

THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

CENTRE FOR
POST-
COMPULSORY
EDUCATION
AND
LIFELONG
LEARNING
(CPELL)


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The school-university nexus and higher education reform: the dualism of institutional policy

Richard Teese

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1



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OVERVIEW

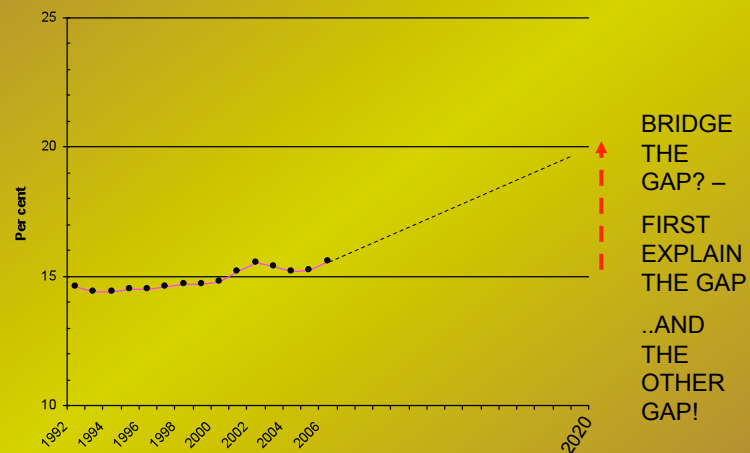
- ❖ primary link between universities and schools is curriculum
- ❖ selection is secondary
 - ❖ because curriculum is the primary link, school resource differences play a big role in social access to university
 - ❖ curriculum is resource-sensitive and highly discriminating in social terms
- ❖ admissions policies can partly compensate for resource effects (e.g., reserved places)
- ❖ but selection is based on score (even for reserved places), and therefore on curriculum
- ❖ expanding social access to university requires curriculum reform
- ❖ and changes in school funding policy

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CONTEXT

Enrolment shares of low SES groups in Australian higher education: 1992-2006 and target for 2020




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BRADLEY

- ❖ highlights the stability in low SES participation
- ❖ explains this in terms of a range of demand and supply factors
- ❖ on the “demand” side, the report points to:
 - (1) awareness of higher education
 - (2) aspirations
 - (3) educational attainment at school
 - (4) direct and indirect costs
- ❖ on the “supply” side
 - (1) selection methods
 - (2) lack of pro-active links with schools
 - (3) lack of financial support to help with poorer students

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THE SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY NEXUS: FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES

To boost higher education participation, two fundamental issues need to be tackled:-

- ❖ social patterns in educational achievement at school
 - these underlie low retention
- ❖ institutional policies and behaviours that contribute to these patterns
 - including through selection, but in more fundamental ways

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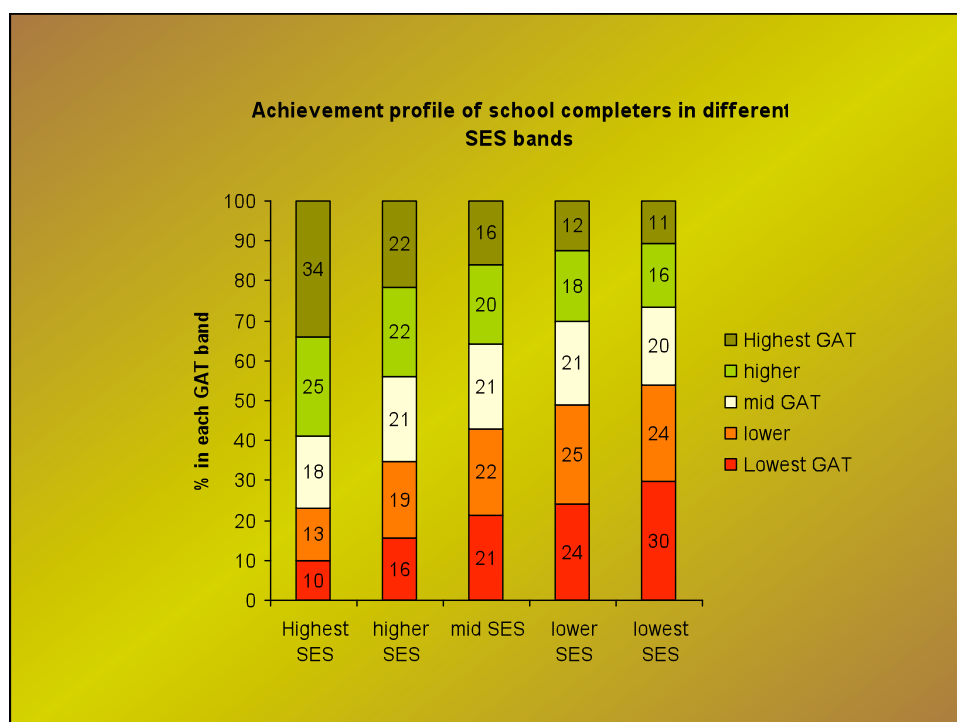
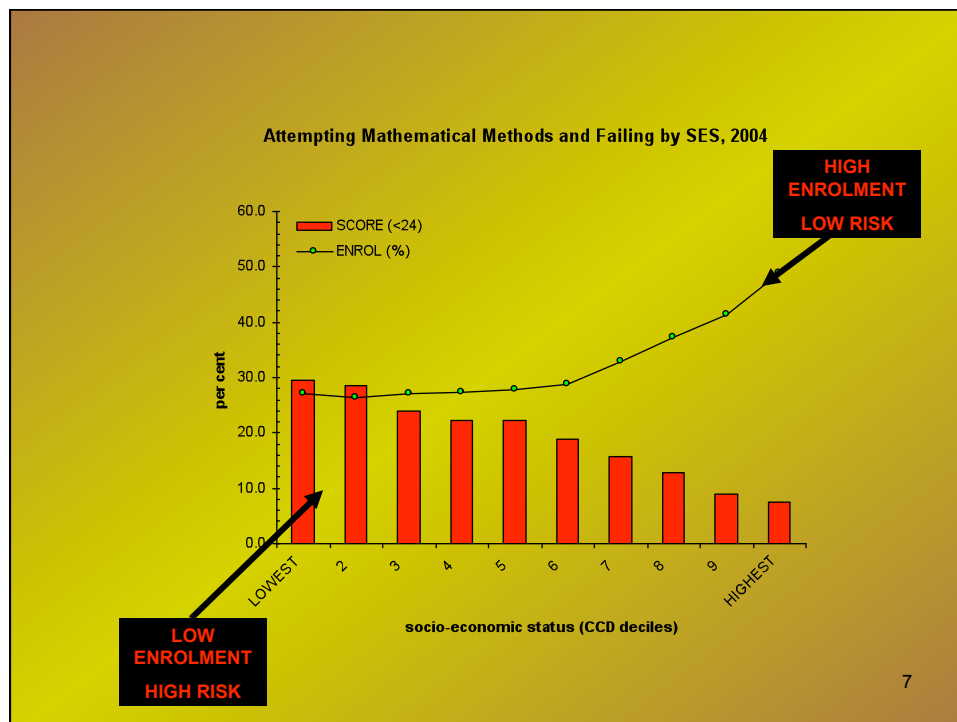
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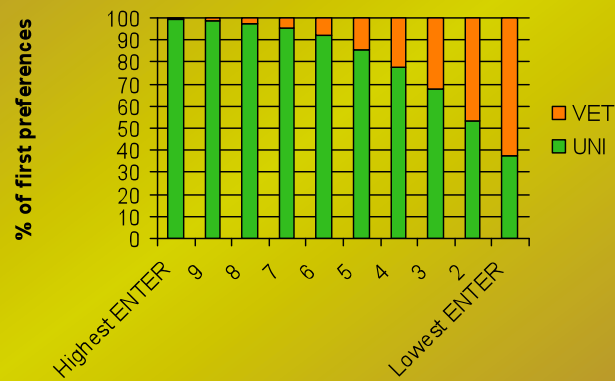
TWO SNAPSHOTS OF UNEQUAL ACHIEVEMENT

