

## INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO THE GREEN PAPER

Date:

Dear (member)

**Please find attached our discussion paper (We call it the TPAA Green Paper ) which sets out the core philosophical problems with our education system.**

This has been prepared by a panel of voluntary working teachers under the leadership of our national executive as a first step to set the parameters of the debate about the reform of our public education system. We need to contend head on with the underpinning party political issues to effectively improve conditions of teaching and the outcomes for students.

Yes, we want your feedback and your help.

If you simply wanted to make money you wouldn't be teaching. It is, or used to be, one of the great "callings" of life. We intend to not only "reclaim" that respected role but to also significantly increase the remuneration teachers receive. **For perspective, no one needs an utterly ridiculous ratio of one bureaucrat for every two teachers (one to ten might be closer to the mark if we had locally autonomous schools). So there could be between \$30-40,000 extra per teacher per year available to pay you more.** But the system has to change, and we want you to lead the change. And here is the good news. We believe that if just 10% of teachers get behind this we can pull it off.

The current system of a centralised bureaucratically run education system has been supported and nurtured by both the ALP and the LNP. The only difference between them is that the registered teacher trade unions and the ALP have managed to monetise the system to their own advantage. **About half of the registered teacher union fees is available to go directly or**

**indirectly in support of the ALP. We absolutely support their right to do that with their members money. Teachers voluntarily join these unions knowing what happens to their fees.** But by knowing this we also understand why the ALP want no change to this system. By contrast the LNP gets neither support nor money. But they too inexplicably want to increase the number of education bureaucrats, get them to inefficiently spend more on school infrastructure and then work with and support the QTU who financially support their political opponents. [Listen here to the Qld shadow education minister on ABC radio](#) – You be the judge. **Is LNP education policy in Queensland “Labor Lite” or it is “Labor Heavy?”**

We support no political party. Is any party serious about actually ensuring our children are educated? **More to the point why aren't the LNP at least supporting TPAA teachers who want to reform the system to benefit both teachers and students instead of promoting the QTU who are the architects of the current system?**

Politicians, registered trade unions and bureaucrats are not the way forward. They have caused the existing problems. However, we believe a core of about 10% of professional teachers through the agency of the TPAA can drive the changes necessary by bringing parents on board to the reform process.

We know that parents are very unhappy with the system. Their interests are intrinsically at odds with those of the registered teacher unions and the centralised bureaucracy they profit from.

And we also know that effective teaching does not need bureaucratic overview. **Teachers are trained professionals the vast majority of whom don't want to teach what the bureaucrats want taught in the way the bureaucrats decree it be taught in the unworkable disciplinary environment mandated by the bureaucrats.**

But here is the thing. **We actually don't need 90% of the current public education bureaucracy if we allow our public schools to become locally autonomous as they once were when education results were actually better and teaching was meaningful and fun. For comparison purposes, the bureaucratic overload money saved if it was all applied to teachers salaries could add between \$30-40,000 to every teacher's salary.**

And going “locally autonomous ” is a lot easier and simpler than you think.. For instance the school funding could come through a ‘fund the user’ system like Medicare. Almost no bureaucrats needed.) This would give parents the power to the move their children to a school which teaches as best for their children, not according to the ever-changing bureaucratic brainwaves.

So parents not bureaucrats will decide which schools get the money. This is not radical change. Over a third of all parents in Queensland have already removed their children from the government school system. Add in those at the government Independent Public Schools and the government Academy Schools which have more management authority than regular state schools, and nearly half of all parents have already voted with their children's feet. It is happening now. We just need to continue the process. Parents not bureaucrats should also decide the curriculum and the school policies in the same way that they determine what goods line the shelves of Coles and Woolworths. It’s called buyers choice. **In practice if parents have the power to send their children to schools which teach what the parents want taught, the schools will adjust what is being taught and the student disciplinary frameworks to match the needs of the parents. They will lose funding if they don’t.**

**By combining the needs of 90% of parents with just 10% of teachers we will win this education debate.** Yes we can do it together. Bring your sensible colleagues on board with us. Looking forward to your feedback and support.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

Parents send their children to schools to be educated and socialised. Teachers and schools have a duty of care to the children that parents have placed in their charge. They have authority over their charges temporarily delegated from their parents, not in place of them. Unfortunately, ideas have crept into education that seek to undermine, or even replace, the authority of parents with those of the schools and the bureaucracies that run them. Ideas that often seek to undermine the confidence of parents in their own authority.

Australia suffers from often grotesquely over-bureaucratised school systems, which comprehensively fail to achieve genuine accountability. Failed attempts to reform school education are all too frequently repackaged and reapplied because of inadequate accountability of the bureaucracies which implemented them. There has been a shift from merely failed ideas to actively toxic ideas colonising Education Faculties and, via them, schools.

### Ideology or Reality?

Accountability, involving reality tests, has the capacity to drive out toxically bad ideas.

Friere opposed using phonics to teach literacy, as it treats literacy as a technical skill to be acquired. He advocated a generative word approach to literacy, not because of any pedagogical evidence about their relative effectiveness, but because it fitted in with his Marxified Theory of education. (*.....that the point of education is to generate the correct subjective understanding of the society folk lived in that would promote its social transformation.*)

Paulo Friere (1921-1997), the founder of Critical Pedagogy, has over 552,000 citations. This despite the fact that his key works — *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and *The Politics of Education* (1985) — defer little if at all, to pedagogical research. On the contrary, Friere

essentially rewrites Marxism for a pedagogical context and his references are dominated by Karl Marx, G.W.F. Hegel, Vladimir Lenin, Mao Zedong, Fidel Castro, and Che Guevara.

It is not that Freire teaches Marxism. It is that he *Marxifies* education: he applies the Marxist template to the processes of teaching. Thus, there is a particular form of property (literacy, educated knowledge) that those running society aggregate to themselves, giving themselves opportunities denied others, that excludes from the full opportunities of society those denied such property. But if students are awakened to “true” (critical) literacy, they can see these structures of oppression and act against them.

Unfortunately, the cost of Friere’s ideological approach to learning to read was simply a measurable decline in primary years literacy for too many Australian children. However, education bureaucrats far removed schools and classrooms supported the bad practice in schools for decades.

## **Toxic Ideas**

Clearly the Friere approach to literacy acquisition proved to be a toxic idea. In fact, much if not all the theory of critical pedagogy remains ideology, untested in everyday reality. Nevertheless, much the thrust of the progressive education, much beloved by university education faculty and central office bureaucrats, is simply failed or untested speculation and opinion.

What drives out bad ideas — by selecting against them — is effective accountability and other reality tests. Conversely, a lack of effective accountability and reality tests enables bad, even toxic, ideas to gestate and spread. This includes selection for practices and ideas that are convenient for bureaucracies and their administrative ease.

Powerful centralized bureaucracies, remote from client accountability and reality checks, are therefore prone to persistent and repeated failure in provision of public education

For teachers at the education coalface the recycling of failed education theory is profoundly demoralizing. A demoralized workplace can be characterized by low retention rates, excessive sick leave and underperformance.

Short term contracts, difficult classroom management, requirements to teach ‘out of field’, excessive and pointless paperwork and lack of clear syllabus content expectations all feed into a crisis in teaching workloads and job insecurity.

### **Measurable outcomes in education**

International academic performance such as PISA and TIMSS indicate a continuous decline in achievement and outcomes for Australian school pupils that began around the 1970’s.

On the other hand, Australian education expenditure per capita has steadily increased over the same period suggesting that underfunding is not the problem.

Consistently teachers are praised for their hard work and dedication to their students always going above and beyond, while removing and diminishing their authority.

Teachers can be unnecessarily restricted by excessive standardised testing, government set policy, and programmes. These often interfere with teachers effectively being able to teach. As previously indicated, the introduction of new regimes and educational ideologies promoted by the bureaucratic system exacerbates existing challenges instead of alleviating them.

