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## THE ECLIPSE OF EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY?

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## ABSTRACT

*Equality of opportunity has been the most important organising principle in education policies in postwar Australia. Equality of opportunity was central to the expansion of publicly-funded education: the promise of upward social mobility through education had broad appeal. Equality of opportunity objectives are now being displaced by the newer and more limited concept of market equity. Equality of opportunity usually implies equality of the educational resources provided to each child, and sometimes goes further to mean positive discrimination in favour of the disadvantaged. However, equity is usually understood only as the right to participate in education.*

*Whereas economic objections used to work in tandem with equality of opportunity policies, the two are now often in contradiction. Further, the failure of the older equality policies to deliver on their promises has partly eroded people's support for the equality of opportunity perspective, especially middle-class support. There is a growing emphasis on relative individual advantage through education. This new policy environment threatens to result in significantly greater inequality of opportunity.*

## THE ECLIPSE OF EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY?

## Introduction: equality versus economics

In Australian education there has been a long-standing tension between the policy objective of equality of opportunity and economic policy objectives that governments have sought to implement within the education sector, such as those related to efficiency and to the development of education's contribution to economic growth.

The equality/economy conflict is by no means an absolute one, and at times both sets of policies have led to the same practical conclusions and have been implemented harmoniously. At other times equality objectives and economic objectives have been in conflict. Generally, this has led to the modification of one or other sets of objectives: one has usually won out over the other.

The issues involved are central ones: for teachers, for those who train teachers and for those who study Australian education. Much education policy and politics is fought out around respective claims about equality and about education's economic contribution. This tension is endemic to education as a social process. Education is about open-ended human development, but education is also funded because it is meant to build a better labour force.

Teachers face equality/economy tensions on a daily basis. To what extent should the teacher's work be directed to all pupils in common? To what extent should the teacher spend time with those students who appear most capable, most receptive to teaching and learning and likely to make the best use of their education? At a system level, to what extent should we focus on raising universal standards - and to what extent should we concentrate on a minority of 'gifted' students identified for higher achievement?

Ultimately the shifting policy balances between equality objectives and economic objectives affect everyone working in education. They affect what we are required to do, and they affect what is possible. Policy objectives are matters of day-to-day pragmatics - part of the conditions of possibility of our work - but they also connect to the deeper level of commitment to that work. As policy objectives change, teaching practice tends to change (although not usually as much). Teacher training may also change. New policy objectives may suggest that different sorts of people should be recruited as teachers.

This article argues that we are now experiencing a major shift in the governing policy objectives in Australian education, affecting both schools and post-school education. This shift results from a new resolution of the equality/economy tensions, one less favourable to broad equality objectives than before. The paper begins by outlining the nature of that shift. It then goes on to explain the causes and the dynamics of the change, drawing on recent developments in Australian education.

### From equality of opportunity to market equity

One person who knew more than most about the equality/economy tensions was Professor Peter Karmel. Karmel himself was an economist, but he was also an educator. The founding Vice-Chancellor of Flinders University, he became the principal national education policy-maker as chair of the Interim Committee for the Schools Commission (1973), the Universities Commission between 1971 and 1977 and the Tertiary Education Commission (1977 to 1982), and the Quality of Education Review Committee in 1984 and 1985.

On 18 May 1962 in Melbourne, Karmel - then a professor of economics at the University of Adelaide - delivered what was to become an influential address on **Some economic aspects of education**. Karmel was responding to the then new and important arguments of the human capital economists, who claimed that there should be a major expansion of education on the grounds that education directly created economic growth (Schultz 1960, 1961; Denison 1962; Becker 1975). It was assumed by most economists and policy makers - although not all (Friedman 1962) - that such an expansion would have to be funded by governments because reliance on private finance would result in a level of demand for education that would fall short of society's needs.

