Changing School Loyalties and the Middle Class: A Reflection on the Developing Fate of State Comprehensive High Schooling

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Abstract

Of all Australian secondary schools in the current period, the government comprehensive high school is in most difficulty. This article looks at the developing fate of this school in terms of middle class social practice in relation to changing schooling loyalties. The recent work of Michael Pusey, Stephen Ball, Janet McCalman, Richard Teese and Judith Brett on the middle class is reviewed to give the discussion an historical and contemporary sociological context. The main idea addressed is that the middle class is being 'forced' to leave public schools. Government policy on state aid since the 1960s is interpreted as encouraging the departure of the middle class from public schooling, though not evenly in all regions or different kinds of government school. The article analyses census data for New South Wales from 1976 to 2001, using the categories of family income, fathers' occupation and labour force status as quantifiable indicators of changing school loyalties in the middle class. The article concludes that state comprehensive high schools face a difficult future. Increasingly these schools are seen as schools of 'last resort', or schools to which students are sent where active choices are not possible, or are not made by apparently neglectful parents. This occurs in a period in which 'good citizenship' is defined less in terms of responsibility to the welfare of broad collectivities in society, but in the informed strategic pursuit of private interest.

Through the twentieth century, and now, into the twenty-first, the system of secondary schooling available to Australians has been subject to continual reform. In this period schooling has been important for enabling many families not only to maintain their wealth and class position, but also to respond strategically to the changing conditions of capitalism within and beyond Australia. Its importance only increases as substantial segments of the labour market become ever more dependent on science, technology and the innovative management strategies of post-industrial

capitalism in countries like Australia. In the mid-twentieth century it was still possible to find part of the middle class, especially the landed and small business 'old' middle class lacking a strong dependence on secondary and higher education for its consolidation and advancement. It is very much rarer at the beginning of the present century (Campbell 1993).

There is an old argument about the significance of education for the making of social classes which tends to pit family against school. One, it was argued, was more influential than the other. This debate is increasingly obsolete. Part of the reason for this paper is to show historically how different social groups have made certain kinds of schooling more or less essential in their strategies for survival and advancement. More contemporarily, Connell (1985, 2003) has shown how parents operating from different social classes and in different schools use schools and their teachers differently. In the wealthier, corporate schools, there tends to be an empowered status for the parent, engaging school and teachers as complicit agents in the raising and education of their children. In many state schools, the distance is greater between parent and school, with parents and children more likely to be the objects of alienating discourses of power.

Over the period of the last century there are clear reasons why most middle class families should have engaged schools as important agencies in the raising of their young. First is the need to encourage young people to feel as if they belong to a group sharing middle class values and a broader, though diverse culture. One would expect that the sharing of such a culture would lead to relatively efficient generational transfers of the motivation and confidence to assume, manage and enjoy a certain level of wealth, status and control. This production of a sense of 'belonging' can also be thought of as constituting networks of social influence. A second reason relates to the increased dependency over the century of the middle class on credentials, usually from educational institutions of some prestige, in order to survive in changing labour markets and in some cases, help legitimate the exercise of social and economic influence. It is the second of these which has become more important in recent times. In identifying such reasons it is necessary to stress their relational character.

In the first part of this paper several studies illuminating contemporary and historical relationships between schooling and middle class formations are discussed. They include recent books on the Australian middle class by Brett (2003) and Pusey (2003) and a third with its main focus on Britain by Stephen Ball (2003). Two older Australian studies by Janet McCalman (1993) and Richard Teese (2000) round out this discussion. The paper then discusses changes in state policy and how these have affected the relations of middle class schooling. The impact of such policies on state comprehensive high schools, and the debate over 'public versus private' schooling are then interpreted in this context.

Because the present paper grows from a research project on the social history of state comprehensive secondary schooling in New South Wales, some of the results of that work are presented. (See also Campbell 2001b, 2003) An immediate statistical context for the paper is the increasingly dramatic shift of secondary students from enrolment in state school systems into the non-government sector. The first table shows the movement for New South Wales.

