

(Re)claiming an educator's view of reform in schools: Whole school reform as a site of negotiation of interests

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In this paper we want to connect with a plethora of literature - broadly defined as critical social research - that tackles the issue of school reform². This tradition might be understood as an epistemology that "explores what it means to do empirical research in an unjust world" (Lather 1986, p. 257) and hence might be understood to be "socially situated knowledge" (Harding 1993, p. 50). An approach to knowing that "offers a way of bringing into play the concerns and interests and diverse voices of marginalised or oppressed groups; as well as a way of assessing the voices of authority and influence" (Ball 1994, p. 3). Alternatively, critical social science might be understood, in the context of school reform, to be unabashedly interested in advancing a view that "schools should be more interested in educating young people to help create a more compassionate and democratic society rather than serving as vocational sites for industry" (Goodman 1994, p. 132). Ball (1994) offers a useful

typography of analytic perspectives employed as analytical resources in this tradition. They are:

¥ critical policy analysis - "the task .. is to examine the moral order of reform and the relationship of reform to existing patterns of social inequality, bringing to bear those concepts and interpretative devices which offer the best possibilities of insight and understanding" (p. 3).

¥ poststructuralism - "the emphasis .. is on the discourses and texts which come into play in the make up of social institutions and cultural products" (p.2).

¥ critical ethnography - "generate[s] critical perspectives upon the impact and effect of policy in local settings. Ethnography provides access to 'situated' discourse and 'specific tactics' and precise and tenuous' power relations operating in local settings" (p. 2). We draw on all three perspectives in our work to make sense of the possibilities for schools that are struggling against the grain of marketisation. In this paper we want to propose that an educator's sensibility if still alive in many schools, a sensibility that holds dear a commitment to an egalitarian ideal, that schooling can make a difference to social inequality. We see such an egalitarian sensibility operating in schools to pursue what we now refer to as the dialogic school - a school that takes seriously a commitment to negotiate with it's community about what is good teaching and learning. In this paper we want to provide a heuristic - a conceptual device for guiding practice - for understanding an alternative to school reform for marketisation and to outline a number of the significant aporias

that define such a struggle.

What does school reform mean in 'new times'?

We presently understand the term 'new times' as a code for naming a rationality that might playfully be referred to as 'Howard's way' - characterised by juxtaposing in a dangerous constellation an uncompassionate State, fast capitalism and an instrumental reason. Howard's way, also described as "supply-side federalism" (Knight & Warry 1996) relentlessly applies a set of somewhat simple-minded political technologies, driven by clerks for a "predatory culture" (McLaren 1994). Within a neo-liberal state the federal government supports deregulation by an integrated set of processes broadly named as privatisation, marketisation, and legitimisation. Privatisation involves selling off publicly owned enterprises to entrepreneurs for private ownership and profit. Marketisation is a strategy for those enterprises that can't be privatised immediately. For example - public schools, public health, public communications are still (just) beyond the scope of the privatisation strategy but can be opened up to the logic of market. Parts of these enterprises can be privatised, some of the work can be 'out-sourced' and where possible the user-pays principle is written into practice. For the purposes of this paper though we are most interested in the methods of legitimisation used by neo-liberal governments. We see a legitimisation strategy that works in at least these three ways: promulgating 'manufactured crisis' or 'moral panics', vigorously promoting a discourse of 'common sense' about the

inevitability of marketisation, and closing down the spaces of dissent.

Schooling, being such a significant site of social and cultural formation is a prime target for the use of moral panics or manufactured crisis³. The marketising of schooling requires pursuing reforms that obviously will be resisted. If schooling is to dance to the tune of the market then schools need to emphasise the development of skills for work. Of course to achieve this requires overhauling commitments to a general liberal education and the need to have an informed citizenry. At a time when it would have been more appropriate to be concentrating on schooling as a means of increasing Australia's 'social capital' (Cox 1995) and hence developing more competent learners and active citizens, the educational discourse is being colonised by the logic of the competent worker. Manufacturing crises generates a discourse of deviancy to deflect the public attention from the broader structural questions. The deviants are the workers (especially trade unionists) who want to be paid too much, who aren't productive enough and teachers who don't teach the right things well enough. What does not seem to get much mention in the official discourse though, is the ineffectiveness of Australia's corporate management in working towards more democratic relationships in the workplace, and the failure of Australia's policies on unemployment.

