'LIKE SCHOOLS', EDUCATIONAL 'DISADVANTAGE' AND 'THISNESS'

PAT THOMSON

University of South Australia

The federal government minister, and senior bureaucrats in some conservative states are frequently heard to say that any discussion of schooling, poverty and unemployment is an inexcusable rationale for teacher inaction. 'The equity problem' can be simply solved by focussing on school efficacy and literacy, numeracy and vocational training. However, scholars who specialise in the measurement of school 'quality' and 'effectiveness' recognise that social context *does* have a persistent and long-term correlation with educational 'outcomes'. They argue that it is (or should be) possible to measure and compare the 'value added' by all schools by developing comparable categories of 'like schools', in which social context is statistically 'controlled'. My recent research (Thomson 1999a) suggests that both of these perspectives—controlling for, or silencing and rendering invisible, the social context—are somewhat problematic.

My doctoral study was focussed on the northern and western suburbs of Adelaide, a region that has borne the brunt of 'structural adjustment'. The wholesale exodus of the footwear and textile industry, the tenuous life of the auto-passenger industry, massive job-shedding in both the state and national public sector, slow population growth and low rates of immigration have all combined with the planned concentration of low income housing suburbs to produce a 'polarised city' (Badcock 1997, Baum & Hassan 1993, Hamnett & Freestone 2000, Peel 1995). My research concentrated on how this social, economic, political and cultural context played out in schools and their neighbourhoods. The research consisted of a corpus of taped conversations[1] with school administrators, youth and welfare workers, photographic observations and an investigation of public collections of educational, demographic, labour market and welfare data.

When I began the research I expected to find a straightforward and common story about educational 'disadvantage', poverty and policy. At the completion of the field work, I was faced with a morass of particularity and specificity that nevertheless showed some evidence of the patterning I had expected. There was a common story of inadequate funding, escalating welfare and disciplinary

demands and an unsympathetic policy milieu. But, scattered throughout the transcripts were stories of events and issues that the administrators claimed were not only important, but also particular to the neighbourhood and/or school. The ways in which particular social relations and practices, the locality, systemic policy and the constellation of individuals and histories coalesced in the institution of the school, all seemed to be important.

I eventually came to theorise this collective but patterned diversity by mobilising theorisations drawn largely from the 'new' geographies. The first clue I found to making sense of the pattern(s) and differences among schools and neighbourhoods came from the words of the school administrators themselves. Whenever I listened to the tapes that constituted my research 'evidence', I heard—'This school ... These kids ... This community ...' My working title for the particularity towards which I was being directed was 'thisness'. The somewhat foolish label has stuck, and it seems to make sense to the school administrators on whose words it is based.

Contrary to the views of policy makers, my research suggests that the capacity of 'disadvantaged schools' to make a positive difference in students' learning *is* context dependent. How this happens can be glimpsed by considering 'thisness'. The reminder of this paper summarises some important characteristics of 'thisness'. I conclude what is necessarily a compressed synthesis by pointing towards some of the implications for social justice policy development that are raised by this analysis.

'Thisness'

One way of thinking about 'thisness' is to think of the school as a 'place', situated in time-space, and in 'stretched-out' (distanciated) political, cultural, social and economic relations (Allen & Hamnett 1995, Massey 1994, McDowell 1999, Rose 1995, Soja 2000). Each school 'place' is a distinctive blend of people, happenings, resources, issues, narratives, teleologies, knowledges and networks, in and through which the combined effects of power saturated geographies and histories are made manifest. This view of the school as a place sees it as porous and permeable, materially situated and tangled in flows, practices, conflicts and settlements that operate across varying scales of influence (Swyngedouw 1997). This view of the school as a place queries the policy conception of the school as an hermetically sealed box in which instruction can unproblematically occur.

Another useful and complementary idea is that of the materialisation of context(s). Appadurai (1996) suggests that the neighbourhood (and places within neighbourhoods) can be thought of as simultaneously 'context derived' and 'context generative'. He proposes that:

> the very capability [of neighbourhoods] to produce contexts (within which
> their localising activities acquire meanings and historical potential) and to
> produce local subjects, are profoundly affected by the locality-producing
> capabilities of larger scale formations (nation-states, kingdoms,
> missionary empires, and traditional cartels) to determine the general shape
> of all the neighbourhoods within reach of their powers (p. 186).

