

6-2012

Basic Literacy or New Literacies? Examining the Contradictions of Australia's Education Revolution

Rachel Buchanan
University of Newcastle

Kathryn Holmes
University of Newcastle

Gregory Preston
University of Newcastle

Kylie Shaw
University of Newcastle

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte>



Part of the [Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Buchanan, R., Holmes, K., Preston, G., & Shaw, K. (2012). Basic Literacy or New Literacies? Examining the Contradictions of Australia's Education Revolution. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(6). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2012v37n6.8>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.
<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol37/iss6/7>

Basic Literacy or New Literacies? Examining the Contradictions of Australia's Education Revolution

Rachel Buchanan
Kathryn Holmes
Gregory Preston
Kylie Shaw
University of Newcastle

Abstract: In 2007 the Labor Government came to power with the promise to bring to Australia an 'Education Revolution'. More than four years later we are still waiting for the full impact of this series of policy initiatives. Among the various facets of the Education Revolution was the assurance that the Education Revolution would focus on the most fundamental skills – literacy and numeracy, and that it would offer world-class teaching and learning through a 'Digital Education Revolution'. The digital education revolution aims to foster the development of 21st century learning skills in students, skills which seem at odds with the government's concomitant emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy and standardised testing. We seek to explore the paradoxical goals of the Education Revolution and to examine the impact of these tensions upon educators.

Introduction

In November 2007 Kevin Rudd led the Australian Labor Party [ALP] to victory in the Federal election, defeating the Howard led coalition government which had been in power since 1996. One of the platforms of the 'Kevin '07' campaign was the promise of an 'Education Revolution'. It our purpose to not only to explore what Rudd meant by an education revolution, but to also detail what effect the policies of the Education Revolution have had on the Australian Education system in the time since the election of the Labor government in 2007. It is our contention that some of the policies and new forms of governance ushered in under the banner of the education revolution are in tension and place competing and contradictory demands upon educators. Before our exploration of the contradictions inherent in the policies and processes of the education revolution we first provide some context to this latest wave of educational reform.

In Australia, the primary responsibility for education lies with the government of each of the states. However, the federal government has been increasingly involved in education due to the 'vertical fiscal imbalance' arising from the fact that the federal government has had more money to put towards education than the various state governments (Lingard, et al, 1995, p. 42). To roughly characterise a complex situation, the federal government has overseen education policy while it has been left to each of the states to run their schooling systems (Lingard, et al, 1995). That is to say the states have been responsible for the running of the public, state based school systems and the federal government has provided national education policy, funds to subsidise private schools, and funding for various national equity programs and grants designed to benefit disadvantaged public and private schools across Australia. However, in the last few years the federal government has increasing penetrated

into what is traditionally state areas of responsibility and seeks to implement, among other changes, a national curriculum and national professional accreditation standards for teachers. Given the complexities of the current politics of education in Australia, we feel that it is important that teacher educators are adequately informed about this changing terrain in order to prepare teachers for the implications of changes which go beyond refiguring teacher education courses to meet federal rather than state based requirements. While federal governments have had increasing influence over education policy since the Whitlam government, the election of the Labor government in 2007 has seen a rapid acceleration of federal intervention.

The Historical and Political Context of the Education Revolution

The 2007 Labor election campaign contended that the coalition government had neglected and underfunded education in the eleven years that they held power and argued that their proposed education revolution would be a continuation of the vital economic reform started by the Hawke/Keating Labor governments of the 1980s and 1990s (ALP, 2007). In January 2007 Rudd commenced Labor's election campaign by championing education as the key policy issue, tying educational reform to increased productivity and economic growth and decrying the neglect experienced under the Howard government (Coorey, 2007). The Labor Party's New Directions Paper released in January 2007 makes the Labor agenda very clear. Entitled *The Australian economy needs an education revolution*, the paper details 'the critical link between long term prosperity, productivity growth and human capital investment' (ALP, 2007, p. 1). Drawing upon OECD studies, the paper describes both Australia's recent loss of productivity growth and decline in education investment, and concludes that if Australia is to turn its productivity performance around as well as enhance workforce participation, the Australian economy now needs an education revolution - across early childhood education, schools, TAFE colleges, universities and research as well as programs for mature age workers:

- A revolution in the quantity of our investment in human capital.
- A revolution in the quality of the outcomes that the education system delivers. (ALP, 2007, p. 3).