Karmel agreed with the conclusion of the human capital theorists. He said that the expansion of education was a high priority. He noted that in international terms, Australia's participation rate and Australia's level of spending on education were both too low. He also agreed with some of the human capital reasoning. He endorsed the claims that education could contribute to improvements in economic productivity, and said that international comparisons showed that there was a "high correlation between the educational efforts of different countries and their annual rates of production" (Karmel 1962: 3), although this was not conclusive proof of a causal relationship. Later in the speech he became more emphatic, asserting that:

*...I believe that in Australia we can and should spend much more on education than we are presently doing. Education has directly beneficial effects on production and the rate of economic growth, so that there is a sense in which it pays for itself by future production, just as any ordinary investment in capital equipment does.*

(Karmel 1962:19)

But unlike most of the human capital economists, for Karmel the argument for educational expansion did not stop there. To him the overriding objective was not economic productivity or economic growth, but the equalisation of educational opportunity. At bottom, he saw the case for education as a democratic one rather than an economic one:

*You will say here is homo economicus in his most extreme form. Here is a fellow who measures the value of education by its effect on national production and its rate of growth. May I therefore say straight out that I do not hold that the main virtue of education reposes in its economic consequences. Quite the reverse. I should tonight advocate a greater educational effort in Australia, even if its sole economic consequence is to reduce national productivity by withholding more young people from the workforce for more years. I should do this since I believe that democracy implies making educational opportunities as equal as possible and that the working of democracy depends on increasing the number of citizens with the capacity for clear and informed thought on political and social issues.*

(Karmel 1962: 4-5).

In the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s, this was the philosophy of many of the teachers and administrators working in the expanding public system of schooling, higher education and further education. Equality of opportunity justified the development of individualised teaching strategies, the recognition of special needs and the differentiation of the teaching service into specialist positions, the demands for reforms to systems of assessment and tertiary selection, as well as the growth of enrolments in the post-compulsory years.

Equality of opportunity - understood mostly in terms of access to careers, to opportunities for upward social mobility - also fitted well with popular aspirations. In the long postwar boom from 1945 to 1975 there were widespread and growing expectations about the education as the route to better jobs and a better life. Between 1950-51 and 1975-76 government spending in education in Australia rose from 1.3 per cent to 5.7 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (Karmel 1966: 4-6; ABS 1982).

The situation has now fundamentally changed. Investment in human capital is on the Federal Government's policy agenda. But in educational policy-making, in the politics of education and in

public discussion of education, equality of opportunity is being reduced to the more limited and market-specific concept of *equity*, and is becoming marginal. As in the 1960s education for national economic interest is occupying centre-stage but, unlike the 1960s, it is no longer coupled with a strong version of equality of opportunity. The tensions between equality of opportunity and education for human capital are being resolved in favour of the latter. And the human capital is increasingly to be privately funded - government spending on education fell to 4.9 per cent of GDP in 1987-88 (ABS 1982). A greater proportion of education and effort is being privately financed, through school fees, the HECS, postgraduate fees and sale of services to companies. This means that, to a greater degree, the benefits of education go to those who can pay for them. This increases inequalities in the distribution of education.

This is not simply a matter of changes to government policies. There has also been a shift in the popular mood. An increasing number of parents and students now believe that investment in private schooling or in fee-based postgraduate courses in the way to maximise the benefits of education. The competitive struggle for relative advantage through education is based on the object of inequality of opportunity, not *equality of opportunity*, and this struggle corrodes the older principle.

To explain the change that is now taking place we need to look at that change in its historical context. But first, what do we mean by equality in education?

#### Definitions

Here *equality of opportunity* refers to a system of formal education in which students are differentiated only on the basis of educational merit. In a system based on equality of opportunity, competition between students is seen as "fair" in the sense that income and wealth, sex, national and cultural background, school type, geographical location, etc, play no part in deciding students' fates. All students are seen to have the same opportunity to succeed. Success is based on the unity of prior natural "ability" (usually understood as an individual rather than a social characteristic) and hard work. It is assumed that ability is evenly distributed by social group (Karmel Report 1973: 16-17).

Equality of opportunity should be distinguished from equality of outcomes, but the two concepts are compatible. *Equality of outcomes* does not

mean that all students individually reach the same educational level. It means a system of formal education in which the educational achievement of students cannot be distinguished on the basis of income and wealth, class, sex, national origin, school type and geographical location, etc. Therefore equality of outcomes serves as a test of, and a precondition of, equality of opportunity:

*The test of whether equality of opportunity existed would then be that those going on to higher education were drawn from all groups in the same proportion as each group was represented in the population.*

(Karmel Report 1973: 17)

Unless there is equality of outcomes at the end of schooling there cannot be equality of opportunity in entrance to higher and further education.

