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Imagining “National” Funding in the Australian Federation: The Gonski Review and the Schooling Resource Standard

Elisa Di Gregorio
University of Melbourne
Australia

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Abstract: This paper takes the landmark review into the federal funding of schools in Australia, known as the Gonski Review (2011), as an illustrative case to demonstrate the scalar practices involved in policy production and enactment. Its primary argument is that, while its core recommendation was a needs-based funding model for the federal government funding of schools, the Gonski Review also articulates an aspiration for the translation of this funding model into a comprehensively *national* approach. This is done, I argue, through important practices of scalar *imagining* and *reasoning* (Papanastasiou, 2017b). However, these national aspirations sit uneasily with the realities of schooling and school funding in the Australian federation, which includes constitutional arrangements, legislation, and policy principles that distribute responsibility for funding across multiple spaces of governance. Drawing on documentary evidence, I argue that scalar tensions are produced between these national aspirations and the realpolitik of Australian federalism. By challenging “the national” as a coherent and predetermined “scale,” these findings reinforce the

importance of attending to the mediating forces of subnational governments, as well as global policy influences, when thinking about policy mobilities in federations.

Keywords: scalecraft; policy mobilities; Gonski; school funding; federations

Imaginando la financiación “nacional” en la federación australiana: La Revisión Gonski y Schooling Resource Standard

Resumen: Este documento toma la histórica revisión de la financiación federal de las escuelas en Australia conocida como la Revisión Gonski (2011) como un caso ilustrativo para demostrar las prácticas escalares involucradas en la producción y promulgación de políticas. Su argumento principal es que, si bien su recomendación central era un modelo de financiación basado en las necesidades para la financiación de las escuelas por parte del gobierno federal, Revisión Gonski también articula una aspiración para la traducción de este modelo de financiación en un enfoque nacional integral. Esto se hace, sostengo, a través de importantes prácticas de imaginación y razonamiento escalar (Papanastasiou, 2017b). Sin embargo, estas aspiraciones “nacionales” no encajan bien con las realidades de la educación y la financiación escolar en la federación australiana, que incluye disposiciones constitucionales, legislación y principios políticos que distribuyen la responsabilidad de la financiación en múltiples espacios de gobierno. Basándome en evidencia documental, argumento que se producen tensiones escalares entre estas aspiraciones nacionales y la realpolitik del federalismo australiano. Al cuestionar “lo nacional” como una “escala” coherente y predeterminada, estos hallazgos refuerzan la importancia de prestar atención a las fuerzas mediadoras de los gobiernos subnacionales, así como a las influencias políticas globales, al pensar en movibilidades de políticas en las federaciones.

Palabras clave: *scalecraft*; movibilidades políticas; Gonski; financiación escolar; federaciones

Imaginando o financiamento “nacional” na federação australiana: A Revisão Gonski e Schooling Resource Standard

Resumo: Este artigo aborda a revisão histórica do financiamento federal das escolas na Austrália, conhecida como Revisão Gonski (2011), como um caso ilustrativo para demonstrar as práticas escalares envolvidas na produção e promulgação de políticas. Seu principal argumento é que, embora sua principal recomendação fosse um modelo de financiamento baseado em necessidades para o financiamento de escolas pelo governo federal, a Revisão Gonski também articula uma aspiração para a tradução desse modelo de financiamento em uma abordagem nacional abrangente. Isso é feito, eu argumento, por meio de práticas importantes de imaginação e raciocínio escalar (Papanastasiou, 2017b). No entanto, essas aspirações “nacionais” não combinam com a realidade da educação e do financiamento escolar na federação australiana, que inclui disposições constitucionais, legislação e princípios políticos que distribuem a responsabilidade pelo financiamento em vários espaços de governança. Com base em evidências documentais, argumento que tensões escalares são produzidas entre essas aspirações nacionais e a realpolitik do federalismo australiano. Ao desafiar o “nacional” como uma “escala” coherente e predeterminada, essas descobertas reforçam a importância de atender às forças mediadoras dos governos subnacionais, bem como às influências políticas globais, ao pensar sobre as movibilidades políticas nas federações.

Palavras-chave: *scalecraft*; movibilidades políticas; Gonski; financiamento escolar; federações

Imagining “National” Funding in the Australian Federation: The Gonski Review and the Schooling Resource Standard

This paper seeks to contribute new insights into theorizing the socio-spatial dynamics of policy production and enactment in the context of schooling in federal systems. In particular, it responds to recent calls made by researchers in policy mobilities and related policy sociology literature that suggest greater attention be paid to the role of policy making at both national and subnational scales (Lewis, 2021; McKenzie et al., 2021; McKenzie & Aikens, 2021; Wallner et al., 2020). The proliferation of the “mobilities turn” has provided important and nuanced ways and vocabularies for understanding “intensified global flows of policy ideas, practices, actors, technologies and capital” associated with the “dynamics of globalization” (Savage, Gerrard, et al., 2021, p. 5). At the same time, there have been suggestions that one of the consequences of this has been an “overemphasis on the global” at the expense of attention to national and subnational scales in the context of policy mobilities literature (McKenzie et al., 2021, p. 398; see also Gulson et al., 2017).

At the center of these arguments is a concern with *scale* in policy processes. That is, these arguments conjure debates about which spatial category or scale should form the site of analytical focus, and indeed, the consequences associated with privileging the focus of one over the other. I argue that in attempting to respond to these calls, it is important to also engage critically with the production and maintenance of categories such as *national*, *local*, and *global* in the first instance. In line with recent work undertaken by Papanastasiou (2017a, 2017b) as well as McKenzie and Aikens (2021), this requires a mobilization and understanding of scale as a category of practice—that is, socially crafted as opposed to a pre-existing or given category. As argued by Savage, Di Gregorio, et al. (2021), critical engagement with scalar practices is particularly “crucial in research on federal systems, because scale is a central category used by policy actors to imagine and assemble political spaces and reforms” (p. 963).

Drawing on earlier work that has interrogated national policy reform in the Australian federation (e.g., Wallner et al., 2020), this paper brings together the concepts of scalecraft and policy assemblage to examine subnational settings as highly important “domains of practice that influence policy mobilities” (McKenzie & Aikens, 2021, p. 314). In particular, following the work of McKenzie and Aikens (2021), I consider the way in which the national scale is actively constructed in the context of school funding policy in Australia, while still being heavily mediated by constructions of subnational scales such as the states or schooling sectors and systems within each.

Empirically, this paper focuses on schooling policy in Australia, which has experienced over two decades of unprecedented national reforms, resulting in “major changes to the governance of schooling in the Australian federation” (Savage, Di Gregorio, et al., 2021, p. 963). As Savage, Di Gregorio, et al. (2021) write, the intensified intergovernmental collaboration over the past 2 decades has “radically reshaped how schooling policies are made and enacted in Australia’s federal system” (p. 964). This has led to what Savage, Di Gregorio et al. (2022, p. 962) and others (see Savage, Gerrard, et al., 2021; Savage & Lewis, 2018) have referred to as the emergence of a new “national policy assemblage,” which has contoured significantly distinct conditions of possibility for the production and enactment of schooling policy compared with decades prior (Lingard, 2018; Savage & Lingard, 2018). Importantly, though, all of this occurs under constitutional responsibilities and arrangements that render state and territory (subnational) governments responsible for schooling.

