



Relating Social Inequality and Education Disadvantage

An assessment of pop and policy texts

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Overview

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- Worldwide: increasing concern about increasing social inequality and increasing focus on education as the solution
- Analysis of relations between social inequality and education disadvantage as identified in two widely acclaimed 'pop-academic' books: *Capital in the twenty-first century* (Piketty, 2014) and *Injustice: why social inequality persists* (Dorling, 2010).
- Evidence of the *illusion* of meritocracy and the *audacity* of elitism in recent Australian higher education policy
- What's missing from Piketty's and Dorling's accounts? What do we need to include for a more explicit focus on **social justice**?

The Price of Inequality, 2012, by Joseph Stiglitz.

The Cost of Inequality, 2012, by Stewart Lansley

The Spirit Level, 2009, by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett.

Does the richness of the few benefit us all? 2013, by Zygmunt Bauman



Increasing economic disparities in society between the advantaged and disadvantaged

Almost **half of the world's wealth** is now owned by just **1%** of the population (Oxfam 2014)

The bottom half of the world's population (3.5 billion) owns the same as the **richest 85 people** in the world (Oxfam 2014).

In the UK, the **five richest families** are worth more than the country's poorest 20% combined (about 12.6 million people) (Oxfam 2014).

In the US and Germany, the **richest 1%** own up to 37% and 33% of the national wealth respectively (Vermeulen 2014)

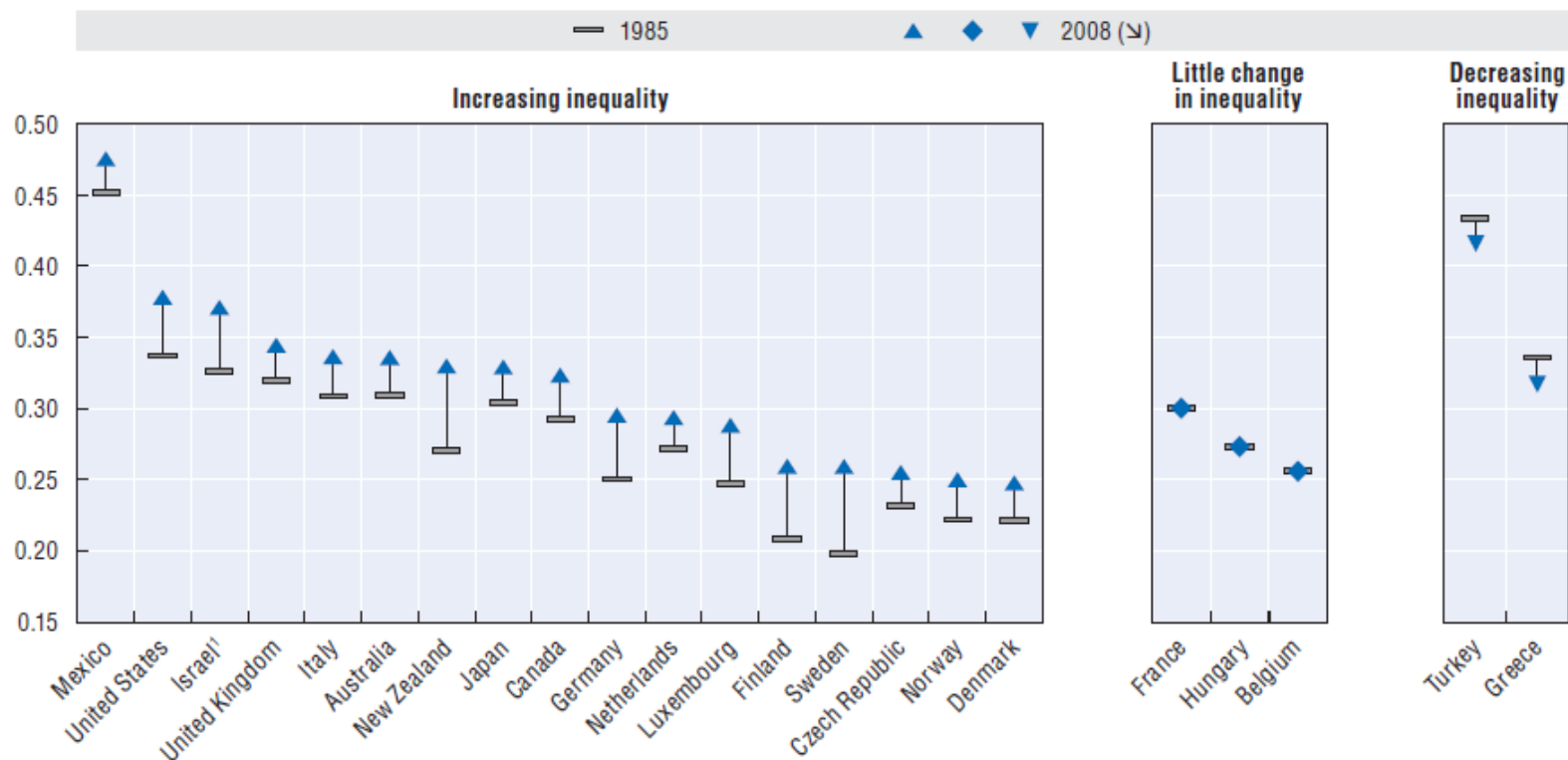
In Australia, in 2011/12, **the top 20% of households** owned 61% of the national wealth (ABS 2013).

In Australia, between 2003/04 and 2011/12, the **share of net wealth decreased** in the second and third quintiles (ABS 2013).

