

Public Schools in Australia from the late 1970s to the late 1980s: the Seeds of Change

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The period from the late 1970s to the late 1980s were transition years for most public (government) school systems in Australia. A reaction was developing against the neo-progressive and radical (neo-Marxist) innovations of the late 1960s and 1970s such as school-based curricula, activity methods, and “open education”. By the early 1980s the emerging economic rationalist, neo-liberal ideas favoured devolution of administrative responsibilities to schools (“the entrepreneurial school”), central control of the curriculum, and an emphasis on vocational training. This change was facilitated by a new form of political control of the administration: ministers for education, premiers and prime ministers and their political advisers determined policy, no longer relying heavily the advice of educational professionals. A new senior executive level in Departments was staffed by politically-approved administrators. Neo-liberal education was enthusiastically adopted in New South Wales and at the Commonwealth level. Victoria soon joined in; Tasmania and Queensland lagged behind.

Introduction

Australian education from the late 1970s to the late 1980s bridged two socio-economic “revolutions”. The first, which was beginning to weaken, had originated in the cultural revolution of 1967-74 and was associated with the New Left. It hastened the disintegration of the long-established traditions of liberal humanism, abandoning the transmission of the western cultural heritage as a significant educational aim. Its neo-progressive wing promoted “open education”; both its radical and its neo-progressive wings supported the school-based curriculum. In the 1970s multiculturalism, or more broadly social pluralism, began to fill the ideological vacuum, finding expression in the flowering of special interest groups and identity politics and, in the schools, the promotion of inclusive principles. We will consider it in more detail below.

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The second revolution, which originated in the early 1980s, was to culminate in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Categorised as neo-liberalism or economic rationalism, it was critical of the expensive welfare state. It favoured private enterprise and competition, the privatisation of state instrumentalities, and the application of business principles and business-like structures to a range of social institutions, including government schools. The advent of this new philosophy was associated with economic expansion, a globally-oriented economy, a low birth-rate, massive immigration, and the inability of the education and training system to produce a sufficient supply of adolescents with technical skills. The 1980s saw the gradual politicisation of the public service and the senior administration. The restructuring of government departments to give greater control by the minister was often facilitated by a financial crisis. The new level of political control of education in the later 1980s facilitated change.

The abandonment of the liberal humanist-realist tradition and the Anglo-Celtic version of the cultural heritage, coupled with the advent of the pluralist multicultural society, had undermined the possibility of a dominant philosophy or ideology of education. The neo-progressives of the 1970s, like the original, relatively few, progressives of the 1940s and '50s, favoured child-centred, activity-oriented education. But while the pioneers had quietly endorsed traditional values, their successors did not. They championed "open education", whose five or six possible meanings discouraged the indoctrination of strong, specific beliefs.¹

"Social justice" and varieties of progressive education appealed to many in the Labor Left. Neo-Marxism attracted the more radical educationists, but this philosophy soon transmuted into a low-level sociology adopting the guise of "critical theory". The more right-wing educationists sowed the seeds of economic rationalism by arguing for a stronger vocational aim and, occasionally, for a revival of the traditional knowledge-oriented curriculum.

Multiculturalism, or more broadly the development of a pluralist society, had produced a number of identity groups, “tribes”, or special interest groups which exerted pressure on the educational system. Many students from non-English-speaking backgrounds posed difficulties.

Official statements by Departments of Education of the aims of education became evasive. Acquisition of mental skills rather than mastery of content or commitment to a specific interpretation was favoured. The 1977 “Aims of Primary Education in New South Wales” revealed a cautious vision: “The central aim of education, which, with home and community groups, the school pursues, is to guide individual development in the context of society through recognisable stages of development towards perceptive understanding, mature judgment, responsible self-direction and moral autonomy”. An editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald* sympathised with primary school teachers “who have to read the latest cloudy generalisations issued by the Department of Education”.ⁱⁱ

In April 1978 H. E. Bedford, NSW Minister for Education, warned that social conditions encouraged confusion of aims. At the first of a series of public seminars under the theme “Is it time for an Educational Audit?” he stated: “We must keep in mind the fact that society is not made by schools: schools reflect society and are effective to the extent that they reinforce the values of society. If society places multiple demands upon schools such that all cannot be met, then the purpose of school loses definition and schools appear to become ineffective”. Early in 1982 the NSW Director-General of Education, Doug Swan, was more forthright, complaining of “the forces for diversity”, a “truly motley horde” of special interest groups trying to impose their often contradictory programmes on the schools.ⁱⁱⁱ

In August 1979 the Victorian Minister for Education publically asked “What is the aim of our school system? What is the Education Department and its teachers trying to do?” He appointed a

Consultative Committee to find out, but the 477 submissions it received reflected “the diversity of views held in the community”. The Minister presented a statement on the matter to parliament in December.^{iv} Similar enquiries went on in the other states, with limited results. Only the Curriculum Development Centre in Canberra, a stronghold of neo-progressive ideas, found “a wide measure of agreement within the community about the aims of schooling”.^v

In fact, confusion in the curriculum was encouraged by the wide range of special interest groups, some with a cluster of objectives, some of them focussed on one major programme. They included teachers’ unions, feminists, ethnic groups, Aboriginal groups, environmentalists, peace activists, representatives of the handicapped, the talented, and homosexuals, together with the persistently-intervening media. Unlike the newer interest groups, teachers’ unions sometimes took a broader view of education. In 1983 a NSW 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, multicultural studies and the rest. Such a proliferation would create numerous one or two hour units.^{vi}

While official statements of the aims of education had become insecure, an alternative guide to the underlying aims or philosophy of education might be provided by the actual curriculum.

The Curriculum: New Lamps for Old

In 1991 the South Australian Associate Director-General of Education. Garth Boomer, described the development of the curriculum over the previous thirty years as a case of “systemic schizophrenia in which official curriculum statements and actual curriculum practice in schools have become progressively more incongruent”.^{vii}

Public Schools in Australia from the late 1970s to the late 1980s

The 1970s and 1980s produced new methods of teaching and new attitudes to learning, especially in primary and junior secondary teaching. A melange of integrated studies (favoured by progressives) and radical re-interpretations of old subjects (favoured by neo-Marxists) existed alongside remnants of the liberal disciplines and curricula which now focussed on process rather than mastery of content. Rote learning and acquisition of facts fell into disfavour. Instruction in the writing of compositions or essays was disappearing. A new popularity for activity methods reduced the intensity of learning. Teachers were encouraged to promote pupil research and problem-solving, which often deteriorated into answering a string of questions and copying paragraphs from books. Formulation of concepts was accorded special value. Subject matter was often organised into disconnected themes.