As previously noted, in Victoria, there exists a bureaucratic ratio of one bureaucrat for every two teachers, while in Queensland, this ratio stands at one bureaucrat for just under two teachers. These ratios are purportedly justified by the implementation of various educational models, school reviews, wellbeing programs, and teacher and learning incentives. However, none of these initiatives have demonstrated positive outcomes, which could be an argument for rendering these bureaucratic positions unjustifiable .

More importantly, the decision about these issues and their efficacy could be made at the school level.

The reduction of the centralized bureaucracy (which is funded by taxpayers) would liberate resources to fund these functions at the school level or more likely appropriately compensating teachers. It's important to recognise that becoming an expert teacher takes a decade, and the cultivation of high-quality teaching cannot be achieved solely through

political allocation of incentives; rather, it necessitates investment in salaries to attract and retain high-quality educators.

## **Conclusion**

Australia suffers from often grotesquely over-bureaucratized school systems, due to structures that appear to be accountable to the citizens but are over-bureaucratized precisely because of failures to achieve genuine accountability. There is a long history of failed approaches being repackaged because of this inadequate accountability.

In addition there has been a shift from merely failed ideas to actively toxic ideas colonising University Education Faculties and, via them, schools.

The allocation of authority to bloated bureaucracies with a predisposition to moral projects has systematically bled authority from teachers and respect for teaching as a profession. The consequences include exit of teachers from the profession, falling student outcomes and increasing problems of classroom management. Adding another set of “the latest good idea” to these structures will not solve these problems. Only a fundamental rethinking of how schooling is delivered to achieve and entrench effective accountability and to systematically enforce the reality-testing of ideas will be effective.



# FAILING STUDENTS, PARENTS, TEACHERS AND CITIZENS THROUGH INADEQUATE ACCOUNTABILITY AND POORLY STRUCTURED INCENTIVES

“Show me the incentives and I will show you the outcome.”<sup>1</sup> Charlie Munger.

## 1. Introduction

Parents send their children to schools to be educated and socialised. Teachers and schools have a duty of care to the children that parents have placed in their charge. They have a duty of care over their charges. In effect, they have an authority delegated from parents by the act of parents placing their children in that school.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, ideas have crept into education that seek to undermine, or even replace, the authority of parents with those of the schools and the bureaucracies that run them. Ideas that often seek to undermine the confidence of parents in their own authority.

These ideas — rooted in Critical Pedagogy, Queer Theory and related intellectual movements that fall under the umbrella of *Critical Social Justice* — seek to flatter teachers by claiming their mastery of such ideas gives them the moral authority and capacity to be “change agents”, understood not in some conventional pedagogical sense of transmitting skills, knowledge and heritage<sup>3</sup> but as agents of directed social change.<sup>4</sup> These ideas have multiple problems, including false understanding of human development,<sup>5</sup> dubious characterisations of existing society, overblown claims about their understanding of social dynamics,<sup>6</sup> and crowding out

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<sup>1</sup> J Hunter, ‘Reform urgently needed to help teachers do their job’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, no. Online, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Supervision of Students*, Victorian State Government, Education.vic.gov.au, 2021. *Suspensions*, Victorian State Government, Education.vic.gov.au, 2024. Apart from reference to their own authority, there is no explicit or clear admission of the relation between parental authority and the authority of schools and teachers.

<sup>3</sup> Being an *agent of change* is implied in the schema by which teachers maintain their competency. Cf. *Performance and Development for Teacher Class Employees*, Victorian State Government, Education.vic.gov.au, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> It is relatively easy to mobilise students — including student teachers — to adopt a cognitive identity— for instance, as social justice supporters— and then get them to reason to protect that identity. But such identity-protecting-cognition is precisely what an advanced technological society does not need.  
<<https://www.gurwinder.blog/p/why-smart-people-hold-stupid-beliefs>>

<sup>5</sup> This can range across overturning the normal process of developing concrete understandings of the world, claiming that sex is “assigned” at birth — when it is observed — to claiming that children are inherently sexual.

<sup>6</sup> If, for instance, the income variability within groups is larger than between groups, then factors other than group membership are more important in determining incomes. Especially as such factors being differently distributed within groups may well explain much of the differences between groups.

student acquisition of broadly useful skills and knowledge. Such approaches show a pervasive hostility to the authority of parents, and of the citizenry, for such approaches have not been subject to democratic scrutiny: indeed, as discussed below, they resist such scrutiny.

Unfortunately, it is difficult for ordinary citizens and parents to judge how much these ideas have penetrated Education Faculties in Australia. The associated rhetoric has, however, very much become part of general public and academic discourse – “de-colonising the curriculum” is, for example, very much a live issue in Australian universities.

A recent scholarly attempt to find a valid scale of adherence to Critical Social Justice found that Critical Social Justice was much more strongly supported by women than men. Among academics, support among women was highest (in order) in Social Sciences, Political Science & Philosophy, Humanities, and Education while the highest rates of support among men were in Political Science & Philosophy and Education.<sup>7</sup>

These ideas have been able to advance as far as they have because of serious failures of accountability in universities — particularly about teacher training — and in schools. The mainstream media has not been effective in informing the citizenry of what has been going on. These ideas both prey on, and aggravate, inherent difficulties in centralised — and so bureaucratised — schooling systems.

## 2. Persistent failures of accountability

There is a well known joke among teachers that you know you have been teaching for a while when the same ideas come around for a second time while it is time to retire when they come around for the third time.<sup>8</sup>

This pattern tells us that:

- (1) Much of what passes for Education as a discipline is not intellectually serious. A serious intellectual discipline would not have a pattern of repackaging previous failed approaches.
- (2) Feedback between what works in classrooms and what Education Faculties teach to trainee teachers has been persistently inadequate. It is revealing that TAFE systems

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<sup>7</sup> O Lahtinen, ‘Construction and validation of a scale for assessing critical social justice attitudes’, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> RE Mayer, ‘Should there be a three-strikes rule against pure discovery learning?’, *American psychologist*, vol. 59, no. 1, 2004, pp. 14-19.

typically do not recognise a single university Education qualification as acceptable to allow one to be a TAFE teacher.

- (3) There are persistent failures of accountability in school systems — otherwise they would not take on repackaged versions of previous failed approaches — and in Education faculties.
- (4) The combination of a persistent lack of intellectual rigour, and inadequate accountability, leaves teacher training and school systems open to being colonised by dysfunctional, even toxic, ideas.

The conservative presumption is that institutions should be allowed to manage themselves.<sup>9</sup> The progressive hope is to use institutions to change society.<sup>10</sup> This leads to — as Business Union principal Ken Phillips has noted — progressive politics generally seeking to control institutions, while conservative politics merely manages them.<sup>11</sup> The public statements, actions in government, and private conversations with, centre-right politicians show them to be persistently unaware of the importance or the dynamics of such institutional politics or the significance of the ideas seeping through education institutions and out into the wider society. They have, with a few exceptions, been systematically oblivious to what they don't know and why it matters. The aforementioned Critical Social Justice ideas go well beyond “being nice” to each other.

The value of bureaucracy is that it regularises administration. The problems of bureaucracy include that it seeks to:

- (1) hoard authority (including supplant other sources of information);
- (2) the transfer resources to itself;
- (3) evade accountability;
- (4) transfer risks and costs onto others.

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<sup>9</sup> Vs. *Digital Learning in Schools*, Victorian State Government, Education.vic.gov.au, 2023. It seems a policy of autonomy per school is delimited to the online space only.

