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Elite and Private Education

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Summary

While meritocratic ideals assume a level playing field for educational competition, those who can may seek to tilt the field in their children's favor to ensure better educational opportunities and the associated life rewards. A growing body of literature is researching 'up' to better understand how advantage for some through the choice of elite or private schooling contributes to the relative disadvantage of others. Institutional claims to offering an 'elite' education can rest on different logics such as social selectivity by dint of high fees or academic selectivity by dint of enrollments conditional on academic excellence. Private education provided by a non-government entity serves as an alternative to public sector provision for those who can afford it. The global spread of neoliberal metapolicy has fanned a general trend towards privatization. Such logics of social restriction can distinguish the whole school, niche programs of distinction within a school, or tracking practices that pool advantage in particular classes or subjects. While education policy debates wrestle with how to articulate competing ethics of excellence, inclusivity, and equity, elite branding unapologetically resolves these tensions by conflating excellence and exclusivity. To achieve and sustain elite status, however, relies on the extra work of carefully curating reputations and protecting the brand. Recent research has started to ask more difficult questions of educational privilege. Such research helps to understand: the curricular processes and nature of privilege achieved through elite and private educational choices; how such education harnesses the semblance of meritocratic competition to legitimate its forms of distinction; and the broader impact of these processes.

Keywords

Elites, private schooling, gender, curriculum, privilege, internationalisation, brands, exclusion.

Introduction

While meritocratic ideals assume a level playing field for equitable educational competition, those who can typically seek to tilt the field in their children's favour to ensure better educational opportunities and their associated life rewards. It is hard to argue with an individual parent's efforts to protect and promote their child's chances. However, the aggregated capacity of some advantaged social groups to do so more than others produces the

social problem of an unequal education system that still invokes individualist meritocratic principles to distribute limited opportunities. Elite schools and privately funded educational choices have accordingly attracted more attention in the sociology of education, re-energising efforts to research ‘up’ (Nader, 1974) to better understand vectors of educational advantage and their contribution to disadvantage elsewhere. A recent flurry of activity in this vein has produced a substantial body of work around this problematic, including the 2015 World Yearbook of Education (van Zanten, Ball, & Darchy-Koechlin, 2015), edited collections (Fahey, Prosser & Shaw, 2015a; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2016), ethnographies (for example, Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a; Kenway & Fahey, 2015; McCarthy, Bulut, Castro, Goel, & Greenhalgh-Spencer, 2014) and special editions in key journals (see Angod, 2015; Kenway & Koh, 2015; Resnick, 2012).

This chapter builds a conversation between some of this recent research and broader sociology of education to ask more relational questions of the educational privilege pursued strategically through the affordances of elite schools and private education. It highlights how these privileged tiers of schooling do not exist in a vacuum, but rather in a system of unequal schooling. In this sense we endorse Weis and Fine’s (2012) principle of ‘critical bifocality’ which seeks to ‘trace *how* circuits of dispossession and privilege travel across zip codes and institutions, rerouting resources, opportunities, and human rights upwards as if deserved and depositing despair in low-income communities’ (p.174). The chapter considers how elite schools and private education sectors more generally harness the semblance of meritocratic competition to legitimate the forms of privilege and advantage they confer on their graduates, and the relational effect this has on other sectors. In this way, these privileged sectors are interrogated as ‘engines of inequality’ (Kahn, 2012, p. 373).

Kahn (2012, p. 362) defines elites as ‘those who have vastly disproportionate control over or access to a resource’. In a recent review of research on ‘educating elites’, van Zanten (2015) adapts this definition to the domain of educational opportunity, to conceptualise elites as those with ‘the possession of resources allowing for the hoarding and monopolization of desired positions, opportunities and honours’ (p.4). Connell’s historical scan of educational marketization (2013) similarly highlights how ‘exclusive education’ constructs limited access to desirable opportunities: ‘What you sell, then, is a privilege – something that other people cannot get’ (p.105). In another review article, Gaztambide-Fernandez’s (2009b) articulates five dimensions which distinguish elite schools as typologically elite, scholastically elite, historically elite, geographically elite, or demographically elite.