While the education revolution campaign harks back to the economic reforms of the Hawke/Keating government – a characterisation of this Labor government also made by Connell (2011) – some of the initiatives of the education revolution are also represented as a continuation of the conservatism of the Howard era (Bessant, 2011; Hattam, Prosser & Brady, 2008). For all the radicalism implied by the 'revolution' of the campaign slogan, the commitment to accountability, national testing and standards suggests an education policy framework that is more reactionary than revolutionary. Reid (2009) argues that a cursory examination of the educational goals shared by the Howard and Rudd governments - national curriculum, increased regulatory frameworks and increased parental choice (Hattam, Prosser & Brady, 2008) suggests that the policies of the education revolution are revolutionary only in the sense of a complete 360 degree turn around an axis.

At this juncture it is pertinent to consider the concept of globalisation as most education policies are underpinned by the increasing influence of an integrated global economy (Apple, 2010). When taking globalisation into account, it becomes evident that the policies of the education revolution are not only driven by a desire to develop workers for the global economy, but also correspond to education trends globally (Ball, 2008; Lauder, Brown, Dillabough, & Halsey, 2006); these global trends can be discerned in policies that

‘privilege choice, competition, performance and individual responsibility’ (Apple, 2010, p. 2). These concepts underpin many of the policies that constitute the Education Revolution. Kevin Rudd was explicit that the education revolution is about using the education system to develop Australia’s human capital: ‘human capital investment is at the heart of a third wave of economic reform that will position Australia as a competitive, innovative, knowledge-based economy that can compete and win in global markets’ (ALP, 2007, p. 3). Despite the current 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). Although schooling serves multiple purposes; such as democratic equality (preparation of young people to be democratic citizens), social mobility (education which provides credentials to allow access to desirable social positions) and social efficiency (preparation of young people to be competent workers (Cranston, et al, 2010); the articulation of the education revolution policy with its repeated references to human capital indicates an emphasis on social efficiency over other educational goals.

What is the ‘Education Revolution’?

The Education Revolution will improve the country’s productivity performance through an increase in both the quantity of investment and the quality of education. It will drive substantial reform of Australia’s education and training systems to boost productivity and participation (Australian Government, 2008, p. 19).

The Labor Party’s New Direction Paper provides a detailed justification for education revolution in terms of increasing Australia’s investment in human capital in order to increase productivity and better compete in the global economy, but it provides scant detail as to the mechanisms by which this is to be achieved. The Australian Government’s *Education Revolution Budget 2008-09* released in 2008 provides more detail as to policies and funding that originally constituted the education revolution and provides a fuller picture as to how the revolution will function. Within this budget document the education revolution is described as being: ‘A New Approach to Education and Training’ (Australian Government, 2008, p. vii), with the policies of the education revolution being based ‘on a vision for early learning, schooling and education and skills development that is a life-cycle approach to policy development, program design and service delivery’ (p. 19).

While we have not the space to fully detail all the policies and funding arrangements that constitute the education revolution, we shall offer brief descriptions to highlight the variety of policies contained under the umbrella of the education revolution. Our analysis will provide an overall summation rather than describe all financial details as subsequent budgets have changed some of the funding details (and some of the contours of the education revolution have been changed as particular policies have not been retained in following years, primarily due to Labor’s commitment to restoring the federal budget to surplus by 2012-2013).