“Today, the richest country, Qatar, boasts an income per head *428 times higher* than the poorest, Zimbabwe” (Bauman 2013)

Figure 1. Income inequality increased in most, but not all OECD countries

Gini coefficients of income inequality, mid-1980s and late 2000s

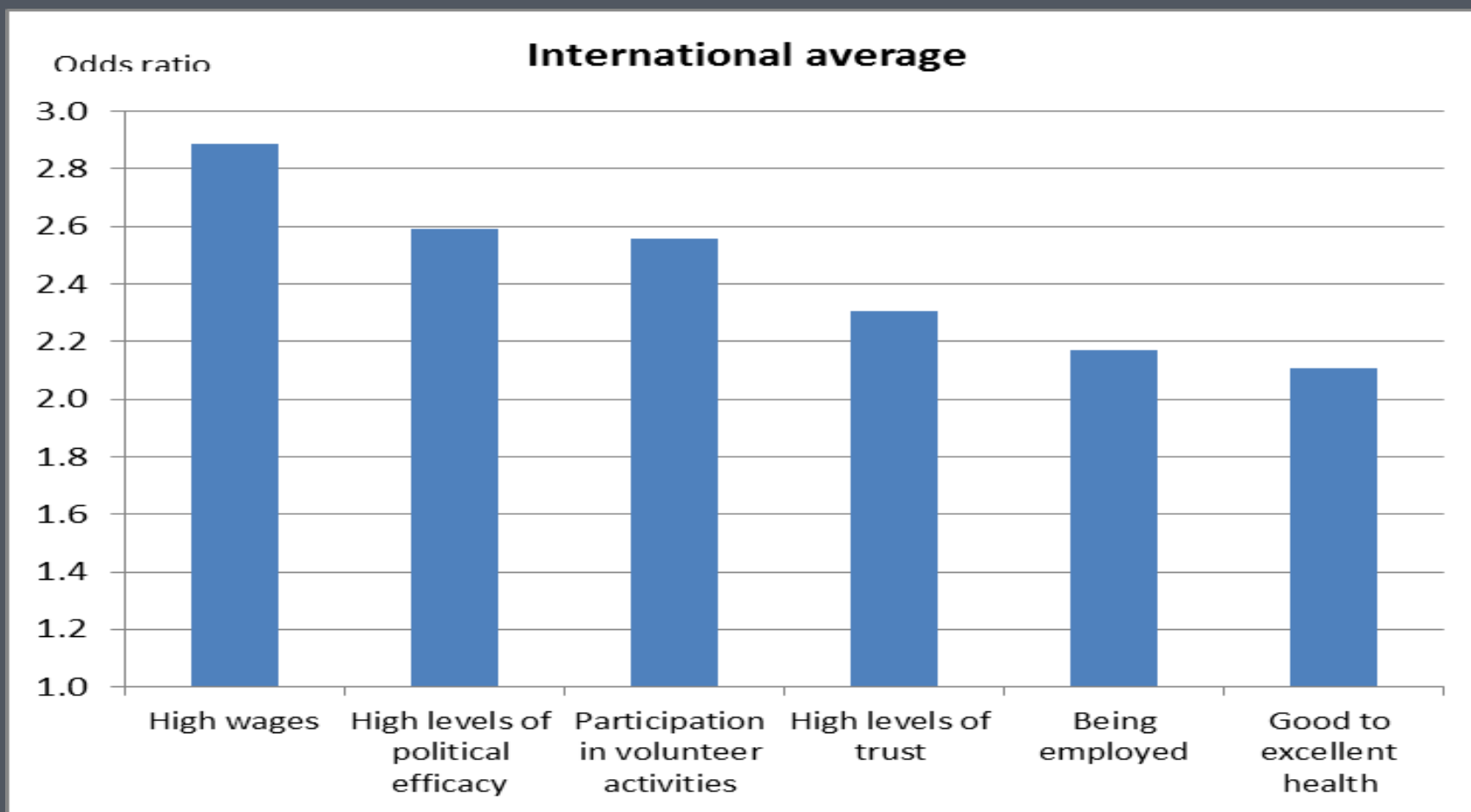


Note: For data years see Table 1. “Little change” in inequality refers to changes of less than 2 percentage points.

1. Information on data for Israel: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

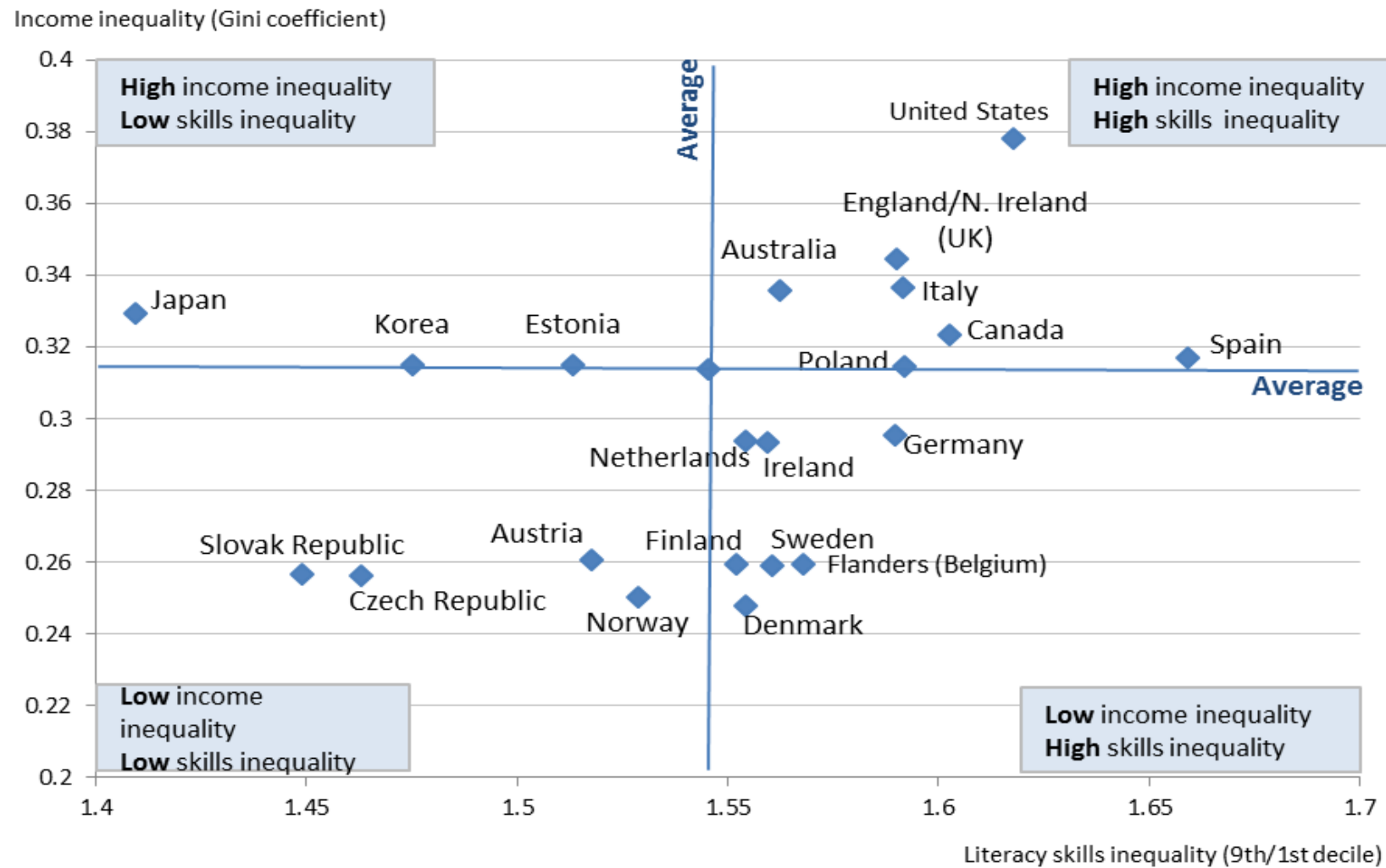
Source: OECD Database on Household Income Distribution and Poverty.


