

## **What then must we do? Rethinking social inclusion policy for educational attainment in South Australia**

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### **Abstract**

This paper enquires into the internal logics and outcomes of a key educational retention policy mandate within South Australia's (SA) 14 year social inclusion (SI) policy agenda, with subsequent recommendations offered to improve schooling engagement and life opportunities for 'at-risk' young people post-school. We argue that the last 14 years of social inclusion policy in SA has been highly successful in re-engaging and retaining more 'at-risk' young people in various forms of secondary schooling, but that this increase in retention has not been matched by a similar increase in educational attainment (successful school completion). As a consequence, we contend that the SA SI policy lens should be turned toward the possibilities of conventional secondary schools to learn from various alternative schooling programs and redesign themselves in more socially just ways to keep more young people positively engaged and successful in schooling. Whilst SI policy with its engagement in learning intent has succeeded in keeping a larger percentage of 'at-risk' young people engaged in negotiated learning programs beyond the 'school fence', we argue that with reduced teacher involvement and constrained curricula offerings in these negotiated learning programs, the policy approach inadvertently minimises their chances of successful school completion. We conclude by offering findings from recent research demonstrating more hopeful ways to improve school completion for 'at-risk' young people inside non-conventional secondary schools, articulated by seven SA secondary school principals courageously pursuing 'doing schooling differently' agendas.

**Key words:** social inclusion, secondary schooling, education, school retention, Flexible Learning Options (FLO)

### **Background**

In SA, the phenomenon of SI within education policy has been marked by an investment in research-informed design and program development since 2002, to engage and keep disadvantaged and marginalised adolescent young people involved in formalised accredited learning options both inside and outside of public secondary schools. In discussing SA's SI agenda within the educational realm, we divide the paper into three conceptual sections: (1) South Australian public education trends in retention and attainment; (2) Our previous research as teacher agents working within the SI agenda in developing a socially just school; and (3) current research with experienced SA public school principals pursuing a socially just 'doing secondary schooling differently' agenda.

In the first section, we interrogate data trends in relation to school retention and Year 12 attainment across public secondary schooling in South Australia and enquire into recent retention and completion data incongruity. We then construct an argument for policy reappraisal in relation to understandings of 'educational engagement', appreciatively building upon the SA social inclusion agenda and our recent involvement in case study secondary school research. We argue that improved retention without improved

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educational attainment, which is the successful completion of secondary schooling in SA recognised through the achievement of the South Australian Certificate of Education (the SACE<sup>3</sup>), presents as fraught policy logic because without the SACE or its equivalent, young people have diminished work opportunities post school. In the second section, we revisit our insider teacher action research work for socially just schooling within the SI agenda's formative years, and highlight SI policy concerns evident from this research, indicating that powerful market-place schooling logics and reduced teacher and curricula offerings collectively work to undermine social inclusion policy and programs. In the third section, we offer a hopeful account of ways forward for SA's SI agenda through presenting current findings from our 'doing secondary schooling differently' research with experienced DECD<sup>4</sup> principals across the educational community. Initial findings from this research are presented to provoke and advance a repositioned DECD engagement and implementation strategy, cognisant of the complexities and challenges within this, that fuses SACE attainment (or its equivalent) with retention as the educational social inclusion 'gold standard' for public secondary education in South Australia.

A substantial body of international and Australian research indicates that young people who successfully complete schooling have a far greater likelihood of continuing with further study, particularly in higher education, as well as entering the workforce (Lamb et al, 2015; Duncan, & Murnane, 2011; Lamb et al, 2010; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011; FYA, 2011; Lehr, et al, 2003). For example, in relation to Australian research on educational attainment, a recent report produced by the Foundation for Young Australians found:

Educational attainment improves the labour market prospects of young people; a corollary of low educational attainment is marginalisation to either part-time work only, or unemployment. Policies to raise educational attainment must be directed at those groups of young people among whom rates of school completion are currently low. (FYA, 2011, p.8)

This coupling of school attainment with increased life opportunity is reinforced in a 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics report titled *Australian Social Trends* which asserts that young people who have completed a Year 12 qualification in Australia have better chances of continuing with further studies, particularly in higher education, as well as entering the workforce (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). This finding is amplified in a recent Australian report prepared by the Centre for International Research on Education Systems (CIRES) by Lamb et al, (2015), which indicated that non-completion of Year 12 in Australia and not achieving well in school were predictors of later negative work and life outcomes.

Such is the import of Year 12 attainment that an extensive body of Australian and international research has penetrated federal government policy in Australia through the COAG National Education Agreement (2009) which in its updated form, aims to lift the proportion of 20-24 year olds nationally with Year 12 or a Certificate 3<sup>5</sup> equivalent to 90% by 2020. For this attainment rate to be met, all states and territories must consider, in the first instance, how to keep a greater proportion of young people in schooling. This brings into play considerations of how to improve secondary school retention rates to which we now turn.

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<sup>3</sup> SACE is the South Australian Certificate of Education awarded to students who successfully complete the requirements of secondary schooling, accredited by the SACE Board in South Australia.

<sup>4</sup> DECD is the South Australian Department for Education and Child Development.

<sup>5</sup> According to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Certificate 3 is recognised as the international standard of equivalence of upper secondary education. (ABS, 2011)

## **Section 1: School retention and attainment**

### ***Public school retention in South Australia***

South Australia has been remarkably successful in increasing retention rates to Year 12 from 71% in 2004 to 91% in 2013 (DECD Annual Report 2013, p.135). In 2013 South Australian public education led the nation with an apparent retention rate<sup>6</sup> (ARR) in government secondary schools of 91% compared to a national retention rate of 77% (DECD Annual Report, 2013, p.133). In a report on Year 12 retention published on the 27<sup>th</sup> January 2015, officially released DECD data showed the retention rate for Years 8 to 12 had peaked at 96 per cent in 2014 (The Advertiser, 2015, p.8). Clearly DECD schools in South Australia are doing very well in relation to school retention and so we now turn our analysis to attainment to see if the outstanding SA retention story has translated into significantly improved DECD attainment or school completion outcomes.

