

To: The Chair, Dr O'Brien
Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System
Email: NSRA.submissions@education.gov.au.

Dear Dr O'Brien

This submission proposes a 'plan for the schooling of low SES students'.

Why? Two reasons.

First ... *low SES students*, comprising 40-60% of public schools' enrolments depending on definition are, overwhelmingly, the biggest 'drag' on Australia's schooling outcomes.

Second ... fix 'it' for low SES students *and we fix it for all students* including many non-low SES students who also 'drag' on the system ... and students who now rank comparatively well but, with changes to schooling purpose, curriculum structure, and curriculum content, could do significantly better.

On the first reason, Australia's social shape & economic performance depends on more upwardly equalising schooling outcomes. We need schools [curriculum & teachers] that provide 'intrinsic value' to low SES students.

Yes, poor outcomes for low SES students IS a matter of funding, but it is MORE a matter of comprehension and perspective. Put simply, is it to be a matter of deadening remedial Literacy, curriculum throttling NAPLAN, and blame-the-poor-quality-teachers ... OR empowering intrinsic value, high-interest, self-motivation, fix-the-fractured-system?

This submission is authored by a life-time experienced educational practitioner, researcher, activist, Schools Commissioner, Commonwealth Curriculum Councillor, equity programs bureaucrat, national teacher union leader, post-grad student, and 3 x top box PhD recipient [REDACTED] who is entirely unconvinced that the failure of the public schooling system to successfully provide for categorised 'low SES' students is the fault of teachers, parents, or kids ... no matter the packaging of the blame as:

1. Poor teacher quality
2. Poor attention to literacy, numeracy, basics
3. Poor school leadership
4. Replace poor public schooling systems with independence
5. Poor teacher pay
6. Poor support services in schools
7. Uneducated or unmotivated parents/carers.

That is not to say that improvements cannot be made in 1-7 ... they can, and should be. But, they are second order considerations. We should not be consumed in R & D processes and fund-lasering the many superficial pimples on a mortally ill elephant. It is not intellectually difficult to comprehend that successfully dealing with matters such as teacher quality, school leadership, and different approaches to Literacy & Numeracy will depend on prior determination on matters of system purpose, pedagogical imperatives, curriculum structure and content, and engaging with educational experiences of intrinsic value to identifiable 'equity' categories of student such as: girls, recent immigrants, indigenous, and low SES students.

That is, it is probably oxymoronic to speak of an 'excellent' teacher in a poorly purposed system required to teach de-contextualised, boring irrelevancies to big battalions of unmotivated students, and especially [but not only] if they suffer relentlessly, daily, and intensely from the effects of immediate and long-term deprivation of physical and intellectual resources, dispossession, disenfranchisement, discrimination, repression, exploitation, disempowerment, and/or misery. This teacher cannot be an excellent teacher.

In my professional lifetime, waves of 'equity' reforms have passed successfully and influentially through the system. In each of these, systems have been more prepared to acknowledge and respond to the 'intrinsic value' of changes to the major arms of system policies. The issue of gender, for example, was given great emphasis by the adoption of a **political** goal more than an education goal [all adult roles open to all girls and boys] which then moved through systems' policy arms of: purpose, curriculum content, teacher education, promotion values, and so on. Similarly, with differing levels of success, in equity areas: disability, immigrants, geographic isolation ...

... but NOT SO with 'low SES' !

In respect of low SES students, system resistance has been various and triumphant. Even to insiders with equity programs management responsibilities, the reasons for the resistance/denial by CEOs and their State Executive Service-appointed advisers has been unclear although plausible suggestions include: to open the 'low SES box' is to reveal a problem too big to fix; being concerned for low SES students is just a Marxist left-wing ideologically motivated fantasia; the 'real' issue is teacher quality. Educational bureaucrats advocating in the 80s and 90s that which Gonski now recommends were organisationally slandered and removed. The highly political and contested nature of curriculum was/is smothered/hidden/denied, trivialised and replaced with narrow concern for Literacy & Numeracy. Teachers have been squarely and relentlessly placed in the frame. Protection for a pedagogically flawed and low-SES neglectful schooling systems has been entirely successfully.

What's needed is a clear understanding of that which has 'intrinsic value' for low SES students, then alignment of consequential changes to the major arms of systems' policy: purpose; curriculum structure; curriculum content; teacher education, promotion, selection, transfer. Because public schooling caters for such a huge proportion of low SES students, the changes will be 'mainstream', they will not be programmatic [except for investigatory/research and trialling purposes], and a consequential alignment of these low SES-generated requirements with the mainstream paradigm, illuminated by the research and action-research driving the proposed new *Plan for Low SES Students* will be required at some point in the near future.

