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Briefings
Thought leadership for the independent schooling sector

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A NEW DECLARATION ON SCHOOLING?

From the Executive Director

Australia's Ministerial Education Council[1] is currently reviewing the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (*the Melbourne Declaration*)* with the expectation that a new declaration on schooling will be adopted by Ministers later this year.

Australia's first declaration on schooling was published in 1989 *(*the *Hobart Declaration on Schooling)* and was followed by the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century* (adopted in 1999) and the *Melbourne Declaration* in 2008[2].

The declarations have been designed to guide Australia's national school education system by setting a vision for schooling in Australia.

For Queensland independent schools, the *Melbourne Declaration* has added importance as it is a requirement under the *Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act 2017* that a school's written statement of philosophy and aims must be consistent with the Declaration[3].

The stated goal of the current review of the *Melbourne Declaration* is to "develop a contemporary national declaration on educational goals for all Australians, to guide collaborative efforts over the coming years"[4].

Given that the *Melbourne Declaration* has been in place since 2008, it is timely that it be reviewed and refreshed. There have been significant national changes in schooling since 2008 (Australian Curriculum, Professional Standards for Teachers and increased use of technology just to name a few) in addition to the ever changing economic and social environment. Further, the increasing reliance on technology in the workplace is having significant impacts on the world of work and the skills that will be required by today's students to ensure their participation in society in the future.

It might also be timely to ask the question as to whether high level aspirational documents like the *Melbourne Declaration* have any impact or relevance on the day to day operations of schools and how we might better link the aspirations enunciated in a future declaration with the challenging task of driving improvements in student outcomes.

Much of the *Melbourne Declaration*'s intent and wording is still relevant in the foreseeable future. The Declaration has two goals:

Goal 1 – Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence; and

Goal 2 – All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

The Declaration sets out a "Commitment to Action" to achieve the educational goals in eight inter-related areas:

- Developing stronger partnerships;
- Supporting quality teaching and school leadership;
- Strengthening early childhood education;
- Enhancing middle years development;
- Supporting senior years of schooling and youth transitions;
- Promoting world-class curriculum and assessment;
- Improving educational outcomes for indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds;
- Strengthening accountability and transparency.

1 The Education Council comprises the Federal Minister for Education and State/Territory Ministers for Education.
2 Copies of the Hobart, Adelaide and Melbourne Declarations can be accessed at https://www.reviewmelbournedeclaration.edu.au/resources
3 This is specified in Regulation 10 (2) under *the Act*.
4 See the Ministerial Council Discussion Paper on the Review at https://www.reviewmelbournedeclaration.edu.au/resources

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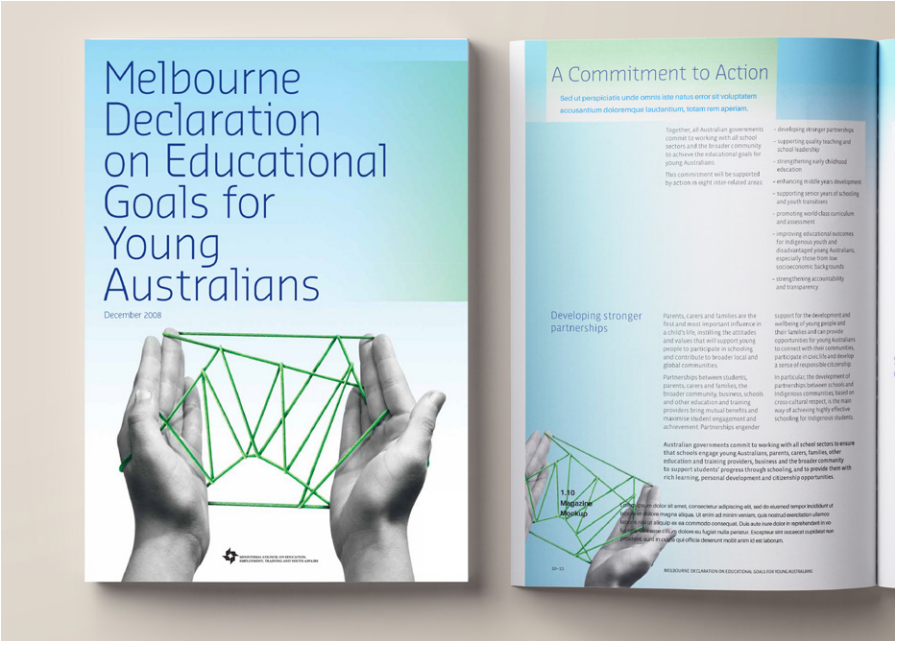

