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Schooling, productivity and the enterprising self: Beyond market values

Introduction

Normalised inhabitants of market capitalist society presuppose its ruling values as the inherent structure of the 'real world' (McMurtry, 2002, p. xvi).

If we are to be competitive we need a skilled workforce that is able to drive productivity (Business Council of Australia, 2007, p. 5).

Like the rest of the Western world, Australian schools are being restructured and recultured around the narrowly conceived and instrumentalist values of neo-liberalism. Neoliberalism is committed to the idea that the market should be the central organising principle for all political, social and economic decisions. This involves financial liberalization, deregulation, the selling off of state corporations, competition, heavy tax cuts, and a shifting of the burden from the top to bottom (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005; Aronowitz & Gautney, 2003; Apple, 2001). Accordingly, the role of schools is to prepare students as enterprising workers and citizens with the prerequisite skills, knowledge and values to survive in a volatile and competitive global labour market. In the words of Willis (2004), education becomes 'inextricably mired in the capitalist relations of the market economy and capitalist labor market' (p. 193).

Nowhere is this logic more apparent than the recent pronouncements of the newly elected Labor Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd. During the 2007 federal election campaign he and education spokesperson Stephen Smith (2007) articulated the importance of creating an 'education revolution' to ensure that Australia was able to produce 'a competitive, innovative, knowledge-based economy that can compete and win in global markets' (p. 3). Prior to his departure on a world tour of Australia's major trading partners in the United States, Europe and China, Rudd (2008) reinforced Labor's technocratic credentials when he declared the need for a 'productivity revolution'. In a speech to The Australian/Melbourne Institute 'New Agenda for Prosperity' Conference on 27th March 2008, he declared:

We cannot sustain strong economic growth unless we lift our productive growth. We cannot sustain improvements in living standards unless our productivity growth improves. We cannot meet the challenges of international economic competitiveness if we do not lift our productive growth; if we do not have a highly skilled workforce; if our workforce is not sufficiently innovative to solve business problems; or if our infrastructure is not modernized to serve our business as platforms for growth' (p. 7).

The message is clear, schools must be put to work and more closely hitched to the shifting imperatives of the global market. Smyth and Dow (1997) summarise the implications for education:

... 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 (p. 2).

Towards this end, the Rudd Labor government created a new super ministry known as the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to address the 'productivity challenge and skills crisis' (Karvelas, 2007, p. 17). More telling was the response of the Minerals Council of Australia chief executive Mitch Hooke who described the new ministry as 'fantastic' and 'consistent with what industry has been saying. It mimics what companies do: there's an integration between your workplace arrangements and your skilling' (Karvelas, 2007, p. 17). Therefore, it was hardly surprising to see education bundled together with skills, training, science and innovation under the 'productivity agenda' at the recent Australia 2020 Summit in Parliament House, Canberra (2008). The purpose of the Summit was to generate a set of policy directions for Australia's future by drawing on the ideas of the nation's 'brightest and best' thinkers. Predictably the outcomes of the Summit offered more of the same. For example, the Interim Report (2008) concluded:

We'll know that we're on the right track when productivity is maximised by:

- Children's development being at the heart of the productivity agenda.
- People wanting to and being able to move in and out of good jobs, training and education throughout their lives, to suit their family commitments and their talents and needs.
- People being able to access the right learning and work opportunities for them in a diverse economy.
- Realising the potential of innovation to meet Australia's needs.
- Australia attracting and enabling the best minds.
- More effective connections between institutions and people (p.6).

