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Towards Equity in the Futures Market: curriculum as a condition of access

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This article provides a consideration of the problem of equity in education. In the first part of the discussion, the author draws on philosophical and sociological literatures to consider what equity means and its implications for education. Drawing on work by Burbules, Lord & Sherman, she looks to curriculum as a condition of access and the importance of learning support structures in bringing about equitable educational outcomes, conceived in terms of Amy Gutmanns's democratic threshold. The paper offers a conceptual-theoretical model for thinking about the resourcing and curricular requirements for equity in contemporary liberal democratic societies, contrasting the social and economic policy mixes employed by governments situated at different points along a liberty/equality continuum.

Keywords: equality, liberty, neoliberalism, social democracy, curriculum and access.

Introduction: Equity & Education

Such a simple title belies the depth of a complex notion. For example, when we couple equity with education do we mean equity *in* education or equity *through* education? Equity across *inputs* or equity of *outcomes*? These are not insignificant questions for as Amartya Sen (1992) points out the "space" in which we bracket our concerns determines to a large extent what we end up evaluating and thus, the kind of judgements we make. It makes sense then to start by questioning what equity might be before we attempt to say what equity can do with regards to education.

What is equity?

Equity is not equality. Equality *is* tightly related to equity but they are not the same thing. One is a means and the other is an end. Equity is what we do - the things we enact, policies we put into place, beliefs we operationalise - in order to influence equality, or more precisely, *in*equality. Equality is at heart about justice and equity is concerned with its fair distribution. The quest for equality through equitable distribution has concerned philosophers since Plato (Miller, 1999) but it was Aristotle, whose maxim "treat equals equally and unequals unequally", set the earliest parameters of the equity debate. A popular conceptual device that clearly illuminates Aristotle's point is the metaphor of cutting a cake. This is also, incidentally, where the difference between equity and equality comes into sharp relief.

Say we have eight people around a table. Equality demands that we cut the cake into eight equal shares. Of those eight people however, two may be very young children who could not possibly eat as large a slice of cake as the adults sitting at that table. Two others may be refugees from a famine torn country who have had little to eat for a long time. They could very well benefit from a larger slice of cake than one eighth would allow. It may not be treating people equally to give them unequal shares of cake but, according to Aristotle, it would be equitable and it would be just.

This sounds simple enough but disputes can occur when we try to proceed from abstract principles to the gritty issue of how much of what should go to whom and why. Persons are unequal in a myriad of ways. Indeed the ways in which we are unequal probably

outnumber the ways in which we are equal. I am short, you might be tall. I can run fast over short distances, you might be better at endurance. You can see better in crowds, I find it easier to pass through them. Does the quest for equality mean that we should see to it so that I can see better in crowds, that you can tie in a race with me over a short distance or that I should be given subsidised access to human growth hormones? There are a multitude of difficulties building here, none the least of which is raised by Bernard Williams (1997); that is, where do we *stop*?

Limits & Possibilities

We operate under the assumption that equalities and inequalities balance each other out in the wider community. Sometimes they don't. Persons are born with different capabilities and into differing circumstances and some fare better than others in the so-called "natural lottery" (Rawls, 1971). In modern democratic societies, the question then becomes: What inequalities should qualify for distributive justice? The ones we deserved or the ones we didn't? Misfortune is often referred to as "brute bad luck" and this is often distinguished from "bad option luck" or the consequences that flow from poor choices (Anderson, 1999). But how do we tell the difference and again, where do we stop?

Take for example patients with diabetes. Some lining up for medical treatment might have Type 1 (juvenile onset) diabetes and some Type 2 (mature onset). Unlike Type 2, which is often a result of poor diet and obesity, Type 1 diabetes cannot be prevented. Should we then separate these patients according to brute bad luck (Type 1) and bad option luck (Type 2), in order to ration limited medical resources to those who most "deserve" them? Regardless of how a person acquires diabetes, when waiting in that line for medical treatment each person is still a citizen, a member of a community and someone who, without treatment, might otherwise die.

The question of limits posed by Bernard Williams (1997) becomes important here. It can still be argued that acquiring Type 2 diabetes is another form of brute bad luck – some people can indulge in diets high in saturated fat all their lives and never acquire diabetes or any other serious illness. Others are not so lucky. Whilst Williams's question, "Where do we stop?" can prompt us to consider when to limit the allocation of resources, the same logic can also be applied when determining who should or shouldn't receive them. How far do we go? Most importantly, whose decision should it be and, should this be decided, what beliefs might get privileged in the process? How do we determine who should get how much of what and why?

"Desert"

Two categories - merit and need - are used in the attempt to judge desert (or "deservedness") but this is easier said than done. Aristotle (1997) privileges merit and a good number of egalitarian political philosophers have followed his lead, outlining principles of desert to determine between the deserving and undeserving (see Pojman & Westmoreland, 1997). Once again though, objections have been raised because simple categories and notions belie the complexity beneath. How *do* we judge merit? By achievement or effort? As all teachers know, a narrow conception of "achievement" using benchmark norms is easily calculated. Determining and rewarding effort is much less so.

Going Back to School: Equity as Distribution

We can start to see some of the complexity of the debate here especially if we relate it back to education. Let us engage in a thought experiment to consider the stability of the notion of merit: In every class there are some children who learn to read more quickly than others. It would seem a somewhat foolish decision to hold these children on Level 10 readers when they might otherwise read at Level 20, simply because that is where the median level of the class lies. The easy answer to this is to let children progress as well as they can. What then do we do if the capability sets in the classroom get too unwieldy and difficult for one teacher

to manage well? How does the teacher determine whom she is going to favour with additional attention? Do we introduce extension for the "gifted" or support for the less well-favoured? Given that we operate in a world of finite resources, to give a unit of the teacher's time to either group means taking from another (see Jencks, 1988). And here, we encounter a problem.

One must acknowledge that any attempt to equalise the situation of those less well-favoured must mean a shift in the balance of "holdings" (Nozick, 2000). This can be done by directly worsening the situations of those better favoured (i.e. handicapping the favourite) or by transferring resources to the less well-favoured which, as Nozick (1997) points out, still results in reducing the amenity - if not the opportunity - of the first group. Now, some in this group may well be entitled to their advantage because they have worked hard and/or made wise decisions. But how do we decide who should be rewarded? Some egalitarian philosophers have come up with intricate principles in order to confer recognition where it is due, however, Anderson (1999) notes the imposition that these merit-based rewards make on individual liberty because increased state intervention is required in order to pass judgement on responsibility and desert. This can be extraordinarily difficult, time consuming and ethically challenging as she shows when hypothesising the dilemma of withholding medical care from at-fault drivers at an accident scene.

Returning to our classroom example above, one group of children might qualify for extra resources under the category of merit (those pushing a basal reader level of 20) and another might qualify under need (those still below Level 10). So, of our young readers, do we reward as "the meritorious" those who are reading at Level 20? Or do we recognise a target of Level 10 and reward all the children who achieve that level whether they try hard or not? How do we acknowledge the effort of a child who struggles and tries her hardest but who is still on a Level 5? Or do we direct resources towards "exceptionality"? If the mean is a Level 10, then perhaps any child who achieves some specified amount above or below becomes entitled to a percentage of resources. Not only is it difficult to work out what the specified amount or percentage should be but when we consider where those resources come from and their limited availability, we encounter another problem flagged by Nozick (2000).

