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Social values and schooling: Curriculum, counselling and the education of the adolescent, 1930-1970s

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Abstract

This paper maps the background to a cultural history of adolescence in Australia in the period 1930s-1970s. The project examines scholarly and professional ideas about the purposes of secondary schooling, debates about the personal and civic values young people should embody, and ideals of citizenship and the kinds of social knowledge that schools should foster. These are matters that command considerable public and policy attention today, and are commonly aligned with concerns about students' wellbeing, which is part of personal development curriculum but also tied to whole-school and system agendas, supported by extensive policy frameworks and service provision. The following paper develops three interrelated themes. First, it outlines some of the ways in which our study is examining antecedents to contemporary concerns about social values and wellbeing, and the kinds of policy and curriculum responses they have generated in earlier times. Second, we bring together the study of school curriculum and the study of student guidance and counselling, arguing that this allows for a more complex view of the formation of the 'personal' and of social knowledge and dispositions and the relationship between the two. Third, we outline the rationale for our decision to focus on the decades of the 1930s, 50s and 70s, and show why we are exploring the history of adolescence via an examination of school curriculum (policy reforms, knowledge areas, materials and texts) and student psychological guidance. This includes consideration of the influence of international philanthropy upon the translation of ideas, practices and policy models in Australian education. Finally, much recent discussion about citizenship and school values has tended to be dominated by polemic and polarised positions, when their significance warrants responses from a variety of research-based perspectives. Historical studies provide valuable vantage points from which to assess the purposes and values of secondary schooling and its role in fostering young peoples' wellbeing and educating them towards citizenship.

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Introduction

This paper maps the background to a cultural history of adolescence in Australia in the period 1930s-1970s. The project examines scholarly and professional ideas about the purposes of secondary schooling, debates about the personal and civic values young people should embody, and ideals of citizenship and the kinds of social knowledge that schools should foster. These are matters that command considerable public and policy attention today, and are commonly aligned with concerns about students' wellbeing, which is part of personal development curriculum but also tied to whole-school and system agendas, supported by extensive policy frameworks and service provision. The following paper develops three main themes. First, it outlines some of the ways in which our study is examining antecedents to contemporary concerns about social values and wellbeing, and the kinds of policy and curriculum responses they have generated in earlier times. Second, in order to understand these matters and the education of the adolescent we bring together the study of school curriculum and the study of student guidance and counselling, arguing that this allows for a more complex view of the formation of the 'personal' and of social knowledge and dispositions and the relationship between the two. Third, we outline the rationale for our decision to focus on the decades of the 1930s, 50s and 70s, and show why we are exploring the history of adolescence via an examination of school curriculum (policy reforms, knowledge areas, materials and texts) and student psychological guidance.

Clearly, there are epistemological and ethical dimensions to questions about curriculum, citizenship and social values. But there are also historical dimensions to these questions, and to how we conceive of what matters for education of young people in the present. Historical perspectives assist us to understand both the specificity of the present and to gain some temporal and critical distance on current taken-for-granted. As US curriculum historian Herbert Kliebard has argued, 'history has a role to play in shaping educational policy, particularly by providing contextual clues as to what succeeds and what fails' (2002: 126). Finally, much recent discussion about citizenship and school values has tended to be dominated by polemic and polarised positions, when their significance warrants responses from a variety of research-based perspectives. Historical studies provide valuable vantage points from which to assess the purposes and values of secondary schooling and its role in fostering young peoples' wellbeing and educating them towards citizenship.

Social values and the purposes of schooling

A central purpose of formal schooling is the education of students for future citizenship and the development of their social skills and values. How schools actually perform such work and what these social values might be are, of course, much-contested questions, and the points of contention vary over time and place. Recent public debate about the teaching of Australian History in schools underlined the close connections between curriculum and wider cultural and political anxieties (Clendinnen 2006).

Associated public discussions regarding national identity and citizenship similarly brought into view the responsibility of schools to forge student and citizen identities and the type of social values schools were, or were not, encouraging (McLeod & Yates 2006). The development of a national framework and school programs for Values Education (DEST 2005; Lovett & Toomey 2006) is one notable response to these matters, as were recent attempts to formalise a compulsory national curriculum for Year 9 Australian History (Taylor 2007).

