

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONTEXT

Introduction

The first chapter of this thesis established that the issue of ‘good’ schools is something that is discussed at all levels of society, from the layman to the academic, and from anxious parents to profit-minded businessmen. ‘Good’ schools appear simple to identify but prove exceedingly complex to describe. They are crucial to the development of local communities and are critical to the future of a nation.

Today, more than ever, we struggle to locate and promote ‘good’ schools. There is intense interest in this struggle from teachers, families and governments. Some parties seem dissatisfied with the direction in which the developments in schools are moving. The intensity of the current debate may reflect the growing importance of the school in an era of rapid change, though no doubt some form of the debate has long been around.

This chapter examines the development of the ‘good’ schools movement since the Second World War. The mid 1940’s is an ideal place to start because the war was a watershed in the development of nationhood and in the development of society. Chitty (2002), speaking about the 1944 Education Act in England and Wales, describes the ‘good’ schools movement as being the product of a wartime urge for the social reform and an effort to produce greater social equity. In the USA the post war period witnessed a similar scenario with a whole gamut of social, economic and political upheavals, including problems with spiralling costs, union demands

and the challenge of segregated schools (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.270). In Australia, the end of the war heralded challenges for the education of returning soldiers, the continuance of emergency Federal taxation measures and changing attitudes towards the funding of private schools (Smart, 1982).

The chapter commences with an international overview of educational reform in England and Wales, the USA and Australia, since 1944. There is emphasis on the growing involvement of centralist politics on the concept of what makes a ‘good’ national education outcome. The focus of the chapter then moves to the phenomenon of ‘restructuring’ in education, specifically targeting the Australian experience, though noting that the process is replicated around the world. Finally, the spotlight is turned to the state of Western Australia and the projection of a more fine-grained analysis of the current educational reforms that are affecting that state’s deliberations about ‘good’ schools.

Throughout this chapter the emphasis is on the changing nature of what constitutes a ‘good’ school, and the variety of power bases and inclinations that are colouring these perceptions. Though it appears logical to establish, as governments do, a close relationship between society and education, there are many political and economic machinations behind the scenes. Some of these machinations will be alluded to in this chapter and will be further debated in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

England and Wales

In 1944, as the Second World War was approaching its climax, Britain’s educational systems were experiencing their own transmogrifying moment.

In England and Wales this appeared in the guise of an Education Act which Frost and Bailey (1973, p.507) describe as “the most ambitious and extensive educational proposal ever accepted by Britain.” The war had redefined the importance and role of a nation’s system of schools. Around the world the war effort, which had mobilised armies and revolutionised industry, had sheeted home to governments the value of ‘human capital’ (Instance & Lowe, 1991). But above and beyond the need to train its workforce into the future, came the immediate post- war concern to rebuild “political, economic and social dislocations caused by the war” (Frost & Bailey, 1973, p.507) and to create greater educational equity for the people (Chitty, 2002).

The context of late-war and early post-war Britain is a critical background to the complexities of identifying ‘good’ schools. This was a time when education was re-valued. Whereas the early twentieth century had used the measurement yardstick of “education for the masses” (Frost & Bailey, 1973), there was now a new bench mark, namely, social welfare and economic advancement (Chitty, 2002). In 1944, the national interest in the structure and purpose of schools in England and Wales, as well as elsewhere in the world, had sparked a political change that would have ramifications well into the future. Whether the individual schools had changed, or whether teaching methods had changed is another story.

Another facet of the background context of immediate post-war England and Wales was the levels of government available to control education, namely, Central Government and Local Government. This configuration of powers needs to be compared to those in the USA, where there was a tripartite

system of Federal, state and local legislature. It is important to note which level of government actually controlled education. Often this is difficult to deduce and the balance changed over time. In England and Wales, for example, the 1902 Balfour Act had placed the supervision of schools “in the hands of local governments” (Frost & Bailey, 1973, p.507). By 1944 the Local Education Authorities were firmly in control of the education system and England and Wales remained as one of the world’s most decentralised systems (Swanson, 1993). Nevertheless, the complexities of government mean that, even today, there is not a simple hierarchy of control, and in England and Wales, together with the USA and Australia, centralisation and decentralisation forces are at work simultaneously (Swanson, 1993).

In 1944, both main political parties in the United Kingdom had a common approach to post-war reconstruction. This approach involved a threefold commitment “to full adult employment; to the idea of a Welfare State; and to the coexistence of large public and private sectors in the economy” (Chitty, 2002, p.10). All three of these elements impacted on the Butler Education Act of 1944 and all three continued to influence government policy well into the 1970s. Chitty (2002) estimates that the 1944 Education Act dominated the education system in England and Wales for the next fifty years. It is significant that, in the eyes of the Westminster Government, ‘good’ schools were ones that fundamentally kept people out of unemployment and away from the poverty traps.

The 1944 Act specifically extended the concept of elementary education for all into the secondary schools. Thus, it created free secondary education for

all students, and it lifted the compulsory leaving age to fifteen years (Chitty, 2002; Frost & Bailey, 1973). Although the Act didn't specify the types of government secondary schools to be provided, three types existed. These were the numerous grammar schools offering an academic curriculum; a large number of secondary modern schools which had grown out of the existing elementary schools, and which offered a more practical type of training; and a few technical schools catering for businesses and industries of the locality. Later on came the comprehensive secondary schools, located in the larger cities and offering a mix of academic and vocational studies (Frost & Bailey, 1973). In reality, most children initially were only able to attend the grammar or the secondary modern schools. The 11-plus examination, which tended to favour the middle class child, ensured that only one in five students made it into the more selective grammar schools (Chitty, 2002). Far fewer were privileged enough to gain entrance to the private schools.

The 1944 Education Act had established a three phase educational ladder available to all students. This ladder had as its lowest rung, the primary school which extended from 2 year olds in the nursery school and day care, through to 11 year olds in grade six. Above this came the secondary rung which catered for students up to eighteen years of age. Finally, there was a variety of further education opportunities including county colleges for those dropping out of the secondary schools (Frost & Bailey, 1973). The Act also created the Ministry of Education, delegated control to the Local Education Authority (LEA), and initiated the system of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs).

Frost and Bailey (1973, p.509) describe the 1944 Act as changing the whole concept of elementary education. Whilst, in hindsight, there was still a long way to go before the government education system offered equity for all, some of the optimism of the immediate post-war period had been translated into the education system and opportunities were growing (Instance & Lowe, 1991, p.22). More changes came some twenty years later when the Conservatives were defeated and the Wilson Labour Government came to power. Labour, through Circular 10/65, attempted to deal with two problems, the unfair allocation of children to secondary schools and the inequitable 11+ examination. Circular 10/65 tried to create more secondary schools on comprehensive lines to cater for a wider range of students, but since it was a 'request' for change, very little happened (Chitty, 2002, p.18). The government also allotted no extra money to the program.

The real stumbling block to further reform of education in England and Wales was the traditional power-sharing relationship, enhanced by the 1944 Education Act, whereby the education system was locally administered. Chitty (2002, p.10) sees the arrangement as "a rather cosy partnership between Central Government, local education authorities and individual schools". This wasn't an arrangement that was going to deliver education change. The LEAs dictated what was happening in their schools because they had control over the money and the admission policies. There was some Central Government influence through the HMIs, but even this body had a good deal of independence and power. Cullingford (1999, p.15) talks of HMIs inspecting schools "on connoisseurial criteria" and regarding themselves "as professional colleagues whose role was to advise local

authorities, teachers and schools rather than enforce national standards". It would appear that the education system of England and Wales may have been centrally administered but that much power lay elsewhere.

It was debatable, in the early 70s, as to what constituted a 'good' school. The HMIs were apparently the custodians of the standards of 'goodness' because they were inspecting the schools. Lee and Fitz (1997, p.45) suggest that the HMIs held a conservative view of 'good' teaching and used a model of 'the Skilled Traditionalist'. The LEAs must also have held a view about 'good' schools but they had the power to keep less successful schools running by directing enrolments and money towards them. Finally the 11+ exam, with its academic bias, was also dictating standards and curriculum content and interfering with the progress of reform (Frost & Bailey, 1973, p.561).

The Conservative Party, relegated to the opposition benches since 1964, didn't have a united policy on what they wished to do with the languishing education sector. They were divided into two camps, the Preservationists who wanted to keep the grammar schools and retain formal teaching methods and high academic standards, and the Voucher Men who wanted to give parents the power to choose which type of school their children would attend. Amongst the Conservatives, the Preservationists held the upper hand until the economic and social upheavals of the mid 70s (Chitty, 2002).

Two significant events occurred in the mid 1970s. In February 1975 Margaret Thatcher replaced Edward Heath as leader of the Conservative Party, and then the OECD economies faltered under the shock of quadrupling oil prices (Instance & Lowe, 1991). This latter event, which also

impacted heavily on the USA and Australia, led to increased unemployment and put pressure on governments to cut expenditure. Cutting budgets in the public service meant cutting the education budget. Governments had to become more resourceful and innovative with their dwindling resources. The resourcefulness and innovation heralded the start of public service restructuring in England and Wales, and elsewhere around the world.