In the late 1980s a lecturer in a Catholic teachers' college reflected on the succession of fashions which for brief periods attracted exponents of both "traditional" and "progressive" curricula:

There is something of a *boom or bust* phenomenon in educational fashions. Exciting new things tend to come and go. Many of us can remember the advent of SRA Laboratories. Shrewdly marketed, attractively packaged, these products were eagerly bought by schools with money to spend in the halcyon days of generous government grants. Kids loved coloured pencils to fill in the little boxes in their record sheets as they covered tiny reading assignments followed by *in depth* questions printed on brightly coloured cards . . .

Remember cuisenaire rods! These coloured shapes were found in infant grades where kids no longer did Maths but rather *Cuisenaire*. The clatter of wooden pieces was an essential feature of busy morning work in the infant grades of the '60s and '70s. Cuisenaire rods may not be extinct but the boom has passed . . .

The 1980s may well be remembered as the age of *Process Writing*. In trendy classrooms, kids exercise *power and control* as they take *responsibility* for their writing in *communities*, they *confer* and *edit* and *publish* while teachers *receive* their *products*. However there are signs that the age of Process Writing is nearing its end . . .^{viii}

The dissolution of the humanist curriculum saw the arrival of the New English and the New History. In English traditional approaches to both language and literature were jettisoned. A wave of progressive education in the early 1950s had encouraged many teachers to abandon the use of phonics in teaching reading; the word recognition (look-and-say) method spread. For many less able children this system was ineffective. In the 1960s most Australian schools abandoned formal grammar. The New South Wales 1974 *Curriculum for Primary Schools: Language* had stated that “as language learning is an on-going process for the child, the notion of correctness is too narrow a focus for the evaluation of the child’s language growth”.^{ix}

In 1974 S. J. Scott, senior lecturer in French at Melbourne University, warned that both the literary content and linguistic focus of English were threatened. “Forced at present into various protean guises from politics and sex instruction to social surveys and film-making, English is in greater danger than most school subjects of losing its true identity. In an age . . . preoccupied with problems of communication, we dare to discourage the classroom analysis of English and so fail to highlight its characteristic properties as an instrument of communication”.^x

Garth Boomer, then Principal Education Officer of the South Australian Department of Education, agreed that secondary school English had almost lost its identity. Some teachers, he said in 1976, tried to follow old paths, only to find them irrelevant. Others had abandoned literature for “creative writing”; or encouraged reading to the exclusion of drama; or themes to the detriment of poetry. In the senior secondary school, where the university retained some influence, remnants of the old curriculum still survived – “a quaint vestigial tail on an exotic modern hybrid”.^{xi} The emphasis had shifted to the study of contemporary literature.

History, another bastion of liberal humanism, deteriorated more slowly. True, it had been replaced by social studies in primary schools across Australia in the early 1950s. But because, unlike

English, not all secondary students took history, it retained much of its basic character. History and geography teachers were strong enough to repel attempts in the early 1970s to promote social science as an alternative to their subjects. Yet history was losing ground. In 1967 Modern History had been fourth in popularity at the NSW Higher School Certificate, with 57 per cent of the candidature, surpassed only by English, Mathematics and Science. By 1977 it had fallen to seventh position, taken by 13,822 candidates, 39 per cent of the total. In an effort to attract more support, extra options were introduced – World History, Revolutions, Asian History and Australian History. The decline continued.

In 1988 Professor Graeme Davison of Monash described the new history of the late 1970s.

Unlike the old history as story approach, the new textbooks were broken into short goblets of text broken up by pictures, cartoons, maps, diagrams, and time-lines. Passages of authorial narrative are interspersed with real or even made-up documents, questions, 'things to make and do' . . . The enquiry method, with its short paragraphs and abundant questions, embraces a pedagogy arguably more appropriate to the children of the television age with their insatiable need for visual stimulus and their short attention spans.^{xii}

The rising retention rate during the 1980s brought changes to the Years 11-12 population, including a stronger interest in vocational subjects, and a lower standard of achievement. For Australia as a whole retention rates to Year 12 jumped from 35 per cent in 1981 to 60 per cent by 1989. The proportion of females now exceeded that of males. External examinations survived only at the end of the secondary school; indeed, Queensland and the A.C.T. had no concluding exams. The external exam meant that a prescribed syllabus existed for at least some subjects. However, the external Year 12 exams were diluted in several ways. In many states a school-assessed component had been introduced, either within the external examination or alongside it.^{xiii} Secondly, the results were adjusted to ensure a predetermined spread, under the process known as “norm-referencing” or standardised scoring. Normative assessment measured the performance by a scale of marks, or even

grades; it was a ranking based on what examiners perceived as the candidate's place on a fixed scale.^{xiv} Criterion-referenced assessment asked whether students had reached certain goals; there was no question of ranking the candidates. Some critics felt this did not cater adequately for struggling or gifted students.^{xv} But complaints were also made about norm-based assessment. After the markers submitted their results the scores were adjusted to give whatever distribution was required. As the Academic Committee of Flinders University of South Australia put it colourfully: "If all the teachers of Matriculation Chemistry in 1980 had determined to teach Astrology instead of the prescribed syllabus, the standardisation of scores would have produced precisely the same distribution as if the teachers had adhered to the syllabus".^{xvi} In Victoria the examiners decided that from 1984 at least 80 per cent of HSC candidates should gain Grade D or higher. At the same time they criticised their limited vocabulary, imprecise use of words, inaccurate spelling, faulty grammar, and confused punctuation.^{xvii} An underlying factor here was the changing character of senior students.