The government funding of schools in the Australian federation offers an exemplary case study for extending this line of analysis insofar as it constitutes an area of schooling policy that, while being informed by a transnational field of policy ideas, practices, and evidence, is heavily

mediated by constitutional arrangements that distribute the responsibility for the school funding across both federal and state and territory (subnational) governments. These arrangements are made even more complex by the operation of three schooling sectors or “systems” (a Catholic sector, government or public sector, and an independent sector), which all receive varied proportions of government resourcing and possess their own methods and models for the distribution of this funding. Altogether, this establishes a complex set of socio-spatial dynamics for the production and enactment of school funding policy in Australia.

In 2010, as part of a broader national reform agenda, the federal government commissioned a review into the arrangements of school funding in the Australian federation, titled the *Review of Funding for Schooling*. The final report was released in 2011 and has come to be more commonly known as the Gonski Review after the preeminent businessman and chair of the Review, David Gonski. The Gonski Review constituted the first substantive examination of Australia’s school funding arrangements since the 1970s and produced worrying findings regarding the inequitable distribution of government funding to schools. Amongst these, the Gonski Review characterized Australia’s federal funding arrangements as highly complex and opaque and identified an “unacceptable link between low levels of achievement and educational disadvantage, particularly among students from low socioeconomic and Indigenous backgrounds” (Gonski et al., 2011, p. xvii). It also identified an overall decline at all levels of student achievement on international and national standardized measures.

Based on these findings, the Gonski Review recommended a major overhaul of federal school funding arrangements (Gerrard et al., 2017), proposing a revised funding formula based on student needs, known as the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS). This model prescribed that each Australian student be allocated a base rate entitlement amount of government funding, which could then be supplemented by additional equity “loadings” that would account for various “forms of disadvantage,” which included socioeconomic background, disabilities, English language proficiency, the particular needs of Indigenous students, school size, and school location (Gonski et al., 2011, pp. 153–155).

The subsequent government adoption of the SRS model constituted a landmark reform moment in the history of Australian school funding. However, this was not achieved without significant political controversy and conflict, resulting in a version of the SRS that reflected the model in principle, but was simultaneously undermined by a series of deals made by the federal government with states and territories to ensure they signed onto the reforms (Gerrard et al., 2017; Savage, 2020b). These became widely referred to as “special deals” made by the then Federal Labor government, which saw states and territories within Australia negotiate different funding agreements that ultimately “perverted the needs-based rationale” of the Gonski Review’s proposed funding model (Savage, 2020b, p. 49). This said, the implementation of the SRS constitutes an important infrastructure or mechanism in the context of school funding policy as well as the broader national reform movement in Australia.

This article takes the Gonski Review and its proposed SRS funding model as a case by which to examine, first, how policy is produced and maintained “through a range of formal governance structures” (McKenzie et al., 2021, p. 313) that include existing governance arrangements and principles (i.e., the principles underpinning the design of federal systems, provisions for funding legislation, and guiding principles of funding governance); and second, the processes through which policies and policy actors actively construct and imagine scale in ways that seek to render it amenable to governance (McKenzie et al., 2021; Savage, Di Gregorio, et al., 2021).

The primary argument of this paper is that, while its core recommendation was a needs-based funding model for the federal government funding of schools, the Gonski Review also articulates a desire or aspiration for the translation of this funding model into a broader,

comprehensively national approach. This is done, I argue, through important practices of scalar *imagining* and *reasoning* (Papanastasiou, 2017b) undertaken by the Gonski Review as it reckons with how this might occur in the context of Australia's federal system. This national imagination or aspiration, however, sits uneasily with the realities of schooling and school funding in the Australian federation, which includes constitutional arrangements and legislation that distribute responsibility for funding across multiple spaces of governance—including states and territories as well as the three schooling sectors. Drawing on documentary evidence, I argue that this produces a scalar tension between the Gonski Review's imagination of funding at the national scale and the *realpolitik* of Australian federalism.

Mobilizing an understanding of scale and scalecraft as a category of practice and imaginative process (Papanastasiou, 2017a), the theoretical contribution of this paper can be positioned at the interface of policy movement (mobilities) and scale (McKenzie et al., 2021). That is, it seeks to understand how practices of scalecraft undertaken in the Gonski Review, in combination with the “practiced scalar infrastructures of educational governance” that characterize Australia's federal system, fundamentally contour the way in which Australian school funding policy is produced and mobilized (McKenzie & Aikens, 2021, p. 312).

The article begins by providing some context around the funding policy arrangements in the Australian federation and the national policy context within which the Gonski Review emerged. Following this, I turn to an analysis of the Gonski Review, in combination with school sector guidelines and legislative arrangements for funding. Here, I argue that the Gonski Review undertakes consequential practices of scalar imagining and reasoning, which ultimately produce a tension between its national aspirations and the *realpolitik* of Australian federalism. The paper concludes by reflecting on what these findings mean for ostensibly national reform in the context of federations. Specifically, it argues that while the Gonski Review has certainly cemented a more consistent and needs-based approach to the federal government funding of schools, its aspirations for a comprehensively national approach to funding must also be understood as an imaginative strategy rather than a necessarily practical one in the context of Australia's federal arrangements. Ultimately, this paper finds that understanding the national as a coherent, pre-determined category of analysis risks obscuring the heterogeneous and variegated reality of funding practices in federations, where subnational governments maintain consequential powers that direct policy action.

Policy Context: A National Reform Agenda and a “Patchwork of Different Funding Methodologies”

Since 2007, Australian schooling has been subject to a broad array of national reforms instigated by the federal Australian Labor Party's (ALP) landmark Education Revolution agenda. These reforms were underpinned by the proposition that improved alignment of the policies and processes of state and territory schooling systems would assist in addressing various problems in Australian schooling, including concerns around declining or stagnating student achievement on national and international assessment measures (Savage, 2020b; Savage & Lewis, 2018; Savage & O'Connor, 2018; Savage, Di Gregorio, et al., 2021). The reforms were also influenced by concerns around Australia's economic performance compared with other nations as well as “arguments that evidence-based national reforms predicated on ‘what works’ to improve schooling outcomes” would enhance human capital production and economic productivity (Savage, Di Gregorio, et al., 2021, p. 963).

This national alignment was also framed as a “fix” to perennial issues of federal governance such as “overlap, duplication, fragmentation and inconsistencies between states and territories”

(Savage, Di Gregorio, et al., 2021, p. 963; Savage, 2020b). These reforms included the introduction of various mechanisms of national reform, including the Australian Curriculum, a national approach to teaching standards; the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST); the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN); the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia, which specifies national performance measures against which all states and territories are required to report against; the My School website, which offers standardized reporting on the academic performance and outcomes of all Australian schools; a National Schools Interoperability Program; and importantly, a nationally consistent funding model for the federal government funding of schools. Various national agencies were also established to develop and implement these policy initiatives, representing “central pieces of policy infrastructure in the assemblage of national reform” (Savage, 2020b, p. 40). These include the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), and more recently, the Australian Education Research Organization (AERO).