<sup>10</sup> *Outside School Hours Care - Decision Making Regarding the Provision of OSHC*, Victorian State Government, 2021. *Alcohol and Other Drugs - Students*, Victorian State Government, Education.vic.gov.au, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Private communication. That progressives tend to be systematically more hostile than are conservatives to people with different opinions. Cf. RD Ridge, CE Hawk, LD Hartvigsen, & LD McCombs, ‘To meme or not to meme? Political social media posts and ideologically motivated aggression in job recommendations’, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 2024. aids the process of progressive domination of institutions.

The inherent tendency is for these patterns to increase over time, unless there are very strong and persistent pressures to impose accountability. Bureaucracies are not ‘wind-up toys’ that one simply sets and forgets. They are social institutions run by living organisms, so they tend to (socially) evolve and, unfortunately, their internal dynamics encourage them to evolve pathologically.<sup>12</sup> This can extend to selecting for bullying and manipulative personalities.

There are very few economies of scale in education. This means that there is very little that extensive bureaucracies can usefully do in education in regularising administration. Hence, in education, the pathologies of bureaucracy are likely to be far more in evidence than its benefits, and for this to get worse over time.

For example, there is considerable evidence for the importance of the principal on school performance. Consider the findings of recent study by Grissom & others.<sup>13</sup> As the study states:

- (1) *Effective principals are at least as important for student achievement as previous reports have concluded—and in fact, their importance may not have been stated strongly enough.*
- (2) *Replacing a below-average principal (at the 25th percentile) with an above-average one (at the 75th percentile) would increase the typical student’s learning by nearly three months in both math and reading annually. But this is just an average effect across students in a school, meaning a principal’s effects are felt by potentially hundreds of students in a school year. Indeed, it is difficult to envision an investment with a higher ceiling on its potential return than improving principal leadership.*

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<sup>12</sup> Pournelle's Iron Law of Bureaucracy states that in any bureaucratic organization there will be two kinds of people:

*First, there will be those who are devoted to the goals of the organization. Examples are dedicated classroom teachers in an educational bureaucracy, many of the engineers and launch technicians and scientists at NASA, even some agricultural scientists and advisors in the former Soviet Union collective farming administration.*

*Secondly, there will be those dedicated to the organization itself. Examples are many of the administrators in the education system, many professors of education, many teachers union officials, much of the NASA headquarters staff, etc.*

*The Iron Law states that in every case the second group will gain and keep control of the organization. It will write the rules, and control promotions within the organization.*

<https://www.jerrypournelle.com/reports/jerryp/iron.html>

<sup>13</sup> JA Grissom, AJ Egalite, & CA Lindsay, ‘How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research. New York: The Wallace Foundation’, in Editor (ed.)^(eds.), *Book How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research. New York: The Wallace Foundation, City, 2021.*

- (3) *Principals have substantively important effects that extend beyond student achievement,*
- a. *We document recent rigorous studies linking more effective principals to key student outcomes, such as reductions in absenteeism and exclusionary discipline.*
  - b. *Research also shows clear links between effective leadership and important teacher outcomes, including more positive teacher working conditions and reduced turnover, especially among effective teachers.*
- (4) *Effective principals orient their practice toward instructionally focused interactions with teachers, building a productive school climate, facilitating collaboration and professional learning communities, and strategic personnel and resource management processes.*

There is very little, apart from collecting and disseminating information, that centralised bureaucracy can do to help any of this and much it can do to hinder it.

Where effective accountability is weak, bureaucracies tend to expand both their use of resources and their authority. Various forms of Critical Social Justice encourage this by giving such bureaucracies various (spurious) moral projects to be getting along with. Adding extra things for schools (and so teachers) to do aids bureaucratic aggrandisement while imposing extra demands on teachers and students.

The pathologies of bureaucracy and the moral-project ambitions of Critical Social Justice operate in mutually supporting ways. A *New York Times* by John Chubb makes the metastasising bureaucracy point well:

*“New York City, as I discovered after a 35 minute phone call with nine different bureaucrats at the Board of Education, has 6,622 full-time employees in its public school headquarters. That's one external administrator for every 150 students.*

*By comparison, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York has so few employees in its headquarters that the first one I called simply offered to count them for me - 30 central administrators; no more than one for every 4,000 students.”<sup>14</sup>*

The bureaucratic bloat in the New York City school system does not represent effective accountability, but the lack of it.

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<sup>14</sup> JE Chubb, ‘To revive schools, dump bureaucrats’, *The New York Times A*, vol. 23, 1988.

In our present centralised government-run education system, the ratio of teachers to administrators in Victoria stands at approximately 2 teachers for every 1 administrator.<sup>15</sup> This inefficiency, and the burden it imposes on students and teachers, represents a failure of accountability hidden by the pretence of it.

It is apparent that government bureaucracy adopts a stance of presumed expertise, pushing schooling and its administration into the realm of what is plausible and convenient rather than effective. Individuals lacking tangible experience in the field often ascend to positions of influence, even at senior levels, via selection processes oriented towards bureaucratic mastery rather than appropriate knowledge and understanding. The managerialist conceit — that there is some generic managerial capacity — does not select for, or even respect, proven aptitude or genuine understanding of the demands of education. In particular, there is no inherent connection to any understanding or commitment to the profession of teaching. The consequence is often opaque bureaucratic structures that undermine accountability,<sup>16</sup> exacerbating concerns surrounding transparency and effective governance.

One of the problems with centralised management of any education system is that the central bureaucracy can present itself as the agents of the Minister or similar authority (e.g. a University Vice Chancellor). Its expansion can then be portrayed as protecting or expanding the authority of the Minister (or Vice Chancellor). This leads to a continual ratcheting up of the level of bureaucratisation and the diversion of resources both too — and by — the bureaucracy. For the costs of bureaucracy extend well beyond the resources it directly consumes to the extra work it imposes on teachers and other service providers. Bureaucracy can be a great thief of attention: both for those it is allegedly reporting to and those it administers.

Excessive bureaucratisation can easily undermine both the responsiveness and the resilience of a system. For example, by diverting resources from teachers while imposing more costs on them, leading to an exodus of teachers.

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<sup>15</sup> In 2022 for FTE, The Department of Education & Training (DET) declared that they had 37574 teachers, 2852 VPS classified employees, and 16822 Education Support employees. J Atta, *Annual Report 2022 - 2023*, Victoria State Government, [education.vic.gov.au](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au), 2022. Cf. <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/roles-and-responsibilities-teaching-service/policy-and-guidelines/education-support-class>. The latter is defined as “Education support class positions are diverse and cover the delivery of support services that include school administration and operations (for example, human resources, finance, facilities) school support services (for example, library, laboratory, information technology) direct student and teaching support (for example, classroom assistance to teachers, careers counselling, student health and wellbeing).”

<sup>16</sup> Senior bureaucrats are often much better protected than the value of what they do warrants.

Bureaucracy is never short of good intentions. What is much more difficult is matching its costs and activities to outcomes that are worth those costs. Poor, or even toxic, ideas can creep in if it is in the interest of bureaucracy to adopt them, or to not block them.

It is often appropriate to treat various reviews of schooling and school policy sceptically, as they often fail to go back to first principles or otherwise take various institutional features of schooling for granted. Consultants regularly avoid upsetting the managerialist bureaucracies administering education systems that are their *functional* clients.

### 3. Toxic ideas

There is a naive view that, as long as there is freedom of thought and speech, bad ideas will drive out good ideas. Alas, often the dynamic is more like Gresham's Law — bad money drives out good — as ideas that motivate people to network together, exclude others and achieve institutional power are selected for.

What drives out bad ideas — by selecting against them — is effective accountability and other reality and character tests.<sup>17</sup> Conversely, a lack of effective accountability and reality or character tests enables bad, even toxic, ideas to gestate and spread. This includes selection for practices and ideas that are convenient for bureaucracies and their administrative ease.