The Minister's apparent advocacy of system-wide adoption of our [1970's and 1980's Disadvantaged Schools Program [DSP] small literacy/numeracy] 'withdrawal classes' shows he is listening and seeing [he referenced Alice Springs] ... which is commendable ... but these withdrawal classes attend briefly to a small handful of bottom-performers in great battalions of otherwise not-attended bottom-performers. Australia's atrocious OECD performance as a bottom-half country on a measure of 'relative disadvantage' is a ranking based on the size of the gap between the top-half and bottom-half of Australian students' outcomes.

The 'pathway' to better performance from the big battalions of low SES students is not through the de-contextualised, de-politicised, NAPLAN punitive, pedagogically-strangling 'door' of remedial literacy classes. No.

The pathway to:

[a] low SES success and

[b] a unified, nationally purposeful, high quality, high equity schooling system ...

... is through the compelling gate of 'intrinsic value' ... along the trail of self-motivation, aspiration, and expectation ... through high-interest themes [K-12, essential] and specialities [K-12, elective] which invite and require requisite skills [such as literacy and numeracy, amongst others] ... towards springboards of advanced TAFE and University educations in both social and vocational studies ... ultimately to goals of all and any adult role.

On the second **reason** ... we don't want different schooling systems for low SES and high SES kids any more than we want different schooling systems for girls & boys, or migrants & non-migrants, or indigenous & non-indigenous. So, this time, your Better and Fairer review must [please] START with the disadvantaged, not leave them as a dot-point to be attended to with 'clip-ons' at the end of your otherwise learned considerations. Fixing it for low SES disadvantaged kids might well fix it for the 60% of all kids who are 'often bored' and often so bored that 34% of kids don't want to be at school despite the fact that 90% like their teachers, make friends easily, feel that school is a place where they belong. [OECD, 2002]

When envisioning this bigger picture we should be mindful of Dewey's observation:

“The conception of education as a social process and function has no definite meaning until we define the kind of society we have in mind”.

Thus, your newly reviewed schooling system should have PURPOSE to which all arms of policy and execution must be aligned. When a system's purpose is absent, or incoherent, or blurred, the resulting performance will be mixed with poorer outcomes.

Currently, the purpose of schooling is to be found in the curriculum shapers [disciplines], and measured in rankings within those silos of knowledge. We don't value, in our purposes, or in our purpose-generated curriculum structure, the [pedagogically appropriate] contextualising real-life themes of: ***relationships; power; governance and democracy; technology; citizenship; environment; multi cultures; poverty & wealth; truth; empathy; fact, belief, & faith; aspiration; individual and common good***; and so on. I proposed a Foundation of Agreed Principles [Davy, 2008. pp394] as a surrogate generator of curriculum to include these 9 principles:

1. To establish and maintain a participatory democracy, with high levels of democratic understanding and practice throughout the citizenry;
2. To ensure a global and local environment conducive to the health of living things;
3. To encourage and maintain a technologically advanced economy, with a high level of self-sufficiency and environmental harmony;
4. To ensure all adult roles holding status and power comprise, over time, people from all identifiable groups and socio-economic backgrounds;
5. To encourage societal cooperation and a concern for the Common Good;
6. To guarantee liberal freedoms to all citizens;
7. To guarantee human rights to all citizens;
8. To provide for cultural diversity; and
9. To encourage creativity and responsible innovation.

Some political philosophers would argue that a competent understanding of these matters is ***essential*** for the empowerment of a 21st century citizen. For the disempowered, in this case low SES students, these 'essentials' for all students have, I argue, ***'intrinsic value' for low SES students*** [see FOAP, Davy, 2008 ... or text me on 0414310968].

Also hugely important, and of 'intrinsic value' to low SES students, is curriculum choice. We do not extend, until age 13-15 [too late for most by-then educationally ruined low SES students], the strongly empowering strategy of: ***curriculum choice***. The benefits of 'choice' deserve a full thesis of its own, but space being limited, it gets one para here. Curriculum choice ***could*** be provided, and ***should*** be, for say 50% of school time, from the earliest years K-12, to run parallel with an essential curriculum K-12 as referenced above.

So, in the formulation of a plan for the education of low SES students I would be hopeful that our quest for outcomes of intrinsic value to low SES students will result in a curriculum structure which provides appropriate empowerment for all ... through a roughly equal mix of socially determined 'essential' and individually selected 'elective' curriculum layers from the earliest to latest years of schooling.

