment. School-based curricula helped erode the differences between the high school and technical high school courses. In some cases a technical high school dropped the word 'technical' from its name. A few boys' and girls' technical high schools also amalgamated. The Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Education in South Australia, *Education in South Australia* (the Karmel Report, 1971), recommended that all secondary schools be co-educational and that the distinction between general and

technical secondary schools be phased out. As noted earlier, this was already underway. The number of technical high schools was declining. By 1973 there were 77 high schools but only 25 technical high schools. After 1974 technical high schools ceased to exist. All new high schools had gymnasias, music and drama areas and open plan architecture became a prevalent feature. The curriculum gradually developed into a system of core subjects, electives and a wide range of integrated studies. At the same time schools became larger.¹⁹

Victoria retained the official bipartite classification of high schools and technical schools longer than South Australia. In 1965 the Victorian Universities and Schools Examination Board agreed to abolish the Intermediate Certificate examination, sat at the end of Form IV, after 1967, and no more syllabuses were issued. A Curriculum Advisory Board was also appointed to define the principles underlying the first four years of secondary education. In December 1969 the Director of Secondary Education, R. A. Reed, gave the schools control of the curriculum from Forms I to IV. In September 1967, because of the large number of students entering fifth and sixth year, Reed presented the Minister with a scheme for senior high schools. These were to be open to all-comers and offer a wide range of courses but in August 1969 the plans were postponed indefinitely. The Victorian Secondary Teachers' Association had been suspicious from the start; senior high schools would lead to the creation of junior high schools and would divide the teaching force into two groups. The bureaucrats in the Technical Division within the Department feared the new schools would diminish the role of technical schools. The principals of private schools were also hostile. They knew that in Tasmania matriculation colleges had enticed students away from private schools.²⁰

Victoria possessed only three selective high schools, all in inner Melbourne: Melbourne Boys' High, MacRobertson Girls' High, and the co-educational University High School. These schools admitted pupils at Form III and offered only professional courses. However, a decline in the number of feeder schools coupled with ideological resentment of 'elite' schools, led to University High accepting first-year intakes from 1972.²¹

Until the end of 1973 education in the *Australian Capital Territory* was provided by the NSW Department of Education in buildings supplied by the local administration. Local responsibility for buildings made it possible for the ACT to adopt the South Australian scheme of open plan schools in 1971. A separate education system was established in 1974. A

strong middle-class ideology, generated by the many senior Commonwealth Government public servants living and working in Canberra, the nation's capital, coupled with the militancy of the ACT Teachers' Federation and generous Commonwealth funding, ensured a friendly reception to progressive and radical education. The ACT discarded the Wyndham system of comprehensive secondary schools. External examinations were abolished, separate community colleges (senior secondary schools) for Years 11 and 12 were established, and four-year comprehensive schools were introduced. A significant devolution of authority included the establishment of school councils. These gave teachers considerable scope to determine the curriculum but the strong middle-class character of the population in the ACT ensured that most pupils would do reasonably well, whatever structure of secondary schooling was adopted.

In 1967 *New South Wales* had just installed its distinctive version of comprehensive secondary schooling, aspiring to accommodate the needs of above average, average, and below average students by its system of 'levels' or 'setting'. The state was naturally reluctant to introduce further changes but the new climate of reform enveloping Australian education could not be completely denied. The Wyndham system was held in place by two new external examinations, the School Certificate, sat at the end of Year 10, and the Higher School Certificate sat at the end of Year 12. As early as January 1968 Dr Wyndham joined the progressives in denouncing external examinations. He told the Teachers' Federation conference that the 'next great task' was to break down 'this incubus of public examinations'. From 1968 the School Certificate was awarded on the basis of 50 per cent school assessment and 50 per cent external examination; from 1973 school assessment counted 75 per cent; from 1975 the Certificate was awarded solely on school assessment with moderation of schools to maintain comparability of grades across the state. The provision of subjects at three levels also ceased. This meant that two essential features of the Wyndham system had been discarded after less than ten years.

The onward march of comprehensive schools resulted in the closure of some selective high schools. North Sydney Technical High closed in December 1969 and Fort Street Girls' High in December 1974, the pupils being transferred to Fort Street Boys' High in accord with the co-educational agenda of progressive education. In November 1972 the Liberal Party Minister for Education announced that the four selective schools in Newcastle would also close.

Queensland also experienced the winds of change. Many students entering the senior years of high school were finding the academic, university-oriented courses too difficult. But to alter these courses required changing two external examinations. The Radford Report of July 1970 recommended that the Junior Public Examination at the end of Year 10 and the Senior Public Examination at the end of Year 12 be replaced by school-based moderated assessments, and these proposals were swiftly implemented. The low proportion of graduate teachers in government secondary schools, the inexperience of many teachers, and the disappearance of external examinations as a motivation for study helped to make discipline a growing problem. In August 1974 the Teachers' Union organised a seminar on discipline and in the following March adopted a discipline policy which recommended limiting the size of secondary schools to 800 pupils; at that time 41 per cent of secondary schools had enrolments in excess of that figure.²²

Western Australia went in a different direction. The Dettman Report, *Secondary Education in Western Australia* (1969), recommended an increase in the number of schools specifically charged with catering for students gifted in specific subject areas. The Report was also followed by the introduction in the junior years of 'levels' in the 'core' subjects: the sciences, mathematics, social studies and English, leading to an Achievement Certificate. A wider choice of subjects was also provided. The scheme was, in fact, an adaptation of some aspects of the NSW Wyndham system and aimed to cater for higher-ability pupils.²³

Tasmania modified its comprehensive secondary system by opening three matriculation colleges between 1965 and 1968. These offered one or two-year courses leading to the university. Consolidating the relatively few academically-oriented senior students was economical but it deprived the four-year comprehensives of many of their more mature students.