In this paper I am interested in exploring and arguing how the 'meta-narrative' of neoliberalism described in these official policy communiqués has been so effective in seizing the public imagination of politicians, policy makers, bureaucrats, parents, students and educators (Apple, 2000; Spring, 2004) and the consequences of this reform in terms of what Foucault has described as governmentality (Peters, 2007; Gulson, 2007). In pursuing this line of inquiry I am curious about how people draw on corporate language to construct their individual and collective identities as future workers and future citizens as though it is innocent, value neutral and inevitable (Saul, 2005; McMurtry, 2002). Watson (2004), a former speech writer for the Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating during the 1990s, provides some insight into these processes with his satirical take on the use of political language or as he describes it 'weasel words'. For him, 'the pompous lunacy of management jargon' (e.g., competitive advantage,

human resources, accountability, consumers, clients, outcomes and so on) is really about the exercise and maintenance of power (pp. 2-3; see Gunter, 1997; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003). Put another way, 'To speak the words the powerful speak is to obey them, or at least to give up all outward signs of freedom. ... This is language without possibility' (p. 2).

My argument is that these broader sets of economic, social and political forces are bearing down on schools and those who inhabit them in profound and damaging ways (Saltman, 2000; Nicholas & Berliner, 2007). In this paper I want to pursue three interrelated aspects of this phenomenon. First, I want to briefly overview the changing nature of the global economy and the implications for young people who face an increasingly hostile and volatile labour market. Second, I examine how these changing circumstances are played out in schools with particular regard to the vocationalisation of the school curriculum. Here, I am especially interested in the attempts of government to create and cultivate enterprising identities and subjectivities more suited to the vagaries of 'worker instability' (Saul, 2005, p. 97). Finally, I want to conclude by considering how we might begin to imagine schools in more democratic and socially just ways by restoring 'human sensibility' (Korten, 1999, p. 167) to the centre of our conversations about education and society.

High skilled, high-tech or 'talent cull'?

According to Sennett (2006), 'the apostles of new capitalism' would have us believe that the global market and its new version of 'work, talent and consumption' will not only provide more freedom but create more jobs, security and rewards for all. Supposedly, this will be achieved on the basis of individual merit and effort in acquiring relevant educational credentials, skills and dispositions (p. 12). As a result, education is treated as another private investment commodity to enhance careers and stimulate economic growth. Historically, the relationship between national economic growth and the development of human capital has become the 'conventional wisdom' among both conservatives and social progressives (Aronowitz, 2003, p. 2; Marginson, 1993; Kliebard, 1999). As Rudd demonstrates so clearly, schools are expected to service the national and international market economy by preparing students for a hierarchical labor market, developing marketable skills, competencies and values and encouraging school-business partnerships (Kenway, Bigum & Fitzclarence, 1993, p. 106). As Ball (1999) notes 'schools become more like business and more business-like' (p. 198).

Like Apple (1998), I am skeptical about the 'overly romantic picture painted by the neoliberals who urge us to trust the market and to more closely connect schools to the 'world of work'' (p. 345). What could be more 'naïve', says Saul (2005) 'than to believe in one rather abstract approach to human life ... based upon a single and highly specific theory of economics' (p. 31). Similarly, McMurtry (1998) warns us about the dangers of a global market that 'subjugates and sacrifices ever more life to its demands—if not by destruction and consumption, then by instrumentalization or starvation of what does not serve it' (p. 390). McLaren and Farhmandpur

(2005) put it starkly when they argue that neoliberalism “is undeniably one of the most dangerous politics that we face today” (p. 16). Given these pressing concerns, it is timely to pause and offer a more ‘troubling’ and ‘disruptive’ account of the commonsense assumptions underpinning human capital approaches to education and the impact it is having on the life trajectories of the most marginalized and vulnerable young people in our society (Kumashiro, 2004).