The research necessary for such a re-structuring of curriculum has not been undertaken. It should be undertaken. It should be undertaken in BOTH the academic world and with the help of the academic world but in situ ... in schools, led by schools, implemented by schools. Thus the second major element of the plan outlined below.

There are other important matters requiring research. In addition to matters requiring research and action-research, there are matters we DO understand right now, some of which, ***such as hunger and cold*** which block learning, we comprehensively understand the Science and effects on learning, and we can, and should, attend to immediately.

Thus, we have two-layers of issues which require a two-layered response.

The first layer is to deal with matters about which we already know much and which require, in the main, resources.

The second layer is to deal with research and action-research along all major arms of systems' policies:

- * social purposes
- * community politics**
- * pedagogical imperatives
- * curriculum structure
- * curriculum content
- * consequential teacher education
- * consequential teacher promotion
- * consequential teacher selection.

** Politics (from Ancient Greek πολιτικά (politiká) 'affairs of the cities') is the set of activities that are associated with making decisions in groups, or other forms of power relations among individuals, such as the distribution of resources or status.

A Plan for the Schooling of Low SES Students'

The Plan comprises two parts: **basic resources & policy commitment** + **school-based, action-research program**

[a] **BASIC RESOURCES:**

- (i) Systems' leadership: From CEOs through to unit heads, must be genuine commitment to:
 - [a] the goal: ... over time, equality of outcomes
 - [b] the strategy: ... intrinsic value.There is **no place** for leadership denial, resistance, sabotage.
- (ii) Directed to students:
 - * blood-sugar levels/food ... breakfast/lunch provision
 - * warmth/clothes ... anonymous provision
 - * emotional equilibrium ... access to counselling
- (iii) Access: child-care, early ed, tertiary Free. Not 'cheap'. Cheap is too expensive for the poor.
- (iv) Capital works: The physical environment is attractive, and supportive of varied and innovative learning strategies [lesser importance]
- (v) Recurrent funding: A differential funding regime based on the needs of each school [a la Gonski, except each school's SES data must be accurate - **based on ACTUAL students' SES** [NSW did this successfully for 2 decades], not extrapolated from pools of undifferentiated data such as LGAs.
- (vi) Teacher education:
 - pre-service: 12 month elective: low SES goal [a] and strategy [b] ... must gain Distinction level
 - In-service: access to the 12 month pre-service elective and more specific, 5-10 week, topics as needed & consistent with low SES goal & strategy
- (vii) Selection of teachers/Exec: selection of teachers and executive staff must be done in participation with the school's geographic community, be administered **en bloc** where possible, and give preference to those with pre-service/in-service education [see above], and a commitment to the low SES goal of 'equality of outcomes, over time' and the low SES strategy of 'intrinsic value'.

[b] **A LOW-SES, SCHOOL-BASED, ACTION-RESEARCH, SUBMISSION-BASED, PROGRAM:**

For implementation, Australia-wide, in the 40% lowest SES government schools, this special program will be designed to review, and formulate new understandings and strategies for each of the major arms of systems' policies, and will have three co-operating elements:

- (i) Action-Research – school-based implementation of new strategies.
- (ii) Research – institution-conducted, school collaborated, school & region-specific research.
- (iii) Public reporting - Reviewing and Interpreting the research from (i) and (ii).

It is expected that as successes are discovered in [b] they will influence & change provisions in mainstream system's policies, including paradigm shifts in key policy areas eg: curriculum structure & content. The Special Program is seen more as an ice-breaker for mainstream policy reform than as a permanent add-on to an unchanging system.

Notes: on the 'Plan for the Schooling of Low SES Students'

The pathway to:

[a] low SES success and

[b] a unified, nationally purposeful, high quality, high equity schooling system ...

... is through the compelling gate of 'intrinsic value' ... along the trail of self-motivation, aspiration, and expectation ... through high-interest themes [K-12, essential] and specialities [K-12, elective] which invite and require requisite skills [such as literacy and numeracy, amongst others] ... towards springboards of advanced TAFE and University educations in both social and vocational studies ... ultimately to goals of all and any adult role.

The plan should, ultimately, extend to the entire schooling system as it is expected the research will indicate that what is pedagogically effective and nationally productive will be of intrinsic value to both low SES disempowered students and higher SES students with the same rights to socio-economic advancement and status.

