WHAT WILL YOUR VERSE BE?
STRATEGY IN THE (RE)PRODUCTION OF STUDENT SUBJECTIVITY

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Abstract
This paper identifies a range of discursive practices and strategies employed by three 'on screen' teachers - who appear in the films Dangerous Minds, Kindergarten Cop and Dead Poets Society - which are directed at constructing particular student dispositions. The paper suggests that the strategies these teachers employ are frequently evident within dominant and discriminatory discourses of race, class and gender. By making these strategies and discourses explicit, the paper seeks to open spaces for exploring how teacher-student relations might be reconstructed in more culturally sensitive ways; for teachers and students to 'seize' the opportunity for their discursive practices to advance the struggle towards a radical democratic politics within classrooms, schools and society generally.

Introduction
This paper examines the discursive practices of teachers and students portrayed in three Hollywood movies: Dangerous Minds (1995), Kindergarten Cop (1990) and Dead Poets Society (1989). It argues that the internal relations legitimated within these on-screen classrooms are informed by a pedagogical politics, ordered (narrowly) from teacher to student. Apart from their similarities, the paper explores the differences between these
classrooms and the discourses mobilised by their three teachers to variously control the minds, bodies and emotions of students. In making these matters explicit, we seek to create space for a review of classroom practices - as depicted in these three films - and for the possibility for them to be re(in)formed by a radical democratic politics. By this we mean the meaningful and effective participation in decision making by those about whom these decisions effect and a more equitable positioning of participants within this process which acknowledges social difference. We see this as requiring the democratisation of public institutions, like schools, the expansion of the range of decisions that are made through democratic processes and giving specific representation to oppressed groups.

As a way of providing for this evaluation - and adapting Connell's 'three-fold model of the structure of gender, distinguishing relations of (a) power, (b) production and (c) cathexis (emotional attachment)' (1995, pp. 71-76) - we take the (epistemological) standpoint of students to reflect on how these films depict:

• who they are and who teachers tell them they are (teaching 'dangerous minds');
• who does what and who decides what to do (policing student bodies);
• how they feel about it and how they are told to feel about it (reviving 'dead' emotions).

In pursuing such evaluation, we employ what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as a 'field analysis' which 'involves three necessary and internally connected moments' (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 104). The first of these analytical moments draws attention to relations between a particular field and broader 'fields of power' (Bourdieu, 1992, pp. 104-105). In this paper we particularly explore how classrooms, as fields, are related to and connected with powerful discourses which discriminate between individuals on the basis of their race, class and gender. A second level of analysis, maps the 'field of positions'. Positions legitimated in classrooms are commonly referred to as 'teacher' and 'student' but their 'mapping' also involves identifying what inter-relations are legitimated by these positions. Bourdieu's third level of analysis involves the 'field of stances'. Here we examine individual teachers' and students' practices and expressions or the stances they take within classrooms; in Bourdieu's terms, their 'habitus' or 'dispositions'.

There are at least two methodological issues here which we want to draw to the reader's attention. Like Bourdieu, we do not see these three aspects of field analysis - of power, positions, and stances - as inseparable in the analysis of any one general field. They are better understood as different facets of what constitutes a field. One discursive moment might provide evidence of power, positions and stances or, as Bourdieu explains, different 'translations of the same sentence' even though 'the space of positions tends to command the space of position-takings' (1992, p. 105). Secondly, 'to think in terms of field is to think relationally' (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 96, emphasis original). There is more to this way of thinking than simply focusing on individuals' intersubjective actions (including their discursive practices), which limits analysis to what is detectable through the senses and 'reduce[s] the effect of the environment to the effect of direct action as actualised during an interaction' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 42). To think in terms of field is to identify the objective relations which the interactions between individuals imply and to contemplate the determinations field relations impose on individual position holders (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 97).

As noted, our analysis of these films suggests that the objective structure of classroom relations - 'the cumulative product of its particular history' (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 105) - is concerned with instructional pedagogies; specifically, teachers instruct and students heed their instruction. When the logic of these relations are sustained teachers are seen to be 'in control' but when they are challenged or abandoned students are regarded as 'out of control'. The struggle over the legitimacy of these relations informs the narratives of the films.
in question in at least three significant ways. Each teacher, new to the school, is presented with a classroom which is 'out of control' in one sense or another. At one level this is less true of Dead Poets Society (hereafter DPS) although, as we explain below, it is the emotional dispositions which students have learned in other classes (educational and socio-economic) which resist the logic of John Keating’s poetry classroom and render it in need of instruction. Each teacher is also monitored by the school’s administration which seeks to maintain established teacher-student relations of instruction. And each teacher seeks resolution of the 'problem' through innovative means, often because of his/her limited socialisation into shared understandings of conventional teacher practices although, in the case of DPS, they are practices which are understood but not always shared. Yet, as we illustrate below, the underlying and traditional structure of relations in these classrooms remain largely unchallenged.