As a broader category of relative privilege sought by the middle class, if not the absolute privilege of elites, private education will be understood as education largely funded by parent contributions, provided by a non-government entity as a choice alternative to the default public sector provision by local, regional or national governments. How public and private sectors co-exist has depended on the historical particularities of different national settings. For example, Indonesia’s low fee private schools have served as second choice to the academically selective public schools, while Australia’s independent private schools have historically been enclaves of relative advantage filtered by the capacity to pay the fees. However the global spread of neoliberal meta-policy is fanning a general trend towards ‘privatization’ both to widen school choice and to open up schools’ operations to private business interests, that is, to ‘neo-liberalize public sector education from within and without - endogenously and exogenously’ (Ball, 2012, p. 140). These agendas are moving fast, meaning past distinctions between public and private sectors can no longer be taken for granted, while new forms of governance, policy discourse and market incentives are fast blurring the categories (Windle, 2014).

To keep a focus on the nexus between relative dis/advantage, we will adopt the concepts of ‘**socially restrictive**’ and ‘**socially exposed**’ schooling developed in Windle’s (2015)

interview study of school choice in culturally diverse Melbourne to explore the ‘wider logic of social restriction’ (p.2) behind stratification by class or ability in educational markets. Under this definition, the ‘socially restrictive’ sector embraces both the exclusive high fee private school, the broader private sector that is able to distinguish its clientele by capacity to pay, and the selective public school or program serving the academic elite. In essence, we are interested in the capacity and efforts of the already advantaged some to withdraw from, and transcend, any approximation of a level playing field by cultivating and hoarding advantageous educational opportunities.

The chapter incorporates eight sections. The first five draw on scholarly research dealing with new social conditions for elites, the selectivity inherent in elite and private schooling, the distinctive character of curriculum in these sites, the dispositions cultivated, and the spatial reach of elite brands. The next two use media reports to highlight issues regarding elite branding and scholarship programs that warrant further research. The conclusion asks to what degree the relative advantage and disadvantage of stratified sectors are earned.

New conditions

The broader social context for elite schooling and privatised education in first world and emerging economies has significantly changed over the last half century. Firstly, with the spread of democratic processes and meritocratic ideologies, social elites are no longer the historically closed circles created by inherited or ‘ascribed’ sociological status, reinforced by intermarriage and exclusive social circuits as described by Mills (1956). Rather, more fluid and global finance-scapes, ethno-scapes and ideo-scapes (Appadurai, 1996) have opened elite echelons to a more diverse and dynamic membership decided by ‘achieved’ sociological status (Kahn, 2012). The churn enabled by this shift has in turn fostered greater uncertainty, anxiety and strategy around the intergenerational transfer of privilege, as captured in Ball’s (2003) study of middle class strategy in the UK.

Secondly, greater access to comprehensive secondary education and the massification of higher education has at the same time increased the population competing for the positional advantage derived from educational qualifications in the emerging knowledge economy. While education is not the only pathway to elite status and material success, there is growing pressure on socializing institutions such as the elite school or high status university to distinguish, ration and brand their forms of value-adding in an increasingly crowded market. As the higher education sector becomes a ‘space of intensified struggle’ (Weis & Cipollone, 2013, p. 702), strategy to position children advantageously for educational opportunity is starting earlier and earlier.

Thirdly, the viral spread of the ‘global education reform movement’ (‘GERM’) (Sahlberg, 2011) has promulgated an ethic of school choice by resourcing and responsabilizing parents to become discerning consumers of educational options, while putting pressure on all educational institutions to prove and improve their quality. Rather than promoting horizontal differentiation and innovation, marketization policies have more typically produced hierarchically ranked strata of schools, programs, and credentials, all competing for the same academically able student. This ironic convergence and isomorphism offers a ‘narrow and exclusive cultural ideal ... hidden by appeals to universality, quality, rationality and freedom of choice’ (Windle, 2015, p. 23). Such formal or informal rankings then nurture self-fulfilling prophecies for programs and institutions at either end of the reputational spectrum. The private sector has flourished in these marketised conditions, attracting a growing percentage of enrolments through ‘middle class drift’ and ‘white flight’ from non-selective public schooling in an atmosphere of both heightened aspiration and heightened anxiety (see for example Campbell, Proctor, & Sherington, 2009).