Comprehensive Schools in Newcastle, 1957-1967

So far this paper has focused on the general development of comprehensive secondary schooling across Australia. Further insights are offered by a closer, 'grass-roots', case study of that process in Newcastle, New South Wales. The establishment of the comprehensive system in Newcastle went through three phases. The first was the introduction of multilateral comprehensive schools between 1957 and 1961. Then followed the introduction of the Wyndham system between

1962 and 1967. Finally, in the 1970s, Newcastle experienced hitherto unprecedented controversy over education when four selective schools, which had survived the first post-1957 policy change, were replaced by four comprehensive schools.

The public hearings of the Wyndham Committee in Newcastle fed growing community interest in education, which found expression at meetings and in the columns of newspapers. The immediate task was to build and staff numerous suburban comprehensive high schools. Belmont, on the Pacific Highway leading south from Newcastle, opened in 1953. Booragul, located in a middle-class suburb on the western shore of Lake Macquarie, followed in 1958. Gateshead, also on the Pacific Highway but closer to Newcastle, opened a year later. This semi-industrial suburb contained many poor, 'disadvantaged' families. Wallsend High, on the western outskirts of Newcastle, opened in 1960. In the same year Jesmond Secondary School became a local area comprehensive school and was renamed Jesmond High School.²⁴

The threat to the four existing selective secondary schools aroused less concern in Newcastle than a similar threat in Sydney. In November 1957 the *Newcastle Morning Herald* mildly commented: 'The recommendations as outlined require elaboration to determine their effect on particular high schools, though what is more important is their effect on scholars.'²⁵ The President of the Newcastle Headmasters' Association said that his association favoured comprehensive secondary schools.²⁶

One reason for the survival of the four selective high schools was the lack of population growth in Hamilton and Broadmeadow, where Girls' High, Home Science High, and the Technical High School were situated. The close proximity of these schools to each other also impeded their conversion into local comprehensive schools. However, once the comprehensive system was officially approved in 1957, teachers at the four selective high schools were no longer specially selected. This reduced one of the grievances of teachers in less academic high schools. The ability of the selective schools to secure experienced, graduate staff depended to some extent on the influence of a particular principal with the Department. In this respect Newcastle did not fare as well as Sydney. The proportion of graduate teachers at Newcastle Girls' High fell from 86 per cent in 1961 to 77 per cent in 1965, but at the selective Fort St. Girls' High School in Sydney, the proportion rose from 87 per cent in 1961 to 90 per cent in 1965. Even at the comprehensive Manly Boys', graduate teachers made up 88 per cent of staff in 1961 and 83 per

cent in 1965 but the school was located in a prosperous middle class suburb!

From 1962 the final phase of the Wyndham system was implemented in annual stages. Its distinctive features included the extension of the full secondary course to six years, the introduction of an external examination at Form 4, and 'setting'. Six more high schools opened in the Newcastle district between 1962 and 1968: Toronto (1962), Cardiff, Whitebridge, and Swansea (all in 1963), Warners Bay (1966) and Kotara (1968). With the exception of Cardiff and Swansea, these schools were located mainly in essentially middle class suburbs.

The post-1962 Wyndham system encouraged large schools. The comprehensive school worked most economically if it had 1000 pupils or more. A first-year intake of 200 pupils was considered the minimum size for effective functioning. Unfortunately, moral education, school tone, and effective discipline, were harder to achieve in a school of 1000 than in smaller schools. In the large school the individual pupil was likely to become anonymous. In 1960, before the full implementation of the new system, no high school in the Newcastle-Maitland-Cessnock district had more than 1000 pupils, though four — Cessnock High, Newcastle Boys' High, Belmont High, and Maitland Boys' — had between 912 and 955. In 1970, after the system was fully operative, four high schools had more than 1000 pupils (Cessnock, Maitland Boys', Whitebridge and Broadmeadow) and another nine had between 900 and 1000 pupils. One solution to overlarge schools would have been to establish separate schools for Years 11 and 12. These were appearing in Tasmania and in the Roman Catholic domain but not in the NSW government system, partly because of Teachers' Federation opposition.

There was no great expansion in the number of state secondary schools in Newcastle after 1967. Glendale High School, six years in the planning, finally opened in January 1970, growing annually until its sixth form materialised in 1976. A similar slow-down occurred in New South Wales as a whole. Between 1960 and 1965 the number of government secondary schools increased by 82. In the next five years (1965 and 1970) the increase slowed to 44.²⁷

Newcastle's Selective Schools Converted into Comprehensives, 1970-78

Newcastle Girls' High and Hunter Girls' High merged in January 1976 as Newcastle High School. A year later Newcastle Boys' High merged with Wickham Girls' High to become Waratah High, while Newcastle Technical High merged with Cooks Hill Girls' High to become Merewether High School. All three new creations were co-educational and comprehensive. A collateral by-product of these changes was the transformation of Wollongong's selective high school into a comprehensive school, from January 1979. At the same time Smiths Hill Girls' High, which had started life as Wollongong Home Science School in 1944, became the co-educational comprehensive Smiths Hill High School. These operations in Newcastle and Wollongong marked the climax of the comprehensive drive in New South Wales. I participated in the debates and meetings which accompanied the Newcastle reconstruction. Accordingly, I include some personal testimony in the following account, if only to declare my interest, as both a participant and advocate.

In 1970 the inner city area of Newcastle was served by nine high schools. The four single-sex selective high schools (Newcastle Boys' High, Newcastle Girls' High, Hunter Girls' High, and Newcastle Technical High) had a total enrolment of 3630; five junior high schools (Broadmeadow Boys', Newcastle Junior Boys', Cooks Hill Girls', Hamilton Girls' and Wickham Girls') had an enrolment of 2671. Junior high schools went up to Year 10. Hamilton Girls' Junior High and Wickham Girls' Junior High had been created in 1962; the Wyndham restructuring led to their reclassification as full high schools in 1968 and 1970 respectively. Cooks Hill Junior Girls' High became a full high in 1969.²⁸

In Sydney the strength of the pressure groups which sprang to life to defend selective schools when the policy of comprehensive high schools became official were strong enough to ensure a decision in October 1957 that most of them would survive. But by the time the Liberal Party came to office in 1965, it had accepted the principle of comprehensive schools and the Minister endorsed a Departmental recommendation that the entry requirements for selective schools be 'slightly reduced'.²⁹

Newcastle was now an easier target for the ideologues in the Department anxious to make the comprehensive principle mandatory. However, the immediate incentive for structural change arose from local demographic and accommodation problems. The non-selective high

schools were in cramped buildings on unsuitable sites, and could not easily be developed into comprehensive high schools.