While at first sight 'neighbourhoods seem paradoxical because they both
constitute and require contexts' (p. 186), further consideration leads me to think
that Appadurai's theorisation supports the view that the capacity of a school to
make a difference (to generate context) is completely imbricated with context
dependent factors, mediated by the actions of local subjects. And, while the
school and the neighbourhood may be patterned by class, gender and race
relations on a larger scale, at the local level, a veritable kaleidoscope of local
variations and capacities to act are to be expected.

'Thisness' is about the specificity of place, and how it is that local action is
delimited by contexts.

Neighbourhood contexts

My research produced three major categories of neighbourhood contexts (ie the
local workings out of larger global, national and state processes), that had an
impact on what it was that the agents in the school (the staff) could, and did, do.
These are (1) the school mix, (2) neighbourhood resources and (3)
neighbourhood issues. I will spend most time discussing the school mix question,
and only briefly indicate some of the issues that arise in the latter two categories.

1 School mix

Each school population was different. Students and their families in
'disadvantaged schools' in the northern and western suburbs were variously
affected by:

• *Changes in the labour market*

Family unemployment/underemployment/tenuous employment (the local
working out of macro and microeconomic reform) played out in schools in a
range of ways—many students had no money for educational expenses; some
children were the only ones in their household who had to get up regularly
everyday and frequently didn't; some parents showed acute levels of anxiety
manifested in health problems and angry outbursts in schools. Secondary schools
reported that there were large numbers of young people who firmly believed that
they would not find any work at all, and they saw little point in compliance or

application. This produced significant 'behaviour' problems which were not addressed by vocational programs in which the students had no faith. There was also another group who were unrealistically confident that they would easily slip into a chosen career. Earlier cohorts of this group were regular and disillusioned visitors to schools, urging their younger counterparts to join them in the mall. Many young people got part-time work as soon as they could and these wages were often a necessary addition to the family income; casual work requirements of employers however often conflicted with homework, and regular attendance requirements.

• *Changes in families*

The increases in the numbers of diverse families (described in policy as separated, blended and re-blended and extended families), many of whom were dependent on income support transfers, particularly those for lone parents and those designated to the 'working poor' with young children, were manifest in schools. Schools believed that significant numbers of children appeared to be dealing with the pressures of living in domestic situations which were not only unstable but also strained from financial worries. Schools reported regular incidences of 'midnight flits', 'staying with grandma', and children moving between family members. Transience and children exhibiting evidence of considerable insecurity and anxiety required regular time away from instruction, and involved classroom teachers and administrations alike.

• *Changes in public policy*

The increased costs and reduction in public services that comprise the 'social wage' (viz. health, public housing and public transport) affected families and their schools. Many schools reported escalating waiting periods for referral services, particularly for depressed and substance abusing adolescents, the de-funding of local employment and family counselling services and the mounting pressure on charities to assist. One school had to hold parents' meetings after school because the bus service no longer ran after six in the evening. Another school catering for adult re-entry students reported increased demand for short term financial assistance for medical and housing expenses. Several schools reported substantive numbers of children requiring 'free' lunch from the school canteen. Several schools in public housing estates being redeveloped or slated for redevelopment were dealing with children who faced the prospect of their family home being demolished, not knowing where they would be living.

• *Concentration of families in crisis*

While all schools reported that the number of families under pressure had increased, some were particularly affected. One school reported unusually high numbers of children with sick and dying parents—it was next to a public hospital.

A couple of schools were located next to women's shelters and an ever-changing parade of traumatised children came and went. Schools in the areas of highest unemployment also seemed to be the locations where there was emergency public housing and they dealt daily with the children and parents literally at the end of their tether. It is important to note that these schools got no extra support in recognition of these very particular issues, and in at least three of the schools it was often as much as they could do to 'keep a lid on' the situation.

- *Patterns of migration and diaspora*

Several of the schools served neighbourhoods in which there were continuing intakes of refugees fleeing intolerable political situations. Others served more established populations of immigrants. All reported significant shortfalls in the community services available to children and families, and increased pressure on the school to step in as a result. Cuts in interpreter and translation services were matched by cuts in adult migrant English provision, all of which required children to act as family translators. Schools in which there were significant Aboriginal populations did receive some support, but all commented bitterly on the lack of fit between quantum of resources and community need. Each school nevertheless attempted to provide an inclusive curriculum, language and learning support, dedicated rooms, and services for parents that were tailor-made for the particular cultural composition of the school population. This was only accomplished by virtue of the good will and commitment of the staff.