It was Thatcher's belief that education in England and Wales had been in decline since Labour had come to power in the 1960s. Labour was seen as having 'progressive' educational policies which promoted child-centred curriculum and informal teaching methods and assessment (Chitty, 2002). Thatcher and the Conservatives also targeted what they saw as the "corrupt alliance between local education authority inspectors and advisors" as well as "radical or incompetent classroom teachers" (Chitty, 2002, p.26). The Thatcher Government had its own clear concept of what made 'good' schools. From the government's point of view there needed to be clear directions for curriculum, rigorous guidelines for teaching, high academic standards and an accountable system of inspection.

Because of the deteriorating world economic climate there also needed to be controls on public spending, greater efficiency in the public sector and a possible shifting of the costs of services into the private arena (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.26). This economic constriction on governments world-wide, which triggered the international move to restructuring, significantly altered the nature of schools and education systems. With money being tight, 'efficiency' and 'effectiveness' became key factors for

educational institutions. The new global viewpoint also highlighted the competitiveness of nations themselves as they sought to secure and maintain their place in the international markets. An outcome was the establishment of a link between education and the economy (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998).

For Thatcher's Conservatives there was a need to take a stance against what they saw as England's parlous position on the world's economic and education stage. They were certain that the concept of decentralised control of education, namely, a national system locally controlled (Chitty, 2002, p.25), would have to go. Thatcher was also certain that there would need to be a weakening of the strong teachers' unions (Harman *et al*, 1991), increased privatisation of schools and a centralised curriculum (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998). After a frustrating first two terms of government during which the opposition of politicians and industrialists thwarted the attempted introduction of a voucher system (Chitty, 2002), Thatcher launched the 1988 Education Reform Act. Chitty (2002, p.33) describes this monumental piece of legislation as "an attempt at gradual privatisation – at blurring the boundaries between the private and state sectors." O'Donoghue and Dimmock (1998, p.27) see this Act, and the complementary 1992 Education Act, as providing "the legislative architecture for the complete transformation of virtually every part of the school system of England and Wales." Not only was there a redefinition of the system under which schools operated, but the 1988 Education Reform Act also redefined the 'good' school. The criteria for such a school were much clearer with efficiency and effectiveness being high on the priorities.

There were three major elements to the 1988 Education Reform Act: the creation of a national curriculum; a new system of local management of schools; and an opportunity for schools to 'opt out' and remove themselves from the control of the LEAs. The National Curriculum was a dramatic demonstration of the Thatcher Government's desire to centralise control of the educational standards in England and Wales. The curriculum specified content and emphasised the traditional subject areas, mathematics, English and science. This centralised curriculum reversed the situation that had existed at the end of the Second World War, where England and Wales had one of the few educational systems in Europe without a national curriculum. It was a clear indication that the policy of non-intervention by the Central Government had ceased (Chitty, 2002, p.48).

An adjunct to the national curriculum, and another indication of the centralised nature of the reform act, was the establishment of national testing. This testing regime, which was to undergo some modifications in future years, targeted students at age 7, 11, 14 and 16. These standard assessment tests (SAT) measured student achievement, school achievement and the uptake of the national curriculum. They also provided data for public scrutiny. A school's SATs results helped determine whether a particular school would succeed or fail in the newly created competitive world of education. National curriculum and national testing exposed the real motivation behind the 1988 Education Reform Act, the need for schools to succeed in an open market economy.

Complementing the parent choice and the marketplace philosophy was the Act's directives about local management of schools. By this process school head teachers and school boards became responsible for the management of their buildings, staffing and budgets (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.29). There were no longer any school boundaries. Open enrolments, together with local management, put schools in control of their own destiny. Only by achieving sound SAT scores, being efficient and effective, and attracting sufficient clientele could schools succeed. Thatcher had seen that "competition is a means for improving the responsiveness and performance of the public education system" (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.30).

From the government's standpoint, 'good' schools were becoming much more well-defined. They were schools that supported the national curriculum, produced creditable SAT scores, worked within their budgets and were attractive to parents. 'Good' schools were those that could survive, prosper and remain open. Failing schools were those that attracted too few customers, failed to improve and needed to be closed.

To complete the triad of elements in the 1988 Education Reform Act, there was the attack on the power of the LEAs in the guise of a school's ability to 'opt out' of LEA support. Schools could become grant maintained and receive their funding directly from the Central Government. The LEAs were also forced to distribute their funds to schools on the basis of enrolments only. This latter change opened up the future possibility of voucher systems, took away the LEAs' manipulative power over money and put pressure on schools to attract pupils or collapse (Chitty, 2002).

The 1988 Education Reform Act did change the schools of England and Wales. It forced a restructuring of everything from curriculum to public relations. It forced schools into the marketplace where they needed to become highly competitive. The winners were the Central Government and the parents; the losers were the LEAs (Swanson, 1993), who the Conservatives believed had been particularly obstructive, and teachers who had appeared to hold too much power (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.32).

The Conservative Government had one more change to make in order to gain full control over the framework of education in England and Wales. This change came four years later in the form of the 1992 Education Act. Thatcher had gone and John Major was at the party helm, but the basic Thatcherite policy direction remained. Like Thatcher, Major talked tough on standards. In a 1991 speech he urged more rigorous forms of testing, including a more challenging GCSE (Chitty, 2002). To ensure the higher standards the 1992 Act spelt the end to the HMIs and the introduction of the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). OFSTED represented a new era in the inspection of schools. It was an independent body disconnected from the Department for Education and Employment (DFEE). Its purpose was not aligned to that of the HMIs who had aimed at developing the quality of input, skills, knowledge and expertise of teachers. OFSTED inspectors were less developmental, being instead “preoccupied with securing improved standards and accountability” (Chitty, 2002, p.73). The 1992 Act did more than ‘privatise’ the inspection process, it sent out a clear message about what constituted a ‘good’ school. A ‘good’ school was one that was compliant,

accountable and giving 'value for money' (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.31).

Since 1992 there have been further changes to the educational context in England and Wales. The 1993 Dearing Review has 'watered-down' the requirements of the National Curriculum and in 1998 further concessions were made to free up curriculum requirements for the primary schools. In May 1997 Tony Blair's New Labour was elected to power with a manifesto that trumpeted the party's priorities as 'Education, education, education' (Chitty, 2002). As expressed in the 1997 White Paper, which became the 1998 School Standards and Frameworks Act, the 'good' schools criteria had changed little from the Thatcher era. The White Paper had three key features on the standards debate: Standards are more important than structures; intervention will be in inverse proportion to success; and there will be zero tolerance of underperformance (Chitty, 2002, p.93). There is also a continuing interest by the Blair Government to encourage private 'outside interests' in the running of State Schools (Chitty, 2002, p.93).

The political and social context of England and Wales since the conclusion of the Second World War is, in a way, unique to that particular corner of the world. Yet that uniqueness, encompassed by the phrase 'a national system, locally administered', is rapidly disappearing. It is being replaced, courtesy of Thatcher and Blair, by a restructured environment which reflects other contexts around the world. The new context is about economic and technological arguments (Instance & Lowe, 1991, p.29), about standards, about competitiveness and about efficiency and effectiveness. The OFSTED

inspectors epitomise the new era of ‘goodness’ in schools as their job has changed from the less formal school improvement of the HMIs to the rigorous accountability encompassed in the OFSTED guidelines (Grubb, 1999, p.71).

United States of America

The social and political context of the USA provides an interesting and illuminating counterpoint to the situation in England and Wales.

Governmentally, the two environments are quite different. Thatcher strove to provide a strong centralised framework to the education system, curtailing the influence of the local education districts. In the USA, the Federal government shied away from direct involvement in education, leaving the management of the system to state governors and local districts. The USA constitution, in fact, attributes responsibility for public education to the states, allowing the delivery of educational services to lie “with local government in all states except Hawaii” (O’Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.41). Yet, despite the geographical and governmental impediments, the same forces for restructuring and the same collective legislative concerns were affecting the USA through the 1990s and into the new century. The country had unique problems of its own in regards to desegregation but in the end the forces of efficiency, effectiveness and accountability were occupying the minds of the President, the governors and the educators.

Harry S. Truman led the country at the end of World War II. As in Britain, there was optimism for increased prosperity, but the period from 1945 to the mid 1950s was a time of “substantial economic, political and social upheaval” (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.270). Truman had to deal with

McCarthy's warnings about communism, the unions' fight for survival, unemployment and the threat of post-war inflation (Urban & Wagoner, 1996).

The apparent inaction by the Federal Government on the education front is explained by the fact that education itself was the obligation of the states, whilst most of the finance, policy making and initiative in the education sector was provided by the governing boards of the 15,200 local school districts (Koppich & Guthrie, 1993). Being funded through local property taxes led to some gross inequities across the states and across the nation (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.42). In 1963-64 for instance, Alabama spent an average of \$197 per public school pupil, Mississippi \$217, Pennsylvania \$564 and New York \$791 (Frost & Bailey, 1973, p.542). Eventually these inequities resulted in Federal support but not before three significant events spurred presidential and parliamentary action.