Notwithstanding this long-term objective, the current fractured and layered system needs lots of transitional work, some of it on simple-to-understand and immediately implementable matters [such as: hunger and cold; selection and education of appropriate CEOs to take the initiative and lead; political commitment by Ministers and CEOs to [a] the goal of, over time, equality of outcomes' and [b] the immediate strategy through 'intrinsic value'], and much of it requiring considerable preparatory thought/collaboration and review, research, action-research in real-life, every-day, mass learning sites.

Professor O'Brien, each of your Review members has the knowledge and experience, without me drowning them in oceans of words and references, to understand each of the briefly presented elements of the proposed plan ... and ... to regard the combination of elements as a single plan. Complex issues rarely have simple answers. Integrated thinking and planning is the antithesis of directionless and often self-serving ad hocery.

In the unlikely but highly desirable event that your Minister shows interest in my proposal, you and your review members may be surprised to discover that I wrote extensively on these matters in Davy, 2008. **Australian Schooling: social purposes, social justice, social cohesion** which was/is a thesis examined independently by Profs [REDACTED] and awarded 3 top boxes and the University Prize ... not to blow a never-blown whistle, just to establish that my views are probably more considered and cohesive than those emanating from people who have not had the lifetime of experience, success, and failure in this ideology-poisoned, vexed and highly contested area of education politics.

In the event that you, your Minister, or your panel members as a group or individually, would like to meet and/or colloquium these proposals, I would be keen to participate, 'though I would appreciate a preparatory discussion about the mode of interaction as I deal with ideas and conversational interrogation of them much better than I deal with formal presentations or combative engagements.

[REDACTED]

Bio: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

NOTES: for those wanting more ‘break out’ on the elements of the ‘Plan for the Education of Low SES Students’

[a] BASIC RESOURCES:

(i) System leadership

this is a key resource. Good leaderships are able to align all their organisation’s internal policies and processes to the goal of successfully implementing the organisation’s goal[s]. This Plan must be led by system CEOs/Directors General with philosophic commitment to the goal of moving towards an equality of outcomes between the category of ‘low SES students’ and the general student body.

To achieve this goal, the systems must develop a low SES strategy which provides ‘intrinsic value’ to low SES students and this will involve a process of exploring and formulating curriculum structure and content which delivers empowering socio-economic outcomes to low SES students. Leadership exists, or not, at the top of system bureaucracies as well as within each of the policy formulation & operational units of each system, especially the public system.

There is no place for leadership of public systems who deny, resist, or sabotage the direction and elements of this Plan. Serving the needs of low SES students was the ‘raison d’etre’ of the Australian public system of schooling, and it is these very students, along with indigenous students, our public system currently fails most dramatically. System leadership not convinced that ‘education’ can be, and should be, an agent of social change is not the leader needed to lead, monitor, and help shape the challenging educo-political elements that make up this plan. Such a ‘leader’ will:

[a] not be capable of leading this Plan

[b] almost certainly be the source of inertia, resistance & ultimately, institutional sabotage either open & defiantly, euphemistic & surreptitiously, or with cleverly administered chicanery.

A system leader of this Low SES Plan will be faced with three philosophic bars over which s/he must hurdle in order to administer this plan. None of them are purely educational considerations. Each has more to do with a philosophic understanding or the ‘politics’ of education, of the nature of education, and certainly the social purposes of education. They are :
equality of outcomes vs equality of opportunity. There is a seriously destructive view held by many administrators and politicians, that schooling needs be concerned only with providing an ‘equality of opportunity’. At its extreme, this would result in the same provision of public funds to those living in resource-less misery and those exhibiting ostentatious wealth. It would result in a curriculum and schooling practices which were accepting of wide disparities in schooling outcomes so long as the inputs of funds and curriculum and teaching were the same.

* the goal

Adopting an underpinning objective of working towards, over time, an equality of excellent outcomes between identifiable categories of student shifts responsibility on systems’ bureaucracies from the simple provision of

equal funds and equal curriculum and equal teaching/pedagogy, to the more cerebral-demanding responsibility of understanding the nature of each identifiable group's socio-economic-political contexts and devising appropriate funding and curriculum regimes that engage and carry these identifiable groupings in roughly equal numbers to the full range of adult roles throughout society.

This shift in responsibility is often described, sometimes wilfully, other times with genuine ignorance, as an attempt to produce every ex-student to be 'the same' ... to be equally dull and uniform ... an argument clearly at odds with the goal of seeing each identifiable group with similar levels of creative, innovative, cultural, inquisitive, and different attributes and with similar skill and knowledge levels to be able to give effect to that equality of diversity.