What might a new Declaration say and what might independent schools expect from any new Declaration?

It is appropriate that Australia has a visionary and aspirational statement to not only provide a focus but also a commitment to action in schooling. However, a statement that is "all things to everybody" needs to be avoided. It should have a very specific focus and preferably this should relate to a relentless drive to develop students and improve educational outcomes.

Importantly, any new Declaration should relate to all schools including those in diverse settings. In this regard, it should recognise and value school-based autonomy whereby school leaders are the key decision makers in achieving student outcomes in the context of their communities. It should recognise the increasing diversity of schools and through this the importance of local decision making according to each school community.

There are key trends since 2008 impacting on schooling which will need to be recognised in a new Declaration. Whilst it is challenging in an environment of rapid change such as globalisation to predict future scenarios, clearly information and digital technology will continue to advance exponentially influencing how future students, teachers and leaders access knowledge and how they learn.

Further, an increasingly boundaryless, socially networked and globalised world means that students will need the ethical and social frameworks that support and celebrate the benefits of a diverse multicultural and multi-faith society.

The new Declaration should also reflect the increasing focus on students' wellbeing; children's mental health, safety and sense of belonging in safe and supportive environments.

Ministers have already agreed that much of the content of the *Melbourne Declaration* is still relevant and supported by stakeholders. They have stated "the intent of a contemporary declaration will remain the same"[5].

However, Ministers have acknowledged improvements will be considered to modernise the declaration and reflect:

- the factors that impact on the success of education;
- the changing nature of education, the economy and work;
- the place of learning within broader society;
- the importance of early learning
- the increasing need for lifelong learning;
- a renewed focus on equity and embracing diversity;
- the importance of smooth transitions and appropriate learning pathways.

Ministers might want to consider the value of including detailed action plans in a future Declaration. Whilst it is important there are clear mechanisms to translate the goals of any Declaration into policies and actions that are particularly relevant at the individual school level, in the past the commitments to action in the *Melbourne Declaration* have been superseded by other national agreements, plans and targets.

A short, sharp and focused Declaration that simply but clearly outlines the key goals for Australian schooling could provide the vision for a common

5 See Education Council Communique following a forum held in February on the review of the Declaration available at http://www.educationcouncil.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/Miscellaneous/Forum%20Communique%2022%20February.pdf

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Finally, there is much speculation as to the titling of a new declaration on schooling – Hobart, Adelaide, Melbourne and then?

Historically, the declarations have taken the name of the capital city of the Minister chairing Education Council at the time of adoption. The Federal Minister is the Chair of Education Council for 2019 perhaps suggesting a Canberra Declaration. The Queensland Minister for Education does not get to Chair Education Council until 2024, so a much hoped for Brisbane Declaration can probably be ruled out.

Education Council has scheduled a series of consultations on the review of the *Melbourne Declaration* over the coming months, including input from students.

The Council has scheduled a meeting in Alice Springs towards the end of 2019. If a new Declaration was ready for adoption at that meeting might we have an Alice Springs Declaration?