There is ample evidence to show that the youth labour market to which the advocates of neoliberalism want to attach schools is rapidly disappearing. The reality is that deindustrialisation and restructuring is reducing the size of core full-time jobs and increasing the number of people working in part-time, casualized, low-paying and repetitive jobs in the retail, trade and service sectors (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Anyon, 2005; Agger, 2004; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). Despite improving economic conditions in Australia over the past decade, 43% of early school leavers and 19% of school completers still experienced a troubled transition to the world of work (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2004). According to Dwyer and Wyn (2001) there is a growing mismatch between the types of jobs available, the rhetoric of the highly skilled workforce and the future aspirations of young people (p. 17). More than two-thirds of young people now start their working lives as casuals and growing numbers may never work any other way (Wynhausen, 2007, p. 22). What we are witnessing says McMurtry (2002) is the ‘dispossessing effects’ of ‘those extra-market prescriptions’ including ‘mass losses of secure jobs, systematic reduction of livelihood and pay, insecurity of employment, de-unionisation, decline of benefits, deterioration of working conditions and unenforced safety-health standards, and loss of social service and security benefits’ (p. 183).

Frankel (2004) points out that despite the ‘propaganda’ of the ‘knowledge economy ideologues’ about high skilled and well paid new technology jobs, ‘nine out of ten of the approximately 2.5 million new jobs in Australia between 1985 and 2001 have been low-paid jobs or part-time or casual jobs’ (p. 124). In other words, basic clerical, sales, cleaning, waiting and laboring jobs continue ‘to make up the lion’s share of new employment opportunities’ (p. 125). Furthermore, ‘between 1988 and 2002, the percentage of people in full-time, skilled, middle income jobs dropped from 74 per cent to 61 per cent of all workers’ (p. 126). The essence of Frankel’s argument is that there will only be ‘a minority of well-paid, creative and analytic jobs alongside a vast majority of lousy, low-paid, insecure jobs’ (p. 131). Regardless of the quality or number of graduates from schools and universities the vast majority will face a bleak future as they endeavour to compete for a shrinking number of high skilled, high-tech and well paid jobs. At the end of the day, the ‘private market seems simply unable—or perhaps unwilling—to provide enough jobs at all, let alone good jobs’ (p. 131).

Braverman’s (1974) early labour degradation thesis helps us to comprehend the changing nature of work in modern day capitalism and the alienating impact on workers. In Braverman’s view,

capital's attempt to separate manual and mental labour is closely connected with the emergence of 'managed capitalism' based on Taylor's scientific management principles (Aronowitz, 1977). According to Kincheloe (1995) this leads to a process of labour fragmentation as skills are broken into component parts and workers become an appendage of the production process with little or no control over their labour (p. 10). Compounding this tendency today, employers are now forced to compete globally and this has resulted in a much more 'oppressive regime of increasing control' or 'flexible discipline' (Blum, 2000, p. 111). According to Blum (2000), this new regime, is characterised by a confrontational relationship between an aggressive management and weak craft unions, the replacement of the traditional craft labour system with craft-less 'utility workers', and the imposition of a range of discipline strategies (p. 120). McLaren and Jaramillo (2007) argue that in reality 'the labor-power of aggrieved groups is being subsumed into an abstract calculus and value form that reduces them to inhuman instruments in the process of capital accumulation' (pp. 63-64).

Sennett (2006) invokes the image of the Great Depression in the 1930s and the 'specter of uselessness' to explain what's happening to jobs globally. He describes how during the depression men 'clustered outside the gates of shuttered factories, waiting for work despite the evidence before their eyes' (p. 83). These images, he argues, still 'disturb' because 'the specter of uselessness has not ended'; its context has changed'. Then, as now, people believe that the solution to individual 'uselessness' is to get an education and a 'special skill' which would immune them from unemployment (p. 83). Sennett (2006) puts this policy maneuver in some perspective when he says 'the work they want has migrated to places in the world where skilled labor is cheaper' (p. 84). Furthermore, he argues that the problem of job migration is compounded by the impact of automation and management of the ageing. In the case of the former, automation is now responsible for producing most productivity gains and labour savings, hence profits (p. 92). In the case of ageing, there is a twofold dilemma. On the one hand, there is a 'sheer prejudice' against age as older employees are seen as 'set in their ways, slow, losing energy' (p. 94). On the other hand, the talents and skills of the ageing are no longer a 'durable possession' (p. 95) in an economy where 'skills extinction' is more likely (p. 98).