The policies of the Education Revolution consist of three interrelated streams; Early Childhood Development, Schooling, and Skills and Workforce Development. One of the common features of these streams is the goal of ‘closing the gap’ between in outcomes for indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. In each of these three areas the government aims to boost participation and productivity, arguing that ‘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, p. 24). 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 desired outcomes of the Education Revolution are described in the budget document (see Australian government, 2008, pp. 24-25). For policies around schooling the desired outcomes are that all children are engaged in and benefitting from schooling; young people are meeting basic literacy and numeracy standards, and overall levels of literacy and numeracy achievement are improving; that schooling promotes social inclusion and reduces educational disadvantage of children, especially indigenous children; that Australian students excel by international standards; and lastly, that young people make a successful transition from school to work and further study. In terms of Skills and Workforce Development, the desired outcomes are that for the working age population the gaps in foundation skills levels are reduced to enable effective educational, labour market and social participation; that the working age population has the depth and breadth of skills and capacities required for the 21st century labour market; the supply of skills provided by the national training system responds to meet changing labour market demand; and that skills are used effectively to increase labour market efficiency, productivity, innovation, and ensure increased utilisation of human capital.

The education revolution represents a major injection of funding into Australia's education system, but much of this funding is going towards one-off projects and is not a commitment to increased future funding (Harrington, 2011). Although the education revolution is constituted by policies running from early childhood education through the years of workforce participation, much emphasis has been placed upon the policies that impact upon the formal years of schooling. The education revolution claims to be 'A transformation of teaching and learning in schools' (Australian Government, p. 23) to be achieved through the government's commitment to:

- Improve literacy and numeracy skills;
- Raise individual student achievement and life school retention;
- Work with disadvantaged school communities and provide resources for well-targeted, evidenced-based strategies to improve outcomes for students;
- Introduce more transparent and robust reporting of outcomes at the student and school levels;
- Build a modern, high quality education infrastructure; and
- Support parents to meet the costs of education for their children.

(Australian Government, 2008, p. 23).

The improvement to literacy and numeracy skills is being measured and tracked through the government's National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN] – the program of national standardised testing that takes place in years 3, 5, 7 and 9. The raising of individual student achievement and life school retention has been secured through a Council of Australian Governments [COAG] Compact stating that all young people are required to participate in schooling to Year 10, and then participate in at least 25 hours per week in either education, training or employment until the age of 17 (Harrington, 2011). The government's commitment to working with disadvantaged schools is being actualised through the National Partnership Programs. 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. One and a half 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.

Clark (2012) characterises the National Partnership schemes as ‘add-on’ programs, and criticises this ‘band aid’ approach to addressing equity and social justice (p. 176).

The introduction of more transparent and robust reporting of outcomes at the student and school levels is being undertaken through the government’s mandatory A-E reporting at the student level and through the ‘MySchool’ website at the school level which purports to present ‘fair, public, comparable national reporting on individual school performance, including comparing individual school performance against schools with similar characteristics’ (MCEETYA, 2009, p. 18). The building of modern, high quality education infrastructure has been addressed by the ‘Building the Education Revolution’ [BER] project and the Digital Education Revolution [DER] project. Parents are been supported in the costs of educating their children through the childcare rebate and tax rebates on monies spent towards their children’s education (i.e. school uniforms, textbooks, internet access, etc.).

The education revolution represents a collaborative approach to education. Detailed in the budget is the agreement reached with COAG (see Australian Government, 2008, p. 20). For the first time agreements have been reached for outcomes, progress measures and future policy directions for early childhood education, schooling and skills and workforce development. This COAG agreement and a policy focus within the education revolution which incorporates early childhood education and childcare, schooling and vocational skills and training, and higher education effectively ‘joins up’ education policy to social and economic policy and reconfigures the ‘traditional time-space configuration of schooling’ (Ball, 2008, p. 3).

Overseeing the Education Revolution: Regulatory Mechanisms

As a result of the education revolution and the COAG agreements the ecology of education is being reshaped - ‘what it looks like, when and where it happens, is being changed and, as a result, so too is the learner (Ball, 2008, p. 3). We would add to Ball’s analysis that the educator is being changed by these policies too. We turn our attention now to the increased regulatory framework that has been put in place to oversee the policies of the education revolution and examine their impact upon contemporary educators.

One area to which the government has pledged reform is in the area of ‘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 (and subsequently unpledged, but the desire to improve teaching through performance based bonus payments remains); 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 are designed to ensure that Australian teachers are of sufficient ‘quality’ and represents not just the latest shift in control over teaching from the states and territories to the federal level (Brennan, 2009) but is also the local permutation of a global trend of increased surveillance of teachers’ work (Brennan, 2009; Rizvi, 2008).