It is within this context that the Gonski Review was commissioned by the federal government. The Gonski Review described Australia’s funding system as a “patchwork of different funding methodologies and models” that are “complex, confusing, opaque and inconsistent” (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 48). While, as described, the Gonski Review’s proposed SRS was (eventually) ratified in legislation in 2013, which provided a consistent approach to the federal government funding of schools, a decade on, the structure of Australia’s school funding system remains something of a patchwork, as described below.

The responsibility for school funding provision is shared between the federal, state, and territory governments, and all fund the three schooling sectors (systems) that are involved in the provision of schooling to varying extents—a government sector, a Catholic sector, and an independent school sector. Each of these has its own system governance structures and processes, while still adhering to state and national regulations. Adding to the complexity of these arrangements are the designated proportions of funding responsibility held by federal and subnational (state and territory) governments. Here, the federal government is the majority funder of independent and Catholic schools (non-government schools). The non-government sector also raises private revenue predominantly through the charging of school fees, which comes in addition to the government funding they receive (Connors & McMorro, 2015; Rowe & Perry, 2020). The government school sector, by contrast, receives the majority of its funding from state governments and is prohibited from charging school fees. Taking all of these arrangements together, this translates to over 20 school jurisdictions in total across Australia’s six states and two territories.

Policy Mobilities, Scalecraft, and Assemblage

This paper seeks to integrate three distinct but closely related sets of literature toward its interrogation of school funding policy production and enactment in the Australian federation—these being policy mobilities, scalecraft, and assemblage. To begin with, I explicate the turn toward policy mobilities in the context of education policy. Work over the last decade in the field of political geography, urban policy studies (McCann & Ward, 2012a), and, more recently, education governance and policy studies (Gulson et al., 2017; Lewis, 2021; McKenzie et al., 2021) has demonstrated the importance of understanding the “spatial repercussions” of “new and intensified global flows of policy ideas, practices, actors, technologies and capital” (Savage, Di Gregorio, et al., 2021). As Gulson et al. (2017) write, the networked and relational “or ‘topological’ nature of globalized education policy, which cuts across new spaces of policymaking and new modes of global education governance,” has demanded a “new mobilities paradigm” that can account for and explain policy movement (p. 225; see also Sheller & Urry, 2016).

The reconceptualization of this movement as a “set of complex socio-technical practices across a vast array of social spaces” (Lewis, 2021, p. 326; Sheller & Urry, 2016) has offered what Gulson et al. (2017) call “new dimensions” to the nation-state as the primary site for the study of policy movement—where “the presence of new policy networks and relationalities means that educational policymaking governance are no longer simply occurring within the preconfigured boundaries of the nation state” (p. 224). Part of the mobilities paradigm’s contribution to the study of contemporary policy studies has been, therefore, emphasizing the importance of avoiding “methodological nationalism” (Beck, 2000, p. 286).

As outlined above, this paper engages with increasing calls made by those working within mobilities-informed research that this theorization has reached something of a “conceptual and methodological impasse” (Gulson et al., 2017, p. 228)—where seeking to avoid this “methodological nationalism” (Beck, 2000, p. 286) has translated into tendencies in policy mobilities and policy sociology literature to, at times, underplay “the role of the state in policy processes” (McKenzie et al., 2021, p. 398; see also Lewis, 2021). The “state” in this case relates to both national and subnational scales which, as I will set out below, continue to play an active role in the context of policy production and enactment in federal systems (McKenzie et al., 2021).

Recent studies in education and schooling have sought to highlight the limitations of such trends in understanding contemporary processes of policy making (and enactment, I would add) in the context of federal systems, lifting to view the capacities of national and subnational scales to mediate policy production and enactment (Engel & Frizzell, 2015; Hartong & Piattoeva, 2019; Lovell, 2017). This is because, as McKenzie and Aikens (2021) describe, even with the more “globally dispersed” influences on policy making (p. 11), national and subnational scales “still mediate whether and how policy circulates” (McKenzie et al., 2021, p. 398).

For example, Wallner et al. (2020) examine the key roles played by subnational governments in the assembling of globally informed standards-based education reforms across four diverse federal systems. Similarly, McKenzie and Aikens (2021) examine the variegated interactions of global circulations of sustainability discourses in education in Canada in relation to “priorities and responses at subnational levels of government” (provincial and territorial ministries of education, local school divisions, and schools; p. 311). This work concludes that levels of policy decision-making are consequential in the relative engagement of sustainability priorities in education and result in policy immobility or resistance in some instances and policy amplification in others.

In the context of school funding specifically, which has been influenced by a diversification of local and transnational policy actors (including non-government actors such as philanthropies, organizations, and corporations), attention to the globally informed but locally negotiated nature of policy is highly relevant. For example, as I write with my colleague (Di Gregorio & Savage, 2020), in examining the production and enactment of school funding policy in the Australian federation, transnational organizations such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) can be understood as a major force in providing the relevant data and “what works” solutions in response to policy problems.

At the same time, though, school funding reforms remain locally negotiated and context-dependent, where the distinctive conditions of possibility of Australia’s federal system shape the uptake and enactment of OECD evidence, practices, and policy ideas. It is these relationships between policy as territorial and place-specific, as well as global and dynamic, that some scholars have suggested should be the focus of further critical policy research (Temenos & McCann, 2013; Wallner et al., 2020). Recent work by Lewis (2021) is instructive here, articulating that the challenge at the center of a mobilities-informed approach (in the context of policy sociology) is that we are required to

account for the new relational spaces of the policy cycle; observe how these policies move within and across, and simultaneously reconfigure, these spaces, including the social-technical practices that enables these movements; and [pay attention to] how these interactions and movements through space, as well as local processes of implementation, reshape the policies in question. (p. 329)

Attempting to get at this global/local, fixity/flow dynamism (Prince, 2017; McCann & Ward, 2012a) inevitably implicates considerations of how scale or levels of governance influences the movement of mobility of policy—that is, categories of scale such as global, national, and local. However, the use or concept of scale in the context of policy mobilities (and related concepts such as assemblage—see below) has been historically limited by the presumption that these concepts are ontologically opposed or at odds (McKenzie et al., 2021; Savage, Di Gregorio, et al., 2021). As has been recently documented, this stems from the critique of previous scholarship on scale that treats space as an a priori phenomenon—that is, in terms of a hierarchical and stable organization, where “social action happens in pre-formed spatial containers” such as the global, local, and national (see Prince, 2017, p. 336; see also Amin, 2022; Brenner, 2004; Jones, 1998; Robertson et al., 2002; Smith, 2003). For example, in tracing the production and enactment of a federal policy (like funding), it is easy to fall into the trap of reinforcing these historically uncritical conceptualizations of scale that privilege the conceptualization of spaces as a “vertically ordered hierarchy” (Papanastasiou, 2017a, p. 42). That is, the movement of policy in a unilateral, downward flow from the federal government to the states and territories to schooling sectors. The same can be said for global forces, or policy influences at the global scale, that are presumed to flow down into nations without consideration of the mediating impacts of the local contexts and conditions within which they are both enacted and, indeed, produced (Lewis & Hogan, 2016). This sits in contrast to policy mobilities and related approaches (such as assemblage), which centralize a “relational ontology that emphasizes disjunctive topological flows” (Savage, Di Gregorio, et al., 2021, p. 968).