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Submissions to the Review of the Melbourne Declaration into the Educational Goals of Young Australians

Independent Schools Queensland
https://rms.isq.qld.edu.au/files/Advocacy_Representation/Submissions_to_Government/ISQ%20Submission_Melbourne%20Declaration%20120619.pdf

Independent Schools Council of Australia
https://isca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/ISCA-Submission-Review-of-the-Melbourne-Declaration-on-Educational-Goals-for-Young-Australians-Final.pdf

COULD DESIGN THINKING SOLVE THE 'WICKED PROBLEM' OF SCHOOL EDUCATION?

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"To think like a designer requires dreaming up wild ideas, taking time to tinker and test, and being willing to fail early and often. The designer's mindset embraces empathy, optimism, iteration, creativity, and ambiguity. And most critically, design thinking keeps people at the center of every process"

(BROWN, 2019)

Every day, school leaders and teachers grapple with the best way to prepare students for a rapidly changing world. Top of the 'to do' list is improving educational outcomes and giving young people the best chance to reach their full potential. School education is complex and there are many challenges educators face, including: a crowded curriculum; fast paced technological change and an uncertain work future; multiple learning and assessment methods; plus differing student abilities. Add to this the often competing priorities of government, parents and communities, and school education is indeed a 'wicked problem'.

'Wicked problems' are a key concept in design theory (Buchanan, 1992). First coined by Horst Rittel, this term describes "social system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing" (Rittel, as cited in Buchanan, 1992, p. 15). Theorists had been trying to formulate a linear process to describe design in practice; however, Rittel argued that because conditions of the problem are not simple but instead complex, or wicked, the sequence of thought or practice that designers follow is not linear (Buchanan, 1992). This non-linear thought process is now known as 'design thinking'.

Tim Brown, CEO and President of IDEO, is regarded as having popularised the term design thinking. Brown (2019) describes design thinking as a way to "address the challenges facing business and society" (p. 1), and as a collection of practices used by designers – across all design disciplines – to find solutions where the user is central. The approach has spread to the business world in the past 20 years, and Brown believes the most progressive organisations are now putting designers at the heart of strategy, to develop truly disruptive new approaches, "rather than [merely] enlist designers to make an already developed idea more attractive" (2019, p. 13). He asserts that the shift from an industrial to knowledge economy is responsible for the recent interest in design: instead of physical products, designers are now using their skillset to create intangible goods and services in an age where "innovation has become nothing less than a survival strategy" (p. 13). He asks "[w]hat might be the impact if we can successfully apply our design thinking skills to the truly 'wicked' problems of the twenty-first century?" (2019, p. 5).

In asking how we might design a new way for education, Brown examples the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design – Stanford University's d.school – where traditional design subjects are not taught, but instead postgraduate students from diverse faculties, such as medicine, engineering and law, collaborate on "design projects in the public interest" (2019, p. 231). Both IDEO and the d.school's design thinking approaches have been used extensively in frameworks and practice for creative thinking in recent times.

Figure 1 shows IDEO's simplified five-step process, and Figure 2 provides a list of key designer practices and behaviours which form the basis of design thinking.

Design thinking in education

Design thinking is used in education both locally and globally. The following examples show how this approach can be used in all aspects of education, from strategy to teaching and curriculum, to changing human behaviour and sentiment. They draw on the key practices and behaviours of designers, as shown in Figure 2.

In the United States, the Teachers Guild is a not-for-profit organisation which promotes design thinking as an approach for creative solutions for issues in education. The initiative was a collaboration between Riverdale Country School and design-thinking leader, IDEO. They developed the *Design Thinking for Educators Toolkit* (available online) as one of several resources, run workshops to teach design thinking as a creative problem-solving approach, and provide teacher-created solutions for anyone to implement in the classroom. Additionally, the Teachers Guild uses the power of the crowd to collaborate on online challenges in education. This is design thinking in practice, a solution to the question "how can we ensure we get the best ideas?", as online crowdsourcing has no restrictions on availability for set meeting times, or on who is deemed capable of originating a great idea.