A significant part of the legitimisation strategy of neo-liberal governments is closing down spaces for dissent. In the education and

training sectors, State governments became "managerial husks" (Seddon 1995) during the years of the Keating Government and hence educational leadership shifted to the federal arena. (We also believe this has released some potential for educational leadership in schools but we will get back to this point later.) The spaces for debate about policy issues almost completely disappeared when State systems closed down most of their Advisory and Curriculum Officer positions (Bartlett 1994). Leadership positions have also been made short term tenured positions and this too have ensured a silencing of critique from those working in the field. Perhaps more insidiously has been the blatant muting of social justice discourse (Lingard & Garrick 1997) (Luke 1997). The category 'social justice' has all but disappeared. We have seen the Disadvantaged Schools Program renamed the Commonwealth Literacy Program and the demise of funding for the National Schools' Network. The closing down of government sponsored spaces for debate in state education bureaucracies has also most significantly meant an institutional silencing of teachers' voices.

School reform in new times then needs to be understood to involve a struggle to assert a market ideology/rationality by using technologies of "managerialism" (Bates 1996) against an educator's sensibility. It now seems clear that educator's knowledge is ignored when developing policy on schooling (Taylor, Rizvi et al. 1997). It is not only teachers' voices that have been marginalised. It does appear as though recent policy development on schools has been ideologically deaf to the best researchers in this country. Take for instance the recent debacle

about literacy standards in Australia. It might be possible to assert that we are living in a post-positivist world in the academy (Lather 1986) but certainly this is not the case in the polity. Those working in the academy perhaps also need to take stock of what Agger refers to as the "decline of discourse" (Agger 1991) - the retreat of academics to write almost exclusively for specialist journals. Recently, academics as intellectuals have tended to write themselves up textual cul-de sac's, "composing themselves in ways accessible to a few hundred" (Agger 1991, p. 175). At a time in which the logic of the market in concert with government is infecting even our public institutions and civil society it seems absurd to lose courage and retreat from a 'diagnosis of the times' to a narrow and safe politics of the sign. In our field - the study of teaching - there has been a tendency to become overly obsessed with tangling in theory wars and not enough attention to the widening gap between educational policy and educators knowledge.

In a society in which 'Howard's way' asserts its influence on public policy and law, and more importantly, manifests in the material conditions of our lives, the contest over the purposes of schooling intensifies. Schooling, as a significant site of social and cultural formation, not only offers potential for increased intrusion of the logic of the market into the political economy, the culture, the public sphere and the family, but also offers spaces for resistance (Shor 1992; McLaren 1993; hooks 1994; Smyth 1995). Classroom practice and hence the consciousness of teachers, might also be understood to be

contested terrain - a site of competing discourses. The term 'discourse' here refers to "different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice [d]iscourses do not just reflect or represent social entities and relations, they construct or 'constitute them .." (Fairclough 1992, p. 3) Teachers are not automatons, that simply implement the authoritative discourse of education policy pronouncements (Bowe and Ball 1992; Ball 1994). Rather they struggle to make sense of - and hence to unite into a coherent practice - the inter-relationships, contradictions and profound differences between the authoritative discourse (education policy) and their own internally persuasive discourse.