Year	Government schools	Non-government schools	% shift to non-government schools
1984	72.7	27.3	
1987	70.9	29.1	+1.8
1990	69.3	30.7	+1.6
1993	69.0	31.0	+0.3
1996	67.9	32.1	+1.1
1999	66.1	33.9	+1.8
2002	64.0	36.0	+2.1
Total shift 1984-2002 +8.7			

Table 1.0: Students in the secondary schools of New South Wales by school category, including the shift toward the non-government sector (%): 1984 - 2002

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools (4221.0)

In addressing the question of the changing school loyalties of the middle class, it is not assumed that the shift to non-government schooling is solely a middle class phenomenon. That there is a strong relationship will become clearer as the argument develops.

Recent historical and sociological work on the middle class and its schooling

One of the obvious difficulties in discussing the schooling of the 'middle class' is that the idea and even the existence of social classes have become contested terrain over the last fifty years. There is a vast literature on this topic which includes Ball & Vincent (2001), Carter (1985), Jamrozik (1991), Martin (1998) and Watson (1993). Ball (2003) has summarised the issues reasonably comprehensively. The special difficulties with the 'middle class' are evident in the Australian as well as international literature.

Connell and Irving (1992) were clearly more comfortable discussing 'working' and 'ruling' classes than the 'middle'. Pusey (2003) chose the term 'middle Australia' to work with rather than 'middle class' though he explicitly connected them (p. 3).

The fragmented character of the 'middle class' is responsible for much of the difficulty; it has often been difficult to find clear examples of relative unity of consciousness and action. This might be expected of a class in the 'middle'. Nevertheless, two historians in particular, McCalman and Brett, have delivered the Australian middle class an authentic genealogy. Like Ball, their understanding of class is based on social practice, and rarely on older economist assertions that class is merely about the relationships of people to the means of production, distribution and exchange. It is with their work that we begin.

McCalman's *Journeyings* (1993) was based on interviews with members of a generation who were secondary schooled in the 1930s and 1940s. The study also reported the results of an analysis of the schooling backgrounds of the 'Australian elite'. McCalman demonstrated that in Melbourne, the graduates of private schools predominated in the professional, business and governing elite, while for Sydney the equivalent group came from the old selective government schools (McCalman 1993, p. 333, Peel & McCalman 1992). These conclusions are important because too often the categories of 'state' and 'private' school have also been taken to indicate substantial class differences. While many corporate schools do service the educational needs of the middle class there have been some state schools which also have had a role to play. The determination to preserve the capacity of some secondary schools to confer 'distinction' and enhance 'cultural capital' of one kind or another (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990) is not solely a function of the relationship of schools to state ownership. A number of historians have shown the process by which some state high schools sought, though not always completely successfully to establish organic relationships with middle class families (Bessant 1984, Campbell 2001a, Sherington 1983).

McCalman's major contribution to the historiography of middle class schooling was to describe a highly plausible sense of class 'mentality' or consciousness which goes with such schooling. Though the same set of 'mentalities' is no longer always relevant, they form part of the cultural history of Australia's middle class. Essential to the making of middle class consciousness was the role of schools in equipping their students not only with intellectual skills but 'the language, the style and the confidence for them to exact deference to their gentility' (p. 113). This approach links with the argument in *Learning to lead* (Sherington et al. 1987) which emphasised the role of adapted Arnoldian technologies of corporate schooling in shaping students. Those technologies encouraged an assumption of responsibility for social leadership

and moral authority in the professions, business, government as well as voluntary organisations.

Brett's *Australian Liberals and the moral middle class* (2003) rarely discusses schooling. Nevertheless it provides an historical explanation for shifts of moral consciousness and class practice which have impacted on the role of public institutions and the loyalty which may be felt toward them. Such institutions may be taken to include state schools. In emphasising the Protestantism of the Australian middle class and its peculiar senses of citizenship, public service and leadership, Brett provides an argument for why many state and most corporate schools might have been considered organic to middle class formations. While emphasising the importance of 'individualism' for middle class practice throughout the twentieth century, Brett argues that its content has been reshaped. The significant decade was the 1970s when the Liberals began to lose the very well educated and cosmopolitan segments of the middle class to Labor, and the broad remainder of the middle class begin to be reshaped as battlers and consumers. The old content of 'individualism' was hollowed out as public institutions, and opportunities for morally-based leadership within them were diminished. Private, individual and family interests displaced the former public orientation (p. 215). In this discussion an historically viable explanation for an initial middle class support for state schools, and the contemporary decline is discernable.