To provide support to either group of children still means a transfer of holdings. The more children we support, the more resources are needed. The more resources needed the more individual persons with the capacity to devote some of their own holdings are required to do so to cater to the needs of the less well-favoured. This is no longer a situation of balancing merit and need between individuals in a classroom at the level of the school. It is now a case of re-distribution between the haves and have-nots at the level of society resulting in distribution through taxes and transfers into educational budgets. However, there are deep political and philosophical beliefs at stake in the process. It is not just a matter of a battle between rich and poor or even the 'deserving and the undeserving disadvantaged' (Anderson, 1999, p. 311). Instead the problem relates to a fault-line deep within liberalism itself and the difficulty involved in realising "equal liberty" for all (Jonathon, 1997).

Liberty and equality

Underpinning liberalism are the ideals of liberty and equality. These are commonly perceived as conflicting or competing values (Anderson, 1999). More accurately however, disputes - which are often popularised as a war between their respective antagonists, egalitarians and libertarians - arise over the weight ascribed to either value in a given theory of justice. Sen (1992) scotches the simple dichotomy of liberty versus equality by arguing that even libertarians are arguing for the equality of *something* – that something being "liberty". Harking back to Aristotle's question: 'Equals and unequals in *what*?',[1] Sen says:

> Wanting equality of something – something seen as important – is undoubtedly a similarity of some kind, but that similarity does not put the warring camps on one side. It only shows that the battle is not, in an important sense, about 'why equality?', but about 'equality of what?' (Sen, 1992, p. 16).

The problem then is not that one group wants liberty and the other wants equality. At core, classic liberalism is about realising freedom for *all*. What libertarians object to is not equality *per se* but the inevitable infringement that efforts to realise equality place on individual freedom. One way we conceptualise the ideological differences between libertarian and egalitarian ideals is by talking of right and left-wing politics. Simply speaking, libertarians congregate the right of the political spectrum and egalitarians the left.

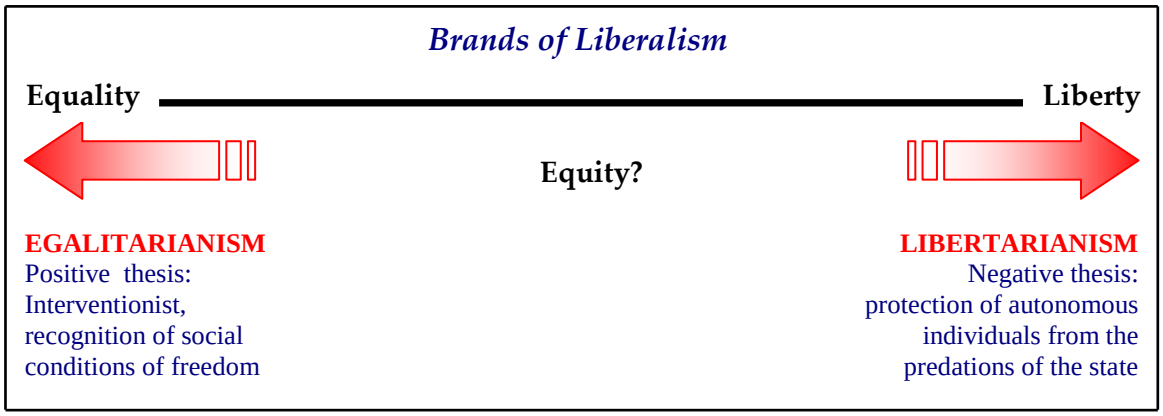

Figure 1: Brands of liberalism along a liberty/equality continuum

More specifically, the right is characterised by a strictly neutralist thesis of governance and the left, a positive (or substantive) one. Colonising the far-right are radical neutralist theories of liberalism: neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism and the New Right (Jonathon, 1997). Since the early 1900s, the threat of the far-left has been welfarism, communism and totalitarianism (Barry, 2005). Incidentally, these movements arose in response to the failure of market capitalism to appropriately provide support for those least able to provide for themselves (Olssen, 2003). Underpinned by Marxian theory these approaches faltered, mainly because they 'denigrated negative rights altogether' (Barry, 2005, p. 23), which saw the way open for totalitarianism. History reveals that travelling too far to the left on the scale above tips the right out of balance – quashing individual rights and dampening the economy.

Since the 1970s, the threat of communism and the rupture of the Keynesian welfare state has operated as a successful trump card for neutralist-liberal politics (Jonathon, 1997). The subsequent globalisation of neo-liberal market theory expresses right-wing political ideology at its extreme (Olssen, 2004). Neo-liberals challenge traditional neutralist liberal theory as not neutral enough, the argument being that:

> …the state should retreat from its earlier responsibilities for ensuring as equitable a distribution as possible of freedom's prerequisites, since this involves interference with the free play of individual effort, merit and preference. It should occupy itself initially with dissolving existing constraints, to facilitate a social order in which individuals would be both enabled and obliged to take over responsibilities they had previously delegated to the state on their behalf. (Jonathon, 1997, p. 19)

Neo-liberalism however, must cause even libertarians some discomfort. The paradox here revolves around the nature of the freedoms available to individuals. Liberty is conceived as the formation and execution of preferences relating to how one might want to live (Jonathon, 1997). There is a distinction however between free (agentive) choice and passive (reactive) choice. Real freedom exists when individuals can choose from options of their own making and this is something Sen (1999) refers to as "agency freedom". This is a different action to simply picking from a set of choices that have been made available (Marshall, 2001) which is a state similar to the negative freedom extolled by libertarians (Nozick, 1974).

In reality, the heaviness of the "hidden hand" of the market circumscribes liberation, structuring choices and limiting access to those who can acquire the political skill required for

agency (Olssen, 2005). Already there is considerable evidence from paradigm cases such as New Zealand, that neo-liberal governance and the failure of markets has contributed to decreasing social mobility and equality (Robertson & Dale, 2002). Moreover, international comparative research shows that the popular notion of US "exceptionalism" (high intergenerational social mobility) is now a myth because this measure is now lower there than in the UK and Nordic countries (Jantti et al., 2005). Indeed in the traditionally libertarian United States, sons born to fathers in the lowest and highest quartiles are particularly likely to remain there (Jantti et al., 2005).

The priority of liberty in liberalism poses a stumbling block for equality - for access to genuinely equal means to be able to form preferences and develop the ability to execute choices is arguably a *precondition* of liberty (Jonathon, 1997). Therefore, equality should be seen not as an obstruction to liberty but as constitutive of freedom for all. In providing a definitive account of the difference between the champions of liberty and equality, Anderson (1999, p. 315) says:

> Libertarians tend to identify freedom with formal, negative freedom: enjoying the legal right to do what one wants without having to ask anyone else's permission and without interference from others. This definition of freedom neglects the importance of having the means to do what one wants… Egalitarians thus differ from libertarians in advocating a more expansive understanding of the social conditions of freedom.