The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already infused to it ... (Bakhtin 1935/1981, p. 342)

At its most sophisticated, the internally persuasive discourse of teachers - a view about teaching and learning that we want to refer to as an educators' sensibility - develops in an independent, experimenting and discriminating way through ongoing rigorous examination of what works in the material conditions of schools (Zeichner 1993; McTaggart 1994). Teachers, we believe enter their classrooms with intent to put into practice their internally persuasive discourse. Such intent though is forced to struggle with other available (and competing) verbal and ideological points of view,

approaches and directions. In the contemporary scene though, teachers are having to counteract a prevailing discourse which seeks to reduce teaching to that of a technical enterprise based on sets of competencies and skills, where teachers roles are largely confined to the implementation of curricula prepared by outside experts and where teaching is viewed as an 'art' or 'craft' rather than scholarly practices informed by ethical frameworks.

It is clear from our case studies that many teachers and school communities work to sustain a broader vision of teaching as an intellectual and ethical activity where issues of educational inequality and disadvantage are part of the fabric of teachers' work and learning (Connell and White 1989; Connell, White et al. 1990). In such communities teachers are resisting models of training and development which operate from a deficit view of teachers. How we construe teachers' work establishes how we conceive of teachers' learning. If teachers are only technicians then their learning is simply a matter of learning the techniques. If teachers' work is construed as being about making curriculum in response to, not only changing social conditions, but to the needs of unique communities, then teachers learning needs to involve making ethical choices, negotiating with students and parents, collaborating with peers, and being reflexive about the rigour (Shor and Freire 1987) of their classroom practice.

The school as a site of negotiation of interests

Ironically the major policy move in relation to school reform has been towards the 'self-managing school' (Smyth 1993; Watkins 1996). We say ironically, because such a move also implies that educational leadership has also moved to schools. Given the trajectory to marketise schooling - to force schools to compete in a market and to have market intrusion in the curriculum - has really only just begun, we believe an educators' sensibility is still alive and kicking in many public schools. We can be thankful that most of our public school teachers make decisions about their teaching practice using an ethical framework that has yet to be completely trampled by the logic of the market. Accepting that hegemony can never be complete (Apple 1981) means that schools need to be considered as possessing a certain, albeit limited autonomy. What's of interest to us, is what schools do with that autonomy - how do they struggle over purpose? In a context of devolution some schools have managed to successfully work against the grain of marketisation and the concomitant effects of intensification and proletarianisation. Some schools have managed to sustain a 'culture of innovation' (Kress 1993) through applying strategies of reform developed through such programs as the Disadvantaged Schools Program and the National Schools Network (Ladwig, Currie et al. 1994). Taking 'whole school reform' (Connell and White 1989) seriously means not only subverting the educational policy process through a politics of 'resistance through accommodation' but of struggling to put into practice what Fraser calls 'radical democracy'. Put simply, the school is viewed as a site for an "actually existing

democracy" _(Fraser 1997)_ which aims to eliminate .. two different kinds of impediments to democratic participation. One such impediment is social inequality; the other is the misrecognition of difference. Radical democracy on this interpretation, is the view that democracy today requires both economic redistribution and multicultural recognition. (pp. 173-4)

Some schools continue to struggle to enact a vision of a school as a site of negotiation of interests. We refer to these schools as dialogic schools _(McInerney, Smyth et al. 1997)_ or critical collaborative communities. Teachers in such schools reject the view that the interests of the most disenfranchised members of their school communities have been incorporated into the policy formulations of outside experts. Instead, such schools maintain a view that social justice is largely worked out locally. These schools are committed to: reforming the mainstream curriculum to improve the learning outcomes of educationally disadvantaged students; involving parents and students in curriculum decision making; integrating the change process in existing school structures; and, redirecting resources to assist in the change process. In essence whole school change is a process or a struggle to actively involve the whole school community including groups who have been constantly marginalised or silenced in the curriculum process and to ensure all students are actively engaged in learning and decision making.

What does struggling for the dialogic school mean for teachers' work

and teachers' learning?