Early in 1971 pupils at Hamilton Girls' High walked out of classes and demonstrated in their playground against the overcrowded and decayed character of their school. This drew Departmental attention to the problem of the inner city schools which catered for the less academic pupils mostly in old building cramped for space. To rebuild them would have been costly and enrolments were declining in the inner city.

On 17 July the *Newcastle Morning Herald* reported that the Area Director, E. E. Gray, had advised the Newcastle District Council of Parents' and Citizens' Associations of a proposal to restructure the inner city secondary schools by replacing the four selective high schools with four co-educational four-year comprehensive high schools and a senior high school for fifth and sixth form students. Converting the selective high schools into comprehensives would provide better accommodation for pupils in the inner city without too much expenditure on buildings. Since most of the students in the junior high schools left at the end of Year 10, the senior high school for Years 11-12 would *de facto* be a selective school. This would placate parents and others anxious to preserve the advantages of selection, while mollifying those who wanted to see selection abolished, but the idea was likely to encounter strong opposition from the Teachers' Federation. Protagonists on both sides were now stirred to action.

Eddie Braggett, like me a former Teachers' College lecturer and now a lecturer in education at the University, wrote to the *Herald* stressing the tensions generated in children in Year six and their parents by the annual selection process for entry into the academic high schools.³⁰ The Newcastle Technical High School Parents' and Citizens' Association arranged a public meeting for 28 July 1971 to discuss the case for a senior high school. The day before the meeting the *Newcastle Morning Herald* printed an article hailing the success of St Anne's, the Roman Catholic senior high school, at Adamstown. A Teachers' Federation spokesman opposed senior high schools. On the morning of the meeting a *Herald* editorial stated that the Area Director's proposal for comprehensive high schools was logical and strong.³¹ More than 600 parents and teachers attended the meeting chaired by Gray, the Area Director. The Assistant Area Director, D. E. Rickard, presented the case for a senior high school. John Turner, Senior Staff Tutor in the Newcastle branch of the University of Sydney Adult Education Department, argued against senior high schools, but Gray would not

accept resolutions from the meeting for fear that they might have favoured retaining selective schools rather than a senior high school.³²

Public controversy increased. On 4 August a *Herald* columnist remarked that the paper had received a number of angry letters, many of which were written under pen-names. 'Interested Parent' of Merewether criticised moves towards co-education, which she thought was being thrust on parents by the Department of Education. 'Concerned Parent', a Merewether teacher, welcomed the proposed restructuring but saw a shortage of money as a major problem. D. J. Bowman, a local secondary teacher and Council member of the Teachers' Federation, took the same line, stating that Canberra should provide finance for reform. On the same day I had a letter published arguing that the main issue at the meeting at Newcastle Technical High School had been 'whether academically inclined children from mainly middle class homes in the inner city area should be educated in six-year selective high schools or in four-year comprehensive schools followed by a two year course in a senior high school.' I believed that either pattern would be satisfactory, but urged that the schools be small enough for the principal to take a class and for pupils and teachers to know each other. Large schools bred student unrest. Senior high schools were more necessary in suburban districts than in the inner city. The letter concluded: 'The Australian tradition in education has been to cater for the average while neglecting the below and above average.' Adequately staffed senior high schools would sustain quality in education.³³

Eight days later an extensive reply, signed 'Lecturer', appeared. The writer dismissed my version of 'the main issue' (six-year selective high schools or four-year comprehensive schools, and senior high schools). Instead, the writer claimed that all the children of the area, regardless of whether they were 'academically inclined' (whatever that meant!) and irrespective of their social origins, should be given the chance, through education, to develop their various potentialities to the full. Senior high schools, it was alleged, would bolster 'an elitist, undemocratic system of schooling that serves best those who least need aid'. The writer rejected my belief that selection could be made on academic merit irrespective of social class or wealth. He denounced my view that the tone of comprehensive schools reflected the community in which they were situated and sneered at my concern for quality in education. The work of a teacher in enriching the cultural and emotional life of a child, he said, should rate as high or higher than that the son or daughter of

Nobsville should achieve the required number of first level passes in the HSC.³⁴

I identified some of the 'Problems of Education' in my response published on 16 August.

Surely it is clear that the attempt to provide six-year Wyndham-type comprehensive schools throughout N.S.W., each offering every course to every student, is wasteful of resources . . . One obvious effect is that many pupils, particularly in country areas, have to take courses by correspondence, since the schools cannot provide the subjects they want. Another defect is the need to time-table simultaneously all lessons in each subject.

I defended the four selective high schools, even though I continued to support the idea of separate senior high schools.

In September-October the University Department of Education organised a seminar on 'Secondary Education in Newcastle' at which five papers were presented. I delivered the first on 20 September 1971 under the title 'The Newcastle Situation: Origins of a Problem', and did my best to put the Newcastle selective schools in a favourable light. In the final paper, 'Proposals for Newcastle, (25 October) Gray said that four proposals were under consideration: (1) to retain the existing pattern of selective high schools and junior high schools; (2) to retain the selective high school, but consolidate the junior high schools into two six-form co-educational high schools; (3) to establish seven six-form co-educational high schools; (4) to establish a separate senior high school for fifth and sixth form students and six co-educational four-form high schools.³⁵

In early November, the Newcastle Secondary Teachers' Association passed a resolution opposing a senior high school. A fortnight later, on 17 November 1971, at a meeting convened by John Turner, some 30 people formed an organisation called 'Parents for Reform of Secondary Education in Newcastle' to campaign for the abolition of selective high schools. Turner was elected president.³⁶

