YOUTH, EMPLOYMENT AND POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION: CRISIS POLICY MAKING IN THREE DEPRESSION DECADES IN AUSTRALIA—THE 1890s, THE 1930s AND THE 1980s
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The paper reviews patterns of post-compulsory education policy in Australia in two periods of depression, the 1890s and 1930s, and in the recession and in the recession of the 1980s and 1990s. It elicits similarities between government action in the three periods while also identifying important differences. Eight interconnected policy themes are explored: that on each occasion education has been subjected to intense public scrutiny; that bureaucratic and political controls over education have been tightened in each period; that each time the secondary curriculum has undergone reform with a powerful vocational bias; that traditional views have reemerged strongly in the three periods; that extensions to compulsory education are closely associated with the prevailing economic and employment conditions; that labour market programs gained new relevance in poor economic times; that in each decade, technical and higher education have also undergone substantial reform and restructuring; and that aspects of humanitarian concern for disadvantaged groups bear comparison in the three periods of economic crisis.

Introduction

This paper reviews patterns of educational policy in Australia at three crisis points, in two periods of depression—the 1890s and 1930s—and in the severe recession of the 1980s and 1990s. The purpose is to draw out similarities between government action in the three periods while also identifying important differences. The paper identifies special characteristics of the Australian economy and political framework during the three depression-recession periods before analysing each of the particular elements of educational policy.

Within the context of economic crisis in the three periods mentioned, eight apparent interconnected policy themes are examined. The first theme, in all three periods, is the holding of major public inquiries into education to examine its efficiency and effectiveness. In a second theme, these inquiries invariably preceded reorganisations of educational bureaucracies to exert public control, reduce expenditure and improve efficiency. The economic circumstances, by heightening the utilitarian value of education for national purposes, were important factors behind a third theme: the introduction (or reintroduction) of a stronger vocational bias in the secondary
education curriculum. Another side of this, and constituting the fourth theme in the paper, has been the reassertion of conservative values in education, especially with respect to basic intellectual skills. A fifth theme, which interlocks tightly with those already mentioned, was the drive to extend compulsory education that was influenced strongly by economic and especially employment considerations in the three periods under scrutiny. Renewed public concern about labour market training programs, a sixth theme in the paper, is also closely related to the economic, employment and educational policy mix represented in the first five themes described. They all, moreover, have an important bearing on a seventh theme: the revival and restructuring of vocational and technical education that occurred in all of the three periods of economic distress. An eighth theme, education and training for the disadvantaged, is included for its special relevance to current policy priorities in the field of social justice and equity. It deals more particularly with the employment and education of girls and young women in the three depression-recession periods.

It is argued here that with respect to the eight policy themes described, there are remarkable similarities in educational policies adopted in Australia during the 1890s, the 1930s and the 1980s. Clearly, however, significant differences cannot be minimised, and particularly with regard to the policy and structural changes occurring in the 1980s and 1990s. These are more far-reaching and have wider political support than was evident in earlier crisis periods, although the genesis of current policy may be identified in problems dealt with in earlier depression times.

This paper builds upon much of my own work (White 1984, 1990) and that of Allyson Holbrook (1987) and others dealing with the 1930s. Several other studies from Victoria and South Australia have provided challenging insights into the 1890s. Judith Bessant (1987) and myself also have pursued similar lines of inquiry, though not knowing of each other’s work until very recently. She has employed critical theory as an explanatory framework. This paper employs a descriptive-analytical approach that avoids theoretical frameworks that this writer believes can put historical interpretations into straitjackets. More generally, however, the official debate on policy relating education to the economy has been carried on with an almost total absence of historical perspective. This is unfortunate, since—as is explained in the present paper—much of what is touted as fundamental reform is neither new nor especially creative. It has also
ignored lessons from experience in earlier decades which might have tempered enthusiasm for the more extreme measures contemplated.

**Three periods of financial crisis in Australia**

There would be little disagreement about the severity of the depressions of the 1890s and the 1930s, nor about their importance in the historical development of Australian society. For that matter, they were periods of financial crisis in most Western nations. As for the most recent recession, there will be debate about when it began, its causes and also its severity. However, most would place its beginnings in Australia at the time of the oil crisis of 1974, with periods of worsening intensity till the stock market crash in Australia of 1987.

Economic conditions preceding the Australian crises of the 1890s and 1930s were depressingly similar (Shann 1930; Shedvin 1970; Walker 1936). Relatively prosperous conditions before them both, spectacularly so during the property boom in Melbourne of the '80s, were accompanied by excessive overseas borrowing for land expansion and public works, especially railways, and the banks had over-extended credit. At the same time the economies of the colonies before 1901 and the States after Federation were almost solely reliant upon agriculture and mining for export earnings.

When international trade dried up so did export revenue, the earning power of governments and international credit. Banks in London and in the colonial/State capitals called in loans; businesses collapsed; banks failed; farming properties closed; and unemployment spread quickly. In 1931, for example, a Premiers' Plan devised by London banks imposed drastic expenditure cuts on State and federal governments. The only colony to escape the 1890s depression was Western Australia, then enjoying its first period of economic prosperity following the discovery of huge gold deposits at Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie.

Secondary industry in both decades was relatively undeveloped and protected by tariffs from overseas competition. This was especially true of Victoria though less so of other colonies in the 1890s, but a general feature of national policy in the 1920s. Manufacturing was hit hard in both depressions, when protection became a liability, but recovered quickly as conditions improved (Mauldon & Polglaze 1935).
Agriculture and mining took much longer to revive, especially in the 1930s. Primary production in Australia returned to pre-1930 levels only when demand improved during the Second World War.