So whilst the problem may not be as easily painted as "equality" versus "liberty" this does not mean that they 'necessarily move social policy in the same direction' (Nash, 2004, p. 369). Anyone wishing to address inequality needs to engage with this "either/or" problem, since it bedevils the project for a substantive conception of justice in most liberal democracies. "Too thick" a claim for equality is usually met with a counter-claim that deplores "too thin" a conception of liberty - and vice versa (Jonathon, 1997). The challenge then is to find an optimum balance between equality and liberty. Too far either way tips one or the other fundamental into an indefensible position.

"Justice as Fairness"

John Rawls (1971) endeavoured to solve this problem by developing a theory of justice governed by two principles:

1. Everyone will have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberties compatible with similar liberty for others.
2. Social and economic inequalities must satisfy two conditions:
   (a) They are to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged (the difference principle).
   (b) They are attached to positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.

Rawls' theory of "justice as fairness" can be viewed as 'an understanding between moral persons not to exploit for one's own advantage the contingencies of their world, but to regulate the accidental distributions of nature and social chance in ways that are mutually beneficial for all' (Papastephanou, 2005b, p. 302). A neutralist-liberal in the Millian tradition, Rawls was concerned through his first principle with the optimal pursuit of individual liberty (Mason, 1990), with limits on that liberty only if it impinged on another's ability to pursue that same goal. The second principle, commonly known as "the difference principle," aims not for equality but for a distributional effect that is to mutual advantage with maximum benefit to the least advantaged. To avoid exactly the kind of "no fair" claim by the well-advantaged at the prospect of giving away some of their holdings, Rawls (1997) argues for justice as fairness through two theoretical maxims: *the original position* and *the veil of ignorance*.

In the original position, parties are considered to have equal rights and capacities to make decisions. Under the veil of ignorance, they are further equalised because neither knows their position in society, whether they are rich or poor, nor what beliefs, talents, strengths or weaknesses they may have. This ensures, theoretically at least, that each party is levelled to a common social denominator and has no way of knowing when they finally emerge from the veil of ignorance what abilities they have received in the natural lottery, nor where in the social hierarchy they will end up. Whilst Rawls' theory has been criticised for its reliance on a particular conception of human nature (Jonathon, 1997), in the aftermath of Enron, the current Iraq War, and many more examples of corporate and political fraud, his cynicism is perhaps wise.

Going Back to School: Equity at the Starting Gate

The value of "justice as fairness" is that it forces parties in the original position to consider what the best structure and minimum floor to bring about the most equal society would be. Rawls also draws on the metaphor of a cake to illustrate how this might work to promote equality. Two people have a piece of cake to share between them by cutting it into two pieces. Each person likes the cake and would like as big a piece as possible. In Rawls' theory, one of them must cut the cake and the other can choose from the results. This guarantees that the cake will be shared fairly. The person who cuts the cake would endeavour to cut it as close to equal as possible, as they would anticipate that the other person would choose the larger share if one were available.

But how does this inform our problem of allocating teacher attention in the classroom? If interpreted literally, this would mean equal provision is the fairest and most just means of distribution, however, since the mid-twentieth century scholars in the fields of sociology and education have shown that children enter school with unequally developed capability sets affecting their ability to capitalise on the share of educational "cake" provided (Coleman et al., 1966; Bourdieu, 1984). Subsequently, emphasis turned towards equalising starting points through resources and educational inputs in the form of compensatory programs,[2] such as Headstart in the US (Coleman, 1968).

The problem with "starting-gate theories" though is that their effects wash out and they foster a deficit model approach. Anderson (1999) terms such approaches as branches of 'luck egalitarianism' and criticises the paradox that those unlucky in the natural lottery must 'lay claim to the resources of egalitarian redistribution in virtue of their inferiority to others, not in virtue of their equality to others' (Anderson, 1999, p. 306). She rightly questions the inherent lack of respect for persons and plurality that stands in contradiction of the values underpinning classical liberalism (Strike, 1991). Anderson's unease is reflected in the work of Papastephanou (2003) who rejects the Rawlsian difference principle for interpreting difference in performance in a naturalist and morally neutral way. She argues:

> If the debatable assumption about natural giftedness proves wrong and social theory is right in claiming that qualitative difference of intellect is exclusively the outcome of social assymmetry and often injustice, the difference principle will be nothing but a further legitimation of inequality. (Papastephanou, 2003, p. 511).

Whilst Rawls (1999, p. 165) says that 'no one is thought to deserve his greater natural capacity or to merit a more favourable starting place in society', he distinguishes his difference principle from the principle of redress and cautions that justice as fairness does not 'require society to try to even out handicaps as if all were expected to compete on a fair basis in the same race'. The Rawlsian project then is *not* to make everyone equal but simply to 'improve the long-term expectation of the least favoured' (Rawls, 1997, p. 186).

The problem is that he continues to say, 'if this can be attained by giving more attention to the better endowed, it is permissible; otherwise not' (Rawls, 1997, p. 186). This opens the way for those who would seek to justify the direction of the teacher's attention towards the "gifted" with the utilitarian intent to 'cultivate the talents of one or two

outstanding students every year' (Jencks, 1988, p. 531). The logic here is that the more productive some are, the more cake there is to share – eg. more GDP, more jobs, more wealth to go around – therefore, concentrating on the "gifted" may result in maximising the good for all (Howe, 1999).

Dangerous Currents Beneath a Rising Tide

Utilitarianism, the economic equivalent to JFK's adage that 'a rising tide lifts all boats' (The Economist, 2006, p. 1), has failed to affect the most enduring facet of inequality – one that is measured by intergenerational social mobility. Indeed, the numbers show that in the US 'the tide is rising fast but lifting less boats' (The Economist, 2006, p. 2). In other words, the good thrown out by the tide tends to get mopped up by those who can access it first *and* make the most of it. Advantaged groups tend to remain advantaged and members of the same groups come to represent the disadvantaged (Connell, 1994), particularly since the abandonment of the post-war settlement (Jonathon, 1997; Robertson & Dale, 2002).

The "rising tide" theory can also obscure and complicate matters.[3] As incomes have risen over time in Australia (Atkinson & Leigh, 2006), one could argue that the Rawlsian difference principle has been and is being satisfied by a utilitarian type policy mix that furthers the interests of the wealthy, who might then drag the rest of the labour force some of the way with them. If we were to look purely at income, then it could be argued Australia's policy mix has been socially productive because incomes have increased across the board (Frijters & Gregory, 2006). But if we were to look at distribution percentages (Johnson & Wilkins, 2004), the rising expenses associated with the cost of living and other markers indicative of relative poverty (Saunders, 2002), then the economic situation in Australia (and other countries towards the right of the spectrum) looks much less rosy (Argy, 1996).

Equality and liberty in international liberal democracies

Rawls' work is credited with reinvigorating attention on the question of justice in political philosophy, however, arguably Rawls was among many grappling with compelling social conditions that emerged and characterised the latter half of the twentieth century. An important point to remember is that not all liberal democracies were responding to the same conditions and not all have employed the same mix of policies. Therefore, the achievement of equity has been more successful in some nations than others.