In response to these profound shifts in the global economy, Sarup (1982) argues that industrialists, politicians and educationalists have attempted to 'defuse the situation' in one of two ways. First, the 'hard' approach asserts that young people 'must learn to live in the real world', they must get up on time, be punctual, develop good habits, learn to accept discipline, gain 'work experience' (p. 32). Second, the 'soft' version 'defines the problem in psychological terms; the focus is on the personal troubles rather than the social problems' (p. 32). Put another way, young people themselves are increasingly being held accountable not only for their own 'labour market fates' (Furlong & Cartmel, 2001, p. 28) but the broader economic and social crises. According to Ball (2006a), none of this could happen without mobilising the 'imagery of crisis and chaos' in education (p. 28). The repertoire of falling standards in literacy and

numeracy, provider capture, left wing academics, teacher unions, educational fads, outcomes education, and poor behaviour all provide fodder for the storylines of neoconservative commentators. Interventions to ‘fix’ the problem are not only predictable but simplistic and educationally unsound. Standardised paper and pencil testing, back-to-basics, ranking and streaming of students, commonsense reporting, prescriptive syllabus and texts, nationally controlled curriculum and examinations, and if all else fails withholding funds (Donnelly, 2004).

In the light of this manufactured crisis (Berliner & Biddle, 1995), Polakow (1995) argues that the discourse of ‘at risk’ has become a ‘buzzword’ (p. 263) which ‘contains proliferating weapons of future educational exclusion’ such as early tracking, sorting and sifting and marginalization (p. 268). In sum, she argues that these cultural processes of exclusion are a part of ‘the neglect, of humiliation, and of disenfranchisement experienced by thousands of children who are targeted recipients of a pedagogy of the poor’ (p. 268). In this climate, we should not be surprised that secondary schools have become such ‘awful places’ for so many students (Lesko, 2001, p. 186). As Bourdieu (1998) argues, this new version of neo-Darwinism suggests that the ‘brightest and best’ will come out on top and this can be explained by a ‘philosophy of competence’ whereby it is ‘the most competent who govern and have jobs which implies that those who do not have jobs are not competent. There are ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ (p. 42).

Commenting on the American experience, Gabbard (2003) argues that compulsory schooling contributes to the enforcement of the market economy by helping people to ‘establish their levels of expectations relative to their patterns of consumption’ (p. 67). As a consequence, he says ‘few students see much relevance in schooling as anything other than a vehicle for increasing individual use-values within the competitive, dog-eat dog world and rat-race that constitutes their own individualistic pursuit of secular salvation within the market society—the American Dream’ (p. 72). Sennett (2006) refers to this (self)selective process as a ‘talent cull’ (p. 130) whereby judgments are made about the ‘inner resources’ or ‘talents’ of different classes of students e.g., ‘you lack potential’ or ‘you messed up’ (p. 123). It is in the context of these broader sets of economic and cultural processes of advantaging and disadvantaging that I want to now turn attention to the attempts of government to create and cultivate enterprising identities and subjectivities more attuned to the realities of the global labour market at the beginning of the 21st century.

Enterprising workers, new identities for the global market

Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996) argue that in a world dominated by global capitalism the new work order is about trying to create ‘new social identities’ or ‘new kinds of people engaged in new social practices’ (pp. xiv-xvii). This involves ‘the need for lifelong learning and the need to continually adapt, change, and learn new skills, very often *on site* while carrying out the job’ (p. 6). In this new ‘enchanted workplace’ they argue that ‘Workers will be transformed into committed ‘partners’ who engage in meaningful work, fully understand and control their jobs, supervise themselves, and actively seek to improve their performance through communicating