Labour market conditions in Australia have historically unique features that need emphasis in this paper. While in general terms the nation follows a free-market approach to economic policy, this has historically been within the context of government interventions to fulfil economic development, welfare and other political objectives. Liberal policies in the 1890s, in spite of the economic conditions, favoured government intervention to resolve labour unrest and ultimately set minimum wages and conditions. The situation was partly the outcome of unions, badly affected by strikes and unemployment in the 1890s, combining to form the Australian Labor Party and alleviate working-class disadvantages through political intervention (De Garis 1974). In the first decade of the 20th century, Australia provided something of a model for other nations in establishing arbitration courts which settled industrial disputes through court awards setting out work practices and conditions and stipulating minimum living wages. At both State and Commonwealth levels, most of industry is covered by such awards. Industry protection linked closely with labour market regulation to provide in theory a fair wage for a fair day's work. Apprenticeship training, the main avenue to skilled work, became tightly controlled within the arbitration court awards.

At the time of the 1890s depression, emergent Australian factories (most heavily represented in Victoria) adopted Taylorist styles of workforce operation in which mechanisation was wedded to specialisation and deskilling (McMahon 1992). For most firms this was simply a matter of adaptation to ensure economic survival, although in other interpretations the changes are viewed as standard capitalist strategies to minimise wages by replacing skilled workers by machines and reducing the power of organised labour through recruitment of semi-skilled workers, particularly women, to perform limited tasks. Arbitration settlements over the following decades might also be depicted in this light although most would hold the more liberal view (Roe 1976; Foster, nd). They are seen as setting minimum wages within ever more tightly defined work specifications befitting industrialised labour, and also institutionalising the practice of paying women at lower rates than men. Similar conditions applied during the
1930s, by which time manufacturing was a more prominent factor in the Australian economy.

Without the benefit of Keynesian economic theory, the classical response to depression in the 1890s and 1930s was to slash government expenditure and cut wages and employment, the very measures that deepened the crisis. Following the 1930s depression, however, it became a matter of government priority to foster secondary industry as a counterweight to Australia's over-reliance upon agriculture and mining and provide employment in the cities. Under war conditions, secondary industry expansion became a matter of national survival whereas in the post-war years factories, sheltered by heavy tariff protection, benefited from generally prosperous conditions and population increases fuelled from the birth boom and immigration. Population increases, which concentrated in the cities, were matched by a growth in service (tertiary) employment. Agriculture and mining, concentrated outside the cities and subject to free market competition around the world, are technologically sophisticated and highly productive sectors of the Australian economy.

There was wide agreement in the 1980s that Australian industry, cosseted behind trade barriers and saddled with outdated work practices and union awards, became complacent and uncompetitive. All this rendered the nation vulnerable to technological changes and the internationalisation of trade, as well as the international recessions of the 1970s and 1980s. Australian industry adjusted too slowly during the 1970s, lacking a workforce culture awake to productivity through worker flexibility and technological innovation. Moreover, prosperity was still carried on the backs of sheep, the harvests of farmers and the ores of mining companies, none of which functioned in a protected trade environment. When the 1980s recessions bit hard, Australian was saddled with outdated technology and workforce rigidities which needed massive adjustment. Meanwhile, overseas trade balances worsened, national budget deficits increased and unemployment began to rise (Jones 1982).

Unemployment during the three periods under scrutiny was extremely serious. In the years 1892 and 1893, possibly the worst in the 1890s, unemployment of adult males reached beyond 30 per cent of the workforce (De Garis 1974: p.225). In the 1930s the comparable figure was between 18 and 30 per cent for adult males, around 45 per cent for males between 15 and 19 years of age and probably about 80 per
cent for young girls (Walker 1936: p.65). The lack of sophisticated statistical services, however, meant that nobody really knew how bad the situation was. During the halcyon post-war years unemployment in Australia was as low as two per cent, and began rising only in the 1970s when it reached four per cent after 1974 and rose to seven per cent in 1982 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1984). By 1992 the proportion out of work was more than 11 per cent. Youth unemployment went from virtually nil in the early 1970s to seven per cent in the 1970s, rising to 18 per cent between 1982 and 1985, and topped 30 per cent in 1992. In the earlier depressions, employment recovered to pre-depression levels fairly quickly. Not so in the 1980s and 1990s, however, when the problems were more deep seated and technological changes had fundamentally altered industry and workforce organisation.

Australian federal and State governments in the 1980s, predominantly Labor, tackled the worsening economic situation with considerable vigour. Perhaps surprisingly, they adopted the 'New Right' and corporatist policies of deregulation and privatisation with almost as much enthusiasm as the Thatcher and Reagan administrations (Lingard, Knight & Porter 1993). Macro- and micro-economic reform was promoted, however, from within the context of an industrial relations accord to ensure union co-operation in productivity improvement across the whole of the economy. The union movement, indeed, took something of a lead with publication in 1987 of a report entitled Australia reconstructed (ACTU/TDC Mission to Western Europe 1987), which outlined the findings of a joint union-government inquiry into structural change in the major European nations. Where industrial relations, skills development and workforce organisation are concerned, the union movement has co-operated with government by marrying acceptance of structural change, enterprise agreements on productivity and the acquisition of skills and flexibility to wage and salary awards under the existing though modified industrial arbitration systems.

The elements of crisis policy making

Element 1: Public inquiries into education

The 1980s, 1930s and 1890s are littered with the reports of governments that examine the performance of Australian education in
relation to economic conditions. Most drew heavily upon what was happening overseas. To illustrate, some of the major inquiries and government programs in the 1980s could be summarised in the following way:


Schools: Learning and Earning (1982).
The Quality of Education in Australia (the QERK report) (Karmel 1984).
The Participation and equity program (1983).
The Participation of young people in post-compulsory education in Australia (Finn 1991)
The Australian vocational certificate training system (Carmichael 1992).

Education: Improving Australia's industrial training system (Dawkins 1989).
Priorities for TAFE in the 1990s (Dawkins 1989).

Higher Education: Review of efficiency and effectiveness in higher education (1986).

Training: Labour market programs (Kirby 1985).
Australia reconstructed (ACTU/TDC Mission to Western Europe 1987).
Industrial training in Australia—Need for change (Dawkins 1988).

The above represent only the more significant federal government inquiries and programs. At State levels, there are almost as many major inquiries, most of them following similar themes.