Similarly, Pusey's *The experience of middle Australia* (2003) rarely mentions schooling. Nevertheless his analysis of the middle class is also suggestive for explanations for the changing attitudes of the middle class towards public schooling. Pusey argues that the middle class in the main have been forced into the behaviours of aggressive individualism and competitiveness as a result of the past thirty years of neo-liberal economic reform. Pusey's middle class is often a victim of reform which has seen substantial shifts of wealth and power to what Connell and Irving might identify as the ruling class. 'People experience the compulsion to reinvent themselves as the risk managers of their own lives as a personal assault on their quality of life' (p. 67). The reduction and reform of the public sector has increased the risk. A social contract has been broken. Its origins were the early twentieth century and based on the protection of the manufacturing industry and centralised industrial conciliation and arbitration which attempted to guarantee certain standards of living and full employment. To such a contract, one might add, especially after World War II, the provision of fair opportunities for education through public secondary schools.

Pusey argues that as middle class families have had to adjust themselves to the market, which only intrudes ever more insistently into family and social life, the market is inevitably looked to for the defence of important values and codes of

behaviour. Pusey argues that such families feel let down by institutions such as public schools which cannot be trusted to do the necessary work (p. 95). The private school becomes a means of protecting children against some of the many uncertainties of life in post-welfare Australia, including inadequate government schools. Pusey refers to the 'guilt' felt by many middle class parents in his interviews. The desire to support the institutions of a civil society are undermined by the imperative of doing the best possible by their children in a dangerous world. Sending one's children to a private or select government school becomes a positive though resented response to cut-backs in the public sector. Pusey argues that the middle class is being driven out rather than choosing to leave. The rise of 'school choice' options within the markets of education is not really about creating new terrains for family or individual agency, since the most desired of choices, a high quality public school, is increasingly experienced as being closed off. Under these circumstances the difficulties of the neighbourhood comprehensive high school become more understandable.

This version of the relations between the middle class and public institutions is silent on the consequences for those under even greater threat, where most public institutions are reduced to the provision of 'safety nets'. Teese (2000) signalled the rising importance of examination success for middle class schools, an obsession once left to some state high schools which were easily criticised for their meritocratic practices. In *Academic success and social power*, Teese discusses the role of the senior secondary curriculum and its relationship to the distribution of social power. In a radical critique of many private schools and some selective state schools Teese argues that 'school failure' may be 'exported'. 'Private schools, operating on an assured platform of public grants, drain secondary education of the cultural resources represented by family education, life-style and know-how and pump these into the most profitable locations of the curriculum. The school system becomes polarized.' (p.204). Teese is pessimistic about the future for comprehensive state high schooling:

> In comprehensive high schools, residential segregation brings together many students with multiple disadvantages - low self-esteem, poor basic learning, language handicaps, poverty and family breakdown. Instead of a mass of cultural and economic resources being concentrated on one advantageous site and applied to the high end of the curriculum - as happens in private schools - there is an accumulation of liabilities at the one site. This weakens the instructional effort and risks severe retribution against those students who stray into the more academic subjects. (p.189)

Teese argues that mathematics, physics and chemistry in particular are organised to emphasise their abstract qualities. Such subjects, despite reforms over the past fifty

years, remain essentially impenetrable to most young people who do not have rather extraordinary cultural resources deriving from their family and class backgrounds. Success in these subjects is the most highly rewarded for tertiary entrance, and provides gateways to the faculties of the universities which prepare youth for the most lucrative and powerful of the professions. Some schools, especially those in the private sector are able to marshal students and resources to specialise in these crucial school subjects. In the process, they 'export failure'. Teese argues that the 'hierarchy of the curriculum cannot be exploited as a system of social advantage without a hierarchy of schools in which to deposit 'reserves of talent' created by educated middle-class families' (p.203).