Christmas and the school vacation intervened. Then on 23 February 1972 the 'Parents for Reform' sent letters to the Minister, the Area Director and the Labor members of three local electorates seeking the abolition of selective secondary schools in Newcastle. The Labor Party had announced that its 1973 election platform would oppose selective high schools and senior high schools. At the same time Turner listed his arguments against selective schools in *The Newcastle Herald*: selection

was psychologically discredited; it was a barrier to children proceeding beyond the junior high schools; selective schools were staffed by better teachers; they had better buildings than the junior high schools. Turner's argument that selection was psychologically discredited, was dubious but his other assertions had a measure of truth. Accommodation in the junior high schools was patently inadequate and as late as 1974, the proportion of teachers with degrees in most subject-departments in NSW selective schools was higher than in comprehensive schools. But the remedy did not require damaging selective schools. His position was largely based on social and egalitarian rather than educational premises.³⁷

Opponents of the egalitarian philosophy were slow to react. The Parents' and Citizens' Associations of Newcastle Girls' High School and Newcastle Boys' High School called a public meeting in June 1972 at which Gray, the Area Director, presented the Department's case for changes. The meeting rejected these and formed a Selective High Schools' Retention Committee. This Committee then called for the retention of two selective high schools in the Newcastle City area and the provision of six-year comprehensive high schools for the remaining pupils. I joined the Committee.³⁸

In June 1972, the deputy leader of the Liberal Party, E. A. Willis, became Minister for Education. In Liberal-Country coalition governments the Country Party normally held the portfolio of Education. The previous incumbent, C. B. Cutler, who had held the portfolio since the elections of May 1965, had not committed himself on the matter of the surviving selective schools although the position of the conservative government on comprehensive schools differed little from that of the Labor opposition.

Willis was anxious to exert his authority. In late November 1972, he told a public meeting at the Newcastle Technical High School, Broadmeadow, that the selective high schools and junior highs would be closed in favour of six-year co-educational comprehensive high schools. Selective schools, he said, were not the result of modern educational thought. They were relics of a time when secondary education was reserved for an elite.³⁹ I sat near the front and in the discussion voiced my regret that the Liberal Party government's policy regarding selective high schools seemed the same as that of its Labor Party predecessor. I also spoke in support of a senior high school. Willis was not interested in addressing these matters either at the public meeting or at the reception afterwards. Over tea and sandwiches he preferred to

exchange reminiscences of our collaboration in student politics at Sydney University more than 30 years earlier, when I was vice-president of the Labor Club and he was the treasurer.

By January 1973, the afternoon *Newcastle Sun* was ready to surrender: 'The selective schools have a proud record . . . But in these advanced days of universal secondary education they've become an anachronism. The large number of high schools that have been built in outer Newcastle . . . have proved that selectivity and segregation are neither necessary nor desirable.'⁴⁰

This was low-level populist opinion and the supporters of selective academic schooling were not yet ready to vacate the field. In May 1973, the P. and C. Associations of Boys' High, Girls' High, and Hunter High, invited Willis to attend a meeting to discuss an alternative plan: that the inner city schools become four-year high schools and the new school planned for Lambton become a senior high. Willis declined to attend. In June the principals of Boys' High and Girls' High, Mr L. T. Richardson and Mrs Val Wells, suggested their two schools amalgamate to become a selective co-educational school. Later that month a meeting of 400 parents called for the retention of two selective schools in the inner city. On 22 June, the *Herald* published a letter from John Turner revealing a change of heart. While supporting comprehensive schools in the inner city, he now argued that a senior high school 'would appear to offer opportunities for high school students that cannot be offered under a comprehensive system'. A senior co-educational high school would bridge the gap between high school and university.⁴¹

Another Liberal politician I had known when we were both students was Peter Coleman, then a member of the NSW parliament. In August 1973, I wrote to him, with the agreement of the Selective High Schools' Retention Committee, seeking his support for the preservation of the existing arrangements in Newcastle. Coleman was the editor of the magazine *Quadrant*, so I knew he favoured a strong academic curriculum. Coleman promised to raise the issue in a forthcoming debate on the 1961 Education Act and also in 'Question Time'. He asked me to furnish any material which I thought might prove useful.⁴² Despite my efforts government policy remained unchanged. In August 1973, Eric Willis reiterated his stand: 'There is no chance whatsoever I will review any decision on ending the selective system in Newcastle. At present there are definitely no plans for a senior high school in New South Wales.' He claimed that most Australians believed their community to

be egalitarian and non-segregational: 'The comprehensive school is regarded as a democratic institution'.⁴³

On 17 November 1973 the Askin-led Liberal government was re-elected with an increased majority and between 1974 and 1978 the four selective single-sex high schools were converted into co-educational, comprehensives. I missed much of the disruption this restructuring imposed on many secondary students because I spent 1974 and 1978 respectively, on study leave in England. Clearly, Gray's original proposal had offered the best solution under prevailing circumstances. The creation of a government senior high school for Years 11 and 12 would have provided a valuable precedent but the hostility of the Teachers' Federation and the concord between both major political parties over comprehensive schools delivered a severe blow to quality education in Newcastle.

