

Utopia or Dystopia? A critical examination of the Melbourne Declaration

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Abstract

The signing of Melbourne Declaration by Australia's state and federal education ministers in December 2008 has set the agenda for Australia's educational future. The Melbourne Declaration seeks the creation of an educated citizenry and the investment in education is justified by the increased economic prosperity that such expenditure will generate. Belying its goals of equity and excellence, its emphasis on educational advancement via technological means infers that the declaration is underpinned by Human Capital theory. The proposed National Curriculum and the Digital Education Revolution are two examples of radical changes to education in Australia that have been facilitated by the agreement reached with this document. But what is the future being ushered in by the Melbourne Declaration? We seek in this paper to critically examine the implications of Melbourne Declaration for Australia's education systems.

Introduction

Educational policy always sits at the intersection of the past, present and future, with the latter often expressed in policy texts as an imagined desired future (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. xi).

The signing of Melbourne Declaration by Australia's state and federal education ministers in December 2008 has set the agenda for Australia's educational future. The proposed National Curriculum and the Digital Education Revolution are two examples of radical changes to education in Australia that have been facilitated by the agreement reached with this document. In tension with its stated goals of equity and excellence, the reoccurring emphasis on economic and educational advancement via technological means infers that the declaration is underpinned by Human Capital theory. The Melbourne Declaration seeks the creation of an educated citizenry and the investment in education is justified by the increased economic prosperity that such expenditure will generate. But what is the imagined desired future being envisioned in the Melbourne Declaration? We seek in this paper to critically examine the implications of Melbourne Declaration for Australia's education systems. We shall start our examination by situating the Melbourne Declaration in its historical, social and political context, and examining the influence of the global economy upon it. Then we shall turn to an exploration of the changes being facilitated by the Melbourne Declaration, before we evaluate the implications of this education policy.

The History of the Melbourne Declaration

Signed on the 5th December 2008 the Melbourne Declaration supersedes the 1989 Hobart Declaration and the 1999 Adelaide Declaration. The Melbourne Declaration outlines ‘The Educational Goals for Young Australians’ (Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2008) and represents collaboration and joint agreement between all Australian Education ministers – the federal education minister and the eight education ministers of the states and territories. Goal One states that ‘Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence’ and Goal Two is that ‘All young Australian become: successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens’ (p. 7). Taken at face value these goals are simple, unobjectionable examples of political rhetoric. Yet, a critical examination of the elements of the Melbourne Declaration and its antecedents suggests that these documents are underpinned by Human Capital theory and represents an economic reform agenda under the guise of educational improvement.

Many of the elements of the Melbourne Declaration were present in both the Hobart and Adelaide Declarations. Common elements of the three national educational goals documents include:

- the desire for Australia’s schooling system to be characterised by ‘excellence’
- a holistic view of education, which provides for students’ intellectual, physical, moral spiritual and aesthetic development.
- to develop in students an appreciation of our cultural heritage
- a desire to equip students for the future workplace and to meet the emerging needs of the economic workforce
- to foster positive attitudes to vocational training and life-long learning
- the creation of an active and informed citizenry
- provisions for the development of students’ fitness and health
- a robust curriculum that includes basic literacy and numeracy; computing and technological skills, maths and science; Australian history and geography, the creative arts, languages other than English, and a values education that includes ethics, environmental concerns and social justice.

In addition to these common elements, the Hobart Declaration (signed in 1989) describes the establishment of efforts to develop a national curriculum and the commitment of the states to the establishment of a common handwriting style, common age of school entry and strategies to improve the quality of teaching (MCEECDYA, 2009).

The common elements of the three documents align with the ‘new’ type of education advocated by the OECD for the development of the kinds of persons required in the emerging knowledge economy (Rizvi, 2008). The OECD suggests that education systems need to produce people who ‘are better able to work creatively with knowledge, are flexible, adaptable and mobile, are globally minded and inter-culturally connected, and are life-long learners’ (Rizvi, 2008, p. 78). It is our contention that all three iterations of Australia’s national educational goals are driven by an agenda of producing workers for the global economic workplace and that this agenda has found its fullest expression in the Melbourne Declaration.