What follows is an analysis of this pedagogical politics of classrooms as it is expressed in three sub-fields located within the US: the 'Academy' of Parkmont High School, located in an inner city area of California; the Kindergarten class of Astoria Elementary School, near Portland, Oregon; and Welton Academy, a private college in Vermont. While these are fictitious classrooms - the constructions of Hollywood - we believe that they reflect the common-sense view of teacher-student relations in Western societies generally and the view held by many teachers, students, administrators, and parents in particular. For these reasons and others we highlight below, they are views worthy of analysis and challenge. We begin by focusing on how one classroom teacher instructs her students to think about themselves and their world. This is followed by analyses of two classrooms which respectively inform student bodies and emotions.

There are no victims in this classroom

The emancipatory narrative in Dangerous Minds (hereafter DM) is familiar enough in Hollywood films of ‘troubled’ classrooms in which the teacher-hero embarks on a project of ‘connecting’ with his/her students - notwithstanding a few teething problems - intent on generating greater freedoms in (often interpreted as ‘acceptance of’) classroom relations and, potentially, freedoms in relations experienced outside schooling. If its box-office success is any guide, many of us are attracted to this seemingly emancipatory discourse. Superficially, it is reminiscent of the work of teacher-activists like Paulo Freire whose pedagogy - as part of a broader agenda for counter-hegemonic social movements - was directed at empowering the poor, illiterate, socially and politically disenfranchised peoples of Brazil and Chile. There is even the hint of Latin America in DM - several students are Latino - and Michelle Pfeiffer, as beginning teacher LouAnne Johnson, employs a curriculum not strictly of the school establishment’s making (or liking).

But the resemblance may be, at best, shallow. Ownership of the curriculum in Johnson's classroom may have shifted away from the traditions and authority of the school's Board of Education, but her 'new' parameters of curriculum development have not embraced her students as co-designers - able to contribute to understandings of what is worth knowing. The culture to which this new curriculum appeals - the 1960s/70s poetry of Bob Dylan - is clearly Johnson's, not the students'. In this apparent re-negotiation of the curriculum, Johnson's dominance in relation to her students is retained; it is her cultural capital which is legitimating and her authoritative position which is reinforced. As Bourdieu would suggest, the 'game' may have changed but the rules remain much the same, despite the discourse which suggests otherwise. This is well appreciated by one student who challenges the legitimacy of Johnson's discursive logic, given its ignorance with respect to broader fields of power. Incredulously, he inquires: 'Lady, why are you playing this game? We don't have a choice'.
Many of these issues find expression around one pivotal scene in which Johnson declares 'there are no victims in this classroom'. Others might use these words to inspire oppressed students to be proud of their culture, to understand their situations as informed by existing social structures such as social class, race, and gender, and to work collectively toward making civil society more responsive to their needs. But for Johnson, it seems that there are no structural arrangements in society - at least not in 'nice' Western societies - designed to ensure that groups of individuals have differential access to social and material goods on the basis of their social and physical differences. It is ironic, then, that Johnson's classroom is characterised by students of particular ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds who have access to limited resources; ironic because such concentrations and restrictions suggest the very arrangements which Johnson's comments deny. Johnson prefers to explain these positional arrangements in terms of choice rather than oppression. As she puts it:

There are a lot of people who live in your neighbourhood who choose not to get on that bus [which would bring them to this school]. What do they choose to do? They choose to go out and sell drugs. They choose to go out and kill people. They choose to do a lot of other things but they choose not to get on that bus. The people who choose to get on that bus - which are you - are people who are saying [in Bob Dylan's words] 'I will not carry myself down to die. When I go to my grave my head will be high'.

