

## **‘Fulfilling Their God-given Talents’: Neo-Calvinist ‘Parent-controlled’ Schooling and Neo-liberal Education Policy**

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### **Abstract**

There has been a period of sustained growth in religious schooling in across Australia generally and with it, an intense and at times polemical dispute has swirled. In this brief paper, I approach this issue in a way that seeks to move beyond the principled polemics of defenders of both secular and religious schools by looking at the policy context that has undergirded this trend. Drawing from neo-Calvinist ‘parent-controlled’ schooling as an instance of the type of religious schools currently proliferating, I argue that far from constituting a separate and unique type of schooling, religious schools like these should be considered as just another part of the Australian education system, one that is governed by the imperatives of a neo-liberal policy regime.

[G]overnment is intrinsically linked to the activities of expertise, whose role is not one of weaving an all-pervasive web of 'social control', but of enacting assorted attempts at the calculated administration of diverse aspects of conduct through countless, often competing, local tactics of education, persuasion, inducement, management, incitement, motivation and encouragement.<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

There has been a period of sustained growth in religious schooling in across Australia generally and with it, an intense and at times polemical dispute has swirled (e.g. the controversy over the proposed Islamic school in the Sydney suburb of Camden in 2007)<sup>2</sup>. This is perhaps unsurprising as what are considered to be at stake in these debates are questions about some of the most cherished ideals of contemporary liberal societies, not least rational and critical thinking; secularity; freedoms of choice, religion and values; the qualities of citizenship; and the desired ends of education like academic standards, entry to tertiary studies and employment opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> Nikolas Rose and Paul Miller, *Governing the Present* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 55

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Senescall and Yuko Narushima, ‘Backlash over new Islamic school,’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 November, 2007, accessed 12 December 2009.

<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2007/11/06/1194117995331.html>

In this paper, I adopt an approach that seeks to move beyond the principled polemics of defenders of both secular and religious schools by looking at the policy context of this trend. I draw on a close reading of one type of religious schooling – the neo-Calvinist ‘parent-controlled’ (NCP) schooling movement – and examine its relationship to the broader neo-liberal regime that governs Australian politics and policy. NCP schooling represents an interesting instance of religious schooling that Australian social analyst Marion Maddox has termed an ‘overlooked sector in Australia’s education market,’ and one which warrants attention because of an apparent paradox whereby, ‘such schools profess – and teach – potentially controversial positions about the relationship between church and state and about Christian citizens’ position in relation to secular law’ and at the same time, ‘receive a substantial proportion – in many cases, the majority – of their funds from the state.’<sup>3</sup> I will pay particular attention to how the prevailing public purpose of education is defined and the accountability measures put in place to regulate schools in accordance with this purpose, and in turn how these are approached by NCP schools. I conclude by arguing that far from constituting a separate and different type of schooling, religious schools like those within the NCP schooling movement should be considered as just another part of the Australian education system, a system that is governed by the dominant political discourses of the day.

### Education within a neo-liberal policy regime

Since the late-1980s, education in general and schooling in particular have been framed as key means of ‘habituation’ for the allegedly new, globally competitive labour market.<sup>4</sup> Within a neo-liberal policy regime, then, there has been a prioritisation of the perceived needs of a global market economy in the context of international competitiveness, and the formation of a more flexible, multi-skilled workforce.<sup>5</sup> Framed as a response to apparently inevitable global economic trends, the introduction of institutional changes in the form and direction of education were accepted as the acts of responsible governments introducing measures necessary for individual, institutional and national economic survival.<sup>6</sup>

These changes were evident in Australia in the proliferation of reports on education and schooling since the late-1980s concerned with ‘upgrading the quality of the stock of human capital’.<sup>7</sup> The inevitability of global economic trends and the need to prepare future worker-citizens has – within a neo-liberal context – become *the* commonsense assumption undergirding education policy. In the present, this assumption is evinced in the government statements and policy platforms that give

<sup>3</sup> Marion Maddox, ‘Church, the State and the Classroom: Questions Posed by an Overlooked Sector in Australia’s Education Market,’ *The UNSW Law Journal*, 34, no. 1 (2011): 300.