### ***Public school attainment in South Australia***

#### *The SACE*

In South Australia, Year 12 attainment is formally recognised in the SACE which is described by the SACE Board as ‘an internationally recognised qualification that paves the way for young people to move from school to work or further training and study’ (SACE, July 2013, p.1). In 2006, the pre-existing SACE was reviewed and a subsequent report released titled ‘Success for all: SACE Review at a Glance’ which made a series of recommendations based upon strong community support for fundamental reform to the SACE and senior secondary education (Crafter, Crook and Reid, 2006, p.5). Amongst these reforms was an aspiration of a ‘SACE for all’. The review panel argued that while many students were being served well by the old SACE, many others were not, and so they developed seven principles as foundations for reform of senior secondary education namely: a SACE that was more responsive to students’ needs; more credible in terms of rigour; more inclusive of all students; worthwhile in the minds of students; futures oriented; connected to previous learning and supportive of quality learning and teaching (Crafter et al; 2006, p.8). These seven principles emerged from a number of key indicators including low apparent retention rates (ARR) and a plateauing of SACE completions over a number of years preceding the report’s release. In relation to SACE completions, the review panel noted:

The stability of the apparent completion rate over time suggests that there has been no appreciable ‘real’ growth in the rate of SACE completions since the SACE was introduced. (Crafter et al; 2006, p.44)

In relation to the apparent retention rate (ARR), a measure of students’ participation in schooling over a five year period from year 8 to year 12, the Review Panel identified a static retention rate of around 70 percent for the decade preceding the report’s release for Years 10 to 12 and over the same period a Year 8 to 12 retention rate of 67%. They qualified these figures by citing anomalies introduced by part-time enrolments, and of course students choosing to leave school, but argued strongly that:

What is at issue is that the consistently low retention rate over many years suggests that there are systemic forces at work that cause young people to reduce and, in many cases, prematurely terminate their involvement in schooling. (Crafter et al; 2006, p.32)

During the period 2009-2011, the SACE Board progressively implemented the new arrangements for completing the SACE with the first Year 12 students awarded the new SACE at the end of 2011. And so the new arrangements for the SACE were based on the South Australian Government’s Review of the

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<sup>6</sup> ARR is a measure of students’ participation in schooling over a five year period from year 8 to year 12

SACE and its subsequent acceptance of the review report's recommendations at the end of 2006. The SACE Board also worked to ensure the SACE was consistent with the state government's policies to improve school retention and to increase the school education age to 17, as well as the government's School-to-Work Strategy (SACE Evaluation Report, 2013, p. 131). So the 'New SACE' was designed with a consideration of historically concerning school retention and attainment data and a futures intent to foster in young people the capabilities needed for 21<sup>st</sup> century life and work. The report also acknowledged the impact of social and economic forces upon school retention and attainment that were beyond the grasp of a redesigned official curriculum. We now offer some DECD SACE completion data to illustrate DECD SACE completion data trends.

### *DECD SACE completion data*

If we consider the total year 8 DECD enrolments of 11,891 students in 2009 (DECD Annual Report, 2009, p.164) and then the same cohort completing year 12 five years later in 2013, using this formula, only 6654 of the 2009 student cohort completed their SACE (DECD Annual Report, 2013, p.132). In terms of a percentage, the SACE completion rate for this 2009 year 8 cohort moving into Year 12 in 2013 was 56%. We acknowledge this figure is influenced by students undertaking part-time schooling and movement of students into work, interstate or to independent schools. It is also influenced by students moving into public senior secondary education from independent schools, or from interstate or returning to school after periods of unemployment, so we are careful not to hold the figure up as indisputable. In fact the phenomenon of part-time schooling is significant in SA. A research study that aimed to address the 'absent presence' of part-time study within the retention-completion nexus, Brennan, Ramsay, Mackinnon and Hodgetts (2009, p.63) investigated evidence provided by Bradley (2008) that a significant percentage of SA's senior school students engage with school, at least at some point, in less than full-time study mode.

Therefore, in order to offer another way of measuring SACE completion for DECD students, we investigated the number of students commencing the Personal Learning Plan (PLP) which is a compulsory subject requirement of the new SACE predominantly undertaken by students in Year 10. For DECD schools, the number of students beginning the PLP in 2011 was 13,624 students (DECD Annual Report, 2011) but with DECD SACE completion data for 2013, indicating 6654 students completed the SACE, this presents a 48.9% SACE completion rate (SACE Annual Report 2011, SACE Annual Report 2013, DECD Annual Report 2013). Again, the significant phenomenon of part-time schooling in SA may influence the accuracy of this rate. However, what is indisputable is the substantial gap between SACE completion and school retention, a gap that has increased over a ten year period. We have illustrated this gap in Figure 1 below, adding the 8.7% part-time schooling cohort to the more moderate 56% SACE completion data configured above to account for possible discrepancies emanating from the SA phenomenon of part-time SACE students.

Figure 1 below highlights the widening gap between retention and SACE completion over a ten year period. In 2003, the ARR and SACE completion rates were 15% apart but moving into 2013, the ARR and SACE completion rates widened to a 27% discrepancy, indicating that the upward trajectory of SACE completion was not keeping pace with the ARR improvement trajectory. Our questions about this widening gap were these:

- (a) Why has SACE completion in DECD secondary schools not followed the same trajectory as school retention over this ten year period?

(b) What significant policy interventions may be contributing to this?