In order to bring to fruition the promise that the education revolution would secure a national curriculum the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

[ACARA] has been established and charged with its development. 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 mechanism 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 economic techniques of accountability and efficiency (Ball, 2008).

Many of the goals of the education revolution (i.e. the national curriculum, the DER, improving quality of teachers and school leaders, social justice in education system) have been enshrined in the Melbourne Declaration, which is overseen by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA]. This agreement between state and federal governments cements these objectives into national (rather than federal) policy. MCEECDYA is also involved in development of the National teaching standards, and the Melbourne Declaration companion document – a 16 page document outlining the federal and state governments' commitment to action on a number of initiatives which support the Melbourne Declaration. One of these areas 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. This commitment is overseen by not only MCEECDYA, but also ACARA and AITSL, thus demonstrating how the various commitments and regulatory bodies associated with the education revolution overlap and interconnect. The changes ushered in by the education revolution represent not just 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 changes in the conditions of teachers' work.

Inherent tensions of the Education Revolution

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. Although there are multiple aspects of the education revolution that are in tension, if not outright contradictory, after highlighting several of these, it is our wish to focus on the contradiction that we have characterised as being between basic literacy and new literacies as this tension encapsulates one of the key debates in education today – the tension between the pre-existing practices and the future oriented technological narrative (Dobozy & Hellstén, 2011).

Before we delve into our exploration of this key educational debate, let us highlight other areas of contradiction in the education revolution. Firstly, there are some contradictions that arise from the nomenclature. For an initiative explicitly named as a 'revolution' the education revolution is not only not radical nor innovative, it contains no explicit focus on pedagogical reform or development. Although AITSL is responsible for the development of quality educators, it seems that this is being targeted via standardisation, accreditation and registration rather than with an explicit focus on pedagogy. Likewise, for an educational policy it has a lot of non-educational dimensions, and an explicitly economic (rather than educational) agenda. For example, one of the much vaulted pillars of the education revolution, the Building the Education Revolution policy, was an economic stimulation measure. A keystone of the education revolution it was essentially a non-educational policy designed to protect the Australian economy and secure jobs during the economic downturn (DEEWR, 2011).

Secondly, while many aspects of the education revolution policy reflect neoliberal economic policy, in the various facets of the policy a tension between Public Choice Theory and Human Capital Theory can be detected. 'Neoliberalism' is generally used to describe a market-driven approach to economic and social policy that emphasises 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). 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). 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). Although the education revolution is based upon a desire for an educated citizenry to increase national prosperity – a notion based upon human capital theory, some of the mechanisms used to achieve the accountability so integral to the revolution are indicative of Public Choice theory – highlighting the contradictory ways in which neoliberalism has manifested within this particular education policy. The influence of Public Choice Theory is suggested by the emphasis on accountability and transparency, and the mechanisms for realizing these (the NAPLAN standardized tests, and the MySchool website) which construct the field of education as a market that will be improved through the exercise of consumer choice (Devine & Irwin, 2005). Thus, there is an inherent tension evident within the neoliberal underpinning of the Education Revolution; schooling is simultaneously constructed as a market place, and as a resource for the development of human capital. This conceptualisation of education places competing demands upon educators. Educators might ask: in this climate, is the role of schooling the development of well-rounded citizens?, Or is it to produce skilled competent workforce ready young people?, Or should educators concentrate their efforts on the improvement of performance in NAPLAN testing so as to ensure the viability of the school in a competitive market place? Educators are left to negotiate the differing conceptualisations of schooling contained within a contradictory policy framework.