At least four factors undermined the selective system in Newcastle. The first was the poor condition of the inner city non-selective schools. There was also an ideological belief shared by the leadership of the Department, the teachers' union and the two major political parties, that comprehensive co-educational high schools generated a sense of equality and a corresponding hostility to elitist schools. Industrial considerations were also significant. The Teachers' Federation was opposed to any increase in the categories of teachers, as this made wage negotiations more complex and divided teachers. Finally, some teachers in non-selective schools were envious of those in selective schools who benefited from high ability classes and fewer discipline problems. An inexperienced Minister for Education was also eager to avoid offending the teachers' union and receptive to the suggestions of his departmental administrators anxious to establish the complete supremacy of comprehensive schools. Ironically, some twenty years later, in a new climate of opinion, another Liberal government would re-establish a selective academic high school in Newcastle. Despite his support for comprehensive schools Willis was indirectly associated with the first signs of a changing climate of opinion. In October 1975, he appointed a committee of departmental officers to report on the surviving selective high schools in NSW. At its first meeting the committee recommended that its terms of reference be broadened to cover the education of highly talented students, and that teachers and parents be represented on the committee. Sir Eric Willis, as he was by then, never received the report. In January 1976, he became Premier. Four months later, in May, a general election saw Neville Wran's Labor Party elected to office.⁴⁴

The Changing Context of Secondary Education

The economic recession which developed in 1974 ended some 33 years of near full-employment and prosperity. Students and their parents thereafter became more interested in vocational subjects, about which comprehensive schools were rather diffident. The state also became less generous in disbursing monies for education. In 1977-78 a drift from government to independent schools began across Australia. This was not unconnected with a growing concern in the late 1970s and early 1980s that government high schools were failing to cater for gifted and talented students. Many middle-class families started to desert the public schools. A short time later some families began to gravitate to new fundamentalist Christian schools, which were often parent-controlled. At first these were mainly primary schools, but soon new Christian secondary schools appeared. Growing public concern about the quality of education generated new investigations: for example, in Queensland the Ahern Reports (1980), in New South Wales the McGowan Report (1981), in Western Australia the Beazley Report (1984), and in Victoria the Blackburn Report (1985). The Commonwealth Government also established several committees to conduct enquiries into education.

The 1980s also saw the beginning of neo-liberal economic policies or 'economic rationalism', which favoured reduced state intervention in the economy and less expenditure on education. At the same time, state departments of education began largely ineffective efforts to recover some of the controls over the schools which they had surrendered a decade before.

Another force for change was the rising retention rate of senior students. Diminished employment prospects encouraged adolescents with relatively low academic ability to remain at school. This affected academic standards, the variety of subjects provided, and the popularity of the major disciplines in the post-compulsory senior years. The changing balance of the sexes also affected the curriculum with some subjects appealing more to girls than to boys. For Australia as a whole the Year 12 participation rate in government schools increased from 18.4 per cent in 1967 (21.1 per cent for males, 15.4 per cent for females), to 29.7 per cent in 1977 (27.8 per cent for males, 31.9 per cent for females), and 46.8 per cent in 1987 (42.9 for males, 51.0 for females). Since then the percentage has continued to rise.⁴⁵

Retention rates varied from state to state. In 1990 the ACT, with a large middle-class population, had the highest rate, closely followed by Queensland and South Australia. In New South Wales the retention rate to Year 12 in government schools was 20.2 per cent in 1967, 32.2 per cent in 1977, and 41.5 per cent in 1987. To take a broader historical view, in 1955, on the eve of the official introduction of comprehensive schools, 14.8 per cent of First Year high school pupils continued into Fifth Year to sit the Leaving Certificate examination. By 1970, when the Wyndham system was fully operating, 33.2 per cent remained to sit the Higher School Certificate. By 1985, when the average retention rate for Australian government schools was 39.9 per cent, the New South Wales figure was 28.4 per cent. This lower rate did not necessarily reflect negatively on standards and subject choice.⁴⁶

Australian society from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s has been variously termed 'multicultural', 'pluralist', 'corporate', and 'permissive'. A dominant social phenomenon was the growing influence of 'special interest', 'minority' or 'disadvantaged' groups. Neo-progressive and radical (neo-Marxist) teachers called for an 'inclusive curriculum' to cater for the educational needs of Aborigines, females, ethnic minorities, the socio-economically handicapped, and the physically handicapped, etc. but attention focused primarily on ethnic and feminist causes. Later, homosexuals and environmentalists were added. Many of the minorities also possessed belief-systems at variance with the older Anglo-Celtic, Judeo-Christian, liberal-humanist tradition.

At the Commonwealth level the Karmel Report, *Schools in Australia*, drew attention to the needs of ethnic communities, while in June 1975 the Schools Commission stated that the 'multicultural reality of Australian society' needed to be reflected in school curricula, staffing and school organisation. The Commission provided special funding for 'Migrant and Multicultural Education'. South Australia had an official policy on the subject by 1976, Queensland issued a document in June 1979, and New South Wales followed with a statement in the same year and a 'Multicultural Education Policy' document in 1983, backed by five supporting documents. The ACT issued a policy statement in September 1979, Western Australia in 1981 and the Northern Territory in 1983.⁴⁷

Following a report submitted by a 'study group' to the Schools Commission, *Girls, School & Society* (1975), each government system produced similar documents: *Males and Females in the Western Australian Education System* (1975), *Victorian Committee on Equal Opportunity in*

Schools Report (1977), *Sexism in Education* (New South Wales, 1977), *Improving Education for Girls* (Tasmania, 1977, 1978), *Inequality in Education* (South Australia, 1978), and *Sexism in Education* (ACT, 1979). In response to these reports, Directors-General issued policy statements. Similar processes catered for other 'interest groups'. For example, the NSW Department of Education issued a statement on Aboriginal Education Policy in March 1982.⁴⁸

The early comprehensive schools sought to reduce social class and, to some extent, religious antagonisms through common schooling. Like the specialised schools, they followed assimilationist policies but as Campbell and Sherington have observed, multiculturalism undermined a major argument for the government comprehensive school. It was no longer seen as the socially logical school for the children of all Australian citizens. The notion of a unitary Australian citizenship was being reconceptualized under the impact of multiculturalism, and it seemed reasonable for particular ethnic groups to establish separate schools.⁴⁹

From the late 1970s, my opinions on comprehensive schools found expression in two magazines that I edited. These provided a forum for many people concerned over the directions in which Australia education was going. My articles and editorials provided a running commentary on Australian education over several decades. I edited *Aces Review* from 1977 to its demise in December 1988. This journal was published by the Australian Council for Educational Standards whose leading figure was Professor Leonie Kramer. From 1989 to 1992 I edited *Education Monitor*, published by the Institute of Public Affairs in Melbourne. Dame Leonie Kramer was also the leader of the IPA's Education Unit. I also wrote on education, including comprehensive schooling, in various other journals as well as in my book on the history of education in New South Wales published in 1988.