Likelihood of positive social and economic outcomes among highly literate adults



Source: OECD (2013: 27). Notes: Odds ratios are adjusted for age, gender, educational attainment and immigrant and language background. High wages are defined as workers' hourly earnings that are above the country's median.

OECD skills outlook 2013 (p. 245)



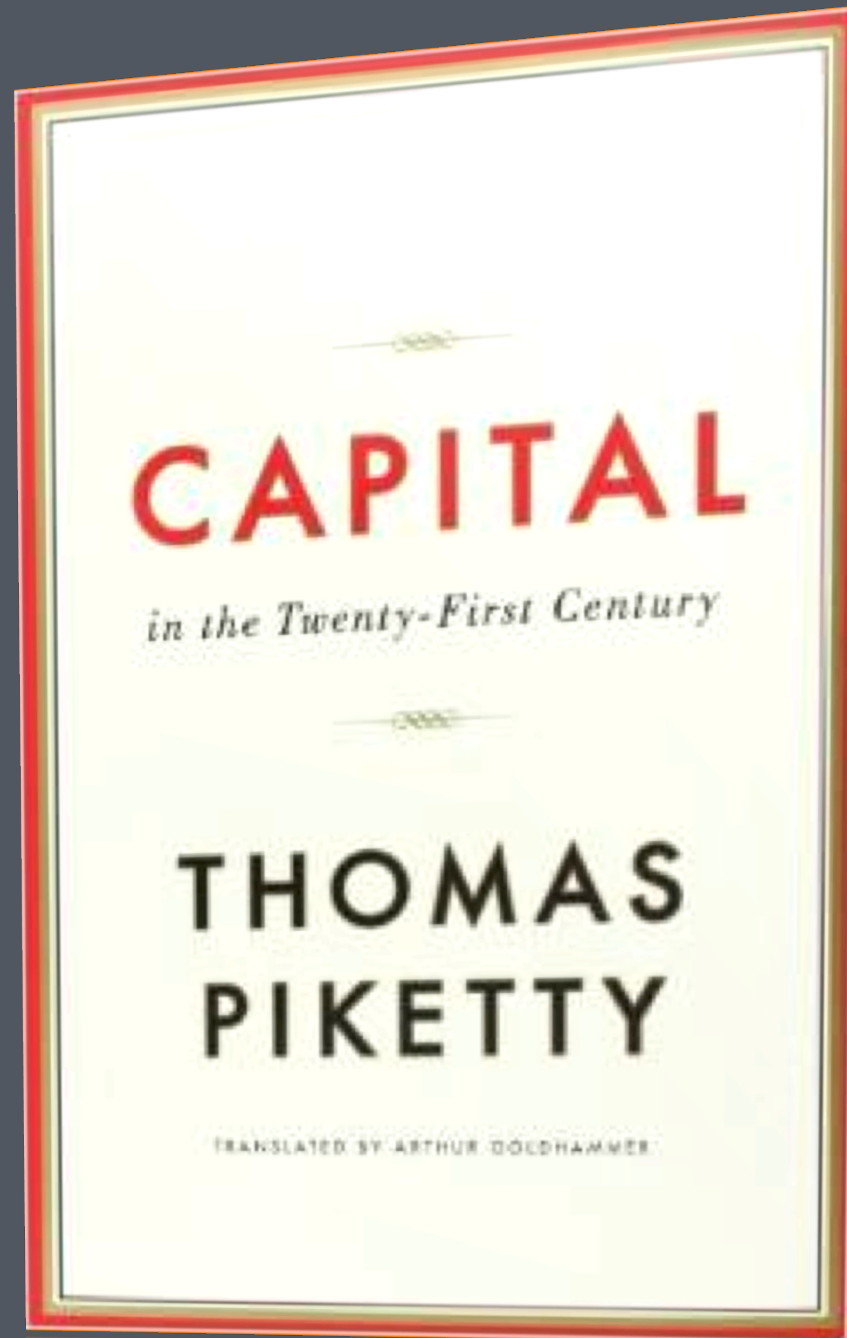


As long ago as in 1979, a Carnegie study vividly demonstrated what an enormous amount of evidence available at that time suggested and common life experience continued daily to confirm: that *each child's future was largely determined by the child's social circumstances, by the geographical place of its birth and its parents' place in the society of its birth – and not by its own brains, talents, efforts, dedication.* The son of a big company lawyer had then 27 times greater chance than the son of an on-and-off employed minor official (both sons sitting on the same bench in the same class, doing equally well, studying with the same dedication and boasting the same IQ) that by the age of forty he would be paid a salary putting him in the top ten percent of the richest people in the country; his classmate will only have a one in eight chance of earning even a median income. Less than three decades later, in 2007, things got much worse – *the gap has widened and deepened, becoming less bridgeable than ever before.* A study by the Congressional Office Bureau has found the wealth of the richest 1% of Americans to total \$16.8 trillion, two trillion more than the combined wealth of the bottom 90% of the population. According to The Center for American Progress, during those three decades the average income of the bottom 50% of Americans grew by 6% – while income of the top 1% increased by 229%. (Bauman 2013)