One response to these changes was a drift in enrolments from state to non-state schools which started in the late 1970s. To some extent this represented a flight by the middle class from state secondary schools. The proportionate shift varied somewhat from region to region. Between 1979 and 1989 the proportion of students in non-government schools on the A.C.T. rose from 28.4 per cent to 33.6 per cent; in Victoria from 25.6 per cent to 32.8 per cent; in Queensland from 21.4 per cent to 24.6 per cent; in New South Wales from 21.0 per cent to 27.5 per cent; in the Northern Territory from 14.7 per cent to 18.8 per cent; in Western Australia from 18.1 per cent to 24.1 per cent; in Tasmania from 16.5 per cent to 22.1 per cent; and in South Australia from 15.1 per cent to 23.3 per cent. The proportionate strength of the swings is significant. In Victoria non-government schools jumped 7.2 percentage points and in South Australia 8.2 points. These states (with the ACT) had seen the greatest inroads of radical and neo-progressive education in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The ACT shift of 5.2 percentage points had minimal significance, as here the strength of the middle class

ensured that students would make progress under almost any system. The smallest shift, 3.2, was in Queensland, whose education system was very traditional. For the record, the other shifts were 6.5% in NSW, 6.0 in WA, 5.6 in Tasmania; and 4.1% in the NT.^{xviii}

Increased Interest in Vocational Education

Throughout the 1980s students, parents and employers became more interested in vocational studies and training. High youth unemployment, a severe decline in unskilled jobs, an increasing proportion of women in employment, and the changing nature of work in response to new technology encouraged a swing to studies with some relationship (real or apparent) to employment. A by-product of youth unemployment was rising retention rates, while the growth of female employment fostered a marked increase in the proportion of the girls staying on. For Australia as a whole the retention rate to Year 12 had remained steady from 1975 to 1982, at about 35 per cent. In the late 1980s the persistence rate increased. In 1987 it was 53 per cent. The rising retention rate produced a growth in the proportion of students lacking strong academic interests. They were more likely to show some interest in vocational studies.

How successful were schools at vocational preparation? Throughout the twentieth century academic high schools played an important preparatory role for the professions. But despite the creation of junior technical and domestic science schools in the 1920s their contribution to the commercial and technical vocations was unclear. Apprenticeships, practical experience in factories, businesses, hospitals and the like were more relevant. Surveying the effectiveness of NSW schools from about 1920 to 1960 in preparing youngsters for work, Allyson Holbrook of Newcastle University concluded that of all the possible conduits connecting education and business and industry “the long-standing and successful educational activities within enterprises provide the key – complemented by the broader school curriculum, not the other way round”.^{xix}

In the mid-1950s New South Wales, Western Australia and Tasmania converted their junior technical and home science schools

into comprehensive high schools. Victoria and South Australia retained separate technical and academic highs. In all states except New South Wales specifically vocational subjects survived for a while, but gradually the boundaries became blurred. In some cases the social aspects of vocational subjects were emphasised, especially for lower ability students, who were offered courses like mathematics in society or science in society.

In 1981 a Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts report, *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 estimated that 20 to 25 per cent of school leavers lacked the fundamentals of literacy and numeracy. This deficiency originated in the early primary schools and handicapped subsequent secondary education. It attributed declining standards in the primary school to changes in the composition of the teaching profession. The proportion of male primary school teachers had fallen remarkably and the average age of teachers had also fallen. While women could teach many subjects adequately, their lack of mathematical skills led to inadequate teaching of mathematics. It suggested that many primary teachers lacked the techniques for teaching reading and neglected reading and writing skills in other lessons.^{xx}

Work experience courses were introduced, especially for the academic adolescents. Links between TAFE (Technical and Further Education) courses and schools grew. In Western Australia a 1984 Department of Education document, *Link Courses and Integrated Programmes: Guidelines for TAFE Colleges and Secondary School Staffs*, warned against restricting such courses to the less academic. "The full range of students' scholastic abilities should be catered for in the provision of link courses and should not be limited to any particular student group". TAFE administrators also expressed concern. "We seem to be getting the lower strain of student. TAFE courses are supposed to be open to all students . . . In courses like Secretarial Studies, the students need to be fairly competent in

English, while in Bookkeeping they need Maths”. They needed to have the Higher School Certificate.^{xxi}

In 1987, 156 Queensland State High Schools and Special Schools were involved in co-operative programmes, as were all 26 Colleges of TAFE. Altogether, co-operative programmes provided 276,000 student contact hours. *Link courses* introduced students to TAFE and to a range of occupations, but were not recognised as TAFE subjects. *Integrated courses* were for students beyond the compulsory age and involved formal enrolment in both the school and the TAFE College.^{xxii}

Some left-wing teachers resented vocational education. As a high school teacher at Wyong, New South Wales, put it in July 1987: “We are not preparing kids for employment. We are presenting them with a whole range of experiences to prepare them for life after school. It is the role of industry to prepare their employees”^{xxiii}

Social Factors Corroding Education

Apart from multiculturalism, other social factors were impeding quality education. The rising figures for employment and the decline in unemployment, reflected a booming economy, presumably needing skilled workers; but other figures showed primary and secondary industry declining, industrial services stable and the largest sector, “other services” (finance and business, public administration, community, recreation and entertainment), rising from 29.7 per cent in 1971 to 41.4 per cent in 1986.^{xxiv}

The actual curriculum, what was actually taught, varied from school to school, but was heavily influenced by two factors: the attitudes of pupils and their parents (both shaped by the social conditions of their lives), and the skills, knowledge and outlook (i.e. the quality) of the teachers. A school-based curriculum still prevailed in many primary and junior secondary classes. The traumatic social conditions of the second half of the 20th century imposed severe constraints on what the schools could achieve. As observers frequently pointed out, “the weaknesses of many of our basic social institutions” meant that

many schools “are being asked to take on many developmental tasks that were the responsibility of the family, the community, the church and the employer”.^{xxv}

From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s Australia’s sole-parent families increased by 73 per cent, from 183,000 to 316,400. (The number of two-parent families with dependent children rose by only 4 per cent, to 1,884,400). Over the same period single-parent families became poorer, while the proportion reliant on Commonwealth income support rose sharply.^{xxvi} The ability of the family to provide support for the education of its children, at home or at school, was reduced by marriage breakdown, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and unemployment. To this list one could add child abuse and the all-pervading intellectual and moral mediocrity of television, pop music, and video games. Teachers faced a severe challenge in devising or adapting curricula to suit the range of pupil abilities and motivations.

The falling birth-rate produced a fall in the proportion of the population of school age (5 years to 15 years) between 1976 and 1986. The fall in the number born in Australia (a decline of 3.9 per cent, 1966 to 1986) revealed a dependence on immigration, as did the rise of 3.6 per cent of Asian-born students.

The declining ideological impact of the Churches was suggested by the high proportion of the NSW population stating in the 1986 census that it had no religion or not answering the question, 10 per cent in both cases.