clearly their knowledge and needs' (p. 29). According to Spring (2007) this is where the school curriculum is expected to play a key role in building national identity and integrating citizen workers into the 'educational security state which is devoted to maintaining an industrial-consumer economy for competition in the global economy' (p. 77). In pursuing this ideological work, Du Gay (1991) explains how the discourse of enterprise has played a pivotal part in encouraging 'market penetration' into all areas of social and cultural life including schools (p. 46). The purpose is 'to cultivate enterprising subjects—autonomous, self-regulating, productive individuals' (p. 49) who take responsibility for 'their own future through their own efforts' (p. 52). Such views have been articulated by the Australian Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (cited in DEST, 2004):

Enterprise education is learning directed towards developing in young people those skills, competencies, understandings, and attributes which equip them to be innovative, and to identify, create, initiate, and successfully manage personal, community, business and work opportunities, including working for themselves (p. 1).

Towards this end, the Vocational and Enterprise Learning Section of DEEWR serves to expand student participation in vocational and technical education in schools and increase the uptake of enterprise learning in schools. This is achieved through programmes such as The Enterprise Learning for the 21st Century initiative which has funded 47 'innovative partnerships' (e.g., 'Enterprise learning through business', 'Think like an entrepreneur') between schools, businesses and community groups to build 'a culture of enterprise and creativity among young Australians' (DEEWR, 2008). The assumption is that for too long schools have been insulated from the world of business and industry and as a consequence students are not 'job ready'. Schools have let the economy down by failing to inculcate young people with appropriate workplace values such as diligence, hard work, compliance, industriousness, and punctuality. Furthermore, schools must do more to develop enterprising virtues including initiative, energy, independence, boldness, self-reliance, resilience, responsibility, self-management, flexibility, risk-taking and so on. In these ways, students can contribute more productively 'to the success of a properly enterprising form of free market economy' through personal conduct and self-regulation (Keat, 1991, p. 5; OECD/CERI, 1989).

It is not my intent to provide a detailed critique of enterprise culture as others have done elsewhere (Keat & Abercrombie, 1991; MacDonald & Coffield, 1991; Smyth, 1999; Peters, 2001; Peters & Marshall, 2004). Rather I want to focus on the key assumption underpinning the rhetoric of enterprise culture at this time, namely, what is good for business is good for education and society. I want to challenge the everyday view that forging closer links with business and industry (school-business partnerships) is in and of itself desirable (Boyles, 2005, 2008). I want to address this issue on two counts. First, by drawing attention to the paucity of evidence to support the claims made by business, political and educational leaders about the links between schooling, productivity, and global competitiveness. Second, by arguing that the imposition of

business inspired solutions to the ‘problems’ of public education are not only profoundly anti-democratic but anti-educative.

Cuban (2004) in his book *The blackboard and the bottom line: Why schools can't be businesses* argues that the relationship between the economy and schools is founded on ‘an abiding belief in the logical linkage between skilled workers, quality schooling as defined by business leaders, and domestic prosperity’ (pp. 91-92; see Institute of Public Affairs, 2008; BCA, 2007). He claims that ‘the discovery of major flaws in the logic and evidence used to sustain these assumptions means that school policies anchored in these assumptions, at the minimum, can no longer go unquestioned’ (p. 124). What Cuban (2004) is arguing here, is that the current obsession with business inspired school reforms in the form of testing, standards, choice, market competition, accountability, league tables and so on is wrong-headed for three major reasons. First, there is no evidence to support the proposition that the mismatch between employers’ requirements and workers’ skills in an ever changing economy has caused lower wages and higher youth unemployment. In fact, he says that ‘increasing the job ready skills of high schools graduates would hardly erase youth unemployment when millions of jobs go overseas in search of lower wages, not higher skills levels’ (p. 131). Second, there is no evidence that more education makes workers more productive. Cuban (2004) concludes that the evidence available fails to show any causal links between school reforms, test scores and worker productivity, something the advocates of human capital approaches to education conveniently overlook (p. 135). Finally, there is no evidence to show that increases in worker productivity increase the nations’ global competitiveness. Cuban (2004) points out that the highly productive employees contributing to the boom in the 1990s were the very same cohorts who supposedly had been poorly schooled in the 1980s. For Cuban (2004), these arguments are ‘rooted in a robust popular conviction surrounded by factually frail assumptions’ (p. 137; see Bracey, 2002). Cuban (2004) rightly concludes that at the end of the day, systemic school reforms based on ‘business-minded prescriptions’ such as standards-based curriculum, testing and accountability ‘cannot provide job opportunities, reduce inequalities in wealth, or enhance family life’ (pp. 125-126).