But the choices for individuals are clearly limited. Johnson's students, for instance, do not have a choice concerning which bus to board and to which classroom and school the bus travels. They are assigned to the 'Academy': a sub-school of 'problem' classes within Parkmont High School. And, unlike Johnson who is able to pass up the invitation by one of her students to 'come and live in my neighbourhood for a week', most of her students are limited in their choices over where to live or, as illustrated below, whether or not to attend school. It is because of these constraints on their lives that they have difficulty relating to the logic of Johnson's neo-liberal challenge: 'Do you have a choice to get on that bus?'

Choice does not necessarily or universally empower individuals as neo-liberals claim, particularly those (such as in DM) whose resources are inadequate to meet the costs of society's benefits. Effectively, you cannot choose what is not available nor what you do not have the capital to secure. A market model for the economy and society generally, in which choice is a central plank, is empowering primarily for those (such as in DPS) with sufficient (cultural as well as economic) capital to purchase its most desirable goods. By imploring her students to accept this flawed logic of choice as freedom, Johnson reinforces their subordinate positions. Left unchallenged are societal arrangements which restrict access to certain highly valued goods and which undervalue or discount the resources which her students do possess. For these students, Jameson's (1991) description of financial markets could equally apply to the logic of their classroom:

... as a concept [it] rarely has anything to do with choice or freedom, since those are all determined for us in advance, whether we are talking about new model cars, toys or television programs: we select among those, no doubt, but we can scarcely be said to have a say in actually choosing any of them. (Jameson, 1991, p. 266)

This analogy of the market is also useful in highlighting significant aspects of Johnson's pedagogy which relies on rewards such as chocolate bars, excursions to amusement parks, and dinners at expensive restaurants. This is juxtaposed beside her claim that 'learning is the prize. Knowing how to read something and understand it is the prize. Knowing how to think is the prize'. The reality is, only certain kinds of learning and knowledge are prized, rewarded or even recognised. There are two central and interrelated myths of dominant neo-
liberal ideology that deflect interest away from such realities: a belief in an equality of opportunity and in just rewards for hard work. The shortcomings of such ideology and Johnson's pedagogy are clearly evident when they confront the structural realities of lived experiences. As noted, Johnson's students do not have access to opportunities afforded their peers in other classrooms and schools, and nor are they likely to experience similar rewards for their labour. These structural realities are clearly acknowledged by one parent in her rejection of Johnson's version of empowerment:

My boys don't go to your school no more and that's going to be it.

You took them out of school?

You're damn right I did. I saw what they were bringing home: poetry and shit; a waste of time. They got more important things to worry about.

Don't you think that finishing high school would be valuable for their future?

That's not in their future. I ain't raising no doctors and lawyers here. They got bills to pay. Why don't you just get out of here. Go find yourself some other poor boys to save.

The neo-liberal discourse of choice has its defence against such attacks. Failure, like success, is framed as a matter of choice. This is a marketised version of the classic 'blame the victim' rhetoric with which critical theorists are familiar. For Johnson, if individuals are disempowered it is because they choose to be, but for those who 'buy into' the 'poor boy makes good' ideology:

Each new fact gives you another choice. Each new idea builds another muscle. It's those muscles that are going to make you really strong. Those are your weapons and in this unsafe world I want to arm you.

And that's what these poems are supposed to do?

Yeah. Hey try it. You're just sitting here anyway. Look, if at the end of the term you're not faster, stronger and smarter, you will have lost nothing. But if you are, you'll be that much tougher to knock down.

Nothing for poor, ethnic minorities to lose in a market economy of the classroom?

There is no bathroom

The problems of classroom control displayed in Kindergarten Cop (hereafter KC) are for many beginning teachers their worst nightmare. In the school psyche, to 'lose control' is often interpreted (even by students) as failure, with the physical behaviour of students an obvious manifestation of a teacher's skills in classroom management. But a classroom 'out of control' is not simply a matter of student disobedience, even when teachers' explicit instructions for the movement and management of student bodies are flagrantly ignored. Institutional imperatives for physical behaviour in classrooms are not always highly valued by students who possess physical dispositions - bodily functions and behaviours - which are commensurate with their level of maturation. As substitute teacher John Kimble (Arnold Schwarzenegger) discovers, it is difficult for teachers to deny young students leave from the classroom to attend to their toiletry needs when the adverse consequences of doing so, for student and teacher, are likely to outweigh the benefits. Crying is another supposed
involuntary behavioural response for which young students often find sympathy, even when this is recognised as the child's intention. And play, generally regarded positively and necessary for child development, can be noisy and disruptive and can raise the ire of adults.