In a few schools many of these factors came together. There were three schools in the sample I studied who had extraordinarily high levels of student transience—more than forty percent of their school population came and went during the year. In a school of two hundred this amounts to eighty additional children coming and going. One of these schools had to completely reorganise its classes twice during one year. This effectively put paid to the establishment of those close teacher-student relationships that are at the heart of the pedagogical relationship. In one year, teachers worked with classes that went from overcrowded to small and back again, much of their time was devoted to helping children settle in and trying to find out the extent of their formal learning. Schools affected by high transience spent funds supplying books and equipment for more children than they were funded for. Global budgets that allocate on the basis of average enrolments are grim jokes in these schools, where staff argue that recognising their material reality is no excuse, but a simple matter of justice.

All schools have different school mixes, different combinations of these embodied neighbourhood effects that made specific, time consuming and often unrecognised demands on staff, curriculum and time.

2   Resources available to the school in the neighbourhood

The capacity of each school to run the mandated as well as desirable co-curricular programs and provide equally and equitably for students were tied to neighbourhood resources. The following werere important:

- *Community infrastructure*

Schools and students rely on local health and welfare services, public library provision, neighbourhood houses, youth services, migrant support programs, recreation facilities and organisations, and public transport. These are part of the neighbourhood assets (McKnight 1995) that support not only learning in and out of school but also general well being. In neighbourhoods made poor, many of these services are routinely underfunded, and in recent hard times many have been rationlised, regionalised and cut back. The cultural and social capital available in poor neighbourhoods varied according to locations, with newly established localities by far the worse off.

- *Employment and employment networks*

Schools depend on numbers of small, medium and large business to provide not only jobs for parents and school leavers, but also work placements and mentoring for students, civic leadership in the local area. Such businesses also make contributions to the local micro-economy through local purchasing arrangements creating more work opportunities as they do so. The long term downturn of manufacturing and small business in the western and northern suburbs of the city has meant that local schools are variously able to offer such networks and opportunities to students.

- *Availability of voluntary labour*

In areas where there were high numbers of parents engaged in shift and casual work, schools found it impossible to engage parents in school activities. In more middle-class localities, many schools have mothers available during the day to act as classroom and school helpers. The addition of this unpaid voluntary labour can make significant differences in school programs. Some poor schools do have numbers of under-employed parents demanding adult and community education, rather than the more conventional parental involvement. Such programs rely on specifically argued for government largesse, since they are no longer seen as 'core business', even though parent re-schooling can have powerful positive impacts on their children.

- *Age of locality—age of school facilities*

Because schools are generally built to coincide with establishment of a particular suburb, there are now numbers of postwar schools in desperate need of renovation, unable to compete with newly furbished, government-funded, low fee non-government schools. They are also unable to provide the same levels of

learning support as those in more wealthy localities where parent contribution and School Council 'clout' results in better facilities. In a few locations, school plant is hopelessly outdated: one school in my study could not operate its small bank of computers at the same time as the air conditioning, for fear of complete power failure.

• *Parent fundraising*

The differences in resources available to schools who can and do ask parents to contribute $400 per annum and those who can and do ask $150 and often don't get it, seems obvious to everybody except policymakers. The luck of having a school oval adjacent to a major football venue is enjoyed by only a few of the cash strapped 'disadvantaged schools'. Lack of funds has already caused numbers of secondary schools to reduce home economics and technical studies practical activities, and all 'disadvantaged schools' find excursions and school sporting programs increasingly difficult to maintain. Nevertheless, poor schools still find themselves variously able to add to their government grants and even the small amounts of money involved do make tangible differences in classrooms.

My study suggested that schools in more established locations in the western suburbs that were close to regional centres and adjacent to gentrified suburbs were able to marshal a greater range of resources, networks and services. Even if on the surface they were identical in socio-economic composition to schools in outlying and newer areas, the actual locality did make difference(s).

3 Neighbourhood issues that impact on the school

There were also idiosyncratic local events that impact on specific schools. Some of these cannot be calculated, whereas others seem more predictable. Each such event consumes a school's energy and time for considerable periods, making it very difficult to concentrate first and foremost on instruction.

• *Neighbourhood factions*

There were a few incidents of local racist gang activity and attacks that spilled over into harassment and fights in particular schools with high South Asian populations. There were also schools in which a spate of lighting fires and vandalism took whole blocks of classrooms out of operation, destroying years of teacher resources and a year of students' work. Such events profoundly disrupt the smooth flow of learning. The disputes among particular houses in particular streets can also spill over into nearby schools. At best, such events occasion a brief intervention from Central Office staff, who seem to have little idea of the time it takes to get over the effects of such episodes.