Equality of outcomes has usually been seen as outcomes in terms of either learning achievement or the level of credential achieved - mostly the latter. (There are other outcomes of schooling, such as social and cultural experiences. These outcomes are important, albeit immeasurable, but are not usually considered in the context of equality policies.)

#### Conditions required by equality of opportunity

When the implications of equality of opportunity policies are followed through in full, they require far-reaching changes to education.

The commonsense assumption is that equality of opportunity requires "equal, and, in the main, uniform provision" in all institutions within a common system (Karmel Report 1973: 16). However, students come to formal education affected by prior inequalities, implying the need for positive discrimination: "More equal outcomes from schooling require unequal treatment for children" (Karmel: 22). More fundamentally, as the Karmel Report pointed out "factors in the culture of the school, its 'hidden curriculum', favour children of some backgrounds and discriminate against others" (Karmel 1973: 21). This breaks down the assumption that the production of educational merit is culturally neutral and brings the very emphasis on "individual achievement" into doubt, as the Karmel Report in fact acknowledged (Karmel 1973: 21).

### Limits of the 1973 to 1975 equality policies

At this point consensus on equality of opportunity policies has usually broken down. In mainstream policies, the equality of outcomes test has mostly been modified in order to evade the radical implications of the equality goal. The highwater mark of educational equality policies in Australia was in the 1973 period of the Whitlam ALP government. Nonetheless, that government stopped short of what its Karmel Committee called "the doctrinaire pursuit of equal average outcomes for all social groups" (Karmel 1973: 23). The final formulation of the Karmel Report was limited and ambiguous:

*The Committee values the right of every child, within practicable limits, to be prepared through schooling for full participation in society, both for his own and for society's benefit.*

*... there are good reasons for attempting to compensate for some extent through schooling for unequal out-of-school situations in order to ensure that the child's overall condition of upbringing is as free of restriction due to circumstances as public action through the schools can make it.*

(Karmel Report 1973: 11)

Although it set up a common administrative framework for Federal funding, linking grants to private schools to the average resources of public schools, the Whitlam Government failed to establish one common public system of schooling. The elite private schools were tolerated within a dual public/private structure of schooling. These schools continued to operate selective entry policies in favour of wealthier families, and hence were able to marshal superior resources and offer apparently better prospects of progression to higher education. Their position was further strengthened by Government funding (Marginson 1985). While these schools maintained their independence it was not possible even to obtain equal resources (material and cultural) in each school, let alone a redistribution of advantage in favour of the poorest schools.

The Whitlam Government's tertiary education reforms also fell short of opportunity. Although students continued to complete secondary school on an unequal basis by social group, the Government failed to open up special and additional routes to higher education for students from disadvantaged groups - let alone abolish traditional academic selection. It merely

abolished tertiary fees and established needs-based student allowances - "merely", because these measures equalised financial conditions only for those *already* admitted to higher education.

It was only later, when some colleges of advanced education began to open up non-academic entry to mature age students, that the fuller benefits of the abolition of fees were realised.

But the high status high income-earning professional training courses, such as medicine and law, continued to select students on the basis of Year 12 scores, without modification. These courses continued to offer a disproportionate share of places to private school students, using arguments about standards and university autonomy as shields against equality reforms.

### Support for equality of opportunity

Limited and contradictory as they were, the equality of educational opportunity policies had a powerful popular appeal in the 1960s and early 1970s. They were crucial to the election of the Whitlam Government in 1972.

As noted, these policies connected on one hand with economic arguments about the need to broaden and deepen the skill base, and on the other with popular desires to share knowledge and cultural resources once monopolised by the upper middle class. Most importantly, they offered the new prospect of upward social mobility to the many children of the postwar baby-boom generation. For the parents of these children, hopes of a better social world and a strong sense of justice were conflated with aspirations for individual futures: it was an educational world typified by "egalitarian individualism" (Kapferer 1989: 123). For social reformers, equality of educational opportunity would lead to a society in which placement would be based only on individual merit, not on inherited privilege. It was the route to the abolition of class and inequality. For ambitious parents, it was their children's route to the professions.

During the post-war economic boom and the growth of services and government employment, significant upward mobility did occur. For example, the growth of teaching itself provided many working class, female and country students with the opportunity to enter the professions. But from the 1970s on the number of graduates at each level of education was growing faster than

the people working in the professional occupations.