Education disadvantage is linked with social inequality through a false hope in the meritocracy of education systems

- Disproportionate government spending on independent schools
- Disproportionate representation of the children of the very rich in elite universities and in elite occupations

Piketty is not against merit but against *the pretense of merit* that pervades education systems



Meritocracy as a strategy of the elite

Ave spending on independent school students

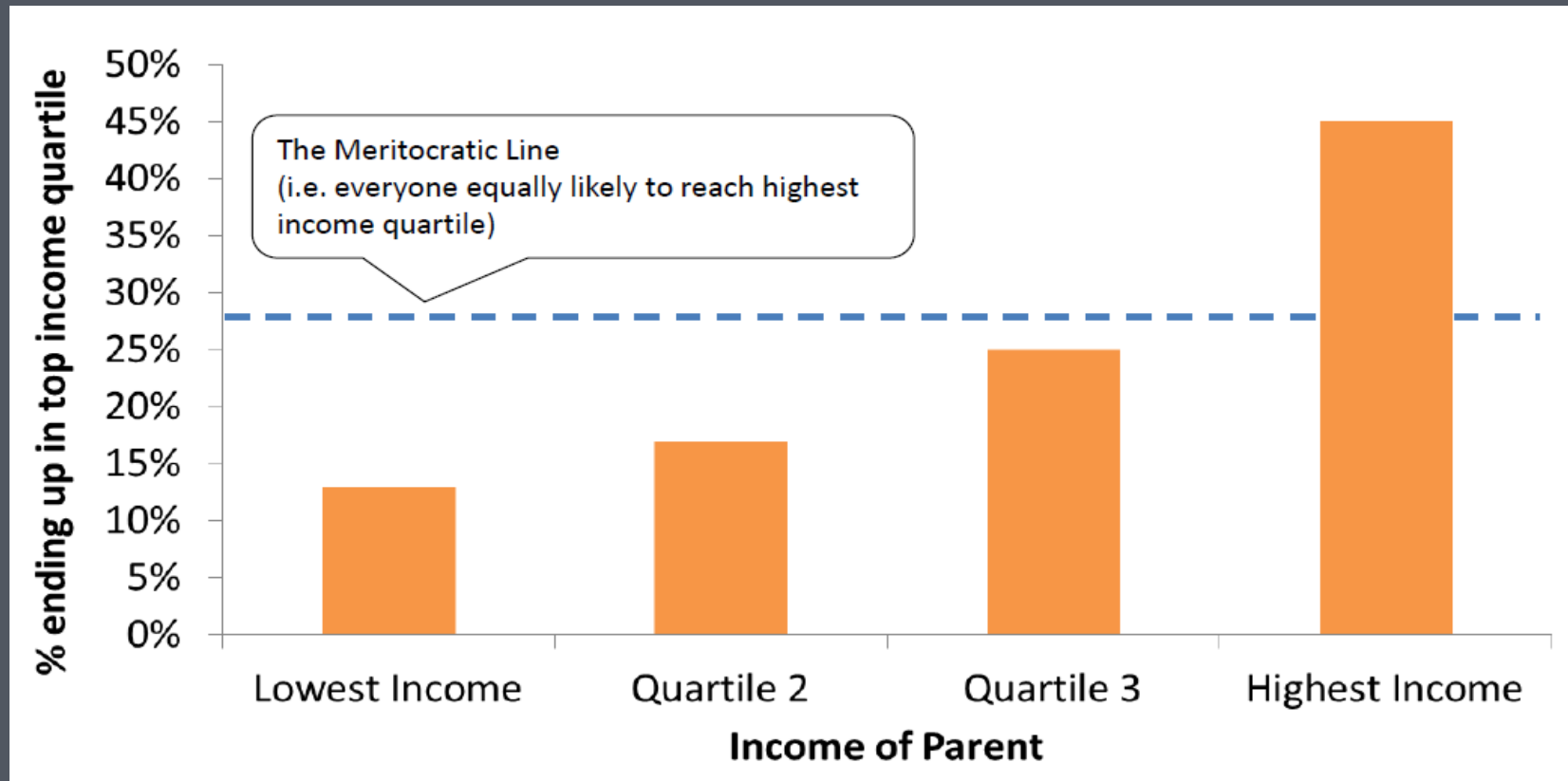
- In Australia, the average net recurrent income per student in 2009 was \$11,121 for the government sector, \$10,002 for the Catholic sector, and **\$13,667** for the independent sector (Gonski 2011: 15)

Ave income of parents of university students

- Harvard – average income of top 2% of workers in USA (above \$450k pa)
- Sciences Pro – average income of top 10% of workers in France

