Explorations of Educational Purpose 29

John Smyth
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The Socially Just School

Making Space for Youth to Speak Back

Springer

The Socially Just School

EXPLORATIONS OF EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE

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The Socially Just School

Making Space for Youth to Speak Back

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Sometimes it is hard to pinpoint the exact genesis of an idea with any precision—and the term *socially just school* is one such instance. Ideas are often encountered, accorded cursory interest, and then mentally archived, to be returned to at some future indeterminate date.

The notion of the *socially just school*, for us, was given its first public airing (it indeed had much earlier existence in discussions between John Smyth and Rob Hattam during their incredible decade-long partnership in the Flinders Institute for the Study of Teaching, Flinders University), at a conference convened by John under the title *Touchstones of the socially just school*, Flinders University of South Australia, in Adelaide, Australia, on 2 September, 1994.

We wish to acknowledge the important impact of the keynote address to this conference by Stephen Kemmis under the title ‘School reform in the ‘90s: reclaiming social justice’, which itself reached back to Stephen’s work with Peter Cole and Dahle Suggett entitled *Towards the Socially-Critical School* (Victorian Institute for Secondary Education, 1983).

The rest is history, so to speak.

In the 20 years since we first parlayed with the idea at the Touchstones conference, the archetype of what we have come to call the *socially just school* has been slowly forming in the work we have done in some remarkable schools with teachers, students and communities who know only too well the incredible damage being done by ill-conceived and brutal neoliberal reforms.

We wish to acknowledge the hundreds, if not thousands, of teachers, students and parents who have shared their stories with us and who have helped us to articulate and promulgate a more just alternative. We are deeply indebted.

We also express our appreciation to the state Education Departments in several Australian states, who despite a lack of political will and courage to embrace alternatives, paradoxically, have still been able to accord teachers and schools a modicum of space in which to not only ‘speak back’ but to speak some incredible alternatives into existence. We applaud you for having the courage to interrupt and disrupt the status quo.

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Needless to say this book would not have come into existence without the unflinching support of Shirley Steinberg and Ken Tobin as series editors, and Springer Publishing. We thank you for the trust placed in us.

May this book be a modest contribution towards demonstrating that there is indeed 'another alternative'.

Ballarat, Victoria, Australia
January 2014

John Smyth
Barry Down
Peter McInerney

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Chapter 1
Introduction, Argument and Organisation

1.1 Setting the Stage to Start the Conversation

Our starting point in this book is that there is something seriously awry with the way schooling around the world is impacting the lives of young people, especially those falling within the category that labels them as 'disadvantaged'. While there is an infinite array of entry points into discussing this issue, one that resonates for us is the metaphor of the 'canary in the mine'. This metaphor is a helpful way with which to begin to point to the damage being done to young people through contemporary approaches to school reform. As Guinier and Torres (2002) put it, in earlier days:

> Miners often carried a canary into the mine alongside them. The canary's more fragile respiratory system would cause it to collapse from noxious gases long before humans were affected, thus alerting the miners to danger. The canary's distress signalled that it was time to get out because the air was becoming too poisonous to breathe…The metaphor of the miner's canary captures the association between those who are left out and the social justice deficiencies in the larger community. (p. 11)

They go on to add:

> One might say that the canary is diagnostic, signalling the need for more systemic critique…. [O]n the other hand [it] is not only diagnostic; it is also aspirational and activist, signalling the need to rebuild a movement for social change informed by the canary's critique. (p. 12)

Guinier and Torres' (2002) allusion enables us to see the patent absurdity of apportioning blame to young people, their alleged deficits, their histories, families and communities in respect of failed educational achievement and attainment—when they carry their canary metaphor a stage further:

> These pathologies are not located in the canary. Indeed, we reject the incrementalist approach that locates complex social and political problems in the individual. Such an approach would solve the problems of the mines by outfitting the canary with a tiny gas mask to withstand the toxic atmosphere. (p. 12)

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Guinier and Torres' (2002) metaphor allows us to draw attention to the worldwide increase in young people, especially those from the most complex backgrounds, who are tuning out, switching off, and rejecting the institution of schooling. Like the canary in the mine, the demise of young people and their growing rejection of schooling, creates an imperative for a movement for change—or what Guinier and Torres (2002) term a 'motivational project'—around the reclamation of a 'democratic imagination' (p. 12).

In recent years, as researchers, we have undertaken literally thousands of interviews with young people who have courageously told us about their decisions that it was time for them 'to get out' of school because of the inhospitable and toxic environment. In the overwhelming majority of cases, young people explain their decision to give up on or exit school, in terms of the institution of schooling not caring about them or as being incapable of respecting their lives, backgrounds, experiences or aspirations for the future.

We have arrived at this rather unedifying situation because schools worldwide have become willingly or otherwise, caught up in a relentless assault on public education for more than 30 years in the form of an unremitting neo-liberal assault designed to convert them into annexes of the economy. The justification for the extent and the depth of the damage inflicted upon particular groups of young people (and the institution of schooling), always collapses back to the argument that these reforms have been necessary in the national economic interest. Regardless of the 'collateral damage', and there is considerable compelling evidence that young people around the world are switching off schooling and being 'displaced' in alarming numbers (Smyth et al., 2000; Smyth & Hattam et al., 2004), the claim has been that this is an inevitable cost that has to be absorbed. Over that period of time, there has been no shortage of critics and no dearth of hand wringing, but there has been little in the way of an articulate presentation of a practical alternative basis that places the interests, aspirations and hopes of young people first, especially those who are suffering the most from the current reform trajectory.

Drawing from nearly four decades of researching, writing and publishing about the lives, experiences, and educational aspirations of young people from 'disadvantaged' contexts, what we have crafted in this book is an archetype of what we call the *socially just school*—an idea that has a genesis stretching back two decades (see: Smyth, 1994, 2004, 2012a, 2013). We are convinced this is an idea whose time has come, and that such is the urgency, that there could not be a better moment to be launching its provocative proclamation. Like any symbol, prototype, storyline or set of narratives, the archetype we are suggesting is organic and evolving, but at its heart is a commitment to producing a very different set of outcomes to current educational reform approaches that are de-forming and crippling a generation of young people.

1.2 What This Book Is About and Its Defining Theme

The 'big idea' behind this book is that schools ought to be social institutions that advance the interests and life chances of *all* young people, especially those who are already the most marginalized—not the interests of the economy, education

systems, the military, corporate or national interests. This is a seemingly radical idea in contemporary times! The centrepiece of this alternative conceptualization is the *socially just school* that has several hallmark philosophical and political dispositions, namely:

- a primary commitment to educationally engage young people—which is to say, connect to their lives, classed and racial backgrounds, their familial and neighbourhood location, and where young people themselves want to head aspirationally with their education.
- to regard all young people as being morally entitled to an educationally rewarding and satisfying experience of school—not only those whose backgrounds happen to fit with the values of schools.
- to treat young people and the backgrounds they come from as being 'at promise' and as having strengths of one kind or another, rather than being 'at risk', 'deficits' or 'bundles of pathologies' that have to be remedied or 'fixed'.
- actively listening to young people, their lives, aspirations, cultures and communities, and constructing learning experiences that are embedded in and based around young lives.

Positing an alternative such as this means that we have to keep continually focussing and re-focussing ourselves around several key rhetorical questions, like:

(i) What has to be struggled against?
(ii) What is unjust about the way schools are currently being (de)formed?
(iii) What does a democratic alternative look like?
(iv) What needs to be done to create and sustain this alternative?

We use the word rhetorical deliberately because our agenda, in part, has to be one of argument and persuasion—that all is not well with schooling, that there are injustices and injuries being perpetrated, that there needs to be a robust analysis, and the insertion of a more just and democratic alternative.

The over-arching framing question therefore becomes: what needs to be confronted and contested, in order to be jettisoned and supplanted? In this regard, Gillborn and Youdell (2000) in their provocatively titled book *Rationing Education*, provide us with a most appropriate point of entry. In essence they argue that schools have become caught up in a process of producing 'ever-widening inequalities' (p. 1), or what Connell (1993) refers to as schools 'steering…young people towards different educational and economic fates' (p. 27). Connell says that far from schools and educational systems being static 'mirror[s of] social or cultural inequalities' they are 'busy institutions'—

> They are vibrantly involved in the production of social hierarchies. They select and exclude their own clients; they expand the credentialed labour markets; [and] they produce and disseminate particular kinds of knowledge to particular users (p. 27).

At heart is a denial of educational opportunity to many young people, especially those of colour and working class background, and this is being driven by:

> The obsession with measurable and elite 'standards', the publication of school 'league tables', heightened surveillance of schools, and increased competition for resources (all central to the reforms), [that] are part of the problem, not the solution (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000, p. 1).

Exactly how this process works 'is the culmination of many factors, the full effects of which often remain hidden from public scrutiny' (p. 1).

One of the ways Gillborn and Youdell (2000) seek to make these workings less opaque is through what they term 'educational triage' (p. 134)—a term they adapt from medical triage, in which patients in a situation of crisis are sorted in order to determine who will receive scarce resources. Educationally, students are seen to fall within three groups—those deemed '"safe" [or "non-urgent cases" and]…on track to attain benchmark grades; the "dead" [or "hopeless cases"]…incapable of attaining these benchmarks; and those "suitable for treatment" [the "under-achievers"] …likely to attain benchmarks if provided with additional resources' (Youdell, 2004, p. 411). The categories of 'safe', 'hopeless' and 'treatable' are also categories, Youdell argues, into which schools can be bureaucratically sorted through processes of re-structuring so that some schools survive on their existing resources, others are allowed to go to the wall as it were, while others are deemed likely to improve and benefit from having access to the knowledge of other schools through joining a cluster.

If we step out and name it, what has to be struggled against here is the process of educational residualisation (Lamb, 2007; Smyth, 2011a, p. 105). The way this works goes something like this. The current infatuation among neoliberal educational reformers with notions of school choice, individualism, markets and their associated trappings of consumption, produce a very skewed and distorted distribution of who is able to access and benefit from education.

At each of the three layered levels, Youdell (2004) depicts an active process of constructing how scarce resources are deployed in responding to differentiating between what are regarded as 'safe', 'treatable' and 'hopeless' categories—regions, schools, classrooms and students. Firstly, *bureaucratic triage* (p. 413) involves engineering the effects of the marketization of schools around notions like 're-structuring' (p. 413), 're-grouping' (for example, by 'clustering', p. 414), and 're-branding' (p. 412) in ways that appear to be responsive to the logic of the market. Secondly, *institutional triage* (p. 416) embraces the ways schools strategically manoeuvre themselves so as rationalise their actions—for example, the kind of student body, and whether the community is capable of exercising choice, or if the deficit performance of the school is portrayed as being a reflection of a 'community deficit' (p. 417). Thirdly, *classroom triage*, which is an amalgamated internalisation and reflection of each of the above, translates into the way teachers construct scenarios that amount to them enacting learning identities for students—for example, that students have to do their economic work of raising the national skills base. At each of these levels, we have implicit assumptions being made about ability, who is worthy and of value, what levels of capability exist, and therefore, how success and failure are manifested in and through the individual. In other words, there is a subjective construction of what constitutes a learning identity—something that has all manner of socially just implications.

1.3 'Wounded' and 'Damaged' by Schooling

Against this backdrop, there is increasing attention being given in recent times to the deleterious and injurious effects (Francis and Mills, 2012, p. 25) on students of inappropriate school reform processes. This attention is often coupled with claims about the loss of notions like joy, fun, excitement, imagination and creativity in the educational lives of young people—not that there was ever a golden era for these in schooling. Notwithstanding, what Francis and Mills helpfully alert us to is a contemporary reform processes that is increasingly pre-disposing schools to being 'damaging organisations'. That is to say, the values that schools are being urged to give primacy to—greed, competition, individualism, consumption, marketization as well as docility and compliance—are precisely the kind of values that construct hierarchical values of one kind or another that permit, license and legitimate violence and damage on/by teachers, as well as on/among students. Olson (2009) also invokes the notion of *Wounded by School* in the title of her book to refer to the devastating consequences on students' and teachers' lives of the policy trajectory being relentlessly perpetrated on schools.

Smyth first began invoking the category of 'damaging' as an apt descriptor for what he perceived was being done to schools, teachers and students by the neoliberal reform project, in the mid 1990s. In speaking about the notion of the 'self-managing school' (Smyth, 1993), to the best of his recollection, he was provoked to mischievously re-name what was occurring as the 'self-*damaging* school'—in response to Stephen Ball's (1993) insightful comment that the state was in the 'enviable position of having power [over school] without responsibility' (p. 77). In other words, in the neoliberal turn, schools were being given the budgetary instrument with which 'to cut themselves and to think that it is for the best because they control their own decline' (Ball, 1993, p. 77). It was clear at the time, that students were being set up to have some significant damage inflicted upon them, and this has largely come to pass. The damage was not limited to schools, with Smyth indicating that researchers (including himself) ran a risk of being professionally damaged as well (see Smyth, 2002). It was always Smyth's contention that the self-*damaging* school could under a very different inflection be made 'more just, equitable and democratic' (Smyth, 1995) and he rehearsed the tenets of the 'socially just alternative' on numerous occasions' (see for example Smyth, 1996).

If we fast forward a few more years, Smyth uses the notion of the socially just school as the only feasible and prudent route available to 'undamaging' damaged teachers (Smyth, 2003a). The theme he was pursuing at this time was what he termed the 'antidote to being done to' (Smyth, 2003b, p. 30) — a policy exhortation, captured in the title of his paper 'Engaging the education policy sector: policy orientation to stop damaging our schools' (Smyth, 2003b) built around Postman and Weingartner's (1971) notion of bringing on the 'soft revolution'. His focus at this stage was on proffering ways in which a new learning identity might be

crafted for teachers around reclaiming their right to exercise professional judgement. The fact that educational leadership in western countries had become so deeply complicit in perpetrating damage upon students through an uncritical acceptance of the tenets of neoliberalism, was confronted and robustly named in Smyth's (2008) Australia's 'great disengagement' at an educational policy level not only with public education through its privatization, but also its abandoning of any pretext to social justice. Smyth's (2011a) bleak analysis of this issue culminated in 'The *disaster* of the 'self-managing school'—genesis, trajectory, undisclosed agenda, and effects'. In this piece, taking the 'self-managing school' as the carrier of much of the neoliberal project and what has subsequently accompanied it like 'school choice', 'high stakes testing', 'league tables' and the move to a 'national curriculum' (p. 113), Smyth (2011a) showed the way in which the policy rhetoric operated to residualise the poorest schools, students and their communities (p. 105)—a matter Lamb (2007) had amply demonstrated empirically.

The final stage in Smyth's analysis of the course of this damaging educational trajectory took the form of what he termed 'speaking back'—not in an impudent or rude way, but rather in terms of students exercising a voice in having a stake in their learning in a context that would prefer that they be docile and compliant in satisfying capitalism's human capital requirements. The reason for his shift of emphasis to students was that among other things, students are the ones who are the most damaged in terms of their life chances by the deepening inequities being etched into their lives by the corruption and corrosion of schools through neoliberalism—especially as experienced by students from the most marginalized backgrounds. Having seen the profound effects which the early stages of neoliberalism was doing to young people in making schools toxic and inhospitable places, through his study of early school leavers called '*Listen to Me, I'm Leaving*' (Smyth et al., 2000), he turned his attention more directly to students and their lives (see particularly Smyth and Hattam et al., 2004). What followed was a virtual deluge of studies that both looked at the negative and damaging effects, as well as the more just alternative (see Smyth & McInerney, 2007a, 2007b). One of Smyth's sharpest foci in students 'speaking back' was around what he termed 'relational power' (Smyth, 2006a, 2006b)— a term he borrowed and built upon from Warren (2005). The essence of his argument was that schools had been hijacked by managerialism and what had to be recaptured was a sense of the paramount importance of relationships in schools (Smyth, 2007). This theme came out strongly in his study of a secondary school called 'Mango High School' (Smyth & Fasoli, 2007) where the impediments became clear as well as the profoundly positive effects when a school reconfigured itself around students as its dominant motif. The importance of students as the most affected 'policy users', and the supposed 'beneficiaries' of schooling, being given an authentic voice, was another theme he pursued in a policy paper around what was wrong with extant views of social inclusion and educational disadvantage (Smyth, 2010a).

The fullest expression of the theme of 'student voice' in speaking back, with its genesis in Smyth's earlier work with Hattam (Smyth & Hattam 2001, 2002), came to full fruition in Smyth leading several guest issues in a number of journals—'Educational Leadership that Fosters Student Voice', (Smyth, 2006c); 'Critical Engagement in

Context of Disadvantage', (Smyth, 2009); and 'Policy Activism: an Animating Idea with/for Young People', (Smyth, 2012b; as well as the lead article of a themed issue of *Critical Studies in Education* by Thomson, Lingard and Wrigley (2012a) around 'Rethinking educational systems, policy and schools'. Smyth's (2012a) paper in this issue entitled 'The *socially just school* and critical pedagogies in communities *put at a disadvantage*' rehearsed, yet again, the by now familiar set of deformities being wreaked on schools by three decades of neoliberalism, along with the key elements of the socially just alternative, including that such schools have: a distinctive mission around re-dressing disadvantage; a belief in agency rather than victim construction; a view of disadvantage as being 'constructed' rather than a natural or accepted state of affairs; an emphasis on celebrating success rather than pillorying deficits; a courageous commitment to innovation; a way of positioning themselves as listening organizations; an active disavowal of discipline as a behaviour management issue, and regarding it as a curriculum issue; and above all, of being community oriented, politically activist, and passionate about pedagogical engagement. In questionably his sharpest naming of the source of the damaging consequences of neoliberalism, Smyth and McInerney (2012a) likened what was being attempted in contemporary schools to 'silent witnesses' in the BBC TV drama forensic crime series *Silent Witness*. Fortunately, unlike their inert counterparts in mortuaries, the storylines from young people in Smyth and McInerney's account of young people who had given up on school and then re-engaged with learning under a very different set of conditions from those that had exiled them, were very 'active agents' indeed. What these young people were doing, Smyth and McInerney (2012b) argued, in the title to another paper, was *'Sculpting a social space' for re-engaging with learning*, a theme carried even further in their paper *Making 'space' for disengaged young people who are put at a disadvantage to re-engage with learning* (Smyth & McInerney, 2013).

Our argument, therefore, in this book is that the reclamation needs to occur around notions of social justice, however defined.

1.4 Creating a Space from Which to *Speak Back*

In a Special Issue of the *Journal of Education Policy* (volume 27, number 1, 2012) posed around the question 'what would a socially just education system look like?', Griffiths (2012) made the salient point that 'the usual account of social justice in formal education is too narrow' (p. 655). Her argument was around a concern that attention to 'recognition' and 'outcomes' was at the expense of seeing social justice in terms of 'living educational experiences as part of what makes for a good life' (p. 655). We agree with Griffiths, but want to construct our account of the socially just school from a slightly different vantage point, one that Gewirtz (2006) refers to as a 'contextualized' one.

Along with arguing for a 'focus upon concrete attempts at social justice', Gewirtz and Cribb (2002, p. 508) call for a pluralistic or enlarged view of social justice that is 'multi-dimensional', 'differentiated' and 'diffused' (p. 501), and they illustrate

what they mean by this through reference to the Citizen Schools established in Porto Alegre in southern Brazil as described by Gandin and Apple (2002). The key aspects were:

- the 'organization and management of the schools…[is] based on strongly participative and democratic models of decision-making' (Gewirtz & Cribb, 2002, p. 507);
- 'the schools are financially autonomous and able to manage their own resources' (p. 507) according to goals and priorities they set for themselves;
- the structure and organization of learning is in 'a way that eliminates the experience of failure' (p. 507); and
- the curriculum is built around the real lives and interests of students (p. 507).

These are also the same generic principles that have been central aspects in the archetype composite of the 'socially just alternative to the *self-managing* school' as explicated by Smyth (1995, 1996) from fragments of dozens of existing Australian schools that have been struggling with these issues for several decades.

Gewirtz (2006) argues that it is not possible to meaningfully provide a 'definitive, abstract conceptualisation of what should count as justice in education' (p. 69) and against which policies and practices can be measured, calibrated and compared—'…what counts as justice can only properly be understood within specific contexts of interpretation and enactment' (pp. 69–70). In other words, in education social justice can only be 'properly' understood 'within its contexts of realisation' (p. 70). The notion of context of realisation comes through graphically in Gewirtz's account of Martin, aged 15, of mixed racial background, and his single mother who had herself left school at 16 without educational qualifications, who live in a context of poor housing, ill-health, low income, rampant unemployment, domestic violence, high levels of crime and drug use (p. 70), where Martin has been permanently expelled from school because of disruptive behaviour with no other school willing to accept him, in what is a 'seemingly unresponsive education system'—one that was 'unyielding, inflexible and uncompassionate' (p. 71) and unwilling or unable to assist with the complexity of Martin's problems. It is in contexts like these, we argue, that there needs to be a space from which to *speak back*. Our claim is that schools are made inherently unjust and unfair places through the workings of capitalism, and that as a consequence, social class needs to be a crucial framing explanation that has to be foregrounded in any approach to social justice—something we will turn to in more detail later in the book.

Drawing as she has in the past (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2003) from the work of Iris Marion Young (1990) and Nancy Fraser (1997), Gewirtz (2006) provides a contextual analysis of how injustice is manifested in the case of Martin and his mother, around three categories—distributive, recognitional, and associational justice (p. 74).

In the case of Martin's mother, who is not in paid work but who gives her time in a voluntary capacity to two organizations (one dealing with domestic violence the other drug support—p. 75), she is also heavily committed to the unpaid work of caring for a son with complex problems. She is clearly oppressed by a wider situation that recognizes and values 'paid work over unpaid work' (p. 75), which is indicative a significant degree of *distributive injustice*. Her 'mothering work' (p. 75) severely impacts the possibility of her pursuing any of her own educational aspirations.

She is on ‘permanent call’ should the special program Martin attends be unable to cope with him behaviourally. At another level, the kind of program Martin attends also suffers the additional distributive injustice of being significantly less well funded than programs available ‘to young people living in better off areas’ (p. 76)—with ‘professionals’ who are ‘stretched’ to the point of not having the luxury of the ‘time to listen’ to the problems of young people like Martin (p. 76).

Gewirtz (2006) presents Martin and his mother as also experiencing the *injustices of recognition* in the way their lifestyle was not recognised except in deficit, pathological or disparaging terms, because Martin was ‘mixed race’, had a single mother, who continually had to deal with the inadequacy of feeling she had ‘a problem child’ (p. 76). For Martin, he suffered the added indignity of not being recognised by a school system because he was not able to perform according to what the school valued—a kind of ‘cultural imperialism’ (p. 77) that refused to see him as having any strengths, only deficits.

People like Martin’s mother suffer *associational injustices* in the way they are individualised and categorised in their dealings with the school and as being unable to benefit from any group representations that might enhance or advance their lives. Her contact with the school was solely in terms of ‘collect[ing] her son at times when the school can’t cope’ (p. 77), except at times when she had to ‘fight the system to try to get her son access to a formal education’ (p. 77). In other words, socially and emotionally she was perceived as crippled, only able to relate to the school through her dysfunctions, and as being totally out of sync with its forms of dominant capital.

1.5 Where the Rest of the Book Is Heading

What we have raised so far are matters that in some shape or form all fall within the orbit of the socially just school—which for reasons of brevity we summarise schematically in Fig. 1.1.

What we see in this diagram are not only some of the traces explored so far in this book, but more importantly, the themes, patterns, orientations and dispositions that will emerge in the chapters to follow. The sequencing goes like this:

We start Chap. 2 “Socially Critical Youth Voice” by explaining what we mean by youth voice as conceived in schools thought about in socially critical ways. In the broad, this will necessitate a discussion of how schools need to re-configure themselves to create the spaces within which young people can ‘speak back’. This involves confronting the inherently unjust nature of the school as a social institution and how relational power has to be divested so young people can construct a classed/raced/gendered learning identity (Smyth, Down, & McInerney, 2010). The remaining themes to be addressed, and that flow from this lager one are: (i) the organizational and institutional political economy of schooling when ‘students have power’; (ii) how schools need to re-invent themselves so that young people can speak their emotional lives into existence rather than being required to expunge them; (iii) the imperative of placing trust and respect at the centre of learning; (iv) actively connecting with young people’s lives in ways that treat them as adults, enlarging their

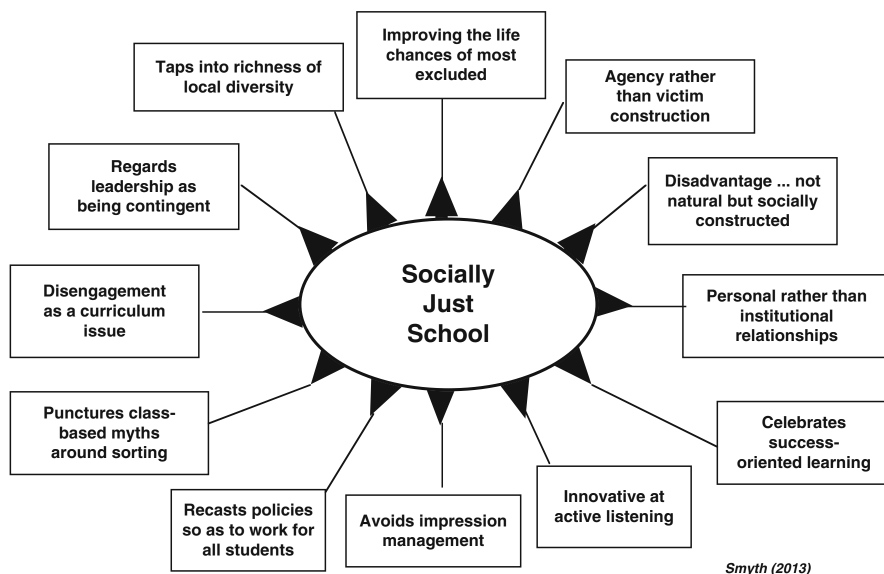

Fig. 1.1 Framework for the socially just school

cultural maps, and fostering a culture of independence; and finally (v) positioning them so that they can re-imagine educational policy while becoming social activists around inspirational social issues in their school, communities, and the wider world. We will draw the chapter together around the four principles of youth participation by Ginwright, Noguera and Cammarota (2006)—namely (i) a conceptualization of young people in relation to the materialities of their economic, political and social conditions; (ii) a need to develop a collective response to their social marginalization and confront entrenched individual responses; (iii) their positioning as active agents rather than 'silent witnesses' (see Smyth and McInerney, 2012a) in speaking their lives into existence; and (iv) the assertion that young people 'have basic rights' (Ginwright et al., 2006, p. xix) that are being trashed.

Chapter 3, "Socially Critical Culture of School Reform" begins by positing a school reform framework (Harradine, 1996) that embraces a troika that will position us for Chaps. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8, but that has special significance for this chapter, namely the notions of: (a) *reculturing*— that involves 'changing values, beliefs, assumptions, habits, patterns of behaviour and relationships in school organisational culture'; (b) *restructuring*— around 'organisational reforms such as…use of time and space, groupings of staff and students, staff roles, organisation of curriculum, and use of technology'; and (c) *changing pedagogy*—around classroom teaching practices, 'the teaching and learning process and student learning outcomes' (Hattam, McInerney, Lawson, & Smyth, 1999, pp. 11–12).

Reforming schools so that they take on the substance of being 'socially critical' entities entails creating a substantive focus around (at least) eight dimensions: (1) *a construal of teachers* as 'intellectuals, activists, cultural workers, and pragmatic

radicals'; (2) a *vision of school planning* that is committed to the school as contributing to 'a more just, caring and democratic society' through being 'dialogic' in the way it pursues 'grassroots reform'; (3) a *notion of leadership* that lives an ethos of critical democracy that is 'dialectical' in respect of relationships, 'openly ideological' in its politics, and has 'moral/ethical concerns' within an 'agency of independence' for young people; (4) *a view of teacher reflection* that is critical in the sense of enhancing 'conscientization' and making the school 'work for all students'; (5) *a commitment to youth voice*, as we have already noted, that promotes 'active citizenship', is sensitive to the 'most disenfranchised', and that connects young people to 'big social issues' in a way that is productive of 'civic courage'; (6) *a view of school/community relations* that is dialogical around 'what the school can do for the community' in a way that propels 'community concerns into the curriculum' and celebrates 'difference'; (7) *a curriculum that is socially just* in the way it treats knowledge as being 'socially constructed', 'connects to the lives and language of students' and is 'activist orientated'; and, (8) *information technology* that acknowledges young lives are 'saturated' with social media, and that provides avenues for pursuing 'critical literacies' and the interrogation of 'cyber-culture' (Hattam et al., 1999, pp. 13–14).