Economic conditions in the 1890s also produced major inquiries, which were similarly influenced by overseas experience. At the time, Australia was still made up of separate colonies; Federation came only in 1901. The two most important inquiries were directed initially towards technical education, but inevitably widened to embrace the
whole education system. In Victoria, Theodore Fink was appointed to head a royal commission on technical education, which was published in several parts over the period 1899 to 1901 (Fink 1899-1901). New South Wales followed with a royal commission on technical education conducted by G K Knibbs and J W Turner, which published several progress reports between 1900 and 1905 (Knibbs & Turner 1905). The two inquiries were avidly read in the other States, being translated into their particular circumstances. What is more important, they heralded further inquiries into the State school and university systems that preceded a complete transformation of Australian State education in the years prior to World War I (Lawry & Cleverley 1972).

Dire financial circumstances and a recurrence of political criticism of inefficiency opened the way to a similar group of educational inquiries in the 1930s. In New South Wales there were the Report on Technical Education (New South Wales Commission on Technical Education 1935), various aspects of education (Drummond 1937), and the Badderley Report on technical education in 1940 (New South Wales Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly upon the Employment of Youth in Industry 1940-41). Although these were heavily oriented towards technical education and the apprenticeship system, they also dealt at length with the effectiveness of the primary and secondary schools in relation to youth employment. In Victoria, comparable reports were by a Board of Inquiry into Certain Matters Concerning the Education Department (Victoria, Board of Inquiry 1931) and a report on technical education in several overseas countries by E P Eltham (1936). Western Australia produced a parliamentary committee report into State education (1938) and royal commissions into youth employment and the apprenticeship system (Wolff 1938) and into the administration of the University of Western Australia (Wolff 1941-42).

Element 2: Cost cutting and tightening control over public education

The major inquires, while having their genesis in the difficult financial conditions in each depression period, provided the rationales behind heavy pruning of educational expenditure by governments at different levels. Taking first the 1980s, at Commonwealth level relationships between costs and benefits—returns for dollars spent—came to dominate inquiries in the first half of the decade. The reaction was partly dictated by mounting criticism of spending during the 1970s,
initiated under the Whitlam Government. It was widely believed that little improvement in student achievement had resulted, while there was widespread disillusionment with bureaucratic efficiency and the competence of professional educators (Lingard 1993).

The 1980s witnessed the introduction by governments of corporate management techniques to enforce accountability upon educational institutions and systems. The QERK (Karmel) inquiry of 1984, for example, not only assessed the effects of ten years of major Commonwealth financial involvement in schooling, but also advocated that funding should be determined in measurable output terms (Karmel 1984, ch.8). A later inquiry into the funding of technical and further education led to the introduction of resource agreements between Commonwealth and State governments that were similarly accountable in output terms (Hudson 1986). At the higher education levels, the report on efficiency and effectiveness preceded the introduction of funding based on agreed ‘profiles’ that outlined planned spending in measurable goals (Dawkins 1988). Most of these practices are now accepted wisdom also at State Government levels.

Another typical response was to reassert political control over education at all levels. In the good years institutional autonomy and educational funding channelled through autonomous coordinating authorities were considered vital to preserve academic integrity and professional freedom. At State level, education departments were headed by professional educators leading non-political public service bureaucracies. All this changed under governments in the 1980s. At the Commonwealth level, a new Minister, John Dawkins, completely reorganised the various autonomous education commissions, the employment portfolio and other educational services to form a mega-bureaucracy—the Department of Employment, Education and Training—in which the minister became the dominant policy maker and the former commissions were reduced in status and power to advisory committees (Dawkins 1987). At the State level, most governments reorganised their former education departments, renamed ‘ministries’, replaced professional educator-bureaucrats with ‘professional’ public service managers, and decentralised education services and devolved funding to schools and regions (Western Australia, Ministry of Education 1966). ‘Lean and mean’ central bureaucracies firmly under control of education ministers rather than professional educators exercised ever-tightening control behind a mask of devolved management at the local level.
It comes as no surprise that as in the 1980s there were sharp attacks upon the education bureaucracies in the 1890s and again in the 1930s, though they were then of course concentrated in the colonies and later States. Free, compulsory and secular elementary education had become a public responsibility between 1862 and 1888 in the eastern colonies, accompanied by the creation of State bureaucracies headed by an inspector-general assisted by inspectors, which had grown quickly in the boom periods before 1890. At the height of the depression, finances were slashed in all education departments along with teacher salaries. Schools were closed or amalgamated; teachers’ colleges closed; the pupil teacher (apprenticeship) system given a new lease of life; and the roles of inspectors were strengthened (Gregory 1974). Both Victoria’s Fink commission and the Knibbs-Turner inquiry in New South Wales severely attacked the competence of senior administrators and the levels of efficiency in education services.

The outcomes were evident within a few years, though at this time the response was to appoint young and vigorous professional educators, for example Frank Tate (Victoria) and Peter Board (New South Wales), who effected substantial reforms to State education (Lawry & Cleverley, 1972). Public service reforms saw education services and personnel re-classified and re-regulated according to clear criteria, for example by rigid application of promotion by seniority and efficiency. The new directors, however, were able to exploit better economic conditions and optimistic political climates after Federation in 1901 to extend the States’ educational responsibilities into post-primary, secondary and technical education. Indeed, they were able to import into Australian education many of the ideas of the ‘new education’, which contained many liberalising influences alongside doctrines of utility (Selleck 1968). But all of this was achieved from beginnings in the avalanche of criticism in the 1890s and a depleted and demoralised teaching service which did not enjoy reasonable wages and conditions until well into the 20th century.

The financial crisis similarly affected other sectors of education. In the independent schools, financial hardships caused upheavals in management leading to the establishment of councils and paid headmasters. The larger corporate schools survived the period, though their private venture counterparts went to the wall (Sherington et al. 1987, ch.2).
The efficiency and effectiveness of public technical, mining and agricultural colleges and schools were the initial focus of such inquiries as the Fink and Knibbs-Turner commissions, which found them wanting in many directions. They were, for example, mostly struggling to maintain economic enrolment levels, relying upon post-elementary general education classes rather than targetted technical instruction, and inefficiently run by local councils or committees or by central authorities lacking sufficient bureaucratic authority. In the fall-out from the commissions, technical education was more effectively absorbed into State education departments; professional heads (directors) were appointed; general education roles were transferred to the elementary and post-elementary schools and vocational training was more tightly defined and limited; and bureaucratic controls and regulation were more vigorously enforced (Miller 1982, p.1-17).