Television exerted a strong influence. In 1986 a left-wing high school teacher, Rowan Cahill, drew attention in the NSW Teachers’ Federation paper to Neil Postman’s discussion on the impact of television on American students. According to Postman, in 1982, the average American aged between 6 and 18 spent 16,000 hours watching television compared to about 13,000 hours attending school. The role of the traditional school curriculum had been usurped by a television curriculum. This, Postman said, was image-

centred, did not encourage the development of analytical abilities, was easy, nearly always entertaining, and was entirely fragmented and discontinuous. Having no connection to what had come before or after, having no rational order, the TV curriculum projected a philosophy that was basically depressive, stressing discontinuity not coherence and immediate rather than deferred gratification. The typical school curriculum paralleled far too closely the fragmentation found in television's weekly schedule.^{xxvii}

Australian television differed from American in several respects. Most obvious was the existence of a national network alongside the commercial ones, offering better cultural and intellectual nutriment. The Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) also had higher intellectual aspirations but was somewhat fragmented by its advertising and its pluralist cultural purpose. Another difference with America was that the deterioration in quality was slower, because the ABC used much BBC material while the SBS often imported quality programmes from abroad. Nevertheless, in Australia, too, television encouraged fragmentation and short attention spans.

Cahill was concerned at the pessimism prevalent amongst adolescents. Although he was writing on the eve of communism's disintegration and the end of the Cold War, "the kids were tragically sure that World War III was about to break out. And with it, the end of humanity". Television, including the vividness of television news, was a source of this doomsday gloom, though not the only one. Cahill cited a writer in the *Australian Bookseller and Publisher*: "To judge from Australian school textbooks and a plethora of current learning resources at all levels, present horrors mean that the future is a distinctly unlovely prospect for many". Cahill comments that in an age of school-based curriculum decision-making and emphasis on relevance, "the gloom and doomers seem to sprout around the nation like so many poison mushrooms".^{xxviii}

Another socially-conditioned difficulty was discipline. Traditional aids to discipline had disappeared. In the mid-nineteenth century primary schools had introduced marching drill partly for discipline

reasons. In the late 19th century “Men discovered examinations to be a first-class substitute for the birch”^{xxix}. But many external exams disappeared in the late 1960s, while school cadet corps were abolished in the 1980s. In Victoria a newly-elected Labor government abolished corporal punishment in government schools in May 1983. It was abolished in New South Wales at the end of 1985 and in Queensland in 1989. The education editor of the *Melbourne Age*, Geoff Maslen, wrote on 25 April 1989: “Across Australia, the classroom has become a daily battleground for teachers as they try to maintain some semblance of control over increasingly mutinous students”^{xxx}.

Discipline problems affected methods of teaching, the type of curriculum, and the means of assessment. In an attempt to improve discipline, students were offered a wider choice of subject in the junior secondary years. For the same reason, integration of subjects, which facilitated activity work, was often introduced.

Growing discipline problems, a relative decline in salaries, and the expansion of alternative white-collar vocations reduced the appeal of teaching as a career; it became harder to recruit high-quality candidates. Between 1985 and 1989 the number of students applying for entry to tertiary institutions whose first preference was teaching fell dramatically from 16.9 per cent to 10.3 per cent.^{xxxi}

The feminisation of the primary teaching service advanced inexorably. Until the early 1970s the NSW Department of Education ensured a balance in the proportion of male and female teachers by manipulation of teacher-training scholarships. This power disappeared when it lost direct control of teachers' colleges and abandoned the allocation of scholarships. In fact, with equal pay for men and women and new opportunities for men outside teaching the proportion of women primary school teachers started to rise from 56 per cent in 1960 to 66 per cent in 1970. By 1980 it had climbed to 69 per cent, by 1990 to 75 per cent. The shortage of male teachers deprived primary schoolboys of a role model.^{xxxii}

These problems were not helped by a growing inadequacy in teacher training. In the early 1970s small state-owned specialised teachers' colleges were converted into large, multi-purpose, Commonwealth-funded autonomous colleges of advanced education. University faculties of education also extended their hold on teacher training. The term "teacher training" was discarded in favour of "teacher preparation" or "teacher education", suggesting a less practical, more theoretical approach. To save money, many training institutions reduced the amount of practice teaching and/or the number of demonstration lessons. Many lecturers in education promulgated politically and socially radical interpretations of the nature of teaching and of the curriculum.

The Commonwealth's New-Style Managerialism

In the 1980s the Commonwealth responded to new currents favouring neo-liberal policies. At the Commonwealth level but also in the states and territories new methods of implementing education policies were appearing. The essence was a type of corporate managerialism at senior level of education departments and more direct control by politicians, notably the ministers for education and even the premiers or prime ministers.^{xxxiii}

A late arrival in school education, the Commonwealth had established a Department of Education and Science under a Minister in December 1966, but controlled no schools. The Commonwealth gave financial aid to universities and non-state schools and grants for secondary school libraries and science. The Whitlam Labor government (1972-75) established the Australian Schools Commission to recommend financial grants to Australian schools and to provide reports on primary and secondary schooling. It was a strong advocate of progressive education. Whitlam Labor also established a Curriculum Development Centre, in 1975 with Malcolm Skilbeck, a supporter of progressive education, as director. Its first and substantial project was the Social Education Materials Project in 1977, which was banned in Queensland.^{xxxiv}

The Liberal-National coalition led by Malcolm Fraser walked quietly regarding education. During the 1983 elections the Labor leader, Bob Hawke, promised to restore the Commonwealth's commitment to government schools. The Fraser budget of 1976-77 had given \$366 million to non-government schools and \$705 million to government schools. Thereafter the non-government allocation rose steadily, the government allocation usually fell. To increase the funding of government schools Hawke planned to reduce its allocation to non-government ones, but the strong drift of enrolments from government to non-government schools and the protests of supporters of the non-government sector frustrated Labor's purpose. All it could manage was the New Schools Policy of 1985 which reduced the possibility of new non-government schools obtaining Commonwealth funds.^{xxxv}

After Hawke became prime minister in March 1983 the Commonwealth began to implement basic elements of neo-liberal political economy, but was somewhat slow to embrace its associated education policies. Hawke appointed Senator Susan Ryan, a feminist and progressive, as Minister for Education. The Commonwealth's contribution to the cost of schools and pre-schools, state and non-state, remained steady at about 20 per cent.^{xxxvi} The Australian Schools Commission's strong commitment to progressive education deterred quality improvement, but soon power began to shift from the relatively autonomous Schools Commission to the Commonwealth Department of Education.^{xxxvii}