Teese extends the argument on class and schooling that Connell and co-authors (1982) pioneered concerning the social role of the competitive academic curriculum, but also alerts us to the changing relations between classes and education. There is now an inescapable merit-based competitive character to patterns of education in many private schools which was more difficult to detect in the nineteenth and for much of the early twentieth century. This is now the case for girls as well as boys. The argument is not totally compatible with that of Pusey. Teese sustains a more critical attitude to the school practices of the middle class; it is as if they are calculated to do harm to working class youth. Nevertheless, the desperation that Pusey reveals about the decisions of middle Australia at least goes some way to explaining why many aspects of its schooling decisions are necessarily both aggressive and in their consequences, ruthless.

Ball's *Class strategies and the education market* argues the continuing importance of class for the understanding of contemporary social relations. He develops an analysis of the 'rational action' by groups within the markets of post-welfare societies (p. 16). He argues that class competition in education is historically contingent. He points to the massive expansion of the middle class in the post World War II period, and reinforces the argument that Martin (1998) made for Australia, that the middle class has in more recent decades been 'decoupled' from public bureaucracies (p. 19). He argues that intense competition for entrance to elite institutions (in the context of the United Kingdom) has involved a shift away from 'merit' as the main currency of access, to be replaced by 'distinction', even oligarchic 'goods' (p. 20). Like Pusey he argues that the insertion of choice and competition into strategic planning undermines the middle class desire for orderly and 'moral' progressivism (p.22).

In his discussion of the retreat of the middle class from the government maintained comprehensive school, Ball argues that the social context of schooling is a crucial issue. Too many students from ethnically alien or poor areas become a threat to successful middle class strategies. Parents expect to influence the school's practices in

the perceived interests of their children.[1] While diversification of state schools retains numbers of middle class families in the state sector, the market pressures tend to undermine cooperation between schools. Parents are forced to intervene in the education of their children in ways unprecedented in living memory. Parents are partners and 'customers' (p. 166). Their approach, engaging their middle class skills, is 'fearful, alert and strategic' (p. 168). Ball puts forward the idea that the middle class is consolidating itself as the working class fragments. Many of the old divisions between professional, business and government employee middle class segments, at least in their common strategic approaches to schooling, are in the process of converging (p. 174).

Since the 1950s in Australia

Until the middle of the twentieth century, and for nearly a century before that time, Australian governments did not fund non-government schools. If we can talk about an 'educational settlement', it was that the state would fund compulsory elementary education provided by the state, and somewhat less enthusiastically fund a group of academic state high schools called into being by demands for scientific and technically trained labour in the lead up to World War I (Bessant 1972, Campbell, Hooper, & Fearnley-Sander 1999). From the 1920s various super-primary schools allowed some years of extended schooling additional to the elementary years for a larger group. The schools which educated a major part of the ruling class, the corporate schools, maintained themselves with fees and bequests. Middle class students attended non-government and government schools. The attachment to government schools, especially the academic high schools was particularly strong in New South Wales.

The religious affiliations of the Australian middle class (mainly Protestant) also had a role to play in this even-handedness. Protestants in the main were much less alarmed by a 'secular' state education than the community led by the Roman Catholic church. Consequently the state was entrusted not only to provide schools for the working class and rural communities, but certain academically selective high schools for the middle classes and working class youth sufficiently endowed with the Protestant work ethic, or at least high IQ scores.

During and immediately after World War II there were signs that this settlement might be disturbed. Education played a large part in arguments for the post-war social and economic reconstruction. There was pressure for more 'equality of opportunity', especially in secondary education. An influential non-government agency advocating such reform was the Carnegie Foundation-funded Australian Council for Education Research. Its publications not only advocated funding by the federal government for

school education, but also comprehensive secondary education (Medley 1943, ACER 1953). One can see in this pressure not only a demand for educational reform, but the modernisation of capitalism and its class relations.

The 1950s saw the collapse of the political conditions which had underpinned the old educational and religious settlement. With the Australian Labor Party split, a circumstance arising from polarised attitudes to communism as a legitimate presence in working class movements during the Cold War, a considerable group of voters, usually Roman Catholic, became detached from their traditional voting habits. The long standing grievance of the Catholic Church in Australia, the denial of state funding to assist its school systems, provided an opportunity to secure a realignment of a previously Labor-oriented vote. The Liberal Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, offered state aid to Catholic schools in the federal election of 1963, an election his coalition won. In the process of delivering state aid, a new funding settlement in Australian education was established. Henceforth, no political party with aspirations to government could afford not to match the funding offered non-government schools by the other political party. Such aid was rapidly offered by all state as well as federal governments (see Hogan, 1978). Though Catholic schools were the immediate beneficiaries in the 1960s and 1970s, the funding was not specific to any religious group. This eventually legitimated state aid for schools to almost any community group, religious or otherwise.

