

## **Chapter 6**

### **Re-imagining Teachers' Work for the 21st Century**

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#### **Introduction**

In thinking about how I might usefully contribute to the conference I was reminded of a comment by Stephen Brookfield (1994) who described the sense of impostership he felt when speaking publicly to groups of educators:

The more I know about their work, the more I feel humbled by their abilities ... If I know too much about who they are and what they have done as educators, I start to say to myself 'what on earth can I say to these people that has any chance of being taken seriously, or considered important, by them? (1994: 207).

Despite these reservations, I suspect that there are two things that bring us together and provide a point of mutual engagement: first, a shared feeling that things aren't right; and second, a desire to change the way it is. In the case of the former, we could spend a considerable amount of time sharing stories of despair, frustration, outrage and even anger about the events, troubles and crises in our world and daily lives. Thankfully, each of us will also be able to share stories of success, joy, inspiration, and hope to nourish our sense of civic engagement. In the case of the latter, we all bring a different set of life trajectories, experiences and expertise to the task of changing our places and world. This conference provides a significant opportunity to both publicly and privately share these stories and in the process, articulate a more just, democratic and sustainable future for our children.

For me, this struggle revolves around my work as a critical teacher educator. It means grappling with the following kinds of questions: What does it mean to be a teacher in these difficult times? What kinds of teachers do we need? What knowledge, skills and values are desirable? What pedagogies work best? What are the alternatives? In tackling these questions, I believe we can begin to re-imagine teachers' work in more socially just and sustainable ways. As Paulo Freire (1998) reminds us:

I cannot be a teacher if I do not perceive with ever greater clarity that my practice demands of me a definition about where I stand. A break with what is not right ethically. I must choose between one thing and another thing. I cannot be a teacher and be in favour of everyone and everything (1998: 93).

In this chapter, I want to try and do three things:

1. To engage in some critique of what's happening to teachers' work at the moment;
2. To suggest how we might re-imagine teachers' work in more socially just, democratic and sustainable ways; and
3. To begin mapping out some general guidelines and practices that might assist in this task.

## **What's happening to teachers' work?**

In this section I want to argue that teachers' work can only begin to make sense in the context of the wider set of economic, social and political forces that are impacting on society in general and education in particular. McLaren and Farahmandpur (2005) summarise these circumstances well:

Neoliberalism ('capitalism with the gloves off' or 'socialism for the rich') refers to a corporate domination of society that supports state enforcement of the unregulated market, engages in the oppression of nonmarket forces and antimarket policies, guts free public services, eliminates social subsidies, offers limitless concessions to transnational corporations, enthrones a neomercantilist public policy agenda, establishes the market as the patron of educational reform, and permits private interest to control most of social life in the pursuit of profit for the few (that is, through lowering taxes on the wealthy, scrapping environmental regulations, and dismantling public education and social welfare programmes). It is undeniably one of the most dangerous politics that we face today (2005: 15-16).

John Ralston Saul in his recent book *The Collapse of Globalism* (2005) points out the seemingly obvious limitations of viewing society solely "through the prism of economics" (2005: 67). He argues:

What could be more naïve than to believe in one rather abstract approach to human life based on an expectation of economic leadership based upon a single and highly specific theory of economics? And what could be more innocent than to expect the world to sit back and watch that theory make its way uninterrupted for as long as it requires in order to succeed in its own terms? And even more naïve: that everyone would wait expectantly for the trickle-down or discipline or inevitability of this approach to successfully reformulate all the other aspects of our lives (2005: 31).

Saul (2004) goes on to describe global capitalism as a form of "crucifixion economics" because of its failure on a number of fronts including: a growing environmental crisis; job insecurity; unemployment; child labour; death from wars; epidemics; malnutrition; violence; and inequality of wealth (2004: 150). Elsewhere I (2006a) have summarised some of the features of an emerging critique of global capitalism such as: "endless consumerism" (Harvey, 2003: 65); "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey, 2003:20); "hyperrationalization" (Kincheloe, 2001: 44); "unpredictability", "irreversibility", "disorderliness" and "complexity" (Urry, 2003: 138); "the politics of fear" (Hinkson, 2006: 25); "social disintegration" and "fragmentation" (Kincheloe, 1995: 9-10); "personal helplessness", "ineffectuality" and "vulnerability" (Bauman, 2002: 18); and "risk" (Beck, 1992).