* curriculum inclusive. The idea of an 'inclusive' curriculum was, and is, a good idea. It helped move systems from books and learning materials which only depicted white, affluent people undertaking their white and affluent lives to learning materials, books, teaching aids, and educational personnel with cultural ties to the children's background. More indigenous-associated materials, more migrant-associated materials, more gender inclusive materials.

Inclusivity is not a bad idea, so long as it is understood to be an essential but grossly inadequate curriculum response to categories of students who are generationally dispossessed and disempowered.

An inclusive curriculum, with inclusive learning materials, will portray different categories of student engaging in life's experiences. The context of learning will include references, images, & personnel that are sympathetic, empathetic, and normal to the categories of student.

Curriculum in all schools should be inclusive of all student categories, and especially in schools with enrolments of indigenous, or migrant, or geographically isolated, or girls, or kids too ill to attend a school ... to mention three of the most obvious.

'Inclusivity' is a relatively easy concept to understand as it fits neatly with our understandings of good manners and open friendliness ... and, it is especially easy to convert into schooling objectives when the student category being addressed is so obviously associated with characteristics that lend themselves to celebration ... such as the wonders of womanhood, incredible indigenous culture and history, and colourful divergence of migrant cultures.

However, while 'inclusivity' may be more inviting, less alienating, and even less disempowering than non-inclusive [alienating] pedagogy, it becomes a serious obstacle when used to block the more confrontational idea of a curriculum with 'intrinsic value' to disempowered student categories. That is, for some categories of student there is little to be celebrated. Being poverty-stricken has many consequences, none of which are obvious candidates for Celebration. Low SES requires more than a comfortably inviting concept of 'inclusivity'.

* curriculum intrinsic value. A curriculum with 'intrinsic value' for low SES students will address low SES-'ness'. It will reveal to low SES students the nature of low SES, how it is generated, what the alternatives are, and the socio-

educational pathways to those alternatives. The idea of a curriculum and associated pedagogy with 'intrinsic value' is confronting for some politicians and conservative bureaucrats, especially 'policy-free' management bureaucrats.

Much of their fear/scorn is borne of political ideology because now, in 2024, we are proposing to empower the disempowered low SES student. In THIS space, educators must contend with pre-conceived and ideologically embattled concepts of the 'working class' and the 'ruling class' as if the French and Russian Revolutions were not well-and-truly over and Australia has not had a well-managed system of democracy and elections and mixed economy for 122 years.

To emphasise this point, in 1980s, the Commonwealth Schools Commission formulated a very successful 'Education of Girls' Plan. Since that time, outcomes for girls, & access to universities has been transformed for girls & women. The very first schooling/curriculum/education goal of that Plan was to provide all girls 'from the earliest years' with an understanding that they have access to 'all adult roles'. It was not an education goal, more a political goal with very significant punch. It was THAT political goal, widely discussed throughout Australia media & politics, which influenced ALL other processes and policies ... curriculums, extra-curricula opportunities, sport, subject expectations and encouragement, selection and promotion of teachers, ... everything educational ... on ALL major arms of systems' policies ... was changed, often radically! THIS was change with 'intrinsic value'. The goal was not better Literacy or Numeracy. The goal was "FROM THE EARLIEST YEARS" ... "ACCESS TO THE FULL RANGE OF ADULT ROLES" !!!!!

Low SES students require nothing less than the clear thinking of these feminist educators of the 1980s. That is, low SES students require, from the earliest years, a curriculum [& changes to other arms of policy – see below] with intrinsic value that reflects the NATURE OF THEIR DISADVANTAGE. The quest for 'Intrinsic value' is not without teacher experience ... in the inner-city of Sydney in the late 1980s two schools of thought were being investigated and action-researched across a range of primary, & secondary, schools. They are worth re-visiting: SPOTE and Essential.

SPOTE: In the SPOTE project, based in low SES inner-city primary schools, it was hypothesised low SES students, from the earliest years, need special attention to SOCIAL, POLITICAL, ORGANISATIONAL, TECHNOLOGICAL, AND ECONOMIC skills and understandings. Considerable work was done, often with participating parents, to formulate age-appropriate curriculum material which conveyed these skills and understandings. In schools with Aboriginal parents this approach led, inexorably, into areas of culture, heritage, history, language, and pathways to better understandings and higher SES. Not surprisingly, high interest experiences and curriculum of relevance provide a learning environment in which otherwise alienated &/or reluctant learners become motivated to improve their literacy and numeracy. Literacy and Numeracy motivation and learning as a consequence of high interest good pedagogy, not as a de-contextualised set of learning tasks!