The epigraph in the Teachers Guild resource, *Thinking & Acting Like a Designer* tells the story of teacher Charles Shryock (Diefenthaler et al., 2017). Shryock was challenged by lost learning time when substitute teachers are used: despite the quality of the teacher, this represents lost time for most students (Kronholz, as cited in Diefenthaler et al., 2017). Shryock wondered if 'sub days' could be used by

Figure 1: IDEO's Five-step Design Thinking Process
Adapted from (Lewrick, Link & Leifer, 2018).

Understand the task, the market, the clients, the technology, the limiting conditions, restrictions, and optimisation criteria

Observe and analyse the behaviour of real people in real situations and in relation to the specific task

Visualise the first solution drafts (3D, simulation, prototypes, graphics, drawings)

Evaluate and optimise the prototypes in a fast succession of continuous repetitions

Implement the new concept in reality (the most time-consuming phase)

"When searching for the next big market opportunity, design thinking offers a strong mindset. The mindset must be further developed and combined with other approaches. No one size fits everything – we have to find our own way and the appropriate mindset for our organization."

Lewrick et al., 2018, p. 314

Figure 2: Designer Practices and Behaviours
Adapted from (Jacobs, 2018)

Design processes and practices

- **Generating insights about users, generating ideas**
- **Prototyping, testing and implementing ideas**
- **Forming multidisciplinary teams, collaborating**
- **Asking "what if?" to imagine future scenarios**
- **Visualising**
- **Using a human-centred approach**
- **Using convergent and divergent modes of thinking**
- **Resolving ill-defined problems**
- **Exploring the problem space and the solution space**
- **Iterating for improvement.**

Design cognitive strategies/ thinking styles

- **Adopting solution-focused cognitive strategies**
- **Abductive reasoning/thinking**
- **Oscillating between divergent and convergent thinking**
- **Reframing problems in a reflective manner**
- **Utilising a holistic view of the problem**
- **Practicing integrative thinking**
- **Imagining possible solutions.**

Design mindsets

- **Experimental**
- **Tolerant of ambiguity**
- **Optimistic**
- **Future-oriented.**

COULD DESIGN THINKING SOLVE THE 'WICKED PROBLEM' OF SCHOOL EDUCATION? CONTINUED

Kirsch's (2014) recommendation for leaders is to embrace collaboration across transparent and flat organisations, where staff are involved in innovating but may play different roles on different projects.

students to work on passion projects. A colleague, and Teachers Guild member, pushed Shryock to contribute the idea, named SubHack, to the online challenge of "How might we create rituals and routines that establish a culture of innovation in our classrooms and schools?". This idea was picked up by West Contra Costa Unified, a school "thousands of miles away" (Diefenthaler et al., 2017, p. v) with a high rate of disengaged students. The school reports "We've seen this program inspire students to be critical thinkers and problem solvers while developing their reading and writing skills. It empowered them to take initiative in personalizing their learning, which had the result of boosting excitement about coming to school" (Gonzalez, as quoted in Diefenthaler et al., 2017, p. v). The project began as an idea, asked "what if?", was human-centred, demonstrated divergent thinking and collaboration when contributed to the online challenge, and was prototyped as a pilot. These are the marks of design thinking.

Australian Examples

Government Level

The Australian Curriculum sees design thinking as a key idea in the teaching of Technologies (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, n.d.); meaning that today's secondary students are learning a process of considering, evaluating and planning to solve difficult problems, a life-long skill they can use to creatively problem-solve or innovate beyond design technology disciplines.

In response to the new Senior Assessment and Tertiary Entrance Systems in 2019, the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) developed a new Design syllabus, including an Australian design-thinking framework, developed by the Asia Pacific Design Library, for students "to learn about and experience design" (State Library of Queensland, n.d., para. 5). "The new syllabus envisions design as a complex and sophisticated form of problem-solving that uses divergent and convergent thinking strategies" (State Library of Queensland, n.d., para. 4). The framework provides a design thinking structure for students to "Inquire, Ideate and Implement, punctuated at each stage by moments of structured Reflection" (State Library of Queensland, n.d., para. 9).