The Commission introduced a "Participation and Equity Program" which lasted from July 1984 until 1987 and channelled a total of \$127,287,000 to government schools and \$14,913,000 to non-government. By 1987 around 800 schools were funded, about 40 per cent of all government schools and 20 per cent of non-government ones. The goals of the PEP were amorphous: "to help more young people complete a secondary education", to foster equal educational outcomes; and to assist "a fundamental improvement in the quality of schooling". The program included curriculum reform and diversification; experiments in assessment and accreditation;

fostering teacher, student and parent interaction; teacher renewal and support; school structure and organisation; and post-school links.^{xxxviii}

The Schools Commission's egalitarian ideology of "individual empowerment" and concern for "social justice" was being challenged by the new ideology of "economic rationalism" supporting deregulation of the private sector and "corporate capitalism", the direct managerial control of individual corporations, including schools. In August 1984 Senator Ryan cut the Commission's staff almost by half and limited its role to advising on policy.

In August 1984 Susan Ryan asked Professor Peter Karmel to chair a Quality of Education Review Committee. Its terms of reference indicated that the Commonwealth's generous funding should produce higher standards in primary and secondary education and a closer relationship between secondary education and employment. The Committee's report of April 1985 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. It noted that employer and industry groups complained of inadequacies; education authorities saw some improvement. Physical provision, such as school buildings, and facilities, such as libraries, had improved. While many students had positive attitudes to their schools, "too large a proportion feel alienated from them and regards much of school life as without relevance". It would seem that another function of the Committee was to facilitate the growth of the Commonwealth's Department of Education at the expense of the Schools Commission.^{xxxix}

Towards the end of August that year Susan Ryan warned that the government was no longer prepared to pour "buckets of money" into the education system indiscriminately. The Commonwealth wanted value for their dollar.^{xl}

On 1 April 1987 the Commonwealth Schools Commission presented the Minister with an unsolicited report, *In The National Interest: Secondary Education and Youth Policy in Australia*. Its opening chapter, "The Economy and Demands made on Education", stated: "At the heart of any review of the economic demands made on education is the concept of skill". It distinguished between basic or generic skills and specific vocational skills and asserted that it was not the task of secondary schools to provide training for specific occupations. The Report suggested a target of a 65 per cent retention rate to Year 12 by 1992. An unobtrusive motive was to accommodate the 14 per cent of the 15-19 age group who were neither in education nor training nor full-time employment. To encourage students to stay on, the Report suggested the abolition of external examinations. The *Sydney Morning Herald* found this "typical of the muddle-headed theory the commission has been peddling for some time".^{xii} Susan Ryan assured employers that "the Commonwealth Government had never supported the abolition of secondary external exams" and that it recognised the desire of business and industry groups for an easily understood credential at the end of secondary school.^{xlii}

The Curriculum Development Centre had been incorporated into the Commonwealth Schools Commission in 1984, becoming the Curriculum Development Council. It ceased to operate at the end of 1987, six months before the Schools Commission was itself abolished.^{xliii}

During the 1980s a new slogan began to circulate: *Back to Basics*.

The States and Territories Attempt Reform

In the 1980s many Departments of Education tried to reassert their controls over the schools. But socio-political influences, in particular resistance from the teacher unions and the special interest groups, made this no easy task. Some state departments of education attempted to recover their lost controls, particularly as regards the curriculum. This was coupled, in some cases, with moves to establish or strengthen school councils, which might serve to divert

pressure exerted by special interest groups from the centre to the localities; school councils might also limit the power of radical teachers' unions and parents' associations. But some departments sympathised with neo-progressive or even neo-Marxist doctrines. Politicians concerned about the new education responded by assuming greater control over education and reducing the power of their departments. An additional pressure for reform was financial: the need to curb expenditure by cutting back the public service, including the education bureaucracy.^{xliv}

In *New South Wales* A. J. Buchan, Acting Director-General, issued a document in June 1979, "Managing the School", pointing out that parents and employers were now demanding that teachers and administrators account for their management of education. It specified five documents that schools were to maintain, including "Teaching/Learning Programs", intended to encourage sequential planning of lessons by teachers.

In April 1979 the Labor Party Minister for Education, Eric Bedford, recommended to Cabinet that the internally assessed School Certificate exam again be awarded on a partly internal/partly external examination. Faced with Teachers' Federation opposition, parliament appointed a committee, chaired by Brian McGowan, a former primary and secondary teacher, to report on the School Certificate. The report of May 1981 suggested broad changes in the junior secondary school anticipated some introduced ten years later: a school year of two semesters, schools to publish details of their courses, zoning to give parents a choice of schools, students not up to standard to be failed. This, too, was blocked by the Teachers' Federation. The Federation also blocked an attempt to introduce school councils in 1983-84. The Minister asked the Director-General, Doug Swan, and the former chairman of the Commonwealth Schools Commission, Ken McKinnon, to ascertain the views of major interest groups. The outcome was *Future Directions of Secondary Education: A Report* in June 1984. This was a cautious document whose main contribution was to sow the seeds for later changes.^{xlv}

A new minister, Rod Cavalier, took office in April 1984. He told parliament he would preserve the remaining selective state high schools (bastions of academic subjects). He told the Teachers' Federation that they had lost their privileged relationship; the Department of Education, he said, could not be run on an *ad hoc* basis, solving particular issues raised from time to time by the Federation. A stronger version of "Managing the School" was issued in October 1984, requiring each school to "develop policies and programs relating to curriculum which are consistent with departmental curriculum statements".^{xlvi}

Cavalier favoured traditional approaches. "Our students must have a solid grounding", he said in 1987. "If there is a problem with gaining children's attention, if there is a problem with discipline, the last solution is in mickey mousing the curriculum".^{xlvii} The Education and Public Instruction Act of 1987, which repealed the 1880 Public Instruction Act, established a new Board of Secondary Education with responsibilities covering Years 7 to 12, thus restoring some external scrutiny over the junior secondary years. Nick Greiner, Liberal Party leader of the Opposition, expressed his admiration. "Mr Cavalier is a Minister of very great diligence. He has a great deal of enthusiasm and a great deal of concern for maintaining the quality of education".^{xlviii} But when Greiner formed his own government after the March 1988 elections his Minister for Education, Terry Metherell introduced legislation which went far beyond anything Cavalier had done.