<sup>4</sup> John White, ‘Education, work and well-being,’ *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 31, no. 2 (1997): 236.

<sup>5</sup> Lucas, Joanna, Jason Paul Pudsey, Benjamin Allan Wadham, and Ross Michael Boyd, ‘Why bother teaching? The aims of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,’ in *Culture and Education*, eds. J. Lucas, J. Pudsey, B. Wadham (Frenchs Forest NSW: Pearson, 2007), 97.

<sup>6</sup> Bronwyn Davies and Peter Bansel, ‘Neoliberalism and education,’ *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 20, no. 3 (2007).

<sup>7</sup> Economic Planning and Advisory Council. ‘Human capital and productivity growth.’ *Economic Planning Advisory Council Paper* 15 (1986).

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rationalisations for the purpose of schooling in Australia on a bipartisan basis and at both Federal and State levels of government. For example, in the opening paragraph of the 2008 *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* published by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) – which consists of the joint Australian Federal and State Government ministers of education, the government advisory bodies like the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board and statutory agencies like the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and the Curriculum Corporation – states that the purpose of education is stated as a key instrument for the future prospering of citizens and the nation as a whole in the context of allegedly global economic trends.<sup>8</sup>

Given the dominance of this perspective on the public purpose of education, it is neither surprising that there has been a steady push by the Federal Government in Australia to regulate schooling through the institution of measures such as standardised testing and reporting, nor extraordinary that there is a concomitant emphasis on the need for schools to be held accountable to these tests as proof of their efficient use of public funding. For under conditions of urgency framed as a result of inexorable global economic tendencies, educational institutions such as schools are accordingly being pressured to simultaneously improve their ability to equip students for competitiveness in labour markets and new work conditions while at the same time being made more accountable to the public for their performance based on this goal.<sup>9</sup> In this way, standardised testing and reporting can be seen as regulatory instruments used to achieve certain social and political goals, which in this case is to ascertain the ‘return on public investment’ into human capital – or more specifically in the language of human capital theory, a ‘social rate of return’ that can account for public investment on a cost-benefit basis.<sup>10</sup>

In 2008, the Federal Government introduced the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) for all students nationwide in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, which was administered by the Curriculum Corporation – a regulatory agency established under Federal law. From the data collected from NAPLAN testing, individual and comparative school ratings on ‘Reading, Writing, Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation, and Numeracy’ measured by a ‘national minimum standard’ have subsequently been made publicly accessible through the *My School* website as of 2010, which makes publicly accessible, commensurable and comparable across Australia certain sets of demographic information derived from individual schools, as well as results from NAPLAN tests and post-school destinations of each.<sup>11</sup> By rendering individual schools across the nation accessible,

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<sup>8</sup> Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. PO Box 202 Carlton South Victoria, 3053, Australia, 2008, 4.

<sup>9</sup> David Hursh. ‘Assessing No Child Left Behind and the rise of neoliberal education policies,’ *American Educational Research Journal* 44, no. 3 (2007): 493-518.

<sup>10</sup> Richard R. Nelson and Edmund S. Phelps. ‘Investment in humans, technological diffusion, and economic growth,’ *American Economic Review* 56, no. 1/2 (1966): 69-75.

<sup>11</sup> ‘About the National Minimum Standards,’ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, accessed July 10, 2011, [http://www.naplan.edu.au/about\\_the\\_national\\_minimum\\_standard.html](http://www.naplan.edu.au/about_the_national_minimum_standard.html)

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commensurable and comparable, standardised testing and reporting can be understood as regulatory instruments that are used to ensure schools are accountable to the public purpose of schooling as defined by neo-liberal discourse, as well as efficient in their use of public funds in attaining to this objective. By rendering school data and performance available on this scale, it is envisaged that standardised testing and reporting will function as regulatory instruments that hold schools accountable to the established public purpose of education.<sup>12</sup>

### **The neo-Calvinist 'parent-controlled' schooling movement on the public purpose of schooling**

What, then, is the position of NCP schooling, which is categorised as a particular religious and private form of schooling, with regard to this broader public purpose? The political lobbying arm of NCP schooling – the Australian Association for Christian Schools (AACS) – states explicitly in its 'Policy Positions – October 2010 and Beyond' document that it is both committed to the broader public purpose of schooling and supportive of government accountability measures directed toward this end:

AACS is committed to 'the public purpose of schooling' that is required under the registration procedures in all states and territories.

