A Typology of Parents

Our participants were diverse in many respects. They lived in the main conurbations of Melbourne, Sydney and Perth; in the further-flung newer suburbs and the closer-in established suburbs. They lived in regional centres and rural towns. They lived on both sides of the Australian continent.

They were also diverse in their socio-economic circumstances, their ethnicity and in the strength of their adherence -- if any -- to religion. The religious backgrounds themselves were diverse.

Despite this diversity, they shared some aspirations and attitudes which were significant in the context of this study. Their aspirations for their children, their motivation for choosing independent schooling, their attitudes to the other education sectors, their attitude to funding issues all had common threads.

Yet there emerged some subtle but in our view important philosophical differences which we want to draw attention to here. To do so, we have developed a typology. As with all such exercises, the distinctions are not hard and fast, but they are distinct enough to be useful in making decisions about the way NCISA and its constituent state bodies might communicate effectively with them.

THE TRADITIONALISTS

Moralists/Disciplinarians
Birthright-preservers
Socially mobiles
Socially complacents

THE IDEALISTS

Nurturers
Experientialists
Socially committed

These are the characteristics, as we saw them, of each type:

Moralists/Disciplinarians

These parents were concerned by what they saw as declining standards of behaviour in society generally: lack of respect by students for teachers; apathetic parenting; widespread drug abuse among young people; an inclination to allow young people too much latitude in expressing contrary opinions. They looked to the school to inculcate in their children countervailing habits, thereby reinforcing the way they were bringing the children up at home.
**Birthright-preservers**

These parents were often first- or second-generation immigrants who wanted their children to retain strong connections with their language, culture and religion. Quite a few could also be classified among the Moralists/Disciplinarians. They expressed concern about the general moral tone in the community at large and wished their children to grow up unspoilt by it.

**Socially mobiles**

Many of these parents struggled hard financially to keep their children in the mid to lower categories of school in the belief that a private-school education, with what they saw as its added prestige, was the surest way to realise their driving ideal: that their children should be better off than they were. Some of these parents -- but by no means all -- could also be found among the Birthright Preservers.

**Socially complacent**

Unquestionably the smallest group of all, these were the parents who could comfortably afford to send their children to the school of their choice. It was simply natural that their children should be educated in the independent sector where they themselves had been educated, where the children of their friends and acquaintances were educated, and where the fees were paid on the assumption that the school would do the rest.

**Nurturers**

There were many parents who fitted this type. They felt they understood each of their children well, recognising their talents and more especially their frailties. They were worried that in the tumultuous heterogeneity of large government schools their children would be lost and their special needs unrecognised. They looked to the school as a close extension of the family home, where their children would be treated with respect, protected from bullying and given every opportunity to develop their full potential.

**Experientialists**

Many parents fitted this type too, and some of the Nurturers overlapped with them. These were the archetypal Baby-Boomer parents who wished their children to have as broad a range of experiences as possible so as to be able to fashion a life that would bring them, above all, personal happiness and fulfilment. They believed that independent schools with their range of facilities, breadth of specialist offerings in their curriculum and capacity to treat each child as an individual, offered the best chance of making their dream come true.

**Socially committed**

A relatively small group, these parents had their children in independent schools because they despaired of a government system which they wished to support but on which they were not prepared to chance their children’s future. They expressed strong views about the need
for vibrant government and non-government schools so that people had real choice. They were more than willing to pay their share of taxes to ensure the viability of the government sector in order that all children should have at least a minimum of decent education.