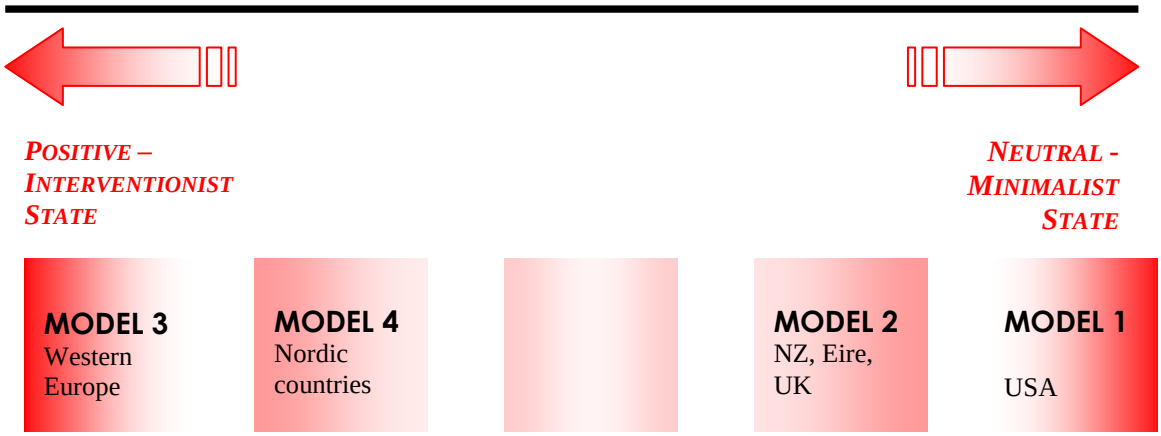

Figure 2: Argy's social models of goverance plotted onto equality/liberty continuum

In a recent discussion paper, Australian economist Fred Argy (2006) describes four social models of governance. These models can be plotted onto the equality/liberty scale developed earlier, with Model 1 - epitomised by the US – appearing furthest to the right (see Figure 2 above). However, the economic dominance of the US extends beyond its own borders in the

dealings of its powerful multinational corporations. The strength and reach of the American economy has thus effected other nations as both trading partners and market competitors. To avoid being swamped other regions have had to adopt growth strategies of their own. These have taken different forms and have had widely differing results. The effects in the form of stress indicators and social exclusion (Sen, 2000), are only recently becoming apparent.

Argy (2006, pp. 62-63) groups different states into four models of social governance according to their performance along four economic performance indicators:

- Income inequality – the share of GDP going to the lowest income quintiles;
- Income mobility – the degree of upward income mobility over one's lifetime or relative to one's parents, as measured by longitudinal studies;
- Productivity – measured either by GDP per hour worked or multi-factor productivity (which are better indicators of GDP per worker as the latter ignores cross-country differences in the rates of investment and in work/leisure preferences); and
- Employment – measured as a proportion of working age population.

In what follows, I describe the differences between these models and briefly explain their placement on the equality/liberty continuum.

Model 1: The United States

Dominated by the US, Argy (2006, p. 63) maintains that this model of governance:

> …delivers very good economic outcomes but poor distribution outcomes, both in terms of income inequality and income mobility. Its overall scale of fiscal redistribution is at the low end of the spectrum, with relatively 'flat' tax structures and low levels of income support and social investment. And it has relatively free labour markets, with little use made of employment protection laws (EPL) – laws which restrict the rights of employers to set wages, dismiss employees, use casuals and so on.

The reason for this can be found in the dominant philosophy underpinning the US constitution where various amendments assert the primacy of individual liberty (Howe, 1992). Challenges and appeals to that constitution have signposted the American road to equal opportunity; the most famous of which was the civil rights action against racial segregation in *Brown v Board of Education* (Howe, 1994). The US school system is the most decentralised of all the models and distribution of funding for individual schools is locally determined through land taxes. This in itself creates great disparity in the funds available to schools in socioeconomically disadvantaged as opposed to advantaged areas, prompting policies such as "busing" to assist racial (and later class) desegregation. Unlike nations further to the left of the equality/liberty continuum however, the retreat from active social investment in the form of a social wage (eg. universal healthcare, quality childcare and preschool, and supportive labour market programs) means that education, as a public good, is left to do its work relatively unsupported – uninsulated by complementary "active" redistribution measures (OECD, 2006).

Until the 1960s economic policy in the US was weighted towards utilitarian aims as the perception was that 'potential gains to the poor from full employment and growth were much larger, and much less socially and politically divisive, than those from redistribution' (Tobin, 1970, p. 263). Whilst the US did achieve stable economic growth and enviable prosperity towards the end of the 1960s, growth of the cake overall has failed to provide appreciable gains in share size for the less well-advantaged. Not only did utilitarianism fail to adequately address relative poverty and structural inequality but the abandonment of social policy to the "agnosticism" of the market under neo-liberal economic fundamentalism has ratcheted that inequality to new heights (Jonathon, 1997), whilst disguising illiberal value judgements and unequal distributional effects (Argy, 1996).

Model 2: UK, Canada, Eire and NZ

Embraced by countries like Britain, Canada, Ireland and New Zealand, Model 2:

> …can boast good economic outcomes but on income distribution and mobility it produces very mediocre results – although with less inequality than model 1… relative to model 1, income support benefits are more generous (although conditional) and there is a little more job protection. But the overall scale of redistribution, especially through EPL is modest compared to models 3 and 4. (Argy, 2006, p. 66)

This actually sounds pretty good. However, while Argy does detail some of the emerging problems in Australia, he does not elaborate on the growing problems of social inequality in the countries Australia seeks to emulate. These include but are not restricted to:

- skills shortages resulting from labour market deregulation policies and a subsequent lack of employer reinvestment into labour (Robertson & Dale, 2002),
- a redistribution of poverty adding children and parents in single-parent families and elderly women to ranks of the new poor (Istance, 1997),
- the persistence of structural inequalities together with market failures (Alexiadou, 2005),
- increasing disparity in educational experience and the cumulative dichotomy between the advantaged and disadvantaged, fuelled by outsourced "user-pays" services rearticulated as the offer of individual "choice" (Jonathon, 1997; Ball, 2003), and
- obstacles to democracy through the reduction of social regulation which, according to Olssen (2004, p. 231) actively frustrates policy initiatives in a number of areas, including:

  - Social policies, which protect small-scale producers of basic goods, especially foodstuffs.
  - Policies to protect jobs and wages of the lowest paid groups.
  - Programmes to preserve the stability of communities, which markets don't protect.
  - Policies to provide employment directly.
  - Policies aimed at protecting the natural environment.
  - The expansion of literacy and education or health care programmes, which would require a role for the public sector.

Australia: torn between two lovers

Starting Australia's fast gallop down the reform road, the Hawke/Keating Labor government introduced economic rationalist policies in the 1980s (Pusey, 1991). Upon grasping the reins in the early 90s, the Howard/Costello Coalition government has solidified Australia's fascination with its powerful friends by emulating the harsh neo-liberal reforms of the US and UK, effectively bringing Australia into line with Model 2 (Argy, 2006). In so doing, Australia has succeeded in delivering 'similar employment and productivity outcomes but with somewhat less income inequality' (Argy, 2006, p. 66). This is due, in good measure, to John Howard's Family Tax Benefit transfer system – however first, such policies tend to obscure increasing income inequality trends and second, passive redistribution encourages welfare dependency through effective marginal tax rate disincentives (Johnson & Wilkins, 2004; Leigh, 2005). Moreover, as Argy (2006) points out, recent Howard Coalition government workplace reform legislation has edged Australia closer to Model 1.