The New Concept of Comprehensive Education

It was the crisis in the secondary school curriculum that played a major part in the decline of comprehensive schools. Garth Boomer, Associate Director-General of Education (Curriculum) in South Australia, described the history of the curriculum after 1960 as a case of 'systemic schizophrenia in which official curriculum statements and actual curriculum practice in schools have become progressively more

incongruent'.⁵⁰ During the 1980s attempts were made to resolve the curriculum crisis, but in the main these failed.

In October 1975 the *New South Wales* Minister for Education appointed a committee of senior officers of the Department to report on selective high schools, which then comprised 13 of the 419 government high schools in the state. The Committee's report, *The Education of the Talented Child*, submitted to a Labor Minister in 1977, recommended that 'the academically selective high schools in their present form be phased out' but no action was taken.⁵¹

In *Queensland* the downturn in the Australian economy in the late 1970s led to unemployment and to complaints by employers and others about the low academic standards of school leavers. A parliamentary select committee, chaired by M. J. Ahern, issued six reports on primary and secondary education between 1978 and 1980. After 1981 the regional high schools were given permission to alter their structures as they felt best, for instance, by introducing streamed classes.⁵²

Victoria still retained its bipartite classification of high schools and technical schools. In the early 1980s the technical school course was extended to include Year 12. Apart from the absence of foreign languages, the most noticeable difference between technical and high schools was that three-quarters of technical students undertook practical studies such as woodwork, furniture, building and vehicle studies, in contrast to the much smaller proportion in high schools. The Technical School Year 12 Certificate did not lead to entry into higher institutions, but more students in these schools were now seeking higher education. Indeed, in secondary schools in general, more students were proceeding to the senior levels. Almost four-fifths of the 67,579 students who began Year 7 in 1980 remained till Year 11; of these, 48 per cent attended government high schools, 19 per cent attended government technical schools, and 34 per cent attended non-government schools. The 1985 *Report of the Ministerial Review of Postcompulsory Schooling* (chaired by Jean Blackburn) suggested that the HSC and similar examinations be replaced by a single internally-assessed Victorian Certificate of Education from 1987. After 1983 all *new* government secondary schools were comprehensive, combining the features of both high schools and technical schools; the *Ministerial Review* recommended that by January 1988 *all* schools should become comprehensive.⁵³

The wide range of special interest groups, some with a cluster of objectives, some of them focussed on one major programme, accentuated the confusion in the curriculum. Early in 1982 the NSW Director-General of Education, Doug Swan, complained of 'the forces for diversity', a 'truly motley horde' of special interest groups trying to impose their often contradictory programmes on the schools. Even some radicals became alarmed. A Teachers' Federation research officer warned of the danger to the curriculum if, alongside basic subjects like English, mathematics, science, history, geography, art, and music, were added all the new 'studies' — peace studies, women's studies, computer education, media studies, career education, living skills, politics, environmental studies, legal studies, technics, Aboriginal studies, consumer education, and multicultural studies.⁵⁴

A 1981 report of the Commonwealth Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts entitled *Preparation for the workforce. Inquiry into the effectiveness of Australian schools in preparing young people for the workforce with particular emphasis on literacy and numeracy*, stated that schools did not appreciate the educational needs of industry or commerce. It believed that 20 to 25 per cent of school leavers lacked the fundamentals of literacy and numeracy. It was claimed that this deficiency originated in the early years of primary school and handicapped subsequent secondary education.⁵⁵

In various circles interest in selective high schools was revived. In November 1980, the *Sydney Morning Herald* argued the case for selective high schools. It is worth quoting at length:

Is there something unduly elitist about special schools for the best and brightest? This feeling that it is somehow undemocratic to have special facilities for pupils already specially gifted is a strongly held one. In fact, the elitist schools in the Government school sector are those in middle-class areas where only middle-class children make up the roll. Moreover, comprehensive schools, as a matter of administrative necessity, have to stream classes and once streaming is accepted the comprehensive nature of these schools is diluted. In the past, selective schools have provided the chance for bright pupils from deprived backgrounds to make the most of their talents. The last two Labor Ministers for Education went to selective schools. For the 1980s, truly selective schools could be a melting pot for bright pupils of all backgrounds to work and learn together.⁵⁶

In 1980 Rachel Sharp, a neo-Marxist at Macquarie University, suggested in a paper for the Australian Schools Commission that there were some good aspects to the 'middle class curriculum'. In 1983 the

Marxist *Radical Education Dossier*, acknowledged that the Left had lost its way in education and organised a conference in Sydney on 'Future Directions in Education'. The following year it changed its name to *Education Links*. Keith Windschuttle, once a left-wing socialist and now a lecturer at the University of New South Wales, argued in 1984 that the comprehensive secondary school, the product of an age of affluence, needed to be replaced in a time of unemployment by a variety of schools, diversified according to their curricula. He also supported dezoning which negated a vital principle of comprehensive schools.⁵⁷

Many newspapers were increasingly critical of the educational system. Greg Sheridan of *The Australian* wrote a series of articles in February 1985, the first of which had the provocative title 'The Lies they Teach Our Children'. *The Bulletin* magazine often criticised the state of education. *Quadrant*, published by the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom, was another opponent of contemporary educational fashions. Various 'think-tanks', such as the Institute of Public Affairs in both Melbourne and Sydney, the Centre for Independent Studies in Sydney, and the Australian Institute for Public Policy in Perth, also agitated for reform. Another Melbourne-based organisation, B.A. Santamaria's National Civic Council and its journal *News Weekly*, frequently criticised current educational trends.