My second concern relates to the anti-democratic and anti-educative nature of economic approaches to education encapsulated in enterprise culture. In his book, *Unequal Freedom: The Global Market as an Ethical System* (1998), McMurtry explains how the discourse of the global market and its corollary managerialism is a ‘deep value system’ which is ‘concealed in the sleep of habit and presupposition’ (p. xix). He writes:

To be indoctrinated is to internalize a structure of thinking by habitual repetition, allowing for no question, alternative, or critical exposure. Typically, people carrying on inside a closed value order do not recognize what they are part of, largely because the demands of that order are incessantly routinized as the requirements of daily life and presupposed as “the way things are” and “must be.” (p. 6).

McMurtry (1998) draws our attention to how closed value systems such as the global market 'are closed to any possibility that it could be wrong' and therefore surrounds itself with 'an armour of protective rationalizations' (p. 7) and 'circular reasoning that imprisons' how people think, feel and act (p. 11). In McMurtry's words (2002) 'the global corporate-mind is not easily opposed. It's fixed value-set knows its fundamentals as final and good and prescribes how peoples everywhere must live: it is a totalitarian morality that is ecogenocidal in its systematic effects' (p. 35). In a similar vein, Giroux (2004) adopts the term 'proto-fascism' to describe the authoritarian and anti-democratic tendencies of 'market fundamentalism' as it sets about the 'obliteration of those discourses, social forms, public institutions, and noncommercial values that are central to the language of public commitment, democratically charged politics, and the common good' (p. xvi). Instead, he argues that we are left with 'an excessive emphasis on the language of privatization, individualism, self-interest, and brutal competitiveness' (p. 102). In short, market values have become the 'lead social activity' (Wexler, 1998, p. 175) through which 'experience, moral imperative and common-sense' are determined (Apple, 2000, p. 22) and presented as 'self-evident' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 29).

The danger in all of this is that education is valued only to the extent that knowledge and skills contribute to economic growth. Therefore, the measure of a good education is based on economic outcomes in particular the acquisition of labour and entrepreneurial skills and dispositions that maximise the ability to compete with others in the global economy. The inherent problem is that the requirements of the market will ultimately determine what is taught and how it is taught (Spring, 2004, p. 47). In this context, the coupling of schools and business is highly problematic because it results in some profoundly 'corrosive ideologies and institutional practices' (Brown, 2003, p. 148) such as 'target-setting' (Fielding, 1999, p. 284), the 'senseless frenzy of testing' (Roselli, 2005, p. 53), 'grading' (Kohn, 2004), 'tracking' (Oakes, 2005[1985]), 'standardized curriculum' (Leistyna, 2007, p. 117), 'enforcement' (Saltman & Gabbard, 2003), and 'commercialism' (Molnar, 2005; Saltman, 2000). As Molnar (2005) concludes, under the influence of neoliberalism, corporations 'have conflated every aspect of school with their own interest in selling products, consumerist values, and corporation-friendly ideas. Even public education is up for sale' (p. 121).