Like the Hobart Declaration which precedes it, the Adelaide Declaration is a four page document and contains, not only the elements described above, but a more developed vision for social justice in Australian education. The Hobart Declaration sought to ‘promote equality of education opportunities, and to provide for groups with special learning requirements’ (MCEECDYA, 2009, p. 1). This is replaced in the Adelaide Declaration with one of the three

national goals being devoted to social justice and outlining over six points where improvements to equitable access to education are to be made (MCEETYA, 1999).

The Melbourne Declaration, at sixteen pages and joined by a four-year action plan companion document (MCEETYA, 2009), is considerably more expansive than the two preceding declarations. The Melbourne Declaration contains two, rather than three national goals for education and the concern for social justice so prevalent in the Adelaide Declaration is described as 'equity' and is twinned with the goal of 'excellence' in the Melbourne declaration. Concern for educational equity waxes and wanes through the three declarations and is most prominent in the Adelaide Declaration. The Melbourne Declaration details not just the two goals and a preamble but also describes the Australian governments' 'Commitment to Action' across eight areas:

- developing stronger partnerships
- supporting quality teaching and school leadership
- strengthening early childhood education
- enhancing middle years development
- supporting senior years of schooling and youth transitions
- promoting world class curriculum and assessment
- improving educational the outcomes for Indigenous youths and disadvantaged Australians, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds
- strengthening accountability and transparency (MCEETYA, 2009).

This 'new level of collaboration' (MCEETYA, 2009, p. 3) achieved with the signing of the Melbourne Declaration was perhaps facilitated by the fortuitous political happenstance of there being a Labor government in power at the federal level and in every state and territory with the exception of Western Australia. Thus the declaration was signed by all Australian Education Ministers, all of whom were members of the Labor party except for Dr Elizabeth Constable of Western Australia (an Independent). This level of political agreement and alignment meant that for the first time, the national educational goals were not just detailed but also joined with a document describing the key initiatives and strategies that the Australian governments would undertake to support the achievement of the goals. In the three years since the signing of the Melbourne Declaration many changes have been made to the education systems of Australia. We now turn our attention to these.

'A commitment to Action': The changes signalled by the Melbourne Declaration

The Melbourne Declaration describes not just the two educational goals for young Australians, but also eight interrelated areas in which the Australian governments have expressed a 'commitment to action' in both the Melbourne Declaration and the companion document *MCEETYA four-year plan 2009-2012* (MCEETYA, 2009). We shall here highlight some of the commitments which have been realised since the signing of the Melbourne Declaration. We attest that while these initiatives have been facilitated by the agreement reached with the signing of the Melbourne Declaration, these policies form a part of the Labor government's economic policy reform agenda and are not a direct result of the Melbourne Declaration. The Melbourne Declaration functions as a symbol of the Australian governments' commitment to educational betterment. We argue that behind that symbol, the policies for achieving the goals of the Melbourne Declaration are a constellation of (sometimes contradictory) policy initiatives aimed at economic reform and achieving higher productivity and participation in the global knowledge economy.

One such area is ‘Supporting quality teaching and school leadership’. To this end the federal Labor government have established the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL]. AITSL is responsible for: the ‘development of rigorous national professional standards, fostering and driving high quality professional development for teachers and school leaders, and working collaboratively across jurisdictions and engaging with key professional bodies’ (AITSL, 2011, para 1). Since its establishment AITSL has developed a set of professional standards for teachers and professional standards for principals and created resources for the professional development for teachers. Other commitments to supporting quality teaching and school leadership include the recognition and rewarding of quality teaching – to which the Gillard government has pledged \$425 million; national consistency in the registration of teachers; improved performance management in schools; and new pathways into teaching (which incorporates initiatives such as Teach for Australia and Teach Next). These regulatory mechanisms designed to ensure that Australian teachers are of sufficient ‘quality’ represent not just the latest shift in control over teaching from the states and territories to the federal level (Brennan, 2009) but also represent a local permutation of a global trend of increased surveillance of teachers’ work (Brennan, 2009; Rizvi, 2008).