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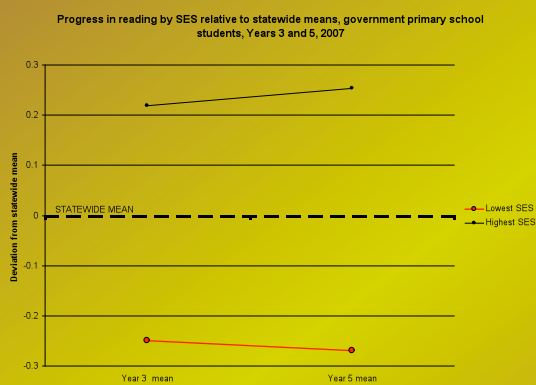
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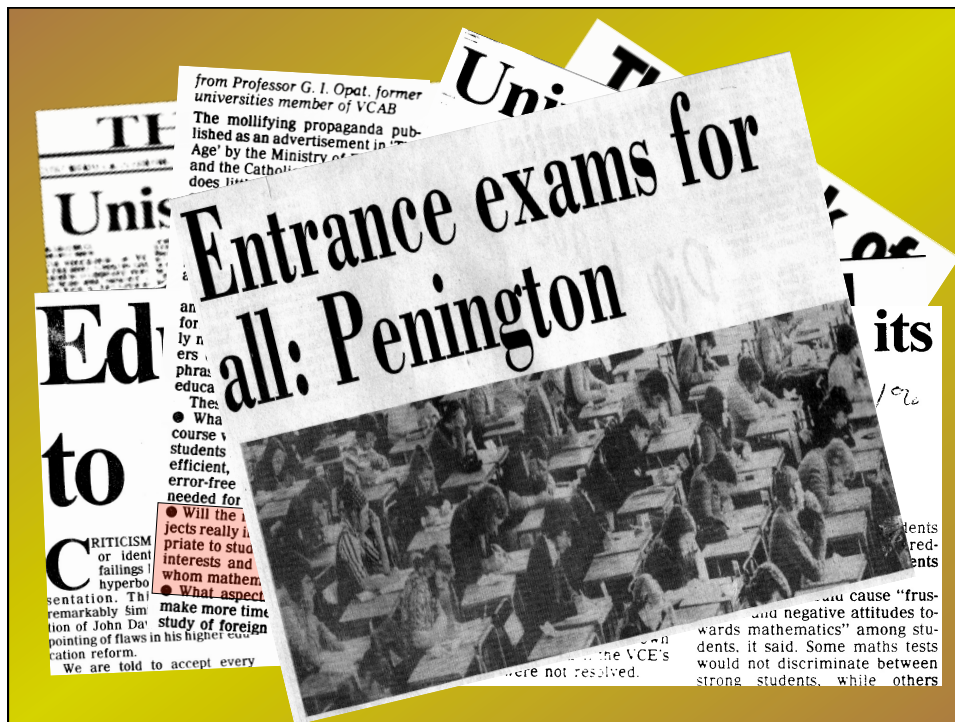
Sector of first preference, school leaver applicants, by ENTER band, 2007



WHY DO LOW SES CHILDREN FAIL MORE OFTEN, WHY DO THEY FALL BEHIND?