Model 3: Western Europe

Fiscal performance and social policy places the larger continental European nations such as France and Germany in Model 3, pushing this Model furthest to the left on the equality/liberty continuum. The policy mixes utilised by countries in Model 3 sail too close to the far left of the continuum, disrupting economic equilibrium via "too thick" a conception of equality and "too thin" a conception of liberty. These countries redistribute on a large scale, making

extensive use of EPL and unconditional income support (Argy, 2006), however, their economic performance has been much more sluggish than the Scandinavian countries (Benner, 2003). Argy (2006) maintains that while Model 3 delivers more equal income distribution than 1 and 2, its performance on social mobility is only marginally better. Although its performance on productivity indicators is not far below that of the first two groups (Argy, 2006), the Western European countries have had major difficulties keeping up with the "American Challenge", experiencing loss of markets, lagging technological innovation and less flexible labour markets (Benner, 2003).

Unemployment levels are high relative to Models 1 and 2 (Argy, 2006), partly because these countries attach less conditions to generous welfare rights (Benner, 2003). Of all the models, those countries in Model 3 mandate the strictest employment protection laws. Consequently, Western European countries enjoy less labour mobility than the US or even the Northern European states, like the Scandinavian countries (Malkin, 1991). Whilst the much vaunted European model of "social capitalism" is defined by a strong welfare orientation and commitment to equality of democratic participation, there are fundamental differences that characterise distinct regions within Europe (Offe, 2003).

Offe (2003, p. 44) speaks to the unique nature of the social imaginary underpinning "the collective", when he states:

> If there is anything distinctive about the "European model" of capitalism, it is the insight… that the interest of "all of us" will be served well if the pursuit of the interest of "each of us" is to some extent constrained by categorical status rights.

Despite the egalitarianism of the Western European model however, OECD performance data demonstrates high levels of inequality in educational achievement, particularly in Germany (McGaw, 2005).[4] This is in stark contrast to the consistently high and equitable spread of achievement by students from the Nordic countries. Fast regeneration and economic resilience in the Scandinavian countries – Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland – has been attracting international attention for the last decade. In 2002, these countries were among the 10 countries considered most conducive to economic growth, with Finland ranking second only to the US (Benner, 2003). Given the problems of inflexibility associated with the European model, the Nordic states have emerged as exemplars of "capitalism… with a conscience".

Model 4: The Nordic Model

Since the second world war, the Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland) and some of the smaller Europeans (such as the Netherlands and Austria) have developed a unique model of social governance in the form of an advanced welfare state (Benner, 2003). Argy (2006) maintains that whilst this model involves high taxes and redistribution on an even larger scale than those in Model 3, the generosity of the income support provided is tempered by work-conditions. In addition, employment protection laws are less strict than Model 3 – although still stricter than in Models 1 and 2. Incidentally, they are also stricter than in Australia - pre *and* post-Howard Government reforms.

The oil shock of the 1970s, together with the rise of stagflation, exposed the vulnerability of Keynesian welfare state politics to the inflexibility of labour markets. In response Australia, New Zealand and the UK have edged closer to the US – institutionalising economic rationalist policies designed to relieve the burden of a cumbersome state. While the larger continental European states (eg. France, Germany) have not moved far towards the right, those countries constituting the Nordic Model have managed to selectively introduce policies to increase competitiveness and flexibility, without destroying their collective culture - which permits high levels of re-investment through research and development, generous welfare provision, advanced social protection and a commitment to full employment (Benner, 2003).

Instead of institutionalising 'highly mobile "hire-and-fire" labour markets' (Offe, 2003, p. 444) through deregulation policies, these countries rely heavily on active social

programs to 'enhance the productivity and mobility of low-income people throughout their life cycle' (Argy, 2006, p. 64). This success can in part be explained by higher levels of investment (about four times more relative to GDP) in education, active labour market programs – including job placement and training initiatives, employment incentives, inclusion of the disabled, direct job creation and start-up incentives (Argy, 2006). Another aspect of their success is that the Nordic states have managed to adapt and adopt some of the competitive practices characterising neutralist models of governance, without buying into the rampant individualism of neutralist-libertarian politics. Such politics produce social division: a "what's in it for me" state that, in appealing to the base instinct of self-preservation, precludes the development of "other-regarding" social policy frameworks.

The quest for equitable distribution is not simply giving the less-advantaged more to bring them up to the same level as the advantaged. It does not mean *equalisation* through passive income redistribution. Indeed there are disincentive problems associated with such measures (Saunders, 2005), which active social investment through public services such as education can avoid. This is something at which the Nordic countries have excelled (Benner, 2003). Indeed, regardless of which nation state we turn to inequality still exists. But importantly, disparity occurs at much greater or lesser degrees – depending on where along the social investment scale nations sit (see figure 2). The reality is that not everyone can live on the waterfront. But one's chances to make this happen, if desirable, should not be delimited by the circumstances of birth – colour, gender, socioeconomic status and so on. Arguably, such personal characteristics are as arbitrary a measure as running ability.

Going Back to School: Equity as Umpire

Unless one happens to be a professional athlete, the ability to run fast over short or long distances is of little consequence in contemporary times. Success in modern political economies does not turn on whether one can win a running race. Whilst Nozick (1997) has a point in that there is no centralised process judging how well individuals utilise their capacities and therefore, that life itself is not a race, he conveniently ignores the role of social institutions in which one enters at various stages along life's journey. These institutions, the school in particular, effectively judge how well one is doing and to what stage of the race one can next progress (see Lamb & Ball, 1998). Working against ameliorative educational inputs in subtle ways, the school curriculum acts as a sorting device, ratcheting both "brute bad luck", eg. socioeconomic disadvantage, and "bad option luck", eg. school subject choice (Lamb & Ball, 1998; Teese, 2000). Life then is still a race but a race of a different sort to the kind Nozick describes. It is also a race that is often won or lost at the scene of the school.

School therefore is a crucial stage in the race and one that requires careful umpiring though policies designed to achieve equity. This is where most discussions about equity stop however. It is assumed that when speaking of "equity", we are all talking of the same thing. This is a dangerous assumption. We need to avoid taking such contested, foundational notions at face-value and dig deeper by asking more pointed questions, such as: equity in *what*? This really means that we need to formulate an equation, say: (X) x (a) = (*b*). That is; distribution (*X)* of (*a*) to achieve (*b*). At the end of the day, the values we attribute to *a* and *b* determines what we do, how we do it and what we end up with. The value of (*X*) then is dependent upon the weight given to *a* and *b*.

"Inputs"

The distribution (*X*) of educational resources (inputs) is designed to bring individuals up to a certain level and that level differs widely between systems. Importantly, dominant political beliefs influence what values are accorded to *a* and *b*, determining the degree of distribution (*X*) and thus, where that level will be. The respective value ascribed to both *a* and *b* is largely determined by political orientation; that is, whether a state leans more towards a left (positive interventionist) or right (neutralist) thesis of governance.