While acknowledging these critiques of scale within geography, public policy, and policy sociology, scale can also be understood as something that is socially constructed as opposed to something pre-existing or given (Savage, Di Gregorio, et al., 2021). Using Fraser (2010), Papanastasiou (2017b) describes this as scalecraft, which “draws attention to the skill, innovation and effort involved in constructing scale” (p. 1). Central to this is a core distinction between understanding scale as a “category of analysis” and a “category of practice” (Moore, 2008, p. 212). This proposition draws on work by Brubaker and Cooper (2000), who explain that “‘categories of practice’ [are] categories of everyday experience, developed and deployed by ordinary social actors . . . to make sense of themselves [and] of their activities” (p. 4). This can be contrasted with “categories of analysis,” which Brubaker and Cooper (2000) explain can be understood as “experience-distant categories used by social scientists” (p. 4). Moore (2008) summarizes this distinction effectively by explaining that “the tendency to partition the social world into hierarchically ordered spatial ‘containers’ is what we want to explain – not explain things with” (p. 212).

As Papanastasiou (2017b, p. 3; 2019, drawing on Jones, 1998) has set out, the core implication of this is distinguishing between scale as epistemology as opposed to ontology (see also McKenzie et al., 2021, p. 399; Savage, Di Gregorio, et al., 2021, for additional examples where this distinction has been elaborated and put into practice). In practical terms, this means understanding “organizing structures of territory, such as cities, states, nations” as socially constructed and “contingent categorizations” (McKenzie et al., 2021, p. 399). This occurs through particular techniques of scalecraft, which include scalar imagining and scalar reasoning (Papanastasiou, 2017b). As I will demonstrate, these practices can be understood as key features of policy production and enactment, “playing a fundamental role in determining how policies and forms of governance are

assembled,” and indeed, how funding policy is imagined at the national scale (Savage, Di Gregorio, et al., 2021, p. 968; see also Papanastasiou, 2017b). As I write with my colleagues (Savage, Di Gregorio, et al., 2021, 969), in the context of Australian federalism, it is not required that schooling policies are constructed or imagined at the national scale in mind, but the “fact that they are is testament to the fact that significant efforts have been made” by policy actors (and indeed, policies) to bring the national scale to life.

The concept of policy assemblage has been taken up widely in policy sociology studies that seek to examine the emergence of what has been termed a national policy assemblage in Australian schooling (Lingard, 2018; Savage & Lewis, 2018; Savage & Lingard, 2018; Savage, Di Gregorio, et al., 2021). When understood as assemblages, policies “appear not as solid or stable entities” but as a “collection of heterogeneous, often incommensurate elements that come together for a period of time” (Ureta, 2014, p. 305). Part of the reason for the proliferation in its uptake in this context is because assemblage has been positioned as a generative means through which to understand and explore policy processes in the context of schooling and, in particular, schooling within federations. Of particular relevance here is the work undertaken by Savage and Lewis (2018), who make the argument that an assemblage approach is highly generative for understanding national reforms in federal systems like Australia, in which national agendas and policies are the results of complex interactions between federal, state, and territory governments as well as transnational policy actors and organizations.

In their paper, which analyses the development of the APST as a national policy reform, Savage and Lewis (2018) argue that attention is required to “complex assemblages of ideas, practices, actors and organizations, which work within and across national, subnational and transnational policy spaces” (p. 137). Such an approach, they argue, offers a generative way to challenge the notion of the national scale as a pre-existing backdrop with a coherent “essence,” understanding it instead as an arrangement of “heterogeneous and emergent” components (Savage & Lewis, 2018, p. 137).

Relatedly, one of the most useful offerings of assemblage thinking in the context of policy mobilities is its ontological commitment to foregrounding movement. Lewis (2021) explains this as being attuned to “what is mobile and, on the move,” but just as importantly, “what is stable and placed based” (p. 328). Part of the value of assemblage, therefore, is its emphasis on the provisional nature of policy, which prescribes analytical sensitivity to not only how multiple components come together (i.e., how they are assembled) but also to the “many ways that policies are subject to forms of disruption and change” (Savage, 2020a, p. 326). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) take the terms of territorialization, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization to describe the way that assemblages form, harden, or stabilize as well as the way these territories are eroded (deterritorialized) as new assemblages form (reterritorialize; Mulcahy, 2015, p. 505).

For example, as I will demonstrate in my analysis, while the Gonski Review might carry territorializing aspirations for a nationally coherent funding approach, these aspirations become reterritorialized or disassembled as it is translated or taken up within subnational systems (i.e., through the states and territories and three school sectors), who then redistribute or redirect funding based on their own funding models (i.e., reterritorialization as new formations are assembled) (Savage & Lewis, 2018). Indeed, as McCann and Ward (2012a) write, an assemblage “is always in the process of coming together and being territorialized just as it is always also potentially pulling apart and being reterritorialized” (p. 328).

The combining of scalecraft with policy assemblage as theoretical tools for understanding policy processes has seen a recent uptake in the context of education scholarship. In a recent paper with my colleagues (Savage, Di Gregorio, et al., 2021), we argue that despite occurring in a federation in which subnational (state and territory) governments maintain responsibility for schools,

a new national policy assemblage has emerged that has been crafted by, and produces, forms of scalar boundary imagining, crossing, and blurring. In this work, we emphasize the harmonious coupling of policy assemblage and scalecraft as a way in which to examine how scale is imagined and assembled in policy, as well as the governance boundary dynamics associated with this (Savage, Di Gregorio, et al., 2021).

The particular contribution of the present paper is, therefore, to further develop this synergy by demonstrating how scalecraft (such as the practices of scalar imagining and reasoning undertaken by the Gonski Review) is central to how particular formations/configurations of policy ultimately settle or territorialize, as well as how they are dismantled and reterritorialized. Or, in other words, how they result from “complex practices of scalecraft” (Savage, Di Gregorio, et al., 2021, p. 968), which includes how policies themselves engage or reckon with existing infrastructures of governance (like the constitutional arrangements that prescribe certain roles for the federal and state government funding of schools, or the historical legislative principles that see school sectors imbued with the authority to deploy their own funding models).

Methods

In line with this paper’s intention to dispense with the notion of pre-existing scales and territories, the analysis undertaken followed the “iterative and inductive methodological practice of tracing sites and situations” (Baker and McGuirk 2017, 436 citing McCann and Ward 2012b). This involves, they explain, tracing “people, discourses, and policy ideas to particular localized sites and examines their embedding in wider social spatial situations” (Baker & McGuirk, 2017, p. 436). Such an approach allows for “relations (and indeed, documentary evidence) to emerge empirically” and without an a priori set of assumptions about where the “policy world” begins and ends (Baker & McGuirk, 2017, p. 434).

The analysis draws exclusively on documentary material gathered through this iterative and inductive approach. “Sites” in this study constituted, for instance, the production of the Gonski Review, commissioned by the federal government. “Situations” included the processes through which the SRS is disaggregated by the schooling sectors as they distribute government funding based on their own funding formulas and models.