The first of these major events was a racial problem which bubbled to the surface at the start of the Eisenhower era. The *Brown v Board of Education* case involved a challenge to an 1896 judicial finding that Negro students were entitled to "separate but equal" educational facilities (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.284). In a land-mark decision of 1955, Chief Justice Earl Warren ruled that "separate but equal" was unconstitutional, paving the way for a 1957 Congress Civil Rights Bill which established racial equality in schools. The desegregation problems dragged the Federal government into justice, administration and economic issues surrounding school management

which included withholding Federal funds from districts that segregated schools.

In the 'good' schools debate the racial problems of the USA in the 1960s raise some issues which have been alluded to in the context of England and Wales. There is a need to consider the national interest when the role of schools is evaluated. The question is, to what extent should schools be asked to cope with social issues? Doubtless, schools had a role to play after the dislocation caused by World War Two, and national governments expected and demanded that the school system respond. Another question might consider the conflicting demands on schools by local, state and national governments. In USA, during the racial uprisings, the varying levels of government were divided, as in Little Rock where state governor, Orval Faubus used the National Guard to oppose desegregation. (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.288). Where does the school stand then? Even if the questions are impossible to answer, the point is made that schools are part of the social fabric of a nation and as part of that fabric, must evaluate their role at more than just the local level.

The second event that prompted Federal intervention in American education was the successful Soviet launching of Sputnik in 1957. Coming at the time of the 'Cold War' this launch seemed to signal a revived threat of communism (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.281). More than this, however, it was a challenge to America's assumed primacy in science and technology. In response to the implied challenge, Congress passed the National Defence Education Act of 1958. This Act provided financial assistance to college

students, and financial aid to states to improve instruction in science, mathematics and foreign languages (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.282). Though the amounts of money dispensed by Congress were reasonably small, the precedent had been set. For the first time a congressional Act had “legitimised broad-based Federal aid to education” (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.282).

These first two events which stimulated Federal involvement in education were largely unrelated to trends in other parts of the world. To a degree they were related to internal fears and factors. The third event, a product of the 1980s, was the economic downturn which reverberated around the globe. The USA, like other affluent nations, would be forced to react to this global economic threat.

For the time being, the 1950s and 1960s were producing domestic problems impinging on education. Chief amongst these, and in some ways related to the desegregation issue, was the problem of poverty. Much of the poverty was centred around inner city areas as happened in London and the large industrial cities of northern England. The use of schooling to alleviate poverty, the approach subsequently taken by Tony Blair’s New Labour, was not initially the solution adopted in the USA. The USA reaction was partly attributable to the research of Coleman (1966) in the mid 1960s and Jenks (1972) in the early 1970s. Both of these pieces of qualitative research focussed on examining the cause of poor educational progress, and both came up with a similar answer, deprived family background. Coleman and Jenks agreed that the school itself had minimal effect on school progress.

Coe and Fitzgibbon (1998, p.421) describe Coleman's work as "an early, seminal example of the kind of qualitative study ... that has come to be called school effectiveness research." The Coleman and Jenks' studies, with their suggestions that schools don't make a difference, were a challenge to the concept of 'good' schools. It required a British researcher, and an assembled team, to restore some balance. Rutter (1982), with his acclaimed publication *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, refuted the Coleman and Jenks' propositions and declared that "schools do indeed have an important impact on children's development and it does matter which school a child attends" (Rutter *et al*, 1982, p.1).

Coleman and Jenks contributed in two ways to developments on the education scene in the USA. They provided the evidence that allowed the Federal government to pour money into the welfare system in an attempt to make all children ready for school. They also stimulated debate on school effectiveness and school improvement. The effectiveness materials have influenced decisions on education right around the world and contributed heavily to the question of "what constitutes a 'good' school". School effectiveness indicators were also the criteria adopted by OFSTED to help evaluate schools in England and Wales.

In 1960 John F. Kennedy became the 35th President of the USA only to be assassinated four years later. His successor Lyndon Johnson stayed in power until 1968 and struggled with the issues of poverty and the Vietnam War. Johnson oversaw the enactment of two important pieces of legislation as he "pursued a 'Great Society' image which included his war on poverty"

(Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.297). The 1964 Educational Opportunity Act led to the creation of the Headstart Program which used Federal money to prepare the poor for education. This program was well supported throughout the USA because it was seen to be a welfare project rather than an educational one. The subsequent 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which bears a striking resemblance to initiatives taken by the Australian Federal Government, is described by Urban and Wagoner (1996, p.310) as “the single most influential piece of educational legislation in American history.” Federal money in this latter program was directed into local school systems and was used for special projects such as cultural and social enrichment, library innovations and nutrition programs. It was a very expensive program and eventually collapsed due to the escalating costs of the Vietnam War.

As we track the gradual involvement of the Federal government in educational subsidies and other support, we need to be aware that the real educational initiatives were happening in the states. State governors vied with one another to earn reputations as education reformers (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.336) and there was some sharing of ideas through the National Conference of State Governors. The main initiatives in state systems were changes in teacher certification, testing programs and financial support (Urban & Wagoner, 1996), but these organised changes could not stem a high level of scholastic failure and a perceptible fall in academic standards (O’Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.42).

In relation to ‘good’ schools, the three decades after the Second World War, had seen only piecemeal change in the decentralised system of USA education (O’Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.41). States were still in charge of educational programs and the local districts were delivering them. There was little uniformity across the nation in terms of philosophies, standards of achievement, or teachers’ working conditions. Federal forays into education were really focussed on “equalising educational opportunity for the poor and minorities” (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.322). Congress had no appetite for involvement in the specific nature of school programs whilst it was embroiled in the problems of civil unrest, poverty and the Vietnam War.

Though President Johnson had initiated significant economic and quasi-educational reform under his ‘Great Society’ plans, his successors, Nixon and Ford, were unable to provide similar leadership. Even Jimmy Carter, elected in 1976, and the first Democrat in the Whitehouse since 1968, kept well out of state affairs. Carter’s administration did, however, create the Federal Department of Education, in return for National Education Association (NEA) assistance with his election campaign (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.313). Though the Department was largely inactive in its initial phase it did represent increasing Federal involvement in education and did become quite influential in galvanising a national approach to educational issues (Urban & Wagoner, 1996).

It was that great communicator, and former actor and governor of California, Ronald Reagan who presided over a period of fundamental change in the American education scene. A combination of Reagan and the third major

national crisis, the economic downturn, launched America into a period of educational restructuring. This was a restructuring that was happening simultaneously around the world as governments fought to prune expenditure and remain competitive on the international economic stage.

Specifically, the eight year tenure of President Reagan, was marked by his failure to achieve any of his educational targets; the abolition of the Federal Department of Education, the establishment of school prayers, and the legalisation of tuition tax credits (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.332). The Reagan – Bush era did succeed in “reducing Federal financial support in almost every aspect of education” (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.328) in line with the need to cope with the economic crisis. Yet, amidst the cut-backs and the failures there was one exceptional and enduring achievement, ‘The Excellence Movement’, which arose out of a small pamphlet which appeared in 1983 entitled *A Nation at Risk* (Urban & Wagoner, 1996). The pamphlet was the work of Terrance Bell, the Secretary for Education in the Federal Department of Education. He had appointed a commission to look into what was perceived to be an alarming decline in educational standards and achievement (Urban & Wagoner, 1996). The indicators of decline appeared to be the poor international comparison of student achievement, a 25 year decline in standardised test scores, a 20 year decline in SAT scores and business leaders’ complaints about the poor education of employees (Koppich & Guthrie, 1993).

The real change heralded by *Nation at Risk* was the raising of a national awareness about the critical role that education played in the economic and

social well-being of the USA. The report had been written to invoke “the image of the USA as economically threatened” (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.333), an approach that created the same public support as a report of a military campaign. The revelation of the grim position on the educational front gave schools an economic and strategic value that defined ‘good’ schools in terms of their contribution to the cause of national competitiveness and viability (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.333). Ironically, although Reagan and *Nation at Risk*, highlighted the national contribution made by education, the Federal government reduced education spending. The responsibility for reform, prompted by increased public concern about education, fell to the various states.

The *National at Risk* revelations helped strengthen the state governors’ resolve in regards to education. There was a movement towards bringing states closer together as they faced the realization that “the changes and complexities of late twentieth century life ... challenge established curricular, instructional and school organisational patterns” (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.335). The national governors proved to be the most forceful proponents of school reform, and in 1986 they published a report of their own entitled *Time for Results* (Koppich & Guthrie, 1993).

Koppich and Guthrie (1993) describe two waves of public education reform that swept through the states in the period 1983 to 1990. In the initial period there was an incremental approach to reform which was top down and prescriptive. The incremental approach involved policy enactments which included tougher high school graduation requirements, tighter teacher

certification processes and more challenging state-wide student assessment regimes. This approach constituted an increased flow of regulations to local school districts from the centralised state level, resulting in increasing uniformity within states and between states (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.336).