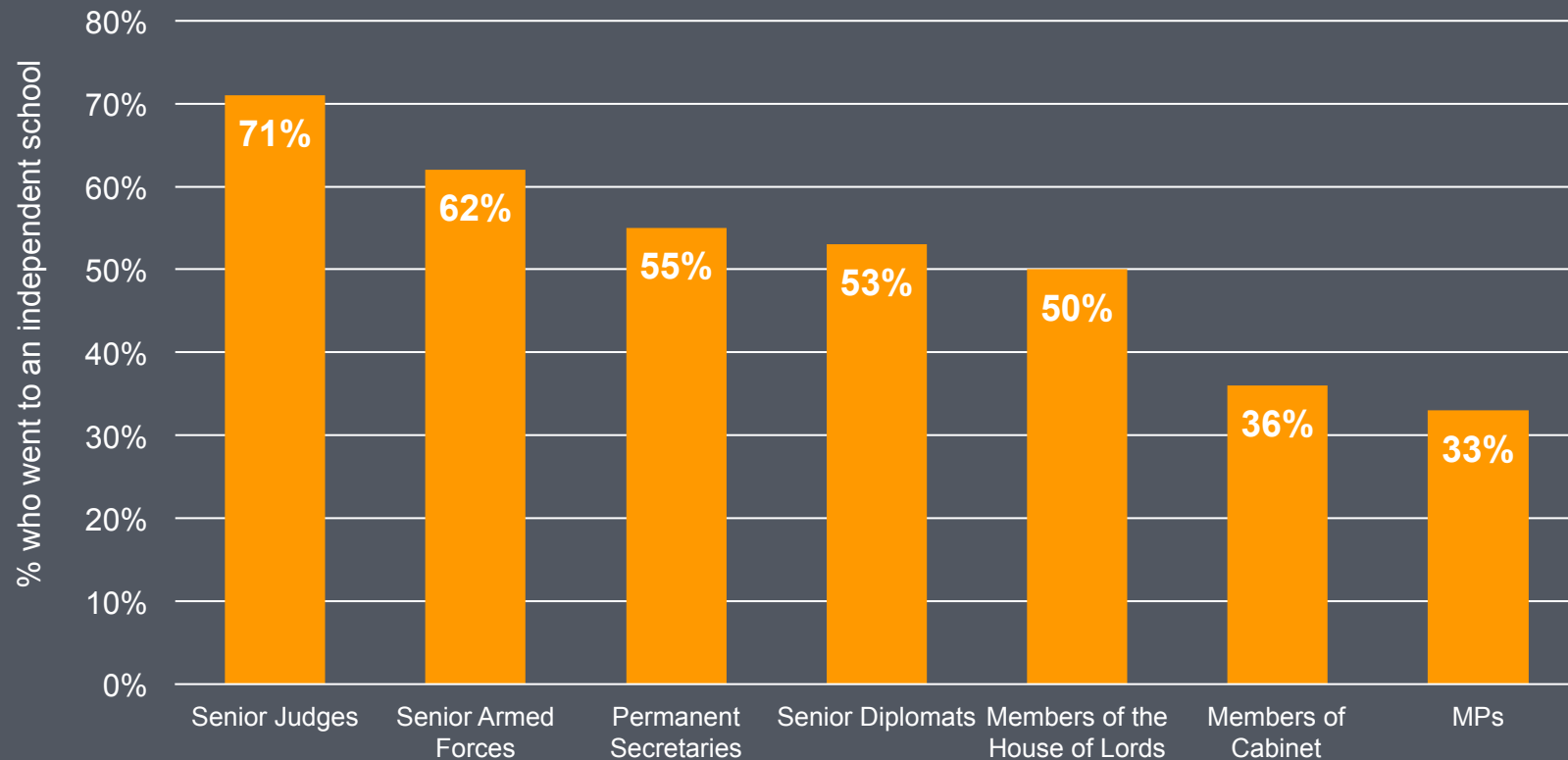
“Obliged to submit to the rule of the majority, *the classes that call themselves the upper classes can preserve their political hegemony only by invoking the rights of the most capable*. As traditional upper-class prerogatives crumble, the wave of democracy will encounter a second rampart, built on eminently useful talents, superiority that commands prestige, and abilities of which society cannot sanely deprive itself” (Sciences Po’s founder, Emile Boutmy in 1872, in Piketty 2014: 487).

Who is more likely to 'get on in life'?



Source: Elitist Britain? (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014: 5)

While only 7% of the British public attend an independent school, they account for:

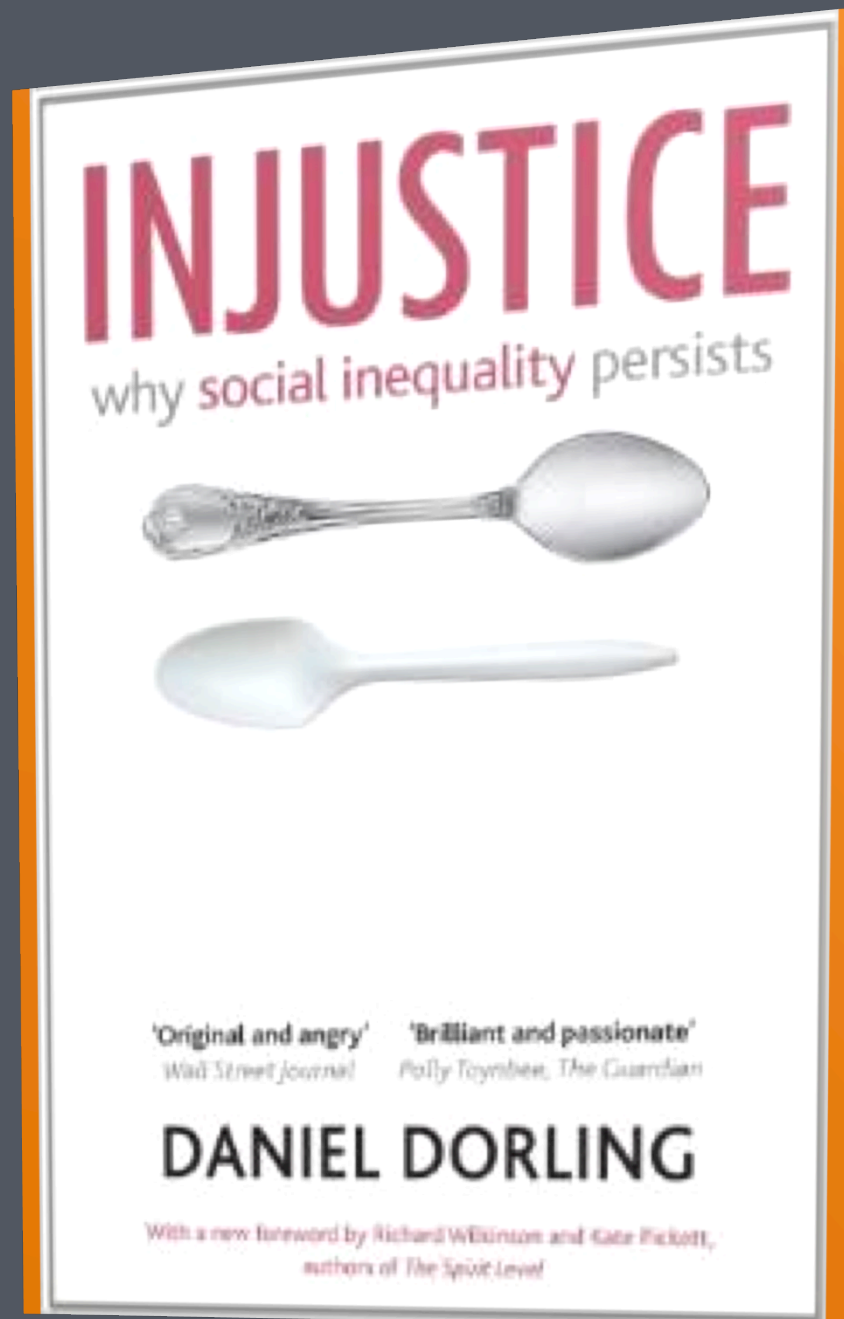


Source: Elitist Britain? (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014: 10)

Education disadvantage is linked with social inequality through a false belief in the efficiency of *elite* education systems

- Concentration of the elite in positions of authority can lead to dysfunctional organizations distanced from the interests of the majority.