In the process a rapidly increasing Catholic middle class, dependent on non-government schools for the education of their children benefited from the new state aid, and were wedded to its continuation.

In the period from the 1970s federal school funding has in theory been responsive to 'need'. Labor governments have made it more difficult for wealthier schools to gain federal funding while Liberal-National coalition governments have made it easier. In the period from the mid-1990s, liberally provided federal funding for non-government schools has been seen as an essential strategy for encouraging school improvement, as well as a means of shifting enrolments toward the private sector. Even government schools have been forced to operate in educational 'markets' created not only between state and non-government sectors, but within the state sector. The competition for enrolments is a serious business for the survival of government schools, those schools decreasingly likely to be patronised by middle class families. From the 1980s non-government schools continually improved their share of all enrolments.

The social impact of these developments is increasingly clear. On the one hand the state has supported, even enriched many non-government schools, to the point that

the disparities between grounds and other material resources, as well as human and cultural advantages, are highly conspicuous. 'Residualisation' is obvious in many government comprehensive high schools. (See Laughlin 1997 on the Mount Druitt schools in Sydney.) These are schools with unrepresentative concentrations of poor and otherwise socially disempowered youth. How sustainable such circumstances might be for the future is an open question, though Pusey is broadly pessimistic (2003, p. 185). A substantial impact of neo-liberal inspired government policy in Australia appears to be the promotion of class division through schooling.

Social indicators of middle class schooling strategy

In this section I use census statistics from 1976, 1996 and 2001 to detect changing social patterns of school loyalty over the last quarter century. The census does not provide easy insight into the behaviour of the middle class, but it can provide 'indicators' of class practice. I have chosen for discussion the three categories: labour force status, family income and occupation. The practice considered is the choosing of different kinds of secondary school by families for their children. In each of the 1976, 1996 and 2001 censuses, the categories available for choice were 'Government', 'Catholic' and 'Other non-government' schools.[2]

The following data applies only to New South Wales which has some peculiarities given the numbers of its state selective high schools since the 1980s. In choosing to explore State-wide patterns, it should be remembered that there is considerable regional diversity within New South Wales.[3]

In *Tables 2.0* and *2.1*, the census categories of 1976 and 2001 are sufficiently similar to allow direct comparison of the Labor Force Status of fathers of secondary age children. In this discussion, I take the 'employer' category as an indicator of clear middle class status. 'Self-employed and employee' are a major part of Pusey's 'middle Australia' or 'middle class'.

Even in 1976, a high point for state school participation, the children of employer fathers were more strongly represented in the Catholic and other non-government schools. Unsurprisingly there was a gap of 19 per cent between the representation of this group in government schools in comparison with unpaid and unemployed worker families. By 2001 this gap had grown to 31 per cent, with the combined total of employer family youth in non-government schools at 56 per cent.

Table 2.1 is based on *Table 2.0*, showing the shift in participation over the twenty-five year period.

Labour Force Status	1976					2001				
	Government school	Catholic school	Other non-government	Total	Total (N)	Government school	Catholic school	Other non-government	Total	Total (N)
Employer	67	21	12	100	26,142	44	30	26	100	46,949
Self-employed and employee	79	17	4	100	299,181	62	26	12	100	301,132
Unpaid worker and unemployed	86	13	2	100	9,441	75	18	7	100	56,891

Table 2.0: Type of secondary school attended by youth according to labour force status of their fathers (%): New South Wales, 1976 and 2001.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, censuses 1976, 2001.