- ❖ rising cognitive demands
- ❖ declining relative value of family cultural capital
- ❖ poorer schools lack cultural & financial resources
- ❖ richer schools concentrate resources
- ❖ failure is cumulative
- ❖ curriculum is hierarchical & aimed at discrimination
- ❖ universities require discrimination in the curriculum



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HOW UNIVERSITIES INFLUENCE SUCCESS AND FAILURE

- ❖ required or preferred subjects, and levels of performance (e.g., Chemistry, at least 35)
- ❖ the content of specialist subjects in the curriculum: what schools teach, what universities demand that they teach
- ❖ concentration of content
- ❖ assessment methods, intensity and function
- ❖ pace of learning
- ❖ resulting narrowness of instructional practice in schools
- ❖ selective admissions based on score
- ❖ traditional teaching practice in university (this cannot compensate for poor achievement in school)
- ❖ prestige student recruitment (which shapes perceptions and adds to self-selection)

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The view from VCE co-ordinators in low SES schools of the instructional regime

- ❖ “It would be good to be allowed to teach according to VELs and *Principles of Learning and Teaching* (POLT) in VCE – we need to get rid of the archaic learning style of VCE, with its teacher-dominated delivery.”
- ❖ “I consider VCE to be an outdated, archaic system which caters for one learning style only.”
- ❖ “VCE is very content-oriented and the pace is inflexible...goes against everything we know about learning.”

INVESTING IN SOCIAL INEQUALITY: THE PRESTIGE GAME

- ❖ universities have a big stake in the curriculum as a sorting device (this is before they select a single student)
- ❖ ensuring students are well-prepared is one thing
- ❖ but the search for institutional distinction through student selection is another

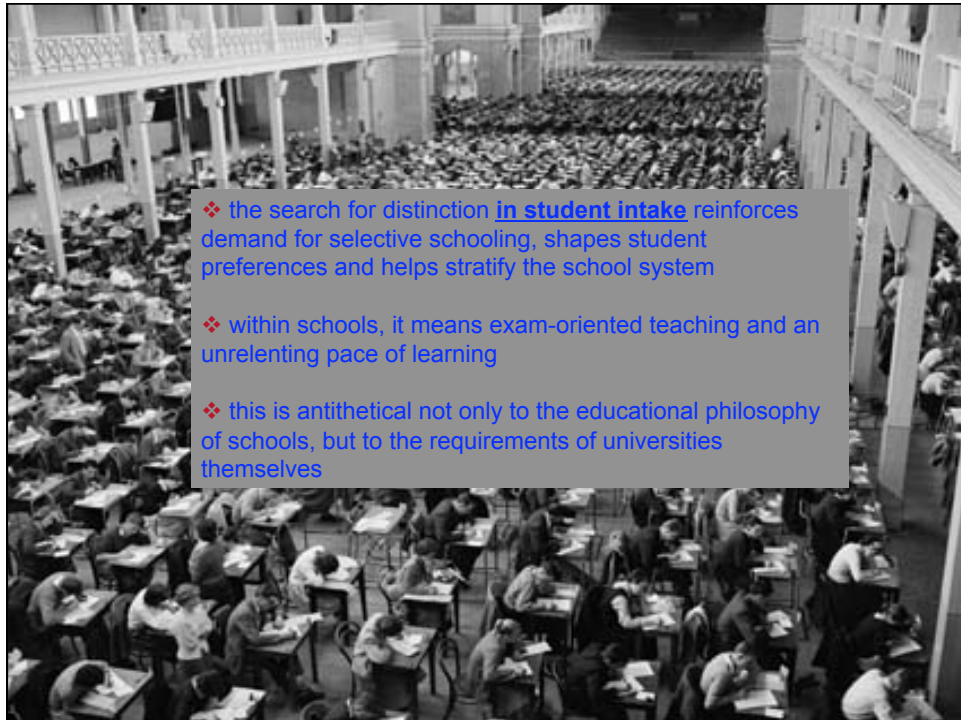
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University of first choice

Victorian school leavers have again voted Monash the local university of first choice, reflecting strong interest in flexible, career-focused degrees and the newly-launched Monash Passport, which provides a huge range of opportunities to students to maximise their experiences.

