The conception of education as a social process and function has no definite meaning until we define the kind of society we have in mind. (Dewey, 1915/1966)
Statement of Originality

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any other university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Signed: ..................................................... Date: ..............................

Acknowledgement of Authorship

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this Thesis is the result of original research, the greater part of which was completed subsequent to admission to candidature for the degree.

Signed: ..................................................... Date: ..............................
Acknowledgements

My late wife, Jennifer Davy, made this three-year effort possible. She provided for all my emotional requirements—most of all, endless affection, a purity of love, endless encouragement and when life was difficult, an elasticity of approach designed to meet the needs of all her family members. Despite her illness, generated by unresolved childhood injustices, Jennifer provided for her loved ones from a bottomless reservoir of goodwill and good humour. She was my soul mate, my very best friend, a source of endless hope and joy. Jennifer was a supremely intelligent woman who resisted her illness with great courage and determination. At the time of her death, two weeks before the examination of this thesis was completed, Jennifer was “high” with new plans for a new life—a mix of University study, TAFE teaching, volunteer charity work. She was heavily and excitedly engaged in re-union with her mates from Sydney Girls High School, extending her circle of friends, enriching the quality of our marriage. She had a clear view of our future…full of excitement, substance, deep and trusting love. She was confident she had rid herself of the major causes of her depression. She was alive, self-actuating, self-confident—a joy to watch, and to tumble along with. Without this core of my life this thesis would not have happened. Now she is gone forever—a brutal reality which I am now struggling to understand. I also had two excellent supervisors—Professor Jenny Gore who provided the most consistently helpful supervision and timely encouragement when morale was flagging, and Associate Professor James Ladwig. I am indebted to both.

There are others, of course, who helped me get to the start line. I should acknowledge, for example, my step-son Andrew who is already showing strong empathy with those who lead largely disempowered lives and who speaks with a little pride of my efforts despite his own current disdain for intellectual pain; my Mother for her insistence on intellectual honesty and her general political settings; Dr Loretta Giorcelli and Arthur Townsend for seeing value in my thinking when the public schooling system didn’t; Vivienne White and John Hughes—for many years my closest allies, friends and tolerant listeners to ideas from a man with too-little leadership skill to do much about them.

One’s ideas are not always magic revelations, but rather the product of many and various experiences and contemplation. Some of the key thoughts can be traced back to experiences which can be acknowledged:

a) schools serving low SES, Aboriginal and migrant kids: teachers who gathered in the inner city pubs of Sydney in the 1960s and 1970s to debate, prepare lesson
ideas, and prepare to battle ignorant and unresponsive bureaucracies for the most basic of resources, and freedom from the repressive Inspectorate; the parents and teachers of the Inner City Education Alliance (ICEA) who drew attention to what the Karmel Report later described as “a national disgrace,” the state of schooling for low SES kids; the NSWTF which, following internal resistance, adopted vanguard differential staffing policies for low SES, Aboriginal and migrant students; the seven women and one male Federation Representatives who led valiant and predominantly female school staffs in the inner-city and Warilla High into unprecedented “indefinite” strike action until differential staffing breakthroughs were achieved;

b) workers in schools: Joan Kirner who pointed out to me many years ago that kids had no union and relied on teachers and parent organisations to represent their interests;

c) seeing the bigger picture: Jean Blackburn and the Interim Committee to the Australian Schools Commission who listened to the voice of Sydney and Melbourne’s inner-city kids and teachers and provided a chapter full of strategic insights for low SES students nationally, insights which, in my view, remain largely unresearched and unimplemented;

d) student boredom: my two children David and Emma, and the students of 1981 at Balmain High School who provided the data which first raised understandings for me of widespread student boredom in schools;

e) equality of outcomes: Joan Brown, Joan Kirner and a gaggle of leaders from the public schools’ parent organisations who repeatedly explained the qualitative difference between “equality of opportunity” and “equality of outcomes”;

f) social cohesion: the Sikh leader from Woolgoolga who explained to ABCTV that the reason there was no social unrest involving Sikhs and others in his heavily Sikh-populated city of Woolgoolga was because everyone went to school together from Kindergarten to Year 12—how could they not get on together? he asked; And a huge Lebanese boy named Mohammed from an inner-city High School who only stopped screaming his intention to return to Lebanon to join an army to kill Christians because he hated all Christians when his girlfriend pointed out to him, quite angrily, that she was a Christian—a situation which stopped the killer mid-flight, led him to explain he didn’t want to kill all Christians just those that he didn’t know, and led to a series of lessons addressing religious acceptance, religious rights, social responsibilities and social harmony; and

g) the politics of curriculum: Garth Boomer who enjoyed wrestling with the complexities looking for solutions, whom I miss very much, and who was
responsible for that brief moment on the Commonwealth Schools Commission when we debated and reported on matters curriculum, including the emerging idea of an “essential” curriculum: *In the National Interest.*
Dedication