ESSENTIAL + ELECTIVE: In the ESSENTIAL CURRICULUM project, teachers from 13 inner-city low SES high schools hypothesised that what was essentially empowering for low SES students would be essentially empowering for all students. The teachers worked on generating a thematic and alternative curriculum to the conventionally siloed, subject disciplines. First, they formulated a Foundation of Agreed Principles that included principles of: democracy, technologically advanced economy, human and individual rights, world of work, creativity, multi-culturalism, environmental sustainability ... and they proposed that these themes could be taught from K-12 absorbing approximately 50% of school time ... & the other 50% would comprise, again from K-12, an elective curriculum comprising the existing and conventional disciplines.

These teachers produced a Progress Report in December, 1989 which was optimistic about both the goal and the processes being followed. The project was wrapped up because the DSP was wrapped up, made into a de-contextualised and boring Literacy and Numeracy program, before being abandoned altogether.

An historic act of bastardry and vandalism.

The project and its goals are well worth re-visiting.

(ii) Directed to students for essentials:

- * welfare - blood-sugar at a certain level is essential for concentration and effective brain functioning. Food scientists have written much about this. The complexities of blood-sugar levels and learning can be summed up in the knowledge that a student needs a decent breakfast before schooling begins, and another bout of nourishment in the early afternoon. This basic Human need should not be left unattended, or provided by a publicly highlighted & demeaning act of charity. Where government knows its failure to govern for all people/children has resulted in hungry children unable to be educated attending their public schools, a 'breakfast and sandwich with fruit' provision should be provided as an integral part of the schools' differential recurrent funding [NOT a special program ... THAT is a 'think' program, while THIS is a basic resources provision.
- * welfare - warm clothing during cold weather is essential for learning. A student who is pre-occupied with physical distress-discomfort will not, any more than the hungry student, turn her/his attention to matters of intellectual work. Learning will occur when the student is motivated to learn. Shivering and aching limbs, cold bodies, are motivations for warm clothing, not learning. The wearing of light cotton clothes and open footwear with accompanying shows of discomfort need to be noticed by school staff and surreptitious interventions made with clothing bought for the student by the school from its Recurrent funding, NOT its special program.
- * welfare - severe emotional disequilibrium requires identification, support, and often, counselling. Where severe emotional distress is being experienced, formal learning is not taking place.

With data sets now available on regions where we know abuses of various substances, alcohol, violence, psychological traumas will affect the learning potential of concentrations of students, we can resource schools accordingly. Counselling and other appropriate professional support needs to be part of the differential recurrent allocation to these schools, NOT as a part of a special program.

(iii) Access:

An organism WILL learn. It probes its environment until it 'accommodates' it. This, as Piaget discovered, is what organisms DO. They learn. And, they learn from their environment.

If a child's environment is barren of socio-structural experiences, of aspirations, of self-motivating expectations, then that child's early conceptions will be similarly barren. In the case of low SES students, as a generalisation, early childhood is entirely separate from the world of power and governance & the well-rewarded professions ... separate from the everyday rewards and pleasures of financial security, affluence, and entrée to society's shaping structures of Law, Governance, Administration, and provisions of health care, transport, education ... and so on.

For these experiences, insights, and developing aspirations/expectations, low SES children rely more heavily on public schooling than higher-SES families and their higher-SES networks. Thus, access to thoughtful childcare and early education can be transformative for these children. Any plan for the education of low SES students must include conscious provision of child-care and professionally provided early education, even if the total cost of this provision is borne by government.

In respect of low SES access to university enrolment the issue is complicated by the necessity to have certain minimum levels of skill and understandings in order to be capable of undertaking learning at more complex levels. However, policy concerning access to universities should not begin at matriculation age. Enrolling at a uni might rely on the acquisition of specified levels of skills and understandings, but attaining those specified levels is largely a matter of the students' motivations, self-discipline, and determination to reach a self-determined goal. Research shows that Kindergarten children from high SES families know that they will be attending university and that university is a part of Life's track to 'being happy'. This is not so with low SES children whose family and Life experience does not include a myriad references to, and expectations associated with, purposeful and wealth-producing university study and happy, engaging, even exotic university life-style.

The issue of university access for low SES students is a matter for action-research and programmatic attention from the earliest years as it is the view of the authors, gleaned from lifetimes of experiences with low SES students, that this matter intersects with [a] the widespread [61%] boredom reported by 15 year old Mathematics and Science students [b] poor schooling pedagogy which is forced to rely on de-contextualised [siloed], rapidly specialising, vertically arranged, subject disciplines

(iv) Resourcing:

Capital works - with church-based schools, & all financially exclusionary private schools, now so wealthily endowed with ostentatiously excessive reminders of wealth, power, & privilege, it raises the question of 'what is fair

and reasonable?’ and ‘just how much privilege and gluttonous waste should government fund?’

