

References

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The Quest for Revolution in Australian Schooling Policy

Glenn C. Savage, Milton Park: Routledge, 2021, pp. 176.

Jennifer Wallner, University of Ottawa (jenn.wallner@uottawa.ca)

The pervasiveness of “alignment thinking,” the ways in which policy reforms that aim to instill order simultaneously disrupt the existing order of a sector, and the value of an assemblage approach to policy analysis are three topics productively explored in Glenn C. Savage’s work *The Quest for Revolution in Australian Schooling Policy*. The book, which provides a detailed examination of transformations to the Australian schooling sector, will be of interest to Canadian policy scholars and political scientists, as it enables us to better understand our own idiosyncrasies in the politics of education while gaining a richer appreciation for the potentially widespread consequences that programmatic changes can have on the logic and functioning of a policy sector as a whole.

As in Canada, where authority over education rests with the provinces, the responsibility for schooling in Australia technically falls to the states and territories. In 2007, however, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd launched what would become the most wide-reaching reform of Australia’s schooling sector. These reforms adhered to what Savage calls “alignment thinking.” According to Savage, alignment thinking involves “a specific form of technical rationality that seeks to standardise, harmonise and impose order on systems” through such measures as standards-based reforms, evidence-based reforms and creating new data and accountability infrastructures that “privilege national and transnational commonality over subnational and local diversity” (2).

The reform agenda centred on smoothing over state and territorial differences in elementary and secondary education through a broad suite of interconnected reforms that included the Australian Curriculum developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA); the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN); the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers; the Australian Professional Standard for Principals; the National Schools Interoperability Program to harmonize data collection and sharing; and Education Services Australia (ESA), established to provide technology-based development and support for all governments in relation to national reforms.

The book’s overview of the education reforms, which were adopted in the span of just a few years, leaves the reader almost breathless at the end (9). From a Canadian perspective, the speed, scope and significance of the transformations accomplished in Australia are almost unfathomable.

Here in Canada, there is no “national” policy space in education. Ottawa has virtually no role in schooling policy, as provinces and territories maintain almost exclusive jurisdiction in the field. Even if would-be federal policy entrepreneurs desired to facilitate some form of national revolution in elementary and secondary education policy, any actual effort would be immediately struck down with vigour and resolve by provincial and territorial decision makers. Canada similarly lacks the necessary administrative structure in the form of a national ministry of education, housed in Ottawa, that could issue such directives if desired. Fiscal

decentralization, moreover, means that provinces derive most of their revenues independently from the federal government. Consequently, Ottawa does not have the fiscal or administrative leverage necessary to enact such widespread and rapid change in the education arena.

While the specific reforms in the Australian education arena were enacted quickly, they did not appear overnight. Savage identifies numerous precursors, and two in particular stand out.

First—far afield from the confines of the education arena—was a macro-structural adjustment that came in the form of federal control over income tax, assumed during the Second World War. The move permanently bolstered the fiscal power of the federal government, enabling the commonwealth to gradually stake greater and greater claim in various sectors, including education.

Second—specific to education—was the emergence of programmatic reforms intended to strengthen schooling in the 1980s and 1990s. Endorsed by the commonwealth with key states as leading entrepreneurs, these reforms pushed for such things as national standards, new reporting systems, increased teacher preparation and large-scale assessments. Building on the influential reports and positions taken by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), national and state-level actors began to mobilize around what would coalesce into alignment thinking.

Historical changes combined with proximate policy initiatives thus laid fertile ground for the revolution that took hold in the schooling sector. Fiscal arrangements, administrative practices and policy initiatives layered to facilitate the emergence of a national policy space in Australian education. The consequence of these reforms that Savage examines is the new and expansive role played by the commonwealth government in an area that had been traditionally reserved to the states and territories and the broader transformations in the processes of governance and policy making in the education sector—put simply, the “new order” in Australian education.