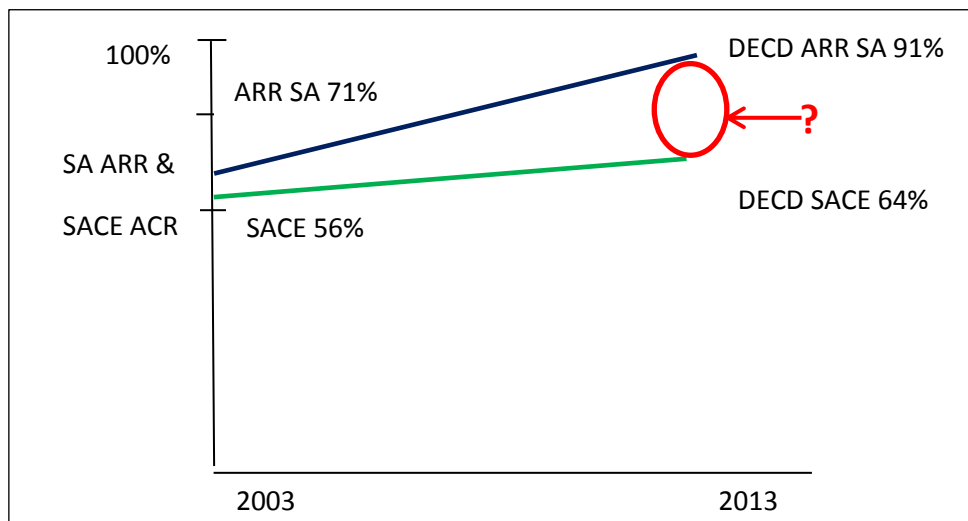


Figure 1: Comparison of the DECD Apparent Retention Rate (ARR) with the DECD SACE Apparent Completion Rate (ACR) over a 10 year period, with the phenomenon of part-time schooling included in the SACE completion figure.

In attending to these questions, we returned to the 2013 DECD Statistical Annex to better understand aspects of the retention data for Year 11 and 12 students that may offer more insights. What was of most interest here was an outstanding retention result for Year 11 students of 114.9%, indicating that not only were all students retained in year 11 but they were also increasing in number. So for the Year 11 DECD cohort, there was retention of 15% above the 100% no loss of students' retention rate in 2013. For the Year 12 students, there was a less impressive retention result of 91.9% signifying an 8% student attrition rate. It would appear that the Year 11 retention result indicates a significant proportion of students are not proceeding to Year 12 the following year, with a 'bottleneck' of student movement from Stage 1 SACE Year 11 studies into SACE Stage 2 studies. Again, this 'bottleneck' could partly be attributed to the phenomenon of part-time schooling but there may be other explanations at work here. Conversely, within the Year 12 retention data, 9% of students beginning Year 12 were not remaining there. Now, again accounting for part-timers, which in fact would raise the Year 12 retention rate rather than lower it, these data require more analysis.

So while Year 11 Stage 1 DECD SACE is generating outstanding retention rates, in fact, by far the highest of all the retention figures provided for students in the data set for Years 8 to 12, the Year 12 retention figure indicates a different story. Could it be that a significant number of Year 12 students are finding aspects of the SACE Stage 2 subjects inaccessible, beyond their capability and consequently making the decision to give up on schooling? Or are they securing more attractive paid work outside of school attracting them away from Stage 2 studies? In considering these questions we hold fast to the school attainment argument provided at the beginning of this paper that school completion or school attainment offers the best opportunities for young people post school. In essence, completion of the SACE (or its Certificate 3 equivalent) represents a passport into enhanced work and life opportunity.

### ***SA policy interventions upon school retention and attainment***

We now turn to policy interventions that may offer insights into the increasing SACE attainment and retention gap over the last 13 years. Three significant policy interventions impacting the school retention and attainment space during this period have been: (1) the introduction, growth and development of the social inclusion policy agenda instituted by the Rann-led Labor government in 2002; (2) the development and roll out of the new South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) beginning its research, evaluation and development phase in 2005 and rolled out to all South Australian secondary schools in 2009; and (3) the advent of the Rudd and then Gillard led COAG<sup>7</sup> National Partnerships. We have already provided some background to the New SACE with a consideration of its design intent and so we will move to a discussion of the Social Inclusion agenda. Because the National Partnerships aligned closely with existing DECD retention, literacy and attainment strategies, offering significant federal resourcing to these initiatives, we will focus the greater part of our discussion upon the SA Social Inclusion agenda.

#### *The SA Social Inclusion Agenda*

Prior to the developmental period of the SACE review, the newly formed Social Inclusion arm of the Rann led Labor Government in South Australia embarked upon a significantly funded and comprehensive social inclusion agenda in 2002 that, amongst many social policy challenges, pursued a schooling retention strategy to address poor retention rates. The program was called SRAP, an acronym for the 'School Retention Action Plan'.

Late in 2003, the South Australian government committed \$28.4 m over four years to address school retention in response to the Social Inclusion Board's advice. This suite of initiatives was the Social Inclusion 'Making the Connections' School Retention Strategy, more commonly known as the School Retention Action Plan. (Stehlik & Patterson, 2011, p.11)

SRAP funding enabled a range of existing 'alternative' schooling programs across the South Australian public secondary schooling landscape to grow, and in other instances, worked to resource the development of new programs. Under the funding, many secondary schools were resourced to cultivate 'grassroots' inspired schooling and community-based retention strategies. 41 publicly funded school retention pilot projects emerged across South Australia during this time (Stehlik & Patterson, 2011), presenting with contextually unique approaches to schooling retention. These school retention pilots were designed to keep young people loosely connected with schooling or in the process of leaving the schooling system connected to accredited senior schooling studies in the SACE through various learning options. Called Alternative Learning Options Programs (ALOPS) by the Social Inclusion Board (Stehlik & Patterson, 2011) after some beginning experimental years, ALOPS was eventually co-opted within a new DECD central office bureaucratic wing called the Innovative Community Action Network or ICAN<sup>8</sup> (Atelier Learning Solutions, 2014) in 2005. Subsequently, the newly established DECD Central Office ICAN team identified features of the more successful retention programs and made policy recommendations to the state government based upon its research investigations. These recommendations became the catalyst for the development of a scaled-up bureaucratic program response to the retention challenge named Flexible Learning Options (FLO).

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<sup>7</sup> COAG is the Council of Australian Governments. It is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia. The members of COAG are the Prime Minister, State and Territory Premiers and Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association.

<sup>8</sup> In 2013, the ICAN initiative receives 75% of its funding from the Commonwealth Smarter Schools National Partnership (DECD, 2013).

### *Flexible Learning Options (FLO)*

The scaled up FLO retention response incorporated the best retention design features of the ICAN programs. These features included the prioritisation of case management and vocational education programs, joined-up service delivery, negotiated individualised learning, on-line learning development programs, and acknowledgement of the need to promote community partnerships in all of the learning options within negotiated learning space(s) often removed from the student's conventional secondary school setting.