At the intersection of these three trends, the socially restricted ‘pointy end’ of differentiated school markets now serves as a crucial mechanism sponsoring some, not all, into more privileged life opportunities (Labaree, 1997). An ethnography conducted in two wealthy US schools (one public, one private) described the private school parents’ careful and sustained dedication to engineering placements for their child in the optimal channel at every stage of their educational trajectory (Weis & Cipollone, 2013). This work and other recent sociology of childhood (for example Lareau, 2011) documents an escalation of what sociology of education has long understood as the ‘hidden subsidy’ (Bernstein, 1971, p. 57) of middle class and elite parents. Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) classic work on social reproduction described the ‘educational channelling and streaming’ (p. 83) of ‘children of well-off families, who decisively consolidate their advantage by investing their cultural capital in the sections most likely to secure it the highest and most durable academic profitability’ (p. 82). Importantly, Bourdieu argued that parents’ backstage investments orchestrated the child’s individual achievement of such status by meritocratic means, ‘so that the educational system seems to award its honors solely to natural qualities’ (1986, p. 254). This individualised achievement could then be formally rendered and ‘validated’ by educational credentials. Such credentialing of achieved status is however new work for elite schools that had previously serviced and reproduced a closed enclave of privilege. As secondary and university education have become more democratised, privileged groups have had to pursue new forms and modes of social restriction to maintain their positional advantage in the educational field. Under these conditions, the curriculum in elite schools has reportedly shifted away from the cultivation of ‘well-roundedness and accomplishment in a variety of physical and cultural activities, reflecting the gentlemanly lifestyles and aristocratic values of the nineteenth century “leisure class”’ (van Zanten, 2015, p. 7) to a sharper focus on ‘excellence and hard work’ (ibid) for meritocratic competition.

Restrictive selectivity

Institutional claims to offering an ‘elite’ education rely on the different but similar logics of **social selectivity** by dint of prohibitively high fees, or **academic selectivity** by dint of enrolments conditional on academic excellence. Such logics of social restriction (Windle, 2015) work at different intensities and in different combinations up and down the hierarchy of offerings in any market to distinguish schools, niche programs within a school, or curricular tracks. These selective sites serve to sequester resources, talent or advantage in restricted and fortified enclosures (Teese, 2000) leaving other educational sites to absorb the challenge of more diverse and disadvantaged populations on behalf of the larger system. A process of selecting **in** equally implicates its shadow process of selecting **out** - the exclusive brand essentially works to exclude. In this way, Gaztambide-Fernandez (2009a) concluded from ethnographic research that the implicit purpose of the admissions process in an US elite boarding school was ‘to exclude and to provide a rationale for such exclusions’ (p. 6). Similarly but more subtly, by pitching its program to the more able student as its point of difference in the market, the public rhetoric surrounding the ‘rigorous’ IB Diploma was considered to actively deter and deselect other students (Doherty, 2009). In this way, socially restricted sites have been able to sidestep the new ethic of inclusivity and its hard work of pedagogic differentiation. Further, Gaztambide-Fernandez (2009b) associates this capacity to exclude some in admission procedures with the creation of pedagogical conditions suitable for more constructivist, participative pedagogies: ‘each class is composed of a carefully selected group of students whom, to some extent, have agreed a priori to participate in such endeavours’ (p. 1103). Selectivity at the point of intake also helps to deliver the higher academic results and image that these schools or niche programs can then claim as their added value. Windle (2015)