Monash Magazine 23 May 2009

State's finest named Melbourne Scholars



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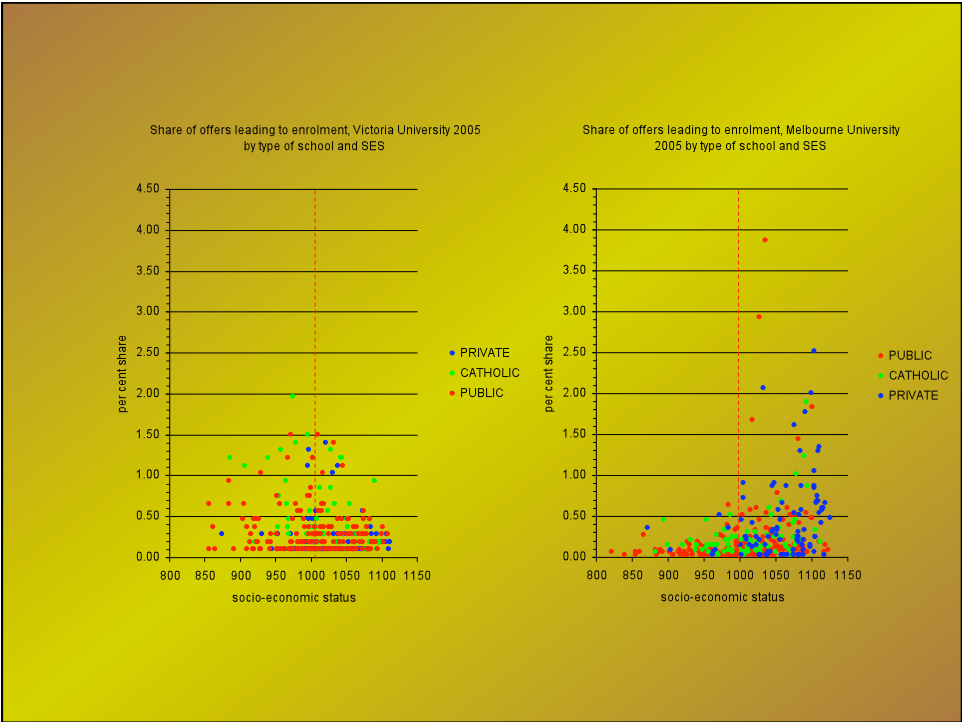
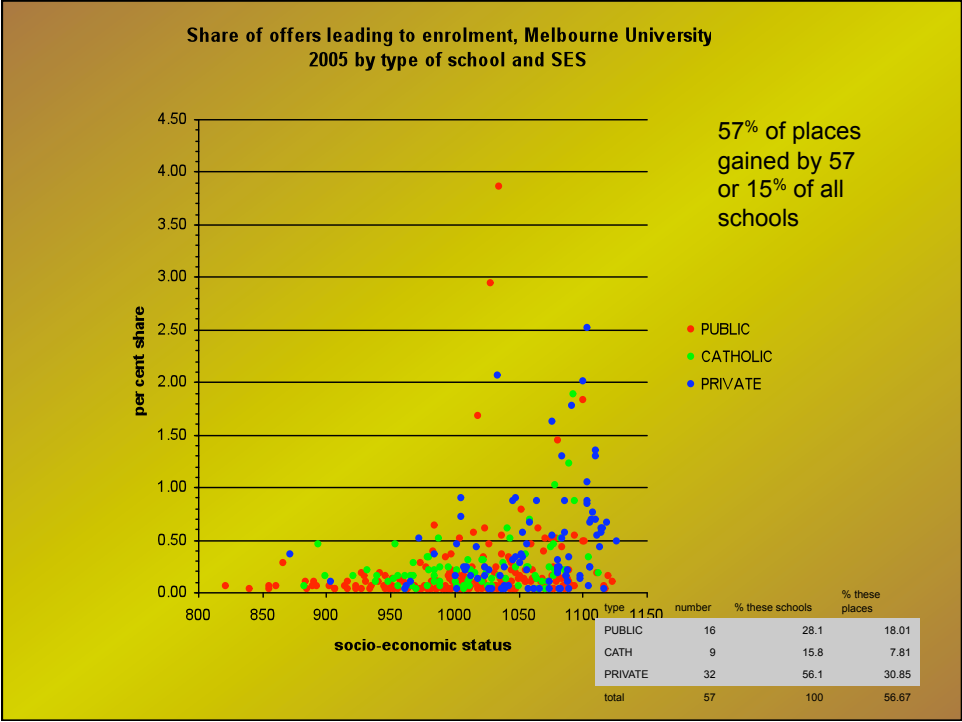
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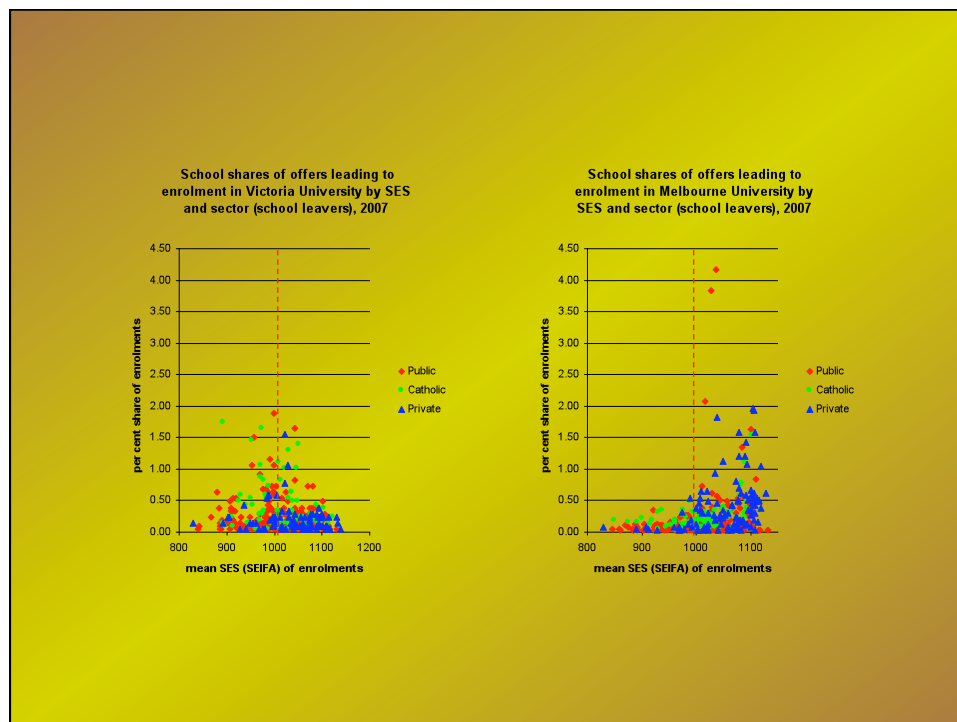
CURRICULUM CREATES A BRIDGE BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES AND SELECTIVE SCHOOLS

- ❖ these operate as powerful academic bureaucracies, routinely producing globally high success
- ❖ “the best universities get the best students”
- ❖ the best schools tend to monopolize the best universities
- ❖ are universities really in control of the game?
- ❖ or have they been colonized?