	Percentage shift		
Labour Force Status	Government school	Catholic school	Other non-government
Employer	-23	+9	+14
Self-employed & employee	-17	+9	+8
Unpaid worker & unemployed	-11	+5	+5

Table 2.1: Shift in participation in type of secondary school attended by youth according to labour force status of their fathers from 1976 to 2001 (%): New South Wales.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, censuses 1976, 2001

In Table 2.1, the departure of families from government schools is very substantial from the first two labour force categories. Other non-government schools are the main recipients of Employer family children while for the Self-employed/employee group the departure is equally shared with Catholic schools. This group forms a major part of the middle class, especially in the terms that Pusey defines his 'middle Australia'. In 2001 federal funding policies had allowed the expansion of low-fee secondary schools not only in the Catholic sector, but the Other non-government sector as well.

Tables 3.0 and *3.1* are not directly comparable. The value of the dollar had dramatically fallen, and the census takers changed their measure from annual to weekly income. Some rough comparisons may be made however, since in each case I have taken the top categories of family wealth. In each table, the wealthiest groups respectively represented 25 and 19 per cent of the populations in 1976 and 1996.

	1976				
Annual income	Gov't school	Catholic school	Other non-gov't	Total	Total (N)
$15,001 or more	69	20	11	100	73,755
Less than $ 15,001	81	17	2	100	221,944

Table 3.0: Type of secondary school attended by youth according to annual family income (%): New South Wales, 1976

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 1976

According to the annual family income statistics for 1976, the wealthiest families supported government schooling, but at much lower rates than other parts of the population. The most substantial difference occurs in the support for Other non-government schools. These schools in 1976 were usually high fee schools whose mission was to educate the children of the middle and ruling class.

By 1996, as Table 3.1 shows, the differences were greater, even though we are looking at a slightly more exclusive group in the wealthiest family category.

	1996				
Weekly income	Gov't school	Catholic school	Other non-gov't	Total	Total (N)
$1,500 or more	52	26	22	100	61,575
Less than $ 1,500	73	20	7	100	254,557

Table 3.1:Type of secondary school attended by youth according to weekly family income (%): New South Wales, 1996

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, census 1996

In *Tables 4.0* and *4.1* we look at the occupations of men which have usually attracted higher status, income and the capacity to exercise social power. Most of these men are likely to be part of the middle class. The categories are again sufficiently similar from the 1976 to the 1996 census to allow direct comparison.

Organised in these occupational categories, the government school allegiances of families with professional and managerial fathers in 1976 were clearly at much lower rates than the other employed. *Table 4.1* shows the dimensions of the shifts by 2001.

What this table highlights is the general nature of the departure from government schooling. If we take the 'All other employed group' and divide them into further categories, basically along the lines of white collar work, and then skilled and unskilled labour we are able to differentiate further.

While such occupational groupings only suggest class related identity, the older semi-skilled and unskilled worker groups remained reliant on government secondary schools at over 70 per cent. The Catholic schools were the most important alternative. Each of the identified white collar, clerical and service worker groups also had a presence of between 9 and 10 percent in the Other non-government schools. These are likely to be the newer low-fee 'Christian' schools of the middle and outer suburbs and country towns rather than the older and expensive corporate schools.

Occupation of father	1976					2001				
	Government school	Catholic school	Other non-government	Total	Total (N)	Government school	Catholic school	Other non-government	Total	Total (N)
Professional	68	19	13	100	30,492	51	25	24	100	66,146
Managerial	68	21	11	100	38,397	51	28	22	100	57,868
All other employed	81	17	2	100	193,435	65	27	9	100	218,861

Table 4.0: Type of secondary school attended by youth according to the occupation of their fathers (%): New South Wales, 1976 and 2001

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, censuses 1976, 2001

Occupation of Father	Percentage shift		
	Government school	Catholic school	Other non-government
Professional	-17	+6	+11
Managerial	-17	+7	+7
All other employed	-16	+10	+7

Table 4.1: Shift in participation in type of secondary school attended by youth according to occupation of their fathers from 1976 to 2001 (%): New South Wales

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, censuses 1976, 2001

Occupation of Father	Gov't school	Catholic school	Other non-gov't	Total (N)
Associate professionals	54	30	16	46,348
Skilled workers (trades)	65	27	8	62,377
Clerical & service (adv & inter)	61	29	10	28,190
Operators & related	71	24	5	44,415
Clerical & service (elem)	67	24	9	12,623
Labourers & related	73	22	5	24,908

Table 4.2: Type of secondary school attended by youth according to the occupation of their fathers: 'All other employed' only (%): New South Wales, 2001

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 2001

An outstanding feature of all of these tables is that despite twenty-five years of state-subsidised privatisation of secondary schooling, that substantial numbers of the middle class continue to send their children to government schools. This is both a possible reflection of a continuing though residualising commitment to public education by segments of this class, but more likely, a consequence of the diverse

character of public schools. Although the selective system in New South Wales is important, the geographical patterns of social segregation, especially in Sydney are likely to be even more important. A comprehensive high school in a middle class area on the North Shore can look very different to the same kind of school in the Outer Western suburbs.