The overall focus of Chap. 4 "Socially Critical School/Community Relations" is around the intersection of youth with school/community relations in ways that seek to redress inequities. The chapter is informed by what Simon (1988) called 'a horizon of possibility' animated around questions of 'why things are the way they are and how they got to be that way' (p. 1). We start this chapter by first exploring how schools committed to advancing the interests of youth and the communities in which they live go about the process of creating 'dialogue' with their communities. We pursue Bernstein's (1992) idea that schools and communities need to be partners in a conversation—which is to say, starting out by regarding one another as having something valuable and worthwhile to say. Second, we examine what it looks like in the contexts of schools when schools and communities work to create a space within which to link people in their 'moments of reflection to their moments of action' (Shor, 1992, p. 86). This Freirean perspective requires, we argue, looking for spaces within which youth can speak, analyse, critique and act on the world—and this ought to be a central role of schools. Third, we specifically focus on some of the narratives and storylines drawn from some of our extensive critical ethnographic research over several years that includes: young people *in* community and community *in* schools; youth *with* and *for* schools and communities; positioning youth as 'powerful people'; how power and advantaging works against some young people; school/community relations that advance the interests of youth who are the least advantaged; and, promoting critical literacies for youth and adults in contexts of learning.

Chapter 5, "Socially Critical Pedagogy of Teaching", draws on Freire's (1998a) notion of 'teachers as cultural workers' and Giroux's (1988) vision of 'teachers as intellectuals' to advance a socially critical pedagogy of teaching in conservative times. We begin by acknowledging Freire's (2004) advice that in 'speaking about reality as it is, and *denouncing* it, also *announces* a better world' (p. 105). In other words, we want to not only critique the corrosive and damaging effects of neoliberal and neoconservative policies and practices (marketization, competition, managerialism,

performativity, standardization, testing, prescribed curriculum and so on) on teaching, but evoke an alternative critical pedagogy of teaching founded on the principles of social justice, critical inquiry, respect for others, civic courage and concern for the collective good (Giroux, 2004, p. 102). We do this, firstly, by explaining what's happening to teachers' work under the neoliberal assault on teachers, students and public education (Giroux, 2012). Secondly, we turn our attention to the radical-progressive potential of democratic ideals and values, and democratic participation, in schooling and curriculum (Beyer, 1998, p. 257) as the cornerstones of a socially critical pedagogy of teaching. In pursuing this agenda, we want to move beyond 'struggling against something, to struggling for something' (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004, p. 6) by identifying some key principles, values, and signposts to help us re-frame and re-imagine how teaching might be conceptualised and enacted in the socially just school. Finally, through the narratives of our ethnographic encounters with teachers and students in school communities across Australia, typically characterised by high levels of poverty, disenfranchisement, disaffection, and disengagement, we will identify some practical policies and strategies capable of generating a different set of conversations among teachers and community activists committed to a more 'optimistic and humane view of human possibilities' (Beane, 2005, p. 12).

Our intent in Chap. 6, "Socially Critical Curriculum", is to outline theoretical strands and practical possibilities of a socially critical approach to curriculum development in schools. We see this as a crucial element in building the socially just school because the form and content of the curriculum sends out powerful messages to young people about what is valued in education and what is worth knowing. In an era when so much of the national agenda has been dominated by conservative and neoliberal policy makers it is crucial that educators are able to articulate robust, coherent and socially critical alternatives to the narrow, standardized and vocationally-oriented curriculum mandated by governments in many Western countries. We begin by describing and differentiating a socially critical orientation to curriculum from more traditional approaches described by Kemmis, Cole, and Suggett (1983) as vocational/neo-classical, and liberal/progressive—approaches which are more intent on sustaining the status quo than challenging inequalities and seeking to transform society. Next, we discuss the theoretical foundations of a socially critical curriculum arising from Critical Social Theory and outline an activist model of curriculum development that draws on Freire's (1972) notions of liberation, dialogic education and critical pedagogy. Informed by the work of critical educators, such as Shor (1992, 1996), Bigelow and Peterson (2002), as well as ethnographic research undertaken by the authors in Australian schools (Smyth, Angus, Down, & McInerney, 2008; Smyth, Angus, Down, & McInerney, 2009), we provide examples of socially critical curriculum in action. Notwithstanding the tensions and dilemmas of radicalizing the curriculum we believe there are spaces, resources and opportunities within schools for teachers to develop curriculum that is responsive to the needs, concerns and aspirations of young people and their communities, engages students in a critical reading of the word and their world (Freire & Macedo, 1987), and creates opportunities for social action in response to pressing local and global issues.

What kind of leadership is needed to promote the ideals and practices of the socially just school is canvassed in Chap. 7 "Socially Critical Leadership". In this

chapter we consider the crucial role of educational leadership in creating schools that are committed to improving the education and life chances of all young people, irrespective of their socio-economic, ethnic and racial backgrounds. Much is expected of educational leaders in shaping the culture of schools and the quality of teaching and learning that takes place in classrooms but over the past four decades or so their roles and responsibilities have been recast in line with corporate business values associated with the neoliberal state (Gewirtz & Ball, 2000; Grace, 2000; McInerney, 2003; Smyth, 2001). According to the new rhetoric, principals need to view themselves as 'change agents', 'innovators', 'entrepreneurs', 'visionaries' and, above all, 'business managers'. As the pedagogical and socially critical attributes of school leadership have been devalued (Smyth, 1989), many principals find themselves 'dancing with the devil' in trying to balance the corporate objectives of state education systems with a commitment to a community-based and democratic approaches to schooling. Acknowledging that 'the realization of leadership is always set within a framework of possibilities and constraints' (Ball, 1994, p. 84), we commence our account with an overview of the political context of educational leadership in Australia as illustrative of the broader international trajectory. Here we highlight the paradoxes involved in the shift towards local school management, the re-centralization of curriculum, the imposition of standardized testing regimes and the ascendancy of bureaucratic leadership. We then turn our attention to a socially critical view of leadership (Gunter, 2001; Smyth, McInerney, Hattam, & Lawson, 1998) drawing on the notions of 'emancipatory leadership' (Corson, 2000), 'democratic leadership' (Gale and Densmore, 2003), 'pedagogical leadership' (Sergiovanni, 1998), leadership for the 'person-centred school' (Fielding, 2006) and 'distributive leadership' (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). With reference to Australian studies (Smyth et al., 1998) and their international counterparts, we show how schools and educational leaders have been able to contest the more corrosive aspects of managerialism by creating spaces and structures which (a) nurture a more collective view of leadership and (b) promote a culture of debate about teaching and learning in schools (Hattam, Brown, & Smyth, 1995).

As we reveal in Chap. 8, "Socially Critical Approach to Work", in Australia as in other countries in the Western world, public education is under siege from a rampant neoliberal ideology propagated by politicians, business leaders and neoconservative media commentators because of its perceived failure to address a broad range of social and economic problems that exist well beyond the school gate. Nowhere are these anxieties more apparent than the concerns around the preparation of young people for the world of work. In response, governments of all political persuasions have pursued educational policies framed within a narrowly conceived technical, vocational and instrumentalist logic (Council of Australian Governments, 2008). Accordingly, educational knowledge is increasingly reworked to produce worker citizens with the skills, competencies and dispositions required by the economy (Ball, 1999, p. 198). In this chapter, we want to challenge the underlying assumptions on which this crude economistic view of education is based. We do this, firstly by examining the fallout from what Beck (2000) describes as the 'Brazilianization of the West' (p. 3) whereby 'every location in the world now potentially competes with all others for scarce capital investment and cheap

labour supplies' (p. 27). Here, we want to demystify the connections between the broader structural forces of 'intensification of insecurity' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 84) and the 'new geography of livelihoods' (Ross, 2009, p. 1) and what this means for young people themselves in terms of the kind of education they receive, or not. Secondly, we shall take on some of the myths and false promises of the vocational education and training movement, in particular the common sense view that all young people can gain meaningful, secure and rewarding work if only they apply themselves diligently at school. In reality, whilst vocational programmes can provide relief from the boredom and irrelevance of traditional academic subjects, they serve to reinforce the bifurcation in which it is acceptable for large numbers of young people to 'work with their hands *not* their minds' (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 139). Finally, we draw on ethnographic narratives of young people to map and describe a socially critical approach to work education capable of changing lives for the better (Oakes & Saunders, 2009; Rose, 1995). This kind of counter hegemonic curriculum focuses on 'young people's own requirements – the capacity to be good navigators through new economies, to live well, and to engage with complexity and diversity' (Wyn, 2009, p. 49). In essence, and drawing on Wrigley (2006) we want to show how 'another world' and 'another school is possible' (p. 115).

In Chap. 9, "Critically Educated Hope", we conclude with Freire's (1998b) notion of 'critical hope' as expressed in *Pedagogy of Freedom* (p. 70)—both the aspect that involves 'indignation' as well as the 'courage' to work for a more socially just world. For Freire, and people like Webb (2010) and Giroux (2004), 'educated hope' is an idea that is deeply rooted in a sense of 'incompleteness' and the 'constant search' for ways to construct a more fulfilling world. We will pursue Freire's (1972) defining notion in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* of how to bring into existence a collaborative communion with others for social justice. We do this, firstly, by exploring what it might look like for young people—those who are the most marginalized—to confront the ruthless pursuit of rampant 'individualism, materialism, consumption, and personal acquisition' (Smyth, 2011b, p. 3) central to neo-liberalism, and examine the way it is deforming and disfiguring lives and communities. Secondly, we will pursue what schools might look like that find the space within which to put a very different inflection on schooling, where: (i) teachers are treated and act as intellectuals; (ii) students position themselves as social activists; and (iii) communities present as politically engaged and connected.

1.6 A Way Forward…

In the end, Connell (2012) is very helpful here. She argues that the educational policy infatuation with market responses that involve 'reducing all areas of life to market-life forms' requires that we be much more adept at developing 'educational responses' (p. 682). This has two aspects to it: first, 'curricular justice' in which 'curriculum is organized around the experience, culture and needs of the least advantaged'; and second, a policy emphasis around 'social encounters' (p. 682),

which is to say, education that is productively organised around notions of 'mutual respect'. In systemic terms, this requires 'trust'—of learners 'without the whip of examination', and of teachers 'without the club of auditing' (p. 682). Smyth (2010b) put this somewhat more forcefully when he argued that rather than allowing education 'to continue to remain capt[ive to] the diminished notions of blame that accompany the neo-liberal agenda of accountability, what is required is that we vociferously and insistently demand…[forms of education] explicitly framed around what Rao and Walton (2004) aptly refer to as "culture and public action"' (p. 180).

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Chapter 2
Socially Critical Youth Voice

2.1 Introduction

Much has been written in recent times, and for good reason, about the importance of student/youth voice (and we will use the abbreviated 'student voice' for ease, but we mean both) in schooling (Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2001, 2004; Fine, 1989; Smyth, 2006a, 2006b, 2008; Thiessen, 2006). When collapsed down to its essence the argument is that when students are accorded a genuine measure of control over their learning, then they learn better, they develop and sustain a commitment to learning (Kirby & Gardener, 2010, p. 112), and they find schools overall to be more amenable places in which to pursue identity formation.

In this chapter we want to push the discussion of student voice in urgent and new directions by arguing for the notion of *socially critical student voice*. This is not a term we have had much success in locating in the scholarly literature, so in this chapter we are stepping out somewhat by scoping out what we think this concept might mean—within the broader heuristic that we are exploring in this book around the *socially just school*.

Uttering a term like *student voice*, while at the same time bracketing it to words like *socially critical,* is likely to invoke images of young people engaged in forms of activism, protests outside of schools in the wider community, and young people who are on a mission to radically change the nature of society and the social institutions within which they live. These are laudatory and praiseworthy ideals that we would not want to resile from. However, we want to pursue a more nuanced and complex set of understandings of what might be meant by *socially critical student voice*.

We have three reasons for doing this:

(i) First, we are concerned that student voice be envisaged as a concept that has an **'inwards'** perspective—that is to say, it starts with and has an existential commitment to examining and improving the conditions under which learning occurs, and by implication, it has an agenda about reforming and reinventing the social institution of schooling by seeking to make it more just. In short, there is an 'inside' school reform and student learning dimension to student voice.

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(ii) Second, for student voice to not be an individualistic and indulgent activity, looking inwards to what is occurring needs to occur at the same time as there is an **'outwards'** orientation, with learning being seen as an activity that is not exclusively domiciled in containers called 'classrooms' or 'schools'. Part of the reason for doing this is so as to inculcate an attitude of mind that regards becoming an educated person as not simply being a matter of acquiring a personal bank of knowledge to be cashed in or drawn upon. There is a crucial social dimension we are arguing for that involves understanding something about how power works, the importance of context, and the politics of how things come to be the way they are; and—

(iii) Bringing both of these analytic aspects together—for that is what they really are—requires that young people be provided with (or locate themselves within) a practical context in which they can develop and pursue an **action-oriented** commitment to a project designed to change something beyond themselves (Giroux, 1986), and monitor and observe the effects, which become the basis for discussion.

We become caught in something of a bind here. As educators, we know intuitively and empirically that in order to secure student engagement, as distinct from docile compliance, we have to be prepared to create the authentic spaces within which young people can participate in owning their learning. On the other hand, we are also painfully aware, excruciatingly so, that in relinquishing control, that things can go awfully awry. It is a classic case of the old dilemma of 'hanging on while letting go'. We have no choice other than to allow young people the space within which to experiment with approaches to learning that work for them, but at the same time we have to impose strictures on their learning in order to meet arbitrarily imposed standards called 'learning outcomes'. While this problem has been foisted on us as educators, in the end we seem to have no compunction about exporting it onto young people, whether it makes any sense or not. This says much about our own morality and ethical sensibilities!

What we are arguing is that what starts out as a seemingly sensible idea, can quickly become corrupted as we adults become co-opted into playing silly games not of our own making.

2.2 Looking for Some Directions: Critical Youth Studies?

If we want to work ourselves out of this practical and conceptual bind, then there is probably not much to be gained by spinning our wheels in the bog of the educational and school literature. Chances are, that with a few exceptions, we will not find much of value that will give us the new setting we are desperately looking for with which to recast student voice in socially critical ways.

Even as we made a cursory preliminary foray into the emerging field of 'critical youth studies', it became apparent that we had hit upon a rich alternative vein from which to begin our re-theorizing. Frequently occurring notions from this literature included among their titles: 'a new paradigm of critical youth studies' (Akom, Ginwright, & Cammarota, 2008); 'youth as public intellectuals' (Ares, Hassberg, & Members of Youth as Public Intellectuals, 2010); moving 'against and

beyond boundaries' (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999); 'critically compassionate intellectualism' (Cammarota & Romero, 2006); 'collective radical imagination' (Ginwright, 2008); 'beyond resistance' (Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006); 'learning on their own terms' (Gustavson, 2007); and, 'struggles for self and social justice' (Quijada, 2008)—terms that were hitting all the right intellectual buttons and providing the right signals that we had indeed located the fertile field of ideas we were looking for.

On closer analysis we were able to discern five areas that have received major attention to date in critical youth studies: (i) methodological issues (Best, 2007; Fox, 2013); (ii) location in urban settings (Dillabough & Kennelly, 2010; Dimitriadis, 2011; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007); (iii) participatory action research approaches (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Evans, Fox, & Fine, 2010); (iv) activism (Ginwright, 2010; Harris, 2007); and (v) civic participation (Kirshner, O'Donoghue, & McLaughlin, 2002). Where the silence seems to be most pronounced in critical youth studies, is in respect of how to work with young people so they are able to 'speak back' to schooling—or as Stovall (2007) put it, we have seen relatively little of the 'politics of interruption', and while there has been work on 'youth struggles for self and social justice' (Quijada, 2008), we have still yet to see the fullest version of this take shape in the context of schooling.

We will canvass these issues in more detail later in this chapter. In the meanwhile, perhaps as a way of initiating this 'interruption' to the field of critical youth studies and forging a new vantage point, we might focus on how young people are going about making and reclaiming space in and around places in their lives—including schooling. It is after all, the tension between 'finding one's place' versus 'fitting into place' that is at the centre of the paradox in young people's lives. In many respects, schooling is 'fitting them up' for a trajectory they may not necessarily understand, agree with, or be inclined to follow.

2.3 Challenging the Notion of 'Fitting into Place' (Taylor, 2012) and Transforming Space

Taylor (2012) points to the contradictory way that the term 'fitting in' is used:

> …as a binding straightjacket, a restriction in getting out and ahead, or it may shore up a sense of comfortable ease and belonging. (p. 1)

As she says, to 'fit in' can convey notions of 'being "stuck" in the past, out of date and out of step' (p. 1). In this, Taylor is alluding to the powerful effects of 'the pull of the past' (p. 12), and the impact this has on 'fitting into place', in a context where the formation of identities is no longer singular, fixed or stable, but rather is 'fluid, flexible, multifaceted and deterritorialized' (p. 2).

These are ideas that have a good deal of relevance to schooling, but they are far from innocent, for as Taylor, (2012) reminds us, when we invoke notions of fluidity, mobility and contingency, notions of social class are always lurking close to the surface:

> Middle-class selves are frequently centred and placed in perpetual motion, always *becoming* rather than being. (Taylor, 2012, p. 2 emphasis in original)

In this era of the 'self-regulating' and 'optimising self':

> Individuals are increasingly expected to take responsibility for their trajectories, assembling a range of networks and capitals in order to envisage and pursue a fulfilling and productive future: to 'come forward' and claim a space as theirs. (p. 2)

It is across and within these increasingly 'flexible' and 'resilient' landscapes that young people are expected to deploy the institution of schooling in negotiating futures for themselves 'according to the logics of choice, attainment and embodied accomplishment' (p. 2). The problem with this enchanted view is that some young people 'cannot and/or will not [or are not able to] invest' (p. 2) in what schooling demands of them for them to 'fit into place' —they become 'hesitant subjects' alongside their 'future-oriented (middle-classed) counterparts' (p. 3).

In an ethnography of two starkly different Silicon Valley high schools in the USA, Davidson (2011) sheds light on how young people go about 'forg[ing] aspirations and social identities' for themselves in the way they engage with the 'dynamics of social reproduction and differentiation' (p. 6). This is a process that requires having 'a wider focus than young people and their immediate school and community environments' (p. 6). As Davidson (2011) put it:

> Because aspiration formation is a social and political process as well as an individual one…[we need to be cognizant of] the broader social, political and cultural forces and circumstances that have shaped and sometimes failed to shape, processes of aspiration formation and class identification. (p. 6)

Clearly, what Davidson (2011) is alluding to, is the view that there are some 'particular dynamics within the public sphere that profoundly influence young people's beliefs about themselves, their place in the world, and the ways they imagine their futures' (p. 6). In other words, how young people are positioned and how they respond, is part of a process of 'emotively charged meanings' that occur inside schools, in out of school programs, and in public places—all of which involve individual 'acts of self-definition' within expectations that are 'shaped by the political-economic interests of global capital', more formally known as 'neoliberal governmentality' (p. 13).

Davidson (2011) coined the term 'strategies of aspiration management' to convey the idea that young people are active players or agents, and not silent witnesses (see Smyth & McInerney, 2012), in pursuing what are often 'multiple' identities produced in quite 'contradictory contexts'. When speaking about what is involved in the 'cultural production of the educated person', Levinson, Foley, and Holland (1996) put it that people are both 'culturally *produced* in definite sites', as well as actively working to '*produce*…cultural forms' (p. 14). It is the reciprocal nature of this cultural production that 'allows us to portray and interpret the way people confront the ideological and material conditions presented by schooling' (p. 14)—by conveying 'how people creatively occupy the space of education and schooling' (p. 14).

Davidson's (2011) term 'aspiration management' serves to highlight 'the active roles [young] people play in defining self-expectation, hope, and the sense of the possible as well as the paradox of self-limitation and desire inherent to all aspirations' (pp. 13–14). The way this works is through the 'everyday practices' young people engage in within forms of 'self-regulation', their 'forms of narrative expression, and

imaginings' (p. 41) of their actual and intended place in the world, and how others place value and worth upon them, including how they negotiate 'coded stigma… [like] being labelled "at risk"…[or] living in an "at risk" neighbourhood' (p. 43).

This leads logically into our next section, of considering—

2.4 Young People Negotiating Neoliberal Policies

To persist with Davidson (2011) for a little longer, the way she puts it is that what young people are increasingly learning through schooling in contemporary contexts, is about the 'burdens of aspiration'—meaning, how to become flexible workers/ citizens responsible for managing their own risk-taking under conditions of increasing global uncertainty. Invoking Mitchell (2003), Davidson points to the marked shift in most western countries from what Mitchell called a 'tolerant multicultural ethos', to becoming 'strategic cosmopolitans', able to adapt to, take advantage of, and be a flexible 'enterprising self' in the new ruthless competitive global economy (p. 195). In its sharpest and starkest form, young people regardless of their class, economic or social status or where they live around the world, are in a situation where:

> …public schooling is now a venue for the promotion of responsible citizenship, an expression of neoliberal governmentality that encourages youth, as malleable citizens-in-the-making and key national symbols of potentiality, to craft identities that are oriented towards the interests of global capital and that compensate for state disinvestments in aspects of social reproduction by privatizing responsibility for it. (p. 201)

The point of departure lies in the differential way they encounter and embrace risk. For students in less advantaged schools, they are taught to see 'risk [as] something that happens to you and that you are responsible for' (p. 201). This is in contrast to their more affluent peers:

> …who also confront social and economic risk but are not deemed at risk [because they] have been socialized to think of risk as something they have the capacity to control. For them, risk taking is often a strategic and sanctioned act. (p. 201)

Davidson (2011) argues that even though schools have been forced to commit to the neoliberal goal 'of producing citizens who are enterprising in ways that suit the dictates of the global economy and facilitate the state's reduction of services and shedding responsibility for risk' (p. 2002), such acts of 'self-cultivation' and 'self-enhancing' are always open to unpredictable consequences. Davidson invokes UK social policy scholar John Clarke (2003) who while warning against over-romanticizing, put it in these terms:

> New subjects do not always come when they are called. Indeed, they might not hear the call, they might not recognize themselves as the subject, or they might just answer back in a different voice. (p. 211)

This provides us with the segue into hearing something of the 'unsettling conversations' (Clarke, 2003, p. 210) that reside within young lives and that occur inside schooling.

The animating question is: where are the points of entry by which we can get into a discussion of the 'politics of interruption' (Stovall, 2007) in what might constitute a *socially critical youth voice* within schooling? Elsewhere, Smyth (2014) has made a preliminary but incomplete start to articulating what an 'evolving criticality' of youth voice in school might comprise, which we might add to here.

Returning to our starting point in this chapter in which we argued that a *socially critical student voice* was three dimensional, having: (1) an *inward* perspective—starting with where young people were at in their lives neighbourhoods and communities; (2) and *outward* orientation—in that what occurs locally and is powerfully framed and shaped by wider social forces; and (3) an *action* or *activist* commitment—having an imperative to act back politically on those shaping forces. An approach that nicely captures this is what Cammarota and Romero (2006, 2009) refer to as 'critically compassionate intellectualism'. This is an approach that has been deployed in working with Latina/o students who have been marginalized and violated by schooling through being racialized, and it seeks to analyse the transformative conditions that need to be brought into existence to move beyond this situation. We will now explain this perspective a little more, and build upon it.

As Cammarota and Romero (2009) explain:

> A critically compassionate intellectualism approach combines three educational perspectives in one framework. Each perspective—cooperative learning, compassionate educator-student relationships, and social justice consciousness—carries a set of principles about learning and human advancement. Each of these is enhanced by the simultaneous presence and implementation of the others. (p. 466)

The major contours of this approach lie within the meaning of the three touchstone words of the title:

Critical—which is to say, challenging deficits, pathologies and stereotypes which act to demean and position certain groups of people in situations of unwarranted and unjustified subservience.

Compassionate—the notion of authentic (as distinct from a synthetic) sense of caring towards improving life chances and circumstances, rather than blaming people for the conditions in which they find themselves, and over which they have little real control.

Intellectualism—which refers to being analytical and asking questions like—How did things come to be like this? Whose interests are served by things remaining this way? What are the impediments or obstacles preventing change?

It is clear that this approach to fostering *socially critical student voice*, while organic in that its primary commitment is to divest power to young people, is highly unlikely to be self-starting in the contained and historically oppressive structures of schools. It will require courageous, sensitive and sustained work and support by politically astute adults.

Reflecting on individuals in the past who had been involved in major social struggles around the kind of touchstone issues just referred to, Carl Grant (2009) reminds us that:

> The impetus for social justice does not initially come from the top-down efforts of established institutions or individuals who are at the highest levels of the power pyramid. It comes about because some individual decides to rock the boat and stand up for equity and equality. (p. 654)

In this regard, Grant says that such individuals have in the past 'refused to be compliant within their geographical and political context. They stood up and spoke truth to power and took action to bring about social equality' (p. 654). He is making the case, of course, for teachers to become socially critical activists in supporting young people in acquiring a *socially critical student voice*.

As we have argued elsewhere in this book, this involves creating a carefully woven ensemble, comprising— a *socially critical curriculum* (Chap. 6), a *socially critical pedagogy of teaching* (Chap. 5), within a *socially critical culture of school reform* (Chap. 3), embracing a *socially critical approach to work* (Chap. 8), committed to promulgating the bringing into existence of *socially critical school/community relations* (Chap. 4), within *critically educated hope* (Chap. 9).

Given the non-spontaneous and induced way in which *socially critical student voice* has to be spoken into existence, it may help somewhat, if we address ourselves to what teachers might need to orient themselves towards for this to occur—and in the process, address Grant's (2009) question of 'where are the teachers?' (p. 654).

One of the nicest and most coherent approaches we have encountered in relation to what it means to live and act in socially just ways within educational contexts, as we mentioned earlier, is that presented by Cammarota and Romero (2009) who lead us into the three central elements of their 'theory of critically compassionate intellectualism' (p. 466). We hope we have done justice to it in our following summary, in which we have taken their key ideas, and put them in our own words that are largely informed by our own experiences, as follows:

Co-operation: This is a much-vaunted word in common parlance, but it has quite a specific meaning ascribed to it here. Within the deeply etched and sedimented layerings of the power structures of most schools and classrooms, challenging and critiquing extant authoritarian forms of teaching is a fraught activity. For starters, one needs a well-honed philosophical commitment as to why this might even be attempted—after all, giving up power does not seem like a rational thing to do, and it does not occur by accident.

The point to be grasped here, is that students need to be able to see that knowledge is something that *can* be produced collectively. For students, especially students of colour and from contexts of disadvantage, this notion is counter-intuitive to all they have been taught. As Cammarota and Romero (2009) note, these students have had a lifetime of being taught that 'the educator possesses the knowledge' and 'students are ignorant subjects passively waiting to receive this knowledge' (p. 466). Unless this idea can be interrupted and the myth punctured, and students can be led to believe that they have something to genuinely contribute, then they will continue to remain in a position of subservience. As Cammarota and Romero put it, 'rarely have leadership opportunities' (p. 466) been invested in these kind of students, with the result that they have to be taught 'how to lead by unlearning oppressive ideologies' (p. 467). They have always been taught that their role is one of dependence on the teacher, to the point where this is so in-grained that they 'are often hesitant to adopt this role because they are "fearful" (Freire, 1972) of claiming it' (p. 467).