AACS is firmly committed to best practice and ethical conduct in all its schools and, to that end, is supportive of additional Government scrutiny where necessary.<sup>13</sup>

The first statement of AACS' policy position quoted above implies that the NCP schooling movement as a whole, as represented by AACS, is dedicated to achieving the aforementioned public purpose of schooling – that is, to train future worker-citizens to compete effectively in the global economy for the sake of the nation. As well, what the proceeding statements further suggest is that as a sign of its commitment to this objective, NCP schools not only accept the legitimacy of accountability measures, but would support an extension or expansion of such measures. With regard to NAPLAN testing and the reporting of results and comparative ratings on *My School* in particular, the stated position is much more cautious:

AACS has no concerns in relation to the existing format of individual and school based reporting of results from NAPLAN tests in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 to parents and schools.

[...]

AACS has no objection to the publication of individual and school results to the schools but has significant concerns about the potential for the data to be used unscrupulously in the hands of the media.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> MCEETYA, *Melbourne Declaration*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> 'Policy Positions October 2010 and Beyond,' Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACS), accessed February 1, 2011 from <http://www.aacs.net.au/>

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The addition of the caveats ‘to parents and schools’ and ‘to the schools’ in both statements about standardised testing and reporting imply that for NCPC schooling movement, it is neither the legitimacy of standardised testing and reporting that is of concern nor the governmental purposes for which these standards are designed, but rather the ‘potential for the data to be used unscrupulously in the hands of the media.’ Taken together, these policy positions of the AACS suggest a broad agreement between the NCPC schooling movement and the prevailing public purpose of schooling and the accountability measures such as standardised testing and reporting used to ensure conformity to this purpose. This alignment between NCPC schooling and the public purpose of education is further underscored by executive officer of the AACS, Robert Johnston, who in a 2007 debate over religious schooling stated unequivocally that:

As registered and accredited schools, all non-government schools that receive taxpayer dollars must demonstrate through a rigorous inspection process, that they serve a public purpose as prescribed by the office of the [NSW] Board of Studies – an agency whose functions are firmly enshrined in state legislation.

The *public purpose* that is served encompasses all manner of standards and expectations that the society, through the BOS, deems necessary for young men and women to demonstrate in order to acquit themselves adequately for the many roles that they will have to fulfill in the society and economy beyond their school days.

The content of curricula, the standards of performance, the values required for responsible citizenship, processes required for child protection, facilities required to support curricula, qualifications required of staff, technology required to keep pace with changing paradigms and a host of other compliance protocols – all are aspects of the standard laid down *to protect the public purpose of schooling*; all these and more are *pre-requisite standards for any registered and publicly funded school*.<sup>15</sup>

In this statement by Johnston in defence of ‘non-government’ schools, the point is repeatedly stated through repetition and emphasis that such schools – including NCPC schools – serve the ‘public purpose.’ It is asserted that they do so in three broad ways: firstly, by submitting to the legislative requirements for licensing – that is, ‘registration and accreditation’ – by State educational authorities (i.e. the New South Wales Board of Studies); secondly, by fulfilling the ‘standards and expectations’ that society places upon schools for the training of students for their future roles as participants in society and the economy citizens and workers; and thirdly, by complying with all accountability measures laid out by State and Federal Governments with regard to these established purposes of.