Thirdly, the education revolution is contradictory in relation to its treatment of the teaching profession. On the one hand, the importance of teachers is recognised, with good teaching described as being the key 'to achieving a world-class system' (Australian Government, 2008, p. 8). On the other hand, the measures selected to improve the teaching profession – performance based pay, the Teach Next initiative and federal professional standards, are policies that arguably undermine the profession. Connell (2009) in her critique of the 'new registration regime' (p. 218) describes how managerialist codified professional standards embody a 'distrust of teachers' judgement (p. 220), rely on a individualistic rather than collective models of work and criticises the arbitrary nature of dot-point lists which potentially lead to a narrowing of teacher practice. The Teach for Australia program and the Labor party's Teach Next initiative involve recruiting high achieving non-Education graduates for a six week training course and then placing them as teachers into difficult to staff schools. While these are relatively new schemes for Australia, research out of the US suggests that not only are the participants of these programs less effective than university trained teachers, but they often leave the teaching profession before two years (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin & Heilig, 2005). The existence of such programs undermines the idea that teachers are highly trained intellectual workers (Connell, 2009).

Fourthly, the social justice goals of the education revolution are in tension with the mechanisms used to achieve these goals. The education revolution budget document states '[o]vercoming disadvantage is a vital part of the Government's social inclusion agenda and a major part of meeting this challenge is raising literacy and numeracy levels' (Australian

Government, 2008, p. 36). The improvements in literacy and numeracy are to be achieved through the NAPLAN testing and \$577.4 million dollars have been pledged to an Action Plan on Literacy and Numeracy. Having the results of the NAPLAN tests published on the public 'MySchool' website has elevated NAPLAN to a high stakes testing regime – a process that results in the exclusion from testing of the very children who most need targeted support (Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008). Reid (2010) argues that standardised testing lowers rather than raises student achievement by narrowing the curriculum and fostering competitive jockeying between schools rather than encouraging cooperation and support across the system. Thus we can see a glaring contradiction between the social justice aspirations of the education revolution and the mechanism chosen to achieve this.

It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list (we have not, for example examined the way that the narrowing of the curriculum that is occurring as a result of the focus on standardised testing negates the holistic educational vision outlined in the Melbourne Declaration), but these highlighted examples serve to demonstrate Ball's (2008) characterisation of globalised education policy as contradictory. We have illustrated some of the contradictions that exist in the nomenclature of the education revolution, in the neoliberal underpinnings, in the way the policy conceptualises the teaching profession, and between the aspirations and mechanisms of the education revolution. We shall now examine the way that the education revolution exemplifies one of the key debates in education today.

Basic Literacy Versus New Literacies: Education Policy with a Foot in Opposite Camps

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 education revolution represents for the Australian Labor Party the vision of a modern education system that is future proofing Australia's economy through the preparation of workers for the knowledge economy. This vision sits in tension with the concomitant emphasis upon basic literacy, standardised testing and teacher accountability. The Australian government has invested a significant amount of money into funding not only the digital education revolution, but also the National Broadband Network. This investment in digital communications is highlighted in the Cyber White paper (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011) which describes the government's vision 'for Australia to become a leading digital economy' (p. 3). The digital education revolution is an investment of over \$2.4 billion in laptops for senior secondary students, better computer access and facilities for all students, and professional development and curriculum resources to support teachers in the use of teaching with ICT. However, as committed as the government is to the provision of technologically mediated education and to the training of future workers for the knowledge economy, the opposing aspects of the education revolution weigh heavily against the innovative teaching and learning that is expected to emerge from the availability of modern computing facilities and curriculum resources.

The emphasis in the education revolution upon basic literacies places competing demands upon educators. With NAPLAN results forming the basis of schools' accountability and with these results being publicly displayed and available on the MySchool website, schools are under increasing pressure to boost their performance and demonstrate that they can improve students' literacy and numeracy performance. There is no such ready accountability, regulation and public scrutiny around the ways in which schools use the newly available digital resources provided through the digital education revolution. Rizvi and Lingard argue that regimes of testing and accountability have 'thinned out the purposes, pedagogies and potential of education' (2010, p. 197). Cuban (2007) refers to the paradox of distrusting teachers and then turning around and expecting them to solve the problems of low-performing students. He notes how the accountability movement has strongly influenced classroom content and practice in the 1990s, a process sharpened by the enactment of NCLB in 2002 in the USA; consequentially, teachers spend more time preparing students for state tests and less time on the subjects not included in the tests. In the Australian context, Zyngier (2009) likewise, notes the way in which teachers are blamed for students' failure and, yet, are expected to be the key to improvement. Heilig and Darling-Hammond (2008) describe the ways in which high stakes testing policies that reward and punish schools based on average student scores create incentives for schools to game the system by excluding students from testing.