offers a participant's account of an admission process for an elite private school in Melbourne, which involved submitting primary school report cards, undergoing an examination, and then participating in an interview. This is interpreted as a 'matchmaking process' whereby the school chooses the student: 'The "well-rounded school" seeks out the similarly well-rounded student who is able to express identity and interests in terms that align with the corporate values of the school' (p. 54). Initial selectivity is typically backed up by the capacity to later expel students who fail to live up to expectations, knowing that there is another tier of less selective sites to accommodate such students. Gaztambide-Fernandez (2009a) highlights the ongoing processes of in/exclusion faced by students in elite schools 'through which students find a niche and the hierarchical positions they assume' (p. 199). Twenty years ago, Labaree (1997, p.54) noted that parents in advantaged strata 'are the ones who play the game of academic one-upmanship most aggressively.' This prediction played out in research recently undertaken in Australia on the uptake of the International Baccalaureate Diploma (IB). The large scale survey study (Doherty, Luke, Shield, & Hincksman, 2012) conducted across elite, private and public schools offering the IB in Australia found a statistically significant overrepresentation of students from families in the highest income bracket and parents with postgraduate education in the IB-choosing population. In this way the social ecology of this educational niche and its parallels elsewhere could be understood to capture then benefit from both social and academic selectivity. Windle's (2015) study of the sociology of school choice in multicultural Melbourne also fulfilled Labaree's prediction, by establishing how 'high socioeconomic status families, non-migrants and those who speak English at home' were significantly more engaged with educational markets: 'those with the most resources were more active in school choice' (p.42). In aggregation, this patterning resulted in 'an inner circuit of socially restricted schools serving a narrow social base' (p. 45) enabling a 'unity of purpose' (p. 47) that then serves as a cultural ideal for quality that masks its footing in selectivity. While a socially restrictive niche program can 'cream skim' talent within any school (Davies, Telhaj, Hutton, Adnett, & Coe, 2009) or community, these tactics will at the same time impact on the reputation, conditions and outcomes of its socially exposed, non-selective complement. For example, case studies of Australian schools offering the IB alongside the local curriculum (Doherty & Shield, 2012) documented how the IB program as the curriculum of choice drew the more highly qualified teachers from the other curriculum, demanding more of their time and more professional development investment than the default curriculum, while maintaining smaller class sizes. It is the non-selective complement that absorbs the negative impacts of these imbalances.

The exclusive curriculum

Curriculum studies have long reported the different types of curricular knowledge, consciousness and identity that have been made available to children occupying different class positions. Anyon's (1981) classic study conducted an ethnography of five elementary classrooms differentiated by the occupational status of their catchments (two working class sites, one middle class school, an 'affluent professional' school, and an 'executive elite' school (p. 5) that had resisted desegregation) situated in the same US state. She described a marked 'social stratification of knowledge' (p.4) with distinct approaches to what counts as knowledge and who can produce knowledge, despite a common official curriculum and a broader society that prides itself on social mobility. Anyon tracked the gradient from low expectations coupled with busy work, basics and fragmented facts for the working class, to the more conceptual 'academic, intellectual, and rigorous' (p.31) knowledge in the elite school, then how these knowledge orientations aligned with the children's own sense of their future prospects. For those attending the elite school, Anyon highlighted 'the perceived

pressure to perform, to excel, to get into the “best” schools. Although highly privileged, many of these children are working *very* hard to keep what they have’ (p. 31, original emphasis). This high degree of engagement contrasted with the dominant pattern of passive and active resistance in the working class sites. In these ways the refracted curriculum-in-use, even at this early stage of schooling, was understood to contribute to the reproduction of the division of labour. At the same time, Anyon identified inherent tensions with transformative potentials.

Luke (2010) revisited Anyon’s work and its ongoing relevance thirty years later for understanding ‘classroom practices of unequal education’ (p.169). He revisits some of Anyon’s classroom talk data to argue that the stratified curricular knowledges also entail ‘the building of a specific epistemological standpoint – a sense of where agency about and around knowledge exists’ (p.174). This amounts to a process of coming to know one’s place. Lim and Apple (2015) also build on Anyon’s legacy to offer a cognate contemporary study of how the same curriculum to cultivate critical thinking was enacted differently in schools of different status in Singapore, one a mainstream secondary school, the other an academically selective elite school. Like Anyon’s study, the case study schools shared a standard curriculum, in the context of a highly competitive, ostensibly meritocratic society. However, the analysis uses Bernstein’s concepts of classification and framing of pedagogic knowledge to show how the students at the elite school were being coached towards intellectual autonomy premised on ‘sacred’ philosophical habits of mind, while the mainstream students received a narrow, more instrumental ‘profane’ (p. 481) version of critical thinking. These different versions of the same curriculum produced different dispositions for a stratified society: ‘curricular form itself (is) the central mechanism in the production of elites’ (p. 473). The fact that Anyon’s work still resonates despite the transformative potentials she identified speaks to the conservative motives, wilful inertia and powerful agencies that work to keep things the same. In this regard, Teese and Polesel have argued the ‘machine of the curriculum’ (2003, p.17) works to ‘shore up class advantage’ (2003, p. 218) in its unchanging traditions, converting the capitals of advantaged families into academic merit in processes that give ‘the illusion of impartiality and neutrality’ (Teese, 2013, pp. 3-4).