Against this broader backdrop, McMurtry (cited in Smyth and Shacklock, 1998) explains how education has been caught up in:

... an international movement towards justifying excellence in education in terms of a goal external to education, namely 'to compete effectively in the international marketplace' that: (a) this justification of education has been

increasingly presupposed or prescribed by corporate, government and educational leadership, and (b) education as a social institution has been correspondingly subordinated to international market goals, including the language and self-conceptualisation of educators themselves (1998: 12).

According to Smyth and Dow (1997):

... the focus is on how to best control education by making it do its economic work through greater emphasis on vocationalism, as well as by changing the ideology and the discourse of schooling (where students = customers; teachers = producers; and learning = outcomes) and through a restoration of the primacy of notions of human capital theory. Coupled with this is a worldwide move towards re-centralising control over education through national curricula, testing, appraisal, policy formulation, profiling, auditing, and the like, while giving the impression of decentralisation and handing control down locally (1997: 2).

These kinds of neo-liberal/neo-conservative inspired reforms have serious consequences for teachers' work. Smyth (2001a) describes how these tendencies have resulted in policy initiatives that:

- Require teachers to work within more rigidly defined policy frameworks and guidelines, of one kind or another;
- Place greater emphasis on determining the worth of teaching in terms of measurable outcomes;
- Supposedly make teachers more accountable by linking outcomes to the actions and activities of individual teachers, classrooms, and schools;
- Move teachers and schools in the direction of processes that are more appropriate to those of the corporate and industrial sector – performance appraisal, curriculum audits, quality assurance, and the like; and
- Preach the virtues of education and schooling as being no different than any other commodity – to be measured and calibrated according to quality standards; packaged and delivered to targeted audiences; and haggled over in the artificially constructed 'user-pays' marketplace of education (2001a: 39).

My concern is the way in which teachers are being construed as technicians/civil servants who are responsible and increasingly accountable for implementing policies and practices defined by external agencies (e.g., the OECD, IMF, and World Bank), governments, and business interests to serve the national interest (narrowly defined as international economic competitiveness) (Taylor, et al., 1997; Thompson, 2002; Apple, 2001). In the process, teachers' work and identities are being restructured and recultured to better reflect the values and behaviour of the corporate world with damaging consequences for teachers and students alike (Robertson, 2000; Woods et al., 1997; Smyth, 2001b). The problem is that teachers themselves are feeling the heat from all sides. This makes it even more difficult for them to find the spaces to engage in conversations about alternative possibilities for the future (Down, 2006b). The recent "literacy debate" conducted in the *Weekend Australian* (September 23-24, 2006) provides some insight into the nature of the problem confronting teachers. David Freesmith, a teacher from Prince Alfred College, is taken to task for expressing a view in the journal *English in Australia* that critical literacy offers important insights

into teaching English. Even worse, is the fact that he dared to challenge the common sense views of the Australian “stable of education writers” (Wiltshire, 2006: 22) which is apparently above politics, ideology or critique. The Editor is so offended that he employs Professor Kenneth Wiltshire to counter this “full-frontal assault” (2006: 22) with a disproportionate response augmented by an ongoing barrage of editorials and opinion pieces by protagonists such as Kevin Donnelly.

Several days later, the Australian ran two more stories, one headed “Howard rallies Right in culture war assault” (Shanahan, October 4, 2006: 4) and the other “Syllabus breeds activists” (Ferrari, October 4, 2006: 7). In the case of the former Prime Minister Howard was addressing the 50th anniversary dinner for Quadrant magazine where in the words of Shanahan, he “marshaled his allies on the intellectual Right ... for another surge against those of “the soft left” whom he warned still held sway in educational and cultural life” (2006: 4). In the case of the latter story, Ferrari reports that “The syllabus for a Queensland school geography course encourages political activism, aiming to provide students with values of social justice, “economic sustainability” and peace” (2006: 7). The upshot is that students should be learning the “facts” rather than “take action to achieve social justice and environmental sustainability” (2006: 7). In the same piece, Federal Education Minister Julie Bishop stated “Geography should be learning about the natural environment and not political science by another name” (2006: 7). Clearly, the neo-liberal/neo-conservative agenda is to put education to work as a part of a broader “conservative restoration” (privatisation, centralisation, vocationalisation and differentiation) (Apple, 1996: 9) while rendering its own ideologies invisible.