- *Neighbourhood change*

Increasing or declining enrolment in schools is a direct consequence of the age of the neighbourhood and its declining birth rate, but this can be compounded by the impact of school choice policies. In South Australia, clumsy and contentious systemic policies to determine school viability have led to the closure of several neighbourhood primary and secondary schools, compelling the remaining students to travel long distances or drop out of school altogether. In my study, there was evidence of the long decline of the school under constant review playing out in a politics of 'voice and exit' that profoundly embittered teachers and families. Areas slated for redevelopment, changes in demographics, external review, and possible closure, all create anxiety and uncertainty which not only affect enrolments but also the capacity and willingness of the school to plan ahead. While some teachers have managed to turn this difficulty into a curriculum opportunity (Comber, Thomson, & Wells in press), such occasions are the exception rather than the rule.

- *History*

The place of the school in the regional hierarchy produces long term patterns of enrolment and expectations that are hard to disrupt. Only very concerted and expensive public relations and image management can rapidly make inroads into the local 'grapevine' and many schools are not willing to devote time and energy to this, as opposed to spending time and energy on more substantive learning issues.

The point is of course that each of these factors listed above (and others that I have not listed here) come together in specific ways. Imagine a school with high transience, in an area slated for redevelopment, with a low standing on the local grapevine, that then experiences a significant fire. Imagine another school in an area of high chronic unemployment, with a significant and politically active indigenous population, aging buildings and rapidly diminishing set of public agencies and infrastructure around them. Imagine a school with a poor but stable population, in an area recently redeveloped, close to the city. These are some of the differences that sit behind the notion of 'like' schools. What can be done and what needs to be one are very different in each of these circumstances, and they need different kinds of support.

What is important however, is that they are not beyond public policy. Combinations of labour market, health, housing, social welfare and transport policies could make quite a dent in a number of these issues, and consequently change things for the better in 'disadvantaged schools'.

There are however also contextual factors, institutional in nature, that delimit what these schools can do. Unlike the neighbourhood contexts, these are directly

amenable to intervention through educational policy —:and indeed are also caused by educational policy-making.

Institutional contexts

The capacity to effect change in 'disadvantaged schools' is, as Appadurai suggests, dependent on the actions of mediating actors. In addition to those students and parents who walk in through the gate, the embodied neighbourhood, there are also the school staff. The number of staff is of course a key issue, and school administrators are quick to point to emerging research from the United States (see Achilles 1999) about the positive impact of reduced class sizes in 'disadvantaged' schools. Other resources such as funding and provision of information technologies are important too, but there are specific variations that, even in an inadequate resourcing situation, still make differences amongst disadvantaged schools, and contribute to 'thisness'.

System support

In public education systems, even those that are devolved, there are resourcing policies that shape what it is that schools can do. They include:

• *Staffing turbulence*
Schools with high turnover of teachers, casualised support staff, and /or high turnover of leadership may appear on the surface to be 'like' others. Yet it is hardly possible for a school to consider making a difference, when two thirds of the teachers leave each year—and that indeed is the situation in some of the schools. Combinations of distance from the city, 'the grapevine', transfer and promotion systems that place no priority on the needs of 'disadvantaged schools' produce extreme differences in school staff capacities.

• *Staffing 'fit'*
Some 'disadvantaged schools' have great difficulty acquiring staff who want to work there. Secondary schools in particular report that there are greater numbers of teachers who have decreased tolerance for the behaviours that result from alienation from school and are less willing to continue to work on changing curriculum. Some are just worn out, while others yearn for a more comfortable teaching assignment. There are also higher numbers of 'reluctant' conscripts sent to those schools that cannot fill positions through the normal teacher choice procedures. There is thus in some schools a spiralling helix of student and teacher irritation, outburst and confrontation, from which both teachers and students lose.

- *Budget*

The degree to which there is sufficient redistribution to compensate for locality factors is a key issue. Systems are able to take special measures in budgets, special grants, equipment provision and so on to alleviate the impact of differential parent capacity to pay. In South Australia, the amount of this provision has been reduced over time, and 'disadvantaged schools' now have considerably less then more privileged schools of most things—books, equipment, consumables home economic and technical studies materials, extra curricular activities, computers.... The degree to which some schools are able to avail themselves of additional funds does create significant differences in programmes and opportunities for students.