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<sup>14</sup> AACS, ‘Policy Positions’

<sup>15</sup> Bob Johnston, ‘Should Taxpayers be Funding Religious Schools? The case for the affirmative’ (paper presented at a debate at the Sydney Mechanics Art School, 13 September 2007)

The fact that such a 'public purpose' is taken to be helping students 'acquit themselves adequately for the many roles that they will have to fulfill in the society and economy beyond their school days' nonetheless raises questions about the terms upon which religious 'non-government' schooling in general – and NCPC schooling in particular – accommodates the present orthodoxy on the role of education as defined by neo-liberal imperatives.

This implicit accommodation between NCPC schooling and the broader public purpose of schooling can be brought to the fore more specifically in the statements by various NCPC schools with regard to how they envisage the connection between their religious discourse rooted in the neo-Calvinist tradition, their missions as schools in relation to this tradition, and the role of academic achievement more broadly – and results in standardised tests more specifically – in the realisation of these missions. For example, Wycliffe Christian School, located at the outer edges of metropolitan Sydney, states in its foundation statement that:

Wycliffe sees a commitment to the pursuit of both academic excellence and authenticity in Christian education as not only highly compatible twin goals but also as an act of stewardship in outworking the opportunities provided to us to nurture the gifts and talents of children and young people entrusted to our care.<sup>16</sup>

From the passage cited above, it can be discerned that for Wycliffe Christian School, there is a broad alignment between academic achievement and imperatives of neo-Calvinist discourse. For this NCPC school, the pursuit of academic excellence is held to be *the* outworking of its function as a Christian school – that is, the latter constitutes its 'act of stewardship' to nurture the God-given gifts and talents of its students. In a similar vein but with greater specificity, the chairman of the board at Dubbo Christian School in Central-western NSW affirms that:

Our mission is to provide high quality Christ Centred and Bible Based education which is both balanced and responsive. Our commitment is to produce young people who have an understanding of their purpose and a willingness to contribute to and serve their communities under the leadership of God. Our students are engaged in the local, national and international community, and equipped to fulfil the Lord's call on their lives.<sup>17</sup>

The function of the school, based on this understanding, is accordingly to produce graduates who work usefully in and for communities at every level – local, national and international – who work under God as an expression of their calling. What is the relationship, then, between this school's stated mission to 'prepare' and 'equip' for their societal and global calling on the one hand, and

<sup>16</sup> Wycliffe Christian School, 2010 Annual Report, p.5, from Wycliffe Christian School website, <http://www.wycliffe.nsw.edu.au/page.asp?id=105>, accessed October 19, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Dubbo Christian School, 2010 Annual Report, p.3, from Dubbo Christian School website, <http://www.dubbocs.com.au/admin/uploads/about/2010%20dcs%20annual%20report.pdf>, accessed September 9, 2011.

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academic achievement as measured by standardised testing and reporting? In the same statement, the chairman of the board of Dubbo Christian School also claims that:

Our literacy and numeracy NAPLAN testing results are excellent. Our students have achieved very good HSC' results and the school has taken great pleasure in making a significant contribution to the academic, spiritual and character development of our students. It is the constant encouragement, nurturing, and mentoring which our students receive along with the teaching inputs from our exceptional staff which allow each individual student to develop their GOD given talents.<sup>18</sup>

Here, like Wycliffe Christian School, Dubbo Christian School evinces its achievements in developing individual students' 'God-given talents' with reference to the 'excellent' and 'very good' results attained in standardised tests at the Federal (i.e. NAPLAN) and State (i.e. Higher School Certificate or HSC) levels respectively. Notwithstanding the mention of its contributions to students' 'academic, spiritual and character', these achievements in standardised tests are taken to be, at least in part, the fulfilment of their God-given talents owing to the work of the school (i.e. through 'constant encouragement, nurturing, and mentoring' and 'teaching inputs from our exceptional staff'). Also noteworthy is the individual nature of such God-given talents celebrated by Dubbo Christian School, and for which achievements in standardised tests serve as one indication. From this perspective, a broad correlation is established between academic achievement and the development of students' God-given talents, which then prepares students for responsive discipleship in different societal occupations.