So how do we make sense of all this controversy? Welch (1996: 101) argues that the back-to-basics proponents are mounting “a moral-political campaign to wrest control of society from supporters of tolerance, difference and democratic self-expression and return it to those who hanker for a more monolithic, certain and authoritarian world”. In a similar vein, Joe Kincheloe (2000: 104) claims we are witnessing the cultivation of “more social obedience and commonness of purpose and less democracy and liberty”. Under a period of sustained neo-liberal/neo-conservative dominance there has been a “manufacture of consent” (Chomsky, 1999: 10) leading to a depoliticised citizenry marked by apathy and cynicism or what Macedo (1995: 81) describes as “literacy for stupidification”. According to Steinberg (2000: 125), liberal democracies have been lulled into a “frightening slumber” or “democratic sleep” that allows monied interests to dominate.

Susan Meier in her book *In Schools We Trust* (2002) believes that the dominant attitude towards schooling reflected in the educational policies that flow from these debates is fundamentally a new level of distrust in teachers’ judgments and in principals, parents and local communities. Furthermore, she says “We don’t trust the public school system ... Nor do we trust in the extraordinary human penchant for learning itself” (2002: 2). In her view, the “quasi science of testing” (2002: 6) which is driving the current reform agenda is highly dubious:

Resorting to flawed standardized testing, whose only virtue seems to be its capacity to enable us to pretend we can rank everyone (or sort everyone) precisely and objectively, is both unnecessary and counterproductive ....We

need, in short, standards in terms of both means and ends, not standardization” (2002:135-136).

Fortunately, there are many courageous educators who are willing to speak out and expose the misleading and disastrous impact of standardised testing and other “poisonous pedagogies” (Lesko, 2001: 187), especially on disadvantaged students and their communities (Emery and Ohanian, 2004; Bracey, 2000, 2003a, 2003b; Haney, 2000; see also [http://susanohanian.org/show\\_research.html](http://susanohanian.org/show_research.html)). Commenting on the American No Child Left Behind Act 2001, Bracey (2003a) sums it up pretty well:

In the great tradition of “The beatings will continue until morale improves,” schools that fail to show AYP [adequate yearly progress] are subject to severe punishment. This ensures that a great deal of time will be spent preparing for the test and that a great deal of attention will be given to the results. Teachers will stifle thought, discussion, and question asking in the name and hope of raising test scores. Call it educational terrorism. I can’t think of a better way to destroy the nation (2003a: 16).

By way of summary, Harvey Daniels (1995) believes that there are basically two competing reform movements at the moment. One is the “governmental, bureaucratic, blue-ribbon commission, business advisory committee, centralized, top-down, Nation at Risk, policing-orientated, rap-their-knuckles reform movement” (1995: 18). The other school reform movement is a “teacher-driven, grass-roots, bottom-up, basically democratic movement that says that what we do in schools doesn’t work. We’ve got to change what we teach and the way we teach it” (1995: 18). In the remainder of the paper, I want to pursue the second possibility and the implications for how it might help us to re-image teachers’ work in more socially just, democratic and sustainable ways.

### **Re-imaging teachers’ work**

As a counter to the broader policy effects described so far, I want to move on to consider some alternative conceptions of teachers’ work for the 21st century. In the words of Bingham and Sirdokin (2004: 6) there is a need to move from “struggling against something to struggling for something”. According to Lather (1984: 53) this involves the possibility of building “counter-institutions, ideologies, and cultures that provide an ethical alternative to the dominant hegemony, a lived experience of how the world can be different”. In pursuing this kind of project, Ball (2006: 62) urges us to “de-familiarise present practices and categories, to make them seem less self-evident and necessary, and to open up spaces for the invention of new forms of experience”. In the words of Kumashiro (2004: 62), it means “troubling knowledge” or making the familiar problematic. As Giroux and McLaren (1986: 215) explain, “Teachers as intellectuals treat their students as critical agents, question how knowledge is produced and distributed, utilize dialogue, and make knowledge meaningful, critical, and ultimately emancipatory. In pursuing this orientation I shall allude briefly to three key elements that might help us re-image teachers’ work in more socially just, democratic and sustainable ways: (i) teachers as cultural workers; (ii) reclaiming democracy; and (iii) connecting to places. I want to illustrate how each of these elements might provide us with some helpful principles, values and guidelines in thinking about our work anew.