Compassion: Care is not a word that resonates well in the ruthless competitive world in which we are expected to out-compete our rivals in a rush to the top, and

as Cammarota and Romero (2009) note, compassion rarely appears 'as an important pedagogical element' (p. 467). With these students there is a kind of inversion that has to occur, where learning content takes second place to students first checking out whether the teacher is a human being worth investing in, in order to learn from. As a school leader and informant in one of our research projects put it:

> …these kids 'learn' the teachers first, then the subjects … these kids can spot teachers who go through the motions and they 'switch off' teachers they don't like. (Smyth & Fasoli, 2007, p. 281)

Care, concern and compassion are not attributes that feature at all in the cold and sterile agenda of raising achievement scores or closing learning gaps—often presented to us as if it will occur through a process akin to wielding a blunt instrument. The kind of students we are referring to learn when trust exists, and 'trust emerges only when teachers continuously demonstrate a deeply profound sense of caring for students' (Cammarota & Romero, 2009, p. 467)—and that means recognizing, acknowledging and respecting what is going on in their lives, families, backgrounds and communities. In our own research, students repeatedly describe this as showing or having 'respect' (see Smyth et al., 2000).

What transpires here is that students 'learn new lessons, while unlearning the lessons of dehumanization' (Cammarota & Romero, 2009, p. 467). It is important to understand the complexity of what is involved here—this is not a patronising process of demonstrating sympathy, because these students will quickly see through that. Teachers we have worked with claim that these students have to develop a sense that teachers genuinely like them, regardless of their 'untidy' attributes (which says more about the middle class norms of schooling, than about the students!). At a deeper level, this means 'recognizing the problems in [their lives] that impede well-being' and working to try to resolve 'some of the most pressing issues facing these students' (Cammarota & Romero, 2009, p. 467). The best way to describe it is as 'active listening' (Fiumara, 1990) in which students get to feel they have someone they can trust and who is prepared to advocate for them (Cammarota & Romero, 2009, p. 467).

Finally, compassion needs to go beyond 'concern for…individual suffering' to engaging with 'students' experiences and struggles as members of a larger social group' (Cammarota & Romero, 2009, p. 468)—which is to say, confronting wider forms of oppression like racism and classism, that position these students as 'socially, economically or politically subordinate' (p. 468).

Consciousness: If the project of creating *critical student voice* was about nothing more than co-operation and compassion, then it would still largely miss the point, because what is needed is a way of intellectualising what is going on, in order to confront, challenge and usurp the forces of oppression. Here, Cammarota and Romero (2009), invoke Freire (1974), in arguing the inadequacy of explanations that amount to 'magical consciousness'—in effect, those situations which people find themselves in and which they are prepared to dutifully accept as being pre-determined by a higher deity, and therefore are 'immutable' (p. 468).

Similarly, there is a need to transcend 'naive consciousness' which locates problems as residing in inadequacies and mismatches 'in family or cultures that do not value

education, resulting in a lack of motivation to succeed at school' (p. 468). Such explanations need to be dismissed for the hokum that they are, as well as for the damage they inflict by feeding a view of self-blame built on a false mis-diagnosis of the nature and source of the obstacles and impediments.

Drawing again from Freire, Cammarota and Romero (2009) argue that, in the end, 'critical consciousness' is the highest form of reasoning because of the way it enables a form of intellectualising that disavows notions of immutability, by pursuing the view that 'if humans create social conditions, they also have the power to alter those conditions' (p. 469). In other words, the end point is to create students who 'feel capable and confident [that] they can change the material conditions of their lives and the lives of those around them' (p. 469). The defining hallmark and end point here is hope and possibility—but for critical consciousness to be possible, it has to be 'modelled' so that educational content centres upon 'a critical perspective relevant to the students' social, cultural and historical realities' (p. 469). This means not only cultivating an educative capacity for an 'awareness of …social and economic forces', but also of ways to prudently and strategically seize the opportunities 'for disrupting those forces' (p. 469).

As Cammarota and Romero (2009) conclude, and as we would concur (see Smyth, 2011a, 2012a, 2012b), pursuing 'critically compassionate intellectualism' is more like becoming caught up in a flow of self-reinforcing elements in the quest for a new way of being, than it is a definitive pathway or destination to be achieved. It is only as a result of having the courage to begin with a particular element, most likely cooperation or compassion, and learning from what happens, that the kind of political astuteness required will lead to the skills necessary to develop a truly critical consciousness.

This leads us into the transformative conditions that have to be brought into existence for these ideas to be possible in schools. The best way we can think of to organise our thoughts is to segue into what we are calling—

2.5 A Political Economy of Schooling for *Critical Student Voice*

The term political economy of schooling is not a term that we have found to have much in the way of currency in the educational literature (for an exception see Cote, 2014), and certainly not when it comes to investing young people with a modicum of critical agency over their lives. We are not invoking the notion of a political economy of schooling here in the narrow econometric sense of that term, notwithstanding the manifestly economic lens with which the policy types insist on portraying and viewing schools. Rather, we are invoking and building upon it, somewhat playfully we might add, in its Marxist sense of having to do broadly with conditions of production and consumption. Schools are certainly places of production and consumption, but fortunately not in the way in which the captains of industry would

have us believe— of schools as willing providers of docile and compliant workers for rapidly disappearing jobs that are being outsourced to the global economy to the lowest bidders.

Contrary to the populist view, schools are not nor should they be, convenient annexes of the economy—schools are far too complex for anything as simplistic and instrumental as that. Schools operate at their quintessential best when they are actively involved in producing and fostering the circumstances in which young lives flourish around meaningful and relevant learning experiences in ways that help young people to form viable, well-rounded and robust identities as socially critical citizens and future workers. In a sense, this is the production side.

Schools are also places of undeniable consumption in the sense that young people consume and partake of a range of experiences and opportunities that help them expand their understandings and the horizons they hold of themselves and their place in the world. In schools, they can get to experience the very best of what it means to be human in the way they interact with their peers, teachers and the wider community and society in which the school is located. In far to many instances, however, they are also recipients of some of the worst experiences as well, in terms of how they are demeaned and treated in ways that often leave them deeply traumatised and damaged as a consequence.

In proceeding as we are, what we are doing is what Fielding and Moss (2010) in their *Radical Education and the Common School*, invoking Unger (2004), refer to as challenging 'the poverty of political expectation' in which there is a 'dictatorship of no alternatives' (p. 1). In other words, as long as we to go along with the view that there are no other possibilities other then those within which we currently allow schools to be conceived and organized, then we will continue to be paralyzed within a straightjacket that produces grotesque educational deformities. We need to interrupt (or better still disrupt!) the circuit that is producing these forces. Put simply, the fact of the matter is that there is an alternative, unpalatable though it might be to the neo-liberal apologists of the marketized view of what a school should look like, but it will require a very different approach to both production and consumption compared with what we are currently experiencing.

To pursue what a political economy of schooling might look like that has as its underpinning proposition— 'when students how power' (Shor, 1996; Smyth, 2006a, 2006b)—we will explore a broad constellation of four not especially novel elements, and we say they are not particularly exceptional because they are ideas that are well-known to good teachers, but they are a set of notions that seem to be totally foreign to policy makers and their ardent followers. These features are:

(i) placing trust and respect at the centre of learning;
(ii) connecting to young people's lives and enlarging their cultural maps through a culture of independence;
(iii) re-inventing schools around the emotional lives of young people;
(iv) positioning young people so as to re-imagine educational policy through becoming social activists around inspirational social issues.

2.5.1 Trust and Respect

Schools have been pushed so far in the direction of becoming beholden to the economy as mere appendages to business and commerce that the defining qualities that make them viable and valued social institutions has effectively been completely erased and expunged. For example, it is not hard to find abundant evidence supporting the view that in the contemporary context of schools, the work of teachers and the way young people themselves are positioned, cannot be seen in any way other than as objects of deep distrust. They are simply not to be trusted, and have to be subjected to close and relentless surveillance and control. Schools have come to be treated as distrustful organizations because as societies we have not only wilfully allowed this to happen but have actively fostered it, albeit in far too many instances schools have become implicated and complicit in perpetuating these distrustful views *of themselves*. Samier and Schmidt (2010) neatly capture this in the title of their book *Trust and Betrayal in Educational Administration and Leadership.*

We can find the evidence for this in the way in which high stakes testing regimes around the world, supported by a huge and profitable testing industry, have been allowed to do their gross disfigurement of young lives according to whether or not young people are perceived as meeting arbitrarily determined standards on achievement tests that often bear no relationship to their learning, lives or aspirations for the future. This sham is further solidified through an insidious ensemble of practices that have at their heart processes of unfair comparisons. For example, teachers are paid by student results, known as 'merit pay' or 'performance pay', based on students' test results, which further exacerbates distrust by pitting teachers-against-teachers as if the work of teaching were solitary piece-work rather than the collaborative and co-operative activity that it is. Schools are then forced to compete against one another in a mandated marketized competition for 'market share' using dubious impression management techniques as parents are drawn into accessing published league tables of test results, by school, as they 'shop around' for the 'best deal' for their offspring—the notion of so-called 'school choice' that allegedly works as a proxy for forcing schools to improve themselves or they die on the vine!

This entire fake edifice is carried to the next ludicrous level by having school systems, indeed entire countries, being ranked against one another in a constructed international version of the educational Olympics, through programs like PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study), endorsed by what some people regard as the reputable OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). In addition, and especially in instances where this econometric model does not perform as expected, schools are tightly controlled through policy by a thousand diktats, and a process of 'militarization' and 'get tough' approaches that ensure compliance with appropriate standards of behaviour, etiquette and performance.

This is not the place for us to launch into a full-scale rehearsal of discussions about trust in education—others have already done that admirably, see for example,

Bottery (2003) and Samier and Schmidt (2010). Suffice to say, that when trust is 'mismanaged' in education in the demonstrable way that it is across so many western countries at the moment, then what follows is what Brown and Hesketh (2004) in the title of their book refer to as *The Mismanagement of Talent*.

Our point here is a relatively straightforward one. Unless schools, teachers and young people can be trusted in the way they go about determining, pursuing and constructing worthwhile knowledge, then no amount of coercing, manipulating, directing, punishing, imposing, conniving and controlling will create the conditions under which learning will occur or young people flourish. We might be able to create the impression through measured achievement scores that something is happening, but *this is not learning*, nor will it help young people in 'becoming educated' (Smyth & McInerney, 2014) through their larger project of identity formation. Connell (1996) referred to what is going on in teaching and learning as 'a gift relation', by which she meant something that is 'founded on a public rather than a private interest' (p. 6) for teacher as well as student. Connell (1996) expands on the nature of the social practice occurring here, at least from the vantage point of the teacher, which we would suggest students would concur with:

> Teachers' work involves constant improvisation … In good teaching, the improvisation goes beyond the boundaries; there is a (benign) excess; an enthusiasm or concern, a capacity to judge the right moment which sparks a learning process, inspires a pupil, or communicates a love for knowledge and a respect for the learner …This excess is something given by the teacher. We recognize it when it happens, but being an excess, we cannot easily define it in job descriptions, nor account for it in budgets. (p. 5)

Connell (1996) also highlights the point totally put under erasure in the econometric view of schooling, that what goes on in learning is an intimate relationship:

> Education is both a social process and a creative process. A social transaction occurs between teacher and student, between learner and learner, and an educational relationship is constituted…Through educational relationships … new capacities for practice come into existence. They cover the full range of types of social action; *productive capacities*, used in economic life; *symbolic capacities*, used in making culture; *capacities for collective decision making* used in politics; and *capacities for emotional response*, used in personal life. (emphases in original p. 5)

Connell (1996) is helpful here because of the direction she is pitching towards in crafting a way for reclaiming the current hijacked version of teaching, by arguing for the renovation of teaching around a broader rather than a narrow agenda— meaning, expanding the 'capacities for social practice' so as to include 'productive capacities, symbolic capacities, political capacities, and emotional capacities' (p. 13).

2.5.2 Enlarging (and Engaging) Young People's Cultural Maps

Another indispensable aspect of the political economy of schooling for critical student voice is the expansion rather than the closing down of opportunities. The term 'opportunities', as we are using it here, is a code word for learning experiences that

are captivating and that stretch students experientially so as to move them into new and unfamiliar but challenging terrain, from which they are able to scaffold new learning concepts for future learning.

When the cultural or experiential understandings of young people are curtailed, are not brought into existence, or are closed down, which is what occurs through diminished, domesticated or 'scripted' forms of teaching, then what follows are the beginnings of 'shutdown'— disengagement, alienation and detachment from learning. Young people are no longer willing to make what Erickson (1987) calls the social, emotional and psychic investment necessary for learning, and while there may seem on the surface to be a 'going through the motions', underneath there is growing resentment that will eventually precipitate into outright rejection. When we inflict scripted forms of learning onto young people that they have to absorb and passively regurgitate back through meaningless tests so that our educational systems can engage in the fake competitive games we mentioned earlier, then we are consigning young people to what Gatto (2001) calls 'the prison of modern education'.

The alternative involves what might seem quite bizarre from a policy perspective—inviting young people into a conversation about what they would like to learn, with whom, how, under what set of conditions, and reported upon using what methods? The reason for our collective hesitancy or even outright reluctance to engage in such a conversation is the presumption that young people are incapable, too immature, too self-preoccupied, or too dumb to know what they might want to learn, and besides, they might select ways that are lacking in rigour, that might prove hard to measure, or that might not map onto some grid of national competencies with which to be seen to be out-competing other countries—all sound reasons for the rejection of such an idea, at least from within its own warped logic.

Elsewhere in this book we have discussed in some detail what this process of experiential enlargement might look like, practically, and we refer the reader especially to Chap. 5 on a 'socially critical pedagogy of teaching' and Chap. 6 on a 'socially critical curriculum'. The major underlying argument we are making in both of these chapters is that engaging young people in learning, particularly those whose backgrounds do not fit neatly with the middle class values of schools, is really about *critical placemaking*. One of us (Smyth, 2011b) drawing on ideas from the field of critical architecture (see Schneekloth & Shibley, 1993, 1995) explained what this might mean around three moments, as follows.

(1) *Creating dialogic space* —that is to say, creating a venue in which young peoples' experiences, stories, hopes, fears, ideas, frustrations can be brought into existence within a safe and supportive environment; (2) *Confirmation and interrogation* —where the young people are then invited to address questions of a kind, 'what is going on in my life?' 'why is this occurring in my neighbourhood?' and 'what seem to be the deeper underlying policies/processes/structures that are working here?'; and (3) *Framing action around inclusion/exclusion* —where young people are then presented with a space within which to address the constraints and opportunities facing them in whatever 'uncertain transition' (Burawoy & Verdery, 1999) they are attempting to make in their lives, but within wider context of the way globalization impacts on their sense of understanding of the local

(see Burawoy, Blum, George, Gille, & Thayer, 2000). Bigelow and Peterson (2002) in their *Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World* provide a very helpful set of practical resources as to how critical placemaking might be attempted.

Our point here is a relatively straightforward one—place is crucially important in learning for young people, but this is not always something that is grasped by people who believe they know what is best for young people.

Now we will turn to another of the enduring myths that has to be overturned in addressing the political economy of schooling around critical student voice—that schools are supposed to operate as if they were emotion-free zones.

2.5.3 Re-inventing Schools Around the Emotional Lives of Young People

If schools are primarily places that do relational work as we are arguing in this book, then equally they are places that do emotional work as well. There is a burgeoning and emerging literature on the topic of 'social and emotional pedagogies' (Gillies, 2011, p. 185; see also Kenway & Youdell, 2011; Nairn & Higgins, 2011; Youdell & Armstrong, 2011) in schooling that is beginning to contest the dominant view of schools as supposedly affect-free zones, or at least ones that are strictly contained. This becomes pertinent Gillies (2011) argues, around issues of anger management where behaviour management policies are invoked to control student behaviour that are headed for suspension or exclusion. As she puts it:

> The dominant emotional literacy agenda structuring contemporary curriculum contrasts sharply with the culture and experience that shapes everyday life in schools. (p. 201)

The dominant perspective to which Gillies (2011) is alluding, is one that purports to operate around processes of behaviour management in schools that aim 'to promote calm, rational manipulation of emotions, raw and often uncontainable feelings [that] continue to infuse encounters in classrooms, playgrounds and staffrooms' (p. 201). In other words, emotions in schools are supposed to be handled therapeutically through rational notions of self-responsibilisation and 'self-efficacy' (p. 186).

We want to distance ourselves from this therapeutic perspective by arguing that what is labelled behaviour management in schools should better be seen as 'a curriculum issue'—that is to say, it derives from a curriculum that is distant from and does not engage with the lives of young people. The price of this detachment is measured in the need to have containment policies that remedy what is produced by a faulty curriculum. When young lives are hermetically sealed in this way, with schools in effect saying 'park your lives and emotions at the front gate when you come in here', then it should come as no surprise that there is trouble that has to be hosed down as a consequence. A distant and detached curriculum and pedagogy which refuses to tangle with young people's existential realities, is in denial of what Gillies (2011) calls the 'impassioned reality of everyday school life' (p. 186) and fails to grasp 'the extent to which socially embedded investments, power relations

and issues of justice and equality are obscured through a focus on personal control and emotional stability' (p. 186). The sharpest way we can put it is that schools are urged, possibly for financial reasons, to exist in a state of denial and shirk their responsibility of connecting to increasingly complex young lives, by exporting the problem back onto young people to manage themselves.

The kind of 'emotional geographies' (Kenway & Youdell, 2011) we are talking about are ones that are cognizant of: the complicated family lives of young people, that are often non-traditional, fragmentary, and highly mobile; there can be unemployment, ill-health and mental health issues, substance abuse and suicide or self-harm in their own lives or those of their immediate family or peers; many of these young people are forced to work part-time, sometimes as the main bread-winners in their families; they are tangling with identity issues often in an increasingly uncertain, unpredictable and risky world; and, all the while, they are trying to make sense of where school fits and where it might carry them in terms developing independence in making futures for themselves. These are not insignificant issues, and they are certainly not ones that can be conveniently 'parked' while some kind of 'objectified' education is pursued—they are issues that have to be sensibly grappled with by schools, even made the substance of what goes on in classrooms, if young people are to emerge in any kind of robust form.

So, where does this leave us? The answer is that we are left in a despondent situation in terms of the likelihood of a policy-led move in this direction. At the same time, it leaves us optimistic that the understandings of what is going on lies much closer to the educative act, in the lives, experiences and emerging aspirations of young people. What we need to turn to for inspiration is the literature around how young people are becoming social activists in issues immediately affecting their lives, as well the larger social issues framing their lives.

2.5.4 Pushing Back into Educational Policy by Becoming Socially Just Activists

The starting point has to reside in the way young people are actively debunking the myth that they are narcissistic, self-absorbed, and lacking in aspirations. This is especially the case in portrayals of young people who have been *put at* a disadvantage. It seems to us that rather then there being a 'poverty of aspiration' as is being alleged officially, it is more likely to be the case that what is occurring is a 'poverty of opportunity'—as we argued earlier (see also Smyth & McInerney, 2014, Chap. 6). In other words, the failure lies in an increasing failure, especially in policy quarters, to listen to or understand what it is that young people are doing or the kind of world they are striving to create.

Along with the literature we started this chapter out with from 'critical youth studies', Giroux's (2013) category of young people as the 'new public intellectuals' (p. 132) probably comes the closest we have found to a useful starting point. Stepping out and using positive rather than demeaning or deficit labels sends important

messages that young people are indeed capable of making decisions around the complexity of their lives. Giroux is using the term 'new public intellectual' to describe the activist part many young people are taking in the activities like the Occupy Movement, and generally 'asking big questions' and refusing to 'conceive of their own agency only in the narrowest of instrumental terms, one that views people as commodities bound together in a Darwinian nightmare that celebrates the logic of greed, unchecked individualism, and a disdain for democratic values' (p. 133). Our 'take' builds on this, but has a slightly different inflection.

An emerging approach that seems to be drawing some attention and that holds promise is around 'critical service learning' (Porfilio & Hickman, 2011), and here we need to be careful because in many cases service leaning amounts to little more than charity work. Porfilio and Hickman (2011) describe 'critical service learning' as a process that engages young people in schools around projects in their neighbourhoods and communities that have at their heart 'a political project, embedded within a social justice orientation with a commitment to guiding students to develop the skills, ideas and attributes necessary to foster equity and freedom in [their] schools and other contexts' (p. x). What makes this process 'critical', among other things, is:

- 'question[ing] the distribution of power in society' as well as reflecting on questions like "Why are conditions like this in the first place?"' (p. xi);
- pursuing analyses of 'what gives rise to social inequalities' and what social forces sustain inequalities in this way?;
- invoking Diagre (2000), 'broadening [the] notion of education to include the production of subjectivities in public spheres outside of schooling [so as to]… extend the imperatives of democracy in those…institutions that shape the quality of human life' (p. 7);
- in other words, putting in place a process in which young people are challenged to both become 'critical students' as well as 'critical citizens'—not necessarily in that order, but in an interactive fashion; and
- engaging in analyses of 'how…larger power structures have generated specific social problems', and specifically, 'how the neoliberal project has impacted life within their learning communities' and how they are able to insert themselves into 'fissures' so as to 'sustain their political projects' (Porfilio & Hickman, 2011, p. xiii).

In short, our argument here has been that young people can and do learn how to enact forms of social justice, that in their everyday lives they often have well-developed views of what is unjust, and this is something that should be extended and built upon within and across the school/community boundary. It is the moral responsibility of schools to make the spaces available within which such activities can occur, for teachers to be emboldened to challenge entrenched norms young people bring with them to schools, and to support them as they are helped to take on and work with more enlightened views (for examples of this, see Gorski, Zenkov, Osei-Kofi, & Sapp, 2013 as to how neophyte teachers are helped to become social critics, and the process is no different in intent for students).

2.6 Coming to a Close…a Different Kind of School!

Ginwright et al. (2006) in *Beyond Resistance! Youth Activism and Community Change* propose four guiding socio-political principles to be mindful of in shaping the collective way we should approach the understanding of young people in discovering 'new forms of youth participation [that] inform a more democratic vision for young people' (p. xvi). They are an appropriate way of drawing this chapter on critical student/youth voice to a temporary close.

(i) *Conceptualizing young people in relation to specific economic, political and social conditions (p. xvi).*

Young people do not exist in a socio-political vacuum—they are impacted by a maelstrom of events and processes, and we need to be attentive to the complexity of these materialities in the way we envisage and deal with young people.

(ii) *Conceiving of youth development as a collective response to social marginalization of young people (p. xvii).*

Given the clear importance of social, political and economic conditions in the lives of young people, we need to be cognizant of the collective dimensions to their development. Ginwright et al. (2006) argue that we concentrate too much on seeing young people in individually 'problem-driven' ways, with the result that we fail to get 'a more nuanced understanding of how young people navigate their environments' (p. xvii). In particular, we miss the 'collective dimensions' of how they develop notions like 'willingness', 'trust' and 'motivation' and how these collectivist responses enable or inhibit opportunities. Our failure feeds into a diminished view of young people.

(iii) *Young people are agents of change, not merely 'silent witnesses' (p. xvii).*

In our previous work (Smyth & McInerney, 2012) in which we invoked the notion of 'silent witnesses', we demonstrated that the dominant psychologistic view of youth as being either 'empty…[or] inert vessels' (Ginwright et al., 2006, p. xviii) or even worse, bundles of pathologies, eschews the fact that they are active players rather than 'passive subjects' waiting for others 'to tell them what to do, how to think and what to say' (p. xix). This is not to say that the choices young people make and the constraints they encounter are not framed by their histories and social positions, but rather to recognise the point that they are 'subjects of knowledge and social transformation' (p. xix) as they live their lives.

(iv) *Young people have basic rights (p. xix).*

Our starting point in this chapter has been a rejection of the notion of young people being caught up in some kind of process of transiting or making a transition, because to view them through this lens is to see them as being locked into the future and amputated from having a capacity to make decisions 'about issues that impact their lives in the present' (p. xix). This is where our argument about seeing young people

as activist agents speaking back to and formulating their own view of educational policy, emboldens them not only to shape their immediate learning lives but also how these exist in the wider sphere. In short, 'young people…have the best vantage point for understanding what they need for securing a healthy, safe and productive existence' (p. xx).

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Chapter 3
Socially Critical Culture of School Reform

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter we want to focus on creating a 'socially critical' culture of school reform. In pursuing this task we adopt a school reform framework (Harradine, 1996) that embraces the notions of: (a) *reculturing*—that involves 'changing values, beliefs, assumptions, habits, patterns of behaviour and relationships in school organisational culture'; (b) *restructuring*— around 'organisational reforms such as…use of time and space, groupings of staff and students, staff roles, organisation of curriculum, and use of technology'; and (c) *changing pedagogy*—around classroom teaching practices, 'the teaching and learning process and student learning outcomes' (Hattam, McInerney, Lawson, & Smyth, 1999, pp. 11–12). Underpinning this approach is a view that current school reform debates need to be reinvigorated around (at least) eight dimensions: teachers as intellectuals; democratic school planning; educative leadership; critical teacher reflection; youth voice; school/community renewal; socially just curriculum; and critical literacy in information technology (Hattam et al., 1999, pp. 13–14). The purpose of this chapter is to explain how each of these dimensions informs a 'socially critical' culture of school reform.

To begin, we want to lay some groundwork by firstly, providing an overview of the theoretical and methodological orientation of the research informing this framework; secondly, clarifying what we mean by the term school culture and the implications for making sense of school reform; and finally, mapping the cultural geography of the high school based on a heuristic framework organised around three archetypes of school culture—'stuck', 'collaborative' and 'socially-critical' (Hattam et al., 1999, p. 13).

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3.2 A Word About the Research Informing This Framework

The empirical data informing this framework is derived from a series of ethnographic research projects conducted across Australia over the past 25 years. Whilst each study is distinctive in its own right and located in a range of diverse geographical settings including the northern suburbs of Adelaide, South Australia (Smyth, 1995, 1997), the southern suburbs of Perth, Western Australia (Down & Smyth, 2010; Smyth & Down, 2005), and in regional Victoria (Smyth, 2010, 2011), there is a consistent theoretical and methodological focus on listening to students' and teachers' voices to help us explain the complex and dynamic interplay between social class, educational disadvantage and school reform.

Of particular relevance to this chapter is the *Teachers' Learning Project* (1996–1998)—a collaborative research venture between the university and school sectors to investigate the relationship between teachers' learning and school reform. This project produced a set of teacher resource booklets to facilitate school-based investigations (e.g., promoting student voices, critical reflection on teaching and learning, making socially just curriculum, developing middle schooling practices) that promote teachers' learning as a means of advancing the notion of the socially just school. These professional development materials, while intended for teachers, have also been reviewed in the scholarly literature (see Moore, 2001). One of these booklets *School culture as a key to school reform* (Smyth, McInerney, Lawson, & Hattam, 1999) provides the empirical data, analysis and field testing to help us frame up and extend these conversations in some important new directions.

To begin, we want to say something about our research orientation and what it means for how we go about our research craft (Smyth, Down, McInerney, & Hattam, 2014). Our research approach falls within the 'critical' research tradition that eschews claims to objectivity and impartiality and instead adopts an unashamedly political orientation:

> …which is too say, that we believe in the importance of research as a way of challenging the existing social order, questioning dominant practices and discourses, and interrupting the asymmetry of the way things are and the trajectory by which they came to be that way. We also believe quite passionately that, however, modestly, a new more just social order is possible. (Smyth, Angus, Down, & McInerney, 2008, pp. 16–17)

In this spirit, we endeavour to dig beneath surface appearances in order to challenge common sense practices underpinning the logic of the high school as we know it, among them intelligence testing, streaming, subjects, timetables, discipline, hierarchy, examinations, grading, homework, rewards, teacher authority, uniforms, vocationalization, and so on. This kind of critical research will inevitably 'irritate dominate forms of power', (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 306) because it seeks to question some deeply entrenched beliefs about the 'grammar' (Tyack & Tobin, 1994) of the normal(ising) high school that have remained intact for more than a century (Smyth et al., 2014). In other words, rather than privileging the way it is, our aim as educational researchers is to discern the contested meanings and interpretations of 'life in schools' (McLaren, 1993, 2007). We do this largely from the vantage point of students, in particular those students who through no fault of their own find themselves on the margins of society and schooling.

By whatever metric, students 'put at disadvantage' face significant barriers and obstacles to achieving success in education, employment and life. For instance, low levels of weekly family earnings, low levels of adult workforce participation, low levels of parental education, high levels of welfare dependency, a greater percentage of single parent families, and high levels of youth unemployment (Vinson, 2007). Against this backdrop, we should hardly be surprised that working class students, more than most, experience what Olson (2009) describes as 'school wounds' or 'the hidden and long-lasting wounds that result from the structural violence inherent in the ways we organize and evaluate learning' (p. xv).