The Melbourne Declaration outlines a commitment to strengthening Early Childhood Education. To this end the government is developing the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care. This investment in early childhood is justified in the Melbourne Declaration on two grounds. Firstly there is reference to the critical early years in children’s development for ‘setting the foundations for every child’s social, physical, emotional and cognitive development’ (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 11). The reoccurring reference through-out the Melbourne Declaration to participation in the economic workforce is the second reason why investment in early childhood education is justified; children ‘who participate in quality early childhood education are more likely to make a successful transition to school, stay longer in school, continue on to further education and fully participate in employment’ (p. 11). The inclusion of the early childhood sector in the Melbourne Declaration (not mentioned in the preceding documents) effectively ‘joins up’ (Ball, 2008) social problems to educational ones and brings the early childhood sector under a federal umbrella of education policies covering people from early childhood through to the end of their lives (i.e. through the utilisation of the concept of ‘life-long learning’). This connection between early childhood and workforce training is justified in economic terms, as is made clear in the Rudd government’s 2008 budget: “Early childhood, education, skills and workforce development policies could boost participation by 0.7 percentage points and productivity by up to 1.2 per cent by 2030. This corresponds to an increase in GDP of around 2.2 per cent, or around \$25 billion in today’s dollars” (Australian Government, 2008). This is a salient example of the way in which through policy, ‘education is now regarded primarily from an economic point of view. The social and economic purposes of education have been collapsed into a single overriding emphasis on policy making for economic competitiveness’ (Ball, 2008, p. 11). The commitment to early childhood education and this justification in terms of increased productivity demonstrates the employment of Human Capital theory in educational policy. The role that technology plays in this process is explained in our exploration of the government’s next commitment.

The Melbourne Declaration offers a commitment to supporting senior years of schooling and youth transition. This commitment includes among other things, the development and

implementation of the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (see MCEETYA, 2008b) and a commitment to 'ensuring learning in the senior years is supported by access to computers, online tools and resources, and teaching expertise in using Information and Communication Technologies [ICT]' (MCEETYA, 2009, p. 12). While both the former and latter have been met, the latter significant as it has been realised in the Rudd (and subsequent Gillard) governments' Digital Education Revolution [DER]. The Digital Education Revolution is also a realisation of the aspect of the goal that 'All young Australians become successful learners [who] are creative and productive users of technology, especially ICT, as a foundation for success in all learning areas' (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 8). The DER is \$2.2 billion commitment to ICT technological development in schools including the provision of all year 9 to year 12 students, and is also an essential part of the vision for the national curriculum. The Melbourne Declaration states that as 'a foundation for further learning and adult life the curriculum will include practical knowledge and skills development in areas such as ICT and design and technology, which are central to Australia's skilled economy' (p. 13). The emphasis on ICT in schools is an important part aspect of Human Capital theory representing the preparation of students for participation in the knowledge economy (Rizvi, 2008; Buchanan & Chapman, 2010).

This highlights further changes that have been justified by the Melbourne Declaration with its commitment to develop 'world-class' curriculum and assessment. To this end the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA] has been established and charged with the development of a national curriculum. The first stage of the national curriculum is due for substantial implementation by 2013 in most Australian states. In addition to the development of the national curriculum ACARA have the responsibility for the administration and reporting of the NAPLAN testing and this has been achieved through the development of the 'MySchool' website. This is a further mechanism by which the federal government is strengthening its control and authority over the states in matters related to education and changing the nature of teachers' work through the economy devices of techniques of accountability and efficiency (Ball, 2008). Apple (2006) describes the implementation of a national curriculum and a standardised testing regime as key steps in the marketisation of education.

The Melbourne Declaration's second-to-last commitment is to 'improving educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds' (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 15). Here the Australian government has committed to closing the gap for indigenous students, and is providing targeted support where there are areas of disadvantage, with a focus on school improvement in low socio-economic areas. 1.5 billion dollars have been pledged to support education reform in over 2500 of the country's most disadvantaged schools through the Smarter Schools National Partnerships programs (DEEWR, n.d.). This program gives targeted funding to disadvantaged schools for reforms in school leadership, teaching, student learning and community engagement but places the onus on the disadvantaged schools to develop ways of achieving these reforms.