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16





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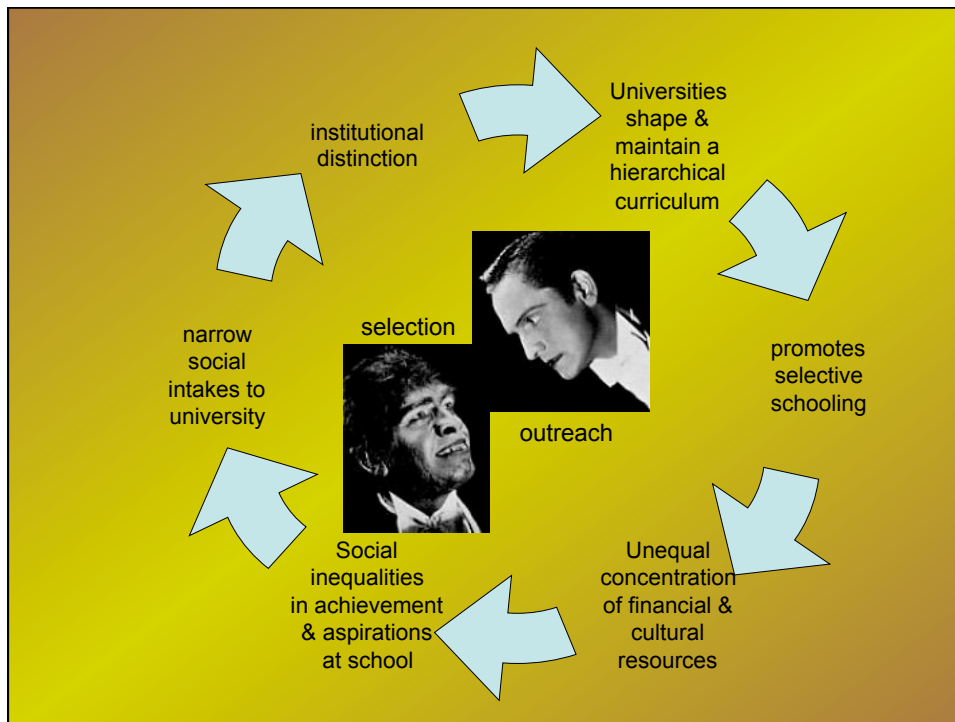
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INSTITUTIONAL POLICY: A CASE OF SPLIT PERSONALITY?