To the educated and democratic empowerment of disempowered people, and to the educated and democratic repair of our pillaged and polluted planet.
Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................................. 10

Section One: How Effective are Public Schools? .............................................................................. 12
  Preface ............................................................................................................................................. 12
  Summary ........................................................................................................................................ 15
  Introduction ..................................................................................................................................... 18
  Section One: ................................................................................................................................. 28
  Section Two: ................................................................................................................................. 29
  Section Three: ............................................................................................................................... 30
  Section Four: ................................................................................................................................. 31

Chapter One: Major Successes and Failures of Public Schooling in Australia .................. 32
  No Agreed Content and No Agreed Standard .............................................................................. 32
  On Average, Australia Compares Favourably ............................................................................ 35
  Australia Has Significant Problems ............................................................................................. 37

Chapter Two: Success in Schooling—All is Well for the Vast Majority…or Is It? ........ 56
  Looking at the Data Differently ................................................................................................... 64

Chapter Three—Public Schools and the Least Successful .................................................. 87
  Political Context ............................................................................................................................ 104
  Educational Contestation ........................................................................................................... 105

Section Two: What is Happening in the Schooling Market? .................................................. 129

Chapter Four—The Schooling Market ......................................................................................... 130
  1. The Market—Expansion .......................................................................................................... 130
  2. The Market—Changes in the Non-Growth Sectors: Public; Catholic Systemic .... 132
  3. The Market’s Area of Diversification and Growth ................................................................. 135
  4. Market Players—Purposes and Governance of Non-Government Schools .......... 140
  5. The Market—Catering for the High End of Socio-Economic Status ..................... 153
  Reasons Advanced for Enrolling Children in a Church-Based School .............................. 161

Chapter Five: Emerging Issues with Significance for the Future of Public Schooling .. 174
  Issue: Sectarian Studies in Church-Based Schools ................................................................. 174
  Issue: The Meaning of “Independence” ..................................................................................... 175
  Issue: Exclusionary Schools—Privilege ..................................................................................... 178
  Issue: How Private are Church-Based Schools? ................................................................. 181
  Issue: How Public are Public Schools? ..................................................................................... 183
  Issue: Values ............................................................................................................................... 188
  Issue: Public Schools Perform Worse than Private Schools ............................................... 198
Section Three: Why Have a Public Schooling System at All? ......................... 225

Chapter Six: Evolution—Australia’s Public Schooling System .................... 227
Early Schooling in the White Settlement of NSW (1788-1826) ................. 229
Church and School Lands Corporation (1826-33) ................................... 234
Denominational Schools (1833-1848) .................................................... 236
Public School System Emerges…In Parallel (1848-1866) ....................... 239
The Public Schools Act and the Public Instruction Act in NSW (1866-1880) 243
20th Century ............................................................................................ 253

Chapter Seven: Political Theory and Philosophy ........................................ 275
Relevance of Political Theory ..................................................................... 275
Political Thinking from Which We Can Draw ........................................... 280
Considering Political “Process” ................................................................. 287
Deliberative Processes .............................................................................. 295
Values, Virtues, Right and Wrong ............................................................ 305
The Democratic Goal: A Well-Educated Public, not a Privileged Elite ........ 313
Future options ......................................................................................... 321
The Vehicle: A Coherent System of Schooling for the Public .................... 332
Identifying the Nature of the New, Coherent System of Schooling ............. 336

Section Four ............................................................................................... 340

Chapter Eight: Social Purposes and Curriculum ....................................... 340
Social Purposes—30 Years of Thinking ...................................................... 348
Social Purposes—A Possibility for the Future ........................................... 389
The Process of Constructing an Essential Curriculum Using the FOAP ......... 398
How Does this Construction of Curriculum Address the Four Major Problems with Education? ................................................................. 403
Future Challenge ..................................................................................... 429