The last area of commitment is to strengthening accountability and transparency. In the time since the signing of the Melbourne Declaration various initiatives have been met in this area, including the introduction of A to E reporting, and the establishment of the MySchool website which presents 'fair, public, comparable national reporting on individual school performance, including comparing individual school performance against schools with similar

characteristics' (MCEETYA, 2009, p. 18). This commitment is overseen by the governing bodies of both ACARA and AITSL, thus demonstrating how the various commitments outlined in the Melbourne Declaration overlap and interconnect.

These mechanisms are what Ball (2008) refers to as policy 'levers' and 'technologies' engaged in 'policy overload' or 'hyperactivism', frenetic policy related activities that are changing the nature of education. The changes ushered by the Melbourne Declaration represent not just both a triumph of collaborative federalism, but in this policy and the development of related initiatives such as national professional standards, standardised testing, and accountability and transparency it is possible to discern the influence of neoliberalism, globalisation and human capital theory. It is to a more in depth analyses of these influences that we now turn.

Globalisation, Education and Human Capital Theory

Globalisation has become a topic of increasing importance in education. Indeed, Apple asserts that it is crucial to consider globalisation in education as most policies and educational practices are underpinned by the increasing influence of an integrated global economy (Apple, 2010). For Apple, although the processes of globalisation are enacted differently across diverse settings, locations and educational systems, convergences and homogenisation are evident and can be discerned; particularly in policies that 'privilege choice, competition, performance and individual responsibility' (p. 2). Within the Australian context, the educational policies of the Howard, Rudd, and Gillard governments reflect the global emphasis on choice, competition and performance – and these concerns are plainly evident in the policies connected to the Melbourne Declaration - the nationalisation of the K to 12 curriculum, the ascendancy of NAPLAN testing, and the accountability and transparency promised by the 'Myschool' website.

Collin and Apple (2010) argue that the 'official' narrative of globalisation portrays it as the inevitable and irreversible process of corporate-led reorganisation of world economies, a process in which schools feature prominently. Globalisation, so the rhetoric goes, will lead to the development of a technological "informational" knowledge economy and schools serve as not only the sites where the future workforce for this economy will be prepared, educated and trained, but the increasing technologically mediated education of the future workforce will steer the unfolding process. Although the global information economy is portrayed as being disruptive of traditional educational practices, the work engendered by the future knowledge economy is envisioned as being more remunerative and engaging than previous economic regimes. (This narrative is not new; see, for example, Neill's 1995 critique). Apple (2010) makes clear that such an account is ahistorical and hegemonic, and that the dominant understanding of globalisation fails to make clear the asymmetric power relations underpinning it and the fact that the profits of the neoliberal globalisation agenda are spread unevenly across the globe and remain dependent on the labour of those who are unable to access and benefit from the informational economy.

The dominant belief in globalisation as the path to the knowledge economy has resulted in developed nations seeing technology dependent education as the means to 'outsmart' others in the race for scientific knowledge and technological innovation. This utopic vision has led to the 'common-sense' view that national prosperity, justice, and social cohesion 'rest on the creation of a high skilled workforce, with the knowledge, enterprise, and insights required to attract the global supply of highly-skilled, high-waged employed' (Lauder, Brown,

Dillabough & Halsey, 2006, p. 3). Various educational government policy initiatives such as the 'Australian Blueprint for Career Development' (MCEETYA, 2008b) and the Melbourne Declaration are underpinned by the unquestioned assumption that a technologically mediated education will generate the creation of a workforce ready to participate in the global knowledge economy. The connection between globalisation, economic competitiveness in a global economy and the role of the Australian education system to produce future workers is made explicit in the Melbourne Declaration:

Schools play a vital role in...ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion. [...] Globalisation and technological change are placing greater demands on education and skill development in Australia and the nature of jobs available to young Australians is changing faster than ever. [...] To maximize their opportunities for healthy, productive and rewarding futures, Australia's young people must be encouraged not only to complete secondary education, but also to proceed into further training or education (MCEETYA, 2008a, p.4).

A neoliberal agenda: Economic policy masquerading as Educational reform

We need to set for ourselves a new national vision – for Australia to become the most educated country, the most skilled economy and the best trained workforce in the world (Rudd and Smith, 2007, p. 5).