### Disillusionment with the old equality of opportunity goals

The publicly-funded expansion of post-compulsory education was associated with equality of opportunity policies distributed the cultural benefits of education more widely and, one suspects, more equally. But equality of outcomes, as measured by the places in higher education distributed to students from each socio-economic category, was not achieved. (There was more visible progress in relation to female participation, which reached the level of 50 per cent of students by 1987.)

But perhaps more important in fostering disillusionment with the old policies was that the *rewards* of participation in education turned out to be less than expected. Labour market opportunities for graduates are determined not by education itself, but by the labour markets. After the international recession of 1974-1975, the number of jobs was growing more slowly at a time when the number of those with educational credentials was increasing strongly. Between the mid 1960s and the mid 1980s the number of graduates at bachelor level increased almost seven times while the total labour force increased little over one third. The proportion of the full-time work force holding post-school qualifications rose from 24.6 per cent in 1969 to 49.6 per cent in 1989. The proportion holding degrees rose from 3.2 per cent to 11.2 per cent (ABS 1984, ABS 1989).

With the number of workers holding educational qualifications now more plentiful, the credential level for entry into many jobs rose and the pay accruing to a constant level of credential fell in relative (and sometimes in absolute) terms. Whereas in 1969 a degree holder aged from 25 to 34 years earned 79 per cent more than the average worker in the age group, by 1981 this differential had fallen to 24 per cent (Marginson, forthcoming).

In a real sense the value of educational qualifications - their value to employees, and therefore their value to the holders of the qualifications - had fallen substantially. Education was more necessary than ever for participation in the middle and upper echelons of the labour market, but it delivered less than ever before. The resulting perception that "standards were falling" coincided with doubts about the

1960s human capital claims concerning the economic benefits of education - claims that looked foolish after the negative economic growth of the mid-1970s (Marginson 1989).

The declining labour market value of credentials, and increasing competition, exacerbated the drive for *relative advantage* through education - attendance at a high status private school, the highest possible Year 12 score, entry to the most favoured higher education courses - as the means of realising social and occupational aspirations.

"Individualist egalitarianism" had been split in two and parents felt forced to move one way or the other. When the problem became posed as sticking to principles (keeping the child in public schooling) or doing the best for the child (going private), for a growing number of parents the choice became almost inevitable. More and more people believed that they could only realise the individual goals fostered in the equality of opportunity era by pursuing *unequal opportunities* through investment in private education.

Government funding policies encouraged the growth of private schooling (especially in the last three years of the Fraser Government), providing the sites where these ambitions could be fostered, for an increasing number of middle-class families. It had become clear that educational selection was *not* socially and culturally neutral, destroying the ethical basis of equality of opportunity policies. In any case, in the environment of hyper-competition, parents felt impelled to find a way of over-determining educational selection, in order to maximise their child's opportunities.

### The "inequality is inevitable" myth

Popular opinion was therefore receptive to the arguments run from 1984 onwards by ALP Finance Minister Senator Peter Walsh and Employment, Education and Training Minister John Dawkins, in support of the reintroduction of tertiary fees.

Walsh, Dawkins and others argued along lines popularised by Milton Friedman that free higher education constituted a regressive income transfer. As the Government Committee set up to propose a new user payment was to put the argument in 1988:

*The fundamental inequity in our present system of financing higher education is that a small and privileged section of the community who benefit from access to higher education make no direct*

contributions to their tuition costs. The bulk of the funding falls on Pay as You Earn taxpayers, the majority of whom are middle to low income earners and who will only receive in return the valuable but amorphous benefit of living in a well educated society. (Wran Report 1988: 15).

If this argument had been raised in the late 1960s/early 1970s, the policy response most consistent with the then dominant policy of equality of opportunity would have been to propose measures to radically alter the socio-economic composition of higher education. Indeed, the abolition of fees was sold (wrongly) as precisely such a measure. But in the 1980s the Walsh/Dawkins argument fitted in with a widespread perception that inequality of education opportunity was *normal and natural*. That was a commonsense response to the disillusioning experience of the past equality of opportunity policies, and the increasing competitiveness of both education and the labour markets.