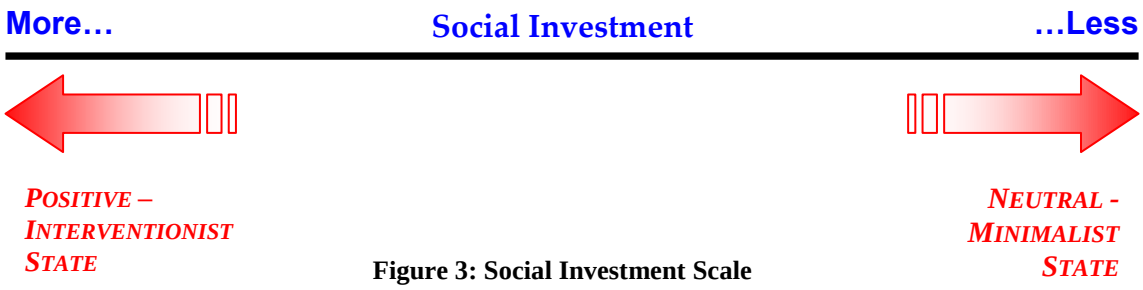

Figure 3: Social Investment Scale

For example, libertarian states (those leaning to the right of the scale) might opt for formal equality of opportunity and may fund each enrolled child equally in order to provide children with a minimum standard (i.e. distribution ends with educational provision).[5] Alternatively, more egalitarian states (those inclined towards the left) might wish to remove barriers to education that exist for some children and so may elect to provide additional inputs (both in and outside of the schooling context) in an attempt to level out the playing field. The value ascribed to *a* and *b* and the resulting distribution (*X*) of inputs can influence at what level a person can run in the race, however, it is worth noting that there is a considerable difference between being able to participate and being able to compete. It is on this difference that much of the controversy surrounding the notion of "equal opportunity" turns.

Equality of Opportunity

One problem with equality of opportunity relates to back to "starting gate" theories or, more precisely, where the start is thought to be. In a seminal work on inequality in education, James Coleman (1973) criticised the 'false ideal of equality of opportunity' (Nash, 2004, p. 373) from the perspective of meagre educational inputs at the start of compulsory schooling. This, he argued, did little to affect the unequal private circumstances of children which had far more impact on their ability to do well at school (Coleman, 1973). Whilst Coleman's critique of equality of opportunity has resulted in widespread rejection of the notion, this need not result in conceptual confusion, nor should the traditional notion of equality of opportunity be reinstated (Nash, 2004). Instead we need to engage with the contradictions that plague the concept of equality of opportunity - particularly educational opportunity.

The Rawlsian difference principle attempts to engineer "simple equality" through a sub-principle relating to equality of opportunity (Blacker, 1999). Now equal opportunity is an admirable concept, particularly when we consider what it has achieved for the career prospects of women and minority groups.[6] Beyond prising the gates open a fraction though, in its most formal sense, equality of opportunity has not achieved anything like equality (Sen, 1992). For example, on average, women still get paid less than men with comparable qualifications and similar work (Livingstone & Lalonde, 2006). Women and minority groups are still under-represented in positions of prestige and power although their representation is becoming more respectable.

That progress has been made is indisputable. There is a grave difference however, between formal representation (as in presence in the labour force) and the conditions of that presence (Phillips, 2006). For example, more women and minority groups are in the labour force but first of all, income inequality is growing and these groups make up the majority of those in the lower quartiles (The Economist, 2006; Atkinson & Leigh, 2006; Frijters & Gregory, 2006). Second, job creation is occurring mostly in the lower skilled, highly casualised, lower paid and least secure occupations (Argy, 2006). The result, if the US is to be held up as a paragon example, is the residualisation of women and minority groups, the

establishment of a sub-class of the 'working poor' and growing social inequality (Argy, 2005).

Going Back to School: Equity as Equal Educational Opportunity

Similar objections have been lodged against the notion of equal opportunity elsewhere and disputes centre largely on 'competing conceptions on what "equal opportunity" is and what opportunity is for' (Blits, 1990, p. 310). What does it *mean* then to say that persons have an 'equal opportunity'? First, we must take another leaf from Sen's book and ask: Equal opportunity *for what*? From an educational perspective, it would be useful to note the moral panic over the achievement of boys. Boys perform lower on average in literacy relative to girls and this pattern bears out internationally (Gorard & Smith, 2004). However, comparisons such as these fail to answer the question: which boys and which girls? (Collins et al., 2000) And, is their literacy performance offset by performance in the high-status subjects of maths and science? (Teese, 2000)

Moreover, whilst the removal of barriers to educational opportunities for girls may have been impressive in most OECD countries (Jutting et al., 2006), this does not necessarily translate to a level playing field in the world beyond school. In developed countries, women enjoy greater "opportunities" than their less advantaged contemporaries, however these women still shoulder the major responsibility for unpaid domestic work and the rearing of children (Lewis & Guillari, 2005). Subsequently many women with children are forced to "choose" casual or part-time working conditions and the precarious job security and low benefits that result (see Argy, 2006).

So - what do we make of the promise of "equal educational opportunity" now? Consideration of divergent post-school pathways leads us to ponder two things: First, what effect can the school realistically be expected to have, and second, should we be talking about equality of *opportunity* or equitable *outcomes*? Despite their limitations (Connell et al., 1982), schools are still viewed as the best means available to promote prosperity and social cohesion (OECD, 2000). Arguably, these are *outcomes* but they are not ones for which the school alone can be held responsible. Schools operate within a social context buffeted by global economic forces and public policy. As we have seen, schools can do much to improve the educational performance of its students but, if the social and economic conditions beyond the school gate are unequal, then "equal educational opportunity" lacks bite.

Equal Opportunity versus Equitable Outcomes

The problem with opportunity in the first instance, is that persons possess different abilities affecting their conversion of opportunities into outcomes (Sen, 1992). This is where Rawls and Sen part company. Rawls (1988) stops short at the equitable distribution of primary goods. To go beyond that would in his view tip political liberalism into the realm of "comprehensive doctrine" – leading to the imposition of specific conceptions of the good – which would threaten the freedom of the individual to lead the kind of life he or she sees fit. However, Papastephanou (2005a) refutes Rawls' claim to political neutrality and judges the priority of liberty in Rawlsian theory as advancing a different conception of the good – one privileging a neutralist thesis of governance. To this we must add Sen's (1990, p. 118) caution that, 'this "political conception," with the insistence on avoiding any comprehensive view, may limit the scope and range of a theory of justice too severely'. He dismisses the Rawlsian reliance on distribution of primary goods saying that they represent only *means* to freedom - not what power persons may have 'to convert primary goods into the achievement of ends' (Sen, 1990, p. 120).

Here we arrive back at a discussion of *means* and *ends* which corroborates and extends our earlier equation by supplying us with a simple value to attach to *a* and *b*; that is, *a* = (*means*) and *b* = (*ends*). Therefore systems need to aim towards:

(*X*) distribution of (*means*) to achieve (*ends*)

Crucially, this simple equation connects to the problem of opportunity versus outcomes and where the "starting-gate" is thought to be. Do we talk of the one at the beginning of compulsory schooling? Or the one that comes at the end? If we recognise the starting gate to be in the early years (as with HeadStart in the US and SureStart in the UK), and provide educational inputs to level the playing field at this stage of the race, does this mean children have an equal opportunity to succeed at school? What about the child who never gets enough food, sleep or space and materials to consolidate their learning at home? Will they have the same "opportunity" to succeed as a child who grows up in a linguistically rich environment, surrounded by a plentiful array of cultural artefacts with access to broadband and a quiet place to study? Educational research has consistently shown that different classes of children convert educational raw materials into different classes of outcomes (Croll, 2004). Unfortunately, the persistence of marked inequality in educational outcomes between the socially advantaged and disadvantaged makes a mockery of formal equality of opportunity (see Morrow, 2004).