In the context of this work, I deploy an understanding of “documents as actors” as opposed to merely “carriers of content” (Prior, 2012, p. 433). By this rendering, documents “do things as well as contain things” (Prior, 2012, p. 427). Such an understanding of policy (that is, one that is sensitive to its agentic capacities) offers a way to make visible the consequential material-discursive work undertaken by policies (for example, the processes of imagining, reasoning, and justifying) that contour/configure how policies are ultimately produced and how they circulate.

The documentary material analyzed in this paper is derived from publicly available sources, including federal and state government websites, as well as specific school sector websites (the Australian Government’s Department of Education and Training, the Victoria Department of Education, the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV), and Independent Schools Victoria). The rationale for the paper’s (primary) focus on the state of Victoria, Australia, is two-fold. Firstly, this analysis emerges from a broader body of work (a doctoral study undertaken by the author), which examined the state context of Victoria. Secondly, Victoria is one of the most populous of the eight states and territories of Australia, meaning that the impacts of funding reforms (like Gonski) serve to impact a large proportion of students. Second only to New South Wales, Victoria has the highest proportion of student enrollments in both government and non-government schools (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). I include the caveat that this is certainly not to suggest that impacts on smaller or less populous states and territories are of less concern.

While future investigations might broaden this work, the state of Victoria offers insights into similar funding practices across the Australian federation, which are organized into similar sectoral configurations (with some exceptions). The analysis is focused on practices of funding distribution undertaken by the Catholic and government schools respectively. The independent school sector has been omitted from this analysis since the funding it receives from the federal government (as the sector's majority funder) is largely distributed to schools without first being disaggregated.

The analysis takes the Gonski Review as its primary object of enquiry, which includes the explanation of and rationale for its proposed SRS funding model. This is supplemented by school sector-based documents in the state of Victoria, Australia, which outline the practices of monetary allocation and distribution of government funding once it is received by school systems. These practices are based on legislative requirements, historical funding arrangements, and sector-specific guidelines. These documents were also analyzed for the guiding rationales and principles that underlie these practices of funding allocation, as well as the technical funding formulas, infrastructures, and mechanisms that mobilize these rationales and principles in the distribution of government money to schools. The analysis is limited to the analysis of recurrent (ongoing) federal government funding of schools in line with the function of the SRS funding model, as opposed to federal government capital funding or grants to schools (funding toward facilities/school capital infrastructure) that are not part of the SRS.

Analysis: “National” Funding in the Realpolitik of the Australian Federation

In what follows, I examine how practices of scalecraft undertaken in the Gonski Review interact with existing legislative arrangements and policy principles of funding in Australian schooling. In doing so, I analyze practices of scalar imagining and reasoning undertaken by the Gonski Review that emerge as central to the way in which the SRS funding model is both produced and enacted. My main argument is that scalar tensions emerge between the Gonski Review's aspirations for, or imaginations of, a potentially national approach to the funding of schools, its remit as a federal funding review, and the underlying principles and legislative arrangements of Australia's federal system, which sees the states and school sectors retain authority for the distribution and allocation of government resources.

Imagining a “National” Approach to School Funding? Establishing the SRS

While being clear about its remit as a review into the federal government funding of schools, the Gonski Review articulates a clear desire or aspiration for the creation of a national approach to school funding that might ultimately be applied consistently across the Australian federation. Following Papanastasiou (2017b), these processes of imagining or aspiring constitute political acts toward the production of scale. These aspirations, I argue, attempt to imagine school funding at the national scale.

These national aspirations are made explicit in the Gonski Review's rationalization for its proposal of a new model for the federal funding of schools, known as the SRS. Here, the Gonski Review suggests that part of the objective/purpose of developing the SRS was to offer a first step or “provide a starting point for a new coherent, national funding model” for Australian schools (2011, p. 173). In elaborating, it explains that (among other important features) the funding model “should be capable of application across all sectors and systems” (Gonski et al., 2011, p. xxii).

Embedded within these aspirations for a national funding model is a clear desire to achieve the alignment and coherency that is (ostensibly) associated with national policy reform. Here, what Savage (2020b, 63) refers to as the “allure of alignment” or order is part of the Gonski Review's vision for future funding reform (see also Mehta, 2013; Savage & O'Connor, 2018). For example, in

discussing the potential improvements that might accompany the implementation of the SRS, the Gonski Review makes the case that it would “provide a new level of coherence and a common structure for funding all Australian schools” (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 174). Going even further than this, the Gonski Review articulates its desire for the SRS to be eventually used not just at the federal level but also across states and territories in the funding of non-government schools. Here, it states that the SRS model

would desirably be used by state and territory governments to inform resource allocation to individual non-government systems and schools. This would help to simplify school funding arrangements by reducing the number of different benchmarks currently in use and add greater coherence to the funding system in Australia. (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 164)

This point is significant insofar as it clearly demonstrates the Gonski Review’s vision for the SRS to act as a potential catalyst for the alignment of the diverse set of funding arrangements in operation across state and territories, as well as the non-government schooling sector in the pursuit of “greater coherence to the funding system” (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 164). These diverse funding arrangements include (as I will explain in the next section) the use of different funding models amongst state and territory governments across Australia, as well as those used in the Catholic and independent sectors to allocate government resources.

I pause to note here that this is not all to suggest that the panel members of the Gonski Review carried unrealistic aspirations for this coherence to fully eventuate. Indeed, the Gonski Review does qualify these aspirations by stating that they would have to take into account “some critical structural and historical” conditions of Australia’s schooling system (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 174). In addition, the national vision articulated by the Gonski Review must be understood in relation to the federal government’s own agenda for its role in schooling, underpinned by the pursuit and achievement of broader national education policy reforms (Savage, 2016; Savage, 2020b; Savage & Lewis, 2018; Savage, Di Gregorio, et al., 2021). In this way, it is not necessarily surprising that the federal government would be pursuing this national vision for funding policy (via the Gonski Review) in the first instance. Despite these caveats, the fact that the Gonski Review does explicitly consider and articulate the promise or potential of a coherent national approach constitutes an important part of reimagining funding at the national scale.

The national aspirations articulated by the Gonski Review as they have been explained thus far have been at least partially realized in the years following its release, translating into a series of policy infrastructures brought together to govern funding at the national scale. In assemblage terms, this constitutes the (at least partial) territorialization of Gonski’s national funding aspirations. Perhaps the most consequential of these is the ratification of the Gonski Review’s SRS funding model into legislation via the introduction of the Australian Education Act (Australian Government, 2013).

The passage of the Australian Education Act constituted a “major new piece of policy infrastructure” (Savage, 2020b, p. 49) that formalized the SRS model as the basis on which the federal government would determine its funding to *all schools across Australia* (Bentley & Savage, 2017, p. 343; emphasis added). To this extent, the “new level of coherence and common structure” imagined by the Gonski Review was realized at least at the federal government level (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 174).

The Australian Education Act (Australian Government, 2013), and the SRS therein, emerges as central to the mobilization of a broader national policy reform agenda, as the federal government made its funding to the state and territory governments conditional upon their adoption of “core national policies and initiatives,” including curriculum, teaching standards, testing, and reporting

(Savage, 2020b, 48; see also Bentley & Savage, 2017; Di Gregorio & Savage, 2020). This practice must be understood in the context of the cartography of Australian federalism, which saw the federal government take over income tax-raising power from the states during World War II. This created a substantial degree of vertical fiscal imbalance through which the federal government can buy compliance from states in the domain of schooling (Savage, Di Gregorio et al., 2021). Ultimately, therefore, the SRS also functions as a core nationalizing mechanism or infrastructure deployed by the federal government in the pursuit of national alignment.