In 1980 *Victoria* seemed about to anticipate reforms implemented ten years later in New South Wales, Tasmania and elsewhere. But its genesis was protracted and confused. During the cultural revolution of 1967-74 Victoria had gone farther than any other Australian state in transferring control of the curriculum to the schools, which at the secondary level largely meant the Victorian Secondary Teachers' Association. The VSTA exercised tremendous influence on educational policy and the Department of Education had lost most of its power. Victoria had only three selective government high schools: Melbourne High School, MacRobertson Girls' High School,

and University High School. Their intake started at Form 3 (later known as Year 9) when students were aged 13 or 14. From 1972 University High School became a local high school with Form 1 (Year 7) entry. The school retained selective entry for its music and accelerated learning (Gifted Students) programs.

Following the re-election of the Liberal government in May 1979 the new Minister, Alan Hunt, launched extensive organisational changes, outlined in the December 1980 White Paper on *Strategies and Structures* which promised devolution, increased participation by parents, the community and teachers, and a core curriculum. As later in New South Wales, these changes were introduced at a rapid rate. Hunt established a Corporate Management Group headed by the Minister and the Department and its Director-General lost much of their authority.^{xlix} But the 1982-84 recession brought Labor to power in April 1982, ending 27 years of Liberal rule. The new Minister, Robert Fordham, redirected the reform movement. The three teacher unions and two parent organisations which had helped Labor gain power expected a share of the spoils. The State Board of Education, set up as an independent body in 1983, became an advocate of progressive and radical education.¹ In February 1984 the Education Act was amended to give school councils the power to decide educational policies for their schools; radical teachers and parents dominated many school councils.

The recession was fading, but Labor was re-elected, with a reduced majority, in March 1985: the first time Victorian Labor had ever achieved a successive term. Ian Cathie, a former teacher, became Minister for Education. In November he announced that a Ministry of Education would be formed which would include the Department of Education. But the former Department, now known as the Schools Division, dominated this Ministry. Cathie appointed a Ministry Structures Project Team, which published a discussion paper, *Taking the Schools into the 1990s*, in June 1986 and a *Ministry Structures Project Team Report* four months later. The *Report* was contradictory. It recommended expanding the powers of school councils to include the selection of principals, appointment of

teachers and development of curricula. Coupled with this was a reduction in the number of regional centres, thus giving more control to the central Ministry. But who would control the school councils and who would control the Ministry? The *Report's* requirement of "equality of outcomes for students" challenged the self-governing autonomy of schools. The strong opposition of the teachers' unions and parents' associations to the proposed restructuring forced the Minister to give ground. Indeed, the VSTA's hostility ensured that Cathie was replaced in December 1987 by Caroline Hogg, who was supposed to heal the policy disputes. Her reign was brief. Joan Kirner became education minister after the elections of October 1988.^{li}

Between 1980 and 1990 eight ministers attempted to restructure the government's largest portfolio, Education. It suffered five restructures and Joan Kirner's extensive "fine-tuning". Administrative staff were demoted, relocated, promoted, reassigned and redeployed. This entailed much waste of money, the collapse of programs, the decline of morale, and the resignation of talented and conscientious staff. Serious reform was blocked by the militant teachers' unions, whose leading members used the expanding bureaucracy as an avenue for career advancement.^{lii}

In the meantime, the senior years of secondary school were under pressure. In 1983 Fordham had commissioned a *Ministerial Review of Postcompulsory Schooling* with Jean Blackburn, ex-communist, feminist, and supporter of progressive education, as chairwoman of a committee of seven. Its report, presented to Cathie in March 1985, took as its basic premise that the upper secondary level courses, originally designed for a minority, were now unsuited to the wider range of ability of students in these years. Between 1981 and 1984 the retention rate to Year 11 in Victorian government schools had risen from 63 per cent to 73 per cent, and to Year 12 from 24 per cent to 34 per cent. In non-government schools the rates had risen in Year 11 from 88 per cent to 93 per cent and in Year 12 from 70 per cent to 79 per cent.^{liii}

The Report recommended that the Higher School Certificate, which offered three specialised Year 12 certificates, be replaced by a Victorian Certificate of Education. This was finally introduced in 1991, after years of agonising debate. The *Report* had said that whereas the Higher School Certificate had compared the achievement of students to determine their fitness for higher education, the VCE would record achievements over a wide range of subjects, many of which (such as dance and drama) could not be assessed in the traditional way. Organisation of the curriculum into semester units would afford greater flexibility in choice – over the two years students would take 24 units rather than 11 subjects.^{liv} But to provide for a wide range of abilities in the one Certificate was an extremely difficult task. Common Assessment Tasks were introduced into all Year 12 courses; they were to be “reported” (rather than graded) by teachers on an A-E scale. The universities objected to the lowering of standards; the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association opposed the elitism of academic studies. Parents' associations supported the unions.

The election of Jeff Kennett at the head a Liberal-National coalition government in October 1992 marked the resurrection of the “Radical Right” reforms launched by Hunt in 1980.

In *South Australia* the task of establishing the new political controls was also difficult. In this state, as in Victoria, progressive and radical education had made great inroads. Between September 1979 and November 1982 a Liberal Party government momentarily interrupted Labor's hegemony; attempts at reform started. In 1981 the Education Department report *Into the '80s: Our Schools and their Purposes* sought to reassert Departmental control over the fragmented curriculum while fostering local autonomy.^{lv} A committee chaired by J. P. Keeves, Director of the ACER was appointed to enquire into education. Its Final Report (1982) on *Education and Change in South Australia* criticised both *Into the '80s* and the Commonwealth Curriculum Development Centre's *Core Curriculum for Australian Schools*, published in 1980. “They touch on certain curricular issues at such a level of generality that an

individual school or teacher could justify the choice of almost any aspect of curriculum policy or practice by reference to either or both documents”. The Report also argued that “school based curriculum planning and development cannot be made effective because the teachers in the schools have neither the time and the resources, nor the necessary expertise to undertake what they have learnt to be difficult and time-consuming tasks”. Yet the Keeves discussion of local versus central control was highly ambiguous.^{lvi}

In July 1982 cabinet approved a proposal by the Director-General to reorganise the education administration. This included reforming the very large but ineffective Curriculum Directorate and creating an Evaluation Review Unit with considerable independence to scrutinise teaching, curriculum and administration.