As the first wave of incremental changes appeared insufficient to promote educational change, especially at the classroom level (Koppich & Guthrie, 1993; O'Donoghue & Dimmock 1998; Urban & Wagoner, 1996) another wave of reforms took place. These began around 1986 and targeted higher educational standards and better quality instruction (Koppich & Guthrie, 1993). Attention was paid to the job of teaching and to the organisation of schools. The buzz words became 'student outcomes' and 'school accountability'. Examples of reforms, which tended to spread from state to state, involved intensive pre-service preparation of teachers, site-based management of schools, and parent choice of schools. There is evidence of similar reform processes taking place in England and Wales, and in the various states of Australia. The second wave of educational reform in the USA represented a wider movement towards restructuring (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.45).

In this early phase of restructuring the states of the USA demonstrated all the complexities and paradoxes that bedevilled the process elsewhere around the world. The struggle was to try and simultaneously meet national and international demands for "excellence and quality, for economic restraint and accountability, and for an adaptive and responsive system able to meet the

needs of a rapidly changing technological society” (O’Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.166). This is the crux of the struggle to create the ‘good’ school, a school which is able to serve a variety of incompatible demands.

In 1983 George Bush, Reagan’s vice-president, was elected President of the USA. He came to the position vowing to be an ‘education president’ (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.340), although education did not play a prominent part in the election itself. Bush had his own strategic pamphlet on educational directions, aptly named *America 2000*. This set of school improvement goals was the outcome of a Federal – State education summit held in Charlottesville Virginia, in 1990 (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.340). *America 2000* reiterated much that was in *Nation at Risk*, but with one “new and potentially controversial idea” (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.341). This idea was to set national standards in the basic subjects. National standards for fundamental achievements in the school curriculum is another identifying feature in the restructuring of schools. The testing is part of increased national interest in school accountability.

The six national goals established by Bush and the state governors, and enshrined in the 1994 Educate America Act (O’Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.47) include the following: all children in America will start school ready to learn; the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%; students in the USA will leave grades four, eight and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history and geography; and students in the USA will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement (Urban &

Wagoner, 1996, p.341). The emphasis of these goals demonstrates the continuity of an endeavour to create ‘good’ schools, in the national interest, by adopting an approach based on standards and accountability in the traditional academic subject areas. In the USA as in England and Wales, the national government has adopted a leading role in the maintenance of the standards.

It is ironic that an ‘educational’ governor, and a convenor of the Charlottesville Education Summit, Bill Clinton, defeated Bush in the 1992 presidential election. Clinton proceeded to build on *America 2000* by announcing his own program for education reform, *Goals 2000*. This new manifesto differed little from the program it replaced (Urban & Wagoner, 1996, p.342).

In an endeavour to set an international context for a study of ‘good’ schools, it is frustrating to spend so little time discussing the fundamentals of teaching and learning. From the viewpoint of a teacher, or a parent, or a principal, ‘good’ schools are not necessarily the ones that contribute most to the balance of the workforce, the advancement of technology or the national competitiveness with Japan or Taiwan. At a local level the emphasis may be more on the quality of the teaching and the appropriateness of the social outcomes. In reality, there are many contexts to consider, but as in *America 2000*, national priorities, where the “driving forces are financial or political in nature” (O’Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.177), are impacting heavily on the local school.

To some extent, the forces operating to create change in the education systems of England and Wales, and the USA, were similar. The Second World War provided a crisis which precipitated the move towards using education in social reconstruction. There was a need to rebuild industry, retrain workers and revive confidence and optimism. It took another crisis, international economic decline, to put in place further changes, this time aimed more at management and efficiency of bureaucracy and education. As we turn to Australia, the focus will sharpen on the changes caused by these same two crisis points and the effect the changes had, and are still having, on Australian education in general, and Western Australian education in particular.

Australia

Australia's political configuration is an important characteristic of the educational context. With a white population that only arrived on the shores in 1788, and a minority Aboriginal population that has an immensely longer local history, Australia presents as a vast, harsh land with sparse centres of inhabitation (Welch, 1996). The white settlements started as colonies, far-flung and independent. As states and territories they were eventually amalgamated into a federation in 1901. The constitution that was drawn up recognised education as a states' responsibility.

The six states were adept at managing their own schools which by 1901 had become a dual system, with government schools operating alongside the mainly church-based private system (Anderson, 1993). A characteristic of the state-run government schools was the philosophy of liberalism, whereby there was an attempt to provide for equality of opportunity and service to the

‘public good’ (Apelt & Lingard, 1993, p.62). Equality of educational opportunity remained as a key facet of Australia’s state school system “for perhaps three decades or so after the Second World War” (Welch, 1996, p.3).

As in England and Wales, and the USA, the Second World War brought many social and economic changes. For Australia there were also some subtle political changes which were eventually to have a significant impact on education. The first of these political changes came in 1942 when the Uniform Taxation Act gave income tax collection powers to the Federal or Commonwealth government. This taxation power remained after the war and the Federal Government used a Grants Commission to direct money back to the states. The use of these grants gave the Federal Government ‘coercive’ power over states’ issues (Smart, 1982). In this ‘vertical fiscal imbalance’, the Commonwealth had the money, and the states had the expensive domains of health, police and education (Louden & Browne, 1993).

In 1946 there was a further political change with a referendum making an amendment to the Constitution. Section 51(XXIII A) gave the Federal Government the power to provide ‘benefits to students’. Despite both these amendments to Federal power, however, the fact remained that the Commonwealth Government had “no constitutional power over education” (Louden & Browne, 1993, p.106). States and the Northern Territory all ran their own highly centralised systems all based on a Department of Education in the capital city. The Federal Government only exercised powers over universities which it funded with triennial grants from 1951 (Smart, 1982).

Initially there was no support for non-government schools and these schools kept going as best they could. Some charged fees whilst there were also Catholic schools, using their own staff to teach, providing some “free” education (Anderson, 1993). To win votes from the Catholic sector, Prime Minister Menzies went to the 1963 Federal election promising money to support and improve facilities in both government and non-government schools. Money was also provided for science blocks and libraries. Here we find the Federal Government exercising its power to provide ‘tied’ grants to schools. By using such grants the Federal Government was able to begin manipulating curriculum areas and teaching policy as it was doing with science and ‘discovery learning’ (Louden & Browne, 1993).

For the 1966 election both political parties, the conservative Liberal Party coalition and the more left-wing Labor Party, were offering to set up a national Department of Education and Science. This promise became a reality with the Holt conservatives winning the election and continuing the right-wing dynasty which lasted from 1949 to 1972. John Gorton became the first Minister of Education (Smart, 1982). The period 1956 to 1971 saw a huge increase in school populations and an urgent need to have funds available to upgrade schools. Thus, in 1969, came a major change in Australia’s education system, per-capita grants to non-government schools. This was not just money for buildings, it was recurrent general assistance funding. The new policy on Federal assistance to non-government schools saved the Catholic sector from collapsing (Smart, 1982; Swanson, 1993), and it set a pattern for a movement towards privatisation of schooling. The states

accepted the money because they needed it, and because they were able to monitor its payment and its use.

The 1960s were heady times in Australian education. The education system and the economy were expanding. This was an era of optimism, during which education was well resourced and supported. It was an era that was to change when the boom times disappeared. But, for the mid 1960s, the liberal faith in the socially and economically beneficial effects of education, at the level of both the individual and society, was in its zenith. (Angus, 1992, p.387).

Even the promise of \$215 million in capital assistance to state and independent schools couldn't prolong the coalition government's Federal tenure, and in 1972 the Labor Party returned to power, led by Gough Whitlam. Smart (1982) argues that there was a party bias in Australian Federal politics, with the Conservatives being Federalist, elitist and *ad hoc*, while Labor was centralist, reformist and egalitarian. These 'biases' certainly seemed to characterise the education policy of Whitlam because 1972 marked the beginning of some fundamental changes. The Australian Schools Commission was set up with a major role in managing the increasing Federal funding. Under the chairmanship of Professor Peter Karmel, an interim Schools Commission was given the task of making recommendations on the immediate financial needs of all government and non-government schools in Australia. Karmel was also asked to specify acceptable standards for these schools (Louden & Browne, 1993, p.111). Townsend (1996, p.114) believes that the Karmel Report of 1973 created "a national education debate, one that

was to change the face of Australian schools dramatically for the first time in one hundred years.”

The report entitled *Schools in Australia* (Karmel, 1973) established several challenging policy directions for schools. These included devolution of responsibility to individual schools, equal opportunity for all students, diversity in teaching, duality of government and non-government schools, community involvement including school councils, and an expanded social role for schools (Louden & Browne, 1993). This is an important list for any studies of ‘good’ schools because Karmel was describing what his committee believed quality schools should look like. Thus, in 1973, a ‘good’ school would be self-managing and serving a social purpose. It would also cater for all kinds of children and provide a program of great variety.

Karmel found many deficiencies in the schools his Commission surveyed. There was often a lack of resources, inadequately trained teachers, a narrow curriculum, authoritarian school management and inequities between schools. The Labor Government responded to the report by providing money for recurrent resources, libraries, general buildings, teacher development, innovations and special education (Louden & Browne, 1993). Expenditure on education quadrupled in the Whitlam years (Smart, 1982).