Not being privilege-oriented we’ve not thought deeply about this, but, needless to say, schools serving low SES students have greater needs from government than the already wealthy, powerful, and privileged. Capital funding of low SES schools should, for the same reasons as differential levels of Recurrent Funding, be allocated differentially having in mind the sporting, cultural, artistic, entrepreneurial, and other intellectual interests of low SES students.

Capital works should reflect the requirements of good pedagogy ... flexible learning spaces, in-doors and out-doors spaces for small and large groups of students, and a variety of opportunities to experience and use different technologies in different settings. It may be that the schooling of low SES students requires more of these pedagogically atuned spaces.

- (v) **Resourcing:** **Recurrent funding** - a differential funding regime based on the actual needs of each school [a la Gonski, except each school’s SES data must be accurate & based on ACTUAL students SES, not supposed SES extrapolated from pools of undifferentiated data such as LGAs. NSW employed this successfully for 2 decades before being axed by the policy-free manager Dr Boston in 1990’s.]

Three crucial matters should be remembered when providing funding for low SES schools:

- * extensive research in the 1980’s and 90’s showed that class sizes of 15-20 in low SES schools is central to producing results
- * our experience in the Disadvantaged Schools Program [DSP] showed that in a ‘think’ program, lots of ‘think’ time, especially collaborative think time, is required from the special program, our teachers “bought time” to consult other teachers, to workshop with parents/carers/cultural contributors/social workers/etc, to prepare submissions for program funding. “Buying Time” should be acknowledged as a definite requirement in a low SES school, and differential allocations made accordingly
- * again, our experience in DSP underlines the huge benefits to be gained from Community Liaison personnel, social workers, counsellors, cultural providers ... specialist providers. This requires, in low SES schools, a sizeable differential allocation of recurrent resources, separate from the special program.

- (vi) **Teacher Education:** **pre-service:** a year-long, specialised, “low SES” elective to be provided in selected city and rural teacher education institutions. The pre-service will address matters of ‘intrinsic value’ and ‘making a difference’ and ‘staff empathy & integration’ into low SES communities and will be acknowledged industrially with both University certification and above-award industrial pay rates for teachers & executive.
- in-service:** industrial opportunity for teachers enthusiastic about ‘making a difference in low SES schools’ to undertake specialised “low SES” in-service education of varying durations on a range of specific topics. For example, it may be a 10 week course on “intrinsic value” or “understanding the pathways out of generational

disempowerment” or “empathy with community cultures, histories, aspirations”. It will not be “class discipline & management” or “interpreting NAPLAN” or “Literacy and Numeracy”. The in-service education being offered is for already competent and enthusiastic teachers, but who require/want specialised education associated with the nature of low SES, its effects, and the pathways towards higher education and higher SES.

(vii) * selection:

a new system of teacher/executive/leadership recruitment, selection, and transfers needs be designed such that communities know they are getting staff in their schools who have empathy with neighbourhood conditions, enjoy the local people, and have signed up to ‘make a difference’ rather than to earn magnified transfer points, or be rewarded with accelerated promotion ... the communities’ needs are to be front and centre and those employed must be committed to that objective.

An essential criterion for selection at any level of the teaching & leadership staff will be a thorough understanding of, and commitment to, the goal of equality of outcomes and the driving strategy of curriculum outcomes of intrinsic value to low SES students.

[b] A LOW-SES, SCHOOL-BASED, ACTION-RESEARCH, SUBMISSION-BASED, SPECIAL PROGRAM:

This special program should be Australia-wide, in the 40% lowest SES government schools, and be designed to explore, innovate, and formulate new understandings and strategies for each of the major arms of systems’ policies. It will have three co-operating elements:

(i) Action-Research – school-based implementation of new strategies concerning:

- student equilibrium: food, clothes, safety, stability
- curriculum structure: empowering disciplines/themes; essential/elective
- curriculum content: intrinsic value/SPOTE/essential
- curriculum materials: teacher-developed, peer-reviewed, free online
- community participation: leadership, curriculum, inclusivity
- teacher/executive: en bloc selection, induction, transfer, promotion
- teacher education: in-service – emerging identified needs
- pedagogy: collaboration, community participation
- testing: social purposes/lit-num/disciplines.