Universities also, subsequent to the financial problems of the depression years, were subjected to government inquiries and reform during the period before World War I.

In essentials, the imposition of austerity budgets experienced in the 1890s depression was replicated in the 1930s. Under the Premiers’ Plan, mentioned earlier, all public service (including teacher) salaries in every State were reduced by 20 per cent, and government spending was subjected to draconian cuts. Teacher recruitment was virtually suspended and in one State teacher training also was closed down. Building and maintenance were severely curtailed.

In such austere financial circumstances, the government ministers for education regained something of the precedence that had been partly surrendered to the education bureaucracies led by the new century’s powerful directors of education. The point needs emphasising that the permanent public service heads of education at this time remained in position whatever the political complexion of the parties in power. Such directors as Tate, Board and Andrews had exercised a level of authority that often rivalled while never exceeding that of their cabinet ministers. New South Wales’ lively Minister for Education in the 1930s, D H Drummond, epitomised this reassertion of political control. At no stage, however, except for an abortive effort in Western Australia, were there moves to return to the situation applying before the 1890s (Mossenson 1972).

On breaking down the bureaucratic professional dominance, a persistent theme of the 1930s was agitation to devolve a measure of
influence to local communities, which had been frozen out of educational decision and management. The ideas gained special prominence from critiques of Australian education in the New Education Fellowship conferences held during 1937 (Cunningham & Radford 1937). Little progress was achieved before World War II, however, although the introduction of representative education commissions or councils to provide advice to government became a significant item on the post-war agenda in many States.

This concern to reinstate community involvement was especially strong in technical education, since the training and placement of young people needed active participation from local industry and philanthropic groups. Victoria’s largest technical colleges, traditionally under representative councils, became something of a model for other States. In Victoria itself, the Department of Public Instruction encountered successful opposition from the councils when it moved to take over the colleges in the 1930s. Labor Party support for the State’s junior technical colleges also ensured that they were not absorbed (as envisaged by the then Director of Education) into the general system of post-primary education (Blake 1973, pp.492-498; Murray-Smith & Dare 1988). In New South Wales, the Minister for Education, Drummond, established a separate Department of Technical Education in 1938, and discussion about the formation of advisory councils for regional colleges was particularly vigorous (Drummond 1938).

The most significant feature of depression policy, though perhaps only in retrospect, was the advent of Commonwealth Government financial involvement in Australian education. Before 1901 education was the sole responsibility of the individual colonies, and that did not change after Federation, when the Constitution excluded education as a federal responsibility. However, section 96 of the Constitution enabled the Commonwealth to make grants to the States for general welfare purposes. In 1935, the States formed an Australian Education Council, comprising the State political and bureaucratic leaders of education and technical education, to seek Commonwealth grants for technical education as a means of alleviating youth unemployment. In the event, the Commonwealth in 1937 advanced only limited grants for youth employment purposes, much of it spent by the States on apprentice training and technical education (Spaull 1987)

From this modest beginning, however, the Commonwealth broadened its financial assistance to university and technical education during
and after World War II, and substantially extended these commitments in the 1960s and 1970s. Commonwealth dominance of Australian education in the 1980s and 1990s, already mentioned, is a far cry from the plans of those drawing up the constitution in the 1890s.

Element 3: The vocationalisation of secondary education

Through each of the three depression periods, official policy in Australia not only imposed more formidable bureaucratic controls; it invariably set a high priority on the utilitarian role of post-primary and later secondary education as a preparation for work. In this broad connection, revisionist historians have always been highly critical of selective secondary institutions, which they describe as instruments fitting working-class people into the capitalist organisation of industry (Miller 1982; Ely 1980). Social policy from the 19th century, indeed, sought to equalise working-class access to elementary and later secondary schools not only through extending compulsory education but also by delaying selection into vocational streams and widening the general education base of compulsory schooling.

In times of depression, however, this general curriculum has been criticised in relation to employment. The reasons are many, including the charge of irrelevance and lowered academic standards coupled to poor cultural preparation for the realities of working life (D'Cruz & Langford 1980). Those resisting the excessive emphasis on employment preparation in schools stress the humanitarian and social-egalitarian purposes of general education and in particular the comprehensive school. Resolving this dilemma presents a moving compromise heightened by the pressures of high youth unemployment.

During the 1980s and 1990s the utilitarian thrust of educational reform dominated federal and State Government agendas. At the national level, the Labor Government and peak industry and union organisations have led the movement, drawing heavily upon findings of the *Australia reconstructed* report of 1987. Indeed, Lawrence Carmichael, a key union leader for more than 20 years, gained unprecedented dominance through association with award restructuring in industry. The skills development and competency rhetoric permeates the whole education reform movement, from support for national curricula and testing and the reorientation of
teacher education, to the creation of a National Training Board responsible for creating a national system of competency standards for Australian industry, at eight levels, that integrates with formal education, on-the-job training and mixtures of both. Far-reaching changes to existing forms of apprenticeship and other forms of training are anticipated. Federal government support for a National Vocational Certificate Training System linked to key competency testing, National Training Board training standards and industry wage awards promises to effect the most thorough-going transformation of upper secondary education that Australia has ever witnessed. All this is tellingly reflected in the restructuring and renaming of most departments of education as departments or ministries of employment and education, with ‘training’ also added in the case of the federal department concerned.

Under national policy in the 1990s Australian governments are restructuring higher secondary education to focus heavily upon the skills required for work, albeit in a society reliant upon high technology and a more sophisticated organisation of industry. It is anticipated that between the ages of 15 and 19 Australian youth in the 1990s will undergo an education that includes instruction and assessment in key competencies (Mayer 1983) besides finding a planned pathway of education, training and work experience that will lead to job-entry skill levels or further education and training. All this will be integrated with different approaches to secondary and technical education (including the establishment of ‘senior colleges’) as well as planned work experience and training in industry.