In response to these social and educational injustices, we attempt to create spaces where young people can 'speak back' to dominant deficit discourses (Valencia, 2010) that construct them in largely disparaging and demeaning ways through labels such as 'disadvantaged', 'low achiever', 'non-academic', 'at risk', 'troublesome', 'lazy', and so on. In making sense of these cultural processes we draw on the tradition of critical ethnography to cultivate an 'ethnographic sensibility' (Marcus, 1998) informed by what Mills (1971) and Schwalbe (1998) describe respectively as 'the sociological imagination' and 'sociological mindfulness' to help us illuminate 'the complexity of students' lives' (Bessant, 2007, p. 21). This kind of 'voiced research' (Smyth & Hattam, 2001) involves 'listening with intent' to what young people themselves have to say in order to 'gain insider understandings' about students' lifeworlds (Smyth & McInerney, 2012, p. 31). Smyth and McInerney put it this way:

> How can we hope to understand why students from disadvantaged backgrounds leave school and negotiate a transition back to structured learning opportunities without hearing their stories? What sense does it make to redesign curriculum, pedagogies and school structures without first finding out from students about what works best for them? (p. 32)

In short, our research endeavours to better understand the kinds of cultural settings—structural, organisational, pedagogical, community and relational— that serve to either enable or constrain the aspirations, dreams, and desires of working class students to 'become somebody' (Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson, & Wurst, 2004; Wexler, 1992). Putting it another way, we are interested in knowing from the point of view of students and their teachers how school culture is constructed and enacted in ways that include or exclude different classes of students from the benefits of education. We now turn to explain what we mean by the term school culture as we see it.

3.3 What Do We Mean by School Culture?

The term culture is most commonly used to describe the customs, habits, mores and way of life of a group of people (Collins English Dictionary, 2006, p. 199). Geertz (1973) provides an extended definition of culture as a 'historically transmitted pattern of meaning … a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life' (p. 89). Stepping outside these everyday definitions of culture as a way of life, Smyth et al. (1999) argue that such interpretations are

limited and simplistic because 'it evades the real meaning of culture and excludes more than it includes' (p. 5). For instance, 'the realities of differences in power and how these are constructed' (p. 5); the ways in which schools are being reshaped and recultured by 'wider forces—of intensification, along with repeated calls for flexibility, accountability, and supposed relevance' (p. 7); and the 'struggle among groups and individuals … to give meaning to their lives and actions' (p. 7).

Appadurai (1996) expresses similar concerns about the use of the word culture as a noun because of the implication that culture is 'some kind of object, thing, or substance, whether physical or metaphysical' (p. 12). The problem for him (1996), is that:

> culture appears to privilege the sort of sharing, agreeing, and bounding that fly in the face of the facts of unequal knowledge and the differential prestige of lifestyles, and to discourage attention to the worldviews and agency of those who are marginalized or dominated. (p. 12)

Expanding on Appadurai's political proclivities, Bauman (1999) argues that 'the world of culture' rests on 'the ambivalence between 'creativity' and 'normative regulation'… both are – and must remain – present in the composite idea of culture.' (p. xiv). Bauman's (1999) insight helps us to understand the 'logical paradox' of culture in which:

> One discourse generated the idea of culture as the activity of the free roaming spirit, the site of creativity, invention, self-critique, and self-transcendence; another discourse posited culture as a tool of routinization and continuity – a handmaiden of the social order. (p. xvi)

Looking at culture in this way we are now better placed to understand the dynamics of school culture where there is a persistent tension between: inventing/preserving; discontinuity/continuation; novelty/tradition; routine/pattern-breaking; norm-following/transcendence of norm; the unique/the regular; change/reproduction; and the unexpected/the predictable (p. xiv). In advancing a 'socially critical' culture of school reform we want to foreground Bauman's (1999) notion of culture as 'the capacity to resist the norm and rise above the ordinary' (p. xvi). This creative approach to school reform requires people who are 'the most daring, the least complaint and conformist spirits' and as such are distinguished by: 'irreverence to tradition, the courage to break well-drawn horizons, to step beyond closely-guarded boundaries and blaze new trails' (p. xvi).

Clearly, we need a far more sophisticated approach to what 'is one of the most elusive, difficult and complex notions in the educational literature' (Smyth and Hattam et al., 2004, p. 156). Smyth et al. go on to explain some of the complexities of defining exactly what is meant by school culture:

> School cultures are produced through a complex interweaving of sociocultural, political, economic and organizational factors, together with a constellation of class/race/gender factors. School cultures are not the prerogative or domain of any one group – teachers, students, parents, politicians, the business community or policy makers. Rather, school cultures emerge out of and are continually constructed and re-constructed through the ongoing struggles between and among each of these groups as they vie to have their particular view of schooling represented. School culture, therefore, looks quite different depending upon whose vantage point is taken in any attempt to represent it. Because of the dynamic and shifting quality of school culture, any attempt to capture or represent it is necessarily a fraught process because of what is included and excluded. (p. 157)

From this starting position we take the view that school culture is neither neutral nor innocent. It cannot be divorced from the wider structural and ideological struggles over the nature, purpose and processes of schooling. Therefore, any attempt to challenge existing conventions of schooling forces us to engage with a set of more penetrating questions such as those suggested by Simon (1992) like: 'what range of purposes schools should serve, what knowledge is of most worth, who should get access to what forms of knowledge, what it means to know something, what notions of authority should structure teaching and learning, and so on' (p. 36). By asking problem-posing questions of this kind we are able to gain a more expansive view of the relation between culture and power by firstly, identifying the link between pedagogy and 'the realities of policy formulation' settings where 'the hegemonic vision and logic of corporate capitalism and individual consumerism' provide the 'justifying framework within which … decisions are made' (p. 36); and secondly, drawing attention to the ways in which 'productive power' and the 'practices of semiotic production' are 'implicated in the formation and regulation of meaning and imagination' (p. 37).

What we take from Simon's (1992) thinking on these issues is that 'cultural practices matter, and the modes and conditions of their production deserve close attention' (p. 37) as they inform 'what is significant and "true" as well as what is desirable and possible' in schools (p. 38). This approach to the cultural politics of schooling provides us with a powerful lens through which to investigate what Simon calls 'cultural technologies' (p. 40) or 'the sets of organizational, curricular, and teaching practices that attempt to frame the ways in which meaning is produced, identities shaped, and values challenged or preserved' (p. 40). Viewed in this way, school culture becomes a site where people, in the words of Appadurai (1996), 'are able to contest and sometimes even subvert the imagined worlds of the official mind and of the entrepreneurial mentality that surround them' (p. 33).

Drawing the threads of these complex ideas together, Smyth et al. (1999) provide a useful summary of the key features of school culture that we are advocating here.

- School culture is a complex and dynamic phenomenon;
- School culture is fundamentally concerned with the educative relationships that are possible in the school;
- It is not possible to think about the culture of the school without also taking into account relationships between the school and the rest of society;
- In examining school culture we need to be especially mindful of relations of power—these can sometimes work collaboratively, or they can be coercive;
- It is not possible to speak meaningfully about teaching unless we embed those discussions in the culture of the school. There is no such thing as context-free teaching. Institutional and social practices of schooling always produce effects;
- Different school cultures position us in different ways, and we need to recognise how we operate as participants as well as how we are being operated upon (p. 9).

By focusing on school culture we believe there is a much greater likelihood of bringing about substantive school reform, by:

- Seeing school through an anthropological lens of how people make sense of their school lives, in other than managerialist ways;

- Emphasising the crucial importance of inter-relationships between people in schools;
- Underscoring the socially constructed nature of schools; and the fact that they are transformed in the ways people choose to live their lives; and
- Mapping the "cultural geography" (Seddon, 1997) of the school so as to have a clearer idea of where the school has come from and where it might be headed (Smyth et al., 1999, p. 11).

Against this backdrop, we now turn to consider the eight key dimensions of a socially critical culture identified at the beginning of the chapter.

3.4 Towards a Socially Critical School Culture

Here we draw on a heuristic framework arising out of the fieldwork from the *Teachers' Learning Project* (1999). This framework provides a way of making sense of the different kinds of school cultures that are reflected in the voices and experiences of teachers and students. We are mindful that such frameworks are far from definitive or applicable in all instances but certainly appear as a 'constellation of tendencies or trajectories' (Smyth, 2001, p. 161; Smyth and Hattam et al., 2004, p. 161) in different school cultures that we have encountered over the years. Hence, our preference is to describe these school cultures as caricatures for the purpose of making sense of lived experience as we attempt to move from 'the stuck state, in the direction of the collaborative and socially critical cultures' as illustrated in the Fig. 3.1 below (Hattam et al., 1999, p. 13).

1. *A construal of teachers* as 'intellectuals', 'activists', 'cultural workers', and 'pragmatic radicals' (Hattam et al., 1999, p. 13).

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of creating a socially critical school culture is the interrelated challenge of firstly, unsettling technicist and instrumentalist approaches to teaching and learning (Diem & Helfenbein, 2008), and secondly, reimagining 'teachers as intellectuals' (Giroux, 1988) or 'cultural workers' (Freire, 1998, 2000). As governments of all political persuasions attempt to control the nature of teachers' work within a set of neoliberal and neoconservative discourses this should be hardly surprising (Reid, 2003). Underpinning these coercive policy manoeuvres is a view of teachers as mere 'deliverers', 'testers', and 'technicians' (Ball, 1993, p. 107) of predetermined curriculum and instructional procedures devised by external experts. Consequently, there is an erosion of 'schools as democratic public spheres' (Giroux, 1997, p. 218) with damaging effects on teachers and students alike. In terms of the argument being mounted here, there is now far less space for teachers to engage in critical dialogue about the nature of their work and what might be possible. Wrigley (2006) puts it well when he argues:

> We must overcome the deep pessimism and fatalism that hang over education today. There are enormous obstacles, but perhaps the greatest is our own fearfulness. Another world is possible. Another school is possible, and will help us to heal a sick world. The relentless drive for higher test scores matters far less than caring and creative learners, a sense of justice, a world of peace, our common welfare and the future of our planet and its people. (p. 115)

	Stuck	Collaborative	Socially-critical
Construal of teachers	technicians bricoleurs	"new" professionals progressive bricoleurs	intellectuals cultural workers activists pragmatic radicals
School planning – vision	Bureaucratic • implement system imperatives • status quo maintaining • ethos of individualism	Learning how to learn • process oriented • dependence	Social justice • contributing to a more just, caring democratic society • grassroots reform • dialogic
Leadership	Hierarchical management • efficiency & effectiveness • performance management • quality assurance • accountability upward • consultative	Participatory and democratic • distributive • interpretative • caring	Critical democracy • moral/ethical concerns • openly ideological • agency, independence • dialectical
Teacher reflection	If not absent then "technical" reflection • how to be a better technician? • how to keep better control?	"Practical" reflection • how to enhance learning? • how to provide more relevant curriculum?	"Critical" reflection • how to enhance "conscientization"? • how to make the school work for all of the students?
Student voice	Control • to be constrained/feared • marginalised in structures that only give lip service • silence equated to compliance • catering to the already successful	Negotiating curriculum • systematic practices to listen to student voice sustained	Active citizenship • sensitivity to those most disenfranchised • connecting students to the big social issues of the day • promoting civic courage
School-community	School as organisation • hermetically sealed – keeps an institutionalised distance • monologue – school reports to community	School as learning community • dialogue sustained around what community can do for school	The community school • dialogue around what school can do for community • incorporate community concerns into curriculum recognition of difference

Fig. 3.1 Stuck, collaborative and socially critical cultures

Curriculum	Traditional/vocational • preparation for work • fetish for content • rigid subject disciplines • standardised teaching	Liberal-progressive • becoming an expert learner • teaching teams • inclusivity	Socially-just • knowledge is socially constructed • connects with the lives & language of students • activist oriented
Information tech.	Inevitable or refusal • out-right resistance or • alternative to teachers • information retrieval	Tool for learning • facilitated by teachers • gives access to learning opportunities	Transformative • developing critical literacies with IT • interrogate cyber-culture • sensitive to media saturated identities

Fig. 3.1 (continued)

If we are serious about creating another kind of school as suggested by Wrigley, we need to promote more widely the notion of teachers as intellectuals and look at ways of harnessing their expertise as a part of a whole school approach to school reform. This involves placing teachers at the centre of school reform and providing them with the necessary intellectual resources to critically investigate their work (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Only then, we argue, is it possible for teachers to see that things do not always have to be as they are, and as such, are able to generate alternative realities and identities. Indeed, they begin to imagine that another kind of world/school is possible. As Simon (1992) explains it, teachers are engaged in 'disruptive dreams' (p. 9) which means 'the necessity of the given historical forms of our daily lives are refused as we embody momentarily alternative identities' (p. 9). The task of re-culturing schools around this kind of critical intellectual work and social imaginary requires some re-conceptualisation of teachers' work and decision-making practices in schools.

One way of capturing this new set of possibilities is Henry Giroux's (1988) notion of 'teachers as intellectuals'. He writes:

> … teachers as intellectuals will need to reconsider and, possibly, transform the fundamental nature of the conditions under which they work. That is, teachers must be able to shape the ways in which time, space, activity, and knowledge organize everyday life in schools. More specifically, in order to function as intellectuals, teachers must create the ideology and structural conditions necessary for them to write, research, and work with each other in producing curricula and sharing power. … As intellectuals, they will combine reflection and action in the interest of empowering students with the skills and knowledge needed to address injustices and to be critical actors committed to developing a world free of oppression and exploitation. (p. xxxiv)

Viewed in this way, teachers become 'knowledge workers' (Kincheloe, 2001a) (as opposed to technicians/civil servants) who 'research, interpret, expose embedded values and political interest, and produce their own knowledge' (p. 241). These teacher scholars, according to Kincheloe (2001b):

- take into account the democratic, moral, ethical and cognitive context;

- push students to understand where content came from, the means by which it was produced, and how it was validated as knowledge worthy of inclusion in the curriculum;
- induce students to use these contextual understandings to reflect, research, and evaluate information presented to them;
- cultivate skills that can be used after the confrontation with content to enable them to learn new content in novel situations; and
- prepare students to produce new content in relation to the context in which they are operating (p. 22).

Beyer (1998) argues that 'the emphasis on critiquing current realities, on participating in the recreation of our worlds, is a central part of a progressive understanding of democracy' (p. 257). Teachers as transformative intellectuals in the sense described by Giroux and Kincheloe are constantly engaged in a process of 'rediscovering the radical-progressive potential of democratic ideals and values, and democratic participation, in schooling and curriculum' (Beyer, 1998, p. 257).

Such teachers require some unique qualities and dispositions. Freire (1998) in his seminal book *Teachers as cultural workers* offers some timely guidance in rethinking what it means to be a radical-progressive teacher. The attributes he identifies not only provide some helpful pointers to the kinds of teachers required in these conservative times but also lays the foundation—pedagogically, ethically and morally—for a socially critical school culture. By way of summary:

- *Humility*: 'courage, self-confidence, self-respect, and respect for others…. No one knows it all; no one is ignorant of everything' (p. 39);
- *Lovingness*: 'armed love', 'the fighting love of those convinced of the right and the duty to fight, to denounce and announce' (p. 41);
- *Courage*: 'the conquering of my fears, it implies fear' (p. 41);
- *Tolerance*: 'being tolerant does not mean acquiescing to the intolerable…. It teaches us to learn from and respect the different' (p. 42);
- *Decisiveness, security*: 'breaking free to choose' (p. 42);
- *Living the tension between patience and impatience*: 'The educator must live and work impatiently patiently, never surrendering entirely to either' (p. 44);
- *Verbal parsimony*: 'The patient person's discourse is always well-behaved' (p. 44); and
- *Joy of living*: 'we contribute to creating a happy, joyful school' (p. 45).

Drawing on these qualities and dispositions we believe schools will have a much greater chance of creating and sustaining a socially critical school culture capable of restoring the values of 'social cohesion, empathy, caring, respect, reciprocity, and trust' (Beckmann & Cooper, 2004, p. 11; Noddings, 2005).

2. A *vision of school planning* that is committed to the school as contributing to 'a more just, caring and democratic society' through being 'dialogic' in the way it pursues 'grassroots reform' (Hattam et al., 1999, p. 13).

Where schools are making progress around whole school reform there is strong emphasis on teachers' learning as well as a conscious attempt to create and enact 'a

courageous vision for the school' (Hattam et al., 1999, p. 14). Drawing on the experiences of the participating schools in the *Teachers' Learning Project*, Hattam et al. represent teachers' learning and whole school reform as a set of interrelated processes:

1. Developing a 'courageous vision or statement of purpose that is broadly understood and shared by the community' (p. 15). This courageous vision 'involves rigorous consideration of which educational goals, experiences, and activities lead towards forms of life which are mediated by concerns for social justice, equity, and concrete fulfilment, and whether current arrangements serve important human needs and satisfy important human purposes' (p. 15).
2. Enacting the vision by 'developing a set of organizational structures, practices and discourses that support a "culture of innovation"' (Kress, 1993, p. 15).
3. Working through contestations and tensions 'within and outside the classroom—by students, other teachers and parents with alternative views about what constitutes good teaching and learning' (p. 16).

Underpinning this school reform approach is the dialogic method espoused by Freire (2000). For him, 'dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world' (p. 88). Freire explains:

> Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection. (p. 88)

Freire (2000) goes on to argue that true dialogue is founded 'upon love, humility, and faith' and only then does it become 'a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence' (p. 91). Significantly, he makes the point that 'Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no education' (pp. 92–93). We believe such views are profoundly evocative in terms of creating and sustaining the kind of participatory learning community we are advancing in this chapter. Without authentic dialogue the inter-related processes of school planning identified above simply become another form of 'manipulation' or 'antidialogical action' as 'the dominant elites try to conform the masses to their objectives' (p. 147)—by 'steering, conquering, and invading' (p. 157) the culture of schools. We believe that working on school culture in more dialogic ways provides an antidote to the performative and managerialist culture being foisted upon schools at the moment.

In pursuing these objectives we believe a socially critical alternative involves some of the following:

- pursuing a courageous educational vision with the school community;
- auditing the culture of the school as a preliminary to devising a plan for re-culturing;
- sustaining a culture of debate in which teachers can (continually) test the adequacy of their theories about teaching and learning that also develops collaboration;
- promoting a school development plan based on the generative themes of teachers' work in the context of negotiating interest with the local school community;

- promoting a dialogue with the local community with a view to incorporating the struggles of the local community into the curriculum;
- promoting "student voices" capable of integrating their personal concerns and the larger issues facing our world;
- promoting debate about the content of the curriculum that is responsive to concerns for social justice and that encourages the development of critical literacies; and
- promoting debate about the incorporation of information technology into the educative process (Hattam et al., 1999, p. 17).

3. A *notion of leadership* that lives an ethos of critical democracy that is 'dialectical' in respect of relationships, 'openly ideological' in its politics, and has 'moral/ethical concerns' within an 'agency of independence' for young people (Hattam et al., 1999, p. 13).

In the context of current policy settings—school-based management, school effectiveness and school improvement, national curriculum, high stakes testing, league tables, accountability, transparency, performance appraisal, and competition—it should hardly be surprising that educational leadership is construed in terms of 'organizational and official policy requirements' (Gunter, 2005, p. 3). In this culture of performativity, the preferred model of leadership assumes that the 'teacher is an enthusiastic follower who teaches in accordance with prescribed methods and who uses resources approved and determined by others' (p. 4). Gunter argues that this hierarchical control and compliance approach to school leadership 'is secured through organizational structures (roles and job descriptions), cultures (compliance and commitment), and performance (integrating cognitive and emotional processes), and so teacher leaders deliver' (p. 30).

In trying to shift the conversations about school leadership we want to map a socially critical alternative that grows organically out of 'collegial and egalitarian concerns about pedagogical relationships and social justice' rather than managerial edicts (Smyth, 2001, p. 170). Smyth (1989a) argues that such approaches require 'an active and inclusive process of questioning, challenging and theorizing about the social, political and cultural nature of the work of schools' (p. 190). From this perspective, school leadership is more about 'enabling teachers to move from a situation of dependence and non-reflectivity' to become 'active inquirers into their own and each other's practices by acquiring new lenses for critically assessing their circumstances and their role in determining them' (p. 190).

Such schools, as distinct from managerialist versions, are concerned with democratic ideals and practices as identified by Gunter (2001):

- Education is a public good, it is an entitlement and promotes equity.
- The purposes of schools and schooling are to educate as well as train, and to enable children to engage in the theory and practice of what it means to be a citizen in an unfolding and reforming democratic project.
- Leadership is a relationship, can be exercised by all, and tasks are achieved through negotiation.
- Teachers and students engage in leadership in the development and experience of learning.

- Schools are located within communities, and so accountability is through mutuality and a respect for difference.
- Management systems support and are integral to pedagogy (p. 19).

From this vantage point, schools become conversational places where the pedagogical is the primary focus of all activity. In these schools, school leaders are concerned with pedagogically inspired questions, like:

- How are the reforms that are being visited upon my school improving the life chances and opportunities of my students?
- Where are the spaces in my school where young people have the unfettered opportunity to have authentic and meaningful (as distinct from tokenistic) ownership of their learning?
- How can I make it my role and responsibility as the educational leader of the school to ensuring that the school exists and works for young people, and how do I protect them from ill-conceived policies that if not interrupted will damage their lives and life chances by turning them off school?
- Who can I work with to form the necessary alliances of solidarity so as to maintain the courage with which to pursue forms of learning that are in the interests of young people?
- How can I disseminate the startling results that will flow from this alternative, and how can I engender others in having the courage to 'speak back' to damaging policies by invoking student voiced approaches? (Smyth, 2012, p. 154)

Elsewhere we (Smyth et al., 2014) have attempted to scaffold a socially critical culture of school leadership, the hallmarks of which are expressed in:

- A willingness to take a stand for the educational rights and entitlements of the least advantaged students in the school system.
- A preparedness to speak out against the injustices and inequalities that pervade public education systems.
- A determination to contest the taken-for-granted structures and pedagogies within schools which dehumanize relations and discriminate against some young people whilst advantaging others.
- A questioning of the fairness of tracking policies, gifted and talented classes, compensatory education programs and those practices which seek to sort and stream students according to their perceived abilities.
- A rejection of deficit views of students and the differential expectations of their academic ability based on social class, gender, and ethnic/racial backgrounds.

This orientating framework seeks to provide a set of principles and guidelines to help schools explore what a more robust school leadership approach might look like. We do not believe managerially inspired checklists and 'how to do' prescriptions for others to slavishly follow actually works. Rather, a socially critical culture seeks to provoke conversations based on a 'radical professionality' committed to investigating the ways in which power structures limit and hinder learning and social justice (Gunter, 2001, p. 146).

4. *A view of teacher reflection* that is critical in the sense of enhancing 'conscientization' and making the school 'work for all students' (Hattam et al., 1999, p. 13).

Today we hear a great deal about the importance of teacher quality as a key to improving student learning outcomes. Whilst we agree with this fundamental proposition at one level we reject the particular versions of teacher quality (read standards and testing) and teacher development (following the script) currently doing the rounds in schools today. We are concerned about the way in which school reform and by implication teacher quality and teacher development are dominated by the technical rationality of the school effectiveness and school improvement movement (Thrupp & Willmott, 2003). Consequently, teacher learning is narrowly conceived as the ability to meet organisational and official policy mandates determined and approved by outside experts. In short, there are considerable institutional, professional and political interferences to the development of critical thought among teachers (and students) (Shor, 1987). As a consequence, teachers have limited opportunities to develop the kinds of critical sensibilities we advocated earlier and therefore, are constrained from 'challenging the power structures and cultures that we inherit and that can act as barriers to democratic development' (Gunter, 2005, p. 6).

As a counter to these conservative forces, we advocate the development of critical teacher reflection (Smyth, 1988, 1989b, 1989c, 1992) as a means of asking 'why things are the way they are, how they got that way, and what set of conditions are supporting the processes that maintain them' (Simon, 1988, p. 2). This form of 'conscientization' or 'awakening of critical awareness' (Freire, 2007, p. 15), in the words of Freire (2007), 'is characteristic of authentically democratic regimes and corresponds to highly permeable, interrogative, restless and dialogical forms of life—in contrast to silence and inaction' (p. 14). The focus is on 'social injustice and how to transform inequitable, undemocratic, or oppressive institutions and social relations' (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 47). Working through educative ideas of this kind is at the heart of a socially critical school culture.

Returning to our framework for a moment we can see how critical reflection attempts to interrupt taken-for-granted schooling practices by shifting the focus from technical (stuck) and practical (collaborative) interests to critical emancipatory interests (socially critical) (Van Manen, 1977). Kincheloe (2001a) explains:

> critical action research is the consummate democratic act, because it allows … teachers to help determine the conditions of their own work. Critical action research facilitates the attempt of teachers to organize themselves into communities of researchers dedicated to emancipatory experience for themselves and their students. When teachers unite with students and community members in the attempt to ask serious questions about what is taught, how it is taught, and what should constitute the goals of a school, not only is critical self-reflection promoted, but group decision making becomes a reality. (p. 353)

Digging deeper, Brookfield (1995) argues that critically reflective practice involves 'a consistent focus on unearthing and scrutinising two kinds of assumptions: (1) those that mask the ways in which the variable of power affects and often distorts educational interactions; (2) those that seem congenial but that actually work against our own best interest' (p. xiii). He believes critically reflective practice happens

when teachers 'discover and examine their assumptions by viewing their practice through four distinct, though interconnecting, lenses'— 'autobiographical experiences', 'students' eyes', 'our colleagues', and 'literature' (p. xiii). Critically reflective practice is a 'hopeful activity' because '[i]t is done in a spirit full of hope for the future' but in way that is acutely aware of 'its dangers' especially the 'political struggles involved in changing colleagues and systems' and overcoming 'cultural barriers' (p. xiii).

Staying with Brookfield's analysis for a little longer, he argues that critical reflective practice seeks to illuminate power by helping teachers to acknowledge that:

> forces present in the wider society always intrude into the classroom. Classrooms are not limpid, tranquil ponds, cut off from the river of social, cultural, and political life. They are contested spaces—whirlpools containing the contradictory crosscurrents of struggles for material superiority and ideological legitimacy that exist in the world outside. (p. 9)

Thus, becoming aware of the oppressive nature of our practices is, according to Brookfield (1995) 'often the first step in working more democratically and cooperatively with students and colleagues' (p. 9). Furthermore, critically reflective practice recognises and attempts to uncover hegemonic assumptions, those assumptions 'that we think are in our own best interest but that have actually been designed by more powerful others to work against us in the long term' (pp. 14–15). In other words, 'everyday life—stock opinions, conventional wisdom, and commonsense ways of seeing and ordering the world actually' whilst appealing and 'eagerly embraced by teachers' in fact 'work to enslave them' (p. 15).

Brookfield (1995) goes on to explain how critically reflective practice and the process of 'gaining new perspectives on our practice and questioning assumptions that we did not realize we had' can produce highly 'emotional experiences' as it involves 'negotiating feelings of impostership, lost innocence, and cultural suicide along the way' (p. 39). Despite these personal and professional struggles, and partly because of them, critical reflective practice is a powerful intellectual resource in schools as it enables teachers to reassert control over their craft and change. Brookfield explains the benefits of critical reflective practice in the following way:

- *We realize the ideological basis of teaching*—as we develop a 'deepening appreciation' of how 'our actions, decisions, and choices all reflect ideological perspectives' (p. 40).
- *We learn to minimize risk* —'for the sake of survival, critical reflective teachers must learn to prompt colleagues to question their taken-for-granted assumptions in a way that doesn't imply that they're enemies or idiots' (p. 41).
- *We see ourselves as being in continual formation*—'When we take critical reflection seriously, we also begin to think differently about professional development.' We are always 'evolving', incomplete, unfinished. 'Our practices require constant investigation' (p. 42).
- *Our teaching becomes a connective activity*—'Critical reflection is a matter of stance and dance.' 'Our stance toward our practice is one of inquiry. Our dance is the dance of experimentation and risk.' (p. 42).