It is important to note that the Australian Commonwealth Government was showing the same tendencies as the British Government by beginning to foster the self-managing school, whilst, at the same time, creating the opportunity to centralise policy decision. The Whitlam Government also moved into the curriculum area with the 1975 creation of the Curriculum

Development Centre. This Centre was involved with developing curricula and materials as well as with research. It also funded some state-based curriculum projects. The Federal Government, with no ‘constitutional power’ over education, was even concerned with what was happening in classrooms (O’Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.70).

The Whitlam Government lost power in 1975 to the Fraser-led coalition. There were some ominous signs on the economic front which were about to create further changes to the Australian education system. Indicative of these changes was the fact that the Conservatives came into office on a platform of cutting Federal Government expenditure (Smart, 1982). Fraser’s period in office from 1976 to 1980 is a demonstration of how the education domain cannot remain isolated from the social, political and economic context that surrounds it. In the late 1970s the recession was beginning to take hold, there was a slowing of enrolments, teachers were in over-supply and there was a growing public call for accountability (Smart, 1982). Not only was the public disenchanted with bureaucratic munificence, but the Liberal Government was not keen to continue the reforming zeal and the centralist philosophies of the Labor Party (Louden & Browne, 1993). Though funding continued, the Fraser Government was making noises about new priorities which involved quality and excellence, assessment and evaluation, choice in schooling and greater recognition of the policy rights of the states (Louden & Browne, 1982). Smart (1982) describes the Liberal Party policy as ‘New Federalism,’ with a return to a less proactive role by the Commonwealth Government. Angus (1992, p.387) saw signs of Fraser beginning to concentrate on the theory of ‘human capital’ whereby “individuals, and their skills, are just an

economic resource” (Welch, 1996, p.6). This theory aligns with the idea that prosperity can be restored to a nation by careful husbanding of all its resources.

The important aspect of this broad-brush context which looks at the government perspective of education, is that the government powers of control are real and powerful. Though the individual schools may not see the logic of support for non-government schools or the ‘human capital’ theory, State and Federal Governments have different priorities. As government, economic and social demands change, there is “much confusion, anxiety and dissatisfaction associated with the transition” (O’Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.165). There is also some concern that the evolution of education has apparently ignored the fundamental characteristic of equity which, with efficiency, “have been key legitimating factors throughout the historical development of the Australian public education system” (Apelt & Lingard, 1993, p.61).

In Australia, as elsewhere in the world, the economic decline of the 1970s had become an issue into the 1980s and beyond. It was a decline, triggered partly by the oil crisis, which affected employment, world trade and economic growth (Angus, 1992, p.387). The decline manifested itself in Australia in the form of rapid inflation, a drop in the price for mineral exports, uncompetitive manufactured goods and rising unemployment, especially amongst young people (Louden & Browne, 1993). It was this latter concern that fuelled the next major change to the educational landscape. Education became inextricably linked to the relative skills of the

workshop and thus implicated in the general demise of the national economy.

Welch (1996, p.6) puts the argument strongly when he suggests that:

State schools, in particular, are increasingly charged with failing in their social and economic responsibilities by producing a generation of illiterate, innumerate, ill-disciplined and work-shy individuals.

The Hawke Labor Government, elected in 1983, inherited the failing economy and the Fraser Government's 'New Federalism' inclinations.

Hawke's plan was to reverse both these trends and the vehicle he chose to investigate suitable options was the Quality of Education Review Committee which reported in 1985. The object of the review was to gauge the 'value for money' from Federal expenditure on education and to examine links between education, labour and training (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998). True to its socialist manifesto, the Federal Labor Party was keen to avoid disadvantaging the less well-off, a stance that the Fraser Government appeared not to have honoured (Louden & Browne, 1993). This support of equity in education had perhaps always been an Australian myth. Even the highly centralised state-run systems of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were far from egalitarian. Apelt and Lingard (1993, p.63) describe centralist state control as a crude attempt at equality which was "heavily weighted in the interests of white, middle-class, able, English speaking males". Hawke was to find that the economic stringency context of the 1980s would be no less favourable to general equity in educational provision.

The *Quality of Education in Australia Report*, (Quality of Education Review Committee, 1985) besides signalling an end to the growth in Federal spending, made one highly significant and very controversial

recommendation that combined accountability with financial stringency (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.71). It encouraged a concentration on outcomes of education, not inputs. From 1985 there was a fundamental change to the character of Australian schools, the imposition, by the Federal departments responsible for education, of some form of national testing. Though the states objected to the accountability demands, which severely compromised their control over their own systems, the Federal grants, which were tied to the tests, were too good to refuse (Louden & Browne, 1993, p.121).

Hawke was in a position of power over the states, not only because of the 'coercive' vertical fiscal imbalance, but because the Labor Party held power in five of the six state parliaments. He also received support from the unions, allowing him "to control the educational agenda right around the country" (Townsend, 1996, p.115). Thus, Federal Labor was able to increase the efficiency of the public service with an accord which allowed a two-tier system of wage-fixing linked to improved performance and efficiency (Seddon, 1994;Townsend, 1996). This industrial reform led, in turn, to the review of teachers' work "and stimulated debate about teacher quality" (Seddon, 1994, p.180).

To a large degree, the prevailing international economic downturn was forcing most governments of developed countries into restructuring their public service functions and philosophies (Harman *et al*, 1991, p.20). The pressure to restructure was creating the paradox of the Australian Labor Party mirroring the policies of the Thatcher Conservatives by cutting costs,

enforcing accountability and encouraging elements of privatisation (Welch, 1996, p.17). The full arsenal of the so-called restructuring movement was revealed to Australian education audiences by Minister John Dawkins during Hawke's third and last term in Federal parliament.

Dawkins occupied the newly created Ministry of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), an interesting compilation of jobs which reflected the growing alliance between education and the future workforce. The avowed aim of the Hawke-Keating Government was to use education as part of the micro-reform agenda in which Australia would produce "a multi-skilled and flexible workforce as part of the non-tariff-protected integration of the Australian economy with the global one" (Lingard & Porter, 1997, p.44). To achieve this aim the Federal Government was prepared to use its "funding power to enforce these changes" (Louden & Browne, 1993, p.124). It had never been clearer that the macro-control of the educational landscape in Australia had passed from the individual states, or the individual schools, to the national arena. As Seddon (1994, p.165) explains, the "pressures from beyond education, that is, influences from the context, seem to be driving education reform."

At the 1988 meeting of the Australian Education Council (AEC) in Darwin, a regular gathering of State, Territory and Commonwealth Education Ministers, Dawkins tabled a paper entitled *Strengthening Australian Schools: A Consideration of the Content and Focus of Schooling*. Along with the need to create a clear statement of the fundamental purposes of schooling, improve teacher training, create equity of opportunity and bolster retention

rates, the paper produced two dramatic proposals – a common curriculum framework to use throughout the nation, and a common national approach to assessment and reporting to parents (Louden & Browne, 1993; O’Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998). *Strengthening Australian Schools* had more than a few similarities to the USA report of 1983, *A Nation at Risk*, and to Britain’s 1988 Education Reform Act (Welch, 1996, p.17). If nothing else, all three of these controversial documents spelt out the message that “the nation’s future depended upon the nation’s schools” (Louden & Browne, 1993, p.126; also Lingard & Porter, 1997; Townsend, 1996).

The idea of a national curriculum met with little resistance from the predominately Labor states; the AEC had been pursuing such an idea before 1987 (Lingard *et al*, 1995). In any case, the states and territories already had similar curricula. However, national standards and national testing were other issues altogether and were strongly opposed by the states, especially New South Wales (Townsend, 1996). Two things were clear about the accountability issue; that the Federal Government was creating a strongly dominant position over curricula content and teaching in general, and that the philosophies of school effectiveness that were prevalent in England and Wales, were now being migrated to Australia (Townsend, 1996). Australia had not embraced the school effectiveness indicators of quality to any great degree and there was an inherent concern that the traditional indicators of quality in Australian schools, “equality, participation and social justice” were being eroded (Townsend, 1996, p.118). Dawkins had precipitated a ‘good’ schools debate by suggesting that the quality indicators be the published results of state and system testing (Louden & Browne, 1993, p.127).

The national goals for Australian schooling were endorsed at the 1989 AEC meeting in Tasmania and eight broad learning areas established. A Curriculum Corporation was set up and curriculum mapping began in mathematics. Work had already commenced in the planning for national reporting and national assessment frameworks (Seddon, 1994, p.179).

Dawkin's proposals had prevailed, inspired more by the 'vertical fiscal imbalance' than by overwhelming state enthusiasm (Lingard et al, 1995).

More changes were on the way. There was a swing away from Labor in four of the five states that had been aligned with the Hawke Federal Government. Then in 1991 Hawke stepped down from Federal leadership and was replaced by Paul Keating. Keating was a staunch advocate of 'vertical fiscal imbalance' as an important tool in his management of the "macro-economic policy" (Lingard & Porter, 1997, p.11), and his term in office was characterised by the predominant position of the Commonwealth Government in areas which had traditionally and constitutionally been state responsibilities (Lingard & Porter, 1997).