Other studies have documented aspects of curriculum specifically designed for the unique socialization of the elite building on the foundation of Bourdieu’s (1984) concepts of habitus and distinction. van Zanten (2015, p. 8) observes that where the elite curriculum had typically featured ‘highbrow’ cultural forms, this is less the case with the current more ‘omnivorous’ generations. However, Gaztambide-Fernandez (2009b) documents the ‘continued commitment to the classics’ (p.1101) in US elite schools, for their symbolic distinction. His ethnography of an elite boarding school (2009a) also points to the school culture’s hidden curriculum in a ‘discourse of distinction’ through which the students undergo a ‘remaking of the self’ (p.15) shaped towards elite occupational futures. Across their global sample of elite schools Kenway and Fahey (2015) identify the common expectation of beneficent charity or service and conceptualise it as ‘gifting’, a form of moral curriculum in giving back that befits students born into privilege (see also Rizvi 2015a). Kenway and Fahey trace the historical heritage of this common practice in elite schools to the moral superiority accorded the upper classes in Victorian England. This idea then travelled with colonization to bestow charitable service upon the racialized Other. They profile two archetypes of such gifting made into curriculum – the IB’s requirement of stipulated hours devoted to Creativity, Action and Service (CAS), and Round Square, a transnational network of elite schools with a commitment to service in its mission. Kenway and Fahey then link this moral curriculum to the gift economy of the wealthy through philanthropy and charity work. This socialization into an ethic or disposition of noblesse oblige on one level is

laudable and well-intended, but nevertheless carries and reinforces a sense of grooming for privilege and deserving entitlement, and is thus open to the charge of presumptuous elitism.

Cultivating dispositions

Many of the scholars in this field also turn to Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus to understand how elitist curriculum, the hidden curriculum of socially restricted schooling, and the physical environment of these sites all cohere in a socialization experience that shapes the students' embodied identities, tastes and dispositions. In this space, Fahey, Prosser and Shaw's (2015b) edited collection employs novel methodologies and a fresh cultural studies lens to focus on the social aesthetics evident around the elite schools and their work of 'class making' (p.17). They argue that 'the social context associated with elite schooling has a distinctive sensory dimension. ... social aesthetics can be read in class terms through the way that the social context is experienced in elite schools' (p. 19). Similarly, Kenway and Prosser (2015) describe the ambience of an elite girls school in South Africa that sits in stark contrast with its social context: 'Over time, old and new campus architecture, design, aesthetics and acoustics have been manicured to reflect and provoke tasteful and tangible elite sensibilities' (p. 39). This peaceful ambience is however only achieved through the 'securitization' (p. 42) of boundaries to monitor who can enter. In the same collection, Rizvi's (2015b) study of the imposing gate marking the entrance to a long-standing elite school in India and other structures on its campus reflects on how such sensory design works on both those inside and those outside to signal and normalise elite status for those who belong inside.

With many elite and private schools being gender specific, these cultivated dispositions will be gendered as well as classed. The film 'Mona Lisa Smile' (2003) directed by Mike Newell featuring Julia Roberts captured the cusp between old and new femininities being cultivated in an exclusive women's college in Massachusetts in the 1950s. Gender roles and subjectivities have continued to evolve in line with broader social change, though unevenly, which begs the question, to what degree do socially restricted sites of education buffer or promote gender role change. Kenway, Langmead and Epstein (2015) approach elite girls schools as historical sites of 'feminist progressivism' (p.154) steering change for women by preparing girls for further education and careers. Their comparison of contemporary practice in elite girls schools in South Africa and England reveals the global aspirations and leadership ambitions projected on these girls which, they suggest, fail to address the less than perfect realities of a gender-unfriendly world of work: 'the smooth sailing they are taught to expect in their lustrous post-school lives leaves them unprepared for the male resistance they are likely to encounter in the corporate workplaces they will enter' (p. 158). Kenway et al. are critical of this 'neoliberal, faux feminist' imaginary for the 'toxic' competitiveness and fear of failure it engenders (p.159). Forbes and Lingard (2015) offer an eerily cognate profile of an elite girls school in Scotland with a suffragette history, and its 'intense cultivation' (p.120) of a habitus of ambitious global aspiration. They adapt the concept of cruel optimism to one of 'assured optimism' with which to 'understand the embodied positive conditions of possibility in the practices and representations central to the habitus of [the school's] students' (p. 121).