- *We try to create classrooms that are more democratic*—'We try to ground our practice in core democratic values such as justice, fairness, and compassion' (p. 44). Such values are not to be to be confused with laissez-faire teaching.
- *We discover our voice*—'In becoming critically reflective, we also learn to speak about our practice in a way that is authentic and consistent' (p. 45). '[At] the moment of finding our own voice leads us to withdraw our consent to our own servitude' (p. 46).

Herein, lies the genesis of a truly socially critical school culture where teachers are not only investigating their classrooms in relation to broader structural and cultural processes but also forging new teacher identities grounded in a commitment to the values of social justice and fairness as well as finding a voice that is authentic and consistent with their experience.

5. *A commitment to youth voice*, as we have already noted, promotes 'active citizenship', is sensitive to the 'most disenfranchised', and connects young people to 'big social issues' in a way that is productive of 'civic courage' (Hattam et al., 1999, p. 13).

Whilst it may be self-evident, schools are places where students come to learn. Yet, for the most part their interests, identities, dreams and desires are largely ignored and seen as irrelevant to the main business of schooling—the sifting and sorting of young people and social control. We argue elsewhere (Smyth et al., 2014) that students' views about their lives in schools has received little attention in research, policy and practice debates:

> Listening to young people is not the preferred logic for policy, or practice. Instead students are still very much at the end of the line of policy logic, in which case their role in schooling is to be done to, and its in their interests to comply, keep their emotions in check, and if they want to be successful, to bring to school, at least a middle class cache of economic, social and cultural capital. If not then they get to blame themselves for their failure. (p. 53)

We take a lead from George Wood (2005), school principal of Federal Hocking High School in America, when he states the seemingly obvious point that 'genuine school restructuring starts with the needs of kids' (p. 29). In establishing his school, Wood asked a series of essential questions:

- How could we create a school program that would engage the minds of each and every one of our students?
- What sort of daily life in school would encourage the young adults with whom we work to do their very best?
- How might we use our students' stories to connect them to the academic agenda of the high school? (p. 31).

Wood's starting point is that students' and their needs are at the centre of school life and therefore, their views and aspirations must be taken seriously if they are to do their best work (p. 28). The problem, according to Wood (2005), is that 'the basic shape of the high school goes unquestioned' and consequently, remains 'unchanged … because we would rather blame the kids than take on the hard work of restructuring our schools' (p. 33).

Like Wood, we take the view that students themselves are the people who will be able to tell us what works—what engages them, and what is relevant and real (McFadden & Munns, 2002, p. 364). Therefore, we intentionally privilege the voices of students because they are not only 'worth listening to' (Shor, 1992, p. 26) in their own right but are able to 'identify and give voice to alternative world views' (Delpit, 1993, p. 121). In sum, we argue there is a manifest necessity to capture students' voices because in the words of Weis and Fine (1993) 'from within the very centres of structured silence can be heard the most critical and the most powerful, if excluded, voices' (p. 1). In conducting voiced research, we acknowledge that such views 'are always complicated, mercurial, unpredictable, and of course complex' (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 317).

Hattam et al. (1999) argue that if we are going to promote student voice in meaningful ways then a major 'paradigm shift' is required. By this, they mean 'giving up authoritarian ways of relating' but not 'giving up authority or rigour' (p. 21). Rather, rigour redefined in democratic schools 'works to involve students in school planning, the decision making process and all aspects of the curriculum—design, implementation, assessment, reporting and evaluation' (p. 22).

Advancing this negotiated approach to schooling, Smyth (2006) argues that educational leadership can show its commitment to student voice by:

- giving students significant ownership of their learning in other than tokenistic ways;
- supporting teachers and schools in giving up some control and handing it over to students;
- fostering an environment in which people are treated with respect and trust rather than fear and threats of retribution;
- pursuing a curriculum that is relevant and that connects to young lives;
- endorsing forms of reporting and assessment that are authentic to learning;
- cultivating an atmosphere of care built around relationships;
- promoting flexible pedagogy that understands the complexity of students' lives; and
- celebrating school cultures that are open to and welcoming of students' lives regardless of their problems or where they come from (p. 282).

One of the hallmarks of a socially critical school culture is the manner in which it is able to develop educative relationships based on the values of trust, respect and care as well as a shared commitment to pursuing socially worthwhile and rigorous learning generated from student interests, needs and desires.

6. A *view of school/community relations* that is dialogical around 'what the school can do for the community' in a way that propels 'community concerns into the curriculum' and celebrates 'difference' (Hattam et al., 1999, p. 14).

We argue that top-down public policy reforms focused around centralised curriculum, core standards, high stakes testing and accountability are manifestly failing young people living in communities put at disadvantage. We (Smyth et al., 2009) believe the best way to advance a more socially critical school culture is by 'building a 'different kind of politics' (Boyte with Gust, 2003) based on relational

power and trust with a range of groups in schools and their communities around a common vision of how schooling can work for all, including those most marginalized and excluded' (p. 130).

We believe this approach encompasses a far more inclusive, community-orientated and socially relevant form of engagement for young people. We (Smyth, Down, & McInerney, 2010) try to capture these sentiments through the notion of 'the relational school' a term we use to describe a new social imaginary of how school and communities might work together:

> The relational school recognizes the importance of building social capital, promoting community dialogue and encouraging local ownership. The challenge for schools is to work *with*, rather than *against*, local communities to develop curriculum that is responsive to students' lives as well as being accessible to adult members of the community; build social networks that open up educational pathways; revitalize grassroots forms of decision-making; and develop integrated programs that contribute to long-term community capacity building. (p. 205)

As we investigated school practices we were able to identify some orientating distinguishers informing this kind of critical school-community engagement, among them:

- The community is an asset with a reserve of skills, talents and gifts to enrich learning for students.
- Teachers are seen as allies and advocates for students and communities in processes of community renewal and reinvigoration.
- Moving beyond the top-down, carrot-and-stick approach of accountability and testing regimes developed by outside "experts", the focus is on 'rich and dialogic interaction' (Gallagher, 2007, p. 8) between teachers, students and community.
- Students are encouraged to see themselves as members of a global community through a curriculum which promotes an understanding of the interconnectedness of local, regional and global economic, political and environmental issues.
- Teachers are willing to engage students in thinking about the big issues and ideas confronting society.
- The relational school embodies a sense of hope and possibility for students and teachers alike (p. 205).

We agree with Theobold and Curtiss (2000, p. 106) when they argue that 'fostering attention to others, cultivating an ethic of being of service to others, especially to those who share a place, or a community, ought to be a high priority of education today' (p. 106). In this context, Bingham and Sirdokin's (2004) notion of 'pedagogy of relation' has much to offer because it reminds us that relationships are the centrepiece of all aspects of teaching and learning. Likewise, Margonis (2004) makes the point that 'any learning—any relationship between an individual and subject matter—occurs within a context of human relationships' (p. 45). Drawing on the experiences of Eliot Wiggington's in *Sometimes a Shining moment: the Foxfire experience* (1985), Margonis advocates the usefulness of 'project education' as one important strategy in connecting students with their community in ways that are both socially and intellectually engaging. In a similar way, we also advocate

the pedagogical importance of place-based education (McInerney, Smyth, & Down, 2011) because in the words of Gruenewald (2003):

> …places teach us about how the world works and how our lives fit into the spaces we occupy. Further places *make* us: As occupants of particular places with particular attributes, our identity and our possibilities are shaped. (p. 621)

Significantly, such approaches can help to sustain what Judith Green describes as 'deep democracy' in which people are equipped 'to expect, to understand, and to value diversity and change while preserving and projecting both democratically humane cultural values and interactively sustainable environmental values in a dynamic, responsive way' (cited in Hutchinson, 2004, p. 74). Drawing on Jane Roland Martin's ideas of the three C's—care, concern and connection—Hutchinson (2004) poses three key questions for teachers and students: 'Why should we care? How can we demonstrate our concern? What is our connection?' (p. 85). In tackling these kinds of questions, we believe schools can assist in revitalising face-to-face local communities, build relationships and restore a spirit of 'public good'. As Theobold (1997) reminds us 'Commitment, allegiance and obligation must reenter conversations concerning the fate of places' (p. 120)

7. *A curriculum that is socially just* in the way it treats knowledge as being 'socially constructed', 'connects to the lives of students' and is 'activist orientated' (Hattam et al., 1999, p. 14).

Nieto (2000) argues that a concern for social justice means 'looking critically at why and how schools are unjust for some students' (p. 183). In this section we want to consider how 'curricular justice' (Connell, 1993) gets done in school, or not, and how it might serve to enhance the life opportunities of the least advantaged. Whilst we acknowledge that schools cannot do it alone we are interested in how schools can make a difference in the lives of working class students who typically do not benefit from the rewards of the education system in the same way as middle class children.

Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, and Dowsett (1982) provide a helpful way of looking at this issue by asking the question: 'what do working-class kids need to know?' They identify three kinds of answers, first, the need to know the academic disciplines with anything else considered to be 'second best' (stuck schools) (p. 199); second, the kind of knowledge that students will find 'relevant and meaningful' (collaborative schools) (p. 199); and finally, knowledge which allows students to 'get access to formal knowledge via learning which begins with their own experience and the experiences which shape it, but does not stop there' (socially critical schools) (p. 199). Connell et al. go on to explain how this latter approach works:

> This approach neither accepts the existing organization of academic knowledge nor simply inverts it. It draws on existing school knowledge and on what working-class people already know, and organizes this selection of information around problems such as economic survival and collective action, handling the disruption of households by unemployment, responding to the impact of new technology, managing problems of personal identity and association, understanding how schools work, and why (pp. 199–200).

Connell's (1993) approach is best described as a counter-hegemonic curriculum 'designed to embody the interests and perspectives of the least advantaged' (p. 44).

Social justice demands that students are not excluded from conventional knowledge through the artificial division between academic and non-academic knowledge (and students) but rather have access to a common curriculum. Such an approach rejects 'all selection, competitive assessment, streaming and classifying mechanisms in schooling … since such mechanisms differentiate offerings and therefore advantage some citizens over others' (p. 46).

In pursuing these ideas at the school level, we believe Shor's (1992) book *Empowering education: critical teaching for social change* provides a useful set of pedagogical values to help guide school-based investigations around the construction of a socially critical school curriculum. Whilst there are many other valuable resources available (Beane, 2005; McInerney, Hattam, Smyth, & Lawson, 1999; Oakes, Rogers, & Lipton, 2006; Romano & Glascock, 2002) we believe Shor's book offers an accessible starting point for teachers and school leaders in rethinking their pedagogy. By way of summary:

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

We believe these kinds of pedagogical values provide a powerful conceptual lens through which to promote socially critical school cultures for the purpose of addressing curricula justice/injustice for the least advantaged students in our schools. In reclaiming the critical democratic purpose of education in these ways it is possible to imagine a more 'optimistic and humane view of human possibilities' (Beane, 2005, p. 12).

8. *Information technology* that acknowledges young lives are 'saturated' with social media, and that provides avenues for pursuing 'critical literacies' and the interrogation of 'cyber-culture' (Hattam et al., 1999, p. 14).

We acknowledge that the world is vastly different to our own childhood. Whilst this observation is self-evident, schools have remained largely unchanged for the

past 90 years—age related classrooms, teacher directed instruction, rigid content, rote learning, testing, and abstract learning to name a few. This presents a conundrum for teachers as the gap between what's happening in schools and the realities of students' everyday lives saturated as it is by technological innovations including mobile phones, video games, music, toys, multimedia technologies, computers and social networking widens.

Douglas Kellner (2010) a respected cultural critic maps the nature of the problem in the following way:

> Technological innovations, expansion of global media empires, an explosion of new media and cultural forms, and the unrestricted commercial targeting of children have all contributed to an environment where today's youth are growing up in a mediated world far different than any previous generation. While technological advancements have created new possibilities for the free flow of information, social networking and global activism, there are also the potential for corporations and governments to increase their control over media, restrict the flow of information, and appropriate these new tools for profit and control at the expense of free expression and democracy (p. 556)

Against this backdrop, Besley (2003) argues that 'we need new ways of thinking of and working with kids, otherwise we will become irrelevant as we produce education for categories of kids that no longer exist in the postmodern world' (p. 174). Green and Bigum (1993) pursue a similar argument by wondering whether teachers are, in fact, becoming 'aliens in the classroom' as the gap between the experiences and skills of students and teachers in handling new technologies grows.

Kellner's (2010) argument is that with the continuously expanding technological and economic transformation of society, critical media and technoliteracies become 'an imperative for participatory democracy' because 'new information communication technologies and a market-based media culture have fragmented, connected, converged, diversified, homogenized, flattened, broadened, and reshaped the world' (p. 556). In this context, Kellner argues that education today needs restructuring around a progressive cultural politics capable of making sense of the proliferation of new technologies and media and how it can contribute 'towards furthering radical democratic understandings and transformations of our world' (pp. 565–566). The fundamental dilemma is that as young people are increasingly exposed to the cultural effects of new technologies and mass media, it can be used to 'promote education, democratic self-expression, and social justice—as well as consumerism, narcissism, and worse' (p. 566). Like Kellner, we believe a socially critical school culture should 'conceive of how to use new media and technologies to reconstruct education and help create a more democratic and just society' (p. 566).

In pursuing this democratic project we leave the final word to Neil Postman (1993) whose provocative analysis of the role of technology in society provides ample opportunity for critical reflection:

> A resistance fighter understands that technology must never be accepted as part of the natural order of things, that every technology—from an IQ test to an automobile to a television set to a computer is—a product of a particular economic and political context and carries with it a program, an agenda, a philosophy that may or may not be life-enhancing and that therefore require scrutiny, criticism, and control. In short, a technological resistance fighter maintains an epistemological and psychic distance from any technology, so that it always appears somewhat strange, never inevitable, never neutral. (p. 185)

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has covered considerable ground. Its starting point was an attempt to interrogate the notion of school culture with some new theoretical tools informed by critical theory. The intent was to unsettle some preconceived views about school culture as simply a way of life. We have taken the view that school culture is far more complex and sophisticated and requires closer scrutiny in terms of the relationship between pedagogy, culture and power. Drawing on a series of Australian ethnographic research projects investigating school life from the point of view of students and teachers we have mapped, identified and described a framework organised around three caricatures of school culture—stuck, collaborative and socially critical. The intent was to move beyond what we described as stuck school culture, to collaborative and socially critical ways of thinking and acting around eight dimensions of school culture—construal of teachers as intellectuals, courageous school planning and vision, critical leadership, critical teacher reflection, student voice, school-community dialogue, socially just curriculum, and information technology. These dimensions have been presented not as a blueprint or checklist but rather as a series of thought pieces designed to provoke school-based conversations grounded in dialogic encounters between teachers, students, parents and community activists.

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Chapter 4
Socially Critical School/Community Relations

4.1 Introduction: A Horizon of Possibility

The notion of the socially just school advocated in this book embodies a socially critical approach to school/community relations. We regard this as a vital element in any endeavour to improve educational opportunities and life chances for young people in disadvantaged contexts. This stance is seemingly at odds with current education policy where so much of the emphasis is attached to centrally imposed standards, mandated curriculum, testing regimes, teacher quality and school-based factors, to the exclusion of community and societal influences on the education, health and wellbeing of young people. In keeping with the central theme of this book, our discussion will centre largely on the intersection of youth with school/community relations, especially those that seek to redress educational inequalities. Our account is grounded in our ethnographic studies of student engagement, democratic decision making, dialogic learning and community capacity building in what Sibley (1995) has termed 'excluded communities'—those places that have been marginalized to a large extent from the mainstream of social, economic and political life.

We start with Roger Simon's (1992) observation that 'education is a moral and political enterprise' (p. 15) and schools should be institutions that advance the interests and life chances of all young people, not just the materially and socially advantaged. Schools, as Simon (1988) points out, are 'sites of cultural politics … where a sense of identity, place and worth is informed and contested through practices which organize knowledge and meaning (p. 1)'. The challenge is to advance our understanding of educational practice which:

> … expands what it is to be human and contributes to the establishment of a just and compassionate community within which a 'project of possibility' becomes the guiding principle of social order. (p. 1)

Such a project must include a framework for grasping current realities and be informed by a 'horizon of possibility' (p. 1) animated around such questions as to 'why things are the way they are and how they got to be that way' (p. 1) and importantly, we would add, how they might be re-configured in more socially just ways.

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The chapter is structured as follows. First, we discuss the concept of community and the ideological positions informing contemporary approaches to school/community relations. Challenging the efficacy of the dominant business model of engagement we argue for a person-centred approach that emphasizes democratic decision making, dialogic relationships and 'the importance of building critical communities as an integral, yet neglected, aspect of education for social justice' (Bettez & Hytten, 2013, p. 45). Second, we explore how schools committed to advancing the interests of youth go about the process of creating 'dialogue' within schools and communities. Here we pursue Bernstein's (1992) '*The new constellation*' and the belief that schools and communities need to be partners in a conversation, and Dewey's (2001) complementary notion of democratic schooling. We provide a concrete illustration of democracy in action in a multicultural Australian elementary school. Third, we examine the possibilities of dialogic forms of learning where schools and communities create spaces in which teachers and young people are able to link their 'moments of reflection to their moments of action' (Shor, 1992, p. 86). What this looks like in practice is revealed through classroom observations and interviews with teachers and students in an Australian school setting. Fourth, we focus on narratives and storylines from young people that reveal how schools can work with, rather than against, local communities to develop trusting relationships and build curriculum around the lives and aspirations of students. In positioning youth as 'powerful people' we reveal how power and privilege work against some youth and how it is possible to reconfigure school/community relations that advance the interests of those who are the lest advantaged in the education stakes. We conclude with a summary of key principles and ideas underpinning a socially critical approach to school/community relations.

4.2 Reimagining Community

We begin with the unremarkable observation that schools are social organizations embedded in communities. They are not hermetically sealed from neighbourhoods nor are they quarantined from the economic, social and cultural forces that impact on the daily lives of students. Young people spend a lot of their life in schools but their identities are shaped by a multiplicity of factors including family background, social class, gender, ethnicity, religion, culture and geography, all of which impact on schooling. The intersection of schooling with community life is a powerful reason for promoting dialogic relationships with all those who have an interest in schooling. Although there have been attempts to integrate education and community services and foster parent participation, we suspect that a school-centred model of school/community relationships still prevails in many Australian schools (Mills & Gale, 2004). In the main, community engagement is viewed through a lens that is sharply focused on the agenda of the school or the education system, rather than the local community. Far from seeking ways of connecting with 'community' the key concern for some school authorities seems to be 'how to keep the community at arm's length' (Schutz, 2006, p. 691).

We believe there are compelling moral and pedagogical reasons for engaging parents, teachers, and students in educative dialogues about the curriculum and the purposes of schooling. First, if we subscribe to the ideals of a democratic society then schools must strive to become democratic institutions where people have a say in what happens in the education of young people. We agree with Wood (2005) that school 'should be an experience that teaches each student, through example, what it means to be part of a democratic community' (p. 32) The irony of preaching democracy but practicing tyranny needs no elaboration. Second, learning is enriched when schools acknowledge and value the unique knowledge which parents and other members of the community can bring to bear in educating young people. With reference to schools in the United States, Wood (1992) claims teachers often underutilize community resources, partly because they are so encumbered by bureaucratization and standardization of the curriculum that text book learning is an easy way out. Third, the need to make the curriculum relevant demands that schools engage respectfully with the interests, concerns and aspirations of young people. As described in the Chap. 2, we believe that promoting student voice in schools is crucial to ensuring curriculum relevance and an extension of democratic practices in classrooms.

What constitutes a school community is somewhat problematic. The traditional model of the neighbourhood school with semi-fixed geographical boundaries, has become unsettled in recent times as demographic, economic, technological and social changes have forced us to revise assumptions about the meaning of 'family', 'community', 'home', 'work' and 'school' (Smyth, Down, & McInerney, 2010). With the expansion of online learning, moves towards specialist secondary schools and an increase in overseas student enrolments, the notion of community seems to be framed entirely around contractual arrangements that define the relationship between the school and its stakeholders. Furthermore, neoliberal policies trumpeting the merits of school 'choice' have led to an increasingly stratified and residualised system of education in Australia (Smyth, 2006a, p. 3). The view of the school as a 'business organization' has gained currency over the past two or three decades as Australian states and territories have embraced models of local school management and the role and function of schools have been aligned more closely with a corporate managerialist agenda (Smyth, 1993, 2011a, b). As a discourse of management, efficiency and accountability has taken hold, students and parents are more likely to be regarded as 'clients', principals as 'business managers' and teachers as 'producers' of an educational commodity. Although parents do have governance roles in this devolved model of schooling, those from working class backgrounds typically occupy a peripheral position in decision making forums (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002).

In contesting the moral integrity of this business-oriented view of schools, Fielding (2000) writes about the need to foster schools as 'person-centred communities' (p. 54) that have a 'reciprocal commitment to dialogue and mutual respect as the driving force of educative encounter' (p. 54). Fielding argues that pre-occupation with issues of efficiency and performance encourages the development of schools as mechanistic or impersonal organisations which inhibit educative dialogues and the cultivation of personal relationships within the school community. Thus, it is not

sufficient to establish decision-making forums for parents, teachers and students, instead what is required is the development of inclusive structures and processes that enhance 'dialogic relationships' (Freire, 1985) and promote democratic practices. To some extent, this philosophy is contained in the notion of the school as a learning community. In his pedagogic creed Dewey described school as 'primarily a social institution' (Archambault, 1964, p. 430)—a form of community life focused on the educational development of young people, both as individuals and as members of society. Railing against the functionalist approach to schooling that he witnessed in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century Dewey wrote:

> The measure of the worth of the administration, curriculum and methods of instruction of the school is the extent to which they are animated by a social spirit. (Dewey, 1963, p. 358)

He went on to state that for this social spirit to exist:

> The school must itself be a community life in all that implies. Social perceptions and interests can be developed only in a genuinely social medium—one where there is give and take in the building up of a common experience. (p. 358)

Implicit in Dewey's philosophy are the centrality of learning and the importance of educative dialogues as a basis for building school/community relationships. The notion of learning communities is broadly accepted amongst progressive educators and typically functions at the following levels:

- teaching and learning teams that support the professional development of teachers
- classroom learning communities which emphasize collaborative relationships and participatory modes of learning
- sub-schools, mini-schools and learning teams that endeavour to foster a sense of identity and belonging amongst staff and students, and
- programs, services and structures which encourage the integration of schools and local communities.

To view the school as a learning community acknowledges that education, participation, success, inclusivity and collaboration are important ideals for the whole community. It also affirms that the spaces in which teaching and learning occur are not just confined to classrooms and that the community has pedagogical resources that can actively support the work of schools (Hattam, McInerney, Smyth, & Lawson, 1999; McInerney, 2002, 2006). This can work both ways. Community engagement might also be understood as a process in which the school becomes a significant resource for ongoing community development. This notion of the community-developing school acknowledges that the goals of schooling are inseparably linked to the task of building more equitable communities. Reporting on research by Bryk and colleagues in Chicago schools, Warren and Mapp (2011) claim that engaging participation and leadership of the entire school community is a crucial factor in school reform. They suggest that community organizing with its emphasis on relationship building and collective leadership 'represents a powerful way to build social capital and engage educators, community leaders and families in collaborative efforts to improve schools' (p. 253). Rather than starting with improvement plans the first task should be to build 'deeply relational cultures' in schools (p. 253). From a

pedagogical perspective, it requires that schools develop educational experiences in concert with students that are sensitive to local, regional and global contexts. [Ethnographic accounts of community-oriented learning and community development in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods are described in detail in Smyth, Angus, Down, and McInerney (2008, 2009), Smyth et al. (2010) and Smyth and McInerney (2012, 2014)]

According to Bettez and Hytten (2013), the idea of community compels educators 'to think in terms of inclusiveness, openness, collaboration, ethical behaviour, and responsible action' (p. 52) but it is sometimes invoked in the literature on social justice in simplistic, romantic, and utopian ways. They argue for a more expansive and critical conception of community that takes account of the challenges and barriers to collaborate across 'lines of difference' (p. 53). Although a good deal of the literature on educational communities speaks of 'consensus, sameness, and homogenization' the reality is far more complex and potentially damaging. Noddings (1996) says that community has a dark side in 'its tendency towards parochialism, conformity, exclusion, distrust (or hatred) of outsiders and coercion' (p. 258). As Bettez and Hytten (2013) point out, '[h]owever inadvertently, lines of community mark some as outsiders and some as insiders' (p. 53) thereby generating forms of inclusion and exclusion which can lend legitimacy to racism and extreme forms of nationalism (Rose, 1997). The task they envision is to build critical communities that push forward new ways of thinking about socially just and school/community relationships. Quoting from Hall's (2007) work on academic communities, Bettez and Hytten (2013, p. 55) suggest:

> … community does not depend upon fixed and agreed upon values, commitments, and/or ideals. Neither does it depend upon, nor necessitate, consensus. Rather, "community is a conversational process, a 'becoming' that is never fully achieved, a process we must choose and continuously commit to". (Hall, 2007, p. 89)

This alternative image of community encompasses a socially critical perspective that resonates with our understanding of the socially just school. They argue that educators need to 'cultivate certain habits, dispositions, and practices, as well as create different structures for ongoing engagement' (p. 56). Amongst those specified are:

> the abilities to effectively dialogue across differences, to look outward to build connections and networks, and to be patient and hopeful while trusting that engagement, rather than isolation, or self-centeredness, indeed changes the world around us. (p. 56)

In the next part of the chapter we turn our attention to school/community dialogue as a cornerstone of the socially just school.

4.3 Dialogical Encounters and Democratic Schooling

> It is only by the serious encounter with what is other, different and alien that we can hope to determine what is idiosyncratic, limited and partial. (Bernstein, 1992, p. 328)

Bernstein (1992) suggests that schools and communities need to be partners in a conversation about the education of young people. Rejecting what Bakhtin (1981)

calls 'authoritative discourses', those that come with their authority already fused into them, Bernstein calls for critically engaged dialogue 'which requires opening of oneself to the full power of what the other is saying' (p. 4). Drawing on the metaphor of a constellation, he points to the need for a plurality of views and a deep sense of contingency in reaching conclusions about knowledge claims. However, he rejects the assertion of some postmodernists that 'the very idea of dialogue and communicative rationality belong to the dustbin of the now discredited history of Western rationality and metaphysics.' (p. 50). In *The new constellation,* Bernstein states '[t]here can be no dialogue, no communication unless beliefs, values, commitments, and even emotions and passions are shared in common' (p. 51). Dialogue is not mere talk or debate, rather, as Bernstein points out, in a dialogical encounter:

> [o]ne begins with the assumption that the other has something to say to us and to contribute to our understanding. The initial task is to grasp the other's position in the strongest possible light. One must always be responsive to what the other is saying and showing. This requires imagination, sensitivity and perfecting hermeneutical skills. There is a play, a to-and-fro movement in dialogic encounter, a seeking for a common ground in which we can understand our differences. The other is not an adversary or an opponent but a conversational partner. (p. 337)

Note that Bernstein does not equate dialogue with problem solving nor, necessarily, consensus building amongst participants. The main intent is to come to an understanding of other's viewpoints and to respond in ways that are respectful of difference and open to new ideas. Like Dewey (1963), Bernstein emphasizes the social as well as the psychological nature of the self. In essence, we are social beings and are shaped by social practices in which we are situated. Knowledge needs to be understood as socially and culturally mediated and constructed rather than a fixed independent entity. Bernstein rejects the notion of absolute foundationalism—the view that genuine knowledge must consist of truths which are known with absolute certainty—and maintains that truth claims should be supported by the best empirical evidence at the time. In *The pragmatic turn* Bernstein (2010) asserts:

> [i]t is only through subjecting our prejudices, hypotheses, and guesses to public criticism by a relevant community of inquirers that we can hope to escape from our limited perspectives, test our beliefs and bring about the growth of knowledge. (p. 36)

Having outlined Bernstein's beliefs about the nature of knowledge and dialogue we now turn to Dewey's (2001) theorizing about school/community engagement. Like Bernstein, Dewey was a pragmatist who believed that philosophy should be grounded in the everyday condition of human life rather than an obsessive preoccupation with metaphysical ideas. Accordingly, human knowledge should be linked to practical social outcomes—a notion embodied in Freire's (1996) view of praxis incorporating reflection and action. Democratic ideals lay at the heart of Dewey's philosophy. He was especially interested in the ways in which education could engender democratic values and promote the ideals of civic engagement. However, he believed this was only possible if schools themselves functioned as democratic institutions. Rarely was this the case from his experience. He was highly critical of

the didactic approach to teaching that characterized schooling in the USA. Writing about the uniformity of method and curriculum in what he describes as 'the old education' Dewey (2001) commented:

> … the centre of gravity is outside the child. It is in the teacher, the textbook, anywhere and everywhere you please except in the immediate instincts and activities of the child himself. (p. 32)

Dewey was not a proponent of student-centred pedagogy as such. Rather, he maintained that students should have guided experiences that linked their lives and interests to the curriculum. He believed that schooling was unnecessarily long, tedious and restrictive and the cause of a good deal of disaffection and alienation for many students. In particular, he lamented the disconnection between young lives and schools which he described as 'the great waste':

> From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilise the experience he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; whilst on the other hand he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning at school. (Dewey, 1959, pp. 76–78 quoted in Smith, 2002, p. 586)

Dewey claimed that for a school to foster social spirit and develop democratic character in children, it had to be organized as a co-operative community willing to engage in experimental inquiry. There is a close correspondence here with Bernstein's (1992) notion of a 'critical community of inquirers' (p. 328) which emphasizes the socially embedded nature of knowledge 'where dissent and reasoned disputation … are welcomed as being central to the place of inquiry' (Phillips, 2002, p. 67).