Educational policy reforms elsewhere share many similarities with those of Australia. A salient example is the political move undertaken by Tony Blair to shift education from the arena of social policy to economic policy (Furlong, 2008, p. 728). In his analysis of Tony Blair's legacy on teachers' professionalism in the UK, Furlong quotes Blair: "Education is the best economic policy we have" (1998, cited in Furlong, 2008, p. 728). Our Prime Minister, Julia Gillard has similarly expressed a belief in the economically transformative power of education stating that: 'the values I learnt in my parents' home – hard work, a fair go through education, respect – find themselves at the centre of Australia's economic debate' (Gillard's speech – The dignity of work, 2011, para. 192).

We note that the reform measures undertaken by the current Labor government are a continuation of the neoliberal agenda of the preceding Liberal government. For example, it is arguable that the current initiatives were made possible by the acceptance of the Council of Australian Governments [COAG] in 2006 (prior to the election of the Rudd government in 2007) that not only is national economic reform in Australia required but necessitates a significant investment in the country's human capital to achieve the goal of greater productivity. It is not our purpose to trace the increasing influence of neoliberalism in Australian politics as we do not have the space available to us, (see, for example, Connell, 2011 who argues that this process starts with the Hawke/Keating governments) we seek, instead, to highlight the points in which this influence can be discerned in the goals and policy levers connected with the Melbourne Declaration. Furthermore, we aim to articulate alternative readings and approaches to the Melbourne Declaration that allow us to see the goals as polyvalent and containing inherent tensions and contradictions. We shall now detail the way in which Human Capital theory is evident in this policy.

The theory of human capital was originally proposed by writers such as Gary Becker (1962, 1964) and Theodore Schultz (1962, 1971), who contend that "people enhance their capabilities as producers and as consumers by investing in themselves...These investments in people turn out not to be trivial on the contrary, they are of a magnitude to alter radically the usually measure of the amounts of savings and capital formation" (Schultz, 1962, p. 1). It has

been on this foundation that education has been conceptualised as an investment in the population (capital) of the future. Human capital theory has provided one mechanism through which the broader paradigm of neoliberalism has been extended into every aspect of social, cultural and political life. The Labor Party New Directions Paper of 2007 articulates this agenda:

Productivity was driven by the industrial revolution in the 19th century and the technological revolution in the 20th century. In the 21st century, a human capital revolution will drive productivity growth. That's why Labor is now calling for an education revolution in Australia (2007, p.3).

Yet despite the current the educational reform agenda being conceived in these rather narrow economic terms, human capital theory has provided education with the rationale for much needed financial investment (see Quiggin, 1999).

In tandem with this, some aspects of the Melbourne Declaration suggest the influence of Public Choice Theory. The emphasis on accountability and transparency, and the mechanisms for realizing these (the NAPLAN standardized tests, and the MySchool website) construct the field of education as a market that will be improved through the exercise of consumer choice (Devine & Irwin, 2005). There is an inherent tension evident within the Melbourne Declaration and its associated policies; schooling is simultaneously constructed as a market place, and as resource for the development of human capital. Although these theories reflect contradictory conceptualizations of schooling, both arise out of a neoliberal agenda.

'Neoliberalism' is generally used to describe a market-driven approach to economic and social policy that emphasise the efficiency of private enterprise and free markets. Neoliberal analysis centres not only on the economy, taxation and public expenditure, but also on the public sector and its economic efficiency; within this approach there "is one form of rationality more powerful than any other: economic rationality" (Apple, 2000, p.59). Although neoliberalism arises out of classical liberal beliefs in the power of the market to achieve social improvement, one of the key differences is neoliberalism's commitment to a strong regulatory state (Apple, 2006). Within this framework, education not only becomes a marketable commodity but its results must become reducible to 'performance indicators' measured and managed by government regulatory bodies (Apple, 2006, p. 474). This has created a situation by which public institutions can be appraised in economic terms, as well as by means which all forms of behaviour could be subjected to economic cost-benefit analysis. In Foucault's words, what neo-liberalism enables is an "analysis of non-economic behaviour through a grid of economic intelligibility" (2008, p. 248). As such, educational policy becomes redefined 'in terms of a narrower set of concerns about human capital development, and the role education must play to meet the needs of the global economy and to ensure the competitiveness of the national economy' (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 3).

