The traditional structure of the university market in Australia

In the years before the Second World War, a war that closed down all universities, and the closure of some private secondary schools, two basic factors had to be taken into account: the competition in group of private secondary schools (financed through state aid and the higher success rate of these schools at the university level) for university admission (the Higher School Certificate — HSC). In part, these success rates involve statistical effects which give an inflated view of the efficiency of the private sector — poor students are counselled not to sit exams or are wheedled out altogether, the incidence of grade repeating has historically been higher, some good students from public schools transfer to private schools. But these activities cannot explain the magnitude of differences in success rates.

... the traditional structure of the university market has remained substantially unaltered, especially in the most prestigious faculties.

There are two basic sources of differences in academic performance between public and private schools: the individual characteristics of students and the resources, organization and curriculum of schools. The higher social composition of private schools, especially outside Catholic schools, is well-documented. For every 100 children in high fee private schools in Victoria, only 10 come from homes in which the occupation of the father could be described as lower middle class or working class — office employee, sales representative, skilled worker, unskilled manual worker. The educational level of private school parents in correspondingly higher. There is ample evidence that private school students have more positive attitudes towards school and that they have higher aspirations and career objectives in which success at school is a key factor. In order to translate the cultural and material advantages of individual students into examination results and university success, a certain density of these characteristics must be achieved within the framework of the individual student, for their family, their school. The hidden curriculum is human, organizational and material resources. Selection policy and long waiting lists permit private schools to achieve the level of cultural homogeneity necessary for academic focus and competitive performance. Fees and public subsidies ensure a high level of resources. Specific organizational features, such as the "house system" and the community curriculum rich in sports and the arts, contribute to the quality of life in the private schools and the level of academic culture. With this concentration of resources, private schools are able to carry their organization to its final point, that is, academic specialization and technical proficiency in the assessment of students.

Several recent studies have shown that private school students are more highly prepared for managing the technical demands of the HSC exams than they are for performance in a university course. A given HSC score will predict higher university performance on the part of a public school student than a private school student. In other words, the future of private school training appears to be on the initial reservation of university places, as in the past, and the level of academic performance once those places are snapped. Less technologically refined, the conventional requirements of the HSC examinations, the public school student benefits that upper Catholic codes of behavior at university and displays qualities related to the student stereotype, as documented by Boudon and Passeron in the French context.

The current structure of the universities can be regarded as the key mediating factor explaining their differential success. For, as we shall see, students at these schools select with much greater frequency the students and the courses that are most culturally rich, the most pertinent and the most susceptible of fine grading or inventive teacher judgement, depending on the nature of the subject and the type of examination. Academic specialization is what finally determines the
The list describes what the HSC curriculum would look like if it were to contain only those elements deemed capable of predicting success at the examinations held at the end of the first year of university. These elements provide the basis on which any school aiming to secure university places for its intake can take the lesson. This is not only because they are often legally prescribed for entry to particular courses, and therefore, taking account of the needs of many students, must be offered as a subject in the curriculum. It is also because subjects with high predictive value for success at first-year university exist and are also predictive of achievement in university subjects — whether or not a school is public or private, as we have already seen. Consequently, subjects like Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics provide the basic building blocks or knowledge which act as feeder schools for the universities. It is important to stress, however, that these are the subjects which, while not having the same predictive value, are regularly chosen together with elements from the main menu to optimise results over the four best subjects aggregated in the HSC score. For example, while less demanding than Applied Mathematics — and therefore relatively less discriminating of future university performance — General Mathematics plays an important strategic role. It is a way of satisfying facility entry requirements (e.g., for the parent-gas medical schools), while permitting a more effective spread of effort over the main menu. Differences in subject choice on this secondary menu are not reported below, nor are elements from the main menu where the frequency counts are too low (Latin) or relate too specifically to one course (Music). A consider that

university curriculum requirements, severity of selection increases as a function of the university and for the most prestigious courses in the most prestigious universities. On the other side of the exchange relationship, the legal power of private schools to control their own curriculum is such that they may permit them to restrict entry to pupils with certain characteristics, to restrict the curriculum in the likely educational and occupational needs of these pupils, to control the quality and nature of teachers, and to accumulate private and public funds in proportion. The legal autonomy of private schools is one of the key conditions which permit universities to maintain selective admissions policies based on the most scholarly curriculum and on the rank order of aggregate scores at the HSC examinations. Matching the freedom of the most influential universities to set market-like standards of competitive entry is the freedom of the most influential sectors of society to define these standards through restrictive admissions based on social criteria, to recruit talented pupils from other sectors through scholarships, to prune out incompetent students, etc. These market freedoms in turn permit university administrators not only to feel confident in raising competitive costs of entry during periods of high demand for places, but lead to the benevolent illusion that this is actually required by social justice. In this context, for example, that administrators seek to give special weight to subjects which are good predictors of academic success and to oppose more selective assessments of potential. It is not necessary to posit any conspiracy to account for the durability of the sole school monopoly in university places. The origin of this phenomenon lies in the mutually validating liberties of the two institutions.

Here is only one possibility to give two specific examples in the exchange relationship between universities and Australian private schools. We have chosen two gender-differentiated domains. The cultivation of Foreign Languages is an important way in which universities justify student selectivities and their own academic authority as repositories of higher learning. There must exist two environments in order to define the place of Foreign Languages as a mechanism of selection: the teaching department of the university, where authority is conserved, and certain schools where the demand to
The university benefits even more from this exchange relationship than is the case for Foreign Languages. For Foreign Languages, the benefits come from the increased international visibility of the program and the opportunity for students to have a broader perspective. For Economics and Physics, the benefits are from the increased research opportunities and the opportunity for students to have a broader perspective. The exchange relationship is beneficial for all involved, as it allows students to broaden their horizons and learn from each other.

References
Norman K. Hockenbery, What chance are you child? Left Book Club, Melbourne, August 1962.

1. Importance of socio-economic composition of higher education
The socio-economic composition of higher education has become more equal since the abolition of tuition fees but all the more skewed in favour of higher income and occupation families. For example, although in 1978 only 14 percent of the labour force worked in professional occupations, 31 percent of university students and 19 percent of CAF students were drawn from families in which the father held a professional occupation. While 31 percent of the overall labor force was in professional occupations, only 19 percent of university students and 26 percent of CAF students were drawn from families in which the father worked in such occupations. Within the universities the high-income earnings of students and postgraduates are also the most socially exclusive.

Despite the expansion of higher education since World War 2, despite increased school retention, and despite periodic attempts to implement policies that would encourage greater equality of opportunity, distributional changes have been marginal. Existing patterns of privilege are continuously reproduced. The educational system has not been sufficiently responsive to permit the continuous expansion of opportunity. Reduced social inequalities through policy changes in higher education and in society are the most promising avenues towards achieving greater equality of opportunity.

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