The founder of Critical Pedagogy, Paulo Freire (1921-1997), has over 552,000 citations.<sup>18</sup> This despite the fact that his key works — *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and *The Politics of Education* (1985) — refer little, if at all, to pedagogical research, as any reader thereof can attest.<sup>19</sup> On the contrary, Freire essentially rewrites Marxism for a pedagogical context, with references in the texts are such figures as Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, G.W.F. Hegel, Rosa Luxemburg, Georg Lukacs, Eric From, Herbert Marcuse, Frantz Fanon, Régis Debray, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Che Guevara, Mao Zedong, Vladimir Lenin, Fidel Castro, Louis Althusser, and various liberation theologians.

It is not that Freire teaches Marxism. It is that he *Marxifies* education: he applies the Marxist template to the processes of teaching. Thus, there is a particular form of property (literacy, educated knowledge) that those running society aggregate to themselves, giving themselves

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<sup>17</sup> Reality tests are things that select for what works in practice and against what does not work. Something that forces people to match their actions to their words operates as a character test.

<sup>18</sup> Paulo Freire, Google Scholar, 2024, <<https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=en&user=IdMf1V7YL6MC>>.

<sup>19</sup> P Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Toward a sociology of education, Routledge, 2020. ———, *The politics of education. Culture, power, and liberation*, Macmillan, 1985.

opportunities denied others, that excludes from the full opportunities of society those denied such property. But if students are awakened to “true” (critical) literacy, they can see these structures of oppression and act against them. This is a structure of faith that has much more in common with cult dynamics than anything that resembles pedagogical practice well-grounded in human capacities and cognition. But it encourages a grandiose self-identity among its practitioners, including a (false) belief that they have understandings of social dynamics denied others.<sup>20</sup>

Do you regard complex societies as hard to create and maintain? Then you will be concerned about teaching skills and knowledge needed to do so, and to enable your students to prosper in such societies.

If you regard societies as not structured by the problems of order — of making things work — but by power and domination, then imparting skills and knowledge to help such societies function is to perpetuate power and domination. Rather the aim is to seek social transformation by alienating people from said power and domination through creating a critical awareness of the same.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, Freire opposed using phonics to teach literacy, as it treats literacy as a technical skill to be acquired. He advocated a generative word approach to literacy, not on the basis of any pedagogical evidence about their relative effectiveness, but because it fitted in with his Marxified Theory of education that the point of education is to generate the correct subjective understanding of the society folk lived in that would promote its social transformation.

A deep irony in the flattering of teachers by various form of Critical Social Justice as “change agents” is that the hostility to authority inherent within Critical Social Justice, the celebration of the “lived experience” of students, treating teachers and students as “equally knowing

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<sup>20</sup> Homo sapiens are the normative species because we developed highly cooperative subsistence and reproductive strategies, and norms made such cooperation more robust. JE Theriault, L Young, & LF Barrett, ‘The sense of should: A biologically-based framework for modeling social pressure’, *Physics of Life Reviews*, vol. 36, 2021, pp. 100-36. We are the religious species because we became the linguistic ape, so developed, and have to manage self-consciousness: CD Frith, ‘The role of metacognition in human social interactions’, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, vol. 367, no. 1599, 2012. The Dialectical Faith developed by Marx holds that self-consciousness separates *Homo sapiens* from animals. So, we create the world around us, thus we humanise the world in a dialectical process of creating society and being created by society. We do not adapt to the world, we create it by achieving a unity of theory and practice dialectically resolving all contradictions through our critical consciousness, our fully awakened and empowered subjectivity. It is a faith system of pathos (lived experience and action) not logos (truth). Hence Marx’s dictum that the point is not to describe the world but to change it. M Horkheimer, ‘Traditional and critical theory’, *Critical theory: Selected essays*, vol. 188, no. 243, 1972, pp. 188-243.

<sup>21</sup> This is the difference between the Constrained and Unconstrained visions as described by Thomas Sowell. T Sowell, *A conflict of visions: Ideological origins of political struggles*, Basic Books (AZ), 2002.

learners”, and elevation of various identities based on notions of “marginalisation”, all operate to undermine the authority of teachers. Moreover, denigration of the heritage of Western societies as “structures of oppression” denies to teachers the status of purveyors of a heritage of human striving and achievement. Yet it is precisely in those cultures where such purveying of heritage is seen as central to the role of teachers that teachers have the highest status and presumptive authority.<sup>22</sup>

The claim of trumping moral and epistemic authority to those who have the correct beliefs that is pervasive in Critical Social Justice literature — that, if you disagree, there is something wrong with, even maleficent about you — entrenches a narcissistic approach to disagreement that damages the emotional and intellectual development of students.<sup>23</sup> The (false) insistence on the primacy of group identity undermines any notion of individual agency. For it is almost invariably true that variability within groups is greater than that between groups, in which case other factors are more important in social outcomes than group membership.

Life strategies can and do vary among cultures and among families. Indeed, much of the differences between groups come from differences in cultures and family structures. But, by refusing to take the problems of creating order seriously — and seeing power and domination as profoundly causally dominant — such explanations are foreclosed by Critical Social Justice. This leaves morally illegitimate differential treatment by others, and the structures of society, as the only approved causal explanations. Disagreement with these fundamental claims is taken to be a sign of moral and/or epistemic delinquency — e.g. “white fragility”. Thus, error correction within the core ideas of this approach is foreclosed.

The stripping of value from their society’s heritage denies students any grounded notion of human striving and achievement and what it looks like.<sup>24</sup> The elevation of group activism as the only valid and effective form of human agency greatly narrows the possibilities of human action. The catastrophising characterisation of existing society as “structures of oppression” — along with the undermining of any notion of personal agency — can easily leave students

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. *EDUC2604 - Teachers as Agents of Change*, The University of Queensland, viewed 26 March 2024, <[https://course-profiles.uq.edu.au/student\\_section\\_loader/section\\_1/128604](https://course-profiles.uq.edu.au/student_section_loader/section_1/128604)>.

<sup>23</sup> Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure*, Penguin 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Youth Justice – Additional Support for Young People*, Victorian State Government, Education.vic.gov.au, 2023. *Behaviour - students*, Victorian State Government, Education.vic.gov.au, 2023. *Student Engagement*, Victorian State Government, Education.vic.gov.au, 2022.

feeling that they are helpless in a hostile world while surrounded by achievements that demonstrate what a false view that is of human possibilities.<sup>25</sup>

Astrophysicist, consultant and Sci-Fi author David Brin recently observed that Western civilisation has managed to create — for the first time in human history — complex societies *not* characterised by systematic oppression.<sup>26</sup> It has done so by evolving processes of reciprocal accountability, generating expanding realms of positive-sum games and being the most self-critical (so self-correcting) of civilisations.

Critical Social Justice denies this achievement several times over. First, by its (false) characterisation of Western societies as structures of oppression. Second, because its systematic usurpation of authority of parents and citizens breaks such reciprocal accountability.<sup>27</sup> It does so based on its zero-sum, conflict theory characterisation of society. Moreover, as we have seen, its core claims are insulated from error correction, doing so on the grounds that when any attempt to put into practice its underlying claims — its secular Faith — does not work, it was just “not done right”, for if it had, they would have worked.<sup>28</sup>

Critical Social Justice represents the reverse of what created the least oppressive societies in human history. This is not the path to any sort of human liberation, but to its opposite.

Critical Social Justice operates on a series of false claims. It presumes that they can identify oppression accurately (they can't, as they define oppression as any restraint on one's subjectivity and any inequality in outcomes as indicating oppression). It presumes that their analysis of social dynamics is correct (it isn't). To take a simple example, Critical Social Justice presumes that imperialism is a result of capitalism, when imperialism is a state

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<sup>25</sup> The creation of such crises in students can be intentional, as social justice educator K.K. Kumashiro states: Once in a crisis, a student can go in many directions, some that may lead to anti-oppressive change, others that may lead to more entrenched resistance. Therefore, educators have a responsibility not only to draw students into a possible crisis, but also to structure experiences that can help them work through their crises productively. K Kumashiro, 'Against repetition: Addressing resistance to anti-oppressive change in the practices of learning, teaching, supervising, and researching', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 72, no. 1, 2002, pp. 74-75.