How relevant are Bernstein and Dewey's ideas to our discussion of school/community engagement? Previously we explained how relationships within schools are now being framed around a set of values and practices drawn heavily from the corporate world. Commenting on the consequences of this situation in the United States, de Los Reyes and Gozemba (2002) argue:

> [t]oo often the voices of students and teachers, the very people who understand best what works in educational settings, are ignored in favour of listening to corporate and political leaders, who have not set foot in a classroom in years. (p. 30)

We suggest that this is largely true of the Australian scene as well. Increasingly, it appears that the social and aesthetic domains of education have been subverted by an emphasis on the technical and utilitarian purposes of schooling. Despite a language of 'local empowerment', the imposition of centrally mandated curricula, benchmarks, standardized testing regimes and other accountability measures have undermined the possibility of dialogical encounters and democratic practices. Historically, this has always been problematic in traditional high schools where credentialing arrangements, hierarchical structures and entrenched pedagogies lead to disparities in power and student alienation (Smyth, McInerney, Hattam, & Lawson, 1999b). A school's capacity to address these issues in a holistic way is further impeded by a culture of privatism and isolation that has traditionally characterised teaching in secondary school settings (Hargreaves, 1992). Notwithstanding the impediments, we believe there are spaces where educators and community members can reclaim

policies and practices to advance the more egalitarian goals of schooling. From our experience, there are schools and educators deeply troubled by the dominant discourse of the marketplace that strive to implement policies based on relational power, trust and solidarity with those who have the greatest investment in the community. Dialogical encounters and democratic action as envisaged by Bernstein and Dewey are still possible as we shall illustrate in the case study below.

4.4 Democracy in Action at Wattle Plains School

Wattle Plains, the pseudonym for a culturally diverse, working-class school community on the fringe of an Australian city, was one of the sites selected for a detailed investigation of school-based forms of teacher development in the late 1990s (Smyth, McInerney, Hattam, & Lawson, 1999a). It was also the main focus of a critical ethnographic account of school reform for social justice (McInerney, 2004) that involved an extensive phase of participant observation and semi-structured interviews with 12 teachers and school leaders. At the time of the research, the school had a population of 900 students, more than one-third of whom came from a non-English speaking background. Approximately 50 % of parents qualified for some form of government financial support because of their low socioeconomic status. The school incorporated a child parent centre, a junior primary school and a primary school with both principals and other leadership personnel working collaboratively across the campus. Sixty five staff members were organised in collegiate teams that had a focus on professional learning and a whole school approach to curriculum development. Coordinators in the arts, literacy, science and technology worked across the school to facilitate curriculum change and teachers' learning. Students were involved in curriculum decision making through a student representative council known as the Wattle Plains Decision Makers. An Aboriginal Students Group and Overseas Committee took account of the special concerns of Indigenous students and those from linguistically diverse backgrounds.

As we were to observe during our time in the school, establishing curriculum priorities was a participatory process which involved the school community in systematic planning and discussion about curriculum issues. How this occurred is revealed in the following account of a school review conducted in the mid-1990s.

> During an interview with the school principals we were told that children were engaged in the review in several ways. At the outset, meetings were held with the student council, the Aboriginal students' group and students from non-English speaking backgrounds, to discuss the issues related to quality of education in the eight required areas of study stipulated in the state education department's curriculum guidelines. Students in small groups of mixed age and gender were then invited to contribute to the review in their classroom settings. Their rights to a quality education were explained and they were then asked to identify areas in the curriculum where they thought they were getting good outcomes and areas which they thought needed to be improved. Students were asked to justify their decisions and they used a preferential voting system to decide their priorities. Every child had six plastic tokens to allocate in a way that best reflected the strength of their feelings on issues they identified.

> In the final analysis, it seems that students expressed a clear preference for the visual and performing arts, followed by Aboriginal studies. Apparently there was a good deal of lobbying from Aboriginal children and parents to support the latter priority. Class representatives were involved in the collection of data from student groups and the whole process was used as a model for student participation in the school. When the process was conducted with staff, the two major priorities identified were literacy and science. The consultation with parents included discussions with the Vietnamese, Khmer and Polish communities, as well as members of the school council and Aboriginal groups. Most parents voted for literacy, but Vietnamese parents chose science as a major focus and Aboriginal parents wanted an emphasis on Aboriginal studies. This information was taken back to the staff for their consideration of the varying priorities of teachers, parents and students.
>
> When it came to the final voting, a lot of staff changed their vote and supported students in their choice of the arts. According to the principals, the student presentation had made a big impact on many teachers, and, after some deliberation, agreement was reached that literacy and the arts would become immediate curriculum priorities. Aboriginal Studies was also added to the plan and it was agreed that science should be a curriculum priority in 1998. (Adapted from McInerney, 2004, pp. 112–114)

It is easy to be dismissive of participatory models of curriculum development, especially when it often amounts to little more than tokenism, but in this instance, the students' ideas and decisions were taken seriously, so much so that their deliberations had a profound effect on the final outcome. To pursue Bernstein's understanding of what is involved in a dialogical encounter, students and parents became conversational partners in dialogues about significant educational matters. Responding to student voice involved more than them 'having a say'; it actually meant taking on board new curriculum directions based on their considered views. Importantly, parent participation took account of a plurality of views and perspectives reflecting the diverse cultural groups which made up the community. Parents were not lumped together as a homogeneous group, but were able to lobby for priorities which reflected their own value positions. Responding to cultural difference in this context revealed a concern for the most marginalised parents whose views could well be ignored if the school simply gave expression to the will of the majority.

The democratic process in this instance was not confined to gathering opinions and 'number crunching', but was preceded by dialogues which enlarged the knowledge of parents and students around the notion of curriculum entitlement. We believe this is a powerful example of the 'democratization of pedagogical and educational power' (Macedo, 1994, p. 168) where parents, students and teachers come together to discuss and develop school-based curriculum in response to grassroots concerns. It also demonstrated a willingness on the part of the school to nurture internally persuasive discourses (Goodman, 1994) that advanced the best interests of the school and community rather than falling back on authoritative discourses where questions of knowledge and power were effectively settled (Smyth et al., 1999a). To the extent that Wattle Plains was able to sustain a culture of debate about teaching and learning, it is perhaps the best example we can cite of a school that approaches Bernstein's (1992) view of a 'critical community of inquirers'.

4.5 Dialogic and Community-Engaged Learning

To live in openness towards others and to have an open-ended curiosity towards life and its challenges is essential to educational practice (Freire, 2001, p.120).

To this point, our discussion has centred chiefly on the cultural aspects of school/community relations and the constraints and opportunities for dialogic decision making in the current policy environment. We now want to focus more particularly on young people and the potential of 'dialogic learning' to advance our notion of the socially just school. The account will proceed from a theoretical account of these issues informed by the writings of Freire and Shor to a discussion of the practical possibilities and limitations of implementing critically engaged forms of learning based on insights from ethnographic research in an Australian elementary school.

Despite the popularity of constructivist views of learning in some quarters, the most common instructional method in classrooms remains 'the narrative voice of the teacher' (Shor, 1992, p. 97). Freire (1996) likens this monologic approach to teaching as 'banking concept' in which knowledge is deposited in the minds of students by a teacher who knows all (p. 53). Fundamentally, it encases a deficit view of students positioning them as 'objects' rather than 'subjects' with a sense of agency. In opposition to this domesticating model, he proposes a problem-posing approach which abandons the depositing notion of knowledge in favour of a dialogic method where students are conceived as constructors of the curriculum and critical investigators into their own communities (McInerney, 2004). How are we to understand dialogue in this context? In Shor's words:

> Dialogue is a capacity and inclination of human beings to reflect together on the meaning of their experience and their knowledge and can be thought of as the threads of communication that bind people together and prepare them for reflective action. Dialogue links people together through discourse and links their moments of reflection to their moments of action. (p. 86)

Mutuality, reciprocity, reflection and action are the hallmarks of dialogue. Dialogue, should not be understood as 'a mere technique' or as 'a kind of tactic we use' (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 13).

> On the contrary, dialogue must be understood as something taking part in the very historical nature of human beings. It is part of our historical progress in becoming human beings. That is, dialogue is a kind of necessary posture to the extent that humans have become more and more critically communicative beings. Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it … Through dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don't know, we can act critically to transform reality. (p. 13)

Shor (1992) does not construe dialogic pedagogy as a laissez faire approach to teaching that ignores structured knowledge and literacy skills. In a similar vein to Dewey, he argues for 'student centred critical teaching [that] balances the authority and expertise of the teacher with the culture and language of the students' (p. 104). Where this approach differs from teacher-student relationships in traditional classrooms is through the mutually created discourses which question taken-for-granted views 'about the canons of knowledge and challenges power relations in society in

the classroom and society' (p. 87). The connection between dialogic teaching and community-oriented learning becomes more apparent when we contemplate Freire's exhortation to teachers:

> Why not discuss with students the concrete realities of their lives … establish an intimate connection between knowledge considered crucial for the curriculum and knowledge that is the fruits of the lived experiences of students as individuals? (Freire, 2001 p. 36)

The concrete realities of young people's lives are intimately bound to their cultural and family backgrounds, the neighbourhoods and communities in which they live and their social and economic backgrounds. Yet, all too often the 'fruits of lived experiences' which youth bring to school are devalued or ignored by educators when it comes to curriculum planning and classroom instruction. This is especially so in schools serving low socioeconomic neighbourhoods where deficit views of young people and their families often prevail. As we have reported previously:

> Typically, these neighbourhoods are perceived as lacking in assets, social networks and funds of knowledge to build sustainable and cohesive communities. Correspondingly, students in these schools are often categorized as emotionally vulnerable or 'at-risk' learners with low self esteem and fragile identities … (Smyth et al., 2009, p. 24)

What we are arguing for in this chapter is a socially critical view of school/community relations that respects what students know, focuses on community strengths rather than deficiencies and acknowledges community 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) as rich resources for students' learning. It is an approach which enjoins dialogic learning (Shor & Freire, 1987) and place-based pedagogies (Gruenewald, 2003; McInerney, Smyth, & Down, 2011; Smith, 2002) as one of the ways of addressing the problems of alienation and disengagement that constitute many young people's experience of schooling. We shall delve more deeply into place-based learning and other aspects of community-oriented learning in the Chap. 6 on the socially just curriculum, but our immediate task here is to describe a school-based example of dialogic learning at Plainsville School.

4.6 Student Initiated Curriculum at Plainsville

Described in detail in Smyth and McInerney (2007a, 2007b) the study was part of a 'multi-sited ethnography' (Marcus, 1995), conducted between 2001 and 2003, which explored the identity formation of middle school teachers and the structural, cultural and pedagogical elements of school reform in the adolescent years of schooling. Built in the early 1960s, Plainsville was a physically run-down Reception to Year 8 public school located in outer suburb of an Australian city. The school had an enrolment of 300 students, including 20 Aboriginal students and a significant number of children with disabilities. More than 80 % of students received government assistance in the form of a school card. From our perspective, what the school was trying to achieve though a student initiated curriculum was a remarkably innovative attempt to create dialogic structures and spaces for young people to succeed with schooling

in a context of disadvantage. This is a complex story and our account here is necessarily brief but we shall reveal at least a few strands of the narrative as they relate to:

1. curriculum innovation
2. fostering dialogic relations
3. negotiated curriculum
4. student activism, and
5. community engagement

4.6.1 Curriculum Innovation

The phrase, 'living on the edge' was often used by teachers to describe the teaching and learning context of Plainsville. It seemed an appropriate metaphor. Many students and their families were living on the edge of economic survival. The school was very much at the edge of curriculum innovation having pushed the boundaries of student initiated learning well beyond most middle schools. This was a risky business and not without set-backs. Teachers had to be prepared to share their power with students and negotiate curriculum in ways that respected student interests as well as satisfying the curriculum requirements of the state education system. We were told that the 'old ways' simply didn't work for kids in Plainsville. This was most forcefully expressed by a former student who recollected his experience of high school in these words:

> In a typical lesson you sit there and copy stuff from the board … There's no teacher–student relationship at all where they can come in and work together to achieve a common goal which is the students' learning … [There's] a corridor with classrooms, chairs in rows, a teacher and a whiteboard up front which isn't really an area which is going to engage students in learning … There's no individuality in what you need to learn, and what is the best way for you to learn it. If you're not capable of sitting there with a pad and a pen and copying and doing what you've been told, then you're not, in their eyes, you're not learning … you're going to fail … The biggest problem isn't that students are failing school … it's that the school is failing the student [although] they don't want to see it that way. The student failed school; the school never fails the student. The system is always right. The system is never wrong. (25 February 2003)

In rejecting the efficacy of this industrial model of teaching and learning, the Plainsville school community set out to support students to become 'architects of their own education' (Eisner, 2002, p. 582) through a student-initiated curriculum, known popularly as the SIC. A teacher described the intent behind their version of student-centred learning as follows:

> [I]t's a lot about student voice and giving them the power to express themselves, to choose their own learning, to make decisions on what they want to do and where they want to go … giving them a range of different choices and out-of-school learning … building up their own power … not just telling them what needs to be done. (9 March 2003)

4.6.2 Fostering Dialogic Relations

In the new arrangements, 88 students in years 6–9 were organized into four learning teams which became the primary unit of pastoral care and forum for dialogic conversations. This occurred twice daily through talking circles, when students met in learning teams with adult educators. (We should add that an educating adult at Plainsville might be a teacher, a school support officer, a parent, an older student or a community member.) What happened in talking circles is described below.

> I joined a newly appointed teacher, Greg, for the year 8/9 talking circle in Learning Area 5. Prior to the talking circle Greg was busy catching up with students over the previous day's tasks, checking their names off lists as they handed him pieces of work. Another adult, Susan, joined the talking circle with 25 students. The talking circle followed similar routines and rituals that we observed previously, namely: (a) students and adults were seated on the floor in a circle (b) a student chairperson welcomed everybody (c) a student read the attendance roll personally greeting each student by name and recording details of absences etc. (d) another student read the daily bulletin (e) the chair asked if there are any issues that need discussing —none on this day (f) a student keeps a record of the discussion. Greg intervened on a couple of occasions to remind students about respectful behaviour towards each other. All students are expected to say 'good morning' to the person reading the roll. 'Grunts and nods are not acceptable'. (Extract from fieldnotes 4 February 2003)

The notion of dialogic space was very different at Plainsville. There were no 'self-contained', teacher-led classrooms as such. All available spaces were called 'learning areas' and students made decisions on a daily basis about which spaces inside and outside the school best suited their learning needs. Typically, adults did not program learning for groups of students. Instead, students had their own individual learning plan for English, mathematics, 'issues' and 'out of class learning'. Prior to preparing a learning plan, students met with adults to audit their own knowledge and to make decisions about what and how they wanted to learn. They had a student-friendly version of the state curriculum guidelines to ensure that they incorporated state-mandated learning objectives into their plans. As a general rule, teachers did not engage in whole of class instruction; rather, students negotiated learning meetings with adults who had specialist knowledge and expertise in a particular topic, subject or skill. With reference to a key competencies framework and other curriculum guidelines, students collected evidence of their learning to share with others. A permanent record of their achievement was kept in a 'learning folder'. When a student had completed a learning plan and satisfied criteria set out in the curriculum standards framework, they receive formal recognition in the form of a 'knowing card' which was signed off by an adult. Finally, when the topic was completed, they arrange to meet with an adult and three other students to talk about what they had learnt in the form of a 'round table assessment'.

4.6.3 Negotiated Learning

Although negotiated learning lay at the heart of this approach, students had a high level of support from adult team members in assisting them to develop organizational skills, posing challenges, monitoring their progress, helping them to evaluate and report on their learning, providing them with a range of ways of learning about topics under study and, generally assisting them to become more independent and confident learners. Perhaps the dialogic nature of learning in this setting is best illustrated through the following example.

> I join a group of 7 boys who are meeting with Mary-Lou, the principal, to discuss their ideas for a fishing learning plan. She has a copy of the plan in the form of a concept map. The map indicated the learning audits that have been undertaken and outlines the content or subject matter (partly derived from the learnings and concepts in the state-wide curriculum and standards framework), the resources they want to access and the ways they want to represent their inquiry. They wish to organize an excursion to the maritime museum and the natural history museum to gather information for their study. Mary-Lou supports their proposal and assists them to plan the excursion for the following day. With her help, they make a list of the things that need to be done—booking into the museums, costing the excursion, organizing a bus driver for the school's mini bus. They decide to invite another teacher, Matthew, to join them on the excursion because they want to get to know him a little better outside of school and he also has a bus drivers' licence.
>
> Mary-Lou poses challenges about the topic the boys have chosen. In the first instance, it seems that the boys selected fishing because it was a recreational interest for some of them and their mates wanted to join them as well. Mary-Lou told me later that she could see the learning potential of this issue for these students, some of whom were often 'switched off' by school. However, she also saw the importance of connecting this topic to important ideas and concepts from the state-wide curriculum and standards framework so that their knowledge was extended in a relevant and useful way. She therefore spent a good deal of time with the boys getting them to identify important subject matter and lines of inquiry into the issue. Some of the areas identified by the group included fish anatomy and physiology, feeding habits, habitats, fishing grounds and predators. They wanted to conduct an experiment into fish anatomy and proposed dissecting a fish. Mary-Lou encouraged them to book a learning group on dissection with Sally, the assistant principal and science expert. She said that the school would be willing to purchase dissecting tools and directed them to a scientific materials catalogue from which to order what was needed.
>
> The task of deciding who is to do what to make the excursion happen begins. Two students volunteer to phone the museums to check admission entrance fees and make necessary booking arrangements. Another two agree to do the paper work for the excursion—organize consent forms, complete administration procedures etc. Mary-Lou suggests that 20 minutes should be sufficient time to accomplish these tasks. The boys are used to this kind of planning and move into action immediately. Other students begin to check out resources in the library and investigate the cost and availability of dissection kits in science catalogues (Extract from fieldnotes 4 February 2003).

Discussion about the fishing learning plan resumed the next day and organizational aspects of the excursions were more firmly established. It was during this meeting that a boy in the group referred to another as 'a gay'. It was apparently said in jest but Mary-Lou spent 2–3 min talking to the group about the offence that that this label can cause. 'Some people are still sorting out their sexual identity', she tells the group. This was one of the most candid conversations I have heard on

homophobia and demonstrated the school's commitment to deal with such matters in an educative and dialogic manner rather than invoking punitive action.

4.6.4 Student Activism

Rather than suppressing young people's ideas about politics and divisive matters, the school was willing to create space and time for them to share their views. An instance of this occurred during a middle school meeting when two girls expressed a desire to get involved in a campaign for peace in the Middle East. At the time the Australian Prime Minister had committed Australia to joining a coalition of nations to invade Iraq, a decision that was roundly condemned by many Australians. The girls had received replies to letters of concern from Australia's Foreign Minister and other politicians and were keen to participate in a forthcoming rally. The principal invited them to do a presentation to the middle school the next day and explained that she would be willing to organize a school bus to take students to the rally if there was a reasonable measure of support. The girls promoted their message by sticking a poster to their backs—an action which became a great talking point for adults and students alike. Not only was this kind of activism tolerated at Plainsville but it was encouraged.

A commitment to student voice (Smyth, 2006b) was evident in student representative bodies and other decision-making forums. There were student representatives on the Governing Council and all other school committees. A lot of students were involved in a peer mediation program and school/community projects arising from learning groups. They had an opportunity to manage projects with support from adults. Students were to apply for jobs within the school, for example at the reception desk, at the sports shed, or catering in the canteen. They received job training and gained accreditation from the school for their work. The school sought to establish opportunities for its children's voices to be heard in the widest possible contexts. In 2001 Plainsville school was selected to present a workshop session on innovative approaches to learning and technology at the World Computers in Education Conference in Copenhagen. Accompanied by the school principal and IT manager, the three 12 year-old students who gave the presentation made such a great impression that they were invited to speak at the closing ceremony. Addressing the state legislature, a local member of parliament expressed her admiration for the student's efforts and the school's innovative approach to learning.

> The three [students] stood and spoke very proudly to the 1,200 delegates from 38 countries about what they had learnt during the conference and their impressions of the sessions that they had attended. They closed the conference with a challenge to all participants to go back to their education sites and use what they had learnt to make a difference for the learners with whom they worked. … I close by saying that this is an outstanding example of what young people and schools can do when they work in partnerships with their students, teachers and community. (Extract from South Australia, Parliamentary House of Assembly, Hansard Records, 15 November, 2001, p. 2827)

4.6.5 Community Engagement

Moll et al. (1992) argue that the funds of knowledge embodied in households and communities can support educational goals of schools and improve classroom instruction. Not only was Plainsville School a meeting place for community groups but it was an important contributor to social capital through its adult education programs, art and craft courses and recreational activities. There was a view that pedagogical knowledge did not reside exclusively with teachers and we were constantly reminded about the importance of 'bringing the community into the school'. This occurred in several ways. First, all students were involved in service learning which engaged them in community development projects in conjunction with the local municipal council and other organizations such as aged care homes and childcare centres. While the intent of this learning was to encourage the idea of voluntarism—to give something back to the community—it also brought students into contact with other significant adults who could support their learning about vocational education, child care, local industries, retail trade and health and welfare. It also shifted the focus of their learning away from the notion of an individual benefit to a collective good. Second, parents and other community members organized and conducted sporting, cultural and craft activities as part of an experiential learning program. Parent involvement brought other tangible benefits as well as a teacher explained:

> One of our parents can't read and write and she has seven children. We found out she was really good at art and craft. She said, 'Why would anyone want to talk to me?' but she stayed and brought another friend and now there are four of them. She comes to governing council because of her confidence. She has started to go to the learning groups here and asked if we can start an adult learning group here. (Teacher, 20 November 2002)

Not only did the students gain from the art and craft initiatives, but as the parents grew in confidence they began to see that they had the capacity to make a worthwhile contribution to school governance.

To conclude this section, dialogic learning of the kind described above is very rare in schools and can have a short-life span. Amidst a great deal of community angst and divisiveness, the school principal at the time was not re-appointed upon expiry of her tenure in 2005 and a good deal of the structures and practices supporting student initiated learning were dismantled in subsequent years. We do not propose to delve into the controversy surrounding the changes in leadership and curriculum except to restate our previously expressed view (Smyth & McInerney, 2007b) that:

> Plainsville took a principled moral and ideological stand on why schools serve some students well, while actively damaging or marginalizing others. This school was prepared to put a negotiated set of common understandings about children and how they learn at the centre of everything they did, and continually subject those ideas to interrogation, dialogue and debate. … The view at Plainsville was that schools ought to be vibrant and engaging places for all students, and that the crucial ingredient was creating school cultures, structures and pedagogies that gave students and their families a real measure of ownership over learning. (p. 1164)

What emerges quite strongly in this view of school/community relationship is the issue of power and how it is exercised and distributed. This is a matter we take up in the next part of the chapter when we look at the experiences of young people in re-engagement programs for young people who have 'dropped out' of school.

4.7 When Students Have Power

Power is a key theme in the lives of young people and a central concern of critical educators, such as Ira Shor (1996) whose book, *When students have power* (see also Smyth, 2006b), remains one of the most powerful accounts of the dilemmas and possibilities of implementing a critical pedagogy in an undergraduate teaching program. Shor has a deep concern for student agency and how this can be undermined by the use of arbitrary authority in educational institutions. In their study of equality and power in schools, Lynch and Lodge (2002) share similar concerns. Power is everywhere in schools they state, 'although the ability to control and influence events is by no means evenly dispersed' (p. 188). They go on to argue:

> Creating equality in education demands that we treat power as an equality problem. We need to set up structures to democratize power relations in all their manifestations. We need to move towards more participatory forms of democratic engagement if those who are currently marginalized in power terms are to be enabled to exercise real control over decision-making. (p. 188)

From our observations, what repels many young people in formal education is their lack of institutional power. As Shor (1996) points out, to a very large extent 'curriculum is made for them by others' (p. 31). So far in this chapter, we have described instances of power sharing and school/community structures which promote democratic engagement in elementary school settings. We now turn our attention to the experience of a young woman who had dropped out of school but chose to resume her education through an alternative (second-chance) program.

4.8 Amanda's Story

Few schools have the resources and programs to cater adequately for pregnant or parenting students. As a consequence, the majority leave school before completing formal secondary education certificates, thereby restricting their employment and further education prospects. Amanda left school in these circumstances but at 21 years of age took the bold step of reconnecting with schooling through a young parents group in an alternative education program known as Connexions. Established in 2005 as an alternative to the mainstream curriculum in Federation City, the program offered a range of education options for early school leavers in the secondary years of schooling. Many students participated in studies leading to a certificate in applied learning but they were also able to choose academic subjects leading to a high school certificate that satisfied university entry requirements.

'Now I'm living my life'

I had my baby when I was 16 years old and I've been in the Young Parents Group for nearly 4 years now. My involvement with Connexions has completely changed my life and how I see a community. That's what a school should be. Unfortunately, I never had good experiences with school. When I was 14 years of age teachers were telling me to leave because they were going to kick me out anyway. They said they couldn't handle me a full day so I was on half time. I sort of stayed there to spite them until I was 15. It wasn't bullying that caused me problems it was just the whole dynamic. I'm a bright girl and I'm good at English but the teachers just didn't care. They give the attention to the 'A' students but not to the 'run-a-mucks'. Some kids had behaviour contracts and if you misbehaved you had to get out. There was a bit of a legal thing to it. When I was in grade 6 in my primary school they invented a little room (an isolation centre) they called Siberia. I've always been a bit of a distraction because I'm a bit outspoken and teachers can't handle that.

I found out about the young mum's program through the district nurse who visited me at home. The program has been featured in the local newspaper and if I see young parents I tell them about how good this group is. All young mums should be connected and helping each other. There are 30 girls in our program and I've seen lots and lots of young mums just in Federation City alone. Some of the girls you see are very young and you wonder if they know what support is out there. Since I've been here I've done TAFE [Technical and Further Education] courses in Community Service, Mental Health and I'm a couple of months from completing a Certificate 4 in Responsible Service of Alcohol. I want to be a journalist and did some work experience at the Federation City Courier. I've had a few issues in my life and I want to give a little bit back to the young mums because they need the help. It's a hidden problem in Federation City—a problem than people don't want to acknowledge.

I don't want my son to hate school. I want him to have good experiences with teachers and the students. I want to have good stories to tell him about school. My mum died when I was 11 and my dad raised 4 kids. I had drug and alcohol issues and that was a very hard situation to work through. At the time I would rather be anywhere than go to school. So I do what I can for other young mums. I tell them that even though you've had all these obstacles you can make a life for yourself. I'm at a stage that I am thankful for everything that has happened to me because it's given me the drive to do what I can. I'm six months away from getting off the Centerlink [welfare] program when I can start work at the end of June. I see myself as a successful person now. I speak to groups on women's health issues and I've been back to my former school and spoken to some Year 9 students.