The historical privileging of male power might suggest that elite boys schools would not have the same progressive agenda in mind, but rather one of maintaining and reproducing gendered power and privilege under changing conditions. Goh (2015) demonstrates the strong link between political power and elite boys schooling in Singapore, then argues that colonial-heritage elite schools have engineered privileging postcolonial forms of masculinity that are distinct from those in the West in their 'anxiety-ridden' (p. 138) and ambivalent complexities. Using school histories and newsletters from the prestigious Anglo-Chinese Schools, Goh characterises the shifting influences on hegemonic masculinities over colonial,

postcolonial and globalising phases to show how ‘the racial and class anxieties of the elites were projected onto the gendered schooling of boys to become men who were physically rugged to withstand tropical enervation and morally righteous and caring for the women and the lower classes of the race’ (p. 140). This is a fascinating account of very explicit designs on what kind of men the school was producing in response to the moral and political concerns of the time, as a way ‘to maintain the hegemony of the ruling elites’ (p.154).

Brand power and spatial reach

In the recent burst of research on elite schooling, there has also been attention to discourses of internationalisation and global citizenship, and the production of more cosmopolitan, mobile subjectivities to prime students for roles in increasingly globalised economies. Global brands and rankings are well established in the higher education sector, with flows of students crossing the globe in pursuit of a high status credential (Vandrick, 2011). The highest ranked destinations with their brand power and status appeal have entered the imaginary and fuelled the aspirations of students in elite schools. As a result elite schools and niche programs are increasingly preparing students for a transnational higher education sector/market. The IB and its genesis in the international schooling sector is perhaps the prototype in this regard (Doherty, Mu, & Shield, 2009), but this is now an increasingly common feature and selling point of socially restrictive schooling. For example, Rizvi (2015a) reports on the ‘new class politics’ (p. 135) whereby parents in an elite school’s community in India prize ‘a place in one of the leading universities in the United States or United Kingdom’ (p. 132) above all else. Lowe (2000) documented the growing appetite for international examinations, ‘that originate in and are recognised for access to university or the labour market in countries outside that in which they are taken’ (p. 363). These credentials serve as “reputational capital” and credentials that signal an educational experience different from that which has become increasingly available to the masses’ (p. 365, quoting Brown & Scase). An educational biography that reaches beyond the nation is increasingly thinkable and doable for those with the necessary resources, but a narrow set of privileged first world Anglophone brands dominate the field. The desire for international higher education poses a challenge for local curriculum that has historically concentrated on nurturing national citizenship, or more recently, on reconciling internal identity politics (Doherty & McLaughlin, 2015). Further, Koh and Kenway (2012) ask the question: if elites choose to transcend their nation’s educational designs, what kind of sensibilities and allegiances might these graduates bring back if they slot back into the local leadership positions for which they have been groomed?

To this point, the discussion has drawn out common problematics across the research into socially restricted education. We now turn to some empirical developments in the field of elite schooling that are both illuminating and worth documenting, as a way to suggest further lines of research enquiry. Our evidentiary sources here are websites and newspapers, not scholarly research.

Living, reproducing and dying by the brand

While education policy debates wrestle with the tensions between ethics of excellence, inclusivity and equity, ‘elite’ branding unapologetically resolves these tensions by rhetorically conflating and celebrating excellence and exclusivity, while defusing equity concerns with a benign discourse of choice. However, to achieve and sustain elite status ultimately relies on the extra work of establishing and curating institutional reputations, then protecting the brand. We suggest that this corporate work of the elite school warrants more research.