These tables suggest that the attrition, even flight from state schooling is high in the middle class. The middle class leads the retreat from government schools; their rates of departure are consistently greater than those for others.

Changing school loyalties of the middle class

In the second half of the nineteenth century, some basic characteristics of middle class secondary schooling were consolidated. First, it would be corporate rather than private in governance. Corporate schools were much more likely than private to guarantee continuity of schooling and the provision of certain material resources, especially the games and sporting facilities associated with the rise of athleticism which swept middle class boys' schooling in the British Empire at this time. Such schools also guaranteed a relationship with the colonial universities. The association fostered a sense of cultural superiority, preparation for social leadership and the provision of another site for necessary class networking. Except for the funding of universities, these developments usually occurred without direct investment by the state. Such trends also occurred for the sex-segregated schooling of middle class girls, although an attachment to 'private' schooling in ladies' academies lasted longer (Mackinnon 1984; Theobald 1996).

By the middle of the twentieth century another 'settlement' had been consolidated. Exclusively middle class schools remained mainly unassisted by the state, but a differentiated government secondary school system existed in each Australian State. At the 'pinnacle' of the state system were academically selective high schools whose efficiency in providing for an emergent 'meritocracy' was obvious. Such schools were attractive to the growing middle class, especially those segments which were increasingly dependent on the achievement of educational credentials for employment (Campbell 1995). In New South Wales families associated with the older professions, part of the 'old middle class' used new state high schools such as Fort Street (see Horan 1989). The 1950s and early 1960s may be taken as the high point of this period, when most working class youth still left secondary school early, or were corralled in less prestigious super-primary schools.

The breaking of this settlement occurred in two phases. Both had the effect of beginning a process by which non-government schools would win substantial new

shares of young people from middle class families. The first phase saw an attempt to consolidate state secondary schools into universal institutions which would increase retention rates for youth from all social classes. An initial commitment to streaming probably averted early and rapid enrolment loss from families who expected educational and social advantage in the schooling of their children. At almost the same time, state aid was re-introduced to non-government schools, initially allowing the survival of hard-pressed Catholic systemic schools. But such assistance went beyond the schools which educated poorer communities. The second phase saw the rapid expansion of federal funding to non-government schools not only on the basis of 'need', but for new ideological reasons. School 'choice' rather than educational 'opportunity' increasingly became a citizen's 'right', while the governments, dissatisfied with the high cost of 1970s style school reform processes, began to decide that school reform might be more efficiently achieved through making all schools compete for students in markets. (On this process see Marginson 1993, 1997a, 1997b)

Australia's new schooling arrangements not only reorganised the institutions and practice of middle class schooling, but increasingly contributed major tax-raised funding to non-government schools. Legitimacy was secured for such funding by encouraging all non-government school communities to act in solidarity against any threat to liberally provided state aid to non-government schools, wealthy or poor. The Catholic school systems have had a particularly important role to play here. Even though the average incomes of the families which support them are not much greater than that of families supporting state schooling, over the last twenty years the Catholic systems have consistently acted in solidarity with the entire non-government sector on the issue of state funding.

The politics associated with the new schooling policies in Australia, with their reintroduction of conspicuous forms of differentiated and unequal schooling have caused some protest. Community action is hard-pressed for victories however, more so in New South Wales than Victoria in recent times, and Labor governments are not reliable allies against pro-school choice policies which generally favour middle class schooling. The discussion within the Labor Party, initially led by Mark Latham (MHR) about the need for Labor to win the newly emergent 'aspirational class' may be read as a commitment to pro-school choice policies, and the continued withering of the state school sector, at least in its role as the dominant provider of socially equitable schooling (see Morton 2001). When the Labor Party lost the 2001 federal election, apparent failures of the Party to meet the needs of the 'aspirational class' dominated the post-election discussion. Such arguments contribute to the legitimisation of the new arrangements in schooling which advantage schools increasingly sought by the middle class.