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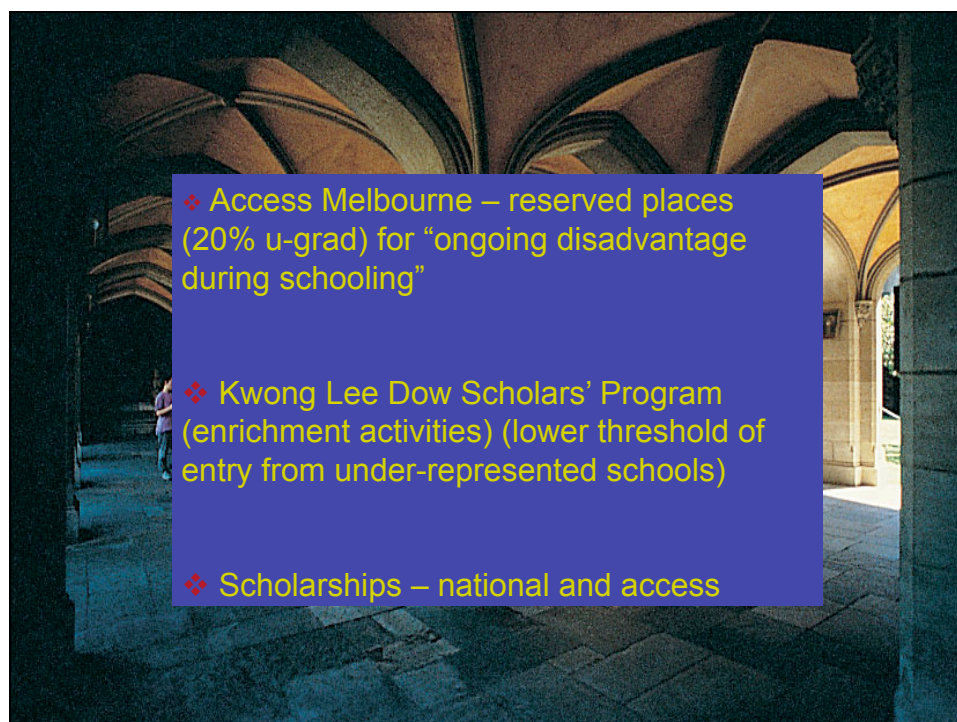
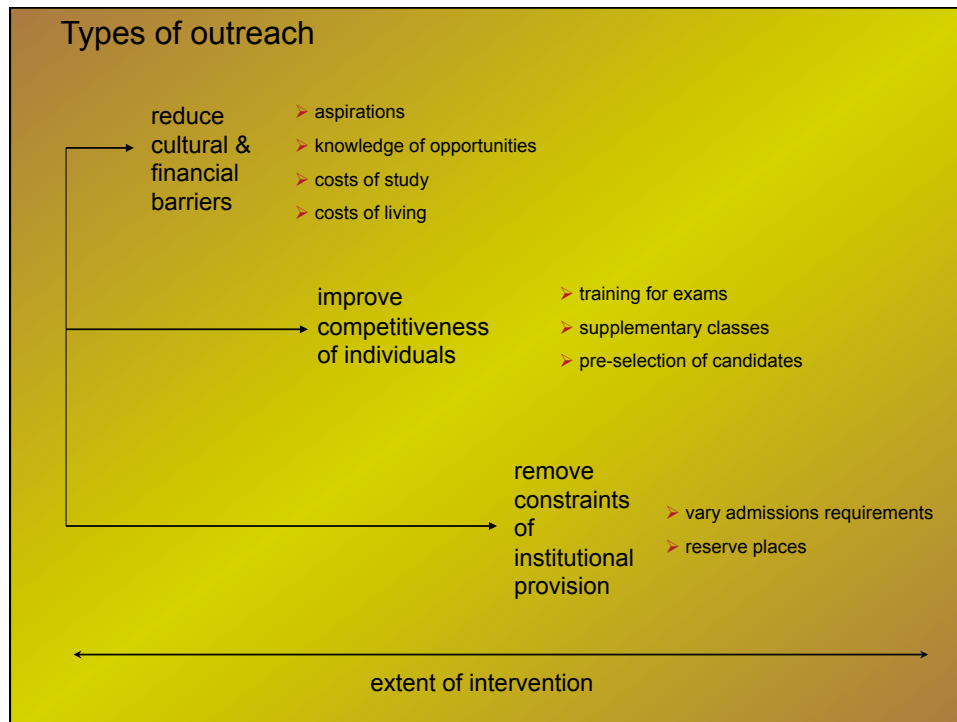
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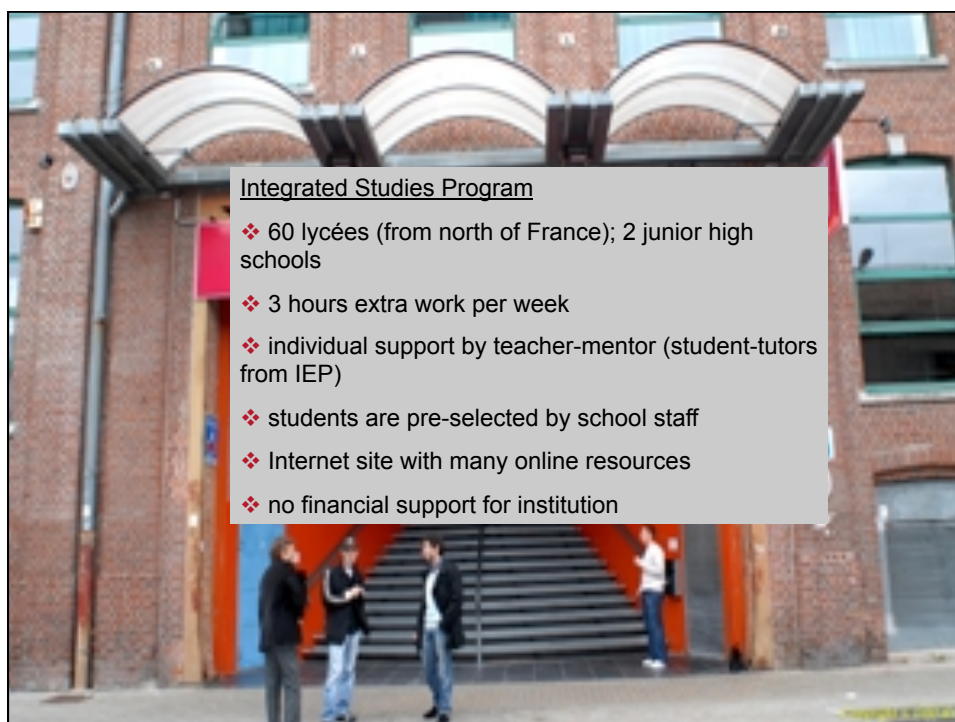
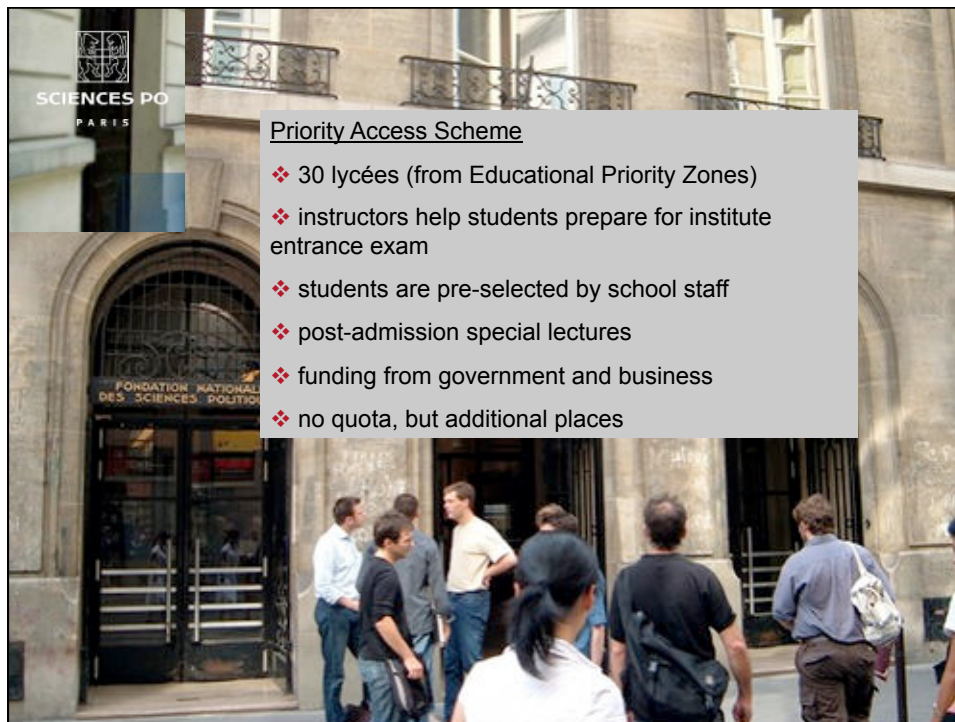
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CREATING AN INCLUSIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH SCHOOLS