While these expressions of the young body have a degree of legitimacy in some fields, the work of the school and its teachers is often directed at their renegotiation and/or at constraining their legitimacy to more 'appropriate' times and places; during recess and in playgrounds, for example. That is, schools and teachers are actively involved in the socialisation of the young body into a particular institutional way of life. Clearly:

... schools are not just places which educate the minds of children, they are also implicated in monitoring and shaping the bodies of young people ... one has only to think of the attempts of teachers to get young children to dress themselves 'properly', ask to go to the toilet in time for accidents to be avoided, sit still and be quiet during lessons ... to realize that the *moving, managed* and *disciplined* body, and not just the speaking and listening body, is central to the daily business of schooling. (Shilling, 1993, pp. 21-22, emphasis original)

'Shaping' the student body - always an unfinished entity - is a feature of all levels of schooling but can seem most transparent in the early years when students are new to school, its values and its dictates of when, where and how to stand, sit, arrive, leave, walk, run, ask, answer, eat, and generally perform. As Bourdieu (1978) notes, acts of labour are required to turn bodies into social entities and the kindergarten class of Astoria Elementary School is one example of such a construction site. As its makeshift teacher, Kimble is unschooled in how to gain control over his students' bodily dispositions and is cautioned about underestimating their strength by one of his colleagues: 'kindergarten is like the ocean. You don't want to turn your back on it.' These control problems are later addressed by emphasising Kimble's 'physical capital' (Bourdieu, 1978) - accumulated through muscle-building and strenuous physical activity - and its conversion into teacher authority. (As an aside, it is an exchange which parallels Schwarzenegger's own conversion of physical capital into economic capital through his participation in the film industry.)

Throughout KC, particularly in its initial scenes, much is made of Kimble's physique. Single-handed, he dispenses with the strongest of criminals and aggressively relates to his fellow police officers. His entry into the classroom is similarly physical. Juxtaposed with the school's principal, a woman small in statue, his 'superior' strength and size is also accentuated by the camera angles and the reaction of his students at his introduction. It is this physical capital that he draws on to reconstruct teacher-student relations in his new environment:

... it's [now] called 'Police School'. I'm going to be your Sheriff, you're going to be my Deputy Trainees. (Groan.) Come on, stop whining. You kids are soft, you lack discipline. Well, I've got news for you. You are mine now. You belong to me. (Oh.) You're not going to have your mommies run behind you any more and wipe your little tushes. Oh no. It's time now to turn this mush into muscles. No more complaining: 'Mr Kimble, I have to go to the bathroom'. Nothing. There is no bathroom!

The strategy is not unlike that employed by LouAnne Johnson in DM who adopts a stance associated with a previous military occupation to gain physical ascendancy in classroom relations: 'you'd make good marines. In fact, from this moment each one of you is like an inductee'. Kimble's appeal to his physical prowess repositions him as a trainer of bodies, as a 'body expert ... involved in educating bodies and labelling as legitimate or deviant
particular ways of managing and experiencing our bodies' (Shilling, 1993, p. 145). Mobilising this discourse enables Kimble's physical capital to be exchanged for more regimented teacher-student relations and student bodies; there is no place for the bodily distractions discussed above which, embodied in the 'bathroom', are now banished from the classroom. Moreover, student bodies are no longer their own. This is not a belonging in the maternal sense, although there is a certain reciprocity for those who comply.

Under this new regime, Kimble's students navigate a barrage of physical activity: marching, jogging, squats, obstacle courses, star jumps, neck rolls, see-saws, rope climbing, hula hoops, fire drills, sprints, and sit-ups - at which 'Zac is [declared] the winner'. The latter is revealing of the subtly gendered nature of Kimble's classroom activity; not exclusively so but nevertheless indicative of:

... the greater encouragement boys usually receive in comparison with girls to engage in strenuous physical exercise and 'cults of physicality', such as football and weight training, which focus on the disciplined management of the body and the occupation of space. (Shilling, 1993, pp. 110-111)

It is significant, then, that the major challenge to Kimble's 'police school', and its physical consequences for his 'trainees', comes from Emma. Emma's bodily disposition is informed by a different discourse; one that is (potentially) more empowering and often associated with young girls. The challenge unfolds in response to Emma's disregard for Kimble's instruction to his new trainees:

Emma! Emma! Bring your toy back to the carpet.

I'm not a policeman, I'm a princess.

Take your toy back to the carpet.