A focus on values and citizenship characterises the various current State curriculum frameworks on 'essential learnings' or 'new basics'. For example, the *Victorian Essential Learnings* identifies 'Interpersonal development'; 'Personal learning'; and 'Civics and Citizenship' as core domains of learning for students in years P-10 (VELS 2007). Equally widespread are discussions about youth wellbeing, from anxieties about obesity and substance abuse to the impact of online worlds and digital culture. Concerns about the emotional and psychological wellbeing of young people and their capacity to negotiate schooling and complex social worlds also, in turn, fuel debates about school values: what is the role of schools in managing and supporting the conduct, attitudes and outlook of young people? How well schools prepare students for their futures, and address the needs of those young people who, for diverse reasons, may be struggling, are longstanding questions; and they require knowledge and skill answers as well as moral and ethical ones. This paper provides a preliminary account of important antecedents to these current concerns about schooling and social values, and indicates the value of developing historically-informed perspectives on these national priorities and contemporary challenges.

Two strands of research on young people provide useful background to this discussion. A flourishing field of Australian and international youth studies scholarship documents the diverse influences on youth identity formation today, frequently exploring the impact of and interactions between schooling and youth cultures (Nayak & Kehily 2007; McLeod & Allard 2007; Tsolidis 2006; Dwyer & Wyn 2001). This work is predominantly oriented to the present and located within sociological and cultural studies traditions. Our approach is influenced by these traditions, but adopts a more historical focus on youth identity formation, giving explicit attention to curriculum and school guidance services, and to their underlying constructions of 'adolescence' and the 'good student'. A second important strand comprises cultural histories of youth and childhood (Lesko 2001; Baker 2001; Bessant 1993) and historical studies of adolescence and schooling (Campbell 1995; Cormack 2005; Johnson 1993). These offer important and related substantive and methodological insights, such as Cormack's (2005, 2007) genealogy of adolescence and the English curriculum in early 20th century South Australia, or Johnson's (1993) study of gendered constructions of the adolescent and the influence of psychology in 1950s Australia. However, while these studies are complementary to ours, additional specific questions motivate our project, notably those concerning the intersection between school values, the 'good student', and curriculum and guidance, topics which we explore comparatively over the 1930s, 50s and 70s. Thus, despite some important historical work, and a robust tradition of contemporary youth studies, the cultural history of adolescence and Australian education nevertheless remains strikingly under-researched.

Our theoretical and methodological approach is broadly genealogical, influenced by post-Foucauldian scholarship and cultural sociology and history (Spillman 2002; Popkewitz et al 2001). These descriptors are often used loosely, but we adopt them to describe an approach that seeks to research i) ‘the history of the present’ and the conditions that make it possible; and ii) the history of ideas and meaning-making via everyday or mundane practices and discourses – for example, curriculum texts, advice to teachers, students’/teachers’ memories – as well as via disciplinary and intellectual traditions. Popkewitz et al (2001: ix) argue that cultural history is distinguished from traditional intellectual history by its concern ‘with knowledge as a field of cultural practices and cultural reproduction’. A genealogical method is guided by the proposition that the present is not the inevitable outcome of the past. It aims to make the present strange, to examine the particularity of the conditions (events, reforms, ideas) that made the present and certain histories (but not others) possible. By drawing out what is specific about the present, this approach also has practical benefits, showing how ‘problems’ are defined or arise and the kind of responses they generate (eg Cormack 2005). Genealogy requires detailed archival research (Foucault 1984) in dialogue with present interests – political, cultural, theoretical. There are strong methodological traditions to draw upon (Baker & Heyning 2004), and a growing interest in developing new directions in the cultural history of Australian education (Green 2005). A combined focus on counselling and curriculum presents a unique opportunity for researching the multifaceted influences that come into play in educating the adolescent and governing the norms of the good student. This paper, and the larger study to which it forms a background, builds on this existing work and aims to contribute to the further development of these approaches in Australian educational history.

Bringing together curriculum and counselling: an historical perspective

By bringing together the fields of curriculum and counselling we hope to open up some new directions for researching the education of the adolescent and add to understandings of the role of schools in shaping values *and* wellbeing. These domains – curriculum and counselling – are typically studied separately, but as we argue below, they are inextricably linked in the task of citizenship formation.