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22

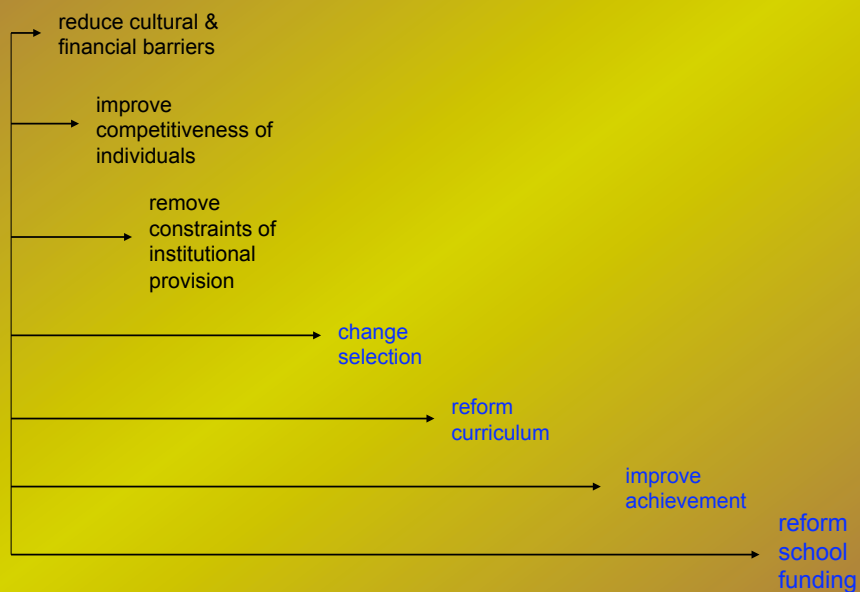


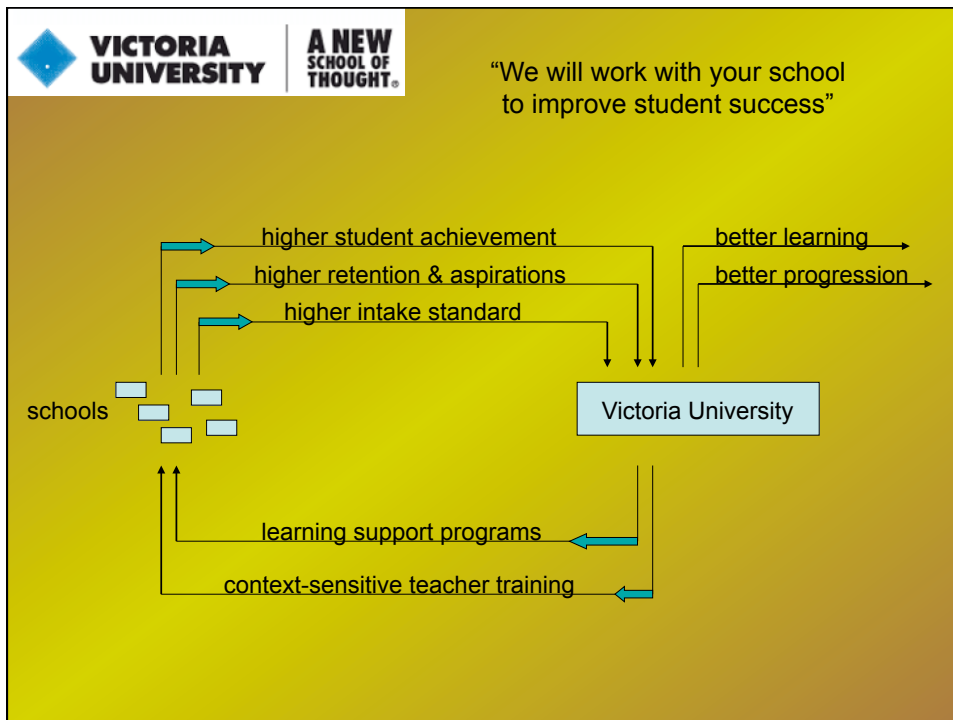


The limitations of outreach programs

- ❖ they do not change the nature of the demands made on schools and students
 - ❖ curriculum remains a vehicle of academic discrimination and selection
 - ❖ competitive performance is valued more highly than breadth and depth of learning
 - ❖ resource concentration on high-end subjects in upmarket schools continues
- ❖ regardless of the extent of “outreach”, the basic framework is unaffected
- ❖ at best, the “meritorious poor” are made more competitive
- ❖ the great majority of low SES students are ignored by searching for stars in an obscure galaxy