The Role of the OECD in Shaping National Aspirations

Transnational policy influences also emerged as important in the construction of the national aspirations held by the Gonski Review. This influence aligns with arguments made by Savage and Lewis (2018), who suggest that any attempt to understand or explain the national in federal systems requires consideration of how “more global policy ideas, practices and organizations interact with federal and state-level governments to help constitute the national” (p. 134). This global influence manifests predominately via the OECD and its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Following Papanastasiou (2017b) and drawing on examples offered by McKenzie and Aikens (2021, p. 318), the work of the OECD and PISA data in the Gonski Review constitute important examples of scalecraft whereby global performance pressures and policy “problems” are rhetorically emphasized to justify and rationalize “national” reform, as well as offering the requisite data infrastructures to make these national aspirations “operational.”

First, the Gonski Review positions the OECD and its work as central to its rationale for federal school funding reform, forming a key component of the policy problem that it sought to address. Here, the Gonski Review laments the “fall in Australia’s international position” as indicated by PISA performance data, in addition to a “significant gap between Australia’s highest and lowest performing students” on PISA (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 22). The Gonski Review also draws on comparisons between high-performing OECD nations and Australia in relation to equity outcomes, identifying a “strong concentration of disadvantaged students in certain schools” and a “relatively low proportion of students who attend schools with average or mixed socioeconomic backgrounds” (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 124). The Gonski Review also makes clear links between the implementation of the SRS and improvements to Australia’s international performance standing in comparison to other OECD nations. Here, it explained that any new funding arrangements “should be aimed achieving an internationally competitive high standard of schooling” and raising “the level of Australian schooling outcomes to those of the best-performing countries on international measures such as PISA” (Gonski et al., 2011, pp. xiv, 157).

Second, the OECD’s PISA data were used as a technical mechanism by which to develop the SRS model itself. As such, in addition to playing a key role in rationalizing and justifying a national approach to funding, the OECD’s PISA was also used to make the Gonski Review’s SRS (and its national aspirations therein) operational. Put very simply, in order to propose an estimate for the per-student dollar amounts of funding in the SRS, the Gonski Review identified a student outcome benchmark upon which this should be based. To do this, it identified a group of schools known as reference schools that currently met this outcome benchmark, and then it used these schools’ financial data as the basis for estimating the per-student dollar amounts. PISA data were used by the Gonski Review in this process as a secondary mechanism through which to *validate* the selection of reference schools identified for use in the SRS, ensuring that those schools identified as meeting the educational benchmark on national measures did so on international measures as well.

In these ways, the OECD figures both rhetorically and technically in the Gonski Review and its pursuit of a nationally consistent approach to funding via the SRS. Considered collectively, these examples also align with previously identified patterns or tendencies of the OECD to engage

differently with the federal government compared with subnational governments, such as the states and territories in the context of Australia. That is, as Savage (2020b) explains, by virtue of the structure of Australian federalism, the influence of the OECD has “translated into schooling systems in disjunctive and uneven ways” (p. 89). This manifests in the OECD’s preference and tendency to primarily engage directly with federal governments and national agencies (such as ACARA and AITSL), compared with subnational governments where direct engagements are “rare in comparison” (Savage, 2020b, p. 89).

The Gonski case appears to reflect these trends to an extent but with some important variation. In this case, it is the way that the work of the OECD is *used* by the federal government that is of interest. That is, while the OECD and its data infrastructures figure prominently in the federal government-commissioned Gonski Review, they are far less prominent in the funding formulas and models (and rationales) in the schooling sectors. While I reserve a more detailed analysis of these for the sections below, an examination of funding models used by the state government, independent, and Catholic school sectors in Victoria demonstrate no clear or substantive links to the OECD and instead focus on the operational and practical elements of funding for their schools and students.

In this way, rather than operating as a pervasive, top-down, and “hegemonic force” (Savage, 2020b, p. 89) in the Australian funding policy context, the influence of the OECD is mediated by the arrangements of the Australian federation, as its impact on the states and territories (and school sectors) is experienced (predominantly) through the federal government and the Gonski Review’s SRS. Altogether then, while the OECD’s influence emerges in disjunctive ways, it still plays an important role in both rationalizing and mobilizing the rescaling of school funding in line with the Gonski Review’s national aspirations.

National Aspirations in the Realpolitik: A Core Scalar Tension

While the Gonski Review carried aspirations for national funding as described above, there is an important distinction to be made between the imaginary or aspiration of a national approach and the realpolitik of Australian federalism when it comes to the conditions of possibility for its enactment. To this end, the Gonski Review undertakes important processes of scalar reasoning as it reckons with how this aspiration might realistically figure into the enduring legislative and governing principles of schooling within the Australian federation—which (in line with Section 51 of the constitution) locates responsibility for schooling largely with states and territories as residual powers.

This is made more complex by an arrangement that sees school sectors (in particular, the Catholic and government sectors) imbued with the authority to distribute the government funding they receive in line with their own methods and formulas. As I will demonstrate in this section, the result of this is the ultimate dismantling (or deterritorializing) of the Gonski Review’s national aspirations as they are mobilized via the SRS, producing a scalar tension (Papanastasiou, 2017b) between these national aspirations and the reality of funding arrangements in Australian schooling.

The first example of such scalar reasoning takes place in takes place in Section 4.3 of the Gonski Review, titled “A New Funding Framework” (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 173). In this section, the Gonski Review engages in a discussion of how federal government funding has historically been distributed to government and non-government schools and, indeed, how its proposed SRS might figure into existing arrangements that divide responsibility for various elements of funding governance across school sectors (or systems), as well as the federal, state, and territory governments.

Specifically, the Gonski Review remarks on the consequences of Australia’s school sector-based system in how the SRS might be realistically mobilized. Describing it as “one of the significant features of Australian schooling” (Gonski et al. 2011, p. 45), the Gonski Review goes on to detail the

functioning of this arrangement as well as the governing principles that underpin it. Here, it explains that “government schools, most Catholic schools and some independent schools are members of systems” and these systems (sectors) are all governed by their own system authorities who hold responsibility for “operating and allocating funding to their member schools” (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 45).

For instance, the Catholic system is governed by the National Catholic Education Commission in conjunction with their respective state divisions, such as the CECV for the state of Victoria. Similarly, the state government system is overseen by state government departments, such as (again) the Victorian Department of Education and Training. These systems receive “recurrent block funding” from the federal government, which they then distribute to their member schools “using their own methods and formulas” (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 45). The exception to this is the independent school sector, which is not organized under any particular system but rather operates largely as individual schools. Correspondingly, this sector receives the majority of its government funding directly from the federal (Commonwealth) government, with supplementary funding from state governments.