Since coming into this program my health has improved. When I first joined the group I had an anxiety problem and I could never sit still for a second. After being in the program for 2 years I got help from Julieanne, the youth worker. She has been through this herself and she told me to relax and put yourself first because if you are not in a healthy state you can't look after your child. I did cooking up at the community house. Some of these young mums have no idea how to cook. I had a bit of experience because my mum had died and I had to look after myself but a lot of them eat McDonalds every day. Here we teach them how to budget and cook meals. We got memberships to the YMCA [Young Mens' Christian Association, a not-for profit community organisation with a focus on physical activity] and some girls are doing some gym classes. This is really good because some of girls have weight issues which can cause them grief. Doing exercise makes you feel good and gives you some energy. We've got a common goal: we just want to do the best we can for our kids.

A lot of young mums don't have any connection with other people and their only contact is through this program. They start bringing toxic people in because they don't have anybody. The program's helped me as a communicator to be more open and honest. I give my phone number to everyone and say no matter what time it is ring me and I'll come and help. Mental health is a big issue. There is a lot of anxiety in our group and we've had cases of depression and suicide so it is an issue. Coming here a couple of days a week really saves them.

> The kind of help we get here you would never get in a normal school. There's no intimidation. It's not like the teacher is the boss. You can talk to them like they are your friends. When it comes to Tuesday morning you think 'yes I need to get into school'. There's a determination to get the kids up and get on the bus even in the pouring rain. People want to be here so they are respectful towards others. I have booked my little brother in here and I tell him that they are not teachers they are people who help you. They are not going to fail you if you don't do what you have to. I've had some family support. My dad's always been around but it's only in the last 6 months that he's baby sat my son. The teachers have really been my support system. The coordinator, Frank, has helped several young mums link into child care and other things. He's Grandpa Frank to all the young kids. The main obstacle when you join the group is yourself really. When you haven't had any social connections it is quite confronting to walk into a group of people. It wasn't until a couple of years in and completing a couple of small things that I slowly built up my confidence. It's scary to think where I would be without this program. I'd probably be sitting at home drugged out of my head. Now I'm living my life. (Extract from a portrait of Amanda developed from a transcript of an interview, 12 March 2010)

Discussing the importance of relational learning in schooling, Smyth (2011b) makes the following point:

> When we fail to place relationships at the centre of schooling and allow the experiences of increasing numbers of students to be degraded, corroded, fractured, fragmented, and rendered meaningless, then we fail in one of our most fundamental responsibilities as citizens in a democracy. (p. 69)

Amanda describes a major change in her attitude to education and her self-image after joining Connexions. In many ways the locus of control over learning had shifted from the teacher to herself and she was imbued with greater sense of agency and self-belief. She found herself in a far more hospitable environment than she had experienced at school. It is obvious from what she says that the young parents group operated as much as a social support network for young mothers as it did an accredited educational program. In the first instance, much of the emphasis was on basic literacy and numeracy, life skills and social interaction but as they gained in confidence the girls move into more academic and vocationally oriented programs offered through TAFE institutes and other providers. Amanda credits Connexions with a life-changing experience for her. It gave her a more optimistic view of the benefits of schooling, brought her in contact with people who really cared for her education and wellbeing, gave her the opportunity to study courses that connected to her aspirations, and helped to pull her out of state of despair and depression that had engulfed her life. 'Now I'm living my life', she says.

Imbued with a spirit of generosity and empathy for young women who have gone through a similar experience, Amanda took on a mentoring role in the group and became an advocate for the program within the community. Like many of the young mothers in the group, Amanda acknowledged that her prime responsibility is to her young child. Talking on behalf of the group she claimed 'we've got a common goal: we just want to do the best we can for our kids'. In a very real sense engagement with Connexions helped to make her a powerful person.

4.9 Concluding Comments

We have traversed a good deal of theoretical and pedagogical terrain in mapping the contours of a socially critical approach to school/community relations in this chapter. From the outset, we were guided by Simon's (1988) notion of a 'horizon of possibility' in seeking to identify and describe those values and practices which contribute to the creation of a more just and compassionate community. This led us to critically review some of the prevailing models of school/community engagement framed around (a) a business-oriented ethos (b) the notion of learning communities, and (c) a commitment to community capacity building. In arguing for a socially critical approach to school/community relations, we were drawn to Fielding's views of 'the person-centred community', Bernstein's theorizing around 'dialogical encounters' and a 'critical community of inquirers', Dewey's notion of 'democratic schooling' and Freire and Shor's advocacy for dialogic forms of learning. Conscious of the imperative to ground our account in the lived experiences of those involved in schools, we drew extensively on ethnographic studies to show examples of dialogic and participatory decision-making and community engagement in Australian schools.

As we have indicated in this chapter, sustaining a socially critical approach to school/community relations is difficult in the current policy environment which leaves little space for parents and teacher—let alone students—to voice their views about the goals of schooling. However, we think it is possible to identify features of more democratic, community-oriented and humane approaches based on insider perspectives from research we have undertaken in schools (Smyth et al., 2009). What follows is far from being a definitive set of principles but we suggest it may encourage debate and discussion about the elements that make for community-oriented and socially-engaged schooling. In schools which have made some progress towards a socially critical approach to school/community engagement:

- Respectful relationships are the prevailing norms of the school culture
- Students feel a strong sense of identity, belonging and acceptance
- There is an understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity
- A large measure of trust and goodwill characterize school/community relationships
- There is a strong sense that the school belongs to the community
- There is a focus on community strengths and assets rather than deficiencies
- A culture of inclusion is the norm in school decision making processes
- Community funds of knowledge become a core part of the curriculum
- The school is highly regarded as a community resource and major contributor to community capacity building
- All parents and carers in the community are able to play an active role in the life of the school
- There is a valuing of what students bring to school in terms of their histories, culture and family backgrounds
- A concern for social justice and democratic practices is ingrained in the culture, pedagogy and organizational structures of the school.

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Chapter 5
Socially Critical Pedagogy of Teaching

5.1 Introduction

We commenced writing this chapter during the final throes of the 2013 Federal Election campaign in Australia. Once again, education is thrust into the spotlight as politicians especially those on the conservative side of politics seek political and ideological advantage by beating the drum of standards, teacher quality, performance pay, values, teacher training, and back-to-basics teaching methods. Whilst politicians are tightly scripted during election campaigns for fear of startling wavering voters, education policy and teachers' work in particular appear to be fair game as the assault on public schools, teachers and students continues unabated. Tony Abbott, Federal Coalition leader (and now Prime Minister) jumped on the bandwagon at a National Press Club speech in Canberra where he urged a rethink of the national history curriculum arguing that 'it underplays the heritage of Western civilization, gives too much focus to trade unions and overlooks conservative prime ministers' (Lane & Maher, 2013). This line of attack can be traced back to Abbott's mentor and former conservative Prime Minister John Howard who in the words of Shanahan (2006) 'marshaled his allies on the intellectual Right … for another surge against those of "the soft left" whom he warned still held sway in educational and cultural life' (p. 4).

In a similar vein, Christopher Pyne the Coalition spokesperson on education (and now Minister of Education) 'warned the teachers union he is up for a fight if it tries to stand in the way of an Abbott government's education reforms' (Owen, 2013). These reforms centre on a return to 'more practical teaching methods based on more didactic teaching methods' (Swan, 2013). On other occasions conservative politicians revealed their deep-rooted hostility to matters of social justice especially when it involves a redistribution of public funds towards those children and schools in most need. Bronwyn Bishop, a representative of the affluent northern beaches electorate of MacKellar in Sydney commented at a public meeting that 'the schools in northern Sydney were the best in Australia and any move to a federalised education scheme would lead to their "dumbing down"' (Maley, 2013). She said, 'They do call us the insular peninsula, but we do have a special way of life that should be protected' (Maley, 2013). Indeed.

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We raise these parochial debates, not as a comprehensive analysis of education policy in Australia or elsewhere for that matter, but simply to make the point that within this climate any attempt to introduce 'unauthorized methods' (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998a) which seek to interrupt traditional methods of teaching and pursue an alternative socially critical pedagogy of teaching face significant obstacles in an era dominated by neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies (Apple, 2000, 2001). This should hardly be surprising given that a socially critical pedagogy of teaching 'foregrounds the *interaction* among context, power, method, and subject matter' (Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998a, p. 2). It directly questions the view that teaching can be neutral. Horton and Freire (1991) explain, 'There can be no such thing as neutrality. It's a code word for the existing system' (p. 102). As Shor (1992) explains it, education can serve to either 'enable or inhibit the questioning habits of students, thus developing or disabling their critical relation to knowledge, schooling and society' (pp. 12–13). In this book we do not pretend to be neutral about the authoritarian and antidemocratic policies being advocated by Abbott, Pyne, Bishop and other conservative commentators (such as Rupert Murdoch's media empire and the free market Institute of Public Affairs) opposed to more democratic, humane and emancipatory forms of education.

This chapter is, therefore, an attempt to speak back to what Daniels (1995) describes as a 'centralized, top-down, Nation at Risk, policing-orientated, rapt-their-knuckles reform movement' (p. 18). Like Daniels, we support an alternative approach to school reform, one that is a 'teacher-driven, grassroots, bottom-up, basically democratic movement that says that what we do in schools doesn't work. We've got to change what we teach and the way we teach it' (p. 18). This latter approach, according to Shor (1999), 'represent[s a] different politics, different models for teaching and learning, and finally different visions of the people and society we should build through education' (p. vii).

This said we do not wish to give the impression that the current state of affairs in politics and education is not without hope, far from it. As we show in this book 'another kind of school is possible' (Wrigley, 2006)—a socially just school based on the principles and values of critical inquiry, social justice, democracy, compassion, care and respect. In pursuing these pedagogical ideals we take a stand against the top-down and authoritarian approaches proffered by our political leaders and their allies in order to present an alternative socially critical pedagogy of teaching that signposts a way forward both intellectually and practically in these 'dark times' (Benhabib, 2010). We do not underestimate the challenges ahead. We appreciate the difficulties teachers confront when questioning the status quo, it's a risky business. This helps explain why socially critical teaching largely occurs 'under the radar' and 'off the grid' in universities and schools. It involves thinking and acting in ways that are tactical and strategic, that is, 'picking the right battles, carving out spaces for dialogue, and engaging in tough conversations' (Kress, DeGennaro, & Paugh, 2013, p. 5).

We gain a much clearer sense of how these struggles are played out by listening to the voices of critical teachers like Bob Peterson. Describing his own teaching and conversations with former students, Peterson (1999) says:

> These conversations are uplifting but they are also depressing. They reaffirm my conviction that good teaching can engage kids intellectually, physically, and socially, by drawing on

> their interest, posing controversial problems, offering meaningful activities, and encouraging an active role in the community. Some call this critical teaching. I also call it teaching for social justice. (p. xi)

Unfortunately even the best schools, according to Peterson (1999), 'do not challenge students to think deeply, to question fundamental social premises, or to discuss real issues with one another' (p. xi). In response, Peterson explains how his own teaching career has taught him 'that what goes on in the classroom is the core of all school change efforts, but that strategies for transforming classrooms need to be interwoven with broader efforts to change the whole school, the surrounding district, and the larger society' (p. xi). And as we suggested above, 'practicing critical pedagogy for social justice in education is not easy' (p. xii).

With this in mind, we want to do a number of things in this chapter. Firstly, to unsettle the taken-for-granted assumptions underpinning conventional K-12 schooling practices and to explain why they are such a problem for students and teachers alike. Here we shall draw on Freire's (1974/2007) influential critique of banking education as a necessary precondition to reconstructing a socially critical pedagogy of teaching. Secondly, we want to identify some of the key elements informing a socially critical pedagogy of teaching including the Freirian notions of problem-posing education, conscientization and praxis. Thirdly, we want to identify some examples of what critical teaching looks like in practice. And, finally, we will conclude by making some suggestions about the way forward for classroom practitioners.

5.2 Unsettling Transmission Models of Teaching

Despite decades of research, official inquiries, academic publications and school reform efforts, students especially those from economically and socially adverse backgrounds are 'disengaging, tuning out, and switching off schooling at alarming and unprecedented rates'. Official statistics in Australia indicate that 'between 30-40 % of young people are making the active choice not to complete high school with figures dramatically higher in some local settings' (Smyth, Down, & McInerney, 2010, p. 1). Young people themselves put it more bluntly when they state that 'school sucks' (Brock & Good, 2013). For far too many students, 'a standardized curriculum gives non-standard students no place to go' (Ohanian, 1999). We know from listening to students that doing school can be an alienating experience—large class sizes, rigid timetables, subjects, hierarchical structures, didactic teaching, punitive discipline, competitiveness, streaming, testing, poor relationships, irrelevant curriculum, bullying, and so on (Pope, 2001; Smyth and Hattam et al., 2004). Little wonder then, that many students make the active choice to leave school because as one student explains 'It's just easier not to go to school' (Olafson, 2006). We also know that learning is more likely in contexts where students feel valued, respected and trusted as young adults. Furthermore, we know that learning must be connected to students' lives and in ways that are engaging, meaningful and exciting (Smyth, Angus, Down, & McInerney, 2008). The question becomes then, why do transmission models of

teaching persist against everything that we know about good teaching and why is it a problem?

Freire (1970/2000) provides a clear exposition of the problem in terms of the 'narrative character' of the teacher-student relationship. It is worth repeating his views at length:

> The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to "fill" the students with the contents of his narration—contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity. (p. 71)

Furthermore,

> Narration (with teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into "containers," into "receptacles" to be "filled" by the teachers. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are. Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. (p. 72)

Freire (1970/2000) goes on to identify the key assumptions underpinning this 'banking approach' to teaching:

- the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
- the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who are not consulted) adapt to it;
- the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- the teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects (p. 73).

Dewey (1938/1997) expressed similar concerns about the 'pattern of organization' of schools in which 'time-schedules, schemes of classification, of examination and promotion, of rules of order' (p. 18) are prescribed in ways that exclude students' experience, language, culture, needs and desires.

> When the implied criticism is made explicit it reads somewhat as follows: The traditional scheme is, in essence, one of imposition from above and from outside. It imposes adult standards, subject-matter, and methods upon those who are only growing slowly toward maturity. The gap is so great that the required subject-matter, the methods of learning and of behaving are foreign to the existing capacities of the young. They are beyond the reach of the experience the young learners already possess. Consequently, they must be imposed;

> even though good teachers will use devices of art to cover up the imposition so as to relieve it of obviously brutal features. (pp. 18–19)

This fundamental disconnect between students' lives and schooling has been at the centre of impassioned school reform debates over the decades. In their seminal book *Teaching as a subversive activity* Postman and Weingartner (1969) evocatively crystallized Dewey's arguments in the following way.

> Let us remind you, for a moment, of the process that characterizes school environments: what students are restricted to (solely and even vengefully) is the process of memorizing (partially and temporarily) somebody else's answers to somebody else's questions. It is staggering to consider the implications of this fact. The most important and intellectual ability man has yet developed—the art and science of asking questions is not taught in school! Moreover, it is not 'taught' in the most devastating way possible: by arranging the environment so that significant question asking is not valued'. (p. 34)

Progressive practitioners and school leaders like Deborah Meier (2002) understand this problem well. Meier's work at Central Park East Secondary School in New York City leads the way in creating a more progressive, democratic and student-centred school culture to counter the basic grammar of the conventional high school (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). She (2002) expresses her criticism in the following way:

> [Students] sit, largely passively, through one after another different subject matter in no special order of relevance, directed by people they can't imagine becoming, much less would like to become. The older they get, the less like 'real life' their schooling experience is—and the more disconnected and fractionated'. (p. 12)

George Wood (2005), principal of Federal Hocking High School in Ohio is equally critical of the organizational and pedagogical design of high schools as 'learning communities':

> We should not be surprised that when we run high schools the way we do –structured as a series of infomercials some forty minutes in length, with nothing linking the subject matter of one to another, and at a pace that virtually prevents any meaningful human contact—that today's students are at a loss as to why they should buy into our agenda. (p. 37)

Goodson (1998) affords a similar analysis of the problem when he argues that classroom practice is largely stuck, delivering predefined knowledge or 'transmission' of knowledge e.g., 'chalk and talk', 'question and answer', 'discovery projects', 'discussion', and 'individualized worksheets' (p. 27). Haberman (1991) describes such approaches as 'the pedagogy of poverty' because the act of teaching is effectively circumscribed to:

- giving information,
- asking questions,
- giving directions,
- making assignments,
- monitoring seatwork,
- reviewing assignments,
- giving tests,
- reviewing tests,

- assigning homework,
- reviewing homework,
- settling disputes,
- punishing noncompliance,
- marking papers, and
- giving grades (p. 291).

Underpinning these practices Goodson (1998) argues, is an assumption that what is decided in the 'preactive context' can be made to work in the 'interactive context'. The key problem being that no matter what is decided in the preactive stage of curriculum planning it is commonly contradicted and subverted at the interactive stage (p. 28). Drawing on Jackson's (1968) notion of the 'unpredictability' and 'reality' of classroom life to help explain why transmission models don't work, Goodson believes the focus should be on 'the pedagogy in interaction' based on 'collaboration', 'student interests', 'dialogue', 'reciprocity' and 'negotiation' (pp. 36–37) themes we shall return to in the sections to follow.

Much of our own research effort is focused on providing spaces for students themselves to speak back to the alienation and pain they often experience within their schools and the twenty-first century standardized, test-driven, competitive, vocational, and back-to-basics educational system. We listen to their voices so that we can better comprehend what life in schools is really like for them (Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson, & Wurst, 2004). Based on these narratives we believe it is possible to move beyond the limitations of transmission models of teaching in order to reconstruct a more humanizing pedagogy (Bartolome, 1994; Smyth et al., 2010). In pursuing this project students become key informants about what works and what gets in the way of their learning (Smyth & McInerney, 2012). We do not subscribe to the view that students who refuse to learn what schools want them to learn are somehow less intelligent or capable (Valencia, 2010). We agree with Kohl's (1994) argument that when students say 'I won't learn from you' it does not mean that they are 'dumb or psychologically disturbed' rather their refusal may in fact be 'an appropriate response to oppressive education' (pp. 28–29).

For this reason we sympathize with students who find themselves 'sitting on the threatening boundaries of the classroom. Marginal. Designated as 'slow learners' or 'remedial' or, eventually, 'vocational' (Rose, 1989, p. 8). Like Rose, we are concerned about the debilitating and demeaning effect on students' identities as learners and citizens. Rose elaborates:

> What young people come to define as intellectual competence—what it means to know things and use them—is shaped by their schooling. And what many students experience year after year is the exchange of one body of facts for another—an inert transmission, the delivery and redelivery of segmented and self-contained dates and formulas—thus it is no surprise that they develop a restricted sense of how intellectual work is conducted. (p. 190)

As a consequence, students experience a dehumanizing education that leads to unspoken patterns of 'laceration' and 'rupture' around conventional educational practices (Olson, 2009, p. 4). Olson presents a disturbing list of what she describes as 'school wounds', among them:

- Students believe they aren't 'smart'

- Students believe they don't have what it takes to succeed in school (and by implication, life)
- Students believe their ideas lack value or validity
- Students believe all their efforts, no matter how hard they try, are below standard
- Students believe they are 'flawed people'
- Students feel ashamed of themselves and their efforts; they develop 'learned helplessness'
- Students show less pleasure, less courage in learning
- Students have lowered ambition, less self-discipline, and diminished persistence in the face of obstacles (p. 26).

Kozol (2007) in his *Letters to a Young Teacher* believes none of this should be surprising when words such as 'delight', 'curiosity', 'kindness', 'empathy', 'compassion', 'happiness', 'curiosity', and 'joy' are cleansed from official policy documents only to be supplanted by business-driven jargon like proficiency, productivity, transparency, targets, outcomes, and accountability—all with devastating effect (p. 100). In this context, teachers are not only feeling demoralized but increasingly de-skilled and de-professionalized as they become technicians or deliverers of a prescribed curriculum and scripted lesson plans. In the words of Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998a), teachers are 'operating only within *authorized* teaching methods' (p. 9). This leads to a diminished view of teachers' work characterized by an 'anti-intellectualism, ideological naivety, limited interpretative practice, and minimal analysis of the assumptions of the professional world' (p. 8). In response to the inadequacy of transmission models of teaching we want to now consider some foundational ideas for an alternative socially critical pedagogy of teaching.

5.3 Towards a Socially Critical Pedagogy of Teaching

To begin, we take our cue from Freire's (1974/2007) critique of 'banking education' as the cornerstone on which to build a more socially just school by firstly, interrupting the way things are and secondly, articulating an alternative vision and practice of critical teaching. As noted earlier, Freire (1974/2007) is very clear that 'education as the practice of freedom' is *not* about the 'transfer, or transmission of knowledge or culture. … It is not the act of depositing reports or facts in the educatee' (pp. 132–133). Central to Freire's (1974/2007) pedagogy is the praxis of liberation or in his words, 'the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it' (p. 79). Freire (1998) elucidates what it means to teach in critical ways:

> … to know how to teach is to create possibilities for the construction and production of knowledge rather than to be engaged simply in a game of transferring knowledge. When I enter a classroom I should be someone who is open to new ideas, open to questions, and open to the curiosities of the student as well as their inhibitions. In other words, I ought to be aware of being a critical and inquiring subject in regard to the task entrusted to me, the task of teaching and not that of transferring knowledge'. (p. 49)

Underpinning Freire's (1974/2007) approach to critical teaching is the notion of problem-posing education in which 'people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as static, but as a reality in process, in transformation' (p. 83). We believe this core principle is absolutely crucial to creating a socially just school because it 'affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming*—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality' (p. 84). In the words of Ayers (2004), this kind of critical teaching enables students 'to become more powerfully and self-consciously alive … to become more fully human' (p. 1). This is a potent idea in a context where deficit views pervade the daily practices of schools in ways that serve to marginalize and alienate large numbers of students and ultimately foreclose possible futures. In this sense, it is a pedagogy committed to a more expansive view of 'what we might become rather than who we are' (McLaren, 1995, p. 109).

Moreover, critical teaching provides an antidote to what Giroux (2013) describes as 'a pedagogy of stupidity and repression geared toward memorization, conformity, passivity and high stakes testing' (p. 2). Unlike transmission models of teaching, critical pedagogy foregrounds new possibilities about what it means to 'create autonomous, critical, and civically engaged students' (p. 2). Hence, pedagogy 'is always a deliberate attempt' to shape a particular version of 'what forms of knowledge and subjectivities are produced within particular sets of social relations' (p. 2). In this instance, a critical pedagogy of teaching seeks to 'provide students with the knowledge, modes of literacy, skills, critique, social responsibility, and civic courage needed to enable them to be engaged critical citizens willing to fight for a sustainable and just society' (p. 3).

Unashamedly, a socially critical pedagogy of teaching rejects claims of neutrality. Horton and Freire (1991) contend that teachers 'must know in favour of whom and in favour of what he or she wants. That means to know against whom and against what we are working as educators' (p. 100). Howard Zinn (2002) in his poignant autobiography clarifies why neutrality is neither possible nor desirable:

> I didn't pretend to an objectivity that was neither possible nor desirable. "You can't be neutral on a moving train," I would tell them [my students]. Some were baffled by the metaphor, especially if they took it literally and tried to dissect its meaning. Others immediately saw what I meant: that events are already moving in certain deadly directions, and to be neutral means to accept that. (p. 8)

In a similar way, Ayers (2004) urges teachers 'to figure out what they are teaching *for*, and what they are teaching *against*' (p. 18). For Ayers, this means teaching 'against oppression and subjugation … exploitation, unfairness, and unkindness' and teaching for 'freedom, for enlightenment and awareness, wide awakeness, protection of the weak, cooperation, generosity, compassion, and love'. Above all, Ayers believes teaching is an act infused with moral and ethical purpose as he explains, 'I want my teaching to mean something worthwhile in the lives of my students and in the larger worlds that they will inhabit and create. I want it to mean something in mine' (p. 18). The way Smyth (2007) put it, in describing his 12 element notion of the 'pedagogically engaged school' (pp. 653–654) which is committed

to speaking back to school cultures that disengage and damage young people, is that this different kind of teaching occurs when teachers become serious about re-inventing themselves in ways that engage students (p. 637).

Accordingly, the goal of critical teaching is to provide an empowering education that enables students to produce knowledge, make choices and transform their reality (Shor, 1992). Freire (1974/2007) argues that when students are treated as passive objects and 'subjected to the choices of others' they are no longer 'integrated' with their context but 'adapted' or 'adjusted' (p. 4). When students are forced to follow recipes and prescriptions they can easily 'drown in leveling anonymity, without hope and without faith, domesticated and adjusted.' (p. 5). As a counter to these distorting and deforming versions of teaching, the purpose of critical teaching is to provide students with 'counter-discourses' or 'resistant subject positions' through which they can imagine a more optimistic and humane future (McLaren, 1997, p. 37).

In pursuing a socially critical pedagogy of teaching Shor (1992) presents a starting point by mapping some key principles to help guide teachers' thinking and action:

> To be democratic implies orientating subject matter to student culture—their interests, needs, speech, and perceptions—while creating a negotiable openness in class where the students' input jointly creates the learning process. To be critical in such a democratic curriculum means to examine all subjects and the learning process with systematic depth; to connect student individuality to larger historical and social issues; to encourage students to examine how their experience relates to academic knowledge, to power, and to inequality in society; and to approach received wisdom and the status quo with questions. (p. 16)

Essential to Shor's approach is the belief that teaching must start from where students are at. From this position, teachers and students become co-researchers of jointly identified problems, questions and issues of immediate relevance to their lives (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998b). These issues are then investigated in the broader historical and social context and linked to questions about the nature of knowledge, power and inequality. Postman and Weingartner (1969) reinforce the importance of this central proposition when they state that 'there is no learning without a learner' nor 'meaning without a meaning maker' (p. 85). The role of the critical teacher is to support students in asking questions, pursuing 'useful and realistic' problems (pp. 84–85), learning new languages so that we don't 'talk ourselves to death' (p. 162), and providing 'the opportunity for substantive participation in the invention, initiation, and implementation of programmes intended to improve the community' (p. 153).

Kincheloe (2001) deepens our understanding of a socially critical pedagogy of teaching as a process in which teachers and students work collaboratively to 'gain new ways of knowing and producing knowledge that challenge the commonsense views of sociopolitical reality with which most individuals have grown so comfortable' (p. 372). This involves asking 'why things are the way they are, how they got that way, and what set of conditions are supporting the processes that maintain them' (Simon, 1988, p. 380). Kincheloe (2009) adopts the term 'metropedagogy' to sum up the social and personal transformations required of a truly desocialising education (Freire, 1974/2007; Shor 1992, 1980/1987). This kind of critical teaching, Kincheloe (2009) argues, pays close attention to producing a new generation of 'warrior-intellectuals' who:

- develop the ability to think critically and analytically
- cultivate their intellects
- understand the world as it is, in relation to what it could be
- interpret and make sense of the world around them by understanding invisible forces at work in shaping particular situations
- employ their creative ability to get beyond ritualized but failed practices in school and society
- use their imagination to transcend the trap of traditional gender, racial, sexual, and class-based stereotypes and the harm they can cause in their individual lives and in the larger society
- reconceptualize the role of 'good citizen' in a way that speaks and acts in relation to dominant power and the ways it oppresses those around them
- develop the ability to teach themselves what they need to know to take on a particular task
- cultivate a humility that allows them to be both good leaders and good members of diverse learning communities
- devote themselves to never-ending, life-long growth as citizens, parents, workers, teachers, scholars, researchers, and lovers (p. 388).