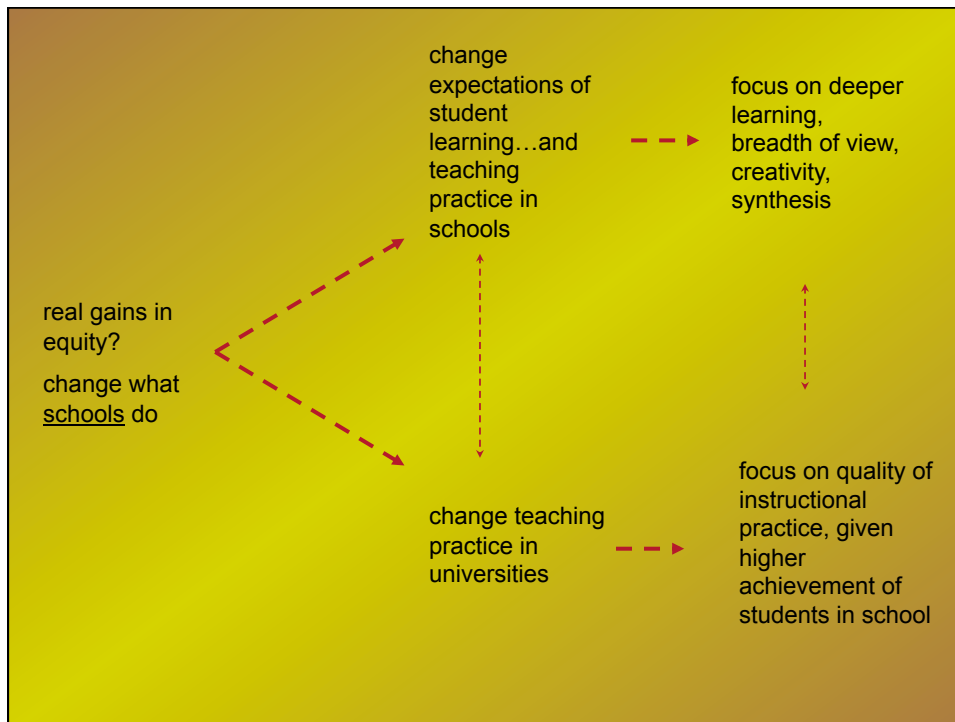
Equity policy – more radical approaches






Real improvements in equity must go through the route of curriculum:

- ❖ different expectations of student achievement on the part of universities
 - ❖ less prescription of content, more emphasis on intellectual growth
 - ❖ much more "space" for teachers to work
- ❖ university influence to promote change in the teaching culture of schools
- ❖ changes in the culture of teaching within universities themselves




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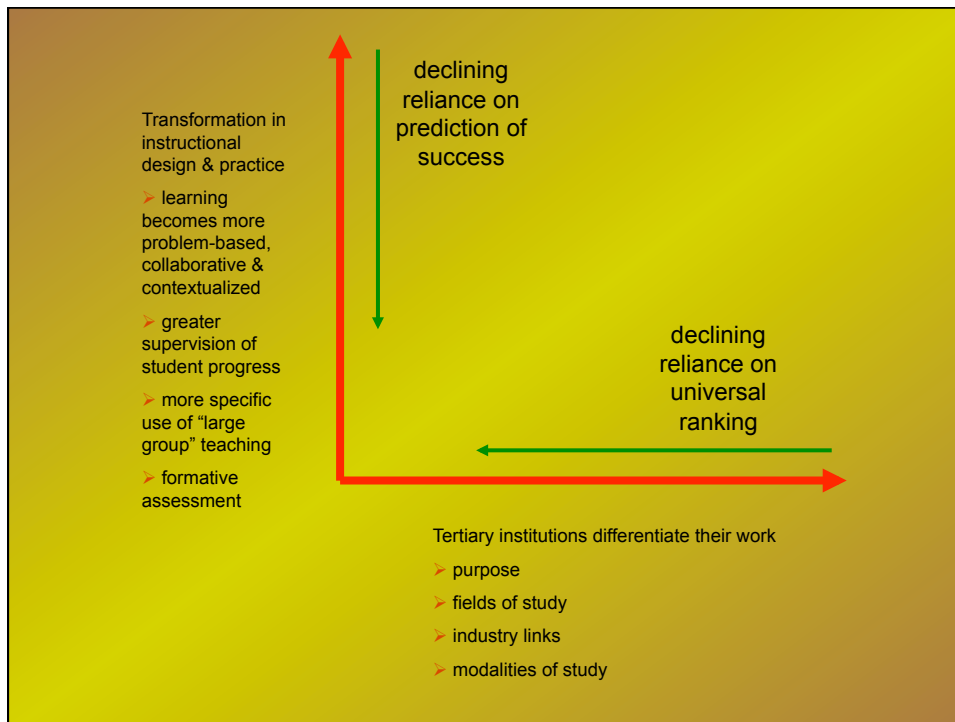
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- ❖ curriculum reform is not only about managing the relationship between schools and universities
- ❖ but universities have a major role to play
- ❖ they should:
 - ❖ end scaling of subjects by “relative difficulty”
 - ❖ require greater breadth & depth of learning through whole student programs
- ❖ reduce reliance on ranking and on prediction of success
 - ❖ by major improvements in instructional design and quality, and supervision of student progress
 - ❖ by institutional diversification
- ❖ student-centred funding should be used to encourage both these

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Questions for any university keen to recruit the "best and brightest"?

Are the university's policies and behaviour helping to enlarge the pool of talent in the whole school system?

Is the university helping to create the kinds of talent that the world needs?

Or is the university only concerned to secure or enlarge its share of the existing talent, preserving the nature of the talent that is available?

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34



Given marked and persistent differences in achievement, can we substantially improve equity in higher education without improving quality of learning in schools for ALL low SES students, regardless of their aspirations?

thank you!