This discussion of the transformation of middle class schooling loyalty is not isolated to Australia. The pressures of recent forms of globalisation place all schooling in many countries under similar pressures. Pusey argues that this need not be so, but also confirms that Australian governments have chosen that it should. The pressure points include access to the labour market and higher education, both increasingly stratified and differentially rewarded. The breaking down of older boundaries between different aspects of family and social life see the linking of activities such as real estate purchasing to school choice decisions (see also Tabakoff 2002). Sometimes older and new middle class cultures clash under the circumstances of globalising pressures. Such transitions and clashes of culture and 'morality' were the subject of Brett's analysis of the Australian middle class. The recent distress of Sydney Boys' High School 'old boys' that new, usually Asian students were failing to maintain sporting and other Arnoldian school traditions may be interpreted in this way (Editorial 2002).

There is a vigorous international debate around the capacity of national governments to significantly alter the pressures on national educational and social policies arising from the influence of neo-liberalism. This is the context of writing by authors such as Whitty (1997) in education and its current global discontents. The form of schooling under most pressure in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia is the state comprehensive high school. This was a form of schooling with post World War II social reconstruction in mind. It had a 'neighbourhood' rather than a 'market' to serve. It was a standard form of schooling, meant to provide roughly equal educational opportunities through a standard curriculum and a 'public service' oriented standard teacher to do the teaching. This is the school which still delivers most Australian youth some form of secondary education, but under the current circumstances it is likely to become a minority form of schooling, mainly for families which do not or cannot exercise a choice in favour of state-subsidised non-government education.

Understanding the relationships between neo-liberal economic and social policies and the funding of Australian schools are crucial for an understanding of changing class attachments and loyalties in schooling. Since the period of the Whitlam Labor government, federal aid for non-government schools has rapidly increased. Such funding did not necessarily have to advantage the schools patronised by the middle class, given the historic alienation of the Catholic working class from state education. Nevertheless in the context of the neo-liberal economic foundations of much social policy, the schools which seek to serve Australia's middle class have been manifestly strengthened. Extensive aid for a wide range of non-government schools has created a powerful electoral base for undifferentiated state aid. The elevation of market ideologies to near hegemonic status has enabled the schools attractive to the middle and ruling class to increase their legitimacy as rightful beneficiaries of state aid. The

growth of low-fee Catholic, Anglican, 'Christian', ethnic and other 'faith' defined schools increases the tendency.

As these developments proceed, state comprehensive high schools face a difficult future. Increasingly these schools are seen as schools of 'last resort', or schools to which students are sent where active choices are not possible, or are not made by apparently neglectful parents. This occurs in a period in which 'good citizenship' is defined less in terms of responsibility to the welfare of broad collectivities in society, but in the informed strategic pursuit of private interest. The increased social inequities resulting from this process will ensure a developing and bitter educational politics in Australia. Currently however, reform produces high anxiety over the provision of quality schooling among a large proportion of the middle class, including the 'aspirational classes'. Such anxiety and its political expression may well ensure for the time being a consolidation of the current schooling tendencies which manifestly disadvantage the families of the less powerful and wealthy.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] An example of this can be seen in the New South Wales controversy over the limited successes of Manly High School students in the Higher School Certificate examinations. Manly High was a selective school, expected to deliver enhanced academic success to its students. A group of parents, not without considerable opposition, were eventually successful in recasting the school's leadership and teaching staff in the direction they had fought for. See Teutsch (1999) and Jamal & Raethel (1999).

[2] This use of the census arises from the specific commissioning of data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics relating to schooling in the censuses of 1976, 1986, 1996 and 2001.

[3] Space does not permit a full discussion of my use of, nor the limitations of census statistics. Obvious issues include that of gender (e.g. my use of the occupations and labour force status of fathers rather than mothers). Also not discussed are the effects of missing and misreported data and the redefinition of categories from one census to the next.

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