By far the greatest legacy of ICAN, proposed in 2006 and implemented in ICAN schools from 2007, is an innovative government school enrolment funding model called Flexible Learning Options (FLO)...Through FLO, students remain enrolled in their home school, but are likely to access learning beyond the school walls. (Koen & Duigan, 2011, p.142-143)

Since its inception FLO has proved to be enormously successful in relation to enrolment growth. For example, FLO enrolments have increased from 680 students in 2007 to 4410 students in 2013, representing a 648% increase (ARTD, 2013, p. 2). This increase represents a significant proportion of enrolled public secondary school students; 4410<sup>9</sup> students out of a total DECD secondary enrolment of 62425 students in 2013 (DECD Annual Report, 2013) is 7 percent of all secondary school enrolments, representing 1 secondary student in every 14 enrolled in FLO. FLO is described as a highly individualised learning program that offers students, depending upon need, varying levels of support to best attend to a range of accredited learning options.

FLO enrolled students in secondary school have individually tailored timetables based on their Flexible Learning and Transition Portfolio which may include a mix of accredited and non-accredited courses or modules, offered at different locations including school, flexible Learning Centres and other sites. The timetable may include part-time work or other agreed activities. (ARTD, 2013, p.43)

In recent years with federal funding through the National Partnership for Low Socio-Economic School Communities making up two thirds of total ICAN resourcing, much of it distributed to the FLO programs, FLO must be considered as a significant policy intervention that has impacted SA retention rates since its inception. So in relation to the 'gold standard of schooling', we ask: How are FLO students faring in relation to SACE completion?

#### *FLO and SACE completion*

In a 2013 evaluation of ICAN, ARTD consultants provided SACE completion data for the young people enrolled through FLO. Citing that FLO students undertaking the SACE represented 86% of the evaluation cohort (p.56), which configured as 3792 students (86% of the 4410 FLO enrolled students in 2013):

- (a) SACE Stage 1 completion was recorded as 7%, with 22% of students having partially completed Stage 1, and
- (b) SACE Stage 2 completion recorded as 2% of FLO students successfully completing the SACE, with a further 3% partially completing.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> A small proportion of these 4410 students may be in primary school so the percentage figure of 7% of secondary school enrolments on FLO may be slightly less but this data was not accessible in the public domain.

<sup>10</sup> These percentage SACE outcomes were derived from DECD 2012 data on page 57 of the ARTD report, figure 15, for a reported student base of only 1879 students, a base which is significantly less than the 3792 students undertaking the SACE in 2013.

The data indicate strong engagement of FLO students in vocational education and training courses which can be counted towards the SACE certificate. In the data:

- (a) 2% of FLO students completed Certificate 3 (an equivalent to the SACE),
- (b) 8% Certificate 2 and 6% Certificate 1 (ARTD, 2013, p.57).

If we then transpose the FLO SACE 2012 completion data into Figure 2, we have a FLO SACE completion rate that compares unfavourably with the total DECD SACE 2013 attainment data.

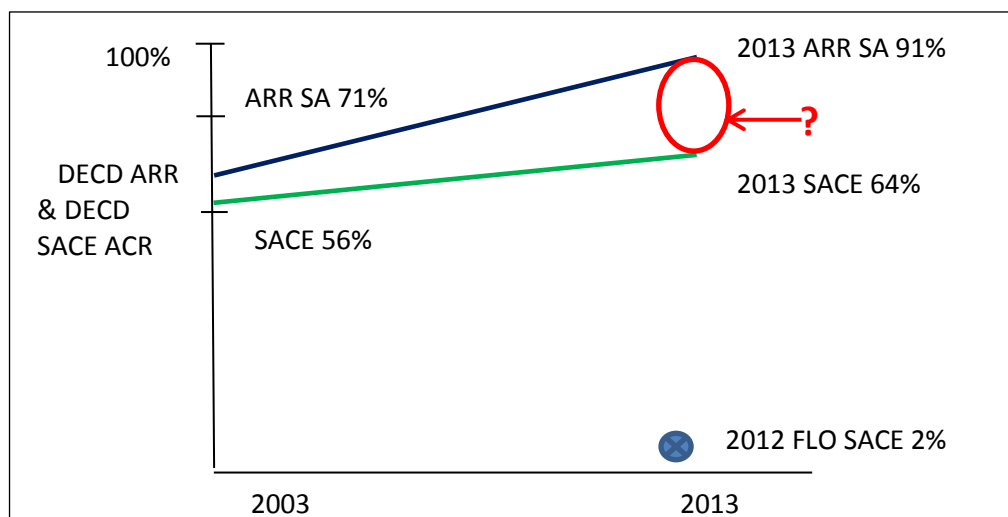


Figure 2: Comparison of the DECD Apparent Retention Rate (ARR) with the DECD SACE Apparent Completion Rate over a 10 year period, with the phenomenon of part-time schooling included in the SACE completion figure and a FLO 2012 SACE completion percentage of 2%.

This data set is of course not ideal because we have placed 2012 FLO SACE completion data into a graph highlighting a 2013 DECD SACE completion rate, so we are not comparing apples with apples. Figure 2 can then only be held up as an indicative graph that doesn't offer definitive data but having said that, given the extent of the discrepancy between FLO SACE attainment and the total DECD SACE completion data, we have data significance worthy of consideration.

The consequent data question for us concerned the impact of the FLO DECD SACE completion rate upon the total DECD SACE completion rate; is it of such significance that it helps to explain the 'dragging down' of SACE attainment offering one explanation for why the DECD SACE attainment trajectory has not kept pace with DECD retention trajectory? In other words, does the FLO SACE completion data offer insights into the widening gap between retention and SACE completion over the last 10 years, does it speak to the identified 'bottleneck' between years 11 and 12 and does it have important things to say about a 'SACE for all students?' We would answer a cautionary yes with some explanation and qualification needed.