The consequences of high-stakes testing mediate against the innovative teaching practices that are expected to develop as a result of the digital education revolution. The digital education revolution is based on the premise that ICT can 'improve educational opportunities, boost outcomes and energise the learning experience' (DEEWR, 2008, p. 3). These lofty aims dovetail with the growing 21st century skills movement which advocates changing the curriculum to include the skills need to be developed to provide for the workforce of the future, and to shift contemporary teaching practice from teacher-centred to student centred (Dede, 2010). The 21st century skills movement is representative of 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). Each of these desired outcomes is heavily mediated against by the government's concomitant emphasis on basic skills. The goals of the DER are in tension with this emphasis and with the means by which schools are held accountable to their students' NAPLAN results.

Teacher Education and the Education Revolution

Through our examination of the contradictory policies and the tensions that they bring to the work of educators we seek to highlight the political dimension of the work of teachers and to illuminate the ways that current policies are simultaneously imposing new demands upon their work while reinvigorating perpetual debates around the purpose of education. How are these contradictions likely to impact upon teacher education? On the one hand, the tension between the old and new paradigms has long been a feature of education; debates about the purpose of education are perennial. On the other hand, the policies of the education revolution are having a direct impact upon the work of teacher educators. The digital education revolution is already impacting education courses in that there is more emphasis on adequately preparing graduates for work with ICT and the proposed national professional standards are likely to reshape the work of teacher educators (Tuinamuna, 2011). For Connell, the impact of these standards could be dire:

The consequences for teacher education are potentially very large. A list of auditable competencies can become the whole rationale of a teacher education programme. There is no need for cultural critique, since the market, aggregating individual choices, decides what services are wanted and what are not. There is limited role for educational research, mainly to conduct positivist studies to discover 'best practice' (2009, p. 218).

It is clear then that the specific policies of the education revolution are having an impact well beyond schooling.

However, the contradiction that we have chosen to explore, the tension between basic literacy and new literacies, while highlighting the contradictory regulatory mechanisms that the Labor government has put in place to oversee teachers' work, is a tension that transcends the education revolution policy framework. Teachers around the globe are under increasing pressure to teach with digital technology, while having their performance measured and shaped through the mechanism of standardised testing; a mechanism that has been shown to narrow the curriculum and encourage teacher (rather than student) centred pedagogy (Lingard, 2010). These pressures are a result of the increasing influence of neoliberalism. While in Australia, the education revolution is the mechanism of these pressures, they are being felt globally, delivered elsewhere by comparable and competing policies.

In Australia, the momentum driving the education revolution seems to have abated slightly, with the Labor government currently focusing on fiscal responsibility rather than ambitious reform agendas. In addition, the cooperation with the states, essential for comprehensive educational reform, is currently complicated by the election of coalition governments in several of the states. The agreement around the national educational goals that can be discerned in the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008) may no longer be guaranteed. Thus, the areas of the education revolution that are not yet in place, such as performance based pay for teachers, may not come to fruition in the short term. There is a possibility that the election of a Liberal led coalition government in the next federal election could reverse some of the policies put in place by Labor. However, the similarities amongst their education policies suggest that this is not likely. Given the long term trend of increased federalism in education it seems unlikely that any government would work towards reversing the technologisation of schools, cancelling the National Curriculum, removing the emphasis

on accountability and transparency and getting rid of the National Professional Teaching standards. These policies are based on a neoliberal vision of teachers' work - shared by both major parties in Australia – an individualistic model of teaching that puts the onus and responsibility for good educational outcomes on individual teachers and school leaders and ignores the complex socio-cultural and political fields that teachers' work is embedded in.

The likely implications for teacher education in Australia, are that not only are teacher education courses going to be reconfigured (where necessary) to ensure that teaching graduates meet the incoming national teaching standards, but graduate teachers are going to be expected to be suitably proficient at digital delivery of educational outcomes. The likely resolution of the tension between new literacies and basic literacy is that the emphasis in teacher education courses will be increasingly on preparing pre-service teachers to be equipped to teach in digitalised classrooms, while it will continue to be in-service teachers and school leaders who will feel the pressure that has developed around basic literacy.