According to Savage, three factors facilitated the emergence of the new Australian order in the schooling sector. First, federal decision makers had a strong faith in the potential of achieving national policy alignment by collecting data, gathering more evidence and instituting clearer standards applied consistently throughout the federation. Second, inspired by this belief, commonwealth, state and territory decision makers committed themselves to new policies and programs that increased interjurisdictional power-sharing and learning in education, mobilized through ACARA and by NAPLAN to ensure the realization of common standards and objectives throughout the country. Third and finally, Savage implicates the rapid rise of global norms, fostered by the OECD and its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which reinforce the calls for alignment thinking in education reform within the Australian policy community.

While mapping the emergence of a new order, Savage is also attuned to its mirror, *disorder*. Taking us through the mirror darkly, he shows us the ways in which alignment and standardization engendered frictions, tensions and subsequent misalignment in the education policy space. For example, the alignment revolution opened a proverbial can of spaghetti in terms of accountability and clarity in the sector—an image explicitly used by an interviewee in his study—wherein state and territorial decision makers no longer know from whom they are receiving instruction, or what they are answerable for. Furthermore, the effort to standardize and align various components of schooling policy simultaneously elevated the significance of new national players, such as ACARA, while limiting state and territorial creativity in the education arena, because they must all now adhere to national standards.

Herein lies the value of the assemblage approach to policy analysis leveraged throughout the book. An assemblage approach sees policy making as a “social process of arrangement resulting from complex interactions between people and things which are embedded within existing conditions of possibility” (3). By using assemblage theory, Savage helps us to move beyond the

static—and inaccurate—binary distinction of change versus continuity often used by policy scholars, in order to show the ways in which a seeming stability in a policy sector is simultaneously imbued with instability as competing logics and processes overlap and are layered on top of each other.

Liberalism, Diversity and Domination: Kant, Mill and the Government of Difference

Inder S. Marwah, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 298.

Richard Vernon, Western University (ravernon@uwo.ca)

This impressive book draws on meticulous research and brings care and imagination to its interpretation. The principal chapters will be a valuable resource for political theorists concerned with Kant, Mill and the themes of empire and diversity.

The discussion of Kant clarifies the problematic relationship between what we may term the anthropological and the ethical dimensions of his thought, drawing on and extending Christine Korsgaard's distinction between incentive and principle (34) and showing how the two can be brought together in a developmental frame. Discussion of Kant continues with an account of the ways in which his antique and disturbing racial theory plays into his account of development. Marwah weighs forcefully into the ongoing debate between those scholars who see Kant's racial theory and those who see his anti-colonialism as more central to his political philosophy, and he gives reasons for favouring the former view.

Interestingly, both Kant and Mill could be seen as developmentalists with a cosmopolitan terminus, but Marwah distinguishes quite sharply between their respective projects. Mill's cosmopolitan terminus, he argues, is less exclusionary, more open to cultural diversity and more attractively fallibilist than is Kant's. The discussion of Mill draws upon admirably comprehensive and detailed research and certainly provides a more than adequate response to the obtuse remark about Mill that Marwah says on page 1 provoked his book.

After the discussions of Kant and Mill, there is something of a change in discursive register, as the book opens up into more recent political theory. Here, of course, it becomes more necessary than before to rely on secondary sources regarding liberalism's complicity in empire and, it is added, regarding the complicity of the Enlightenment and the West more generally. The author maintains a sane balance, despite the fact that many of the views discussed have been arrived at in a somewhat more frictionless way than his own. The book argues that despite these wide-ranging sources of critique, a "Millian" view remains viable and even attractive.

That conclusion may be weakened rather than strengthened by the critique of "Kantian" liberalism that follows. John Rawls, of course, is the target, but he is represented here not in his own voice but by way of hostile critics' views, and more uncommitted readers may be left wondering why Rawls, who after all celebrates the diversity of goods and warns us about the "burdens of judgment," could not equally well be classed—if we were somehow obliged to choose—as a Millian fallibilist rather than a Kantian. The critique of Rawls then rather quickly broadens into very brief critiques of contractualism and ideal theory in general, but at this point we have gone beyond what can compellingly be claimed on the basis of this book's own fine research.