As in Victoria, when Labor regained office (November 1982) reform changed direction. The original scheme was abandoned in favour of administrative decentralisation, greater powers to local schools and a small Central Office, with two directorates responsible for curriculum and resources. The Curriculum Directorate, operating with fewer officers, was to develop primary and secondary school curriculum policies to Year 12. The restructuring absorbed Departmental energies from 1983 to 1985. As in Victoria, the new system brought much reclassification, retirement and relocation of officers. The Office of the Minister (as distinct from the Department) increased in size. A subsequent report of the parliamentary Public Accounts Committee on *The 1983-86 Reorganisation of the Education Department* complained that it was difficult to assess whether “imprecisely stated goals” were achieved; whether the reorganisation had saved money or increased costs; and whether out-of-school resources had been reduced.^{lvii}

A “School Development Plan” of 1987 aimed to give schools new responsibilities in self-management. Financial problems produced a reduction in the number of senior officers in the Department. The teachers’ union, the South Australian Institute of Teachers, was dubious about devolution, fearing it might reduce resources for

schools, make the principal a manager first and an educator second, and “shift blame to schools”.^{lviii}

In *Western Australia* Peter Jones, Liberal Party Minister for Education 1975-1979, was the first activist occupant of that office for decades. Concerned that his Department’s head office had grown to 1000 members and was paying too much attention to policy rather than administration, he organised a restructuring in 1979. Despite this, central staff providing support services to schools continued to increase. The Burke Labor government which came to power in February 1983 found it necessary to undertake cost cutting; the highly centralised department of education seemed an obvious target.^{lix}

Bob Pearce, a former teacher, was minister for education from 1983 till 1988. The new government appointed a “Committee of Inquiry into Education in Western Australia” on which Education Department bureaucrats were strongly represented. The Beazley Report of 1984 was an unwieldy and wide-ranging document, focusing on liberal-progressive ideas coupled with Labor’s concern for disadvantaged “minority” groups. Its outcome was limited to reducing university power over the secondary curriculum.^{lx}

The State School Teachers Union had considerable influence over education policy, but this collaboration with the minister ended after a change of leadership in the Union in 1985. In September 1986 the Director-General, Bob Vickery, retired two and a half years before his term expired. His successor, given the new title of Chief Executive Officer, had diminished power.^{lxi}

Burke’s White Paper, *Managing Change in the Public Sector* (1986) outlined new administrative principles in government agencies. These included the need for efficiency and economy and increased ministerial control over their departments. The Functional Review Committee of the WA government (August 1986) applied these principles to the Education portfolio. The culmination of the new order was the *Better Schools in Western Australia* report of 1987.

However, at the same time the education administration used the Beazley Report as an excuse to introduce a new progressive education policy, a unitised curriculum.

Tasmania showed little interest in educational change. Brian Caldwell, co-author of *The Self-managing School* (1988) and a senior lecturer in Educational Administration at the University of Tasmania, described the 1980s as an era of tranquillity in Tasmanian education. "From a schools' perspective, Tasmania began the decade with a higher level of decentralised decision-making in resource allocation than any other state, with evolutionary development towards self-management in succeeding years".^{lxii} This was something Caldwell himself had advocated. A White Paper on *Tasmanian Schools and Colleges* (May 1981) had urged that all schools and colleges establish school councils by 1985, but progress was minimal. Labor lost government in May 1982 to the Liberals, who retained power until June 1989. In 1984, despite opposition from the Tasmanian Teachers' Federation, a Liberal minister extended the literacy and numeracy tests for 10 and 14 year-old children in government schools. Up till then these tests, a unique feature of Tasmanian education from 1976, had been given in alternate years; now they were applied each year.^{lxiii}

Serious change was finally provoked in June 1990 when the critical economic situation led the government to commission a Melbourne-based consultancy firm Cresap to conduct a review of the Department of Education and the Arts which was spending 23 per cent of the State's recurrent expenditure.

Queensland was equally uninterested in change. Still a pioneering, rural society, it was much less hospitable to progressive and radical education than most other parts of Australia. The Department retained its firm control. School councils did not exist and little devolution of power to school principals had occurred. At the beginning of 1978 the Queensland cabinet banned the use of two programmes, MACOS (Man: a Course of Study) in primary schools and SEMP (Social Education Materials Project) in high schools,

both of which employed progressive styles of work. The first was an American programme, the second was produced by the Curriculum Development Centre, Canberra. In April 1978 premier Bjelke-Petersen appointed a parliamentary Select Committee to consider Queensland education. The Ahern Committee of 1978 to 1980 submitted six Interim Reports and a Final Report. The Committee was intended to placate various interest groups seeking policy changes; few of its recommendations were acted upon. During the 1980s the Department was concerned mainly with administrative restructuring. During 1984-86 five reports were submitted on various aspects of Queensland education. Little real change occurred.^{lxiv}

In the *Australian Capital Territory*, as in Victoria, a strong middle-class and a militant teachers' union provided a favourable environment for progressive education. Public education was controlled by an autonomous statutory authority, the ACT Schools Council. The teachers' union, parents' association, community groups and students were represented on this Council, ensuring a favourable environment for progressive and radical education. Control of the curriculum was handed over to the schools. In the 1980s pressure for reform came not from the administration but from parents, newspapers and private organisations, including the small but active Professional Association of Classroom Teachers. Complaints about the quality of education in the high schools (catering for Years 7 to 10) produced the 1983 Steinle Report: *The Challenge of Change. A Review of High Schools in the ACT*. It was scathingly criticised in *The Canberra Times* as

the latest in the endless stream of reports, reviews, discussion papers, agendas and working-party reports generated by the ACT secondary schools system and the bureaucrats who sit on top of it . . . The report is symptomatic of a sick system. It is precisely the sort of document that might have been expected from one group of "educationists" invited by another group of "educationists" to sit in judgement upon them and their works.^{lxv}

Attempts were made to restore direction to the curriculum. In 1984-85 the Schools Authority produced non-prescriptive curriculum

guidelines in two curriculum areas, with little result. In late 1988 the Authority decided to produce “frameworks” for each curriculum area in the junior secondary school. The 1987 *Management Review of the ACT Schools Authority* (Berkeley Report) contributed to the development of a more conventional ministerial structure with an administrative hierarchy when the ACT became self-governing in 1989.^{lxvi}

The *Northern Territory* lacked a middle class sympathetic to progressive education. It was a pioneering, sparsely-settled frontier society, which would normally favour formal pedagogy. But South Australia, which administered the Northern Territory school system until 1975, planted the seeds of progressive education, which were watered by Commonwealth funds. Canberra held formal responsibility during 1975-1979 but its bureaucrats, lacking experience in running an educational system, “were inclined to accept the advice of the idealistic professionals”, who were accountable to Canberra, not the local community.^{lxvii} Two South Australians, John Steinle and Hedley Beare, fostered progressive fashions. The government education system, as a NT Department of Education officer put it, was “unencumbered by the baggage of tradition, entrenched bureaucracy and a self-perpetuating teacher cadre which had gone to school in the system, taught in the system and eventually risen to manage the system”.^{lxviii} The teachers had considerable freedom in the schools and little central supervision.