With close to 3792 public school students attending to the SACE through FLO in 2013, which equates to a FLO total DECD SACE cohort in percentage terms of 14% using DECD 2013 Year 11 and 12 part-time and full-time persons engaged in SA government schools by secondary year level data (DECD, 2013, p.3), we have a noteworthy percentage of FLO students within the total SACE cohort to then argue that the year 11 to 12 SACE 'bottleneck' can be in part be attributed to the phenomenon of FLO. Unfortunately, for the vast majority of FLO students, a 'SACE for All' does not apply. We wanted to undertake further longitudinal analysis of FLO students post-school to better understand the act of the



FLO programs but the 2013 ARTD evaluation report indicated that longitudinal analysis of participating FLO young people post school was not comprehensive, raising further questions for us about the measurement of FLO policy impact and the public expenditure that has funded the programs over a 10 year period without longitudinal tracking of FLO students post school in place.

### ***What then must we do?***

The big question for parents, caregivers, policy makers, principals, teachers, and community youth stakeholders involved in this challenging social justice phenomenon is contained in Tolstoy's infamous question 'What then must we do?' (Tolstoy & Maude, 1935). Leo Tolstoy, having surveyed the misery of the ordinary Russian people, tried to answer this question in 1886. We (the public education community of South Australia) need to make further inroads into the answer for the sake of the many FLO young people leaving schooling uncredentialed. With publicly available data illustrating serious attainment concerns, we argue policy re-appraisal of FLO is urgently needed with longitudinal tracking of FLO young people post-school put in place as a first step within a new FLO policy agenda.

However, at this point it is important not to understate the inroads that ICAN and its FLO flagship initiative have made in addressing the SA school retention challenge over the last 13 years. Unequivocally, this initiative has kept young people loosely connected to schooling attached to formalised education with mentoring support. So any policy appraisal must appreciatively build upon the organisational learning that has featured throughout the thirteen year developmental history of FLO. And on the policy construction front, what was been outstanding in terms of the development of the ICANs and the subsequent FLO policy formulation and implementation approach was that it was designed using a form of bottom up policy-making, gathering insights from the field to inform the construction of the policy initiatives. Policy formulation during the ICANs developmental period was therefore cognisant of what Ball (1997) described as integral to good policy formulation; careful regional, local and organisational research to understand the degrees of 'play' and 'room for manoeuvre' involved in the translation of policies into practices. Grace (1995) argued in Ball (1997) that:

Policy scholarship resists the tendency of policy science to abstract problems from their relational settings by insisting that the problem can only be understood by the complexity of those relations. (Grace, 1995, p.3).

Ball (1997) considered how policies often pose problems to their subjects and that an analytical focus on just the one policy can forget the enactment of other policies in play, and the social and economic forces at work within these various policies that may influence the one policy and its outcomes. For example, The Smith Family's 2011 'Unequal Opportunities: Life chances for children in the 'Lucky Country' report identified and discussed economic and social forces in Australia and recognised the existence of unequal life opportunities for disadvantaged groups, in essence claiming Australia to be an unfairly structured society. The 1975 Henderson report on poverty pointed to the impact of an unfairly structured society upon educational opportunity.

Poverty is inseparable from inequalities firmly entrenched in our social structure. Inequalities of income and wealth reinforce and are reinforced by inequalities of educational provision, health standards and care, housing conditions and employment prospects. (Henderson, 1975, p. viii)

In more recent times, the 2011 'Review of Funding for Schooling' publicly known as the 'Gonski report' indicated that:

There is a disproportional number of students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds attending government schools, as indicated by data collected by the Australian

Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) on the occupation and education level of students' parents (the socio-educational advantage measure). (Gonski, 2011, p.9)

The Gonski report argued that low socioeconomic status has an impact at the post-school level, with students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds being less likely to attain a Year 12 or equivalent qualification (Gonski, 2011, p.114). The report indicated public schools were carrying and having to address the greater proportion of the 'disadvantage burden' that features in the context of ICAN and FLO initiatives, a key driver behind their construction. Poverty continues to be a significant issue in South Australia. There are increasing numbers of people in this State living below the poverty line and an increasing gap between the rich and the poor. Many scholars argue this gap is a consequence of the complex relationship between the capitalist marketplace and the policies of the state. In current times the state's support of the global labour market translates into an unwinnable competition with workers in industrialised countries who compete with workers in developing countries, effectively wiping out manufacturing industry in SA (Thomson, 2002) leaving an increasing pool of unemployed labour.

## **Section 2: Case study from our research as insider-teacher agents during the SI period**

Good policy analysis considers the tensions at work between efficiency and social justice (Ball, 1997, p.271), cognisant of the multifarious ways that policies and economic and social factors interact, making it especially difficult to attribute 'effects' to just the one policy. In this section we wish to illustrate this efficiency and social justice tension through a three year action research study we undertook with teacher colleagues prior to and during the ICAN developmental years from 2002 to 2005. In fact, the resulting initiative was co-opted under the bureaucratic umbrella of the ICANs and was considered in the policy formulation period prior to the ICANs. Here we are building upon Ball's notion of good policy analysis that considers the relational field in construction of good policy and also revisiting, using this case study as an example, how the ICAN and FLO initiatives came to be, initially through grounded research into engagement initiatives across South Australia's schooling landscape.

With principal support and a small funding grant from the Australian Education Union (AEU) we worked closely with educational researchers at the University of South Australia within a university-led professional learning community (PLC) to develop a new school designed to work for those students who refused to participate within conventional secondary schools. Within the PLC our engagement work was collaboratively considered, critiqued, theorised, supported and strategised. This PLC assisted us to develop educational initiatives informed by a dialectical interplay between theory and practice (Lather, 1986). The action research we undertook led to the emergence of the 'Second Chance Community School' (SCCC, a pseudonym), which offered a second educational chance for students to complete the SACE within a more personalised adult learning environment. The SCCC still continues in current times, having re-engaged over 1500 marginalised young people across the community back into formalised accredited senior schooling learning options and post-school pathways. In recent years it has operated with an enrolment of 100 students. In 2004 the SCCC won an SA Great Youth Initiative Award, one significant DEEWR<sup>11</sup> grant in 2003/2004 and ALOPS funding in 2004. The SCCC gained positive recognition from a previous State Government Minister for Education after a visit to the College in 2005 and during this time was identified by the Social Inclusion Unit (SIU) as a best practice social inclusion initiative. Despite these official affirmations, throughout its history the SCCC has demanded of its teachers and youth stakeholders considerable curricular work and activist resourcing efforts to make the SACE achievable for the young people attending; easier said than done!