Dorling says that social inequality persists because of 5 main beliefs, including the assertion in relation to education that *elitism is efficient*





Professor John Hattie

Chairman of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
Head of the University of Melbourne education research institute.

We see successful schools as the high-achieving ones but I see successful schools as the high-growth or improving schools ... While 60 per cent of schools are in good shape, almost one-third of schools are cruising ... We have to make sure we have the right problem and *the problem isn't kids at the bottom or among Aboriginal kids, it's in the schools cruising at the top*"

Keynote address to the Conference of the Australian Council for Educational Leadership, Melbourne. 3 October 2014.

“This is not how children in the Netherlands actually are, nor how the majority of their parents think of them; it is not even how their teachers, school inspectors or government rank them” (Dorling 2010: 39)

The educational ode of the OECD

(Dorling 2010: 37-38)

- Monday’s child has limited knowledge
 - Tuesday’s child won’t go to college
 - Wednesday’s child is a simple soul
 - Thursday’s child has far to go
 - Friday’s child can reflect on her actions
 - Saturday’s child integrates explanations,
 - But the child that is born on the Sabbath day
Has critical insight and so gets the most say
- 13% ‘v limited k’ledge’
 - 21% barely adequate
 - 27% can cope with ‘simple concepts’
 - 26% ‘effective knowledge’
 - 13% well-’developed inquiry abilities’; bring ‘critical insights’ to situations
-

Only one in seven (2%) of these demonstrate ‘advanced scientific thinking and reasoning’



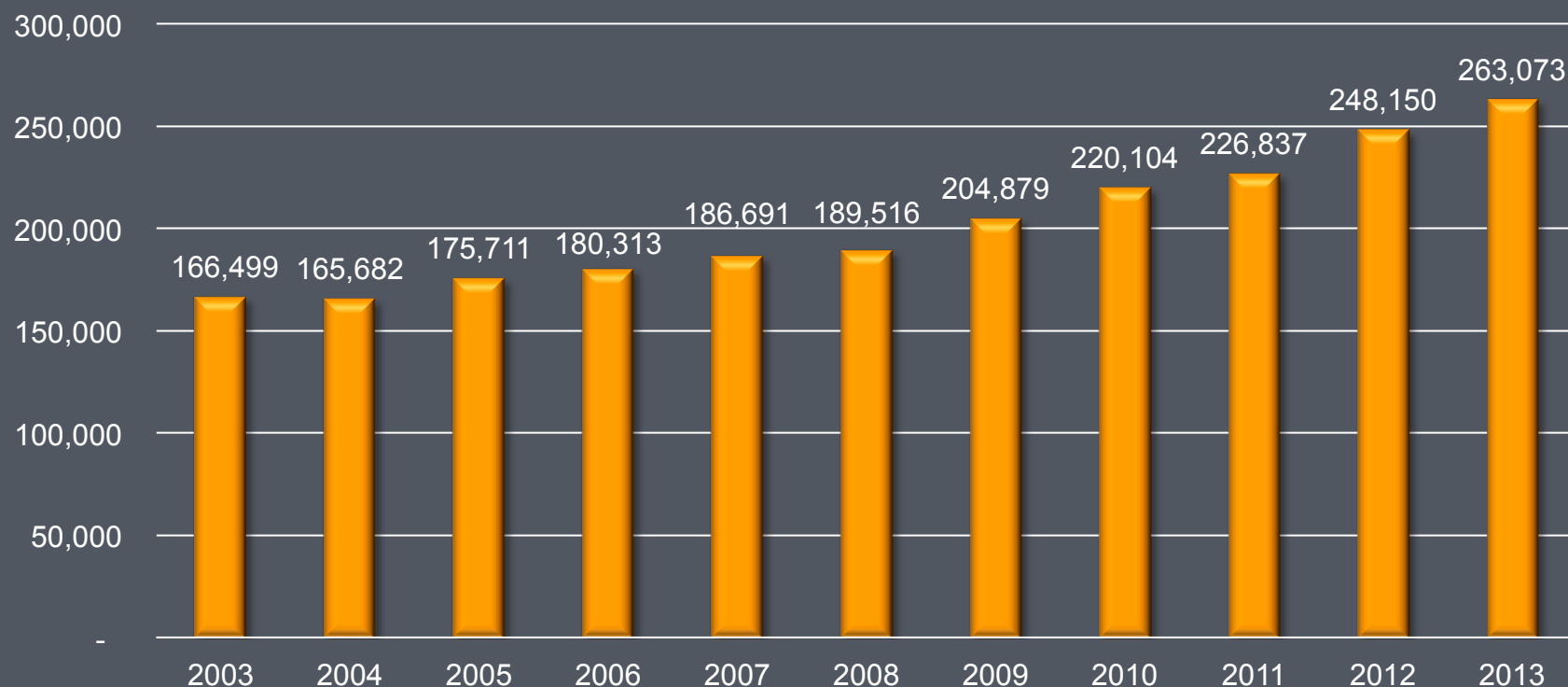
Rather than being efficient, elitism is a strategy for maintaining privilege – under the cover of meritocracy – and runs the risk of producing dysfunctional organizations

“Where institutions rely on *too narrow a range of people* from *too narrow a range of backgrounds* with *too narrow a range of experiences*, they risk behaving in ways and focusing on issues that are of salience only to a minority but not the majority in society” (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014: 2).

“inequality has also *an adverse, halting effect on economic performance*; instead of enhancing, it holds it down” (Bauman 2013).