Further, the claim that the egalitarian reforms of the past had failed was a powerful method of disposing of any and every such egalitarian reform in the future.

It was only a short step to the selling of market policies such as the return of fees which really *did* make inequality of opportunity *inevitable*, but appeared to be more realistic. Further, if it was assumed that the existing inequalities were here to stay, user pays policies could claim to be fairer than the alternative.

There was a certain sleight of hand in the Government's construction of this "inequality is inevitable" myth. The Labor Ministers never actually put it as boldly as this, continuing to profess a commitment to access or fairness. And they had to sidestep evidence that there had been certain improvements in equality of opportunity: more women students, more mature age students, some increase in the proportion of students whose fathers were manual workers (HERT 1985). Nonetheless, these obstacles were overcome. The debate was won, and it was crucial in displacing Labor's traditional reform commitment to equality of opportunity, ushering in the new concept of *equity* and clearing the way for the installation of market exchange in post-school education.

### The present policy environment: market equity

The new concept of equity in education is quite different from the old concept of equality of opportunity.

Equality of opportunity could be *measured* by reference to outcomes. Equity is harder to pin down. Its meaning is more subjective and less quantitative. Equity is usually used in terms of its dictionary meaning of justice and fairness. A wide variety of systems can be just or fair, depending on what has become normalised as fair.

Equity can therefore vary somewhat in its use. When some progressivist education reformers are using it, the term can still be interchangeable with the sharp end of equality of opportunity. When market economists are using the term it takes on the more limited *and opposing* meaning of the right to invest in the education market - equal rights to participate in a market in which social inequalities are natural, are sanctioned and are legitimated.

The substitution of "equity" has blunted the earlier equality of opportunity policies and facilitated the switch from the progressivist education reformers' idea of equity to the market economists' idea of equity. Government policy discourse increasingly leans towards the latter approach. The main aspects of the mainstream Government/media/administration understanding of equity are that it is individualist, that it is about access to education but not what happens after access has been achieved, and that its principal purpose is economic rationality rather than social justice - except to the extent that social justice is seen as economically rational.

Equity is also *less important* than was equality of opportunity. It is no longer as central to securing social consent for the system and it no longer threatens to reform the internal distribution of resources between institutions, or between students by social group.

Equality of opportunity was once coupled with economic objectives as the joint *raison d'être* of policy. Now equity is definitely subordinate to the instrumentalist economic discourse. The new organising principle emerging to take the place of equality of opportunity is *the market*. The market

and economic utilitarianism (instrumentalism) are the new means/ends coupling in education policy. The market has tremendous purchase in education because of its ascendancy in the broader economic and social policy debate, although market education is perhaps less attractive at a popular level than was equality of opportunity in its heyday.

### Limits of policies based on equity

In the Federal Government's view, equity is about access to or participation in post-compulsory education. All have a right to this access, which is seen as a key determinant of social justice. In fact the Government has redefined poverty as lack of educational qualifications (Dawkins 1988a).

But the economic argument for equity is probably more important than the democratic argument (Dawkins 1988b: 53). Equity policies are seen to maximise the skill base: the Federal Government has returned those 1960s economic readings of equality of opportunity which stressed the need to take up all available talent. Indeed, the difference is that now *all* students are potential skilled workers (OECD 1987) and therefore all should participate in post-compulsory education.

However, equity is silent on what it is that they are participating in. Perhaps because equity derives more from higher education than schools (and therefore does not take into account a tradition of equalised institutions), contemporary equity policies do not require the different forms of participation to be equal in value. To repeat, equity stops at the point of entry to the education market, and in the neo-classical market it is inefficient to interfere with the distribution of resources, or the process of production.

This is a very limited conception of equality. After all, we share with the Packers and the Murdochs the right to enter the share market and buy \$100 million worth of shares on the stock exchange. The only obstacle is the availability of the finance and the information with which to choose the best buy.

Because equity does not seek the equalisation of the conditions under which opportunities are taken up, it does not necessarily imply a need for policies of positive discrimination. It does not require equal capacity to buy. It does not require an examination of, or compensation for, cultural specificity in the curriculum and the system of student assessment and selection, to the extent that this cultural specificity discriminates against

some social groups. When the market equity perspective becomes dominant, the old idea that governments should intervene to create equality of educational resources received by all students, to enable a fair and objective educational competition to take place, is necessarily set aside.