Keating's Government initiated the Finn Report (Finn, 1991) into post-compulsory schooling and the 1992 Mayer Committee Report (Mayer, 1992) which created a list of employment related competencies for effective participation in work (Townsend, 1996, p.117). Both these reports and the 1992 Carmichael Report (Carmichael, 1992) continued to reinforce the links between education and employment, which had become a feature of the nation view of education policy. Interestingly, during this period the AEC launched the "Good Schools Strategy". It commenced in 1991 with a survey

responded to by 2300 schools. High on the list of things that made a 'good' school were staff (52% of responses), ethos (58%), curriculum (52%) and resources (48%) (Townsend, 1996, p.119).

By 1993, Keating's push to retain a strong Federal presence in education met a set-back at the AEC meeting in Perth. The shift towards Liberal 'coalition' governments in the states caused the Mayer Key Competencies, the national statements and the national curriculum and profiles to be rejected (Lingard *et al*, 1995; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998). The states had shown they wouldn't be dictated to. In 1996 the Howard Liberal Coalition replaced Labor in the Federal sphere and immediately set up a National Commission of Audit to look into the 'management and financial activities of the Commonwealth Government (Lingard & Porter, 1997). The suggestion from that Commission was that there be a return to the post World War Two scenario whereby the states look after government and non-government schools, and the Commonwealth administers the university and technical college sector. The trade-off from the states would be the provision of outcome data from the schools. By 1997 this process was underway, with Education Minister David Kemp having won agreement from the states for national standardised literacy testing at the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in March of that year. (Department of Education Western Australia, 2002; Lingard & Porter, 1997). Because the Commonwealth has more money than the states and will continue to be parsimonious with its grants, it is doubtful whether the states will be able to avoid dancing to the Commonwealth's educational restructuring tune (Lingard *et al*, 1995, p.41).

There is no doubt that Australia and the Australian States and Territories have become embroiled in the global and borderless phenomenon of public service restructuring (Lingard & Porter, 1997, p.15). Affecting the whole gamut of government instrumentalities, the restructuring processes have been particularly invasive in the education sphere. The fundamentals of the processes, decentralisation, devolution and marketisation, not only change the structures of schools but they set up fundamental philosophical dilemmas:

Moral traditions, according to Habermas, have largely lost their power and been replaced by a pragmatic set of values that allow, or encourage the bureaucratisation or co-modification of everyday life (Welch, 1996, p.18).

To take decentralisation, as an example, we find that the Federal and State Governments have sought to dismantle central departments of education and push services out into district and regional areas. This has the effect of cutting costs and avoiding duplication, but raises issues of equity and equality, bedrock principles of Australian education. In a vast, sparsely populated country, without a history of local and regional government, there is a level of inexperience and reluctance that inhibits the development of a decentralised system. Decentralisation is also constricted by the apparent lack of guidance emanating from the centre. Schools and communities are confused by the fact that policy makers “have little idea when embarking on the next wave of restructuring initiatives what the requirements are for their success” (O’Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.170).

A second, and for this research, more critical element of restructuring, is devolution. This element is akin to decentralisation in that it creates a

movement away from the centralised hub of power. However, whereas decentralisation is merely a distribution of administrative functions to smaller, local areas, the intention of devolution is to pass over decision making to districts and schools. Devolution of power is a real change for schools and has the potential to give individual schools the opportunity to build their own character. If schools can make decisions based on their own special circumstances and respond to the needs of their own communities, there is a chance that those schools may come to be regarded as ‘good’. The downside to local management is the real danger that the characteristics of egalitarianism and equity are lost. Affluent parents may well take control, skewing the school’s direction away from some sectors of the community. There is also the danger of a ‘back-to-basics’ lobby as schools try to become answerable to their local boards and councils (Apelt & Lingard, 1993; O’Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998; Welch, 1996). Devolution and decentralisation could well result in a deterioration of educational service as districts and school councils struggle with inadequate knowledge, resources and funds (Apelt & Lingard, 1993, p.69).

A third characteristic of restructuring, and one that is not immediately apparent, is the movement towards the marketplace philosophy. This is a key principle evident in the Thatcherite philosophies of the 1980s (Harman et al, 1991), and one that led to a competitive culture amongst schools in Britain. The basic premise of the marketplace is simple – open up schools to parent choice. Harman (1991, p.21) calls this “the politics of privatisation”. The offer of parent choice was part of the Fraser Government priorities in the

period 1976 to 1980 and it was included along with ‘quality and excellence’, and ‘community participation’ (Smart, 1982).

For governments, market forces are seen as excellent regulators of schools.

In an era when standards and accountability are the catchcry, the argument is that the competition of the marketplace will force schools to perform. In an atmosphere where responsiveness and flexibility are assets, the power of choice makes it imperative that schools respond. Successful schools will be those that produce the exam results and retain the student numbers. Failing schools will either have to lift their game or face closing their doors.

Whether the emulous environment of competition will ultimately produce better schools is, once again, open to question. The logic suggests that it will, but schools are complex organizations which serve a valuable purpose in the community. The marketplace may reduce education to a commodity in which the outcomes become more relevant than the process itself (Angus, 1992, p.349).

The affects of global restructuring and the pervasive nature of Federal Government policy need to be placed in the context of the state education systems which are at the centre of this thesis on ‘good’ schools. It is at the state level that the effect of national decisions and requirements translate into the “real world of schools, in which teachers and students are struggling to deal with curricula and do their jobs well” (Angus, 1992, p.389).

Western Australia

Arguably the largest state in the world (Tourism Commission, 1998),

Western Australia occupies the western third of the Australian continent. It is

a vast area of 2.5 million square kilometres, much of it dry and sparsely populated. The bulk of the population live in and around the capital city, Perth, which in 2000 was home to 1.37 million people (Regional Development Council, 2002). The remaining 27.3% of the population is spread between regional centres and isolated towns and settlements. The state's breadth and diversity has posed a challenge to education since the beginning of white settlement in 1829. Issues of egalitarianism are part of the Australian and Western Australian culture, and equity of service provision drove many of the early developments in education (Hoffman, 1994, p.4).

Western Australia was comprehensively isolated from the rest of Australia until gold discoveries of the 1890s and the advent of Federation in 1901. Like the other states, Western Australia was geographically compelled, and constitutionally required, to create and run its own system of education. At first, the only schools were those provided by the churches and it was not until 1847 that the first government-funded primary school emerged (Hoffman, 1994). In October 1893 the Education Department was formed and by the turn of the century the state had a highly centralised system of government education. All government support for the private schools had been withdrawn (Hoffman, 1994).

For the first half of the twentieth century all states and the Northern Territory independently administered their own schools with little Commonwealth interference, save for the regular Australian Education Council meetings which were initiated in 1936, and were to continue until the formation of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

(MCEETYA) in 1994. It was in the period after the Second World War that the Commonwealth Government began to support the states' government and non-government schools, firstly with tied capital grants, supplemented in 1969 with per-capita grants to non-government schools. The Federal grants for the period 1951 to 1973 did not threaten state control of education (Louden & Browne, 1993). In 1972 the Whitlam Labor Government was elected and a confluence of politics and economics put the Federal Government in a position to challenge the states' independent control over education. The 1973 Karmel Report "lifted Commonwealth spending on schools from \$364 to \$1091 million" (Marginson, 1997, p.46). Not only did this bring an imposing Federal presence into the states, but it also brought with it the seeds of policy change in the guise of "opportunity, diversity, choice, devolution and participatory citizenship" (Marginson, 1997, p.46).

In this thesis on the concept of 'good' schools, the influence of the Federal Government in the resourcing and cajoling of government state schools must not be overlooked. The Karmel Report *Schools in Australia* (Karmel, 1973) actively encouraged the loosening of "the centralised control of schools by State Education Authorities" (Angus, 1995, p.6). This first attempt at devolution was not a success but the Federal grants did promote innovative projects and programs for disadvantaged children throughout the various states' systems. The Federal Government influence, mainly due to the 'vertical fiscal imbalance', has continued to play a significant role in the configuration and purpose of individual schools.

With the ousting of the Whitlam Government in 1975, the Fraser Conservatives embarked on a program of 'New Federalism' whereby there was a diminished reforming zeal by the Commonwealth and an effort to return some responsibilities to the states (Louden & Browne, 1993; Smart, 1982). Interestingly, this period of reduced influence by the Federal Government was a time of decentralisation by the Western Australian Government. Hoffman (1994, p.5) describes how thirteen regional offices, headed by either regional directors, or superintendents, had been created in 1976. This development appeared to be a response to what the Karmel Report had encouraged, involvement of local communities purposefully in education. Loosened central control had arrived in Western Australia for the first time in 86 years (Hoffman, 1994, p.5).

It was the economic downturn of the 1980s that forced the Federal Governments of Fraser, and later Hawke, to attempt to rationalise the unaffordable expenditure on the public sector. The logic behind the restructuring policy was deceptively simple - because the earnings of the 'productive' part of the economy, such as primary products, minerals and manufactured goods was falling, there was not enough money to support the 'non-productive' elements in the economy such as the public service (Marginson, 1997, p.75). The 1986 Government White Paper *Managing Change in the Public Sector : A Statement of the Government's Position* (Western Australia Parliament, 1986) tabled in the Western Australian Parliament on 19 June, was the state response to the growing financial crisis (Hoffman, 1994, p.6). The review of the Education Department, culminating in this White Paper, had recommended some organisational changes to the

Department which involved an administrative realignment, and a new title, Ministry of Education, to reflect that adjustment. This exercise was about streamlining the central office, attempting to create more co-ordination with the various education areas and cutting costs (Hoffman, 1994, p.6).