Australian HE: deregulation of student places

Number of *commencing* domestic *undergraduate* students,
Table A & B Institutions, Australia, 2005-2013



Source: Australian Government Department of Education, Selected Higher Education Statistics, Students

Diminishing returns on individual investment in higher education

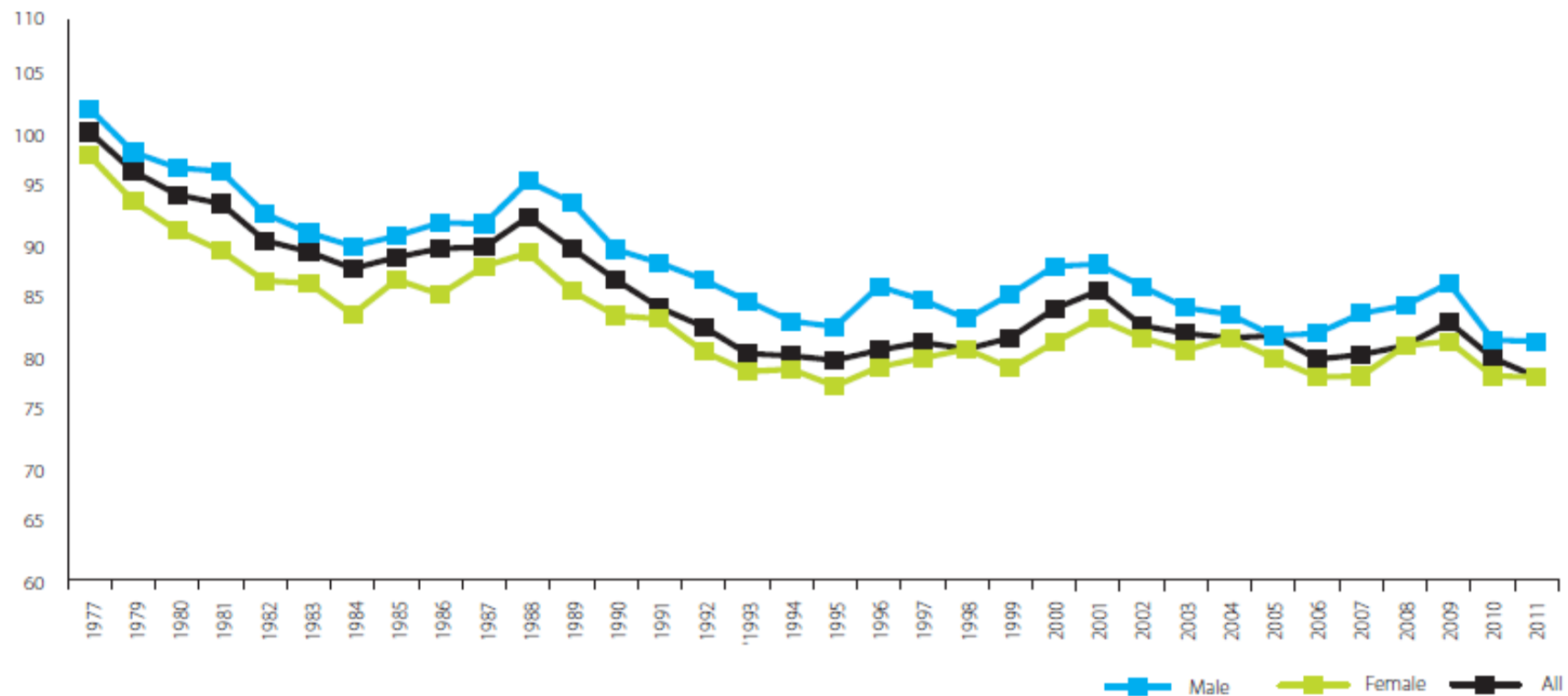


Figure 2: Male, female and all graduates' median starting salaries relative to the annual rate of full-time average weekly earnings, 1997-2011

Source: Graduate Careers Australia (2012, p. 9)

Australian HE: deregulation of student fees

If universities attempt to fully recover costs...

Data: NATSEM

Occupation/course	Repayment length (years)			Total Repayment		
	New	Current	Difference	New	Current	Difference
Business, Male	8.2	7.3	0.9	-\$45,716	-\$36,162	\$9,554
Business, Female	9.7	8.6	1.1	-\$48,431	-\$37,085	\$11,345
Nursing, Male	9.8	7.9	1.9	-\$35,475	-\$22,921	\$12,555
Nursing, Female	11.7	8.3	3.3	-\$36,307	-\$22,997	\$13,310
Science, Male	10.7	6.9	3.9	-\$88,378	-\$43,297	\$45,081
Science, Female	13.9	8.4	5.5	-\$95,720	-\$44,228	\$51,492
Teacher, Male	10.9	8.8	2.2	-\$49,044	-\$31,820	\$17,224
Teacher, Female	12.8	9.2	3.7	-\$49,054	-\$31,395	\$17,658

Source: National Centre for Social and Economic Modeling (NATSEM)