It is a scheme on the grand scale which challenges the perennial status of academic preparation for higher education while retaining it for the students concerned, seeks a realistic preparation to entry-level jobs and technical education for others and superimposes over all a national system of key competency assessment and vocational qualifications. Selection of suitable ‘pathways’ implies detailed planning, guidance and advisement in schools (Carmichael 1992).

The most telling aspect of this intended reform, given the traditional constitutional difficulties in a federal system, is the support it has won in the State legislatures of all political colours and among the opposition parties. The Australian Education Council, as mentioned before, has been cleverly exploited by the Commonwealth to achieve State agreement to the reform program. During 1991 the
Commonwealth stirred vigorous opposition to proposals that it should take over financial responsibility for technical and further education. This would have permitted national dominance of the vocational and training systems beyond secondary school along lines already well established in higher education, which from 1973 has been totally funded from the Commonwealth purse.

Peak industry bodies and the union movement are in general agreement with the reforms, and the Liberal-National Party Coalition built the system into its (unsuccessful) election policies for 1993. Coalition policy, if anything, went even further than Labor's in favouring a market-driven, vocationally-oriented, competency-based system that added a voucher approach to funding that was intended to replace existing bureaucratic methods of budgetting, fund allocation and accountability (Liberal & National Parties 1991).

All parties concerned have accepted the 'human capital' doctrines underpinning Australia reconstructed, while the terms 'skill' and 'competency' have achieved a remarkable grip on political imaginations. The new pressures threaten to swamp the wider aims of education at all levels. School systems struggle to retain elements of the liberal tradition in secondary education, while universities have baulked nationally at the push for competency assessment for the professions. They may be fighting a losing battle.

Controversies about selection and vocational preparation were equally important in the 1930s, although the movement towards universal secondary education was in its infancy and separate tracking beyond the elementary school excited little controversy from the political left. Educationists facing criticism about the general curriculum nevertheless argued strongly against denying children access to the wider cultural subjects that were deemed necessary to good citizenship, intellectual liberation and class mobility (Technical Education Commission 1935, pp.86-87). They also opposed premature specialisation, which was deemed unsuitable for job preparation in a quickly changing economy.

On the other hand, during the 1930s vocational guidance gained almost motherhood status as the bridge between education and jobs (Holbrook 1987). State initiatives, however, were largely overpowered by the sheer magnitude of youth unemployment and lack of resources, although conditions improved somewhat later in the decade.
Meanwhile, philanthropic and community bureaux for care, training and placement of young people, which proliferated during the depression, experienced a measure of success among those who were on the streets. In Queensland, government employment bureaux in various regions appeared to work reasonably well. A lesson derived from the depression experience, but not capitalised upon in the post-war boom period, was that guidance and placement needed the vigorous involvement of local communities and industry (White 1984).

Turning now to the 1890s and the first decade of the present century, doctrines of utility and national efficiency were driving forces behind reforms to State education, although tempered to a degree by humanitarian features of the ‘New Education’. While reactionary views about the State’s role in universal elementary (primary) education did not ultimately prevail, extension beyond that level in State education was heavily influenced by utilitarian ideals. Highly selective institutions were established that separated State academic high schools from post-primary classes with agricultural, industrial, commercial or domestic science biases. In Victoria, junior technical schools were introduced as a separate system intended for early school leavers needing pre-vocational training (McMahon 1992; Robson 1967), while Tate won his battle for State high schools by clothing his intentions in propaganda emphasising their value for agricultural education in rural centres. In most States the new academic high schools adopted a ‘modern’ curriculum, which was intentionally contrasted with the ‘classical’ traditions of the independent (private) grammar schools.

The main liberalising forces in State education, it needs emphasising here, have come in more affluent times and especially in response to two world wars. Although this theme lies beyond the scope of the present paper, it is well documented in the works by Barcan (1980, 1993) and Lawry and Cleverley (1972), who have described the ‘democratisation’ process in reforms to post-primary education after World War I and secondary education after World War II. The broader problem of balance between liberal and vocational education should excite more public debate than appears to be happening in the 1990s, since economic crisis has tended to block out the humanitarian goals of liberal/general education.
Element 4: Re-assertion of conservative values

In the three depression periods, and particularly the 1980s, Australian schools were attacked vigorously for having failed the nation's children where basic competence in numeracy and literacy was concerned. The allegations formed only one more facet of criticisms already examined. Industry was particularly critical, citing cases where functional illiteracy was a key factor in the exclusion of youth from jobs. During the 1980s the words 'literacy' and 'numeracy' appeared with monotonous regularity in nearly all the inquiries and policy statements of Commonwealth and State Governments. Policy implications have been far-reaching, commencing with demands to reform teacher education and curriculum, to devote special attention to the core subjects, and to introduce national and State-Level testing in the core areas for accountability and diagnostic purposes. On testing, whereas earlier attempts to introduce forms of national testing had foundered in 1981 (Power & Wood 1984) owing to teacher opposition, similar measures late in the 1980s fared much better.

The Commonwealth Government exerted irresistible pressures on the states after 1987 to turn the 'basics' debate into a national program. The minister, Dawkins, worked through the Australian Education Council—a body comprising the Commonwealth and State ministers and senior executive officers of education—to achieve agreement on the introduction of national curricula in the basic subject areas (Australian Education Council 1990). The same body gave birth to the Finn (Participation of young people in post-compulsory education and training 1991) and Mayer (Employment-related key competencies: A proposal for consultation 1992) Reports, which have given national endorsement to the introduction of testing for what have been termed key competencies. National agreement (now suspended to a degree following the election of several conservative State governments) to implement the main thrusts of the Carmichael Report (1992) means that national curricula and national competency testing may come into operation within a very short time. The Opposition parties have found no grounds for fundamentally altering this emergent structure.