Equity in this sense does not require equality of outcomes by social group. The market discourse assumes inequalities are individual rather than social, and they are both natural and inevitable. In this framework, the quality of the participation achieved by each student is determined by the student's own ability and/or ability to pay for education. Success or failure in and through education is seen to be a function of individual behaviour. Therefore equity policies are about the rights of individuals, not the rights of groups.

In the longer run, it may be that what happens to social groups will drop off this policy agenda. This would be consistent with the parallel shift in human capital thinking: in human capital theory, education is now seen largely as a private benefit. The old 1960s assumption that the social benefits of education considerably exceed the private benefits - providing a strong case for government intervention - has now been discarded by the neo-classical economists (Marginson 1989).

Some have argued that to the extent that education becomes produced on a market basis it might be more equitable for opportunities to be distributed on the basis of capacity and willingness to invest in education, rather than educational merit. This is the view of the free market-orientated Centre for Policy Studies, which carries the market logic considerably further than does the Federal Government. As the Centre put it in 1987:

*Meritocratic selection is based on the assumption that those performing well at the year 12 examination are more likely to succeed in, and make better use of tertiary education ... An alternative method of rationing entry is by the charging of fees. Willingness to pay the free then replaces exceeding the cut-off score as the eligibility criterion. The former is probably better than the latter as an indicator of motivation: one does not outlay, say \$6,000 for a year's enrolment without either a genuine interest in the course or a genuine desire for the qualification it leads to. Since motivation and ability (as measured by matriculation score) are substitutable over a substantial range in most*

tertiary studies it is possible that a better motivated but less able group would perform as satisfactorily, or better, than the converse. (Freebairn et al. 1987: 108-109)

### Implications of this new environment

As noted, in recent years there has been a return to emphasis on the economic benefits of investment in education (OECD 1987). Unlike the 1960s, fiscal policy has shifted to smaller government, and there is no longer the concern expressed by Karmel in 1962 that private demand for education might be insufficient. This is because the penalties of leaving education early are now very obvious. Thus governments no longer need to provide equal educational opportunities in order to maximise participation. Inferior opportunities are taken up, because they are better than non-participation. There are limits to an increase in educational participation on these terms, although these limits have not yet been reached.

Thus - providing participation rates continue to rise - the Government no longer sees reforms of "equity" as central to the national interest. The reality is that if the Federal Government's explicit policies on "equity" were dropped tomorrow this would not make much difference to educational practices except to signify the decisive defeat of the social reform perspective in education. It would not mean a major change in material provision. Few resources have been committed to the current equity policies, partly due to the successful popularisation of the flawed argument that there is no proven link between increased spending on education and improved outcomes, including social outcomes (for an influential version of this argument about the 'futility' of resources, see Hanushek 1986). But the bottom line of current policy is that ultimately the educational market, untouched by government hands, will produce the fairest outcome.

One of the most serious problems of an educational system in which the market is the chief organising principle - and we are moving towards such a system - is that it places beyond the reach of policy those educational inequalities which are the consequence of deliberate human actions. It makes them into matters of economics rather than politics - and therefore outside the ambit of governments, which by definition must refrain from interference in the 'free' market. Thus, grossly unequal outcomes are made to look like they are 'natural' and inevitable. But such outcomes are not inevitable. They are the result of

conscious and identifiable actions, by governments and by market agents.

There are a number of implications of this downgrading of concern about equality, and the associated growth of market exchange in education. If the trends continue:

1. Inequalities of opportunity, and inequalities of outcomes by social group, will increase markedly.
2. Inequalities have always been inadequately monitored and measured (for example, there are no good longitudinal data on the socioeconomic composition of students in higher education). If concern about equality slips far enough, it will not be measured at all and we will lose an essential reference point from which to judge the education system.
3. If capacity to pay more completely rules entry, the contradictions inherent in the new concept of equity will become apparent. Equity assumes universal participation on an unequal basis. But as supply and demand are brought into line, the high-demand high-fee areas will become priced out of the reach of most people. The opportunity costs factors and loan discounting periods will become too large. Significant areas of professional training will become exclusive, monopolised by small groups which are protected by high fee barriers. (So much for rights of entry.)
4. Remedial programs, bridging programs and other forms of special assistance for certain categories of students will be weakened or phased out. Individuals will be expected to take responsibility for their own educational success, i.e. realise the value of their own education investments.