The first main focus is the curriculum areas variously named Civics, or Citizenship, Moral and Values Education, which, in various ways, have articulated the norms of good student and good citizen, and the types of knowledge and values seen as necessary for young people and future adults. Citizenship education encompasses formal curriculum areas devoted to the study *of* civic life, as well as education *for* citizenship (Marginson 1993, Kennedy 1997). However, even subjects dedicated to the study of civics are not usually confined to learning the principles of government (Hogan 1995; Gilbert 1992). From its beginnings in the late 19th century, civics education in Australia has attended to the cultivation of ‘character as well as capacity’ (Meredyth & Thomas 1999: 2). Citizenship also involves forms of identity and social interaction: ‘it is about the kind of people we become, and the kind of people we encourage or allow our children to become’ (Cullen 1997: 2). For example, one goal of the Australian

comprehensive secondary school in the 1960s was ‘to provide a common curriculum core to all Australian youth’, reflecting a ‘firm sense of what was required to produce Australian citizens’ (Campbell & Sherington 2006: 159). Type of school, formal and informal curriculum, pedagogical practices, and support services all contribute to the shaping of student identities and their (re)making as future citizens (Popkewitz 2006).

The content and form of this identity and knowledge work varies over time, as do the curriculum areas deemed most responsible or appropriate for the work of citizen formation. That is, in addition to curriculum areas designated as Values or Civics Education, other subject areas have either been associated with or attributed special responsibilities for citizenship and values formation. Of course, this is the work of schooling in general, but our specific focus is the changing functions and aims of particular subject areas and the different ways in which curriculum knowledge and values about citizenship were articulated and mediated in different historical periods, via for example, curriculum policy, text books and so forth. For example, in the present, history is regarded as having special responsibilities for citizen formation. Yet, in preceding decades, English and Health and Human Relations have held comparable positions (McLeod 1999). Students’ dispositions and values are, however, obviously shaped by more than the formal organization of school curriculum; other popular and formal knowledges come into play, including those about the care of the ‘whole person’.

Student wellbeing and welfare have thus become important foci of contemporary education policy, leading to an expansion of student support and counselling services. The idea of wellbeing represents a convergence of social and psychological concerns, and is aligned with the language of risk and resilience. These languages have histories and part of that history lies in child and adolescent psychological guidance, and the work of schools in managing, preventing, diagnosing and measuring problems of adjustment and mental and emotional wellbeing. A second main focus of our historical enquiry is thus tracing the development of student guidance and psychological support services, and building an historical account of these practices in schools throughout the mid-twentieth century in Australia. As we argue below, transnational influences, especially from the US and the UK, are important to the history of these practices.

Psychological knowledge and the future citizen

The proliferation of psychological knowledge during the twentieth century (Rose 1990; Damousi 2005; Wright 2008) profoundly shaped ideas and practices in education. Psychology provided the means for identifying, diagnosing and managing students who were judged as outside developmental norms, or who appeared to have ‘problems’ or did not conform to prevailing ideals of the ‘good student’, which in turn placed them at risk of not becoming good citizens (McCallum 1990). Theories of cognitive and personality development infused curriculum programs, notions of individual difference underwrote mental testing, and concerns about adjustment and maladjustment gave impetus to the establishment of various forms of guidance and counselling. The founding of child guidance clinics in some education departments (Cook 1944) and the introduction of comprehensive schemes of vocational guidance during the 1930s (Giles

1937) constitutes a significant event in the spread of psychological strategies and the governing of student identities.

Initial research shows that during these formative years guidance clinics and psychology services were limited both in scope and focus, but were well-established in some states by the 1950s. As a senior official in the NSW education department noted, the school counselling service, 'instituted originally as a means of giving guidance at the transitional stage, and of preparing for vocational guidance, has become a service of general practitioners in educational, vocational and all kinds of psychological guidance' (Verco 1958). During this period, social psychology was an influential framework for interpreting the dramas and characteristics of adolescence (Erikson 1950; Johnson 1993). It both gave impetus to the guidance movement and had a powerful impact upon educational ideas and curriculum practices, evident across a range of educational reforms underpinned by notions of, for example, the peer group, adolescent adjustment, the sex-role and so forth (McLeod 2006). By the 1970s, however, a stronger interest in *counselling* emerged and school guidance services adopted a more therapeutic approach in dealing with educational and personal problems (Wright 2007). This shift to managing the emotional health and wellbeing of all individuals – not only the troubled adolescents – paralleled broader socio-cultural change, manifested in, for example, a heightened interest in self-reflexivity and the project of the self (Giddens 1991), and also found expression in pedagogical strategies such as values clarification.

These changing emphases in psychological guidance had significant consequences for understandings of the adolescent, consequences that extended beyond the practice of counselling and guidance services. The expansion of these services pointed to changing roles for schools as they took on ever more responsibility for diagnosing and managing the emotional and psychological needs of students. How these responsibilities were understood and put into practice has affected school and student cultures more generally, not only those students who were the focus of interventions. Further, changing emphases shed light on the shifting norms of the 'good student' by elaborating the characteristics of such a student and by delineating and serving the needs of those who deviated from these norms. The history of these services is therefore important in understanding the history of adolescence.