Importantly, in explaining these arrangements, the Gonski Review draws attention to one of the key principles underpinning this particular arrangement, known as the subsidiarity principle in the context of schooling governance in the Australian federation. This principle, as it is understood and explained in the Gonski Review, relates to the level of government that is considered best equipped or most appropriate for the delivery and oversight of particular services. In this case, the subsidiarity principle prescribes that “the level of government closest to the communities receiving those services should provide those services, and, if possible, fund and regulate them” (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 181). The Gonski Review points out that over time, “subsidiarity has become an important guiding principle for governments when considering the appropriate roles of various levels of governments in federations like Australia” and is reflected in current arrangements that see school system authorities maintain responsibility for the redistribution of funding once it is received from governments (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 181).

In considering how the SRS might be mobilized within these existing sectoral configurations and principles, the Gonski Review articulates its clear support for upholding the subsidiarity principle as one of its key findings. Specifically, Finding 8 of the Gonski Review states that, in recognising the many benefits of government and non-government school systems, future funding arrangements for schooling should continue to enable systems to make decisions around the distribution and allocation of resources at the local level, with enhanced accountability. (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 53)

The decision to support these arrangements is rationalized by the Gonski Review on the basis that system authorities are “better placed than the Australian (federal) Government to determine the most effective allocation of available resources in their particular circumstances” (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 181). The Gonski Review elaborates that in line with the subsidiarity principle:

The benefits of government and non-government school systems allocating or redistributing funding to where it is most needed based on local knowledge of schools and communities . . . are well established. Larger systems, in particular appear to be well placed to apply a greater range of measures of need in distributing funding to individual member schools in their funding formulas. (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 53)

In this way, the principle of subsidiarity is positioned as central to these scalar considerations regarding the level at which decisions around the allocation of government funding to schools

should occur, based on the capacity of systems (sectors) to identify the needs of their own member schools and distribute funding accordingly. Here, the Gonski Review’s aspirations for a nationally coherent approach to funding sit in *contrast* to its advocacy of system or sector-specific distribution practices, locating the decision-making power for the allocation of government funding at the local or subnational scale (that is, with the Catholic and state government sectors/systems).

In doing so, the Gonski Review emphasizes a “logic of difference” (Papanastasiou, 2017a, 44) between the national and subnational scale, articulating that while a nationally coherent approach to funding is desirable, there must also be subnational (sectoral/systemic) decision-making power around how money is ultimately allocated and distributed to students. As a result, a core scalar tension emerges between the Gonski Review’s aspiration for a nationally coherent approach and what is possible, realistic, and indeed “beneficial” (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 53) in the realpolitik of school funding in Australia. Altogether, the scalar negotiations undertaken by the Gonski Review constitute an important example of how “scales of policy practice are produced and maintained through a range of formal governance structures” (such as legislation and funding principles) as well as the discursive work of policy itself (McKenzie & Aikens, 2021, p. 313).

Redistributing the SRS: The Case of Victoria

In this section, I turn to demonstrating how the scalar negotiations undertaken by the Gonski Review actively shape the enactment and operation of the SRS in the context of Australia’s schooling system. Specifically, the Gonski Review’s upholding of the subsidiarity principle results in diverse and sector-specific funding practices that ultimately trouble the prospect of national alignment and coherence imagined in the Gonski Review. To demonstrate this, I undertake a close examination of how school funding models are reterritorialized in line with state-specific practices in the state of Victoria, Australia.

First and foremost, the Gonski Review’s endorsement of the subsidiarity principle became resolidified as part of the technical details of the schooling SRS in legislation, ratified via the Australian Education Act (Australian Government, 2013) and the associated Australian Education Regulation (2013, the Regulation). Specifically, Section 71 of the Act sets out that the approved system authority “is the body to which recurrent funding under this Act is ultimately paid,” providing “the legislative authority for the department to provide Australian Government funding to school approved authorities, block grant authorities and non-government representative bodies” (Australian Government, 2021, p. 55).

In practical terms, this translates into a number of varied funding models across Australia, where states and territories, as well as the Catholic systems (sectors) therein, are able to negotiate their own funding models in response to local or sector-specific requirements or needs. In this way, schooling sectors are able to redistribute (or, in assemblage terms, reterritorialize) the money they receive from the federal government (via the SRS) in line with their own funding formulas and models.

These varied practices and models become clear upon comparing the redistributive funding approaches undertaken by the Victorian government school sector and the Catholic school sector, which deploy distinct methods for reallocating government funding received via the SRS. In broad terms, the Victorian government uses what is referred to as the 2022 Student Resource Package Guide, which is constituted by its own needs-based funding model for the distribution of both federal and state government money (states are the majority funders of government [public] schools). This model includes a combination of funding types that are designed to “recognize the differing costs associated with different levels of learning, different types and sizes of schools, and the additional costs imposed by rurality and isolation” and is “assessed according to school or campus type and student need” (Victorian Department of Education and Training, 2022, pp. 5–6).

Compared with the state government system, the Catholic sector's distribution practices are even further devolved, involving not only CECV as the state-wide governing body but also four Catholic education offices that cover the archdiocese¹ and diocese of Victoria (Melbourne, Ballarat, Sale, and Sandhurst). Importantly, when it comes to the ultimate division of funding, the CECV decides the share of resources to go toward each of its four dioceses from the block funding it receives from the federal government. Here, the Catholic sector explains that the practice of block government funding is considered a "fundamental characteristic" of its approach to funding (CECV, 2022, p. 14). In summarizing this practice, it elaborates that,

while government recurrent grants for systemic Catholic schools are calculated individually for each school according to government funding models, the grants payable to Catholic schools are aggregated and provided to the CECV. *The CECV then allocates government grants within the Catholic sector according to its own processes and funding models.* (CECV, 2022, p. 14; emphasis added)

While maintaining some close similarities to the federal government's SRS model, this translates to separate funding models for primary and secondary schools, which both integrate a number of (differing) forms of funding allocations, which are explained as the additional funding measures required to attend to the various needs of the sector's community (CECV, 2022). Moreover, its guidelines outline numerous instances where government funding is reallocated between schools and toward central system costs. This includes, for example, the reallocation of funding to a provision titled "Additional (Untied) Diocesan Allocations," which allows dioceses to "meet local schooling priorities" (CECV, 2022, p. 18). This money is "untied" and can be used in a discretionary manner. In this way, local diocesan funding priorities and formulas are highly influential in making government funding move in particular ways, with material effects for the schools that ultimately receive it.

Here, government funding (derived initially from the SRS) moves in lateral flows as it is reallocated across the state of Victoria. This becomes even more complex if we take into account the Catholic and government sectors in other states and territories in Australia, which apply their own versions of these models with various departures and alignments. These practices, I argue, constitute the scalar tension in action, where the simplification and coherence of funding arrangements ideally sought by the Gonski Review with the introduction of the SRS sit uneasily with the reality of the devolved funding system it endorsed in practice.

Implications for Researching "The National" in the Context of Federal Systems

Taking the Gonski Review and the enactment of its recommended SRS funding model as its focus, this paper has sought to demonstrate how scale and practices of scalecraft operate as core features of how polices are assembled and mobilized in the context of federal systems. This includes not only understanding scale as a "deeply imaginative process," but also how these scalar imaginations interact with existing "scales of policy practice" and how they are "maintained through a range of formal governance structures and discursive work" (McKenzie & Aikens, 2021, p. 313; Savage & O'Connor, 2018).