The link between the actualisation of God-given talents and gifts to academic achievement is also made by Tyndale Christian School and Covenant Christian School in metropolitan Sydney. Commenting on the overall results of their students in Federal and NSW State-wide tests, the former avers that:

Senior School staff are committed to ensuring that students achieve results commensurate with their ability, and KLA [i.e. Key Learning Area] Coordinators work with staff to maximise student performance. Teachers are committed to ensuring that students are enabled to perform to their ability academically, not only because of the importance of student results in accessing further study options but also because of the understanding that students should use their gifts to the utmost, in order to prepare themselves for a life of service to God and others.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Dubbo Christian School, 2010 Annual Report

<sup>19</sup> Tyndale Christian School, 2010 Annual Report, p.19, from Tyndale Christian School website, [http://www.tyndale.edu.au/pdf/TyndaleChristianSchool2010Annual\\_Report-110630.pdf](http://www.tyndale.edu.au/pdf/TyndaleChristianSchool2010Annual_Report-110630.pdf), accessed February 11, 2011.

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In this passage, Tyndale Christian School points to the commitment of its staff to maximise student performance in standardised tests because academic achievement represents both a means to further study and as an expression of students' use of their God-given gifts to the utmost. It is expected that students will then use these gifts actualised in the form of academic achievement as instruments to serve God in their future lives. This commitment is also shared by Covenant Christian School, which states on its school website that:

Our aim at Covenant Christian School Sydney is not only for academic excellence but a broad all-round education which will enable our young men and women to take their place as Christians in our society. For some this will involve further study at University or TAFE, while others will join the workforce. We encourage our students to develop their God-given talents to the full, academically, spiritually, socially, creatively and physically.

Covenant Christian School Sydney's HSC results are excellent and well above State average. Past students are working in many fields, including law, medicine, various trades, computing science, design, media, hospitality, full time ministry and numerous service industries.<sup>20</sup>

Here, it is stated unequivocally by Covenant Christian School that it does not aim 'only for academic excellence' but an education that will enable its students to 'take their place as Christians in our society.' Yet the following paragraph immediately states that its HSC results are 'excellent and well above State average.' The connecting statement that links the first paragraph to the second paragraph is the claim that Covenant Christian School encourages their students to 'develop their God-given talents to the full, academically, spiritually, socially, creatively and physically', which when expressed through academic achievements enables its graduates to enter various professions as Christians in society.

From these examples of NCPD schooling and the AACSD' policy positions, two points can be made in relation to the movement's approach to the public purpose of schooling and the accountability mechanisms used to ensure adherence to this purpose: firstly, there is a broad coherence between NCPD schooling's desire to actualise the God-given talents of its students on the one hand, and the prevailing public purpose of schooling on the other, which is to train future worker-citizens to compete effectively for employment in the context of a global economy. The mediating nexus between these objectives, which arise from two historically distinct discourses – neo-Calvinism and neo-liberalism – is academic achievement in schooling as measured by its comparatively good results in tests and consequently, the post-school destinations of its graduates. Secondly and perhaps to a degree in consequence of its favourable results, while the NCPD schooling movement appears cognisant of the limitations of such measures of education achievement in relation to Christian education as a whole, it

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<sup>20</sup> 'Academic results,' Covenant Christian School, accessed 5 February, 2012, <http://www.covenant.nsw.edu.au/secondary-academicresults.html>



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nonetheless regards the state's implementation and enforced observance of them as valid and legitimate. Thus, on the basis of these examples, Johnston and the AACS' point that such schools serve the public purpose, and in addition abides by its standards and expectations of schooling to prepare students for future roles in society and the economy appears to be compelling.