Surprisingly, although there are extensive histories of child guidance in the US (Horn 1989) and the UK (Sampson 1980), comparable Australian accounts remain limited. Some important Australian historical studies in related areas do exist, notably those on child welfare (van Krieken 1991) and vocational guidance (Holbrook 1989; Dixon 2002), but a history is yet to be written on the diverse forms of student management and support that developed from the international child guidance movement during the interwar years and evolved into an extensive system of student guidance and counselling during the second half of the twentieth century.

As with the history of curriculum, the development of guidance clinics in Australian schools was caught up in wider, transnational intellectual and political currents, particularly the traffic in ideas and personnel between the US, the UK and other Commonwealth countries (Cunningham 1938; Butts 1955). These transnational dialogues are an important part of Australian educational history, and warrant further

attention. Campbell and Sherington (2006: 49), for example, note the influence upon the development of Australian comprehensive schools of British and North American discussions about ‘the future of the education of the “adolescent”’. Yet, as Holbrook (1989) observes, while the influence of the UK and Europe on Australian education is relatively well-established, accounts of the influence of the US have been considerably less common. This history thus builds on and aims to contribute to knowledge about the circuits of transpacific and transatlantic exchanges on educational reform, specifically investigating their influence on Australian secondary curriculum and adolescent support services during the middle decades of the 20th century.

Travelling ideas in the 1930s, 50s and 70s: Decades of disruption and change

A significant feature of educational discussions in the decades of the 1930s 1950s and 1970s was extended professional and scholarly reflection on the purposes and organization of post-primary schooling, as well as on the education and guidance of the adolescent. Educational practices and systems are rarely static, and it is a common trope in the history of education for the period under study to be identified as one of change. Nevertheless, our preliminary research shows that these three periods, both independently and sequentially, are especially important for understanding the influence of transnational ideas on school values, citizenship and the education of the adolescent. Circulating within each of these three decades were influential theories and models for understanding the education of the adolescent – eg. progressivism, child-centredness, social psychology – and the legacies of these continue to be felt in educational reforms.

The lineage and intellectual history of these ideas and their manifestations in policy, curriculum, school practices and experiences require further investigation, and our analysis of these is, in turn, underpinned by the notion of ‘*travelling concepts*’ (Hultqvist 2004). This term captures a critical and historical attention to the transnational flow of ideas and practices, embodied in the movement of ‘key players’ and more subtly evident in text books, reports, policy and emerging professional and academic commonsense. Our analytic focus is thus the shifting and influential ‘*systems of reason*’ that frame discourses and practices regarding the education and guidance of the adolescent. A core purpose of our investigation into ‘systems of knowledge (or the rules of reason) is to understand how the “common senses” of social and cultural life are invented’ (Popkewitz et al 2001: ix). A second core purpose is to analyse shifts, movements, disruptions or challenges to those common senses. The close-up study of one decade allows for depth and nuance, and the sequence of decades allows for sufficient spread of time to capture a sense of changing themes and concerns over the mid twentieth century.

Each of these three decades can fruitfully be studied separately (eg Johnson 1993). But there are additional benefits to be gained by examining them comparatively and in aggregate, allowing us to assess cultural and generational change over time. This includes offering insights into the effects of collective memory of educational reform – how 1930s educational ideas were regarded in the 1950s, and how both the 30s and the 50s were recalled, remembered or reviled in the 1970s. This will allow us to explore

how, in these three decades, remaining memory of earlier curriculum reforms enabled or constrained reform action. This, in turn, may open up ways of exploring how we in the present remember reforms from the 1970s or 80s, and how these (partial, nostalgic, repudiated) memories, or lapses of memory shape contemporary reform efforts. Though it is not possible in this paper to provide an in-depth analysis of each of these decades, we provide a snapshot of some emblematic events to convey the concerns of the times and indicate the types of issues that we are researching.