But in 1978 the Northern Territory gained self-government, a Country Liberal Party began an apparently perpetual term in office, and the government set about reining in the freedoms of progressive pedagogues. The initial secretary of the new NT Education Department, Dr J. Eedle, warned that the Department would not allow schools to “drift away into independent school republics accountable only to a handful of incompletely representative school councillors”.^{lxix}

In 1980 Education absorbed about 40 per cent of the NT budget and one-third of its public servants. Because of this, the Chief Minister

placed education in the public sphere rather than creating an autonomous authority, as in the ACT. The Minister for Education circumscribed the autonomy of the teaching service by delegating powers to the Secretary of the Department of Education. In 1983 school councils were set up, with chairmen or women who were non-education staff and with a direct line of communication to the Minister, by-passing the Education Department and the school principal. But in practice principals and teachers on school councils were often able to persuade parents and community members to take their side.^{lxx} Thus it was possible for the teachers at Sanderson High School, Darwin, to introduce in 1985 a unitised curriculum. This arranged courses into ten-week packages with vertical grouping of pupils (i.e. mixed age groups). Students selected their units once a quarter, while meeting certain pre-requisites. Soon other schools imitated this.^{lxxi}

Yet in general the Northern Territory, like Queensland, managed to restrain the enthusiasms of the new education even before a new wave of reform started in 1987.

Sources of Reform

Some of the reforms attempted in the 1980s sprang from the need for financial economy. Many were related to the new concept of administrative organisation. While some Education Departments sought to restore the authority over public schools they had lost in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the dominant trend was the efforts of ministers or premiers, and sometimes their equivalents at the Commonwealth level, to replace departmental control with political control. In some states efforts weakening departmental authority involved strengthening school councils. The need to reduce costs provided an impetus to reduce the size of the public service, including the education administrative bureaucracy.

Yet progressive education retained a grip. It provided a rationale for the non-educational situation in some state schools. State secondary schools, in particular, were finding it difficult to maintain a liberal academic curriculum and formal teaching methods. It could be

argued that progressive education was not a cause but a consequence of educational deterioration. Moreover, many university and college of advanced education lecturers in teacher education continued to advocate progressive and radical pedagogy to their students. A third influence, in the early 1980s, was the Commonwealth Schools Commission's support, backed by financial resources, for progressive education. But as we have noted, the tide was changing.

Discontent with the curriculum and standards persisted. Greg Sheridan's series of articles in *The Australian*, starting on 2 February 1985 with "The lies they tell our Children", was the strongest of many public protests about the curriculum. In the late 1980s the politicians, and teachers, faced the unpalatable fact that many students – perhaps as many as 20 per cent – entered secondary schools unable to read, write or add up effectively.^{lxxii} Their chances of acquiring secondary education were thus reduced.

Not all teachers and not all schools had embraced the new education enthusiastically. Many continued to use traditional methods and struggled to preserve elements of the traditional curriculum. Some teachers experimented with the new methods but later reverted to the old. However, as the years passed such teachers became fewer as resignation, retirement, acceptance of fashion and death reduced their numbers.

Initial efforts at reform faced for four major obstacles: (1) Departments of Education lacked sanctions to enforce their proposed reforms. They had little control over the education and training of future teachers, no effective system of inspection, no effective form of external examination; (2) the leadership of the teachers' unions and parents' associations usually opposed reform. They feared that school councils would undermine their centralised structures and power; (3) the Departments contained many "professional educationists" who sympathised with the progressive pedagogy; (4) some teachers adopted informal methods as a solution to dealing with recalcitrant students.

Torn between the pressures of conflicting interest groups, the Departments resorted to issuing a flood of documents – statement after statement, report after report. But some ministers for education began to intervene; the politicisation of education was under way.

Yet the drift in the late 1970s from government to non-government schools necessitated political intervention. So did the complaints of parents about poor standards and uncertain values. So, too, did the demands of employers for a greater emphasis on vocational skills. The politicisation of education control provided the key to changing the public schools. Certain features of neo-liberal education, such as greater central control of the curriculum, the encouragement of a vocational emphasis, and devolution of responsibilities to the individual schools, weakened and dispersed the influence of the special interest groups.

Different states faced different challenges. Victoria seemed about to take the lead at the beginning of the decade when a Liberal government attempted to re-establish authority over schools. This was interrupted by the election of a Labor government. Yet when in due course the Labor Party Minister for Education also attempted modifications he, too, was frustrated by radical and progressive teachers. In New South Wales, somewhat more conservative educationally, the urgency was less pressing. Yet as early as 1984, after the Labor Party's Rod Cavalier became minister for education, the *Sydney Morning Herald* discerned "a basic shift in the power politics of education".^{lxxiii} At the end of the 1980s the Liberal Party's Terry Metherell carried through the most extreme restructuring in Australia. Few remedial measures were attempted in South Australia, which in the late 60s and early 70s had matched Victoria in its enthusiasm for progressive education. Change arrived in Western Australia in the late 1980s. Reform in Tasmania came very late, finally forced by economic pressures. Queensland seemed immune to reform.

During the 1980s Australia began to enter a new, globalised economy. The Commonwealth shared New South Wales'

commitment to the application of “economic rationalism” and neo-liberal policies to education. The main demonstration of this was the shift in power from the Australian Schools Commission, which favoured progressive education, to the Minister and the Commonwealth Department of Education. It lost most of its functions in November 1985 and disappeared when the Department of Employment, Education and Training was formed in July 1987. The new era was formally announced when John Dawkins, Commonwealth Minister for Employment, Education and A. C. Holding, Minister for Employment Services and Youth Affairs issued a document titled *Skills for Australia*: “The Government is determined that our education and training system should play an active role in responding to the major economic challenges now facing Australia”.^{lxiv}

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