### **Teachers as cultural workers**

Giroux (2002: 78) argues the importance of redefining teachers as cultural workers who are capable of “reclaiming, without romanticizing, popular culture as a complex terrain of pedagogical struggle”. For him (1996: 52), “Pedagogy represents a form of cultural production implicated in and critically attentive to how power and meaning are employed in the construction and organization of knowledge, desires, values and identities”. Giroux’s approach brings together the “intersection of pedagogy, cultural studies and a project for political change” (1996: 52). This kind of approach would see teachers questioning commonsense understandings and interrogating dominant media and consumer representations of youth, work and social life (Weiner, 2003).

For example, Smyth, Shacklock and Hattam (1999: 74) develop an “Australian critical cultural studies” approach to teaching which invites “a critical exposure and interpretation of relationships people form with everyday cultural effects like work, sport, music, school, printed text, television, cinema, art, theatre, consumer goods, advertising, and fashion”. Pedagogically, students and teachers co-author the school curriculum around “generative” themes from everyday life, “topical” themes that have local, national or international significance or “academic” themes that lie in traditional disciplines (Shor, 1992).

Such approaches are concerned with the moral question of “why things are the way they are, how they got that way, and what set of conditions are supporting the processes that maintain them” (Simon 1988: 2). The focus is on “social injustice and how to transform inequitable, undemocratic, or oppressive institutions and social relations” (Burbules and Berk, 1999: 47). As McLaren (1997: 37) explains the purpose of a critical pedagogy “is to provide students with “counter-discourses” or “resistant subject positions” - in short, with a new language of analysis - through which they can assume a critical distance from their familiar subject positions in order to engage in a cultural praxis better designed to further the project of social transformation”. For teachers, this involves a commitment to practices that are:

- Grounded in the lives of our students;
- Critical;
- Multicultural;
- Anti-racist, pro-justice;
- Participatory, experiential;
- Hopeful, visionary;
- Activist;
- Academically rigorous; and
- Culturally and linguistically sensitive (Bigelow, et al., 2006: 7; see also Freire, 1997, 1998; Dewey, 1916; Shor, 1987, 1992; Steinberg and Kincheloe, 1998).

In developing the idea of teachers as cultural workers, Freire (1998) identifies a number of desirable characteristics of progressive teachers:

- Humility: requires “courage, self-confidence, self-respect, and respect for others.... No one knows it all; no one is ignorant of everything” (p.39);
- Lovingness: towards students and the process of teaching (p.40); ““armed love”, the fighting love of those convinced of the right and the duty to fight, to denounce and announce” (p.41);

- Courage: involves “the conquering of my fears, it implies fear” (p.41);
- Tolerance: “being tolerant does not mean acquiescing to the intolerable.... It teaches us to learn from and respect the different” (p.42);
- Decisiveness, security: to make decisions; “breaking free to choose” (p.42);
- Living the tension between patience and impatience: “The educator must live and work impatiently patiently, never surrendering entirely to either” (p.44);
- Verbal parsimony: “The patient person’s discourse is always well-behaved” (p.44); and
- Joy of living: by living these qualities “we contribute to creating a happy, joyful school (p.45).

In the words of Freire (1998: 45), “We forge a school-adventure, a school that marches on, that is not afraid of the risks, and that creates, that speaks, that loves, that guesses, that passionately embraces and says yes to life. It is not a school that quiets down and quits”.

### ***Reclaiming democracy***

Beyer (1998) argues that “the emphasis on critiquing current realities, on participating in the recreation of our worlds, is a central part of a progressive understanding of democracy” (1998: 257). For teachers it means “rediscovering the radical-progressive potential of democratic ideals and values, and democratic participation, in schooling and curriculum” (1998: 257). Like Beyer, I want to argue that teachers’ work is critically bound up with the ideals of democracy and the values of “social cohesion, empathy, caring, respect, reciprocity, and trust” (Beckman and Cooper, 2004: 11). At heart, this involves restoring “schools as democratic public spheres” (Giroux 1997: 218). In mapping out this kind of vision I shall draw on the recent book of James Beane (2005) *A Reason to Teach: Creating Classrooms of Dignity and Hope*.