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<sup>11</sup> DEEWR is the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations  
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What was initially most problematic about the SCCC in relation to its SACE completion mandate was the need to offer a curriculum expansive enough to get young people through the various curricular components of the SACE with only three teachers and some youth support staff. We tried to address our lack of curricular breadth by negotiating their participation in subjects at neighbouring Grammar High School (GHS). Unfortunately our referred young people would invariably be asked to leave GHS because they would not conform to school uniform requirements and behaviour expectations. Essentially the cultural geography of GHS (Smyth & Hattam 2002; Smyth, Hattam, & Cannon, 2004) was problematic for our students and they would eventually run 'foul' of the GHS teachers, forfeiting curricular opportunities in the SACE. They would then 'bounce back' our way and we would have to 'dig deeply' into our professional knowledge and resources, activating new conversations with our academic friends to enact more engaging curricula options that could get the students through the SACE.

The SCCC certainly drew young people back into schooling. They told us they were attracted by its physical location (on an aesthetically pleasing vocational adult learning campus), its negotiation of curriculum approach (which they called freedom to choose) and schooling design that resonated with the lifeworlds of the young people attending (they said they felt welcome and safe), and the College's nuanced approaches to case management (they said they had people to go to) but over its twelve year history it only managed to deliver SACE completion outcomes similar to the FLO SACE attainment outcomes. Like the FLO cohort, many of the SCCC young people presented with mental health issues and were from disadvantaged backgrounds, and though willing to pursue SACE achievement, many found the literacy demands of the SACE and the complexities of their lives to be overwhelming. As a consequence, we offered short vocational courses similar to some of the learning arrangements featuring in FLO which became more achievable. This curricular approach has dominated the work of the college in recent years.

### ***The problematics of educational market-based logic***

However, what was concealed in our efforts to involve SCCC students in curricular offerings at GHS were the market logics that all conventional public secondary schools are embroiled in (Campbell, 2005). GHS like all schools was situated in a competitive parental school choice policy environment. Within this educational marketplace, GHS was obligated to present the best community image possible to draw young people into the school. Our young people through their non-compliant schooling appearance and overtly difficult behaviours (though the majority were not displaying problematic behaviours in the SCCC) represented a threat to that image and therefore removal from the school addressed a market logic principle. The SCCC also attracted students from other conventional schools in the region, helping those schools to maintain and enhance a positive school image in their marketplace. Over time the SCCC became for many schools (both public and private in our region) an attractive 'dumping ground' for problematic young people. When we became known as a second chance school, willing to work with all young people no matter their presenting needs and previous schooling forays, our enrolments expanded from a beginning enrolment of 35 in 2003, to 70 students in 2004 and to 100 students, full capacity in recent years. Because the SCCC cohort represented a stratification of disadvantaged young people SACE achievement became highly problematic. This challenge is well captured in the following excerpt taken from the Gonski Report.

There is also a growing body of evidence that demonstrates that the composition of a school's population has a significant impact on the outcomes achieved by all students at the school. This is particularly significant in Australia in light of evidence that some parts of the schooling system are becoming increasingly stratified according to socioeconomic status. (Gonski; 2011, p.111)

In other words, the Gonski report cited research indicating large concentrations of disadvantaged young people (stratification) at the school level accentuates underperformance and can have a deleterious impact upon a school's overall position and drawing power within the educational marketplace.

As a school's reputation worsens, it is argued that more parents send their children elsewhere, and hence the cycle continues. (Gonski, 2011, p.124)

While many students were drawn to us through word on the 'community youth grapevine' which according to our interviews with students, communicated the SCCC as a 'cool' place to be, we were also aware that market logic was at work within regional schools seeking ways to improve their community standing through referring some of their more problematic students our way (Bills, Cook and Wexler, 2015). And we, the teachers, were on the receiving end of this referral logic. We always accepted the referred students, despite the motivation behind the referral. As a consequence, our work as teachers within the SCCC became even more demanding. Beyond teaching, we were called to be social workers, agents for rental accommodation, referral officers for Youth-Allowance payments, advisors to police and advocates for our young people who were often seen as trouble-makers by various community groups. So while the SCCC initiative was driven by a socially just concern for young people disenfranchised with schooling, and did very well in engaging and keeping young people in various forms of accredited learning, the initiative was flawed on three counts:

- (1) The SCCC lacked the social, financial and professional architecture of conventional schools to meet the presenting learning needs and curricular interests of the students;
- (2) The SCCC attracted a stratified disadvantaged cohort of young people making SACE achievement even more difficult; and
- (3) Market logics at work in in our region potentially reduced innovation activity for more socially just schooling within our regional conventional secondary feeder schools because many of these students were referred to us. Their historical imprimatur to innovate was softened by the regional presence of the SCCC (Bills et al, 2015; Teese, 2006).

In other words, because the SCCC became the regional 'easy fix' for troublesome students, we hypothesised that we reduced socially just conventional schooling innovation activity, what Richard Teese (2006) described as 'schools condemned to innovate' (p.1). Similar to the phenomenon of SA public secondary schools predominantly situated in the most disadvantaged regions of SA that refer the largest numbers of students into FLO (ARTD, 2013), we argue the SCCC softened the need for surrounding conventional secondary schools to deal with an 'innovate or perish' choice. This meant the SCCC initiative worked to strengthen the continuation of historical schooling logics (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) in regional secondary schools because the more complex students were no longer attending. Turning now to FLO using our SCCC case study as a provocative springboard, we pose the following questions:

- 1) Is the escalation of FLO enrolments in recent years driven by market-place logics which work to better position dominant FLO feeder schools in the marketplace?
- 2) Has the advent of FLO and the educational marketplace policy worked to weaken the socially inclusive nature of conventional public secondary schools?
- 3) Are the FLO students returning to conventional schooling or staying 'glued' to the program?
- 4) Are conventional secondary schools learning from the best features of the FLO initiative and implementing these features?
- 5) What longitudinal data are available on tracking the transition of FLO students into post-school options (e.g. into university, TAFE, employment or unemployment)?