Economic conditions in the 1890s produced almost identical fits of apoplexy about the levels of competence in the three Rs as occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. During the 1890s, however, elementary education had barely moved beyond this core in most colonies. In Victoria, government policy allowed these subjects to remain free of tuition
charges, but imposed modest fees on all ‘extras’. There was some apprehension at the time about permitting the working classes to grow ‘bigger than their boots’ by broadening their education to encompass the liberal arts and sciences, which were deemed the province of grammar schools in the private sector. It was important, however, that instruction in these basic subjects should not only be efficiently done; it was necessary core for young working-class boys and girls to move into the lowest industrial occupations (Gregory 1974).

In the 1930s criticisms of achievement in the three Rs were perhaps more akin to those of the later decades. Western Australia’s captains of industry made no bones about their perception that standards had fallen, attributing this to the time devoted to ‘cultural’ subjects (White 1982; New South Wales Technical Education Commission 1935). But similar concerns are interwoven through the pages of most of the reports of committees of inquiry that are mentioned above.

In all three depression decades there was a strong moral dimension to concern about the basic subjects and the educational role of State schools. The introduction of cultural content (history, geography, literature and science) into the elementary curriculum was viewed as detracting from competence in basic skills as well as having the potential to lure young people, largely from the working class, away from industrial occupations in the cities or from farming in the rural areas. There is no question that this attitude underpinned support from industrial and commercial leaders for a strongly utilitarian-vocational curriculum for the majority of school children. Calls for a firmer hand in school discipline were another manifestation of this same line of attack. During the 1980s concerns about discipline in State schools appear (amongst other things) to have influenced the drift of enrolments from State to private schools. Over the decade, the proportion in non-State schools rose from around 23 per cent to nearly 30 per cent (Anderson 1992).

Element 5: Extending Compulsory Education

The four elements of policy already examined add special significance to a fifth, pressure to lengthen the period of compulsory schooling, which was apparent in each of the three depression-recession periods covered in the present paper. High levels of youth unemployment in the 1980s lay behind government policy to raise the levels of
participation by Australian young people in post-compulsory education. International comparisons from the 1970s on put Australia rather low on the list of advanced nations where participation at this level was concerned. More alarming was that up to 22 per cent of the age group left school without any training whatever (Australian Tertiary Education Commission 1982; Kirby 1985). Two factors influencing the policy are easily identified. One was that groups most at risk invariably left school early; for them a longer schooling would develop the skills and knowledge necessary for employment. Keeping young people at school longer also reduced pressure on youth labour markets, thus opening up opportunities for those most in need of jobs. Less creditable was the view, attributed to cynical politicians, that if young people were at school they did not appear in the unemployment statistics or on dole queues. Government policy in Australia, notably following the ‘Learning and earning’ report of 1982 but more particularly after the Finn and Carmichael reports of 1991 and 1992, is to lift participation of 15–19 year old youth to 95 per cent.

It is less easy to superimpose this concern with participation upon conditions in the 1890s, although something akin to it was obviously present. At the same time as the captains of industry opposed extending the cultural riches of general education to the working classes, the liberal middle-class parties and labour movement combined to pass legislation to ban child labour and sweating in apprenticeships and step up compliance with compulsory clauses of the various education acts (McMahon 1993). In Victoria the school leaving age was raised by legislation to 14 years of age and in other States truancy was severely dealt with during the decades either side of 1900. The worthy motivations behind these measures tended of course to mask more pragmatic economic objectives in keeping children at school for longer periods: extended compulsory education and mandatory training for apprentices relieved pressure on employment markets for older workers.

Economists during the 1930s were more forthright in arguing the case for extending the compulsory leaving age to 15 years (White 1982; Walker 1936; pp.104-112). Falling birth rates during the early depression years created favourable demographic conditions, while an additional compulsory year—it was believed—would delay by one year the appearance of young people upon the labour market. (Early retirement also was proposed for similar reasons.) Leaders in commerce and industry were not convinced of the value of this extra
year; but they were sure about what sort of curriculum would be appropriate if it were to materialise. It would be heavily vocational in orientation based upon a solid grasp of the 3 Rs. Most States legislated for a leaving age of 15 during the 1940s, but waited till the 1960s before implementing it. Most also reshaped lower secondary school public examinations to give more equal standing to vocational-style subjects (Barcan 1980, pp.227-278).

Raising the age of compulsion, although considered during the 1970s and 1980s, was hardly necessary since jobs for unprepared youth had largely disappeared from the economy. Indeed, the poor labour market for young people in the 1980s virtually forced them to stay at school in increasing numbers, lifting participation to around 65 per cent in 1983 (Kirby 1985, ch.3). Current policy, seeking a 95 per cent participation in education, training or employment by 1995, is linked to a complete overhaul of institutional and curriculum arrangements at this level.

Element 6: Labour Market Training

During the three depression periods, vocationalisation of the secondary school curriculum and extensions to compulsory education were closely interconnected with specific training for the youth labour market, not least through the institution of apprenticeship. In the 1980s, for example, concerns about the employability of about 22 per cent of young people who left school early and sought entry to the workforce without sufficient general education or any suitable training, highlighted problems that were wrapped in the rhetoric of ‘participation and equity’ policies. International comparisons, moreover, implied that Australian industry was well behind that in comparable countries, especially Europe, where labour market training had become an accepted part of industry development. The then newly elected Hawke Government in 1983 launched a ‘participation and equity’ program which subsumed various youth training schemes, promoted enrolment beyond the age of compulsion and extended special assistance to particularly disadvantaged groups in Australian society. The program lacked, however, any specific labour market focus.

A national survey of labour market training in 1985 (the Kirby Report) pinpointed one of the key issues: in Australia, traditional
apprenticeship was virtually the only form of such training, and it was old fashioned and rigidly structured to suit industries that were stagnant or of declining significance (Kirby 1985, chapters 7 and 8). Specially targetted training programs which had been intended for unemployed youth suffered from their ad hoc and highly specialised character. Following the Kirby report, the Commonwealth introduced the Australian traineeship system under the banner ‘Priority One’, which aimed to provide job-entry training for boys and girls located under contract in industry but supported by periods of vocational education in technical colleges. The scheme developed more slowly than anticipated, however, being absorbed into the national vocational certificate training scheme being introduced in 1993.