I'm not a policeman, I'm a princess.

Take it back!

Alright.

As a princess, Emma's body is able to roam free and is answerable only to the wishes of a king, if then. But the discipline of Kimble's classroom does not allow for and cannot accommodate such freedoms. Emma eventually succumbs to the insistence of Kimble's instruction but not because it offers an attractive alternative. In the final analysis, control is always underwritten by physical strength (Kimble is a man and Emma a girl) and always has consequences for the body.

No, we'll not have that here

Like the training of their physical bodies, males are often lauded for their control over their emotions as are whites and the upper classes of Western societies generally. It is not surprising, then, that this particular interaction of gender, race and social class in the private boys' school of Welton Academy - the on-screen classroom in Dead Poets Society (hereafter DPS) - should address the construction of young men as 'civilised bodies' (Shilling, 1993) adept at emotional control. Schooling itself is central to the production of this defensive style of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1995) with its tight control over emotions. As Seidler (1989) explains, current constructions of masculinity are informed by the elevation of
abstract thought in Western academic traditions. In tracing the greater demands placed on these matters from the period of the Renaissance, Shilling (1993) notes that:

... there has been a shift in emotional and physical expression as a result of long-term civilizing processes in the individual and society. To simplify, the civilised body characteristic of modern Western societies ... has the ability to rationalize and exert a high degree of control over emotions, to monitor its own actions and those of others, and to internalize a finely demarcated set of rules about what constitutes appropriate behaviour in various situations. (Shilling, 1993, pp. 150-151)

Such 'civility' in DPS is unmistakable. For example, teachers and students are explicitly addressed in courteous terms, their surnames prefaced with the title 'Mr'; a vain attempt at times to mask emotions which are often betrayed by associated actions and/or tone of voice. But for Robyn Williams, as Welton alumnus and incoming teacher John Keating, these and other controls placed on his students by the Academy are indicative of emotional restrictions which are, in a sense, 'out of control'. In his view, the school's collective pedagogy has effectively 'deadened' its students' emotions, much like the physical bodies of the poets which they are required to study. This is the issue for Keating: that the study of poetry has been divorced from the emotions which produced it; a disengagement reinforced by Pritchard's clinical rating scale which prefaces students' poetry reading and acts to keep their emotions in check.

In addressing this denial of self, Keating intentionally stages his pedagogy to provoke an emotional response. Breaking out of the school's traditional mould of poetry pedagogy, Keating declares war against the prevailing academic wisdom:

Excrement. That's what I think of Mr J. Evans Pritchard. We're not laying pipe, we're talking about poetry. ... Rip it out. Rip. Be gone J. Evans Pritchard, PhD. ... this is a battle, a war, and the casualties could be your hearts and souls ... Armies of academics going forward, measuring poetry. No, we'll not have that here ... In my class you will learn to think for yourselves again. You will learn to savour words and language. No matter what anybody tells you, words and ideas can change the world ... We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race and the human race is filled with passion. Medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life, but poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for. To quote from Whitman, '... you are here ... life exists ... the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse'. What will your verse be?

What is important to note here is Keating's realignment of the school's curricula. Studies that lead to prestigious professions - ones for which his students might fully expect to be destined - are repositioned as peripheral, no longer the central subjects that students would expect to dominate elite educational institutions. These are to be displaced by and take their meaning from poetry which is represented as the bearer of the very elements of life itself, experienced through the savouring of words and language. There is also an internal rearrangement of the poetry curriculum. Ownership is now to reside in the hearts of students, not in the measured minds of remote authorities whose practice, if not intent, is to suppress emotion and independent thought. Again, it is emotion which is to form the rationale for studying poetry not its utility. As Keating explains, 'Language is developed for one endeavour and that is ... Mr Perry? To communicate? No. To woo women!'
Keating continues his attack on what he portrays as the battle against the establishment for his students' hearts and minds:

Just when you think you know something, you have to look at it in another way, even though it may seem silly or wrong you must try. When you read don't just consider what the author thinks, consider what you think. Boys, you must strive to find your own voices but the longer you wait to begin the less likely you are to find it at all ... most men lead lives of quiet desperation. Don't be resigned to that. Break out ... Dare to strike out and find new ground.