New research addressing these questions would offer valuable insights to inform future FLO policy formulation. We now consider recent research with principals of secondary schools in SA who were forging ahead with a *no-FLO* or *low-FLO* referral agenda.

### **Part 3: Preliminary findings from our ‘Doing Secondary Schooling Differently’ research project**

In a recent research study in our ‘Doing Secondary Schooling Differently’ research project, interviews and analysis of interviews undertaken with seven experienced principals of SA public secondary schools, revealed leaders who viewed FLO to be a last resort educational option for young people. These principals embraced a socially just schooling innovation approach to make their schools work for all young people, including those young people who would normally present as FLO referral candidates. Drawing upon the component theory approach first developed by Meighan (1978) and since used to articulate ideologies within multi-cultural contexts (May, 1992), Christian education (Giles 1995a, 1995b), curriculum development (Brown 1988) and the de-schooling movement (Meighan & Siraj-Blatchford, 2003), the research methodology enabled us as researchers to gain an appreciation of the integration of course curriculum, pedagogy, school and classroom structures and professional development approaches as it related to the aims and goals of the various leader’s school mission and vision agendas, the perceived roles of the teachers and learners within this mission, and the organisation for learning that needed to occur. Space does not permit a full analysis and discussion of the research undertaken thus far, so we offer some pertinent excerpts taken from the interviews to highlight the socially just and progressive schooling nature of their work as leaders and our work in taking the analysis of the interview themes into a conceptual rendering of their common ideological approaches to schooling.

These principals have taken the position that the challenge of schooling engagement for all young people should be met within the context of their entire school community. Their dialogue with us led to shared understandings about their ideological positioning of public secondary schooling. Abridged insights provided by the principals are offered below to highlight their various ideological approaches to schooling and how their ideologies manifested in practice.

Principal 1: ‘So imagine if it was open...they can allow the disciplinary edges to blur and then students could actually follow what they’re interested in, what they can produce is amazing. So that’s why going down the co-design way, they have all popped out of the woodwork. Students who are quite capable of designing their own learning programs, of reading syllabus, setting goals...’ (December, 2014)

Principal 2: ‘And, the whole notion of teaching now, most of it is the Guide on the Side...for the teacher to have to let go...We tried to make a worksheet free zone...Entrepreneurship- we’ve got a working brewery (a proper commercial brewery now on site); so we’ve looked at what are the entrepreneurial possibilities for kids? So integrated curriculum now has replaced the notion of the separate subjects. ...’ (December, 2014)

Principal 3: ‘project-based learning...particularly for reluctant learners...is a very good group-skill we are finding...so we’ve developed a template...with a real inquiry-based model where the kids actually develop the inquiry questions, and be very specific.’ ‘...we need to find out what that hook is for that child and use that to re-engage that child into learning...it’s not about student’s behaviour- it’s about engagement.’ (July, 2014)

Principal 4: ‘...we teach single year levels and the teachers work as teams...One part of it is like explicit learning- yes. But the kids get engaged by doing things... We’re actually in a situation where the technology is changing so rapidly that we’ve got to be careful about how- it’s not the technology, it’s what you do with it....’ (May, 2014)

Principal 5: ‘...we’re on about...rigour, relationships, relevance and reflection...So it’s starting from the students and providing a really good understanding of what actually makes a difference in student learning. And, that’s the affective as well as the effective domain...And,

just a willingness to learn (referring here to teaching staff)...that none have this mastered- that we're all on a learning journey.' (August, 2014)

Principal 6: 'increase of technology in the School...and the old assumption that all students are the same- no, they are not! You have to learn how to actually work with those students. Putting students out in the community- being prepared to do stuff for the community... ...recording their biographies, doing craft work with them, listening to them and teaching them; ...offering our school for use for community organisations.' (December, 2014)

Principal 7: 'So that project-based learning ... So it's that kind of entrepreneurial stuff... So it's very much a sense of how do you make an impact on the building here- yeah and changes....so kids record movies, sounds and stuff like that...under that bit of plastic...is a pizza oven that three kids built in a week. Teachers are trying to get to the next step of how do you make that essential to the curriculum (talking about project-based learning) rather than the edge of the curriculum?' (August, 2014)

The quotes above demonstrate an ideological positioning by the leaders to make their schools 'places of connectedness' for young people, which in a curricular and pedagogical sense translates into authentic learning approaches, performative learning experiences and a willingness exemplified by the principals to do 'whatever it takes' to make schooling work for all young people. We have summarised the key findings (essential components) from our analysis of the interviews in diagrammatic form below.

### Findings from the 'doing secondary schooling differently' research project

This brief discussion of the 'Doing Schooling Differently' project is intended to highlight some of the directions followed and associated schooling purposes, logics and practices pursued by all of the principals. We have provided a conceptual representation of these key common ideological components (framework) represented in the "*Doing Schooling Differently*" conceptual model.