NB: it may be discovered that a curriculum with intrinsic value to disempowered students will explicitly address the same empowering themes the Australian public, if given the opportunity, would expect for all students, thus further enriching the national discussion concerning an ‘essential’ curriculum and its agreed social purposes:

- democratic understandings and practice
- the range of relationships
- technological advanced economy
- cultural diversity
- media and communication
- family and community
- the responsibility and rewards of work;
- individual/human rights, incl religious/spiritual
- environmental responsibility and regeneration
- economic balance and goals;
- creativity;
- the Great Debates of Humanity.

(ii) Research – a program of institution-conducted, school collaborated, school-specific [for school-based analysis] and regional-wide research concerning:

- parent/carers social & econ aspirations for their children ... ages 3,5,7,9,11,13,15
- student aspirations, including university access ... ages 3,5,7,9,11,13,15
- student 'belonging' @ school ... ages 3,5,7,9,11,13,15
- student relationships with teachers ... ages 3,5,7,9,11,13,15
- student relationships with students ... ages 3,5,7,9,11,13,15
- student boredom [teachers] ... ages 3,5,7,9,11,13,15
- student boredom [curriculum] ... ages 3,5,7,9,11,13,15
- reasons for student boredom ... ages 3,5,7,9,11,13,15

- social purposes of schooling [parents of low SES]
- social purposes of schooling [low SES students]
- social purposes of schooling [parents of high SES]
- social purposes of schooling [med-high SES students]

- meaning of 'intrinsic value' to low SES students
- does 'intrinsic value' require both 'essential' & 'elective' curriculum components?
- are the essentials of 'intrinsic value-low SES' similar for higher SES students?

- a program of institution-conducted research concerning:

Once it was known that 'low SES' was a major [the major] determinant/indicator of schooling outcomes, the onus was on the schooling system's leadership to interrogate its major arms of policy and associated processes. This program should now engage independent research organisations such as universities & ACER to undertake a systematic series of research studies into the matters listed below:

- what is it about system curriculum structure, if anything, that suppresses low SES outcomes? Does it also depress outcomes for mid-high SES?
- what new curriculum structure might provide 'intrinsic value' to low SES outcomes? Would it also provide 'intrinsic value' for mid-high SES?
- what is it about system curriculum content, if anything, that suppresses low SES outcomes? Does it also depress outcomes for mid-high SES?
- what system curriculum content, if modified, might provide 'intrinsic value' to low SES outcomes? Would it provide 'intrinsic value' for mid-high SES?
- what is it about system schooling leadership selection, if anything, that suppresses low SES outcomes?
- what is it about system socio-political relationship between staff and community, if anything, that suppresses low SES outcomes?
- what is it about system teacher selection, if anything, that suppresses low SES outcomes?
- what is it about system values rewarded in the system's promotions system, if anything, that suppresses low SES outcomes?
- what is it about the symptoms of poverty [hunger/cold/distress], if anything, that suppresses low SES outcomes?
- what is it about levels of systems' school funding, if anything, that suppresses low SES outcomes?
- what is it about system teacher pre-service/in-service education, if anything, that suppresses low SES outcomes?

(iii) Public reporting - Reviewing and Interpreting the Research from (i) and (ii).

Independence: An independent body, such as a university, or cluster of universities, or universities joined with pure research bodies, or an especially established organisation ... is required to remove this essential tool of analysis [data, research questions, methodology], options-generation & policy formulation, from the grip of school systems' bureaucracies with a vested interest in protecting their reputations and legacy. Even university/ACER research teams should have representatives of low SES organisations at crucial points of shaping research questions, adopting research methodology, and data analysis. Systems and research organisations are not immune from research-bending behaviours that defend reputations and legacies rather than interrogating causes and remedies. The issue of low SES' is a massive case-in-point.

Public data: Fresh and comparative data, much of it longitudinal, should be part of the public debate concerning public education and its social purposes. Governments, but also the media, professional associations, the entirety of civil society, have a strong stake in both the nature of social purposes adopted, AND the schooling outcomes concerning those social purposes. Thus, these politically relevant data should be made available, every two years to:

- (i) the Australian Govt & State-Territory Govts to inform government policies
- (ii) schooling systems and quasi-systems to inform systems' policy reviews

IMPORTANTLY: Similarly, every two years, school-specific data packages should be made available to individual schools, with an expectation that these data will be studied, discussed, and critiqued by the schools' staff & communities with a view to identifying existing strengths & weaknesses, and formulating relevant organisational & educational responses.

Recommendation: the independent body will recommend to government. These recommendations will be made to coincide with the bi-ennial release of data but, unlike the data which must be made public immediately, the recommendations for action will be made to government which must then make them public within 6 months of reception.