<sup>26</sup> DJ Volodzko, 'The Radicalist', in Editor (ed.)^(eds.), *Book The Radicalist*, Apple Podcasts, City, 2024.

<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the clearest statement of this perspective is Herbert Marcuse's essay 'Repressive Tolerance' (originally published in *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* in 1965) which provides an updated version of the principle of the medieval Inquisitor – that error has no rights and that those who embrace the appropriate social vision can determine error. The demands to ban “hate speech” and block “misinformation” update the underlying idea. The essay is available at <<https://www.marcuse.org/herbert/publications/1960s/1965-repressive-tolerance-fulltext.html>>.

<sup>28</sup> As has been seen in every Marxist society. Hence no amount of mass murder and tyranny is enough to shake believers. Nor has been the surge in homicides in the US after progressive “Black Lives Matter” anti-police activism or the spreading dysfunction of progressive-administered US cities led to questioning of the basic approach. Treating all dissent from Critical Social Justice originating claims as signs of bigotry represents systematic attack on the feedback that accountability needs in order to function.

activity — as soon as states evolve, there begins to be imperialism. That imperialism is have done states regardless of how “capitalist” they are undermines the positive notion of state action advocates of Critical Social Justice seek to push. From the beginning of states they were — when they could be — territorially imperial for the same reason that bureaucracies tend to be socially imperial: it provides more status and resources to those making the decisions.

#### 4. Persistent failures of accountability

False, even destructive, ideas have been able to advance as far as they have through systematic failures of accountability. The pattern whereby citizens elect Members of Parliament, one of whom becomes Minister of Education, who supervises a centralised bureaucracy, which runs licensing systems and directs schools, whose teachers then teach students in classes, with all this operating as just part of a complex welfare state, has proved to be profoundly inadequate for effective accountability.

No structure of accountability is infinitely flexible. There are so many points where effective accountability can fail in the above processes that it is hardly surprising that highly motivated networks of believers have proved not merely willing, but able, to insert false and toxic ideas into teaching, particularly via the colonisation of teacher training.<sup>29</sup>

The problem is magnified if ideas are disseminated — or perhaps laundered — through UN or other international bodies.<sup>30</sup> Many of the states involved are not democratic and, even with those that are, no one is elected on the basis of what they do or do not do at the UN or other such bodies. Such bodies then become effective mechanisms for giving (spurious) authority to ideas while evading accountability. Indeed, much of the appeal of such international bodies is precisely such evasion of inconvenient accountability.

A recurring technique to evade accountability is to give words that have a general meaning a specific use within Theory so as to provide avenues for inserting Critical Social Justice into classrooms: the principle of using your language but not your dictionary. The usurping of the

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<sup>29</sup> What Scott Atran and his colleagues call *devoted actors*. S Atran, ‘Devoted actor versus rational actor models for understanding world conflict’, *Preliminary remarks during presentation made by the author to the National Security Council at the White House*, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> This can be by way of s51(xxix) of the Australian Constitution, which empowers the federal government to make legislation to align with external affairs, viz., treaties or simply by the use of the UN as an authoritative source.

authority of parents and citizens can be done through quite deliberate misdirection or obfuscation.<sup>31</sup> As a Critical Social Justice text notes:

*I'd like to begin by considering the use of the word critical to describe pedagogy as it has essentially become one of many code words used to make the political agenda of a course invisible or at least less visible. This has allowed educators to access public resources in order to further the goals of social justice in education.*<sup>32</sup>

This both exposes systematic failures of accountability and the quite deliberate usurpation of the authority of parents and citizens. Failures made worse by activism and advocacy that actively seeks to evade, or break, the institutional chains of trust that complex societies rely on.

Critical Social Justice rests on the unwarranted claim that all outcomes can be equalised between all groups. Critical Pedagogy extends that to the even more unwarranted, indeed grandiose, claim that schools can be the mechanism for such.

Every additional aim added to schooling stretches the limited resource of student attention (and capacity) more thinly while multiplying burdens on teachers. Critical Social Justice and its derivatives very much seek to direct attention to its concerns and critiques — to disseminating what it regards as correct viewpoints — and away from improving the functionality of societies, and the ability of students to function better within them, that it characterises as inherently oppressive.

Respecting the authority of parents, and restoring the proper authority of teachers to educate rather than indoctrinate, has to involve structures that are pervaded by the key practises of Western civilisation — reciprocal accountability, creating positive-sum interactions, inbuilt error-correction. This extends well beyond giving parents greater choice — so greater authority — over the educating of their children. However important it is to ensure parents are informed about what is going on in the schools their children are going to, and to ensure effective accountability directly to parents, all the school choice in the world will do little if the training and certification of teachers, of schools, of curricula are captured by ideas of

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Student Voice, Agency and Leadership*, Victorian State Government, Education.vic.gov.au. What exactly is “voice, agency and leadership” mentioned over & again here without distinguishment or definition.

<sup>32</sup> K Hackford-Peer, “‘That Wasn’t Very Free Thinker’: Queer Critical Pedagogy in the Early Grades”, in *Cris Mayo & Nelson M. Rodriguez (eds.), Queer Pedagogies: Theory, Praxis, Politics*, Springer International Publishing, Cham, 2019, p. 80.

indoctrination, rather than of educating, or simply by dysfunctional ideas that appeal to self-aggrandising bureaucracies, yet do not work.

One of the fundamental problems of bureaucracy is shielding decision-makers from the consequences of their decisions. This problem can extend to professional bodies, which can be surprisingly easily captured by ardently pushed ideas that appeal to people's sense of moral status and concern yet lack a strong evidentiary base.<sup>33</sup> This has proved to be a particular issue with the transgender issue, as repeated reviews in the UK and across Europe have found that the evidence base for "gender affirming care" is poor: yet another case of bad ideas lacking good evidence being spread via bureaucracies.

Nevertheless, various professional-regulatory bodies in the US<sup>34</sup> and Canada<sup>35</sup> claim that "gender affirming care" should be the preferred model for dealing with children who express ~~any level of~~ discomfort with their physical body or associated behavioural expectations. A discomfort that is quite common among children who are highly likely to turn out to homosexual or have other emotional difficulties. These professional body endorsements have then justified systematic usurpation of the authority of parents by schools keeping "transition" of children secret from parents. As a recent report containing leaked emails and other documents states, given the surgical and hormonal mutilation of minors involved, it is an urgent question:

*how activists with little respect for the Hippocratic Oath could have risen to such prominence as to set the Standards of Care for an entire field of medicine, leading to the medical abuse of minors and vulnerable adults.*<sup>36</sup>

Activist perspectives that have been adopted within Australian schools. A process marked by hostility to dissent, thereby impeding or blocking the feedback required to test claims that is basic to accountability. There is a reason that tyrannies are such keen censors.

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<sup>33</sup> That progressives are much more likely to be actively hostile to divergent views than conservatives makes progressive-dominated institutions far more prone to conformism and blocking effective feedback. Ridge, Hawk, Hartvigsen, & McCombs, 'To meme or not to meme? Political social media posts and ideologically motivated aggression in job recommendations'. That conservatives base their identity far more on things outside themselves (social order, family, country, heritage ...) while progressives far more on their (interior) commitments to an imagined future likely accounts for this pattern.

<sup>34</sup> E Redfield, KJ Conron, W Tentindo, & E Browning, *Prohibiting Gender-Affirming Medical Care*, UCLA School of Law, Williams Institute, 2023.

<sup>35</sup> K Ross & S Fraser, 'Minimally invasive procedures in gender-affirming care: the case for public funding across Canada', *CMAJ*, vol. 195, no. 31, 2023.