A new business model is emerging that provides a shortcut to elite branding by forms of franchising. An example is Haileybury, a co-educational secondary boarding school in Hertfordshire formed in 1862, and forged in the British Empire when the East India Company was divested in the 1850s. The historic Haileybury name is now attached to two English-medium schools in Kazakhstan teaching British curricula. In 2015, a Haileybury-Turnford academy was formed in partnership with a publicly-funded school in the local British community. The Haileybury name promises quality by association, carrying both the connotations and imprimatur of an august institution to help raise both student aspirations and community expectations:

Already the benefits of partnership have been felt. Haileybury has provided assistance for able pupils in applying to Russell Group universities, entrance to the Combined Cadet Force, involvement in the Model United Nations weekend and access to a series of Haileybury lectures. In return, Haileybury has benefited from Turnford's professional expertise in the use of data for teaching and learning and its close community links. Haileybury Turnford will build on this start. The new academy will continue to be publicly-funded but will also gain the freedom to be innovative, drawing on the history and ethos of Haileybury, sharing aspirations and ambitions. (<https://www.haileybury.com/explore/haileybury/haileybury-wider-world/haileybury-turnford>, accessed 18 December 2015)

In Melbourne Australia, there is another Haileybury, a multi-campus independent school with a long and proud history. This Haileybury has recently established an outpost, the Haileybury International School near Beijing, China, which offers Australian curriculum through a combination of Chinese and English language. Selected senior students from the Australian Haileybury 'spend a month in the English country town of Hertford where they attend classes with their fellow English Haileyburians' (<http://www.haileybury.com.au/international>, accessed 21 December, 2015). Though situated in a very different context, the burgeoning private sector in India has also discovered the benefits of franchising reliable or proven brands in 'chains' (see for example <http://www.shemford.com/franchise>) that promise quality and distinction.

There are equally risks attached to the elite school's reliance on reputation. In this regard, elite schools have recently become newsworthy in Australia for all the wrong reasons. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse conducted hearings in three states over 2015 which have revealed the remarkably similar but independent work undertaken in a number of elite secondary boys' schools to contain, suppress and defuse student allegations of sexual abuse over time. According to newspaper reportsⁱ of the Commission's proceedings: students raising allegations were disbelieved, or offered non-committal settlements under strict confidentiality conditions; their allegations were not reported to police; and accused staff were offered early retirement to avoid criminal charges or supplied with references to help them relocate. The reasoning given to defend these common responses was to firstly limit the financial risk from further claims for damages, and secondly to protect schools' reputations from the tarnish of scandal. Another recent national news itemⁱⁱ has reported on the end-of-year address given by the school captain of an exclusive girls' school in Sydney, in which she took the opportunity to accuse the school of being 'run more and more like businesses, where everything becomes financially motivated.'³ A video recording of her address went viral on social media, sparking commentary over the priority placed on the surface gloss of advertising images and reputation rather than student welfare in the elite school sector. Together, these episodes highlight the crucial importance of reputations to socially restricted institutions, the potential fragility of these reputational brands, and their careful curation as a priority for the elite institution's business plan. In a

world increasingly constituted and mediated by discursive means, elite schools should be understood as both vulnerable and proactive on this front.

The Indigenous scholarship student

In another telling development, an Australian consortium of high profile business leaders, philanthropists and community leaders has established the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation (AIEF) which, since 2008, has placed and supported young Aboriginal people, the majority from rural and remote communities, ‘at some of Australia’s best schools and universities’ (<http://www.aief.com.au/about/> accessed 15 December 2015). The program regularly features in good news storiesⁱⁱⁱ in the conservative press, depicting well groomed students sporting crisp private school uniforms, ties, blazers and dazzling smiles. Quotes from the students speak to the initial challenge but ultimate rewards of inspiration, achievement and confidence. Rates of school completion and transition to further education for the scholarship recipients are reported to exceed that of the wider population. The Foundation is proud of its ‘ripple effect’ building aspiration in students’ extended families and communities (AIEF, 2014, p. 5).

Research into the scholarship student experience affords a valuable perspective on socially restricted education. Hoggart’s (1957) moving account of the social isolation, self-consciousness and ‘uprooting’ of ‘the scholarship boy’ (p. 239) in mid-twentieth century Britain in many ways anticipated Bourdieu’s theory of habitus and field. Hoggart described not just the difficulties of fitting into the new environment of privilege, but more poignantly the ‘chafing’ between scholarship students and their community of origin, which contributed to ‘a sense of no longer really belonging to any group’ (p. 239). Such enquiry illuminated the class relations underpinning systems of unequal education, but could equally inform a similar focus on the racial politics therein.