In Victoria, the state government is rolling out 10 new 'Tech Schools'. They combine STEM curriculum with a design thinking approach, and work with industry to solve real problems, using key design processes and skills by "applying empathy to understand another's needs, brainstorming creative solutions with… peers, in a learning environment where failure is encouraged" (Victoria State Government, 2017, para. 1). For industry choosing to be partners with Tech Schools, students form part of a multidisciplinary team, offer different experiences and ideas, and bring a design cognitive mindset.

The New South Wales Department of Education used design thinking to "embrace a customer-first approach to the way students, parents and teachers engage digitally. It's a work-in-progress story stretching from embracing human-centred design thinking principles and mindset, to new technology platforms, cross-collaboration and unified data and digital capabilities" (Cameron, 2019, para. 2). Director of Digital Services, Peter Buckmaster, explained how the project took two years for department buy-in and 13 months to implement (Cameron, 2019). His approach places the user first, whether that is at the school level, creating the best functionality and mechanics to get schools to migrate from multiple legacy platforms to a single content management system, or offering parent-friendly digital options, such as searching school catchment boundaries and enrolling online, something that was previously both opaque and time-consuming. The variety of innovations in this project show how divergent and convergent thinking, parts of design thinking, result in a store of ideas for immediate use or future piloting, each responding to a solution for how to use digital services across all levels of the education process to improve student outcomes.

School Level

There are examples in school leadership practice too. Association of Independent Schools Western Australian (AISWA) has partnered with design thinking organisation, NoTosh, to run workshops for school teaching and leadership teams. Developed to foster design capability across "the whole school" (AISWA, 2019, p. 2), this enables design thinking to be elevated to the leadership level (rather than restricted to issues of curriculum),

and 'what ifs?' to be asked relating to strategy, relevant to school boards and management.

Two schools which report benefits to the *wider* school community, after their leadership teams worked with NoTosh, are Wesley College (Perth) and Meningie Area School (Adelaide). Both projects established multi-disciplinary design teams – comprised of board members, school leaders, staff and students – to develop school-wide approaches to their issues. The effect on community for Wesley College was in improved parent satisfaction as their understanding of a revamped facility and its relationship to students, pedagogy and school values, had increased due to deep student involvement (AISWA, n.d.). Meningie Area School actively designed for improved community: the town was in decline following serious drought and the design team worked with the community to create a series of questions focused on improving the town's future. These were then taken into the classroom and interwoven with curriculum so that the students were actively improving their community "while fulfilling learning goals at the same time… News of what was taking place at the school quickly spread throughout the local community, and the relationship between the two was strengthened." (NoTosh, n.d., p. 1). Using design thinking by creating non-hierarchical design teams, iterating ideas and prototyping created a strong school community for these two Australian schools, which in turn is important for the enrolment pipeline and future stability.

Creativity Bias

"In order to survive in today's complex world, organizations need to generate, embrace, and execute on new ideas. That takes creativity and a creatively capable workforce. It's the secret sauce, or in evolutionary terms, it's what keeps you fit" (Brown, 2019).

Case Study: Design thinking for a new independent school system

Peruvian businessman, Carlos Rodriguez-Pastor engaged IDEO in 2011 "to design a school system that is international in quality, affordable to families in the emerging middle class and able to grow to a significant number of schools, thus having nationwide impact" (IDEO, n.d., para. 14). Peru has recently experienced high economic growth; however, despite the improved economic situation, in 2012 the country ranked 65th out of 65 on the OECD PISA scale (Brown, 2019).