<sup>36</sup> M Hughes, *The WPATH Files: Pseudoscientific Surgical and Hormonal Experiments on Children, Adolescents, and Vulnerable Adults*, Environmental Progress, viewed 22 March 2024, <<https://environmentalprogress.org/big-news/wpath-files>>.

The identity of *being an authority* can itself be corrupting, particularly when allied to highly moralised good intentions. The medical field has a series of disastrously inappropriate treatments being pursued by the combination of authority and good intentions — lobotomies; ovariectomy (removal of healthy ovaries to treat mental illness); apotemnophilia (removing healthy limbs to bring the body in line with self-conception); engineering children’s height with hormones; recovered memories of abuse (known as *the Satanic panic*).<sup>37</sup> Not coincidentally, these are all about treating mental illness: the area where observation is most indirect, causality is most difficult to discern and the risk of simple non-conformity being pathologised is greatest. The more Education as a discipline shares such characteristics, the more likely it is to go awry in similar ways.

A commitment to an overall theoretical framework easily leads to small studies — often not much better than anecdotes — to be cited as supporting the framework. Such studies, or even just cases, are invoked to support the narrative being pushed well in excess of their evidentiary value. Critical Social Justice is particularly prone to this pattern. When confronted with evidence contradicting their claims about social dynamics, there is often a resort to “magic spirits” sociology, whereby malign forces that are somehow pervasive (“structural”) — but not tied to any specific actions by individuals or organizations — are presumed to block achieving equal outcomes.

While various forms of Critical Social Justice provide particularly extreme manifestations of failures of accountability allowing toxic ideas into school systems, such ideas represent failures of accountability that have been manifest for decades. There is a previous history of educational fads working through institutions that thereby have proved to lack robust accountability. Indeed, the failures of previous educational fads based on inadequate evidence created something of a market for new educational fads, also with inadequate evidence, operating within the same systems of inadequate accountability.

The previous fads were aimed at improving educational outcomes — literacy, numeracy, comprehension, and so on. Critical Social Justice is not aimed such, but at generating what it regards as appropriately critical attitudes to existing society and its heritage. This requires, as we have seen, explicit frustration of accountability to parents and citizens. That it has proved

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<sup>37</sup> The report by Mia Hughes attached to the release of the WPATH provides further details on these medical failures: *ibid.* Journalist Trish Woods explores the similarity between the sterilisation and mutilation of minors in the name of “gender affirming care” with the patterns of the Satanic Panic on her Substack: T Wood, *Shocking Video Shows How Captures Professionals Convince Kids They are Trans*, Trishwood, Substack, viewed 22 March 2024, <<https://trishwood.substack.com/p/shocking-video-shows-how-captured>>.

relatively easy to spread into teacher training and schools illustrates how inadequate accountability has been.

Moral concern, particularly ostentatious moral concern, makes it easier to block or frustrate the feedback that is necessary for genuine accountability by deploying the activist's fallacy:

We are doing X to achieve Y.

You are against X.

*Therefore,*

You are against Y.

Any criticism of the methods used to achieve the stated good intentions becomes a frustration of, or hostility to, the good intentions. Quite disastrous ideas can be protected and promulgated in this way. Hence the need for effective systems of accountability and a commitment to the norms thereof. To make criticism of some technique or structure morally impermissible destroys accountability. A sense of righteousness in one's actions can, as C.S. Lewis famously observed, be quite dangerous:

*Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It would be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience.<sup>38</sup>*

The more morally grandiose the intentions, the easier it is to justify and deploy one's grand moral intentions as a block to accountability. It is no accident that Critical Pedagogy, and other forms of Critical Social Justice — whose ambition is the transformation of society — have proved most relentless in deploying the activist's fallacy, treating all dissent from their programs as manifesting racism, misogyny, transphobia, etc. Such moral abuse of dissent has proved to quite effective at frustrating accountability. Not least because it offers people an easy path to having a sense of moral authority. It can be startlingly easy for highly educated people to endorse foolish or destructive ideas as they are better at rationalising and moralising nonsense.

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<sup>38</sup> CS Lewis & W Hooper, *God in the dock : essays on theology*, Fount paperbacks, Collins, London, 1979.

Once one has adopted a persona as a ‘moral master of the universe’, particularly as part of a network of like-minded people, there a powerful incentive to self-curate information to maintain that identity. The norms and procedures of accountability can be degraded, or even fatally compromised, by such processes. Such self-siloing of information can generate polarising social “bubbles” of mutual incomprehension. As C.S. Lewis continued:

*They may be more likely to go to Heaven yet at the same time likelier to make a Hell of earth. This very kindness stings with intolerable insult. To be "cured" against one's will and cured of states which we may not regard as disease is to be put on a level of those who have not yet reached the age of reason or those who never will; to be classed with infants, imbeciles, and domestic animals.<sup>39</sup>*

Much of modern media seeks to offer both its journalists and its readers precisely such a sense of moral authority, and so leans into such self-curating of information, making it a very unreliable mechanism for accountability for parents and citizens. Once they have become committed to a particular narrative, both journalists and their readers have a powerful incentive to ignore or deny information that contradicts that narrative.

Again, this feeds into more general institutional failures. Once a bureaucratic structure has adopted a policy framework, those who do not conform to these directives can be penalised for displaying independent thinking, which government bureaucracies, and the Ministers they advise, insist must adhere strictly to prescribed norms.

## 5. Commerce or command

If any good or service is to be provided at scale, the only readily available mechanisms are commerce (including not-for-profit providers) or command. Commerce involves the processes of discovery, assembling and managing productive resources, along with risk management, being bundled together. The more effectively they are bundled together, the greater the return. This encourages seeking new opportunities, releasing unused or under-used resources, keeping costs down and more efficient coverage of risk.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> “Once upon a time we were poor, then [market-tested betterment] flourished, and now as a result we are rich.” D.N.McCloskey, *If You're So Smart: The Narrative of Economic Expertise*, University of Chicago Press, 1990. P.ix.

Command, on the other hand, encourages increased use of resources within its processes to serve its administrators, does not encourage value-adding discovery and regularly involves passing risks onto others. This is why mercantile societies are persistently more technologically dynamic, prosperous and less environmentally destructive than command economies. The problems with the incentive and information structures of command systems is why peace-time armed forces often drastically underperform in the early stages of a conflict.<sup>41</sup>

Not-for-profit providers, due to a much weaker financial ‘bottom line’, can display tendencies for inflated staffing costs. On the other hand, if they are embedded in a local community with strong cross-connections, they can be effective service providers.

The difference between commerce and command is the difference between decentralised chosen providers and centralised imposed providers. The latter are systematically poor at discovering what works in changing circumstances. Hence the pattern of selecting only for what maintains the present system and/or elevating the role of the administering bureaucracy. For instance, the evidentiary basis for benefits from Diversity Equity Inclusion is weak or non-existent, but its bureaucratic aggrandising benefits as expansive moral projects are high, hence its spread through government, non-profit and corporate bureaucracies.

The model of public schooling, of centralised routinised learning, was developed to teach — to educate and socialise — conscript soldiers and factory workers. As women entered the workforce, it also became a mechanism of mass child-minding that reduces the inconveniences, but also many of the joys, of parenting.

The factory model — of teaching as a routinised practice — encourages the recurring generation of teaching approaches of dubious value, as if teaching is a matter of routines into which new routines can be slotted in. In reality, effective teaching reflects the personality of the teacher, including being able to “read the room” and respond to and direct the dynamics of class and cohort. Just as the best way to learn is to teach, one learns to teach by watching good teachers and then developing teaching style or styles that work for you and your students. Genuinely robust scholarship about human learning is likely to be much more useful than yet another “new framing”.