In the meantime, skills development in industry became a national priority following the Australia reconstructed report. Commonwealth leadership to rectify the deplorable condition of industry-based training in Australia targetted the culture of training in a two-pronged attack. One involved restructuring the whole area of industrial relations, to link wage settlements to productivity gains achieved through enterprise agreements on flexible work practices and skills development. The other was to introduce, in 1990, the Training Guarantee Act under which industry was required to invest three per cent of the sum expended on wages for approved training. This training in turn was tied into award restructuring and productivity bargaining.

The rigidity of Australian apprenticeship training dated from the 1890s depression when, as already described, it was pulled into the arbitration award system and tied to Taylorist industrial organisation. Technical education became involved to supplement on-the-job training with limited theoretical instruction, a practice which eventually became compulsory by industrial law in most States by the 1920s (Birman & White, 1981).

In the 1930s apprenticeship became a particular concern since the older craft-based training had been undermined by mechanisation and the assembly line, yet industrial arbitration preserved the institution inviolate. The 1935 Commission on Technical Education, Drummond and Youth Employment reports in New South Wales and the Youth Employment and the Apprenticeship System Report in Western Australia, as well as other inquiries in Victoria and the other States all advocated substantial reform of the system, with industry favouring a
less structured industry trainee system (as in New South Wales). Others thought it should be abandoned completely. In the event, the industrial relations implications of change were so daunting that governments preferred to strengthen the existing apprenticeship system. It was viewed as an antidote to youth unemployment and as preparing a pool from which trained young people might be drawn when the depression lifted. Most States used the Commonwealth grants for youth employment after 1937 to support apprentice or trainee training.

Element 7: Revival and restructuring of vocational and technical education

Acceptance of utility as the guiding principle behind educational reform in the recessions of the 1980s, the 1890s and the 1930s was accompanied by thorough overhauls of colonial and later State systems of vocational and technical education. Taking first the 1980s, this decade witnesses the most fundamental reorganisation of technical education in Australia's history. As the nation's largest occupational training resource, the technical and further education (TAFE) system assumed high priority in the Australia reconstructed transformation launched in 1987. However, through being isolated in education bureaucracies in each State, the system lacked support from industry which viewed TAFE as out of touch with shop floor realities. There was also poor integration between TAFE and industry training, which occupied virtually different worlds, one particularly oriented towards more generally focussed vocational education and the other driven by specific need and the profit motive. At the same time the Commonwealth considered TAFE to be unresponsive to quickly changing employment priorities and the needs of disadvantaged groups. Federal authorities, which from 1974 had extended millions in financial assistance for TAFE development, were determined to change the situation in line with industry restructuring and economic development (White 1987, 1989).

Restructuring in Australian TAFE during the 1980s, aimed at bridging the gap to industry training and improving responsiveness in the systems, took many forms. Funding by way of resource agreements has already been mentioned. More fundamental, however, has been the transfer of control over TAFE, in all States, from education departments or ministries to employment, training and productivity
departments. Within the new bureaucracies, TAFE has been merged with industry-based training under more direct industry and union direction through appropriate advisory, planning and budgetary machinery. The establishment of national training standards and awards, under the National Training Board, also envelopes both TAFE and industry training within a superstructure of competency assessment covering every occupation. Another ploy has been to drive TAFE systems into entrepreneurial training activity with industry as a means of augmenting their financial resources. The transformation, although slow, confused and highly contentious, is well advanced in the 1990s.

In view of the present situation, it is instructive to look back at developments following the 1890s depression, which influenced a similar enthusiasm for vocational education and training. In Victoria and New South Wales, for example, government policies drew heavily upon overseas examples to bend educational reform around utilitarian purposes. Murray-Smith (1966) described the shift in technical education as 'The retreat from Liberalism', marked by Social-Darwinist doctrines of national efficiency and survival. Tightly meshed utilitarian fences were thrown around technical education, confining it to support training for apprentices, operative training and the preparation of technicians and professional workers in particular industries. At the post-primary level, Victoria developed a system of junior technical schools tied closely to local industry and transfer into senior technical schools. Domestic economy and industrial classes were added in other States to the general/academic classes in central schools, and most States in the new century added evening 'continuation classes' with a vocational orientation. On the training front, the key development of the period involved apprenticeship, which became regulated by industrial law and gradually linked to the technical schools. Typically, although in no case emulated, Germany's successful apprenticeship system was the preferred model for most Australian states. The emphasis on technical education, however, also drew heavily in a general way on prevailing concerns with industrial efficiency and technical education in the United States and Britain.

Higher education in technology and the applied sciences received special attention following economic crises in the 1890s. Public agitation to 'modernise' the universities led to important developments in professional faculties of the older universities in Sydney and Melbourne. Higher diploma programs in schools of mines and the
main metropolitan technical colleges also were strengthened to meet the needs of emergent new professional groups. New universities, in Queensland (1909) and Western Australia (1911) were specifically designed along the applied and industry-oriented lines of Britain’s provincial universities and America’s land grant universities in the mid-Western States.

In the 1930s considerable discontent emerged about the inferior status of higher technical education as compared with the universities (Willis 1983; White 1990; Murray Smith & Dare 1986). In view of the economic situation, greater reciprocity between awards and courses in the two sectors received spirited advocacy, much of it derived from policy trends in Britain and Europe. The basis was laid at the time for the eventual establishment after World War II of the New South Wales University of Technology (1949), the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and the Western Australian Institute of Technology (1965) (White 1994).

As for the 1980s, Australia’s higher education system was completely overhauled in 1989 by the then Commonwealth Minister for Education, John Dawkins (Smart 1989). Heavily influenced by the financial situation, needs of the Australian economy and industry, and demands for better recognition of training in applied fields, the Commonwealth completely restructured the institutions involved. It abolished the formal distinction between universities and colleges of advanced education (a second and less prestigious sector or tier of higher education), and engineered many amalgamations between existing institutions to form what was called the ‘unified national system’. In conjunction with funding arrangements, already described, and with new criteria and machinery for awarding research grants, the government has given special priority to developments that implement national priorities in training and research and in the promotion of greater participation by Australian youth in higher education. Joint activities with industry in professional education, research and development and retraining are strongly supported.