Teachers' learning - towards the dialogic school

Being a teacher in a dialogic school involves learning in response to either, the educational needs of their students, or else, in response to the changing social context of schooling. For example, teachers are learning to respond to the learning needs of an increasingly diverse cohort of students, and/or they are learning how to incorporate new technologies into their practice. Both reasons in the end, aim to direct working/learning to improve the educational attainment of their students. What is recognised in dialogic schools - a point that seems to have alluded recent policy initiatives - is that teachers are the most important actors in educational reform and it is their efforts which ultimately determine the success of any moves to change schooling practices (1993). Hence representing accounts of teacher development which bring teachers back in the centre of the frame has been a major goal of our research. Early on in our research we concluded that teachers' learning needed to be understood as a 'social practice'. As such teachers' learning can't be considered as a private and individual event but always occurs within interpretive communities - such as schools, (clusters and school systems). What's being argued here is that schools operate as powerful interpretative communities. What constitutes good teaching and learning is authorised and institutionalised at the level of the school. What possibilities teachers have to develop their practice - to enhance teachers' learning

- then is encouraged and or constrained by the culture of the school.

Such a view means that the nature of teachers' learning is largely determined by school culture. School culture we understand here to be about such things as: leadership practices; school decision making structures; school planning practices; relationships with the community; relationships between teachers and with students; and, the quality of the educative debates and discourses that operate in the school. School culture being the prevailing structures, practices and discourses through which those working and learning in schools make sense of what's going on.

A way of understanding this idea is to imagine the nature of teachers' learning in various geographical locations - try comparing a secondary school in a wealthy suburb, a primary school in a community with a high proportion of refugees from South East Asia or an Area school in a farming community. Another comparison is between schools with different views about curriculum reform, or school development. Try comparing the nature of teachers' learning in a school with a vibrant curriculum development program - based on a rigorous process of examination of practice, with a school that is convinced the existing curriculum is working well, even though teaching practice is rarely examined or debated. Each school has very different culture which give rise to different possibilities and realities for teachers' learning.

Enhancing teachers' learning in schools, we believe involves working on

the culture of the school. Ideally this means whole school reform, but smaller less ambitious projects we believe can also make a significant contribution to working on the culture (Hattam, Brown et al. 1995). How might we understand school cultures that enhance teachers learning?

The question might also be turned on it's head and we might also ask - how might teachers' learning contribute to a more vibrant school culture? At the risk of over-simplification and stereotyping it seems to us that schools might be broadly categorised as follows -

Enter diagram here

What follows is a further elaboration of the caricature of these types of school cultures.

"Stuck" Schools

Schools which have few of the structures and planning processes to promote collaboration and the development of educational dialogues in the community seem to be stuck when it comes to school reform. In such schools restrictive practices associated with individualism, privatism and hierarchical systems seem to shut off the possibility of teachers working towards educational goals or visions shaped through democratic processes in response to community needs. In the absence of community owned processes, such schools allow their agenda to be driven from outside and end up being trapped in their own inertia.

Collaborative schools

Other schools have developed collaborative practices and various forms of collegiality as part of the process of advancing teachers' learning and whole school reform. Some of the characteristic features of schools moving towards this model include:

- ¥ a shared public discourses on education
- ¥ democratic planning practices
- ¥ opening up of the spaces for dialogue in the school
- ¥ school structures to support teachers' learning
- ¥ teachers play a prominent role in identifying and defining their
professional learning
- ¥ forms of distributive leadership - not a hierarchical model of
leadership.

The big questions in such communities centre on the primacy of student learning. How is student learning best enhanced in this place? How, in turn, is teachers' learning constituted to ensure that it contributes to improvements in student learning? How, in turn, is teachers' learning constituted to ensure that it contributes to improvements in student learning? In such schools, a large number of the teachers realise that it is important to be continually testing the adequacy of their theories about teaching and learning. In a number of schools the school culture supports and encourages such investigations.