Beane (2005: 137) puts it well:

Ours is the obligation to remember those who struggled to make a progressive and democratic history. Ours is the obligation to recapture the possibilities of democratic teaching and learning. Ours is the obligation to help and support teachers who want to begin to teach the democratic way. And ours is the obligation to seek out those who never let go of that hope - the courageous teachers who are keeping the progressive, democratic dream alive in these difficult times. Our obligation is to ask how we can help sustain and expand their will and their efforts - and to ask how, in answer to Dewey’s call, we can make the meaning of their work “more widely accessible and more generously shared than we have received it”.

Beane (2005: 8-9) goes on to argue that “Democracy is an idea about how people might live together. At the core are two related principles: (1) that people have a fundamental right to human dignity and (2) that people have a responsibility to care about the common good and the dignity and welfare of others”. In the case of the personal right to dignity he argues that the following are important: “the right to think for oneself, to be fully informed about important issues, to hold beliefs of one’s choosing, to have a say in what and how things are done, to pursue personal aspirations and growth, to be free from oppression, and to experience just and

equitable treatment” (2005: 9). In regard to the common good, Beane (2005: 9) argues, “Caring about the common good and the dignity and welfare of others, meanwhile, includes the obligation to collaborate in resolving community problems; to be well informed about social and political topics; to participate in deliberations about governance and social issues; to promote justice and equity; and to act in ways that generally enhance the social, political, and economic life of the larger society”.

Beane’s (2005: 12) “optimistic and humane view of human possibilities” proposes that:

- all people have an inherent right to dignity;
- we are capable of caring for and about each other;
- we can see our own personal fate tied to that of the common good; and
- we have the collective intellectual capacity to work together in doing so.

In this task, Beane (2005: 136-136) believes that it is time to reclaim the democratic purpose in education. Towards this end, we should ask that the curriculum:

- bring diverse groups of young people together in communities of learning where they can live and work together in democratic ways, where their diversity is a prized aspect of the group rather than a criterion for the sort-and-select machine;
- focus on topics that are of real personal and social significance to both young people and the larger society;
- treat young people with dignity, as real people who live in the real world and care about its conditions and fate;
- value the knowledge and experience that young people bring with them to school, as well as the knowledge that they think would be worth pursuing;
- engage important knowledge from many sources and be organised so that it is meaningful and accessible to young people;
- draw on knowledge from many sources in academic and popular culture and that it privilege no one source nor serve the exclusive interests of any particular class or culture;
- bring young our young people into contact with the most important and current ideas through the best resources we can find;
- offer our young people a chance to critique existing knowledge and construct new meanings, accepting no ‘fact’ as true simply because it appears in a book or on the internet;
- offer something better than short-answer, standardized tests, for these cannot possibly reveal what students really know or what is really worth knowing;
- be reasonable and achievable for all young people and that none of them are excluded from those goals for reasons having to do with their race, class, or gender;
- be kind to young people, uplifting their hopes and their possibilities rather than discouraging their spirits and aspirations;
- brings them joy in new insights and exciting discoveries;
- challenge our young people to imagine a better world and to try out ways of making it so;
- bring them justice and equity, that it can help them to overcome the narrow prejudices still evident in our society;

- serve the best interest of our young people and our democracy and not be implicated in the ambitions of politicians or the profit desires of the corporate marketplace; and
- be better for our young people than it was for us.

In re-imagining teachers' work around these kinds of pedagogic questions we should not underestimate the hostile environment in which we currently work. As I have argued, this kind of approach to teaching and learning challenges "the narrowly conceived efforts of government to control teachers' work through teacher-proof curricula, test driven threats and punitive forms of accountability" (Down, 2006b: 89-90). As Beane (2005: 136) notes it "Moves beyond questions like: Will it give our businesses a competitive edge in the global economy? Will our students score as well as those of other countries on international comparison tests? Will they get into elite colleges or universities?".