In the current social enterprise, elite or private schooling is offered as a ‘solution’ to the ‘problem’ (Bacchi, 2009) of poor school completion rates by Aboriginal students across the nation. Without disputing the very real change in prospects this program might offer its participants by building aspiration and providing mentoring, closer analysis would raise some uncomfortable issues with this ‘solution’. Firstly, the sense of forcibly making the Other in one’s own image needs to be interrogated. Windle (2015) highlights ‘the conflict of the narrow cognitive and cultural system of traditional schooling with a diverse student population’, with elite schools emerging as both the least equipped and least willing to accommodate difference to date. The scholarship student, especially one with Indigenous heritage, is absorbed entirely on the school’s terms as a visible display of the sector’s ethos of noblesse oblige. Secondly, the scholarship child is hand selected and placed as an individual off country, offering no greater solution to the communities and families left behind. ‘Saving’ the individual does not solve entrenched sociological inequalities, but rather, places great responsibility on that young person to eventually make the difference desired. Thirdly, there is a self-congratulatory sense that ‘enterprise can succeed where the state has failed’ (Ball, 2012, p. 140) in the conservative championing of this solution. This discursive use of elite and private schooling in a national agenda around ‘closing the gap’^{iv} of Indigenous disadvantage further cements the elite and private schooling sectors’ privileged status while it erases any contribution the public education sector might make if it were given the same substantial resources that have been invested in the scholarship program.

Undoing privilege: Unearned advantage?

This chapter has staged a conversation with recent literature that researches ‘up’ to better understand how advantage for some through the choice of socially restrictive schooling is implicated in the relative disadvantage of others. Elite schools and private education

‘transform common schooling into uncommon schooling’ (Labaree, 1997, p. 66) then restrict access to their forms of distinction and privilege. To conclude, we have adapted the title of Pease’s (2010) book in our heading to ask whether the relative advantage achieved through socially restrictive schooling is ‘unearned’.

Our conversation has in many ways highlighted the intense strategic work of those in the elite and middle classes to retain their positional advantage in the face of more open competition in their ranks and more intensified competition in the education field. As the membership of privileged social echelons has become more open and contingent on achieved status rather than ascribed status, these groups have worked assiduously to reinvent forms of social restriction around advantageous educational opportunity. More importantly, their children are exposed to immense scholastic pressure in increasingly meritocratic modes to prove themselves worthy and capable of achievement of privileged status. The institutions themselves work hard to establish, grow and protect their reputations. While the social base competing in educational markets for limited opportunities has widened, the internationalisation of higher education has worked to narrow the goalposts. The highly desired prizes of placements in a handful of US and UK universities remain tightly constrained, all the more valuable and desirable for their scarcity. Though very few students across the globe successfully win places at these high status institutions, their brands increasingly occupy the imaginary and aspirations of privileged and academically elite students across the globe. In this sense, the whole industry behind those who make the ultimate cut could be considered to have worked hard to ‘earn’ their privilege.

Their achievements however come at a cost which is borne by others who are left competing on the fictional ‘level’ playing field without the advantage of optimised learning conditions, hidden parental subsidy, and distinctive curriculum. The cohesive unity of purpose achieved within socially selective education effectively concentrates the challenges of greater social diversity in the non-selective, socially exposed sites of the complementary public sector. The academic curriculum that serves the goals of the academic elite continues to dominate schooling despite its incapacity to engage the more diverse student body in socially exposed sectors. Advantaging some relies on disadvantaging others (Weis & Fine, 2012); these are not independent processes. In this way, we would argue ‘no brand’ public education suffers from ‘unearned’ disadvantage.

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Notes

i For example:

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ii Taylor, D. (accessed 8 December, 2015), 'Ravenswood captain accuses school of putting image ahead of student welfare in year-end speech', ABC News, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-12-07/ravenswood-captain-calls-out-schools-privilege/7006918>

iii For example, Aikman, A. (12-13 December, 2015) Dreaming of a future that reconciles two worlds. *The Australian*, p. 1.

iv See <http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/closing-the-gap/key-facts/what-is-closing-the-gap>