Critically collaborative communities

Schools as critically collaborative communities have moved beyond the comfort zone of collaboration to a culture of learning where teachers confront their own teaching practices and begin to critically reflect on issues of social justice and the broader context of teaching and learning. We have suggested that such a community might be regarded as a dialogic school in which parents, students and teachers are engaged in on-going dialogues and debates about the curriculum and the purposes of schooling. The big questions in such communities centre on the socially situated nature of student learning. So the question - how is student learning best enhanced in this place? is still important but is read off against other questions such as - how might schooling make a difference to persistent social inequalities? In such schools, a large number of the teachers are investigating the adequacy of their theories about teaching and learning, with a view to introducing their students to the "representational resources" (New London Group 1996) needed to "read the word and the world" (Freire and Macedo 1987) in these "new times" (Hall and Jacques 1990). The following constellation of features (Smyth, Hattam et al. In progress) could be considered to encapsulate the critically collaborative or dialogic school:

1. Articulating the purposes of schooling: The school has a clear and coherent educational philosophy (Goodman 1992), in which the role of the school in developing society and students is displayed in both policy and practice.

2. Advancing a concern for social injustice _(Connell 1993)_: The pursuit of tolerance is a hallmark of a critical appreciation of difference, and is a distinguishing feature of the democratic school. The demonstration of a capacity to embrace diversity and to debate its features makes a school able to challenge and supplant dogmatic and entrenched viewpoints.

3. Continually (re)focus on learning: All aspects of school life should be interrogated by the question - does this enhance kid's learning?

4. A culture of innovation: The atmosphere in the classroom and the school emphasises possibilities arising from learning, the reward that comes from understanding what the world is like, how it came to be that way, how things work, what could be done differently, and in what ways everyone might share more equitably.

5. Enacting democratic forms of practice: The school organises spaces for the interaction of all of its members; parents can attend school council meetings; parents are invited to engage in discussion with staff; students engage actively in discussion of school policies and practices and carry the outcomes of these discussion to the school decision making body where they have representation.

6. Being community-minded: Democratic schools work hard to achieve a shared consciousness of the situated and located nature of the learning process _(McLaren 1989)_. This involves working to be relevant to the community around the school, and of being partisan in response to the their struggles to live worthwhile lives.

7. Educative Leadership: This means that leadership is given a somewhat wider definition than just referring to the Administration - leadership

is encouraged from the teachers, students and parents.

8. A discourse emphasising critical literacies: This means promoting critical and political literacies not just functional ones that lead to technical literacy _(Fairclough 1992)_.

IV

So far we have provided a sketch of an alternative to school reform for marketisation - the struggle towards a dialogic school as an 'actually existing democracy'. But this is only half the story for those of us working within a socially-critical orientation committed to theory with "practical intent" _(Bernstein 1978: 206)_.

Theory with practical intent seeks not only to understand the world but also to transform it. Such a vision contains two elements.

First, it entails a conception of a better world, an image of what the world could (or should) be. The realization of this better world is the aim of theory with practical intent. And second, it involves a claim concerning how such a world can be realized, one predicated on the belief that the intentional actions of social actors can play a role in determining the dynamics and direction of change. _(Alway 1995: 2)_

In attempting to come to terms with how a dialogic school might be realised a somewhat more nuance reading of the terrain is required than

outlined here already. We don't intend to give a lengthy treatment here but offer some directions as to how we might consider the complexity of struggling towards a dialogic school. A conceptual construct that offers some potential here is 'aporia'. The Concise Oxford defines aporia as "a perplexing difficulty" . Whilst the Oxford Companion to Philosophy defines aporia as " the cognitive perplexity posed by a group of individually plausible but collectively inconsistent propositions ... and logic as such can enforce no resolution." Perhaps an example will be instructive as a means to introduce a number of aporias for those working in dialogic schools. For those working within a socially-critical tradition the following aporia is a defining feature of their project - the aporia of the necessity to continue to work in the tradition of critique, yet the corresponding necessity to transcend it without compromising it. Critical social theory "is caught between a critique of categories as fulfilling an ontological need, and it's own will to explanation, a program which requires positive, unhistorically mediated, categories" (Aronowitz 1992: 297). Critical social theory is defined by the perplexing difficulty of a commitment to constantly interrogate our categories and the categories of other discourses circulating in the public sphere and also to act upon the world to change it. What follows is a first pass at describing some of the significant aporias confronting those working towards the dialogic school.