- *Professional development*

'Disadvantaged school' administrators remember with considerable fondness the networks of practitioners and universities that were sponsored by the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP), the clearinghouse function that enabled the sharing of school stories and projects, and the collegiality amongst those who shared a common social mission to make a difference to the life chances of those children who usually did not benefit from schooling. They do not believe that their current isolation and badging as schools that are failing to teach literacy and numeracy is one that is helpful (cf. Yandell 2000). However, some schools are able to link with others and to take advantage of the systemic options that do exist. To be a 'disadvantaged' focus school for information technology, for example, equates to significant professional development for staff, and opportunity only available to a select few sites.

- *A school staff selected for their commitment to, and understanding of, justice and equity*

The 'disadvantaged schools' in which most effort is still going into equity programs are also the schools in which administrators have engaged and supported staff in ongoing dialogue about how to 'do' pedagogy, curriculum and assessment more inclusively and rigorously. They have focussed on building and supporting a critical mass of teacher-leaders who will undertake the hard intellectual work of changing pedagogies. Because there is no longer much support for debate and discussion around questions of race, gender, class and schooling, these were administrators and teachers who had managed to find other resources to support this endeavour. Not all disadvantaged schools are so lucky.

- *Research into more equitable schooling practices*

While some tendered research does still occur into disadvantage and literacy, there is a marked decline in the emphasis on, and support for, school-based research and school contributions to professional knowledge. There is instead a

policy of schools taking up the implications of research that has been generated elsewhere. This is not only bad for the schools and their staffs but also denies the system access to a potential powerhouse of knowledge production. Some schools however had managed to take up some of limited opportunities available, often several at once. The competition for such projects ensures that there is differential knowledge generation and innovation amongst similarly placed schools.

- *Support for democratic practices*

The current stress on leadership and policy implementation positions administrators to coerce parents and teachers to sign onto government policy agendas, rather than generate local dreams, and knowledges that can inform policy. Democratic participation has been transmogrified into parent choice and participation by limiting the idea of participation to governing bodies. Staff decision making is confined to procedures rather than curriculum, assessment and other policy matters. School administrators and staff alike believe that they are asked to 'fit in' rather than 'feedback' (Reay 1998). Some schools however have been able, despite difficult industrial and policy climates, to continue to work democratically, and have often found unlikely local sources of support. These are the schools in which morale is still high and in which considerable energy is still being devoted to the messy and paradoxical doing of just schooling.

'Disadvantaged schools' heartily resent their representation in policy as schools that are either making excuses about poverty or who are the heroic exceptions to the poverty-learning nexus. They feel dispirited and/or separated from their colleagues and unable to disrupt the discourses that remove social context from consideration. They point to the complex interplay of systemic and neighbourhood issues that come together in their schools, and demand a policy framework that not only meets their needs, but also 'sees' their situations as they are.

Implications

'Thisness' is not a complete list of contextual issues. It is the set that has come to my notice as I have looked at the evidence I collected from some schools and neighbourhoods in one Australian city. What is important about the list is that it suggests that the capacity of each school to deal with the everyday demands of managing the relations of inequalities, their capacity to take on systemic reform policy and their adoption of the principles of doing justice *are shaped and delimited* by neighbourhood and systemic contexts.

'Thisness' has several implications. In education policy, attention clearly needs to be paid to the variable and inequitable ways in which staffing, professional development, research opportunities and redistributive measures are competitively and ineffectively meted out. Stabilising staffing would be a major

benefit for many disadvantaged schools, and would be greatly applauded by parents and students who seriously question the efficiency and motives of a public system which cannot guarantee a well-qualified, highly motivated teacher who stays with their child's class for the year.

'Thisness' also queries the education policy approach that seeks to either mathematically screen out the factors which create differences in schools, or create a set of 'like schools' based solely on student characteristics drawn from positivist population sociology. The variations categorised in the 'thisness' list suggests that any policy which works on the basis that all schools can achieve common 'outcomes', is idealist and light years away from the everyday life of 'disadvantaged schools'.