Restoring 'human sensibility' to educational conversations

Against this backdrop, I want to briefly consider how educators might begin the task of reclaiming 'the nuanced language of education' (Fielding 1999, p. 287) as a means of restoring what Korten (1999) describes as 'human sensibility' to educational conversations. In other words, how can teachers, parents, students and community activists start to move beyond the relatively narrow concerns of market and managerial discourses to construct a new 'social imagination' (Greene, 1995) concerned with 'life, knowledge and possibility' (Watson, 2003, p. 2-3). In the words of Greene (1995), this kind of project involves building 'a vision of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, in our

schools' (p. 5). Rather than 'seeing schooling small', that is a preoccupation with test scores, time on management, accountability measures and so on, the emphasis is 'on actual human beings' (p. 11). This approach 'speaks to the existential heart of life one that draws attention to our passions, attitudes, connections, concerns, and experienced responsibilities' (Noddings, 2005, p. 45).

These 'critical counter-cultural communities of practice' are interested in developing 'a critical and engaged citizenry with a democratic sensibility that critiques and acts against all forms of inequality' (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 11). In pursuing this ideological work McLaren (1997) calls for 'a new language of analysis—through which they [students] 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' (p. 37). According to McMurtry (2002), this involves 'excavating and putting into play' (p. 117) 'society's deep life economy' including universal education and healthcare, protective laws, biodiverse environments, shared music, arts and public spaces of different cultures (p. 117). He (2002) argues that these 'selectors of social life' provide a 'defence against global corporate occupation' (p. 117), in particular the excesses of 'inhuman capital theory' which is impacting on our schools in violent and damaging ways (Harber, 2004, p. 59).

Thus, what is required in these exploitative times is a renewed emphasis on the school's civic function to produce a fairer and socially just future for all students through critically engaged learning and community capacity building (Smyth, Angus, Down & McInerney, 2008). Ayers (2004) confirms some of the key elements of this kind of education when he speaks about 'Engagement, thoughtfulness, connectedness, valuing youngsters as three dimensional human beings with their own hopes, dreams, and capacities' (p. 18). For Ayers (2004) teaching is about 'making people more powerful' (p. 27). In terms of producing the next generation of workers and citizens, Weiner (2007) believes that the emphasis should be on 'recalibrating the discourse [of schooling] so that it 'speaks' to the immediate problems of workers and others who struggle under the daily grind of time edicts, low salaries, disrespectful work environments etc' (p. 75; see Simon, Dippo & Schenke, 1991). This kind of critical democratic education is designed 'to inform, provoke the imagination, heighten the senses, support interpretative experimentation, provide tools of conceptual/creative analysis, produce new formulations of knowledge, and challenge assumptions' (p. 67).

In these ways, schooling moves beyond narrowly conceived and instrumentalist approaches to skills training and job readiness. The intent is to develop a curriculum that is not only more respectful of the intellectual and creative potential of all learners but recognizes that crafts and trades involve higher orders of intellect (Kincheloe, 1995, 1999). Sennett (2006) believes that the idea of craftsmanship involves students 'doing something well for its own sake. Self discipline

and self-criticism adhere in all domains of craftsmanship: standards matter and the pursuit of quality ideally becomes an end in itself” (p. 104).

Conclusion

In the paper, I have mapped the broader economic and political context in which schooling is being reshaped to serve the interests of global capitalism. Drawing on the official rhetoric of the new Rudd Labor Government in Australia, I have highlighted how policy discourses have focused on producing students with the knowledge, skills and dispositions relevant to a globally competitive labour market. What I have attempted to do in this paper is to interrupt the dominant market driven policy obsession with narrowly conceived and instrumentalist human capital approaches to schooling, in particular the emphasis on vocational education and training and the cultivation of enterprise culture. As an alternative, I have alluded to some key principles and values based on ‘human sensibility’ (Korten, 1999), economic and political democracy, critical inquiry, civic engagement and ‘educated hope’ (Giroux, 2004, p. 136) to help guide educational conversations beyond the limitations of market values.

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