



**U.S. PISA 2009 Summer
Conference:
Australia's education
system**

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AUSTRALIA



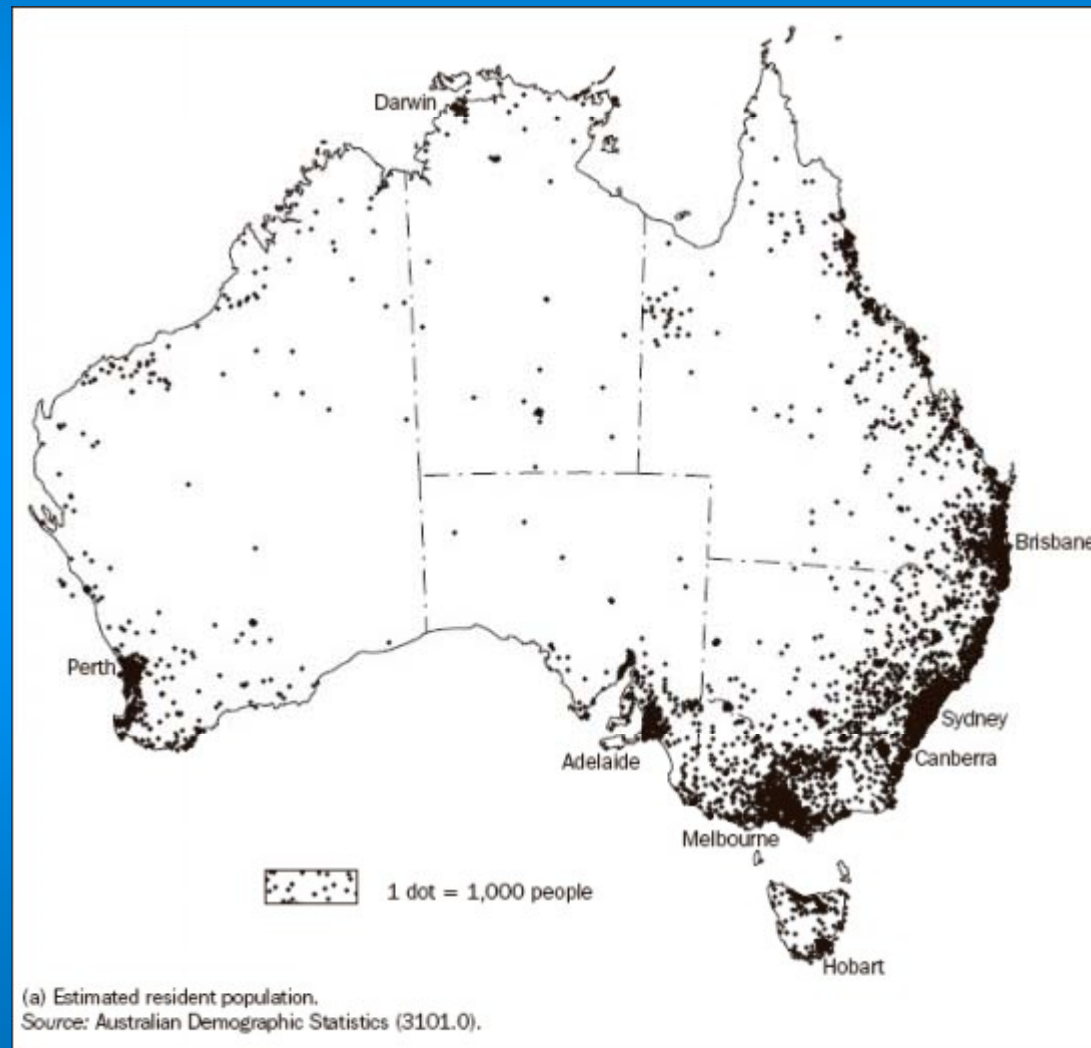
A bit about Australia

- Population: 21 million in an area of 7.7 million square kilometres.
- Although the overall population density is low, it is a highly urbanized society.
- Outside the cities, the country is sparsely populated; 30% of primary schools have fewer than 100 students and 30% of secondary schools have fewer than 500 students.

A little perspective...



Where we live ...