We argue that when viewed within a broader context, the Melbourne Declaration and its antecedents, the Adelaide and Hobart Declarations, can be seen simply as policy substitutes for broader economic and social reform. In essence, education reform replaces much needed wider economic and social change (Connell, 2011) and as a consequence: 'Teachers and teaching become the objects of scrutiny and critique right at key junctures of social, economic, and cultural change' (Luke, 2006, p. 188). Although the Melbourne Declaration's call for an educated citizenry to increase national prosperity is based upon human capital theory, some of the mechanisms used to achieve the accountability called for in the Melbourne Declaration are indicative of Public Choice theory – highlighting the contradictory

ways in which neoliberalism has manifested within this particular education policy. This use of economic policy as the basis of educational reform means that some of the goals of the Melbourne Declaration are problematic in terms of their impact on education, for example the goal of equity and the concomitant emphasis on accountability. It is to these that we now turn.

Equity

For Australian schooling to promote equity and excellence, governments and all school sectors must improve educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 15).

The emphasis on promoting equity and excellence as an Australian educational goal, however worthwhile, creates some dilemmas. Does commitment to educational excellence take precedence, or do we focus on educational equity? Does such a conceptualisation draw a false distinction, that no system can be truly excellent without also being equitable, thereby balancing each of the claims equally or simply, is it that goals are neither really possible?

Recently Luke claimed “Australian schools are in effect currently serving the social and economic interests of slightly less than half of all Australian youth – despite over a decade of major and costly attempts at policy and curriculum revision, market-based reform, and business management techniques to schools systems” (2010, p. 340). MCEETYA (2008) identifies many of the students in which Luke is referring to; Indigenous students; students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, remote areas, refugees, homeless young people, and students with disabilities are named as the groups that with “targeted support can...achieve better educational outcomes” (p.15). Whilst such a notion seems logical enough, Reid argues, “It assumes that knowledge is neutral and that concepts such as cultural and social capital don’t exist; and it fails to acknowledge the ways in which the very structures of the curriculum can discriminate against certain groups of students” (2009, p. 5). Also seen within current reforms, the effort to impose dominant measures of standards, assessments, and accountability has consequences for both teachers and students. As McNeil (2000) argues in "over the long term, standardization creates inequities, widening the gap between the quality of education for poor and minority youth and that of more privileged student" (McNeil, 2000, p. 3). This suggests that goals of equity and excellence represent self defeating strategies when standardized national testing is the means by which attainment of these goals is measured.

Accountability

Ball (2008) describes the way in which policy discourses establish the need for reform at the same time proffering the solution. The discourses around accountability and transparency evident in the Melbourne Declaration function in this way. The logic of accountability and transparency are key drivers in current education reform based on the normative claim of, a right or need ‘to know’. “Parents, families and the community should have access to information about the performance of their school compared to schools with similar characteristics” (MCEETYA, 2008, pp.16-17).

1. With the governmental rationality outlined above, the techne being utilised has been through information delivered via NAPLAN and the MySchools website. The website allows for any member of the public with any purpose, to examine individual schools’ performances in the tests and their performance relative to ‘like’ schools. Exploring the ‘need for feedback information’ in educational policy in Belgium,

Simons noted, such a 'need' for feedback information elevates the status of testing to evidence, providing relevant, necessary and valid information and that the 'exchange of information mentioned above (and its supply, demand and use) should be regarded as a symptom of a new governmental regime', that far from being technically neutral, transparency offers a definitive mechanism of imposing accountability logic on the system, and 'that installs less evident power relations' (Simons, 2007, p. 532).