1. Being a leader means being in control, whilst being democratic is about being open to the voices of others. One way to think about this

issue is to tease out the difference between being authoritarian versus being authoritative. The authoritarian asserts a view of the world, whilst an educator "practicing authority with freedom" (Shor and Freire 1987, p. 92) practices dialogue with others to find a more adequate way to work the world.

2. The reality of intensification of teachers' work undermines enacting a democratic culture in a school. We hear the cries for pre-packaged materials and for the need to limit the meeting schedules of schools.

3. Many teachers fear that democratic relationships in the classroom will mean standards will fall. A way forward here is to replace the idea of standards with. The question then becomes - how do we expect students to be engaged in rigorous learning tasks? How might we define an educative rigour?

4. And a related point - How to engage the voices of the students without trivialising the curriculum? Being able to bring the lives of the students into the curriculum does not mean abandoning giving them opportunities to engage in powerful learning processes. Neither does it necessarily mean giving up the right to determine what is important knowledge.

In conclusion, we hope that our research will lead to the development of a set of materials for schools that will assist those who are

interested to work through the perplexities that confront them. As such, we aim to develop a set of technologies or investigations that we hope will enable teachers to work towards a school culture that rigorously examines its own practice.

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1 This paper was developed out of the Teachers' Learning Project as a means to theorise about what's happening to teachers' learning in an era of the devolved school The Teachers' Learning Project is an Australian Research Council funded project involving the Department for Education Training and Employment (DETE) and the Flinders Institute for the Study of Teaching (FIST). The major aims of the project are to:

- ¥ develop a detailed account of the supportive conditions and structures to facilitate the professional development of teachers;
- ¥ identify and develop strategies which can be used in schools to promote and support teachers' learning;
- ¥ develop and trial materials which schools could use to enhance teacher learning; and,
- ¥ evaluate the implementation of trial materials and strategies concerned with teachers' learning.

The special focus of this research has been on teacher managed forms of learning and to date the team has gathering descriptions of teachers' learning at eight schools - including primary and secondary - in South Australia. Using a case study methodology we have interviewed teachers, parents and students, engaged in an extensive program of observation in schools, and collected and analysed school policies and planning documents.

What we have been attempting to understand from a research perspective is the phenomena - teachers' learning. We have deliberately studied schools that we believed fulfilled certain criteria. Namely - exemplify a teacher-managed form of learning, have a focus on learning and teaching, encompass a commitment to addressing the needs of all students and show evidence of success or potential success in improving learning outcomes. Perhaps to summarise, we were after schools that were sustaining a culture in which the theory and practice of teaching

and learning were being rigorously examined by the teachers as a means to improve the learning outcomes of all of the students in the school. Schools in which an educators view was alive and kicking. In going after teachers' learning in schools it has become clear that school culture is a significant determining context. Such a view has led us to propose a typology of schools - stuck, collaborative, and critical collaborative. The critically collaborative or dialogic school being seen as an ideal to be struggled for. We have begun to describe what this ideal looks like and how we might understand a trajectory towards such a school. In moving along this trajectory a number of significant tensions need to be worked on. Understanding these tensions/problematics gives us a few clues about what resources might be useful for schools - resources that enhance teachers learning.

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see also Discourse Vol 17 (3) devoted to feminist perspectives on the
marketisation of education

3 A number of manufactured crisis have been used in the past as a
powerful concoction to legitimate the need to privilege the imperatives
of the market in devising curriculum - e.g youth are deviant (Roman
1996); the Australian education and training sectors need to do more if
Australia are to be economically competitive in an international market
place; and, we have a debt crisis.