Epilogue ..................................................................................................... 432

References ............................................................................................... 441
Figures

Figure 1: Proportion of public and non-public school students enrolled in Australia's top and bottom halves of student performance ................................................................. 54

Tables

Table 3.1: Calculation of the Accumulated Learning Load (ALL) for NSW indigenous students in public schools: 2004 ................................................................................. 94
Table 3.2: Calculation of the Accumulated Learning Load (ALL) for low SES students in NSW (PSFP) public schools: 2004 ................................................................................. 97
Table 3.3: Calculation of the Accumulated Learning Load (ALL) for NSW geographically isolated students (Country Area Program schools): 2004 ................. 98
Table 3.4: Calculation of the Accumulated Learning Load (ALL) for NESBT students in NSW public schools: 2004 ................................................................................. 99
Table 3.5: Calculation of the Accumulated Learning Load (ALL) for NESBI students in NSW public schools: 2004 ................................................................................. 100
Table 3.6: Calculation of the Accumulated Learning Load (ALL) for female students in NSW public schools: 2004 ................................................................................. 101
Table 3.7: Calculation of the Accumulated Learning Load (ALL) for male students in NSW public schools: 2004 ................................................................................. 102
Table 3.8: Degree of urgency the public school system should attribute to identified groups of students ........................................................................................................ 103
Table 4.1 Enrolment of students in “independent” schools in Australia: 2002 ................. 139
Table 6.1: Dates of legislation for four key elements of public schooling ....................... 248
Abstract

In this dissertation, the author, Van Davy, makes a case for a cohesive system of schools which can serve the public—both the national interest and individual interests—while directly addressing the current system’s major failures to engender schooling success for low SES and Aboriginal students.

Davy’s analysis ranges across a number of disciplines, fusing together a number of viewpoints: historical, political theory, educational performance, and educational theory. It searches Australia’s schooling outcomes, identifies low SES and Aboriginal outcomes as major areas of failure, and challenges a number of widely accepted schooling practices. In the process, Davy discovers OECD and ACER data, but little official interest or analysis, concerning widespread boredom amongst Australia’s students. He argues that, in respect of both low SES students and student boredom, system responsibilities such as the nature of Australia’s curriculum, could be just as implicated as concerns for “teacher quality.”

Davy’s interest extends beyond the purely educational. He examines the purposes that public and non-public school authorities articulate, as well as reasons parents give for enrolling their children in schools. From this research Davy identifies several issues and suggests that very considerable “choice” in schooling could be found in a different curriculum paradigm, and that both public and non-public schools are deficient when measured against widely-accepted concerns for religious freedom, social cohesion, and fundamental democratic principles.

For Davy, a major political issue confronting Australia is the national imperative of “social cohesion.” He searches Australia’s schooling history for evidence of any social agreement around the social purposes of schooling, including more recent attempts to formulate “essential” and “new basics” and “national” curriculum. He concludes that while many educators, and the OECD, refer to the need for a pre-requisite set of social purposes that outline a preferred future society, the politics of schooling has not permitted this to eventuate and, given the absence of this management fundamental, “it is not surprising that schooling systems are shaped by internal logics (ideologies, religions, personalities, internal politics, quest for advantage and/or privilege) rather than wider concerns for the shape of the globe’s and nation’s future, and the advancement of the twins: Common Good and Individual Good.”
With these three problems laid bare—low SES and Aboriginal outcomes, student boredom, and social cohesion—Davy addresses all three simultaneously.

He draws confidence from contemporary political theorists proposing political processes which engage the public in a “deliberative democracy.” He constructs a surrogate “foundation of agreed principles” which, he deduces, the processes of deliberative democracy might lead the Australian people to construct, then outlines a step-by-step means by which these principles can generate an essential curriculum for all Australian children from the earliest to the latest years of schooling. Paralleling this “essential” stream Davy proposes another, elective stream, providing a full range of choice through subject disciplines and sectarian studies. With the dual-stream curriculum paradigm addressing major educational weaknesses apparent in the current system, providing unprecedented subject choice and religious freedom through all grades, while attending to socially-agreed themes concerning the national and Common Good, a new political context is anticipated.

This new, less adversarial and more trusting political context is seen to be fertile ground for the replacement of Australia’s fractured schooling system with a cohesive schooling system for the Australian public—an Australian schooling system—to be managed nationally.