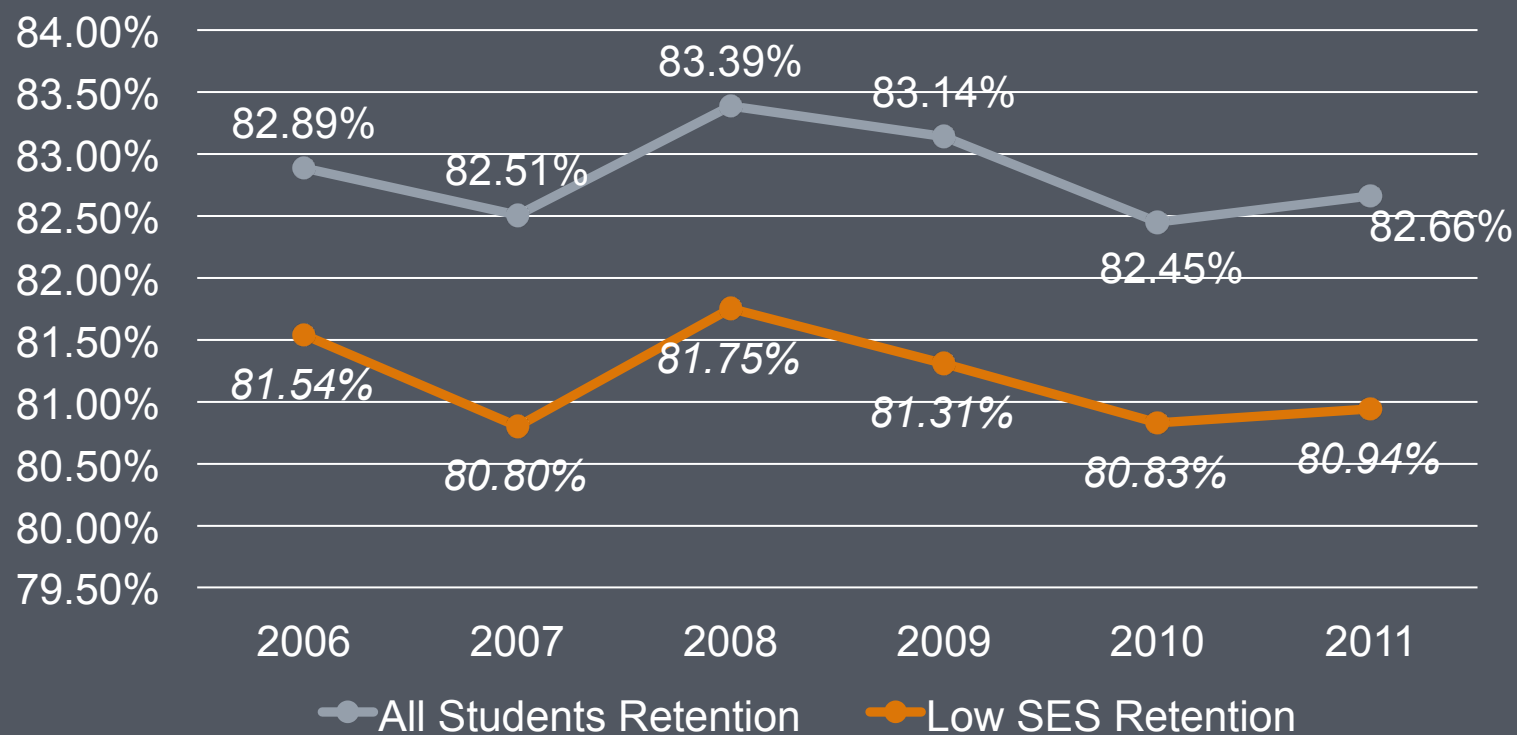
Kemp and Norton 2014

Low socio-economic status students *would benefit from increased access to sub-bachelor courses* (p. xiii) ...

Compared to public universities, TAFEs are likely to better deal with the perception by *some prospective low SES students that they do not 'belong' at university.* (pp. 39-40)



All and low SES domestic *undergraduate retention rates*, Table A Institutions, Australia, 2006-2011



Retention Rate = Continuing Students / All enrolled students minus completed



What Piketty and Dorling don't take into account ...

Epistemological equity (Dei)


- What knowledges and ways of knowing (pedagogy) are legitimated within education?
- What counts as literacy (e.g. texting) and ways of learning literacy (e.g. gaming)?

Agency freedom (Sen)

- What are the lives and ways of living that people have reason to value?
- Literacy that develops people's capabilities to live the good life as they see it, not (just) to fulfill the ambitions of government

The constraints on epistemological equity and agency freedom

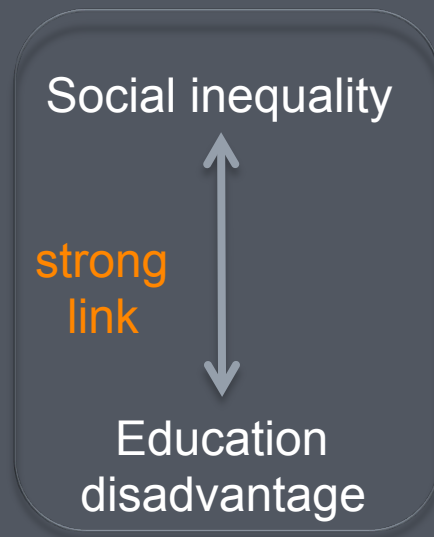
- **The organisation of knowledge:** e.g. the academic distinction between pure and applied knowledge is a false distinction for the working class
- **Ways of knowing:** what is privileged, e.g. narrative vs. analytical accounts
- **Different knowledges:** privileging of certain knowledge perspectives – e.g. invasion vs. settlement
- **Exclusion of knowledges:** what is off limits or unknown e.g. Indigenous knowledges of the health benefits of certain plants or how to use the land to navigate from one place to another
- The capability to **imagine** one's own life; to aspire to what one has reason to value. e.g. to know what is a good university to choose.
- The capacity to live it; to **'navigate'** towards an imagined future. e.g. to know what is required to be offered a place at that university, to be able to get there.



“We must never merely discourse on the present situation, must never provide the people with programs which have little or nothing to do with *their own preoccupations, doubts, hopes, and fears* — programs which at times in fact increase the fears of the oppressed consciousness. It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather *to dialogue with the people about their view and ours*. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their situation in the world. Educational and political action which is not critically aware of this situation runs the risk either of "banking" or of preaching in the desert” (Freire, 2005:96).

Strong *market* states

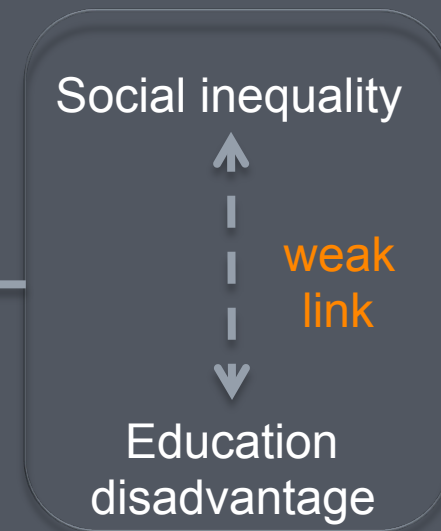
(e.g. USA, UK, etc.)



Less likely to contribute to social mobility

Strong *social* states

(e.g. Nordic nations)



More likely to contribute to social mobility