¹ Put simply, these archdiocese and diocese constitute the geographical districts or jurisdictions by which the Catholic Church is divided in Australia. Each diocese operates under the authority of its archbishop and bishop, who oversee the Catholic schools within their respective districts.

Reinforcing findings by Savage, Di Gregorio, et al. (2021), this paper has raised core tensions regarding the imagination or aspiration for policy alignment at the national scale, the principles and arrangements underpinning the design of federal systems defined by multi-level governance arrangements, and areas where subnational governments maintain significant responsibilities for schooling policies (Wallner et al., 2020). These divisions emerge as especially consequential in the context of school funding in Australia, where state and territory governments, as well as the schooling sectors, exercise historical powers over how federal government money is ultimately distributed among their schools. Amongst other things, these tensions present ongoing considerations for federations (such as Australia) who continue to pursue the promise of alignment and consistency of a national approach to policy reform in a system that is designed to resist such commonality and alignment (Savage, 2020b ; Savage & O’Connor, 2018). These insights also have consequences for the extent to which we can ultimately understand policies, especially in the context of federal systems, as fundamentally national in name or nature, with the sense of finality or coherence implied by such characterization (Sassen, 2006). In the context of school funding policy in Australia, it can be argued that the notion of the national functions more as an imaginative strategy of the federal government that is at the same time required to fit with what is possible and practical within the arrangements of the Australian federation—particularly where responsibility for schooling (and funding) is constitutionally distributed between federal and state and territory governments and made more complex by the redistributive authority bestowed upon the schooling sectors.

In this way, while my analysis demonstrates that the Gonski-informed SRS constitutes a consistent approach to the federal government funding of schools that can be applied across the nation, it would be a mistake to assume that this automatically translates into a comprehensively national approach in practice. As Li (2007) reminds us, while the process of forging alignments between various parts is central to the formation of an assemblage, these “alignments do not mean the assemblage has a coherent essence or singular rationality” (p. 265).

In this case, by examining practices of scalecraft, we are also able to lift to view the potential analytical risks associated with such presumed coherence. This includes (amongst other things) obscuring the heterogeneous and variegated nature of funding policy practices in the context of states and school sectors/systems, which maintain consequential powers for the redistribution of federal and state government funding on the basis of their own formulas and community needs. Therefore, close attention to system and sector-based practices of funding allocation and distribution are of similar (and in some instances, greater) concern compared with broader national or even global comparisons, where seemingly small differences in funding models or calculation processes between the school sectors can have significant material consequences in terms of what public resources students ultimately receive. The equity implications of this, while not expressly the focus of this article, cannot be understated and should be the focus of future analysis.

More broadly, I join scholars who advocate for the closer and continued examination of “subnational settings and domains of practice” in the context of federal systems (McKenzie & Aikens, 2021, p. 313; Wallner et al., 2020), while at the same time being sensitive to global policy flows and how they are shaped by local conditions (Lewis, 2021). This is typified in the Gonski Review, where despite global influences in its production, the Gonski Review and the mobilization of the SRS funding model that it recommends are heavily contoured by the conditions of possibility of Australia’s federal system (Di Gregorio & Savage, 2020). These findings also reinforce well-established arguments that global policy flows are “amplified, adapted, resisted, or ignored” by various scales “of policy making” (McKenzie et al., 2021, p. 399), as opposed to being simply implemented as “perfect facsimiles” (Lewis, 2021, p. 330; see also Engel & Frizzell, 2015; McKenzie & Aikens, 2021). In the case of school funding, not only is the OECD’s PISA used in ways beyond

its primary function as an international comparative measure, but its policy influence on funding within the federation is also *mediated* primarily by the federal government, which acts as a conduit for states, territories, and sectors (Savage, 2020b). This empirical case, therefore, also serves to reinforce the importance of paying close analytical attention not just to forms of mobility and flow but also to immobility, stasis, and fixity. Indeed, as Lewis (2021) explains, there cannot be mobility without some form of simultaneous immobility. In practical terms for Savage, Gerrard, et al. (2021), this means “addressing the past and the policies (e.g., the principle of subsidiarity and its role in funding historically; federal, state and territory constitutional responsibilities for schooling; legislated funding arrangements), materialities (e.g., the socio-technical practices of funding distribution through formulas and models that direct the flow of money) and socialities that are *enduring and sustaining*,” as well as what is mobile (p. 10; emphasis added).

In doing so, we see how (in this case) the policy knowledge and data infrastructures of the OECD are made “actionable and productive when . . . embedded or territorialized in specific social, spatial and institutional contexts” (Peck & Theodore, 2008, p. 123; as cited in Savage, Gerrard, et al. 2021). Thus, when considering or seeking to understand the global/local power dynamics of policy production and enactment in federal systems, I echo arguments made by Savage, Gerrard, et al. (2021), who advocate for the importance of attending to “both the world of flows and related practices of fixity and stasis” (p. 10).

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About the Author

Elisa Di Gregorio

University of Melbourne

elisad@student.unimelb.edu.au

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4041-0368>

Elisa Di Gregorio is a PhD student at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, the University of Melbourne. Her research focus is in the field of education policy, with a specific interest in school funding policy, equity, and intergovernmental relations in the context of Australia’s federal system.

About the Guest Editors

Jason Beech

University of Melbourne

jason.beech@unimelb.edu.au

Jason Beech is Associate Professor in Global Policy in Education at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education and Visiting Professor at Universidad de San Andrés in Buenos Aires where he holds a UNESCO Chair in Education for Sustainability and Global Citizenship. He is associate editor of *Education Policy Analysis Archives*. His research focuses on the globalization of knowledge and policies related to education. He has also written and is passionate about the challenges of educating for global citizenship and a sustainable future.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4971-7665>

Laura Engel

George Washington University

lce@gwu.edu

Laura Engel is Professor of International Education and International Affairs at The George Washington University. Laura focuses on global education policy trends in federal systems, including national and cross-national studies on global citizenship education. Her latest book is *Sociological Foundations of Education* (Bloomsbury, 2022), and she has recent journal articles in *Educational Researcher*, *Comparative Education Review*, and *British Journal of Sociology of Education*.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2937-5167>

Glenn C. Savage

University of Melbourne

glenn.savage@unimelb.edu.au

Glenn C. Savage is an Associate Professor of Education Policy and the Future of Schooling at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. He currently leads an Australian Research

Council project that is examining policy co-design and collaboration between governments in the development of national schooling reforms. His latest book is *The Quest for Revolution in Australian Schooling Policy* (Routledge, 2021).

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6495-6798>

Bob Lingard

Australian Catholic University and The University of Queensland

r.lingard@uq.edu.au

Dr. Bob Lingard is a Professorial Fellow at Australian Catholic University and Emeritus Professor at The University of Queensland. His most recent books include, *Exploring education policy through newspapers and social media* (Routledge, 2023), co-authored with Aspa Baroutsis, and *Global-national networks in education: Primary education, social enterprises and Teach for Bangladesh* (Bloomsbury, 2022), co-authored with Rino Wiseman Adhikary and Ian Hardy.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4101-9985>

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