### **Connecting to places**

Gruenewald (2003: 620) argues that place-conscious education "aims to enlist teachers and students in the firsthand experience of local life and in the political process of understanding and shaping what happens there". This embedded approach to teaching has been variously described in the literature as experiential learning, context-based learning, problem-posing education, outdoor education, environmental/ecological education, critical pedagogy, and service learning (2003: 620). According to Gruenewald (2003: 621):

... places teach us about how the world works and how our lives fit into the spaces we occupy. Further places make us: As occupants of particular places with particular attributes, our identity and our possibilities are shaped.

Gruenewald (2003) identifies five dimensions of place-based education that make it so central to teachers' work:

- Phenomenologically: "places are the ground of direct human experience" (p.623);
- Sociologically: "place is where the world manifests itself to human beings, places hold our culture and even our identity. People are place makers" (p.625);
- Ideologically: "spaces and places are expressive of ideologies and relationships of power.... In recognizing that space is a product filled with living politics and ideologies, critical geographers resuscitate space from its historical status as fixed and dead-as inert territory awaiting discovery and colonization-and draws the life of places into the dialectic of history" (p.628);
- Politically: "The political dimension of place-conscious education, therefore, demands a radical multiculturalism, a multiculturalism that continually challenges the regimes of accountability that are designed to move everyone toward the political center, a multiculturalism that embraces "the spaces that difference makes" (p.633); and
- Ecologically: "drawing on bioregional understandings that whenever possible people should produce, consume and waste locally - that way people are more likely to know where their products come from, how they are made,

where they end up, and the impact of production, consumption, and waste on human and natural systems” (p.634.)

Gruenewald (2003: 636) goes on to suggest some of the shortcomings of much schooling today that place-based education might help us to address:

In rethinking the reason for caring about diversity in the first place schools would need to acknowledge how patterns of spatial organisation in schooling, a) limit the diversity of experience and perception; b) cut children, youth and their teachers off from cultural and ecological life; c) reproduce an unquestioning attitude about the legitimacy of problematic spatial forms; d) deny and create marginality through regimes of standardization and control; and e) through their allegiance to the global economy, function to exacerbate the very ecological problems that they deny. Place-conscious education aims to acknowledge and address the problems that the educational neglect of places helps to create.

I agree with Theobald and Curtiss (2000: 106) when they argue that “fostering attention to others, cultivating an ethic of being of service to others, especially to those who share a place, or a community, ought to be a high priority of education today”. In this context, Bingham and Sirdokin’s (2004) notion of “pedagogy of relation” has much to offer. In their recent edited book *No Education Without Relation* the authors remind us that relationships are the centrepiece of all aspects of teaching and learning. In the same volume, Margonis (2004: 45) makes the point that “any learning - any relationship between an individual and subject matter - occurs within a context of human relationships”. Drawing on the experiences of Eliot Wigginton’s *In Sometimes a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience* (1986), Margonis advocates the usefulness of “project education” as one important strategy in connecting students with their community in ways that are both socially and intellectually engaging. Significantly, such approaches can help to sustain what Judith Green describes as “deep democracy” in which people are equipped “to expect, to understand, and to value diversity and change while preserving and projecting both democratically humane cultural values and interactively sustainable environmental values in a dynamic, responsive way” (cited in Hutchinson, 1999 or 2004: 74).

Drawing on Jane Roland Martin’s ideas of the three C’s –care, concern and connection – Hutchinson poses three key questions for teachers and students: Why should we care? How can we demonstrate our concern? What is our connection? (1999 or 2004: 85). In tackling these kinds of questions, schools can assist in revitalising face-to-face local communities, build relationships and restore a spirit of ‘public good’. As Theobald (1997: 120) reminds us “Commitment, allegiance and obligation must reenter conversations concerning the fate of places”.

### **Some resources and strategies**

Finally, I want to conclude this paper by identifying briefly some resources and strategies that might be useful to teachers committed to the kinds of principles and values alluded to in the previous section. These ideas are by no means new or unique and have been around in the educational literature for some time. The challenge is to find the spaces and places where teachers can begin to debate these pedagogical approaches as the basis of their work with children.