### Teacher training in the new environment

How do we respond to these developments? Policy trends have a good deal of inertia and, like ocean liners, it is difficult to turn them around quickly. But my personal view is that it is both desirable and possible to shift policy back towards greater concern about equality in and through education. It would be unfortunate if the ethics of *Wall Street* were allowed to gain more ground in what is meant to be a public service, a social process committed to the common good. We need a renewed commitment to equality of treatment in the way we educate.

One strategy would be propose measures to bring about greater equality by social group in entry to the high-income professions - medicine, law, etc. This is the heart of the equality debate. (This change might result in a fall in the average earnings in those professions, but that would be no bad thing.) Policies to bring about greater equality of access to the professions would undoubtedly face resistance - the debate about the Victorian VCE shows that. But it is an essential step, one the 1970s equality reforms failed to take, seriously undermining their credibility.

We also need to promote more discussion and debate about these policy issues. The way our education develops is a function of the work of every administrator, every teacher, and every teacher trainer. It is necessary that teachers in training become able to talk about equality and about markets in education. These debates are likely to become increasingly controversial, and there is much at stake.

The Australian education system of the future is in our own hands, and in the hands of parents and others of goodwill. To adapt a slogan often used in talk about Governments, we get the education that we deserve.

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## PREFERRED MODELS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EDUCATION

### A WESTERN AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE

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#### INTRODUCTION

Early childhood teacher education in Australia continues to be a topic of contention. The erosion of specialized early childhood courses during the early 1980's was indicated by Briggs (1984) in the face of then new shared structures with primary teacher education. Restructuring of courses at that time was brought about by amalgamations of many higher education institutions which provided courses for teachers. At that time, the tertiary education sector began what has become the most significant post-war re-arrangement of higher education Australia has witnessed. Course developments in 1984 were illustrative of the kinds of amalgamations which were taking place and attention was on "rationalization" of many courses within the college sector as it moved towards university designation.

To-day, early childhood teacher education courses are considerably different from those described by Briggs in 1984. On a national scale, connections with primary teaching courses have altered and much of the character of traditional early childhood preparation is again apparent.

However, the preparation of early childhood teachers in each State and Territory is now being challenged by new moves to restructure teacher education in this country and to develop a nationwide teaching profession (K-12) with national teacher registration, and national salary benchmarks and classifications. Early childhood teacher education in this exercise is subsumed in a teacher education model focused on the school as work-place.

The Australian Education Council Report on Teacher Education (1990) advocated directions for pre-service teaching courses which differ in notable ways from the style and composition of the present Australian Early Childhood programmes observed recently (Tayler, 1990). Now more than ever, is the time to document clearly the reasoning behind certain present early childhood course attributes and to consider critically what constitutes a sound preparation for early childhood specialists. National, system-

wide changes to teacher education generally need to be instituted in full knowledge of the scope and diversity of teaching in the early childhood field and with recognition of the specialized needs of teachers of young children employed in a wider work-place than the school. Early Childhood Education nationally, spans child care, kindergarten and the early primary years.

Catering effectively for any group in teacher education requires giving attention to the specific contexts in which the group will operate and linking the programme to the dominant philosophies in the profession - early childhood, primary, or secondary. In particular, beliefs about the ways children of different ages think and learn and beliefs about what constitutes appropriate educational provision for children in early childhood, primary and secondary years should impact on the design and implementation of teacher education programmes for teachers working in these sectors.

This paper outlines the features of early childhood teacher education considered important by early childhood teacher educators in Western Australia, where current courses differ in marked ways from those of other Australian States and Territories. Included are several issues for consideration, as these pertain to all Australian early childhood teacher education programmes and must be debated in the process of developing national responses about appropriate directions and provisions for Australian early childhood teacher education. The tensions between current reform plans (AEC, 1990) and present Australian early childhood programmes are also illustrated in some cases by reference to data collected by the writer (Tayler, 1990).

#### Early childhood teacher education in Western Australia (1990)

Because of known differences in early childhood programmes across the country, some attention is given first to highlighting factors about the Western Australian programmes which differ in substantial ways from early childhood