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<sup>41</sup> A persistent issue is that “[l]ay economic reasoning tends to be dominated by the intentional fallacy: inferring consequences or outcomes from stated or apparent intentions.” A. Bhattacharjee, & J. Dana, ‘Lay economic reasoning: An integrative review and call to action,’ *Consumer Psychology Review*, (2024) 7(1), 3–39. With increased resources being presumptively good due to their justifying intentions.

The dramatic changes in information technology, and advancements in understanding of human origins, development, capacities for learning, have led to remarkably little change in the structures of public schooling. This is not surprising, as centralised imposed provision is a poor mechanism as discovering what works and adjusting to that.<sup>42</sup>

Much of schooling has become structured to produce the sort of people who administer education systems. For instance, trying to train students to be little historians rather than giving them a well-grounded general understanding of the flow of human events<sup>43</sup> or replacing technical high schools with comprehensive schools aimed at generating university entrants.

This focus has been leavened by emotionally convenient ideas that elevate the importance of such administrators, the providers of teacher training and, in certain narrow ways, teachers. How well, or not, schooling works for students who do not end up travelling that path has very little impact on those making the decisions. Hence the ongoing tendency for repackaging of failed ideas, whether failed in the narrowly pedagogical sense or failed in grander social transformation sense.

## 6. Current problems

The failures of accountability, and pathologies of bureaucracy, have led to a range of problems with contemporary schooling:

- (1) Insufficient compensation for teachers persists while education funding is often directed towards bureaucratic positions.
- (2) Overbearing administrative loads on teachers. In 2022, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) found that full-time classroom teachers

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<sup>42</sup> The myriad of policies to which Victorian public schools are bound, while doubtless aiming to provide coherency and consistency across all schools, make it impossible to incentivise, as far as would be explicitly warranted by one's supervisor, HOD and/or principal, innovation and flexibility. Instead, the initiative of any is likely to be disincentivised when met with the strictures of so many policies to observe. It is just too hard to act reasonably in the circumstance when 'what is reasonable' is already determined by umpteen policy documents.

<sup>42</sup> What may be expected of a teacher, who is not an employee, is often different to what may be expected of a teacher who is an employee; so much so, that the teaching vocation has grafted to it an ongoing onus to *behave reasonably in the circumstance*. In the circumstance this means that a teacher is strictly bound to comply with reasonable directions (also reasonably in the circumstance). Since most circumstances are covered by a policy document, it means that the teacher lacks agency to innovate, even dissent. Their vocation is dwarfed by their contractual obligations.

<sup>43</sup> Given the human love of narrative, history as the human story can be a powerful way to hold student interest. That history does not repeat but it does rhyme means that a sense of the rhymes of history is of value for future voting citizens.

reported working an average of 53.7 hours per week, senior leaders reported 58.6 hours per week, and middle leaders reported 55.3 hours per week. ‘The Age ’reported on the workload crisis among teachers:

*“Dr Hunter said teachers are expected to “assess student learning frequently, monitor progress closely and adapt their practice appropriately, stay abreast of the research evidence, develop children’s social and academic competencies, and ensure their teaching is inclusive of the range of student abilities.”<sup>44</sup>*

*“Add in hours of yard duty and extracurricular activities each week, a good dose of paperwork, student welfare checks, administrative meetings, and the frequent introduction of new programs to tackle emerging social issues from financial literacy and cyber-bullying to informed consent, and the average teacher’s schedule is bulging.”<sup>45</sup>*

Excessive bureaucratic demands detract from the primary focus of teaching students. These demands often manifest as checkbox requirements that lack evidence of improving outcomes but serve as a means for administrators to justify their roles, undermining the authority of teachers. The increased workload imposed on teachers is not balanced by clear accountability for improved outcomes from the bureaucratic burdens.

- (3) Lack of teachers due to mass exodus from the profession. Teachers encounter job insecurity due to reliance on casual positions and short-term contracts, leading to financial instability and hindering the ability to secure a stable future. There are also issues with the demands on teachers and increased difficulties of classroom management.
- (4) Reduction in positive student outcomes. The OECD’s Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reported, Australian students currently score lower than students 10 years ago in science, maths and reading. Education departments announce policy programs with the standard good intentions that do not match the results. For example, in Victoria, according to its publicly declared policy (<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/victorian-teaching-learning-model/policy>):

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<sup>44</sup> Hunter, ‘Reform urgently needed to help teachers do their job’. Cf. D Brear, *Why workload remains the biggest issue facing teachers*, Independent Education Union: Victoria, Tasmania, viewed 22 March 2024, <<https://www.ieuvictas.org.au/news/why-workload-remains-the-biggest-issue-facing-teachers>>.

<sup>45</sup> Hunter, ‘Reform urgently needed to help teachers do their job’.

*“The VTLM brings FISO 2.0 into the classroom, providing school leaders and teachers with a framework to systematically review student outcomes, reflect on current teaching practices and put in place evidence-based strategies to positively impact student learning and wellbeing.*

*The VTLM encompasses 5 components all with a team of bureaucratic roles leading each outcome focus.*

*A vision for learning and wellbeing helps create a unified set of values and beliefs to drive a high-performance learning culture.*

*The practice principles for excellence in teaching practice (practice principles) are 9 signature pedagogies which make the difference in improving student achievement, motivation and engagement.*

*The pedagogical model describes what effective teaching looks like in the classroom and helps teachers effectively apply the practice principles.*

*The high impact teaching strategies (HITS) present 10 instructional practices that reliably increase student learning.*

*The high impact wellbeing strategies (HIWS) are 7 practical, evidence-based strategies that have a significant effect on student wellbeing.”*

Current figures show a decline under these principles in student outcomes, wellbeing, and mental health with an increase in teacher burnout.

Teaching all children in a uniform manner on the factory-school model frequently leads to insufficiently challenging the brightest students. Personalised learning stands out as a crucial element in attaining school success. This method involves deploying customised strategies that capitalise on each student's strengths, thereby elevating their level of engagement.

Around one in five Australian school students encounter challenges in engaging with their education, significantly hindering their learning journey. This issue tends to exacerbate as

students advance in age. The consequences of this disengagement manifest in increasingly disruptive classroom settings and a surge in incidents of bullying.

These concerns add to the growing apprehension surrounding self-harm, anxiety, and depression among students. Notably, factors consistently associated with increased risks of poor mental health include experiences of childhood trauma, identification as LGBTQ, autism, and disabilities. Behaviours linked to compromised mental health include disengagement from both educational and recreational activities, as well as a lack of awareness about mental health.<sup>46</sup>

- (5) Increase in harmful, violent, and aggressive behaviours, lack of engagement, truancy, and school refusal. School refusals in particular have increased markedly since the Covid lockdowns and school closures.
- (6) Mistreatment and lack of support for students with disabilities. According to a recent Royal Commission report (*Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability*, reporting 2 November 2023), parents have highlighted instances of severe abuse directed towards their children with disabilities, prompting them to contemplate alternative options. This can be a daunting prospect, particularly as schools hold the discretion to accept or reject students, leaving parents with limited alternatives.<sup>47</sup>
- (7) Lack of response through proper complaints by parents on serious issues regarding their children (investigation into sexual assault of children and young people in Victoria as well as Royal Commission). Current systems often entrusts the complaints process to ineffective positions lacking clear channels of communication. Complaints are frequently bounced between departments without resolution. Parents encounter dismissive and intimidating behaviours, and are met with legal threats, leaving them feeling compelled to remain silent or seek placement in a more suitable environment. Consequently, issues persist unresolved.

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<sup>46</sup> OECD, *PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2023. p. 397.

<sup>47</sup> R Sackville, B Bennett, AJ Mason, JF Ryan, & RLGJ McEwin, *Executive Summary, Our Vision for an Inclusive Australia and Recommendations*, Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, Commonwealth of Australia, 2023, pp. Cf. 1-2, 4, 19, 22.