2. 'Schools need reliable, rich data on the performance of their students because they have the primary accountability for improving student outcomes' (MCEETYA, 2008, pp.16-17) whilst for parents and families, 'Information about the performance of individuals, schools and systems helps...make informed choices and engage with their children's education and the school community' (MCEETYA, 2008, pp.16-17). Reid (2009) claims that such notions of choice and accountability are associated with the broader policy assumptions of neoliberalism. He states:
3. At the heart of this approach to accountability is competition – the belief that the best way to encourage quality is to get individuals and institutions to compete for custom, by providing 'consumers' with comparative information about schools....Extending the education market and improving equity are incompatible policies (Reid, 2009, p. 7).
4. At no time is the government held accountable in this logic of schooling. Schools become accountable through the publication of results – and the wider social problems that contribute to these results are rendered invisible. Such normative statements very successfully shift the focus from a lack of support for these for education in the past, to one that is now being remedied by the new federal government and their reform mechanisms of accountability and transparency. 'School performance and teachers' teaching are closely tied to the process of inspection, promotion and in some cases financing and rewarding (or punishment)' (Sahlberg, 2006, p. 265). The consequences, Sahlberg continues, 'Teaching aims at high scores on standardized achievement tests. That typically leads to teacher-centred teaching and motivates students towards rote learning. Creativity and risk-taking will not be favoured' (2006, p. 265). It can be seen that the goals of equity and accountability as they are expressed in the Melbourne Declaration are problematic. Are the other aspects of this document equally troubling, or can this policy document offer a positive impact for education in Australia?

Conclusion: Utopia or Dystopia?

Futures are not inevitable. They are imagined and created, but always with the legacy of the past bound into their fabric. (Robertson, 2005, p. 167).

The nature of teachers' work is changing due to policies such as the DER, the NAPLAN standardised testing regime, the increased regulatory and bureaucratic oversight of the teaching and the increased federal control of a traditionally state-based profession. In these changes one can detect the influence of the globalisation of education and neoliberal policies where investment in education systems is justified in terms of the production of workers in the knowledge economy. While these processes have been tied into the goals of the Melbourne Declaration, they also fit with the Labor Party's reform agenda, and correspond to global trends in education.

It is hard to determine whether the goals of the Melbourne Declaration are laudable or problematic without an adequate benchmark. For this purpose we draw upon the idea of the social purposes of education, as described by Cranston, et al, (2010) and Reid (2010). Reid describes three main purposes of education as being democratic, individual and economic. Democratic schooling, that is schooling to enhance the social fabric of society, Reid characterises as being a *public purpose* of schooling. Individual schooling is schooling to

secure individual advantage in economic and social life, within this purpose education is treated as a commodity, and Reid characterises this as schooling for *private purposes*. The economic purpose of schooling ‘aims to prepare young people as competent economic contributors. Since this combines public economic benefits with private economic benefits, it is a constrained public purpose’ (Reid, 2010, p. 1).

Reid characterises the Rudd/Gillard governments as chiefly focusing on the economic purposes of education – their policies are justified as the preparation of human capital for the labour market. In Reid’s view ‘this dilution of the public purposes of education has had negative impacts in the idea and practice of education as a common good’ (2010, p. 2). He calls for a return to a renewed emphasis on a democratic public purpose for Australian education. Reid notes that the Melbourne Declaration represents a ‘formal commitment’ to the public purposes of education. We argue that the economic purposes of education are not only clearly discernible throughout the Melbourne Declaration, but dominate it. Although the economic purposes of education are heavily present they co-exist with goals that support the public purposes of education. For example, Lovat, et al. (2011) highlight the commitment contained within the Melbourne Declaration to a holistic vision of education, with its declaration that ‘Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians (MCEECDYA, 2008, p.4). For Lovat, et al. the Melbourne Declaration provides a justification for the inclusion of values pedagogy in schooling.

Anderson and Fraillon (2009) call for the measurement of non- academic outcomes as a means to improve teaching practice. They use the holistic vision of education espoused within the Melbourne Declaration as a justification of their goal. Likewise, Martin (2010) refers to the Melbourne Declaration’s support of the physical development of young Australians to support his call for the inclusion of outdoor education in the national curriculum. Thus, with its holistic vision of education the Melbourne Declaration is used to justify the inclusion of educational goals that serve the public good. While the Melbourne Declaration has facilitated the implementation of policies that are changing the nature of education in Australia, it nonetheless contains possibilities and inconsistencies that can be exploited in the pursuit of progressive educational goals.

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