Beginning with the 1930s, the proceedings of the 1937 travelling conference, ‘The Fellowship of Education’, reveal that Australian and international educators were much exercised by the purposes of post-primary schooling and the philosophical underpinnings of curriculum (see too Green 2003). This conference was funded by the US Carnegie Corporation and was a kind of a ‘moveable feast’ of educational ideas that travelled to capital cities in Australia with speakers from many parts of the world – South Africa, Europe, New Zealand, the US, the UK – who delivered talks on their views on the pressing educational matters of the day and their implications for Australian education. There were extended discussions on the psychology of adolescence, child-centred curriculum and the possibilities of citizenship and education for democracy. Echoing the widespread fears across Europe and the Atlantic about totalitarianism, propaganda and the vulnerability of poorly-educated and irrational citizens, Professor I.L. Kandel (Teachers College, New York) observed that a key challenge facing Australian education was ‘the issue between education for democracy and education for confusion, between education for enlightenment or training for uncritical acquiescence, between education for intellectual freedom and progress or indoctrination in a fixed ideology’ (Cunningham, 1938: vii). Kandel had recently undertaken a 6-month study tour of Australia (also Carnegie-funded) and reported bluntly on the education system’s strengths and weaknesses.

Two decades later, Professor R.F. Butts (also from Teachers College) undertook another Carnegie-funded study tour of Australian education in the 1950s, and he too published his views on the assumptions underlying Australian education (Butts 1955), with recommendations for reform and direction. The end of the 1950s saw the expansion of secondary schooling and a corresponding interest in the life and character of the adolescent (Campbell & Sherington 2006). The Australian Council for Educational Research (which had itself received considerable funding from the Carnegie Corporation) published a series of comparative studies during the 1950s (Carnegie funded) on *The Adjustment of Youth* in the US, Australia and the UK. This report designated adolescence as a ‘social problem’ and drew on the language of social psychology to explain the influences on adolescents and the challenges facing schools in educating them.

Influenced by the ‘new sociology’ of education and social movements, schooling in the 1970s was seen by many as both reproducing inequalities and holding the potential for social transformation. Whereas earlier decades emphasised conformity to norms and roles as a sign of adolescent adjustment, the 70s fostered the critique of those same norms. Feminism was particularly influential here, with schools encouraging young people to adopt non-traditional sex-role roles and question social norms (*Girls, School and Society* 1975; McLeod 2006). During this time, the social context of psychological

problems was emphasised, as was the social significance of interpersonal relationships (*Royal Commission on Human Relationships* 1975). In comparison to guidance in the 1950s, greater attention was given to 'normal' personal and educational problems and to self-esteem, self-development and growth for all students, with a corresponding expansion of school counselling services. This helped make possible the contemporary focus on the emotional wellbeing of *all* students.

This brief discussion suggests how transnational ideas concerning child-centred and progressive pedagogy from the 1930s onwards, developmental, social psychology and adolescent and youth studies from the 1950s, the 'new' sociology of education and social inequalities and feminism in the 1970s, were having an impact on Australian curriculum and guidance programs. Australia has a longstanding engagement in international dialogues and research on this topic provides a counterpoint to arguably more common views of Australia as either largely anglophilic or intellectually isolated, or only a relatively recent player on the international stage. We have found, for example, that Australian education in the 1930s appears more cosmopolitan and embedded in international exchange than is usually remembered in the present. Additionally, some current debates about globalisation, in overstating its singularity, also under-estimate the impact of earlier manifestations of the transnational 'flow of ideas'. Arising from this observation is the perceived significance of the relationship between philanthropy and public policy. It was not only abstract ideas that were travelling: international philanthropy, such as the Carnegie Corporation and the Commonwealth Fund, and the projects and travel they funded, had practical effects on Australian public life. Some research exists on the institutional relationships between Carnegie and Australian education, especially ACER (White 1997; Connell 1980) but there is limited research on the extent and nature of the influence of international philanthropy upon the translation of ideas, practices and policy models in Australian education.

Conclusion

The role of schools and educational systems in influencing social values, student wellbeing and citizenship are serious matters. Equally, history matters, as recent debates about the teaching of Australian History in schools and concomitant concerns about its importance to national identity have shown. An examination of the influence of transnational ideas on the education of the Australian adolescent will add to knowledge about Australia's own history in the important field of schooling and citizen formation. Research on the relationship between international philanthropy and education provides historically-based perspectives for understanding Australia's dynamic relationship with international/global educational developments. Historical research, by standing outside the present, but also motivated by it, provides a means to reflect on current policy commonsense and taken-for-granted directions. Documenting the conditions and initiatives in different historical periods assists with understanding why some schooling practices and approaches to educating and supporting young people take the form they do, and why some have changed or been abandoned. Finally, bringing together the study of school curriculum and student guidance, will offer new insights into the adolescent educational experience and broaden understandings of the role of schools in shaping values and promoting wellbeing.

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