- Australia is classified as a high-income country
- Literacy among adults is nearly universal
- Nearly half of the population has completed secondary school, and around one-third hold a university qualification.
- The population is mainly of European background, but immigration has produced greater ethnic and cultural diversity.
- One-fifth of the population (22%) was born overseas and a similar percentage (21%) speaks a language other than English at home.
- About 4% of Australian school students are Indigenous, and some of them live in isolated communities

AUSTRALIA'S SCHOOLS

Australia's system of education

- Australia does not have a single national education system.
- The states and territories are each responsible for their own educational administrations, although the overall structures are similar.
- Collaboration on matters of policy takes place in a council of ministers of education, and the role of the federal government has increased during the past two decades.

- State education departments recruit and appoint the teachers in government schools, supply buildings, equipment and materials, and provide limited discretionary funding for use by schools.
- In most jurisdictions, some responsibility for administration, staffing, and curriculum has devolved to regional offices and schools. The extent of devolution varies between jurisdictions.
- It is important to remember that one-third (33%) of school students in Australia attend non-government schools.

Compulsory schooling and grade structure

- Education is compulsory from 6 to 16 years of age, with several states extending the age of compulsory schooling.
- Children generally attend pre-school or kindergarten for one or two years part-time before starting school, although attendance numbers vary widely.
- Most children start primary school at five years of age and continue to Grade 6 or 7 (depending on the state) in their primary school.
- Students in Australian primary schools usually have one teacher for most subjects, and are promoted to the next grade each year.

- Secondary education is provided for either five or six years, depending on the length of primary education in the state.
- The first two years of secondary school typically consist of a general program followed by all students.
- In subsequent years, a basic core of subjects is supplemented with optional subjects available to students. Students in secondary schools generally have a different teacher for separate subject areas.

- In the final two years of secondary school, students have more scope to specialize, and a range of elective studies is provided from which students choose five or six.
- One of the most marked changes during the 1980s was an increase in the percentage of students who remained to complete secondary school.
- The percentage of secondary student starters remaining to the final year of school rose from 35% in 1980 to 77% in 1993. It has since declined a little, to 75% in 2006.

PISA “skill” coverage

- The skills covered by PISA are taught to a large extent in Australian schools, which is probably why we do better in PISA than in TIMSS.
- There has been a strong push for a number of years for problems to be set in real-world situations, and for students to be able to apply their knowledge to real-world situations.

Programme types

- After the compulsory years of schooling, students can choose to attend a vocational (TAFE) college or in some states complete a vocational final year qualification.
- There is (supposedly) no explicit tracking or streaming in Australian schools.

AUSTRALIA: ASSESSMENT

Assessment systems

- The National Assessment Program for Australia was established by Federal and State education authorities over the past five years.
- It involves full-cohort assessment in literacy and numeracy of students in Grades 3, 5, 7 and 9; a program of sample assessments at Grades 6 and 10 in science, civics and citizenship and information and computer technology (ICT) conducted every three years; and participation in TIMSS and PISA.

Purposes of testing

- The purposes of these testing programs are to both report information about student achievement based on a common test to parents, teachers and schools and to monitor the overall performance of the education system.
- There has been an increased emphasis on evaluation for accountability purposes and these testing programs reflect that emphasis.

Final year assessment

- At the end of secondary school all states conduct formal assessments of achievement.
- The examinations are conducted under the authority of state curriculum and assessment authorities by panels of experts in each of the subjects.

- The purpose of these assessments is to certify student achievement at the end of school.
- They also provide the basis for selection to courses in higher education.
- In most states the assessments are based on a combination of curriculum specific formal examinations conducted by a state authority and school-based assessments of student performance on specified tasks or assignments.

AUSTRALIA: TEACHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Pre-service education

- There are two models to gain the qualifications required to teach in Australian secondary schools.
 1. Students must have completed an undergraduate degree and a postgraduate diploma in education, which provides together the essential content and pedagogical knowledge required.
 2. Students complete a combined four year degree/diploma which combines pedagogical and content knowledge

Practicum

- In both models, completion of practicum is seen as essential. In the first model this is most commonly in the form of three “teaching rounds” of 2-3 weeks in which student teachers go out into schools and, under the guidance of experienced teachers, actually perform the work of a teacher.
- In the second model these are more often extended placements with experienced teachers over the final year of the course.

In-service education

- Teachers are encouraged to pursue higher education opportunities.
- It is also mandatory to participate in a variety of pedagogical and professional education programs that are shorter term and focussed on particular issues.

AUSTRALIA: WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Major educational issues

- Indigenous performance
- Performance of students in rural and remote areas
- Achievement of low socioeconomic students – equity
- Encouraging students to enter mathematics and science courses post-school
- Getting and keeping well-qualified teachers
- Improving learning!