## 7. Under our current structures

Consistently our teachers are praised for their hard work and dedication to their students always going above and beyond, while removing and diminishing their authority. Teachers are restricted by standardised testing, government set policy, and programmes. These often interfere with teachers effectively being able to teach. As previously indicated, the introduction of new regimes and educational ideologies promoted by the bureaucratic system exacerbates existing challenges instead of alleviating them.

Rather than heeding the concerns voiced by teachers regarding the challenges within the profession, authorities persist in adopting a stance of presumed superiority.<sup>48</sup> The lack of respect for teaching as profession is not conducive to attracting and keeping good teachers.

Despite the implementation of specialised attraction and recruitment initiatives, there remains a steady exodus of teachers from the profession. Repeatedly, teachers voice grievances about unattainable administrative burdens, unmanageable classroom behaviours, instances of abuse, and attacks from students and parents. In addition, the lack of equitable financial compensation exacerbates the strain, placing individuals in positions where meeting expectations entails significant personal repercussions.

Teachers are eager to fulfil their vocation, advocating for their voices to be heard and for meaningful change to occur. Despite the acknowledgment of teachers' pivotal role in student success, the insufficient support and lack of meaningful change present a stark contradiction. The purported Department support often falls short of expectations, emphasising data-driven approaches that prioritise justifying bureaucratic positions.<sup>49</sup> However, evidence indicates that these efforts do not significantly improve student outcomes and fail to demonstrate genuine appreciation for the contributions of teachers and school staff.

Despite a considerable imbalance in administrative personnel and a multitude of specialised divisions, student outcomes remain stagnant. As previously noted, in Victoria, there exists a teacher:bureaucrat ratio of approximately 2:1; while in Queensland, this ratio appears slightly

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<sup>48</sup> What may be expected of a teacher, who is not an employee, is often different to what may be expected of a teacher who is an employee; so much so, that the teaching vocation has grafted to it an ongoing onus to *behave reasonably in the circumstance*. In the circumstance this means that a teacher is strictly bound to comply with reasonable directions (also reasonably in the circumstance). Since most circumstances are covered by a policy document, it means that the teacher lacks agency to innovate, even dissent. Their vocation is dwarfed by their contractual obligations.

<sup>49</sup> It seems a contradiction that a teacher can be both an agent of change & an agent of student success, unless one of these meanings are conflated into the other. It appears more likely, given the strictures placed upon teachers in public schooling, that their success is read in terms of the change they affect within those strictures.

worse, at about 1.8:1 in 2022.<sup>50</sup> These ratios are purportedly justified by the implementation of various educational models, school reviews, wellbeing programs, and teacher and learning incentives. However, none of these initiatives have demonstrated positive outcomes (viz., OECD results), which could be an argument for rendering these bureaucratic positions unjustifiable but more importantly the decision about these issues and their efficacy should be made at the school level. The elimination of these positions, funded by taxpayers, would liberate resources to allocate funds towards these functions being maintained at the school level or more likely appropriately compensating teachers. It's important to recognise that becoming an expert teacher takes a decade, and the cultivation of high-quality teaching cannot be achieved solely through political allocation of incentives; rather, it necessitates investment in salaries to attract and retain high-quality educators.

Additionally, classroom behavioural issues have intensified, accompanied by alarming trends such as school refusal, truancy, and a concerning deterioration in student mental well-being, manifested in elevated instances of self-harm, eating disorders, and suicide.

Concurrently, there has been a notable surge in staff departures, as well as an uptick in merit and equity cases, alongside an increase in Workcover claims. These observations underscore a systemic failure within our existing hierarchical structure.

Governments often exacerbate the strain on an already stressed system with impractical initiatives, misallocation of public funds, and a notable disregard for the daily challenges faced by educators. Frontline workers frequently bear the brunt of these pressures, sacrificing and enduring hardship in their pursuit of Department recognition and validation for regional positions.

Parents frequently express feelings of being marginalized and unheard, with transparency being lacking. Administrative roles often deviate from established policies and procedures, leaving concerns unattended while student performance declines, behaviour issues rise, and

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<sup>50</sup> In 2022, firstly, the Department of Education had 75371 FTE employees. Of that, it employed 58502 “frontline” employees. *Queensland public sector workforce profile*, Public Service Commission, [forgov.qld.gov.au/workforce-statistics](http://forgov.qld.gov.au/workforce-statistics), 2022. In the same year, secondly, the Department of Education spent \$0.588126Bn on Teacher aide salaries. *Annual Report 2021-2022*, Department of Education, <https://qed.qld.gov.au/publications/reports/annual-report>, 2022. Lastly, the medium Teacher Aide paypoint provides for approximately a \$62634 annual wage - *Department of Education Teacher Aides' Certified Agreement 2022 (CB/2023/47)*, Queensland Industrial Relations Commission (QIRC), <https://www.qirc.qld.gov.au/>, 2022. Given annual spending total on Teacher aides, we would arrive at approximately 9389 employed Teacher aides. Taken together, this would mean there are approximately 49112 teachers, suggestive of 26258 employed in non-teaching/“support” roles (Cf. Fn #15).

teachers depart. Parents are kept uninformed about student issues due to a lack of access to honest data and information.

When comparing the operational structure of the Education department to that of firms or corporations, it becomes evident that the system is structured to function efficiently, akin to a well-oiled machine. However, this structure inadvertently fosters the advancement of individuals with pathological tendencies, incentivising those with manipulative personalities to exploit the system for personal gain. These individuals may utilise deception and manipulation without being held accountable, thereby establishing a culture of command and control within the organisation.

Through the framework of control established by the legal system governing employment within 'the Firm,' a master-servant relationship is established.<sup>51</sup> This structure conveniently serves those in positions of power by facilitating corporate control while shielding them from accountability or responsibility. The cause-and-effect dynamics generated by this setup serve to suppress and cultivate distrust between management and lower-level employees, achieved through operational constraints on freedom within the bounds of the law. Over time, this restrictive environment stifles creativity and diminishes performance, a phenomenon observable in many large organisations, including governments. Consequently, this environment fosters corruption, the proliferation of internal monopolies, evasion of accountability, and protection of misconduct, all of which contribute to diminished performance, unfavourable outcomes for students, and an erosion of teacher authority.

Upon examining current employment contracts, the necessity of transitioning from a bureaucratic organisational structure to a school-based system becomes increasingly evident. These contracts not only impede the growth of the organisation but also impose limitations on the market. Embedded within employment contracts are concealed provisions that afford the 'Master' (bureaucrats/governments) the unilateral authority to modify terms without the consent or consultation of the 'Servant' (teachers/Principals). Consequently, these contracts effectively serve as methods of master-servant control, crafted to align with a predetermined narrative.

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<sup>51</sup> A Merritt, 'The Historical Role of Law in the Regulation of Employment-Abstentionist or Interventionist', *Austl. JL & Soc'y*, vol. 1, 1982. Cf. J de Flamingh, 'Employment law: Freedom of speech in a master / servant relationship', *LSJ: Law Society Journal*, no. 56, 2019.

## 8. Conclusion

Australia suffers from often grotesquely over-bureaucratized school systems, due to structures that appear to be accountable to the citizens but are over-bureaucratized precisely because of failures to achieve genuine accountability. There is a long history of failed approaches being repackaged precisely because of this inadequate accountability. There has been a shift from merely failed ideas to actively toxic ideas colonizing Education Faculties and, via them, schools.

The allocation of authority to overblown bureaucracies who aggrandise themselves through moral projects has systematically bled authority from teachers and respect for teaching as a profession. The consequences include exit of teachers from the profession, falling student outcomes and increasing problems of classroom management. Adding another set of “the latest good idea” to these structures will not solve these problems. Only a fundamental rethinking of how schooling is delivered to achieve and entrench effective accountability and to systematically enforce the reality-testing of ideas will be effective.

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