Going Back to School: Education *for* Equity

Educational inputs are still important though. Whilst the landmark studies into educational inequality by Coleman (1966) and Jencks (1972) pointed to the limited effects of educational interventions against the weight of social inequality in general, the relevant message both then and now is that educational inputs alone cannot bridge the ever-widening gap between rich and poor. But they *are* a thumping good start. The problem is not that inputs lack effect. Indeed they help to build what Burbules, Lord and Sherman (1982) call criteria of access. They make some important observations that are worth detailed examination here.

Realising Opportunity

Pausing to consider what it really means to have an opportunity, Burbules et al. (1982) conceptually re-define opportunity as *access*.[7] Now, a person's access to something can be affected by personal factors such as physical or intellectual ability and this would be a *criterion* relating to their successful procurement of that good (see Burbules et al., 1982). Criteria of access can be further split into criteria *of* access (ability) and criteria *for* access (learning-enhanced ability or embodied capital, see Bourdieu, 1984). However, external factors can also affect a person's acquisition of or access to something and this, say Burbules, Lord and Sherman (1982), is a *condition of access*. The example they give is a small child wishing to reach a book on a shelf. The height of the shelf is a condition of access. The height of the child (and their ability to jump) is a criteria *of* access. It can be argued that their ability to draw on prior learning to find other means to reach the book is a criteria *for* access.[8] Crucially, it is the height of the shelf (the conditions of access) which determines the necessary criteria of/for access.

Let's apply this to the scene of the school. Educational inputs can assist the child by positively influencing criteria of access; providing a footstool to assist the child to reach the book, so to speak. In the case of access to the curriculum however, raising the child by one foot in order to reach a particular book on a particular shelf is not necessarily going to help them when they need to reach a different book on a higher shelf. Climbing the curriculum is an exercise in accumulation and consolidation (Teese, 2000), so children do need to access that first book on the first shelf, but also many more from there. Active social investment in the form of high quality child-care, preschool and early intervention can help them to do that (OECD, 2006) – but individualised early intervention is not enough on its own. Like climbing a rock wall, children need to gain a safe initial foothold from which to progress however in their schooling career, they will need continued access and the ability to reach the next book on the next shelf and so on. For this, children also need to develop criteria *for* access – hence the importance of school curriculum.

Curriculum as a Condition of Access

Educational inputs in the form of short-term compensatory programs at the early years "starting gate" may well help secure a foothold at that first shelf but they are by no means enough to ensure safe passage from one foothold to the next. Furthermore, as empirical research has consistently shown (Oakes, 1990; Teese & Polesel, 2003), the structure of the curriculum strangles opportunity by closing down access to all but the most stoic students. The cumulative nature of curricular knowledge and access requires not only that individuals possess or obtain the criteria *of* access (eg. motivation, intelligence, relevant knowledge) but that they are exposed to and successfully obtain what I would define as criteria *for* access (eg. the ability to consolidate learning and put it to work in other higher-order tasks). That is, individuals must master each stage or level of the curriculum in order to be able to access the next. Therefore, the stratified nature of the academic curriculum functions as a *condition of access*. This has implications for how we structure our equation, since we now need to answer: distribution of inputs *when* until *when*?

(X) distribution of $(\textit{means})_{[\text{WHEN}]}$ to achieve $(\textit{ends})_{[\text{WHEN}]}$

Amy Gutmann (1987) argues that the purpose of education is authentic democratic participation and her notion of the democratic threshold is a useful device to think about the problem of means and ends. She advocates two distributive principles: the *authorisation principle* [AP] and the *democratic threshold* [DT]. The first grants 'authority to democratic institutions to determine the priority of education relative to other social goods' (Gutmann, 1987, p. 136), allowing for the distribution of sufficient educational resources to support children's learning up to a democratically deliberated level of education. The latter principle - the democratic threshold - establishes this limit. Beyond this threshold, liberal democratic societies may exercise discretionary distribution according to meritocratic principles. The value of Gutmann's authorisation principle is: first, that it acknowledges the need for the equitable distribution of educational inputs; and second, it allows us to extend resources in the form of learning support *beyond* the traditional early years starting gate. Gutmann's principles would inform our equation thus:

(X) distribution of $(\textit{means})_{[\text{AP}]}$ to achieve $(\textit{ends})_{[\text{DT}]}$

But where should the democratic threshold be? Marginson (2006, p. 211) describes democratic education as the 'transformation of agency'. Arguably agency, or the ability to form preferences *and* execute them (Jonathon, 1997), is precisely what is missing when individuals cannot ascend the curriculum, experience school failure and face 'social closure' (Barry, 2005, p. 15) through low-paid dead-end jobs or a listless wait in the unemployment line. The idea that the central purpose of education is to equip citizens for democracy has popular support, although the exact nature of that democracy and how schools should get kids there remains contested territory (Donnelly, 2006; Ferrari, 2006; Wiltshire, 2006).

Gutmann (1987) maintains that the more educated a society, the higher the democratic threshold needs to be. Recent research data confirms that across the rich OECD nations, citizens are at their most educated than ever before (Peters, 2004; 2006; Argy, 2006; Hudson, 2006). The knowledge economy has effectively ramped up the level of education required for individuals in these nations to be able to participate in what Gutmann calls "democratic processes". Note though that this does not translate simplistically into the development of adequate literacy levels to understand "how to vote" cards. Being a full member of society means being able to participate meaningfully and being able to choose between lives one sees reason to value (Sen, 1979).

"Outcomes"

Outcomes has become a dirty word in Australia. Commentators like Donnelly (2006) malign outcomes-based education and not without some cause. However, the campaign against OBE should not mean we stop talking and thinking in terms of outcomes – although I would stipulate outcomes in the broader sense to avoid restricting the value of education to benchmarks and test scores. As an aim, equality of outcomes comes in for criticism, although there are still strenuous arguments to be found in support of the concept (Howe, 1989; Phillips, 2004). In a formal sense, completely equal outcomes in education is unachievable and a healthy society requires different knowledges, skills and tastes. A healthy society also requires depth in its labour force. Besides, returning to the definition of equity made at the beginning of this paper, the problem is not differential results but how those results are distributed and the effects of that distribution upon individuals; that is, whether those results effect their life chances and provide them with a life they can see reason to value (Sen, 1999).

In recent work by Luke, Graham, Sanderson, Voncina & Weir (2006), from which this paper derives, 'equality of outcomes' was interpreted,

> …to mean choice of pathways leading to meaningful participation in society, economy and culture. This would require multiple, flexible pathways that led to credentials that hold some 'parity of esteem' and actual exchange value in specific occupational, educational, social and civic fields. It would also entail the achievement of those social dispositions, knowledges and outcomes that enable one to participate in a just society.