However, expecting an 'answer' to the 'disadvantage problem' from education policy alone is clearly foolish. The ways in which school mix, neighbourhoods issues and neighbourhood resources permeate everyday life in classrooms and school yards have implications for whole of government agendas. Policies for 'disadvantaged' schools ought not to be treated separately from other related government policies that impact on neighbourhoods. An overall public policy framework is needed, one that seeks to manage markets and equity together, that holds in balance the private and social benefits of education, and that has as its focus the growth and development of financial, physical, human and social capitals. Such a policy would need to take on board the current debates around recognition and redistribution, commonality and difference (Coole 1996, Fraser 1997, Phillips 1999, Young 1997), and those around the questions of 'social exclusion' (Byrne 1999, Levitas 1998), some of which are dealt with in this AER issue.

A combined (state and federal) policy approach to poverty and disadvantaged schools and neighbourhoods would integrate and coordinate job creation, public housing, transport, as well as health, and welfare. This may profoundly improve the context(s) of local neighbourhoods and their schools. But such an holistic approach need to get well below the level of the region. Because of the potential for increased heirarchisation of schools[2] and neighbourhoods (see Pacione 1997, Troy 1999) and the marbling of poverty throughout parts of major cities there is a need to respond to the particularities of specific locations.

In the first instance, there need to be mechanisms to ensure that when there are local crises, such as in the one small school and location which has been suddenly beset with a significant number of new families with substance abuse problems, then sufficient coordinated public resources can be mobilised without huge bureaucratic fanfare and time consuming performance requirements. Consequently, I argue that where there are concentrations of families in crisis, there must be provision for continuing intensive and flexible local support that is

coordinated at the local level. Other local events, such as dealing with racism, might attract a similar flexible response. Secondly, additional professional development should be available to all staff, including those in schools, who work in such locations. This should be geared to building 'leadership depth' and be based on the specific, not just general, locational issues and needs. In addition, the emotional toll of working in such situations needs to be taken into account by senior policymakers and public sector officers, and a variety of positive support mechanisms developed.

Furthermore, a local policy approach must take on the creation, support and strengthening of social networks. Community development processes that link together the local and the region and promote associational justice (democratic participation) are necessary. At the same time, there should be recognition that local, place-based policies have limitations (Robson 2000). There is still a need for the state to assume a coordinating role and there are emerging new deterritorialised arenas (such as the Web) in which 'doing justice' is also important. Places are now constituted by economic, social, cultural and political relations and flows information, commodities and people that extend far beyond any given locality (Castells 1996). Any new government policy agenda will have to deal with this new set of global contexts at the same time as finding ways to support the micro-politics of everyday life in disadvantaged schools.

Conclusion

'Thisness' suggests what *needs* to be done, but provides clues as to the limits of what *can* be done, even in the most sympathetic and well-resourced policy circumstances. In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that working on what needs to be done is not important. It is, because what *actually* happens is the result of the ongoing tensions, actions, and interplay of contexts and subjects. But, to set idealistic goals for schools, without taking into account both neighbourhood and institutional issues, is to run the risk of setting unattainable targets and expectations that also obscure how it is that contexts may be preventing, skewing and distorting what happens (Simola 1998).

It is not the case in 'disadvantaged schools' that nothing can be done, nor is it the case that everything can be done. It *is* a matter of 'disadvantaged schools' making a positive difference, but they cannot pretend that there is an impermeable barrier between the school and the 'outside', and as if institutional practices and policies are not at issue. A more reasonable and achievable set of expectations of 'disadvantaged schools' should be adopted, not as a 'second best', but in recognition of what they must do. Social justice in practice must take

up the question of local differences as well as a realistic approach to what constitutes actual school improvement.

Notes

[1]   I co-constructed conversations (Collins 1998, Scheurich 1995) with twenty 'disadvantaged school' administrators in the northern and western suburbs of Adelaide, the two poorest parts of town (and the nation (Baum, Stimson, O'Connor, Mullins, & Davies 1999). They were primarily (but not all) principals from both primary and secondary schools, had been involved with debates about equity policy, and their schools had the reputation of making positive differences for students. I also spoke with four principals who had been in 'disadvantaged schools' but moved to more privileged locations, two country principals, two 'disadvantaged school' principals from the southern side of town, and a smattering of principals from other city locations. I also included two youth workers, a local government officer and the Chief Executive of a large welfare agency, all of whom were involved in school programs.

[2]   Thrupp (1995, 1998a, 1998b) and Lauder (Lauder & Hughes 1990, 1999) both argue that policy must control this by regulating 'school mix'. This may be possible in New Zealand where there is only a small private school sector, but the clock of choice could not be wound back in Australia, given that such choice has been in-built from the inception of the public education system.

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