In August 1984, Senator Susan Ryan, Commonwealth Minister for Education, asked Professor Peter Karmel to chair a Quality of Education Review committee. Its April 1985 report found no incontrovertible evidence from either government or non-government schools that the 'cognitive outcomes' for students had become either better or worse since the early 1970s; employer and industry groups complained of inadequacies but education authorities saw some improvement. The report urged the Commonwealth to measure the success of any funds it directed to education. Four months later Susan Ryan warned that the government was no longer prepared to pour 'buckets of money' into the education system indiscriminately; it wanted value for its dollar.⁵⁸

The storm clouds were gathering. A re-elected Commonwealth Labor government in July 1987 gave the Education portfolio to John Dawkins, who was anxious to generate new, vocationally-oriented policies. In March 1988 a Liberal government came to power in New South Wales with a reforming Minister for Education, Dr Terry Metherell. In November the recently-appointed Director-General of Education, Fenton Sharpe, recognised the new environment. He claimed that the curriculum in the schools insufficiently recognised the value of

practical skills. We have kept an unhealthy distance from the captains of business and industry, he said, and under-emphasised the economic importance of our industry to the health of the economy. He sadly acknowledged the new reality:

Well, now the tide has turned and the determination of educational policy has slipped largely from the hands of the professionals . . . to reside firmly with governments, political parties with their educational policy committees, economists, management experts and their major advisers from business and large employee organisations.⁵⁹

New Liberalism Undermines the Comprehensive Ideal

In the late 1980s the neo-liberalism of the 'New Right' began to influence comprehensive secondary schools, especially in New South Wales, in the shape of administrative restructuring designed to promote the in the self-management of schools. In most states the control and direction of education at ministerial level was also placed increasingly in the hands of professional administrators often trained in fields other than education. While administrative devolution spread to schools, central control of the curriculum was increased. A new emphasis on vocational preparation also pervaded the curriculum while the decline of humanist subjects accelerated.

The Metherell reforms in New South Wales were modelled on changes in England and New Zealand, and were foreshadowed in several reports including *Schools Renewal* (June 1989), the *Report of the Committee of Review of New South Wales Schools* (September 1989), and *School Centred Education* (March 1990). The legislative instrument was the Education Reform Act of 1990. New South Wales led Australia in the 'deconstruction' of the comprehensive high school. Major changes designed to increase choice and competition in public schooling included: (1) partial zoning, which allowed parents to send their children to schools outside their local area; (2) the establishment of schools with specialised curricula, such as selective academic high schools, technology high schools, language high schools, performing arts schools, sports high schools, creative arts schools, rural technology high schools, and marine technology high schools; (3) the creation of specialised structures in many schools offering general curricula, such as separate senior colleges for Years 11 and 12, usually with close links to a TAFE college or a university, and multi-campus colleges, incorporating two or more feeder junior high schools and a senior high

school; and (4) the establishment of tests or examinations for entry into some of the specialist schools.⁶⁰

By the end of 1991 NSW the state had 27 technology high schools, 21 academically selective state high schools, 17 language high schools, a sports high school, a high school for the performing arts, a senior high school, and a conservatorium high school, and the trend continued. By 2002 the number of selective or partially selective high schools had grown to 28. There were also 10 multi-campus colleges often with strong links to technical colleges (33 high schools operating as junior and/or senior campuses.), and the number of sports highs had grown to 7. Correspondingly, the number of technology highs schools had fallen to 11, and the number of language high schools to 5. The 'residual' comprehensive high schools numbered less than 300 and 70 of them had 'opportunity classes'. By the turn of the new century New South Wales offered not 'a system of comprehensive high schools but a comprehensive system of high schools'.⁶¹ This more varied pattern was, of course, easier to establish in large urban areas, such as Sydney and Newcastle. Some features of the comprehensive system survived including a bias in favour of co-education and automatic progression to secondary schools.

The Liberal-National coalition lost power in March 1995 but the new Labor regime did not seriously modify the reforms initiated by Metherell because the Labor leader, Bob Carr, was strongly committed to reforms likely to raise academic standards.

In June 1998 the NSW Director-General of Education and Training, Dr Ken Boston, told a secondary principals' conference that the tradition of identical comprehensive high schools across the state was no longer the best way to meet the needs of all students. Low retention rates and poor or mediocre HSC performances and low enrolments were evidence that the model of schooling introduced in the 1950s was not meeting contemporary needs. Local reorganisation of secondary schooling would permit the introduction of new curricula.⁶² The *Sydney Morning Herald* welcomed this redefinition of secondary education.

The reason why the model made sense in the 1950s and 1960s is that the department saw the main task of the schools in this period in terms of socialisation rather than education. In the 1970s, for instance, a number of comprehensive school principals were interviewed about their programs for gifted students. They had no programs, they said, because they had no gifted students. With the enormous number of migrants coming into Australia during this period, many of them not

speaking English, the schools (as they have been in the United States) had to provide an environment of socialisation.⁶³

The *Herald* went on to say that the technological revolution had made it necessary for Australia to become a brainy rather than the brawny country. The paper failed to note that a few states had retained specialised schooling in the 1960s; it ignored the financial reasons that had initially encouraged the introduction of large comprehensive schools; that administrators welcomed the relief comprehensive schools provided from the representations of parents on behalf of their children; and overlooked the socio-political (as distinct from educational) pressure for comprehensive schools emanating from left-wing sources such as the Teachers' Federation and lecturers in teacher training institutions. Nevertheless, the paper's recognition that a new era had arrived in secondary education was significant.