However, we also cautioned that, 'an educational system based on individual choice and a free market presupposes that individuals and communities are in a position to exercise choice and, indeed, that the market is fair, transparent and equally accessible' (Luke et al., 2006). International comparative data shows that market systems unmediated by social policy, epitomised by systems in the countries towards the right of the social investment scale (see Figure 3), fail to provide equality of access much beyond formal or simple equality terms (Luke et al., 2006). Alternatively, social democratic nations such as the Nordic countries, which employ a policy mix towards the centre-left of the social investment scale (see Figure 3), appear to realise excellence in educational achievement and a more equitable distribution of results.

So… how to close a growing gap?

Slowly realisation is dawning that neutralist-policies open the gate for widening inequality. Australian economist, John Quiggin (2000, p. 8) observes as such:

> The neoliberal orthodoxy is based on the assumption that our economic and social problems arise mainly from the intrusion of government into areas best left to the free market. The reality, however, is the opposite. The range of social problems for which market solutions are inadequate is so great that the capacity of government to address them has been overstretched. Health care, education, the environment, public safety , infrastructure and social insurance are all areas where market outcomes are both inefficient and inequitable, and they are all growing in importance. The return of mass unemployment has placed further demands on the social security system.

Recently in Australia, the impetus for change is coming not from the extremes but from the shrinking middle-classes, which are under pressure to keep up with the fleet of foot and avoid sliding into the growing under-class represented by the working poor (Pusey, 2003). This is not an experience unique to Australia. The world over, policymakers are now looking to the successes of the Nordic model.

This is because the policy mix employed by the Nordic countries *works*: producing both economic growth and social equality (Argy, 2006). Delivering low and stable levels of income inequality, high and rising levels of income mobility and very good productivity and employment outcomes, the success of the Nordic model suggests that high levels of redistribution (including employment protection that is limited relative to model 3 but still

greater than Australia had before the Howard Government reforms) are 'not *per se* incompatible with good economic and employment outcomes – provided the redistribution policy mix is liberally spiced with "active" government intervention to help people get jobs and work incentives' (Argy, 2006, p. 64).

Despite the evidence that moving further along the equality/liberty continuum from Model 2 towards Model 1 'produces little economic benefit and considerable distributional pain' (Argy, 2006, p. 66), the Australian ship has set sail in search of higher tides – ignoring the increasing turbulence caused by social stress and relative poverty (Saunders, 2002; Pusey, 2003). Whilst US economic fundamentalism may have gone too far to turn back (Malkin, 1991), the same cannot be said for those countries closer to the centre of the continuum. Argy (2006, p. 66) maintains that 'even a partial move from model 2 to model 4 offers more equality of opportunity without any great national economic cost', moreover with the injection of active redistribution policies, he argues that not only are the economic risks much less but net economic results are positive.

Ultimately, the message from the international political experiments outlined here is that Australian policymakers should take note of the innovative practices developed by those countries of the Nordic Model. As maintained by Luke, Graham, Sanderson, Voncina & Weir (2006), this would have to entail more than simple access to a market of differential school, curriculum programs and pathways, for:

> True educational freedom of choice requires a threshold of mastery of cultural tools and common cultural and intellectual resources that would enable one to assess options and pursue choices. Such choices, further, would have to demonstrably lead to meaningful and gainful participation in what is, hopefully, an equitable society. A curriculum model committed to equity therefore must necessarily strike a balance between equality of resources and individual freedom to pursue equitable but different outcomes. This would begin by equal access to a cognitive, linguistic and practical 'toolkit' for unpacking culturally significant knowledge and enabling access to the facts and truths, values and beliefs, knowledges and interpretations, texts and discourses of the curriculum.

Whilst curriculum structures can enhance equity, curriculum is nested within education policy frameworks that may or may not support equity. Learning support policies that rely on narrow disability eligibility criteria work to limit who can lay claim to educational resources (Graham, 2006b). The chronic under-funding of education systems has meant that parents are encouraged to use private means to support their children's learning. Whilst this has contributed to a rapidly expanding franchise tuition market, only the already-advantaged can afford to use it. Parents of children with additional support needs are being pressured by schools to get their children diagnosed with conditions recognised by education systems as eligible for extra support funding (Burke, 2006). Success and failure is individualised and learning support services out-sourced as much as possible.

Ultimately though, everyone pays. Evidence suggests that market-based systems informed by a neoliberal rationality, which leave education systems uninsulated by active social investment and a healthy social fabric, place inordinate strain on teachers, schools, parents and communities (Graham, 2006a). Inadequate safety nets leave gaping holes leading to social closure and lives spent in the constant shadow of stress, insecurity, low self-esteem, increased risk of depression, suicide, substance abuse, low intergenerational mobility, welfare-dependency and general despair. None of this is conducive to producing active citizens in a healthy democracy. Education is however, 'crucial for democracy, as educational institutions… intersect with, and therefore mediate between, institutions like the family and those of the state and the economy' (Olssen, 2003, p. 549). What all this means is that a comprehensive education system must be well-supported both within and out. It should be of high quality and that quality should be fairly distributed. High quality education should be 'public, universal, compulsory and free' (Olssen, 2003, p. 549). Ultimately, governments must realise that high quality and high equity in education is inconsistent with a political rationality that sees education simply as a (costly) economic lever.

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[1] Aristotle, *Politics*, Book V.

[2] Such theories draw on egalitarian models of resource distribution, for example: Dworkin's equality of resources model. See discussion in Anderson, p. 308.

[3] For example, Australian incomes have risen consistently (Atkinson & Leigh, 2006), causing much debate about the nature of "real" poverty in a highly developed country and consequently, how a poverty-line should be calculated (i.e. half of the average, mean or median income). It is argued that the average is no longer a reliable measure because it is pulled up by inordinate increases at the top: ie. salaries of chief executives and financial officers (2006). The rich, the poor and the growing gap between them. London: The Economist Newspaper Ltd. 25th October. Available at: http://www.economist.com/world/displaystory.cfm?story_id=7055911.. Most social commentators now agree, however, that it is 'not possible to fully participate economically and socially in Australian society on an income equal to half of the median. More [is] needed, perhaps something closer to one half of mean income' Saunders, P. (2002). Getting Poverty Back onto the Policy Agenda. *Research and Social Policy Briefing Paper No. 10*. (Sydney, The Smith Family)**:** 1-4..

[4] This is most likely due to the early streaming practices utilised in Germany. See Luke, Graham, Sanderson, Voncina and Weir (2006).

[5] See Gutmann (1987), "Financing Public Schooling", pp. 139-148 for an interesting discussion of US policy.
[6] It must be noted that "affirmative action" is a positive-interventionist interpretation of equal opportunity and thus, would violate Rawlsian neutrality.
[7] Popkewitz and Lindblad make an interesting point that concepts related to individual access embody particular liberal constructions of individualism by relating the problem of inclusion to access, whereas the collective imaginaries particular to the social democratic countries conceive of inclusion as 'social integration' (p. 8). I am aware of the individualistic assumptions involved in dividing a cake but as stated earlier, this paper is concerned with the problems in achieving "equal liberty for all" in liberal democratic countries. Indeed, one aim of this work is to argue that this is done better elsewhere.
[8] Criteria for access is my construction, for which I am indebted to Burbules, Sherman and Lord's earlier definition of conditions and criteria of access.