The emotional 'revolution' in DPS induced by Keating's pedagogy is perhaps not surprising, given its 1959 setting on the verge of 1960s social experimentations. But as Wouters (1986, 1987, in Shilling, 1993, p. 169) explains, the period is better understood as ushering in a 'highly controlled decontrolling of emotions'. In a similar vein, it is also difficult to ignore the dilemmas inherent in reconciling Keating's imposed pedagogy and emotionally 'liberating' curriculum. Emotional freedom, it seems, does not come without its own constraints. Moreover, if his students are to take him at his word - to beware the uncritical acceptance of authority - they are faced with the choice of rejecting Keating's own voice and authorship of their dispositions. And this is probably the crucial issue in DPS: Keating's students do have a choice; their particular gender, race and class dispositions are at work to ensure their significant accumulation of social, cultural and economic capital.

The realities of these social arrangements are not lost on students in DM, whose voices echo in the distance, '... why are you playing this game? We don't have a choice'. Indeed, these insights of Parkmont High School 'Academy' students belie Keating's 'critical' understanding of the function of poetry in Welton Academy and like institutions. Poetry, too, can lead to prestigious professions. Centralising it within elite institutions and sharing the ownership of its interpretation with elite students, does nothing to address the structural inequalities of society. Elsewhere, Ball (1994, p. 26) describes such arrangements as 'first order (practice) effects' as a way of comparing them with 'second order [structural] effects' which bring real change. In this context it is not hard for Welton students to 'break out' when the dangers of doing so are minimised by the safety nets of wealth and position and when 'breaking out' simply means the generational exchange of control.

**Conclusion**

We began this paper by asking how the discursive practices of these three on-screen teachers position and construct their students: telling them what to think, how to act, and how to feel about being a student. To some extent our analyses have been fragmented in that they have tended to isolate a particular control stance taken by each teacher and to demonstrate the classroom relations which this evokes. Our reasons for doing this have been analytical rather than informed by any particular conviction about their separation in the contexts of teaching practice. Certainly, there are times when a particular teaching stance appears as more prominent but again this is as much an issue of analysis as it is about empirical evidence. We have provided hints of these inter-connections, however: Johnson's appeal to her physical capital, accumulated as a marine, is not unrelated from her cultural capital and are utilised in conjunction to secure her control of the classroom; Kimble's battle for control over his students' bodies is as much a battle for control over their minds; and Keating draws on his own combination of cultural and emotional resources to establish his position as teacher.

Nor has this paper delved too deeply into any explicit comparative analysis of these teachers. There are some comparisons but on the whole these have remained implicit; left to the reader - with more time and space - to enter the discussion. Any such comparison would
probably note differences amongst them but there is at least one disposition which these teachers all have in common: they all share a desire to make things better for their students and, to this extent, we might regard them as 'well intentioned'. Johnson, Kimble and Keating are not alone in this regard. We imagine that the vast majority of teachers in Western societies would lay claim to a similar project. Unfortunately, intentions - good and bad - are not always reflected in practice and we suspect that this has more to do with how 'good' is understood, and by whom, than with the need for teachers to learn (in isolation) 'better' forms of practice. The familiar dictum of liberal teachers who 'treat all students the same' is a prime example of this disparity between thought and action.

At one level our argument is that discourses which encode and decode teaching practices require greater scrutiny but we are also concerned with examining the ideologies which inform discourses. As 'rules' which construct and deconstruct objects, discourses are not exclusively bound by one intent or another, although some appear more disposed towards particular ideological orientations. With regard to the latter, we have already voiced our concerns with neo-liberal versions of democracy which defer to the organising logic of economic markets and, consequently, appear difficult to justify as democratic. While its attendant discourses champion the merits of choice and, in its wake, rework notions of freedom, it is clear that the constraints and limitations of these 'choices' are such that traditional classroom structures and relations, as well as broader asymmetrical power relations, remain largely unchallenged.

Our preference is for a radical democratic politics which is recognisable on at least two fronts. First, by a societal commitment to meet the basic needs of all persons. Short of this, people cannot pursue satisfying lives or participate in meaningful ways in civic society. Second, all groups of people, especially oppressed peoples, must be able to express their interests on an equal basis with other groups; social difference must be recognised and valued, not assimilated. The achievement of these two goals would require significant changes for Western society and schooling. For example, these principles suggest conditions under which all students would develop skills that they value and that are socially valued. Education would be conceived of as a public service, not as a marketplace. This conception, coupled with a societal commitment in favour of a just and equal society, must be struggled for collectively, by teachers, parents, students and all those affected by education.
References