It is at this point worth quoting the AACS' most recent statement on its contribution to the public, which highlights its understanding of the role of NCPC schools with regard to the societal and economic structures of the nation, as well as its compliance to state legislation and the standard curricula and testing directed toward these ends:

[NCPC Christian] schools are registered by government authorities and serve a recognised public purpose. They offer curricula based on state syllabi and present students for public tests and exams. They are intensely accountable under approximately 50 pieces of federal and state legislation. Their graduates have an established record of taking their place in the multitude of institutions that make up the economy, the public service and the societal structures of our land. The beliefs, values and attitudes taught in Christian schools have flavoured their graduates' citizenship of the nation and contributed significantly to the moral capital and the cultural mix of the country.<sup>21</sup>

As this statement confirms, then, the NCPC schooling movement positions itself as part and parcel of the education system in Australia, which serves the ends of the nation and its public by contributing to cultural diversity and the training citizens for their place in the economy and society. This is in turn evinced, as the AACS is at pains to emphasise here and in Johnston's statements above, by its shared subjection to state-mandated curricula, tests and exams amongst other regulations. In this way, such educational standards function as what Rose and Miller (cited above) call 'technologies for governing at a distance,' which link the 'powers of expertise' vested in regulatory agencies like the ACARA and the Curriculum Corporation who are presumed to have privileged access to how education *should* be conducted with the 'local tactics of education, persuasion, inducement, management, incitement, motivation and encouragement.'

For the NCPC schooling movement, such 'local tactics' that link to broader policy objectives can be exemplified by terms like actualising students' God-given talents. A circuit of consent and regulation is thus operant in this policy regime insofar as these accountability measures function to regulate NCPC schooling as a form of so-called private, religious schooling by steering it toward neo-liberal imperatives, and whose sustenance is in turn buttressed by an active 'translation' of the moralities, epistemologies and idioms of a local religious discourse into a generalised discourse of education and academic achievement as defined by neo-liberal imperatives (see Figure 1).

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<sup>21</sup> 'New Government Settled In,' Australian Association of Christian Schools, accessed on 1 February 2013. <http://www.aacs.net.au/>

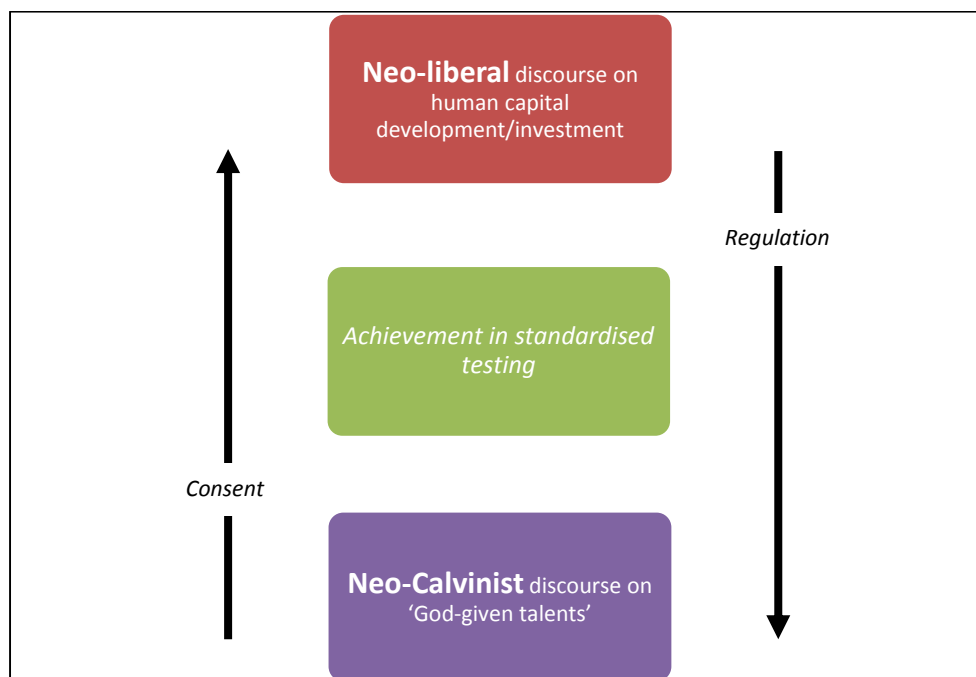


Figure 1: Circuit of regulation and consent within the neo-liberal education policy regime

In this way, NCPC schools are articulated to the prevailing regime insofar as they have ‘come to understand their situation according to a similar language and logic, to construe their goals and their fate as in some way inextricable.’<sup>22</sup> This goal and fate is encapsulated, as I have argued, in the shared notion of the public purpose of education as defined by neo-liberal imperatives – a public purpose that appears to traverse the line of religious and non-religious schools.