Associated with this White Paper was the 1986 review of schools entitled *A Review of the Administration of State Schools in Western Australia* (Hoffman, 1994, p.7). There were 74 recommendations from this review which focused on efficient use of educational expenditure. Chief amongst these recommendations was that schools must become more self-determining and responsive (Hoffman, 1994, p.7). In this regard the functional review was echoing the recommendations of the Beasley Committee which, two years earlier, had urged greater community participation in schools (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998).

A summary of the State Schools' Administrative Review became, in 1987, a document entitled *Better Schools in Western Australia: A Programme for Improvement* (Ministry of Education, 1987). First released to assembled senior officers of the Ministry of Education early in the year, it was later launched, in an uncharacteristically glossy format (Seddon, 1994, p.181), to orchestrated groups of school administrators. Prepared without wide consultation, and hardly resembling a 'draft' document, *Better Schools* met with strong opposition. As Angus (1995, p.10) suggests, "from day one, the reform program was represented by its opponents as conspiratorial, anti-educational and impractical."

Unpopular though it may have been *Better Schools* was certainly a reflection of the difficulties facing education systems throughout Australia, and it offered some clear indicators to developments for the future:

In a system of 750 schools, spread over a third of the continent, and with a history of highly centralised decision making, the reforms proposed for Western Australia in the ‘Better Schools’ report were the most radical this century (Angus, 1995, p.8).

Prepared under the stewardship of the new Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Education, Dr Warren Loudon, the *Better Schools* document “promoted the rationale that good schools created a good system” (O’Donoghue & Dimmock, 1995, p.71). The ‘good’ schools envisaged by Loudon and his team were to be ones that had the devolved “authority (and capacity) to determine the way in which the school could achieve the agreed outcomes” (Angus, 1995, p.9). This was to be the era of the “self-determining school” (Angus, 1995, p.7).

The Government was attempting to implement all of the recommendations of the 1986 schools’ review with the exception of those relating to the devolution of school staffing (Hoffman, 1994, p.7). There was no immediate transfer of powers to schools but work began on policies that would gradually be introduced from 1989. A five year timeline had been allocated for implementation.

In essence, *Better Schools* aimed to streamline Central Office, restructure the existing 13 regional offices and elevate the schools “from being somewhat passive and powerless towards being more self-determining and responsible, with greater participation by staff, parents and the community in school

management” (Hoffman, 1994, p.7). Angus (1995, p.9) sees six main elements to the *Better Schools* program, These six elements epitomise what State Governments, the Federal Government, and various governments overseas were instigating as part of the push towards the efficiency and effectiveness of state-run education systems. Perhaps top of the list of elements was accountability, both financial and educational. This was a cost-cutting exercise but also an attempt to raise standards. From 1987 onwards, Western Australian schools were to come under increasing pressure to produce an acceptable standard of outcomes. There has been intense government and public interest in ‘value for money’ from schools (Lingard & Porter, 1997, p.41) and regular testing, auditing and reporting have become part of the modern context for education.

The *Better Schools* interest in measuring outcomes rather than inputs meant that there was a need for enhanced policy, standards and frameworks statements to be issued from Central Office. To a degree these appeared in the guise of the endearingly named ‘Squiggle Documents’ that began appearing in schools from 1989. These booklets, published by the Ministry of Education, fleshed out further requirements of the ‘Better Schools’ program and, as such, represented some policy direction from the Centre. In order of appearance the booklets were, ‘School Plans’ (Ministry of Education Western Australia, 1989), ‘School Decision Making’ (Ministry of Education Western Australia, 1990), ‘School Accountability’ (Ministry of Education Western Australia, 1991), and ‘School Financial Planning’ (Ministry of Education Western Australia, 1991). Though the ‘Squiggle Documents’ were an excellent resource for schools, and retained their

usefulness for the following decade, there was a general lack of clarity in other aspects of Central Office regulations and policies. As O'Donoghue and Dimmock (1998, p.170) point out in regards to system-level policy makers:

They have little idea when embarking on the next wave of restructuring initiatives what the requirements are for their success, what problems are likely to ensue in the process and what are the likely or realistic outcomes and effects.

In addition to concentrating on outcomes, instigating financial and educational audits, requesting the development of school plans, and restructuring the district and central offices, *Better Schools*, as the policy booklets suggested, required schools to run their own budgets for almost everything except salaries and to set up School Councils. It appeared that there was a significant degree of devolution to the school level, but in reality it was a decentralisation of responsibilities rather than a devolution of power. Schools had more tasks but, if anything, Central Office had strengthened its power through its control of audit process and curriculum outcome requirements. Townsend (1996, p.126) sees a general trend in *Better Schools* reforms whereby “there is a case to be made that some systems are implementing a covert centralisation as more powerful control mechanisms replace others that are done away with” (Also; Angus, 1995, p.14).

Union representatives and a wide spectrum of government school teaching and administrative staff, believed they detected something ‘covert’ going on. The lack of open and participative contribution and consultation in the preparation and presentation of the document, certainly upset many stakeholders. There was also strong opposition to local staff selection proposals, lack of policy clarification and impending industrial

complications. The school principals were also concerned with their proposed new role as middle managers with heavy responsibilities, greater obligations and seemingly few enhanced powers. In 1989, as a result of pressures created by the *Better Schools* proposals, principals lined up alongside teachers in the first general strike for 50 years (Angus, 1995, p.14).

Despite some upheaval, the *Better Schools* directives made an indelible mark on government schools in Western Australia. School Decision Making Groups were formed, though with very limited powers, schools took charge of many additional budget areas, the four policy booklets rolled out into staffrooms and 13 Regional Education Offices became 29 District Offices (Hoffman, 1994, p.7). The proposed halving of the Central Office bureaucracy never eventuated and the audit role of school superintendents met with a very luke-warm response from the superintendents themselves. In 1994, there was a review of the impact of the *Better Schools* policy. The committee conducting this review was led by Dr Norm Hoffman, Chairman of the Ministerial Independent Assessment Group on Devolution, and was required to report to the then Minister of Education, Norman Moore. The review was prompted by the suggestion that *Better Schools* had created some instability and unexpected changes (Hoffman, 1994, p.111). Hoffman's task was to reign-in what was considered to be some of the extravagances and to re-establish some boundaries. It was a push to ensure that the government was getting value for money ... a push for efficiency.

The review committee looked at all the restructuring initiatives that *Better Schools* had introduced. It examined their impact and endeavoured to project

them into the future. Twenty-five recommendations were made and many of them are just being completed as we enter the first decade of the twenty-first century. Some recommendations have not yet been achieved.

Chief amongst Hoffman's recommendations were the need to introduce teacher performance management, annual reports of whole-school activities to parents, changes to the Education Act, the development of an outcomes-based curriculum framework and enhanced powers for school councils.

There is a definite 'accountability' flavour about these recommendations.

The argument was that, in return for increased independence, schools had a responsibility to increase their accountability to their 'clients'. Hoffman's committee insisted that the accountability regime be linked to school improvement and that it "not be pursued solely as an end in itself" (Hoffman, 1994, p.63). The committee stated that schools needed to provide data which would show absolute standards in achievement of outcomes, performance relative to previous performance, and performance relative to the performance of similar schools. Hoffman expected some of the accountability data to come from the existing system of random sample testing which his committee strongly supported. It recommended that this random sample testing 'Monitoring Standards in Education' (MSE), developed by the research section of the Education Department, be extended to allow public reporting against all of the performance indicators in the Education Department's 'Statement of Ethos and Purpose' (Hoffman, 1994, p.80).

Hoffman and his committee had produced a report that would have significant implications for the development of education and schools well into the twenty-first century. In particular, it drew attention to the challenges of devolution and the reciprocal need for enhanced accountability. It placed the school in a position of importance as an ally of state and national development. It is a report that covers the managerial aspects of education with reference to decision-making, planning, performance management, regulatory framework and budgets. Above all, it is a report about accountability, an issue that has become the central and centralising focus of schools at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Angus, 1992, p.379; Cuttance, 1994; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p.166).

The Hoffman committee was very clear about the need for schools to monitor their performance and to use the data in a process of school improvement. The merit of this standpoint was accepted by the Department with the result that, in 1996, a draft system for monitoring and improvement was introduced to all Western Australian government schools. The information was contained in a small twenty-two page document bearing the title *School Performance: A Framework for Improving and Reporting* (Education Department, 1997). *School Performance* was fundamentally a self-assessment tool whereby a school was able to collect suitable data and apply it to a measurement matrix. The measurements on the matrix were drawn from school effectiveness research. They were – ‘Improving School Performance’, ‘Teaching and Learning’, ‘Leadership’, ‘Managing Staff’, ‘Learning Environment’ and ‘Interacting with the Community’.