Element 8: Education and training for the disadvantaged

Affirmative action to assist the disadvantaged—women, people in isolated districts, migrants, aborigines and the physically handicapped—was built into all schemes for employment-related
education and training in the 1980s. Participation and equity were the twin pillars of all policy to promote access to education and jobs, with a special emphasis on women and girls. Studies show, however, that even in technical education, females are heavily represented in traditional ‘women’s’ occupational training programs and are virtually excluded from all apprentice trades (except hairdressing) (Pocock 1987). The isolation of aborigines from normal access to employment is an on-going and almost insuperable problem in Australia. Migration generally, especially from Asian regions, poses fewer problems though it has been a feature of all debates about the levels and composition of annual migrant intakes. Immigration, moreover, has been a crucial factor in alleviating shortages of skilled labour in periods of economic expansion.

By the 1980s, Australia had become a more diverse society than before World War II, owing to post-war migration from Europe and subsequent waves of refugee intakes from Asian countries. In the 1930s and the 1890s Australian society was predominantly white and drawn from the British islands (including Eire). Aborigines were even excluded from the census, and so not counted among the general population. Legislation, moreover, had excluded non-European migrants (the so-called ‘White Australia’ policy) on both industrial and racial grounds. Equity issues in the 1930s therefore focussed on access to education and training in isolated districts (which was mostly covered by the extension of correspondence training) and the special problems facing unemployed youth.

One interesting feature concerned the employment problems of women and young girls (Walker 1936, ch.VI; Thibert 1933). The then infant women’s movement effectively spelt out all the employment disadvantages faced by women in the 1930s, which read surprisingly like their disadvantages in the 1980s. Only 21 per cent of the workforce then comprised women, however, as compared with nearly 50 per cent in the 1980s. Even so, women in employment were blamed for the high level of youth unemployment, especially among boys.

In principle, however, as employment opportunities for women could not be denied, the various inquiries surveyed ways to improve the situation. Though the women’s leadership identified barriers against women and girls entering male-dominated fields (especially apprenticeship), they focussed on domestic service and homemaking for appropriate occupational training. Notable achievements at the
time included expansion of the Emily McPherson College of Domestic Economy in Melbourne and the introduction of domestic science (later home economics) courses in Western Australia (White 1982; New South Wales, Report on Youth Employment 1940-41, pp.120-124). In New South Wales, however, E M Simmons, Manageress of the Women's Employment Agency, identified the basic problem: 'The Australian girl', she concluded, 'is not domestic minded!' and wherever possible preferred factory work with regular hours to the degrading conditions of employment in homes and kitchen (New South Wales, Report on Youth Employment 1940-41, pp.120-124).

As for the 1890s, women were neither seen nor heard, since traditional attitudes placed them as wives, mothers, domestic servants and (increasingly) production-line workers in factories (McMahon 1993). In the post-primary grades and in technical education, the only new developments involved the introduction of domestic and commercial (typing and shorthand) courses and training in such other areas as millinery and dress-making. They were barred from apprenticeship under award agreements reached in the new arbitration courts, though admitted to training as 'improvers' in the textile industry for example and paid half the male rates of pay.

**Conclusion**

The present paper has focussed upon educational policies forged in the heat of economic adversity and implemented in a climate of utilitarian and reformist ideology driven by industrial crisis and high levels of unemployment. In the Australian setting it has been argued that there are elements of such policies associated with the economic depressions of the 1890s and 1930s, and the severe recession of the 1980s, that are remarkably similar in essentials though occurring within historical contexts that differ in important ways. In particular, attention is drawn to the far-reaching impact of the recessions of the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the all-encompassing nature of educational reforms associated with industry restructuring in this more recent period.

Eight interconnected elements of crisis policy making have been identified: the holding of major public inquiries into education; cost reduction and the intensifying of central control over public education; a resurgence of public support for employment-related forms of
education; the reassertion of essential subjects and conservative moral values; pressures to lengthen the period of compulsory education; a renewed emphasis on technical education and its relationships with industry; revived involvement in labour market training, and concern for the training of disadvantaged groups in society (especially in this case women).

Whether the policies were effective is a matter requiring further research and another paper. Some issues are relatively clear, however. First, nobody in any of the three depression periods believed that education and training would solve the nation's economic woes. Only responsible economic measures and a general revival would achieve that objective. A further issue warranting attention concerns whether, once economic revival was under way, politicians were much concerned about education and training, the alleged inefficiency of education bureaucracies or even the bias of the curriculum. Raising the school leaving age (or in current terms improving participation rates in post-compulsory education), it is clear, was intended as much to relieve pressure on certain labour markets as it was to create a new era of education related to the world of work. Vocationally-oriented reforms to the school curriculum, at post-primary level in the 1890s, the lower secondary level in the 1930s and upper secondary levels in the 1990s, were perhaps to be expected; although once the political rhetoric is stripped away, the thrust of reform is remarkably similar in the three depression periods.

An observer conscious of the earlier rhetoric might well have asked whether the emphases on vocational preparation in the 1980s and 1990s might not have been more balanced by a deeper appreciation of the liberating features of a general education, even in the fields of technical and industrial training. There might, at the very least, have been less confidence displayed in the brave new utilitarian world of the 1990s. It is shown to be less unique than most politicians and bureaucrats appear to appreciate, and experiences from earlier economic crisis periods might, with advantage, have been brought to bear upon the formulation of current policies and programs. As a final and related comment, the time is perhaps ripe for the nation to re-examine the purposes and relevance of liberal/general education in the schools, technical institutions, training and the universities. For more than a decade the overriding priorities have been overpoweringly utilitarian, dominated by concerns of economic recession and high unemployment. Post-graduate thesis work by
Beevers (1993) may point the way towards dealing honestly with the contradictions inherent in much current policy, and especially within the technical and further education sector. It remains true, however, that TAFE has shown little interest in its own history; while philosophising about vocational education in Australia has seldom attracted the attention of academic researchers. On the research side, technical and further education is pregnant with potential for humanities and social science-based research.

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