In the task of mapping out an educational project founded on the principles of social justice, democracy and sustainability, Ira Shor's (1992) book *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change* (1992) provides a helpful starting point for teachers. Drawing on the work of Freire, Shor illustrates how teachers might begin thinking and acting on an alternative vision of critical teaching for everyday life (1987). By way of summary, Shor articulates the following set of values:

- Participatory: Students should be active and involved from the beginning.
- Affective: Learning is a social interaction which should involve a positive relationship between thought and feeling.
- Problem-posing: Human beings, knowledge and society are viewed as unfinished business. Students participate in knowledge production and the shape of society.
- Situated: Learning is situated in the themes, knowledge, cultures, conditions, and idioms of students.
- Multicultural: When learning is situated in the language and experience of the students, their diverse cultures are built into the curriculum.
- Dialogic: Developing critical thought and democratic participation through student centred dialogue.
- Desocialising: Questioning the social behaviours and experiences in school and daily life that make us the people we are.
- Democratic: Students make meaning from their experiences and act on it.
- Researching: Students are co-researchers with the teacher in studying their community and conditions, and their own culture.
- Interdisciplinary: Crosses the boundaries of academic disciplines.
- Activist: Invites students to effect change in society from the knowledge they gain.

The kinds of values and sentiments expressed by Shor are at the heart of socially engaged approaches to teaching and learning and have been identified in various ways by presenters during this conference. By way of summary, there are a range of resources and strategies worthy of further investigation:

- Students as researchers (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 1998);
- Communities as curricula (Theobald and Curtiss, 2000; Sleeter, 2005);
- Teaching for social justice (Westheimer and Kahne, 1998)
- Local literacies (Street, 1994; Comber, Thomson and Wells, 2001);
- Funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992)
- Teaching for resistance (Howard, Woodbury and Moore, 1998);
- Authentic pedagogy (Newmann et al., 1996); and
- Place-based education (Gruenewald, 2003).

Each of these pedagogies is committed to helping teachers and students to work collaboratively to generate "new ways of knowing and producing knowledge that challenge the commonsense views of sociopolitical reality with which most individuals have grown so comfortable" (Kincheloe, 2001: 372). In the words of Smith (1999: 44), it involves investigating "how our everyday/everynight worlds are put together, determined and shaped as they are by forces and powers beyond our practical and direct knowledge".

In the process, Hutchinson (1999) again reminds us that from the point of view of students teaching and learning is about:

... being known, teachers caring about you, relevant subject material. Sense of belonging, hard work, fun, learning a lot, having choices, lively discussions, projects, the arts, critical thinking, finding a 'voice', having someone believe in you, connecting to the community and one's family, talking about things that really matter (Hutchinson 1999: x).

## Conclusion

This paper set out to highlight the broader political context in which teachers' work is being reshaped around the narrowly conceived instrumentalist logic of neo-liberal/neo-conservative interests and values. The official rhetoric focuses on producing students with the knowledge and skills relevant to the workplace, curriculum differentiation, specialisation, standardisation, high stakes paper and pencil testing, school choice, league tables, and accountability. As a part of this broader New Right agenda education in general and teachers' work in particular is being refashioned to serve the dominant ideologies of the day. Nowhere is this struggle more apparent than in the popular print media where education is caught up in the "cultural wars". In this context, it seems absurd to suggest, as some politicians and policymakers do, that education is not political. The controversy over the teaching of History and Geography indicates that education is political, the only question seems to be whose politics and whose interests are represented? What I have attempted to do in this paper is to offer some critique of existing policy directions, to interrupt narrowly conceived technicist views of teachers' work and to begin the task of mapping out an alternative vision and practice founded on the values of economic and political democracy, critical inquiry, civic engagement and "educated hope" (Giroux, 2001: 125). For me, this means questioning the "school as factory" model where systems management, outcomes based education, curriculum alignment, standardised test, and quality control are the dominant discourses (Levine, 1995: 52). Like Levine, I have argued for "school as an experiment in democracy" in which teachers are willing and prepared "to explore and develop student-teacher relations and curriculum content that promote high expectations, cooperation, and student initiative" (1995: 53). In conclusion Peter Singer (1993: 179), the Australian philosopher currently making an impact internationally describes the obligation we all have to take action:

I have a very strong sense of being responsible to the world, that I can't just live for my enjoyment, but just the fact of being in the world gives me an obligation to do what I can to make the world a better place to live in, no matter how small a scale that may be.

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