It was expected that, in each school, all of the staff would sit down together, work through the indicators and plot the performance of their particular school. From this profile they could then draft a plan for future improvement. The results of the self-assessment would also form the basis of an accountability discussion with both the school council and the District Director.

School Performance outlined exactly what the Education Department believed constituted a ‘good’ school. The document is quite specific on these criteria, with each indicator being divided up into sub-categories.

‘Leadership’, for instance, is subdivided into – ‘Communicating a Common and Clear Vision’, ‘Empowering Staff’, ‘Managing Change’, ‘Evaluating and Responding to Feedback’ and ‘Sharing and Promoting the Education Department Ethos’. These sub-categories are further defined with a list of pointers. Thus, it was made clear with the *School Performance* document what was valued from the Education Department of Western Australia’s (EDWA) perspective. The criteria used for the measurement are taken directly from school effectiveness literature, and the *School Performance* process indicates that a reflection on performance against effectiveness criteria can lead to school improvement.

By the mid 1990s the elements of restructuring and future context for education in Western Australia were being outlined by the then Director General of the State Education Department, Cheryl Vardon:

Right now all states and territories are moving to reform school systems in response to changes in Federal funding policies. Competition for students is the name of the game, together with a blurring of the distinctions between

government and non-government schools and an improvement in the choice parents have for education of their children (Vardon, 1997, p.5).

This statement by Vardon is perceptive and illuminating. It encompasses the economic pressures, “the politics of privatisation” (Beare & Boyd, 1993, p.9; Welch, 1996, p.11), “the growing power of the Federal Government, and the marketisation of schools” (Marginson, 1997 p.240). Implicit in Vardon’s statement, but not delineated, was the aspect of accountability, in some ways the thread that ties much of restructuring together. The government education system in Western Australia by now had four separate avenues through which the government could measure outcomes. The *School Performance* (1996) was an annual whole-school review conducted by the school in liaison with the School Superintendent, and subsequently aggregated by Central Office into a system report to parliament. The new Curriculum Framework and Outcomes Statements (1998) were creating curriculum improvement plans in all schools which were subject to annual District Education Office review. The state-based Monitoring Standards in Education Tests (MSE) were being randomly applied to government schools each year, and had been since 1989. Results from these tests were used for public accountability and program improvement. Finally, there were the Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Tests (WALNA) which had their genesis in the Federal Government’s push to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the nation’s education system. The idea was introduced to the Australian Education Council meeting in Darwin in 1988 by Dawkins, and came to fruition in March 1997 at a meeting of Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers (Department of Education, 2002). WALNA is a set

of tests, initially only in reading, writing and spelling, but later extended to numeracy, conducted in all state schools, at years 3, 5 and 7, annually.

Results from these tests are used by the State Government to monitor school performance and the results also become part of a national database on literacy and numeracy achievement. Parents receive test scores for their own children and a general report on their school's level of achievement in the tests.

The intensity of accountability is increasing in light of the government's change of focus from inputs to outputs (Angus, 1992, p.389). There may be more to come. Hoffman (1994) in recommendation sixteen, alluded to the establishment of a 'Schools Review Unit' which would be independent of the "line-management structure which links schools to the Director General of Education" (Hoffman, 1994, p.XIII). Such a scheme was promoted and trialed in several Australian States by Scottish educator, Peter Cuttance. On July 7 and 8, 1998, Cuttance conducted some workshops with Education Department Staff in Perth. At the conclusion of the forum Cuttance outlined part of his vision to the local press:

As well as an annual report, school should expect to undergo an external review to ensure they adhere to expected standards ... The review team would have to report directly to the Education Department Director General and the Education Minister." (The West Australian, June 9, 1998, p.10).

In line with the recommendations of the Vickery Report of 1993, and a subsequent recommendation in Hoffman's Report (Hoffman, 1994, Recommendation 15, p.V), a new Education Act was proclaimed in 1999. This Act, and its accompanying Regulatory Framework, has been a source of

clarification and empowerment for schools. Some of the flexibility and authority, promised by devolution, has now come into being. Benefiting most from the legislative changes is the School Council giving the local community a genuine say in local school direction and development.

Some of the future change that may occur in the Western Australian education system could emerge from a recent review of government schools conducted by the newly installed State Labor Government. This review, chaired by Professor Alan Robson, reported after twelve weeks' investigation, to the Minister for Education, Alan Carpenter. The title of the report was *Investing in Government Schools: Putting Children First* (Robson, 2001). It concentrated on a review of the "structures, support services and resources provided by the agencies within the education portfolio to government schools" (Robson, 2001, p.23).

Much of the report concentrates on the 'unbalanced funding pattern' between government and private schools (Robson, 2001, p.33). This raises the fear that, if the trend of funding continues, government schools will end up catering only for "those who cannot afford to send their children to private schools" (Robson, 2001, p.33). The report makes the point that government schools have been, and should continue to be, a force for equity and social cohesion. This is a fundamental role of a 'good' government school.

The Robson Report, focussing as it does on resources, suggests that the physical appearance of many schools is detrimental to the perception of government schooling. Government schools are "below community

expectations” (Robson, 2001, p.37) and the recommendation is for maintenance standards to be raised.

A good deal is said about pastoral care in schools and the importance of children feeling that their school environment is “safe and supportive” (Robson, 2001, p.45). Pastoral care is linked with extra-curricular activities such as camps, projects and organised sport which can have the effect of “enriching the opportunities available to children” (Robson, 2001, p.10). Pastoral care and extra-curricular activities form part of the collaboration and social cohesion that the report sees as a prime role of government schooling and an element of a ‘good’ school.

The Robson report also makes mention of standards and outcomes. Literacy and numeracy are seen to be of fundamental importance and public expectations are for the “highest standard of excellence” in these and other curriculum areas (Robson, 2001, p.39). Robson warns that some of the Education Department’s accountability requirements, designed to create this excellence, tend to concentrate on “compliance and inputs” rather than on authentic demonstrations of excellence (Robson, 2001, p.55).

Finally, Robson hones in on the importance of good teaching as a critical element of a ‘good’ government school. The report encourages the development of teachers who “care about knowledge, who hold high expectations of their students and whose mastery of classroom practice is as complete as possible” (Robson, 2001, p.71). Without good teachers there would be no effective improvements from enhanced physical, monetary or policy initiatives.

The report produced by the Robson committee is the latest review of the conception of government schools. Though dealing with a changed economic and political environment, many of the elements of ‘good’ schools that it proposes, don’t appear to have changed much over the years. What has changed is the role and motivation of governments as they struggle to remain viable amidst increasing global competition.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the context to a study on ‘good’ schools. Initially, the chapter took an international focus looking at post Second World War developments in education from a national government perspective. The highlighted educational systems were those of England and Wales, and the USA. Despite the differences in the structure of government in these two regions, with the USA having state-based responsibility and England and Wales relying on “a national system, locally administered”, similar centralising and restructuring forces began coming into operation around the mid 1980s. A world economic downturn forced national governments to target schools as centres for the development of ‘human capital’. Attention turned to ‘efficiency and effectiveness’ which largely translated into cost-cutting and standardised testing. By the end of the 1990s England and Wales had developed a highly centralised system under the auspices of the 1988 Education Reform Act which promoted a national curriculum and national testing. In the USA, the *Nation at Risk* report was a wake-up call to Americans, aimed at improving competitiveness on the world’s economic stage and designed to put rigor into a locally-based, state administered system of education. In both situations there were indications of

politicisation of education of the nature Marginson (1997) describes as ‘The New Right’.

An analysis of developments in the Australian education sphere, for the same period, produced more evidence of an international trend towards devolution, privatisation, and the paradoxical centralisation of audit and policy initiatives. These similarities, which O’Donoghue and Dimmock (1998, p.164) call “surprising and disturbing”, have had a significant impact on the Australian system which boasted a tradition of egalitarianism and which had been based constitutionally on the authority of the states. The social cost of the restructuring process is particularly relevant to the more localised issues of individual schools.

A close analysis of the Western Australian state school system gives some fine-grained exposure to the effects of international and national contexts at a local level. It is possible to see the effects of tighter budgets and the move towards marketisation of schools. The phenomena that Welch (1996, p.14) calls the “chimerical nature of devolution” is apparent in the school principal’s role in the self-managing school, where increased responsibility isn’t always matched with increased authority.

Amidst what Mahwhinney (1998, p.100) calls the desperate race “to become competitive in the global economy”, it is difficult to identify the ‘good’ school. Governments would appear to value efficiency and some internationally acceptable effectiveness; parents, with the freedom of choice, are probably looking to academic excellence, school uniforms, strong

traditions and moral character; whilst educators themselves, caught up in movement that they can't control, must value what is best for the child.

Chapter Three now presents the literature review underpinning the study reported later in the thesis. This review centres around two challenging works, one by Ball which highlights the paradox of 'good' schools, and another by Rose, which is a report of a physical and intellectual search for examples of 'good' schools across America. Other texts are reviewed under the headings of school effectiveness, school improvement, school restructuring, school accountability and school culture.