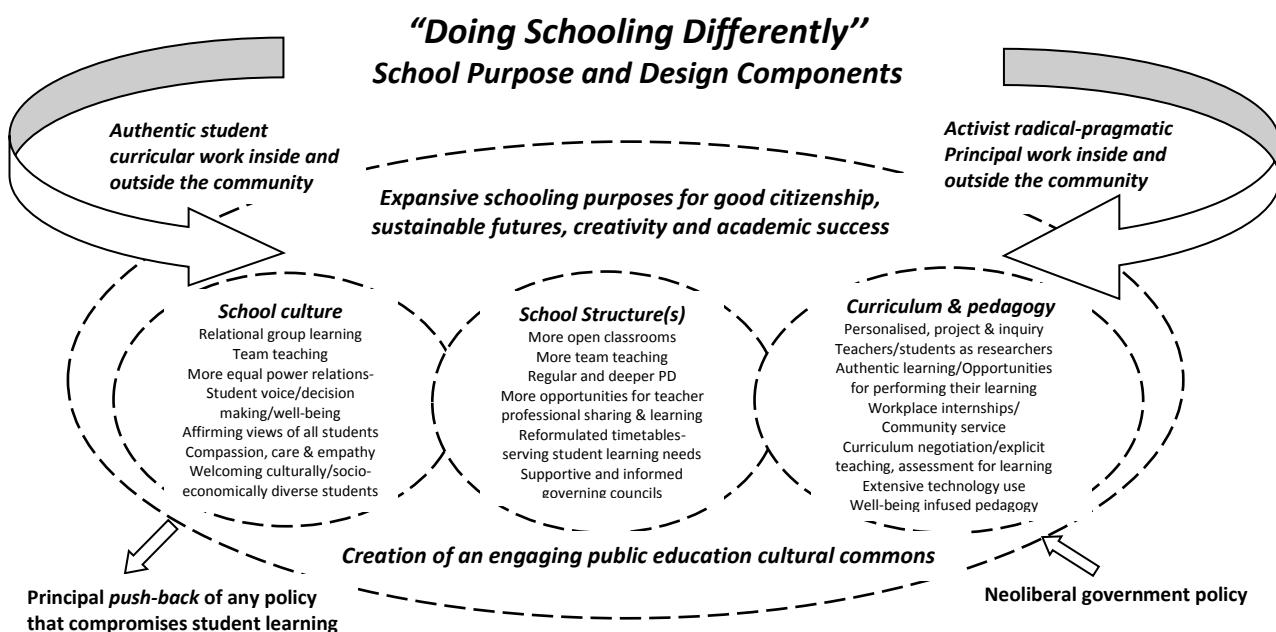


Figure 3: The “Doing Schooling Differently” conceptual framework illustrating the ideological components of schooling resonating with and common to the work of the seven interviewed principals.

The findings are considered here in terms of the ideological processes that were apparent across all of the principal interviews. Seeing a moral mandate for schooling design change, and working with the senior leaders, teachers and the extended school community, the principals have initiated change processes that sought a shared storyline of ideological change manifesting in the form of a group philosophy that represented a significant ideological shift (Schein, 2010) from conventional schooling logics.

Shared principal ideologies presenting across the interviews in relation to our component theory analysis included (1) the courage to lead ‘against the grain’ of systemic compliance and conventional school design logics; (2) re-structuring and re-culturing schooling to promote relational connectedness and positive learning mindsets; (3) instituting turnaround pedagogies that involve personalising and negotiating the curriculum around student learning passions using inquiry/project-based learning approaches; (4) forging learning partnerships with universities, community and business invoking community service and citizenship values as integral to the learning experience and (5) investing heavily in rich forms of staff professional development to make the experience of learning for all students deeper and more meaningful. Using hermeneutic methods we came to understand these components as representative of a ‘radical pragmatic’ ideological approach to educational leadership praxis, where these principals were doing ‘whatever it takes’ to offer all students the respect and learning opportunities they deserve as 21st century learners.

This research project still has some way to go, but we believe these beginning findings demonstrate potentially powerful insights that can make a contribution to refreshed social inclusion policy in SA. We would encourage similar research on a larger scale that initially focuses on low FLO referral schools situated in low-socio-economic areas of SA where the largest FLO enrolment figures are found (ARTD, 2014), research into schools that are noted for not only doing schooling differently but also doing it successfully differently (with outstanding retention and attainment data), research that tracks FLO students post-school and research seeking to understand what is going on in schools that have significantly high levels of FLO referrals.

## **Conclusion**

Analysis by the Brotherhood of St Laurence (ABC, 2014) highlighted the current employment predicaments for young people in Australia claiming it to have reached ‘crisis point’. The report showed an average of 12.4 per cent of young people unemployed nationally between the ages of 15 and 24 in the year to January 2014, double that of the overall unemployment rate. The analysis also shows that the region of northern Adelaide, the region with the largest percentage of FLO referrals (ARTD, 2013), has a youth unemployment rate close to 20 per cent. More than ever, in a shrinking and therefore increasingly competitive youth labour market, educational attainment presents as the best opportunity to lift young people’s chances of securing work.

We have argued through an interrogation of data available in the public realm and a publicly released 2013 evaluation of FLO that socially just secondary school redesign should be the social inclusion ‘main game’ to improve SACE completion. This approach contests the design logics of programs like FLO and SCCC. Using research findings within the Gonski Report, socially just redesign of conventional schools appears to offer more hope for improved attainment outcomes than the current social inclusion moves which are undermined by market logics that intensify the stratification of a cohort of disadvantaged youth into second or last chance programs like FLO and the SCCC.

With the potentially life limiting opportunities rendered upon disadvantaged young people through the market logic of schooling (which may be contributing to the escalation of FLO enrolments and may be reducing socially just school redesign innovation), new research is needed to better understand the potentially unintended consequences of current well-intentioned social inclusion policy. In this regard, school leaders who enact 'first chance' schooling options for all rather than referral of problematic students to 'last chance' schooling options like FLO are courageously exercising forms of socially just leadership practice and warrant systemic support and open professional conversations with DECD bureaucratic leaders to elicit systemic insights to inform the construction of new policy-interested SI research.

In this paper we contended that secondary schools are best placed to improve school completion illustrated through our analysis of the FLO and SCCC initiatives. We argued that new and more comprehensive research is needed into FLO, particularly longitudinal, involving tracking of FLO students post school to be better inform the effects of policy. We also disclosed that schools are by their very nature, resourced to offer students sophisticated and extensive schooling architectures resplendent with teachers, curricular choice and facilities, but that historical, habitual and marketplace schooling logics inhibit socially just school redesign. Despite these constraining logics, we offered hopeful insights and ways ahead from our current research with seven DECD secondary school principals undertaking substantial socially just schooling innovation work at their schools that is proving to be attractive to all students - disadvantaged (potential FLO students) and more privileged students alike. These significant 'inside of school' initiatives recognise that the industrial model of conventional schooling has had its day.

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