The project was human-centred in approach, and iterative in practice as, after building five Innova schools, the team realised that the education model, which was "hands-on, experiential, collaborative" (IDEO, n.d., para. 7), was not sustainable. The model moved to one which uses technology and guided education to solve the issue of a shortage in highly trained teachers. Innova has continued to grow using a sustainable business model, and data to ensure educational outcomes are high; in 2018, there were 49 Innova schools serving communities right across Peru, with parents paying US$130 per month for tuition. Tim Brown's key insight from this project was that "schools, no less than sunglasses, street signs, or electric scooters, are designed – and like any other artefact of our civilization, they may be designed well or poorly, or may simply have been designed to meet challenges that are no longer relevant" (Brown, 2019, p. 254).

On winning gold at the International Design Excellence Awards in 2015, awards panellist Dana Arnett commented that "[t]his is a great example of design running the full spectrum of concept — from business model and curriculum design to building architecture and design. I was impressed how this program brilliantly tackled Peru's challenges to create a new and better school system" (IDEO, n.d., para. 30).

Read the full case study

While thinking creatively is seen as an important skill, there exists a bias against it which poses problems for individuals and groups trying to implement design thinking as a strategy. Marcus Kirsch asserts that creative thinkers and the general population assess information differently: while the general population is using information to confirm existing views, the creative thinkers are using the same information to reconsider new ways, "[w]hich is why it is easy to recognize the [design] thinkers with their standard response of 'Well, it depends'" (Kirsch, 2014, para. 5). Kirsch (2014) describes some of the biases that restrict creative thinking: 'confirmation bias' is a trust in the option that is already appealing; 'framing' is a narrowing of the issues; and, 'attitude polarisation' is where a preference is more fixed after a decision is made. Kirsch's recommendation for leaders is to embrace collaboration across transparent and flat organisations, where staff are involved in innovating but may play different roles on different projects.

In another example of unconscious bias against creativity, Mueller, Melwani, and Goncalo (2011) explain

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that there is a disconnect between the enthusiasm for creative thinking and the reluctance in the adoption of new ideas. While novelty and practicality are key aspects of creativity, the two are often seen as opposing, with practicality admired and novelty something to avoid (Mueller et al., 2011). Mueller et al. (2011) believe that novel ideas may be difficult to support due to the risk of failure, potential for ridicule and the unknowns around production. Their research showed that there exists "a conflict between an explicit preference towards creativity and unacknowledged negative associations with creativity" (Gaertner & Dovidio, as cited in Mueller et al., p. 4) which are opaque in the evaluation process. These biases against creativity are important for leaders to understand when embarking on design thinking as a strategy for change: key are the designer characteristics of an experimental mindset and the ability to reframe problems in a reflective manner (see Figure 2).

Conclusion

The idea that innovation follows a defined process with a clear sequence from recognising a problem, to implementing the 'best' ideas, led by those at the top of an organisational hierarchy is still prevalent in many companies; however, this model is now seen as outdated. Education is complex, and examples of design thinking in practice can be seen across all levels, from government devising policy and curriculum to ensure students are ready for a changing future, to individual schools implementing novel ways to impact community sentiment or re-engage students. Although the decision to embark on innovative strategic change may come from the top, design thinking asks that multi-disciplinary teams are set up in a flat structure, often involving students themselves. By creating the right team, asking 'what if?', letting go of cognitive biases to allow a wide range of creative solutions, schools can pilot new ways to solve their most difficult dilemmas.

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Further Reading

Design thinking for educators toolkit https://www.teachersguild.org/approach

Thinking & acting like a designer: How design thinking supports innovation in K–12 education https://1ff0468933cb72301e2b-43a5badbf472eb02814bc3b816e38c31.ssl.cf5.rackcdn.com/Thinking%20and%20Acting%20Like%20A%20Designer%20%E2%80%93%20DT%20in%20K-12%20education%20%E2%80%93%20IDEO%20+%20WISE.pdf

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