### Discursive antecedents in neo-Calvinist discourse

How is it that the contemporary NCPC schooling movement, for whom a stated end is to form ‘responsive disciples’ who actualise their God-given talents for ‘God’s kingdom,’ to be understood in relation with the goals of the neo-liberal regime?

The antecedents for the articulation of the NCPC schooling movement’s ethos can be found within the discourse of the neo-Calvinist tradition upon which it is built. For neo-Calvinists, the sovereignty of God is to be seen in all things, encompassing this-worldly politics in relation to such social institutions as the state, as well as practices like education. For the latter, to quote John Calvin, the whole world is a ‘theatre erected for displaying the glory of God.’<sup>23</sup> This discursive tradition led the pioneers of NCPC schooling to reject the state-run education system in Australia in the 1950s despite its

<sup>22</sup> Rose and Miller, *Governing the Present*, 14

<sup>23</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), I.5.5

provision for extra-curricular religious education, which for them would effectively lead to the separation of God from life. 'After all,' asked NCPC pioneer Hoekzema rhetorically, 'are we not to acknowledge God in all things?'<sup>24</sup>

The particular alignment of this religious discourse with neo-liberal discourse can be traced to the instrumental treatment of worldly institutions and practices within the neo-Calvinist tradition, which gives rise to a type of Christian pragmatism that seeks to influence in a Christian way – or in the language of neo-Calvinism, to 'transform'<sup>25</sup> – actually existing societal institutions like the state and the market while treating them as a given owing to the providence of God. This leads NCPC schooling to seek the actualisation of students' God-given talents in accordance with a given regime and its institutions, bringing to bear their Christian 'values' within them. The means of achieving this is, in part, through academic achievement as measured by prevailing educational standards.

Given this position, it is perhaps unsurprising that the NCPC schooling movement sees no conflict between its key function to cultivate students' God-given talents and equip them to participate effectively as Christians in the institutions of the present social order to glorify God, and the prevailing (neo-liberal) public purpose of education. This is because actualising God-given talents and the active participation of Christians is taken to necessitate the skills and accreditation that the present educational system provides.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the public purpose of education in the present conjuncture is taken to be the training of future worker-citizens to compete effectively in an allegedly unstoppable globalising labour market. education represents an investment in the human capital of the nation, and consequently, that regulatory instruments such as standardised testing and reporting to make certain that schools are accountable to this purpose and ensure a 'return on public investment' for the nation's future. NCPC schooling, as I have demonstrated above with reference to several AACS and individual NCPC schools' statements, is aligned with this public purpose of education through its accountability measures by seeing these state imposed accountability measures as a legitimate avenue for its students to exercise their God-given talents.

I thus submit that religious schools like NCPC schools should be seen as part and parcel of the education system in Australia, which is governed by the imperative to train citizens for their place in the economy and society. This is in turn evinced, as the NCPC schooling movement is at pains to emphasise, by its shared subjection to state-mandated syllabuses and public tests and exams, as

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Justins, "Christian Parent Controlled Schools in Australia – A Study of the Relationship between Foundational Values and Prevailing Practices" (PhD diss., Australian Catholic University, 2002), 59.

<sup>25</sup> Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1985).

well as its accountability to state regulations. The presence and growth of such religiously-based types of schooling should therefore be seen not as a strict privatisation or desecularisation of the Australian education system as such, but rather as a conjunctural linkage of elements from neo-liberal and particular religious discourses – for example, in the conjunction of NCPD schooling's desire to nurture the 'God-given talents' of its students on the one hand, and the articulation of this with high achievement in standardised testing as a measure of the neo-liberal state's return on human capital investment. This conclusion takes us far afield from the principled polemics defenders of secular or religious schooling toward questions of the political foundations and imperatives of the policies governing Australian education as a whole, which is perhaps where the lines of the debate should instead be drawn.

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