The other states accepted the same basic principles, notably school self-management, centralised control of the curriculum, and replacement (at least for some years) of departments of education by ministries of education. The abolition of zoning permitted enrolment in non-local schools, but most states retained zoning, while permitting some schools to specialise in an aspect of the curriculum. Zoning weakened the 'critical mass' of students attracted by the speciality. In addition to proper dezoning, New South Wales was distinctive in creating large numbers of selective academic schools. These were supported by opportunity classes in the fifth and sixth years of some primary schools. In Sydney, students from a migrant background accounted for two-thirds of enrolments in selective schools: 9451 out of 14,300 students. They came predominantly from Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean language groups. By 2005, 83.6 per cent of students at Sydney Boys' High, 74.7 per cent at Sydney Girls' High, and 67.2 per cent at Fort Street High, were from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The strongest migrant presence, 92.3 per cent of pupils, was at James Ruse Agricultural High School which, despite its vocational name, was highly academic.⁶⁴

Western Australia based its reforms on *Better Schools in Western Australia: a Program for Improvement*, published in 1987. South Australia adopted a *School Development Plan* in the same year. Tasmania initiated reforms following the *Cresap's Final Report: Review of the Department of Education and the Arts* (1990). Queensland issued *Focus on Schools* (1990). The Northern Territory issued a *Standard Devolution Package: A*

Practical Guide to Education Decision-Making for School Councils, in November 1991.

Victoria dragged its feet. A Labor Party Minister for Education, Ian Cathie, had tried to implement reform in 1985-6 (*Taking Schools into the 1990s*) but the teachers' unions and parents' associations frustrated this. Finally the election of a Liberal government in October 1992 was followed by a policy statement, *Schools of the Future*, in 1993 and the Education (Self-Governing Schools) Act in 1998. In Victoria corporate independent schools had always dominated secondary education; there were only two selective government high schools, Melbourne High School, for boys (who entered at Year 9 after an examination and interview) and MacRobertson Girls' High. Although University High was a local area co-educational school, it selected by exam a limited number of Year 6 students to join its "Gifted Students' Programme" in Year 7. The 1998 Self-Governing Schools Act permitted specialisation by allowing individual schools to become centres of excellence in a variety of fields. But when Labor regained power in 1999 it ended this. From 2005, however, a number of secondary schools were clustered to form three Language Centres of Excellence.

South Australia followed a path similar to that of Victoria. In general it preserved the comprehensive system by retaining zoning but certain schools were allowed to develop 'special interest programs'. As early as 1979, Adelaide High School became the state's only special interest language school. By 2007 eight secondary schools specialised in sport, three in music and one each in arts and languages.⁶⁵

By 2007 *Western Australia* had several comprehensive high schools which specialised in particular subjects, including performing arts, aviation, music, and physical education (basketball). At the start of the 2007 school year, Perth Modern School, converted from what was essentially an English-style co-educational selective grammar school without the classics, to a standard comprehensive five-year high school in 1958, became yet again 'a school of academic excellence'. Henceforth, all new entrants are to be selected strictly on academic merit. Western Australia also has several senior campuses for Year 11 and 12 classes.⁶⁶

In all states non-government schools are currently providing a growing alternative to state comprehensive high schools. This move became evident in the 1980s and thereafter, as anxious middle-class parents became increasingly disillusioned with the quality of government secondary schooling. When the Howard Liberal

[Commonwealth] Government came to power in 1996, it made the establishment of private schools easier and increased Commonwealth funding to non-government schools.⁶⁷ Many government high schools across all states have fared badly of late. Those located in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods have increasingly become 'residual' type schools struggling to educate a majority of pupils from culturally impoverished homes whose parents do not have the financial means to choose to send their children to non-government schools. In many cases their children also do not readily identify with the middle class values of the schools and show little interest in furthering their studies. Many so-called 'residual' comprehensive high schools are also increasingly hard-pressed to find teachers willing and able to educate poorly motivated adolescents who often have a very poor attitude to discipline.

And So?

In the early twentieth century the Australian states set up systems of specialised government post-primary schools, some of them junior two- or three-year vocational schools, others four- or five-year academic schools offering professional courses. These reforms offered 'Equality of Opportunity' by means of an 'Educational Ladder'. In the 1950s 'Secondary Education for All' was implemented in most states through comprehensive schools. This system of schooling soon developed into an 'Educational Conveyor Belt'. In the 1990s specialised schools, more vocational in character, reappeared. They offered 'Pluralist Education for a Pluralist Society' or 'A Free Market in Education'.

Officially, the main driving force for comprehensive schools was the democratic ethos, i.e. the motive was political and social rather than educational. Although originally a creature of political democracy and favoured by the Labor Left, after 1970, both Liberal and Labor state governments supported comprehensive schools. Nevertheless, practical necessities also underlay the introduction of 'secondary education for all' in comprehensive schools. The growing flood of pupils entering secondary schools, a phenomenon encouraged by the abolition of the external qualifying examination at the end of primary school, together with the rise in the birthrate after 1945, and the wave of post-war immigration, were the chief contributing causes. A more general cause was the spontaneous tendency to stay on at school, engendered by the fact that prolonged schooling opened the way to new and lucrative white-collar occupations. The educational bureaucracy also found

comprehensive schools attractive for economic reasons because they promised 'economies of scale'.

In retrospect, the main weakness of comprehensive schools was their neglect of higher ability pupils. In many instances they also became too large and often neglected vocational subjects in favour of subjects best fitted to prepare students for white-collar occupations. Their degree of success, as measured by their academic reputation, also depended largely on the social character of the neighbourhood or their catchment area. Moreover, some were not truly comprehensive, especially in New South Wales, where they shared their potential clientele with selective high schools, corporate colleges, and Catholic schools. Comprehensive schools were the creation of a particular era, the 1950s and early 1960s. The cultural revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s, coupled with the advent of the permissive society and the dawn of multiculturalism, transformed the social *milieu*. In the 1970s, the 'inclusion' of multicultural groups became a new variant of the original class-centred social function. Another aspect of 'inclusion' related to the education of girls, but the demand for an end to sex discrimination in secondary schooling had varied roots including the new feminism, the new status of the sexes in a permissive society, and the changed role of women in the workforce. In conclusion, it is probably fair to say that the social aims of comprehensive schools as portrayed in the 1950s were too ambitious. Schools cannot, of themselves, achieve social-class reconciliation any more than they could the multi-cultural ideals of the 1970s. Family values and expectations are still highly influential in determining the outcomes of schooling, especially in an era in which government policy in education is strongly influenced by economic rationalism, the free market, and the sanctity of parental choice.

NOTES

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