That is not to say that in-service teachers are not under pressure to use technology, but rather there is an expectation that graduate teachers will emerge as 'agents of change' in this area (Donnison, 2007). While there are many studies reporting how innovative teachers are using technology, this focus on innovation displays the state of the art, rather than the state of the actual (Selwyn, 2010). More research needs to be done in order to gain a picture of the nuances that exist in the uneven deployment and take up of digital technologies across the education sector (Selwyn, 2010). While studies from Australia and beyond show the effects of high-stakes standardised testing, there is a paucity of research into how non-technologically literate teachers are dealing with the increasing pressure to use educational technologies.

In the tension between basic literacies and new literacies we can see, firstly, that education in Australia is, like elsewhere, caught between two paradigms; the old and the new. How long it will be before this tension is adequately resolved is not clear. What is clear, however, is that more research is needed into not just the successful and innovative schools that are openly embracing the educational opportunities that new technologies bring, but research into schools where this is not happening needs to be undertaken in order to provide critical insight into how schools are dealing with the competing paradigms. Secondly, while the impact of the education revolution has not yet been fully realised, these policy initiatives are having a discernible influence both in schools and in teacher education. The effects of neoliberal policies which individualise teachers' work and is reshaping teacher education into an exercise of ticking graduates against the boxes of the federal professional standards categories needs to be replaced with a vision that educates and engages teachers in the complex political and policy arena of education.

References:

- Apple, M. (2000). Between Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism: Education and Conservatism in a Global Context. In N.C. Burbules and C.A. Torres (eds.), *Globalization and Education: Critical Perspectives*. London: Routledge, pp. 57–77.
- Apple, M.W. (2006). Producing inequalities: Neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism, and the politics of educational reform. In H. Lauder, P. Brown, J. Dillabough & A.H. Halsey (Ed.s). *Education, Globalization & Social Change* (pp. 469 – 489). Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Apple, M. (2010). *Global Crises, Social Justice and Education*. New York: Routledge.
- Australian Government (2008). *Budget: Education Revolution 2008 – 09*. Accessed 31st August, 2011 from http://www.budget.gov.au/2008-09/content/ministerial_statements/html/index_education.htm
- Australian Labor Party [ALP] (2007). *The Australian economy needs an education revolution: New Directions on the critical link between long term prosperity, productivity growth and human capital investment*. Accessed 19th August, 2011 from http://www.wa.alp.org.au/download/now/education_revolution.pdf
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL]. (2011). Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. Accessed on 29th August, 2011, from <http://www.aitsl.edu.au/>
- Ball, S. (2008). *The Education Debate*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Bessant, J. (2011). Conservatives, politics and the crisis of modern education in Australia. *Policy Studies*, 32(6), 631 – 647.
- Brennan, M. (2009). Steering teachers; Working to control the feminized profession of education. *Journal of Sociology*, 45, 339 – 359.
- Clarke, M. (2012). Talkin' 'bout a revolution: the social, political, and fantasmatic logics of education policy. *Journal of Education Policy*, 27, 173 – 191.
- Commonwealth of Australia. (2011). *Connecting with confidence: Optimising Australia's Digital Future*. Cyber White Paper. Canberra, ACT: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Retrieved 12th January, 2012, from http://cyberwhitepaper.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/connecting_with_confidence_public_discussion_paper.pdf
- Connell, R. (2009). Good teachers on dangerous ground: towards a new view of teacher quality and professionalism. *Critical Studies in Education*, 50(3), 213 – 229.
- Connell, R. (2011). *Confronting Equality: Gender, Knowledge and Global Change*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Coorey, P. (2007, 23 January). Rudd vows Education Revolution. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved 12th January, 2012, from <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/rudd-vows-education-revolution/2007/01/22/1169330827940.html>
- Cranston, N., Kimber, M., Mulford, B., Reid, A., & Keating, J. (2010). Politics and school education in Australia: a case of shifting purposes. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 48(2), 182 – 195.
- Cuban, L. (2007). Hugging the middle: teaching in an era of testing and accountability. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 15, 1 – 27.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Holtzman, D.J., Gatlin, S.J. & Heilig, J.V. (2005). Does teacher preparation matter? Evidence about teacher certification, teach for America, and teacher effectiveness. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 13(42), 1-48.
- Dede, C. (2010). Comparing Frameworks for 21st Century Skills. In J. Bellanca & R. Brandt, Eds, *21st Century Skills*, pp. 51-76. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- DEEWR. (2008). Success through Partnership: Strategic Plan to guide the implementation of the Digital Education Revolution initiative and related initiatives. Retrieved from <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/DigitalEducationRevolution/Pages/default.aspx>

- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR]. (N.D.) Low Socio-economic status school communities. Accessed 28th August, 2011, from <http://smarterschools.gov.au/nationalpartnerships/Pages/LowSocio-EconomicStatusSchoolCommunities.aspx>
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR]. (2011). Nation Building: Economic Stimulus Plan. Accessed from <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/BuildingTheEducationRevolution/Pages/default.aspx>
- Devine, N. & Irwin, R. (2005). Autonomy, Agency and Education: He tangata, he tangata, he tangata. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 37, 317-331.
- Dobozy, E., & Hellstén, M. (2011). Editorial: Teaching and education research in a Web 2.0 world. *Issues in Educational Research*, 21(3), ii – vi.
- Donnison, S. (2007). Digital generation pre-service teachers as change agents: A paradox. *Australasian Journal of Teacher Education*, 32(4), 1-12. <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol32/iss4/5/>
- Harrington, M. (2011). Australian Government funding for schools explained. *Department of Parliamentary Services*. Retrieved 12th January, 2012, from <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/bn/sp/SchoolsFunding.pdf>
- Hattam, R., Prosser, B., & Brady, K. (2008). Revolution or backlash? The mediatisation of education policy in Australia. *Critical Studies in Education*, 50(2), 159 – 172.
- Heilig, J. V. & Darling-Hammond, L. (2008). Accountability Texas-Style: The progress and learning of urban minority students in a high-stakes testing context. *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 30, 75 – 110.
- Lauder, H., Brown, P., Dillabough, J. & Halsey, A.H. (Eds.). (2006). *Education, globalisation and social change*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lingard, B. (2010). Policy borrowing, policy learning: testing times in Australian schooling. *Critical Studies in Education*, 51(2), 129 – 147.
- Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA]. (2008). *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, December 2008. Retrieved from http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf
- Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA]. (2009). *MCEETYA four-year plan 2009 – 2012: A companion document for the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. Accessed from [http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/resources/MCEETYA_Four_Year_Plan_\(2009-2012\).pdf](http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/resources/MCEETYA_Four_Year_Plan_(2009-2012).pdf)
- Quiggin, J. (1999). Human Capital Theory and Education Policy in Australia. *Australiann Economic Review*, 32(2), 130 – 144.
- Reid, A. (2009). Revolution or reversion? A review of two key aspects of the Rudd government's 'education revolution'. *Journal of the Home Economic Institute of Australia*, 16(3), 2 - 8.
- Reid, A. (2010). Accountability and the public purposes of education. Accessed from: <http://www.aefederal.org.au/Publications/2010/NS/AREid.pdf>
- Rizvi, F. (2008). Rethinking educational aims in an era of globalization. In P.D. Hershock, M. Mason, & J.N. Hawkins (Ed.s) *Changing Education – Leadership, Innovation and development in a Globalising Asia Pacific*. Netherlands: Springer.
- Rizvi, F., & Lingard, B. (2010). *Globalizing education policy*. New York: Routledge.
- Selwyn, N. (2010). Looking beyond learning: notes towards the critical study of educational technology. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 26, 65-73.
- Tuinamuana, K. (2011). Teacher Professional Standards, Accountability and Ideology: Alternative Discourses. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(12), 72 – 82.

Zyngier, D. (2009). Teachers under the pump – and over a barrel – and up the creek: Reframing the current debates about the ‘quality’ of education. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 29, 83 – 90.