What we have described so far is a set of foundational ideas based on the Freirian notions of problem-posing education, conscientization and praxis. This kind of critical teaching has a strong moral, ethical and intellectual commitment to building a different kind of school grounded in a spirit of social justice, critical inquiry, agency, hope and solidarity. We want to conclude this discussion by returning to our earlier critique of transmission approaches to teaching, in particular, Haberman's (1991) description of 'the pedagogy of poverty', in order to identify some key elements of what good teaching looks like. Haberman's list is helpful to the extent that it offers classroom teachers a way of engaging with this broader discussion of socially critical teaching and deciphering how some of these ideas might look in their own classrooms. By way of summary, Haberman believes that good teaching is happening:

- Whenever students are involved with issues they regard as vital concerns, good teaching is going on.
- Whenever students are involved with explanations of human differences, good teaching is going on.
- Whenever students are being helped to see major concepts, big ideas, and general principles and are not merely engaged in the pursuit of isolated facts, good teaching is going on.
- Whenever students are involved in planning what they will be doing, it is likely that good teaching is going on.
- Whenever students are involved with applying ideals such as fairness, equity, or justice to their world, it is likely that good teaching is going on.
- Whenever students are actively involved, it is likely that good teaching is going on.
- Whenever students are directly involved in a real-life experience, it is likely that good teaching is going on.

- Whenever students are actively involved in heterogeneous groups, it is likely that good teaching is going on.
- Whenever students are asked to think about an idea in a way that questions common sense or a widely accepted assumption, that relates new ideas to ones learned previously, or that applies an idea to the problems of living, then there is a chance that good teaching is going on.
- Whenever students are involved in re-doing, polishing, or perfecting their work, it is likely that good teaching is going on.
- Whenever teachers involve students with the technology of information access, good teaching is going on.
- Whenever students are involved in reflecting on their own lives and how they have come to believe and feel as they do, good teaching is going on (pp. 293–294)

Pulling our argument together in this section, we have attempted to provide an overarching set of key critical ideas that inform the basis of an emergent socially critical pedagogy of teaching. We acknowledge that such views are largely excluded, silenced and marginalized from mainstream debates about education. We have tried to unpack the seemingly impenetrable logic of transmission models of teaching, why they have such a hold on the way students are taught in school, and the consequences for the kinds of education students receive, or not. To address these concerns we have identified and described some core principles and values of a more engaging and socially critical pedagogy of teaching. In the section to follow we want to extend this conversation by identifying some examples of critical teaching so that we can see how it looks in schools and classrooms from the point of practitioners engaged in this important pedagogical work.

5.4 Socially Critical Teaching in Practice

Smyth (2010) argues that critical teaching is the 'counter-hegemony' to neoliberalism' (p. 187). Indeed, he argues that:

> Spaces exist within the work of teaching in which teachers can exercise agency, through the way can work with young people to unveil and unmask how power works and puncture the mythology that individualism, competition, and consumerism are the only, or the best, alternative that is available. (p. 188)

Reid (1992) defines critical teaching as 'a set of teaching strategies which social justice activists use in schools in order to enable their students to become convinced and informed social justice activists' (p. 10). Unfortunately, as Martin and te Riele (2011) observe, Freire's legacy in K-12 education has struggled to gain traction because of 'the realities of contexts that insist upon, at the very least, a sort of pragmatic compliance, through the increasing bureaucratization and corporatization of education' (p. 29). We have raised our own concerns in this chapter about the ways in which the dominant transmission models of teaching and the normal(ising) grammar of the high school preclude the enactment of 'unauthorized methods' (Kincheloe

& Steinberg, 1998a). Gore (1993) put this issue on the agenda when she identified two main strands in critical pedagogy, one focusing on critical educational theory and the other on classroom practice (p. 42). She argues that there has been insufficient attention given to the 'instructional aspects of pedagogical practice' or the question of 'how to teach and what to teach' particularly by critical pedagogues in the academy (but not all) (p. 20).

Part of the problem Goodman (1992) argues is that the language of critique (critical educational theory) promoted by critical pedagogues is not only inaccessible to practitioners and perceived to be a form of 'self-indulgent expression' and 'professional aggrandizement' (p. 166) but leads to a sense of despair by promoting the view that teacher's lack a 'sense of agency and power' to make meaningful change (p. 168). In addressing these twin problems, Goodman argues that whilst the language of possibility certainly creates a more optimistic and accessible vision grounded in the principles of empowerment, equality, and democracy (p. 169), these 'visualizations' too remain at an overly abstract level of discourse (p. 172). In response, Goodman advocates for a 'democratic imagery' or 'theoretical language which is informed by and rooted in images of real (or hypothesized) people involved in tangible acts that take place in real settings' (p. 173). Hence, his call for critical educators to 'directly and explicitly address the question of *how* (either hypothetically, based upon observations, or as a result of reflecting upon one's own practices) individuals or groups of people can potentially act within educational settings to advance the democratic ideal' (p. 174).

Much of our own ethnographic research has grappled with this tension as we attempt to identify, map and describe the kinds of cultural, pedagogical, organizational, and community practices that lead to student disengagement and/or reengagement in learning based on real practices in real schools and in real communities (e.g. Smyth, 2007, 2010; Smyth and Hattam et al., 2004; Smyth et al., 2008, 2010; Smyth & McInerney, 2007, 2012). In this body of work we have attempted to act as cultural cartographers of high schools by mapping the contours of policy and practice that either work, or not, largely from the vantage point of students. Methodologically, we adopt Lather's notion of 'dialogic theory-building' (Lather, 1986) to shuffle between theory (mostly critical) and the everyday experiences of students and teachers. During this process 'data constructed in context are used to clarify and reconstruct existing theory', so that theory is always 'subjected to interrogation of generative themes unearthed from the everyday experiences of those lives being investigated' (Smyth and Hattam et al., 2004, p. 28).

Drawing on these insider stories of school life we can extrapolate a constellation of ideas and practices, many that draw closely from Smyth's (2007) notion of the 'pedagogically engaged school' (pp. 653–654), that inform a socially critical pedagogy of teaching. By way of summary:

Connecting to students' lives and culture

Socially critical teachers share a view that the present should generate the problems that lead to students and teachers collaboratively investigating experience (Shor, 1992; Smyth et al., 2008, pp. 157–158).

Building relationships based on trust, respect and care

Socially critical teachers are aware of the importance of building relationships founded on trust, respect and care and also inducting students into the process of relating to bigger and more important social ideas, issues and questions (Noddings, 2005, 2006; Smyth et al., 2008, pp. 159).

Incorporating place-based learning

Socially critical teachers connect local community questions, issues and problems to broader 'global environmental, financial and social concerns, such as climate change, water scarcity, poverty and trade' (Kahn, 2010; McInerney, Smyth, & Down, 2011, p. 11; Romano & Glascock, 2002; Somerville, Davies, & Power, 2011).

Interrupting deficit thinking

Socially critical teachers challenge deficit views about their students, families and their communities and appreciate that all students are capable of learning with the appropriate cultural, pedagogical and organizational settings (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 23; Valencia, 2010).

Listening to students' voices

Socially critical teachers show a willingness to listen with 'intent' to what students have to say about their life worlds (Smyth & McInerney, 2012, p. 31) and a preparedness to share power and negotiate the curriculum including more flexible forms of assessment (Boomer, 1992; Shor, 1996).

Developing critical literacy

Socially critical teachers adopt critical literacy strategies to provide students with the capabilities 'to read, to interpret, and to understand how meaning is made and derived from print, photographs, and other electronic visuals' (Berry, 1998; Macedo & Steinberg, 2007; Semali, 1998, p. 139).

Nurturing interdisciplinary research

Socially critical teachers use inquiry based and interdisciplinary research methods to identify problems, map and describe them, and develop action plans including interviews, photography, writing, and videos to develop an 'integrative, emergent, and authentic curriculum' (Oakes, Rogers, & Lipton, 2006; Reid, 1992; Romano & Glascock 2002; Schultz, 2008, p. 137).

Interrogating popular culture

Socially critical teachers tap into youth popular culture such as fashion, music, television and movies to probe the cultural complexity of daily life and the ways in which it either limits or enables understandings and actions of young people in society (Daspit & Weaver, 2000; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Porfilio & Carr, 2010; Porfilio & Viola, 2012; Smyth, Shacklock, & Hattam, 1999).

Fostering critical service-learning

Socially critical teachers move beyond traditional service-learning pedagogies of charity work to promote critical service-learning activities where students reflect upon the forces and structures responsible for injustice, work collectively with marginalized communities and teach others about the effects of unemployment, work, technology, consumerism, sexism, racism, poverty, child-labour and so on (Porfilio & Hickman, 2011).

Engaging youth participatory action research (YPAR)

Socially critical teachers are aware of the potential of youth participatory action research to provide young people with opportunities to explore social problems affecting their lives and then determine social actions to remedy these problems. In the process students develop the capabilities 'to contest and transform systems and institutions to produce greater justice' (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 2; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Howard, Woodbury, & Moore, 1998).

Promoting social justice through the arts

Socially critical teachers utilize a wide range of arts based strategies including the performance arts, visual arts, music, poetry, and mixed media as a means of nurturing the imagination and teaching for social justice (Beyerbach & Davis, 2011; Greene, 1995; Vasudevan & DeJaynes, 2013).

Asking critical questions

Socially critical teachers adopt a problem-posing mindset by asking critical questions and embracing critically reflective practices. They are willing to challenge the beliefs, assumptions and values underpinning the everyday practice of teaching as well as envisaging social just alternatives (Brookfield, 1995; Kincheloe, 2003; Smyth, 2011).

What we have attempted to do here is to provide a snapshot of the kinds of existing ideas and practices that inform a socially critical pedagogy of teaching. To invoke the title of Smyth and Shacklock's (1998) book, we have literally been arguing for a *Re-making of teaching: ideology, policy and practice*. We want to make clear our point, that the language of critique and possibility associated with critical pedagogy is not merely abstract principles, theories and ideals but woven into the curriculum and teaching practices of real schools. In other words, we want to provide some evidence of 'actual practice' (Goodman, 1992, p. 169) but in a way that does not suggest a recipe or checklist approach. Goodman reminds us that 'how-to-do' approaches 'negates the dialectical relationship between theory and action' and 'reduces the reader to a passive consumer of ideas' (p. 175). What Goodman is saying, is that teachers need 'to learn from the images provided and to apply what is vicariously experienced to one's own particular situation and limitations' (p. 175).

We would like to conclude this section by returning to Kincheloe and Steinberg's (1998a) notion of 'unauthorized methods' as a way of capturing the essence of what it means to be a socially critical teacher. In their words:

> … the well-prepared teacher is not one who enters the classroom with a fixed set of lesson plans but a scholar with a thorough knowledge of subject, an understanding of knowledge production, the ability to produce knowledge, an appreciation of social context, a cognizance of what is happening in the world, insight into the lives of her students, and a sophisticated appreciation of critical educational goals and purposes. (p. 13)

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we set out to provide a critique of transmission models of teaching with particular regard to the ways in which it leads to conformity, obedience and passivity among students and teachers alike. We argue that 'banking education' leads to an emaciated view of teaching because of its narrowly conceived and instrumentalist focus on method, technique and content. As a consequence, the broader intellectual, contextual, moral and ethical purposes of teaching are glossed over. In response, we have advanced an alternative socially critical pedagogy of teaching grounded in the values of critical inquiry, democracy, social justice, compassion, respect and care. In pursuing a socially critical pedagogy of teaching we draw on Freire's ideas of problem-posing education, conscientization and praxis as a means of creating a more humanizing education. These anchor points become the foundation on which we explore a range of existing practices in schools geared to promoting social justice activism among students, teachers and local communities. We hope these socially critical teaching practices will provide inspiration for ongoing dialogue among teachers in particular schools and contexts. In other words, we want to encourage what Rose (1995/2006) describes as a 'revitalized talk … about the ways, intellectual as a well a social, by which respect for young people is conveyed' (p. 431).

> This talk would be rich with imagery, from all sorts of classrooms, in a range of communities, reflecting a wide sweep of histories, cultural practices, languages and dialects, classrooms vibrant with achievement and thoughtfulness, play and hard work, characterized by what development psychologist Eleanor Duckworth nicely calls the having of wonderful ideas. (p. 431)

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Chapter 6
Socially Critical Curriculum

6.1 Introduction: Curriculum for and About Social Justice

> The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a selective tradition, someone's selection, some group's vision of legitimate knowledge. It is produced out of the cultural, political, and economic conflicts, tensions, and compromises that organize and disorganize a people. (Apple, 1993, p. 222)

Few issues create so much controversy, yet generate such little genuine public debate, as curriculum policy—especially when it involves the development and implementation of a national curriculum. Officially launched in 2010, the Australian National Curriculum has attracted a barrage of criticism from educators, academics, journalists, and politicians, from all sides of the political spectrum. Many teachers regard the 'official curriculum' as overly prescriptive and a threat to their professional autonomy and judgment. It has been criticized for a heavy emphasis on content rather than process knowledge (Atewh & Singh, 2011), for failing to clarify underlying assumptions about knowledge, pedagogy and power (Ditchburn, 2012), and constituting a 'return to the Tylerian model of objectives-based curriculum design' (Brennan, 2011, p. 275). Perhaps the most vitriolic condemnation has come from right wing commentators and conservative politicians, such as the Federal Opposition Spokesperson for Education, Christopher Pyne (now Minister for Education), who has disparaged what he regards as over-emphasis in the History curriculum on indigenous and Asian culture to the detriment of Australia's British and Judeo-Christian heritage (Blake, 2013). Such criticisms confirm Apple's (1993) view that curriculum making is an ideological and contentious endeavour, not only with regard to the selection of content and cultural perspectives, but to the underlying beliefs about knowledge, learning theories and pedagogy.

Keeping in mind Apple's views about 'legitimate knowledge', our main intent in this chapter is to outline theoretical strands and practical possibilities of a socially critical approach to curriculum development which we regard as a crucial element in building the socially just school. Curriculum does matter. '[W]hat knowledge is

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selected, how it is taught and how it is evaluated in schools goes to the very heart of issues of individual and social identity' (Atweh & Singh, 2011, p. 189). Importantly, the form and content of the curriculum sends out a powerful message to young people about what is valued in education and what a school stands for in terms of its moral and ethical responsibilities to society. In an era when so much of the national agenda has been dominated by conservative and neoliberal policy makers we believe that educators need to articulate robust, coherent and socially just alternatives to the instrumental, standardized and vocationally-oriented curriculum mandated by governments in many Western countries. Shor (1992) gets to the core of our argument for a socially critical curriculum in the following words:

> *Not* encouraging students to question knowledge, society and experience tacitly endorses and support the status quo. A curriculum that does not challenge the standard syllabus and conditions in society informs students that knowledge and the word are fixed and are fine the way they are, with no role for students to play in transforming them, and no need for change. (p. 12)

Our advocacy for socially critical curriculum does not rest solely on the need to transform structures and policies that reproduce educational inequalities in education. We also envisage the possibilities of schools working with young people to create a more socially just world through a curriculum which positions them as active social agents capable of acting upon and changing the world (Freire, 1994).

The chapter is structured as follows. Following a discussion of the ideological dimensions of curriculum and the policy context, we describe and differentiate a socially critical orientation to curriculum from traditional approaches described by Kemmis, Cole, and Sugget (1983) as vocational/neo-classical, and liberal/progressive. Next, we examine the theoretical foundations of a socially critical curriculum arising from Critical Social Theory and outline an activist model of curriculum development that draws on Freire's (1994) notions of liberation, dialogic education and critical pedagogy. Informed by the work of critical educators, such as Shor (1992, 1996), Bigelow and Peterson (2002), as well as ethnographic research undertaken by the authors in Australian schools (Smyth, Angus, Down, & McInerney, 2008, 2009; Smyth, Down, & McInerney, 2010), we provide examples of socially critical curriculum in action. Notwithstanding the tensions and dilemmas of radicalizing the curriculum, we believe there are spaces, resources and opportunities within schools to develop curriculum that is responsive to the needs, concerns and aspirations of young people and their communities, that engages students in a critical reading of the word and their world (Freire & Macedo, 1987), and that creates opportunities for social action in response to pressing local and global issues. We conclude with a set of touchstones of a socially critical curriculum framed around Fraser's (2005) notions of redistributive, recognitive and representative justice.

6.2 Ideology and Policy: The Politics of Official Knowledge

Connell (1998) has described curriculum as 'the most difficult area of educational study—where the theory of knowledge meets the practice of classrooms in complex and turbulent ways' (p. 84). Such a view challenges those who tend to equate

curriculum with a written prescription, a syllabus or plan of 'what is intended to happen in schools' (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 2). However, as Connell (1998) and Stenhouse (1975) explain, curriculum also denotes the existing state of affairs—what actually happens in classrooms as a consequence of teacher/student interaction and the institutional context of schooling. At one level, curriculum can be understood as all the learning, whether planned, unplanned, overt or tactical, that occurs within schools, but as Ditchburn (2012) points out, it can also be regarded as 'a function of a larger set of beliefs about what the schools should be doing' (p. 348) and what is deemed to be worthwhile knowledge. The political and social dimensions of curriculum should not be underestimated. Seddon (2001) claims that 'curriculum determines both students' learning and teachers' work in ways which institutionalise hegemonic conceptions of what it means to be an educated person' (p. 310). She goes on to argue that curriculum governs the purposes and objectives of education, the resource allocations, and the practical efforts of learners and teachers orientated to realizing those ends. More broadly:

> … curriculum carries representations and cultural resources across generations. What counts as valued knowledge is both a consequence of socially produced selective traditions and, through its educative effects, contributes to the wider economic and cultural formation of society and culture, its patterns of power and inequality, and its dynamics of conservation and renewal. (p. 310)

In this context it is important to distinguish between 'official knowledge,' which Bernstein (2000) defines as 'the educational knowledge which the state constructs and distributes in educational institutions' (quoted in Atweh & Singh, 2011, p. 194), and the forms of 'unofficial knowledge' that lie outside the mandated curriculum. The latter is typically generated through pedagogical encounters between teachers, students, and texts in school settings and communities. Within Australian education systems there has always been a tension between grassroots curriculum that emphasizes teacher/student agency, community engagement and place-based pedagogies, and centrally imposed curriculum which tends to be highly prescriptive with regard to subject content, learning objectives and assessment practices.

In many ways, schooling in Australian states and territories has been dominated by highly bureaucratic education departments for more than a century but for a brief period in the 1970s and 1980s curriculum development was invested more strongly in local school communities. Largely through the agency of the Disadvantaged Schools Programme (Connell, 1993), a reforming Federal Labor Government directed funds to individual schools to support programs aimed at improving the education of 'disadvantaged' students. The shift to a bottom-up model of school reform created a space for popular dissent and experimentation as networks of teachers and parents began to focus on the development of more inclusive curriculum, teaching practices and assessment methods. However, what could be described as socially democratic approach to curriculum was largely eroded in the 1990s as economic rationalist thinking began to dominate all aspects of government policy. Brennan (2011) argues that the global policy context has helped to frame educational policy as Australian governments, in line with other OECD countries, have turned their attention to education sectors 'mainly for their contribution to national economic productivity' (p. 259). This has led to a much greater emphasis in the 'official

curriculum' on vocational education, basic skills and competencies, and standardized testing measures, most notably the National Assessment Program –Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).

As mentioned previously, the most recent expression of government intervention in curriculum development has been the creation of a national curriculum predicated on the need for 'national consistency' and a 'world-class curriculum' (Ditchburn, 2012, p. 347). Ignoring much of the ground-breaking work on curriculum integration and interdisciplinary approaches to schooling promoted by (amongst others) middle school advocates, the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) responsible for developing and implementing the curriculum for all states and territories has divided the curriculum into 13 subjects and a set of cross-curricula perspectives to be introduced in three phases between 2011 and 2014. Brennan (2011) argues that the national curriculum is a syllabus not a curriculum that 'most easily fits with a regulating accountability-driven, measurement focused testing policy regime' (p. 275). Ditchburn is deeply concerned about the disempowering nature of the national curriculum:

> It is a policy that offers conservative understandings about knowledge, effective pedagogies and power; that places knowledge as something to be prescribed by 'experts'; that situates teachers as policy implementers; and, importantly, fails to acknowledge the real and valid contributions of students or others in the development of curriculum. (p. 348)

Lingard and Mills (2007) claim that 'issues of pedagogies, social justice and inclusion cannot be considered in isolation from those of curricula and assessment' (p. 235). What can we conclude about the curriculum reform in the current Australian context? What are the principles and values underpinning the 'official' curriculum? To what extent do they reflect a commitment to socially just schooling and the alleviation of educational inequality? In exploring these questions we turn our attention to a report prepared for the Victorian Institute of Secondary Education by Kemmis et al. in 1983 which examined the vexatious issue of transition education at a time when there was considerable pressure on schools to become more responsive to post-school demands, especially those relating to job preparation.

6.3 Orientations to Curriculum

In their report Kemmis et al. (1983) challenged the instrumental view of schools as training organizations and outlined a number of strategies for transforming contemporary schools so that they were more aligned to the notion of a socially critical school. By way of teasing out some of the difference between codes in education they outlined the features of three orientations to curriculum, namely (a) vocational/neo-classical (b) liberal/progressive, and (c) socially critical. Though somewhat dated we suggest that these orientations are still recognizable in school and education systems and provide an insight into the values and beliefs influencing school processes such as learning, assessment and evaluation, teacher-student relationships, and community engagement.

6.3.1 The Vocational/Neo-classical Orientation

In this orientation, education is primarily understood as preparation for work, whether 'skilled or semi-skilled labour requiring well known and defined competencies … or managerial or professional, requiring higher levels of education and abstract, universalized thinking' (p. 18). Though separate technical high schools have largely disappeared from Australian education systems, the great binary between non-academic and academic curriculum is very much still preserved in schools through tracking and selection process which direct the so-called 'less-able' students to vocationally-oriented courses, many of which are conducted through TAFE [Technical and Further Education] institutes or provider organizations. The orientation is neo-classical insofar as it based on time honoured beliefs about what is worth knowing and is very much intent on preserving the status quo. Connell (1993) has described this as a hegemonic curriculum that perpetuates inequalities in education through exclusionary school structures, policies and pedagogies which work against the interests of working class and culturally marginalized students. According to Connell (1998) this is embodied in the Competitive Academic Curriculum (CAC) in Australian education systems and is marked by:

- an abstract division of knowledge into 'subjects' (most evident in secondary schools)
- a hierarchy of subjects (with classics, now mathematics, at the top)
- a hierarchical ordering of knowledge within each subject (fine-grained distinction between elementary and advanced material)
- a teacher-centred classroom-based pedagogy
- an individualized learning process
- formal competitive assessment (the exam) (p. 84).

Rather than the curriculum being a dialogic space to investigate the world the CAC functions in anti-dialogic ways to deny students a say in enunciating their own experiences, histories and social positions (Smyth, Shacklock, & Hattam, 1999, p. 78). Although the cultural rationale for the CAC has been weakened it remains intact largely because it is supported by a coalition of powerful interest groups including employers, conservative politicians and their media backers, and a significant proportion of teachers and academics. In neoliberal times advocates for more inclusive and socially just curriculum have to contend with counter prevailing forces hell-bent on redefining schools in response to economic imperatives rather than cultural and social responsibilities. As we have documented elsewhere, federally-driven policies, have led to a narrowing of the curriculum, the introduction of a national literacy and numeracy testing program (NAPLAN) and a much greater emphasis on functional approaches to teaching and learning. A language of 'marketization', 'vocationalism', 'skills formation', and 'enterprise education' now underpins many educational programs.

6.3.2 The Liberal/Progressive Orientation

Preparation for life rather than work is the defining difference between the vocational/neo-classical and liberal/progressive orientation to curriculum. In a language that has humanistic overtones, greater emphasis is placed on the idea of education for the 'whole person' rather than education which serves instrumental purposes, for example, the needs of industry. According to Kemmis et al. (1983) it takes 'an individualistic perspective on social philosophy, and sees the development of the autonomous persons as the aims of education' (p. 18). In contrast to the vocational/neo-classical orientation it is informed by constructivist views of learning rather than behaviourist, transmission theories, it is less bound by rigid subject differentiation, student grouping and timetabling, and is more open to alternative forms of assessment than tests and examinations. Tangible expressions of a more liberal/democratic/student-centred approach to curriculum and pedagogy include:

- greater emphasis on interdisciplinary, thematic and integrated approaches to learning
- a willingness on the part of teachers to develop curriculum around the interests and concerns of children rather than slavishly following a set syllabus
- a move from whole class to small group instruction, peer mentoring, cooperative forms of learning
- a greater degree of student negotiation in the selection of subject content and learning activities
- a move from ability groups to mixed ability arrangements in classroom organization
- greater attention to the relational aspects of learning as evident in efforts to promote learning communities and foster a stronger sense of belongingness—a particular strong element in middle schooling (Smyth & McInerney, 2007).

Kemmis et al. (1983) claim that the liberal/progressive orientation to curriculum sees society in need of improvement through democratic processes and it does attach some weight to the notion of citizenship education. However, it does not view young people as social activists in their own right nor does it accord the school a prominent role in speaking out publicly against injustices and joining with coalitions committed to radical social change.

6.3.3 The Socially Critical Orientation

Given their views of the role of schools and society it is not altogether surprising that Kemmis et al. (1983) favour a socially critical orientation to curriculum—indeed the report is largely framed around the need for a socially-critical school as an alternative to the 'separate school' (p. 8) which they claim has largely lost contact with the issues and concerns of the community and society. What distinguishes this orientation to curriculum from the two we have outlined above? First, proponents

of a socially critical orientation are deeply sceptical about the possibilities of improvement to society through the actions of individuals: they 'must be brought about by collective action capable of confronting unjust and irrational structures' (p. 18). Second, 'education must engage society and social structures immediately, not merely prepare students for later participation' (p. 18). To this end, the school curriculum must create opportunities for students to gain experience in 'critical reflection, social negotiation and the organization of action' (p. 8) as a routine part of school life. Third, if these aims are to be realized the curriculum must assist students to develop critically reflective practices that allow them to understand and interpret their cultures, histories and societies. Fourth, the socially-critical orientation 'requires participation of the school in the life of its community and the community in the school' (p. 19). From this perspective, the school is a resource for learning, research and critical analysis in its community (p. 27) and the community becomes a central point of reference for curriculum development.

Having outlined the broad features of a socially-critical orientation we now look more closely at the theoretical strands of this approach to curriculum, particularly those derived from Freire's notions of dialogic learning and critical pedagogy.

6.4 Freire's Socially Critical Curriculum

We begin by acknowledging that Freire expresses faith in the transformative possibilities of education—a position that reproduction theorists of the 1970s had largely rejected. However, the kind of education he envisages is not simply a process of socialization, rather, it involves what Shor (1992) describes as 'a critical pedagogy for self and social change' (p. 15). Much of the original theory behind Freire's critical pedagogy is set out in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, first published in 1970. In this landmark publication Freire draws on his early life and work in Brazil to describe a 'banking concept' of education (Freire 1994, p. 53) characterized by a deficit view of students and didactic teaching methods which positions learners as 'objects' rather than 'subjects' and adaptable, malleable beings able to be integrated into the world. Such an approach denies the political nature of education, fails to recognize the transformative capacities of students, and helps to reinforce the subservient position of those already oppressed. In this view of curriculum '[k]nowledge is fixed, pedagogy is limited and power is contained' (Ditchburn, 2012, p. 349). In opposition to this model which encourages silence and complicity, Freire presents an activist, problem-posing approach which positions students as constructors of the curriculum and critical investigators into their own society. This view of curriculum attaches greatest importance to dialogic learning and to praxis, which Freire described as 'reflection and action on the world in order to change it' (Freire, 1993, p. 33). From Freire's perspective, dialogue is not just about deepening an understanding of student's worlds but is about making a difference in their worlds.

In arguing for the democratization of the curriculum, Freire claims that teachers must get to know children's reading of the world and students must have an input into the choice of the content and activities. He poses the following question for educators:

> Why not discuss with students the concrete realities of their lives … establish an intimate connection between knowledge considered crucial for the curriculum and knowledge that is the fruits of the lived experiences of students as individuals? (Freire, 2001, p. 36)

His exhortation resonates with Shor and Freire's (1987) belief that the dialogic approach to curriculum needs to be 'situated in the thoughts, language, aspirations and conditions of the students' (p. 11) and not based on some preconceived view of what students need to know. This does not mean that teachers' readings of the world should be downplayed: on the contrary, because teachers have special curriculum knowledge and competencies they not only have a right to offer their reading but they have a responsibility to extend children's horizons and to critically challenge their views of the world. What they must not do is to impose their reading on students—this is authoritarianism, however well-motivated. One of the most significant resources for teachers committed to this view of learning has come from the prominent Australian educator Garth Boomer in his model of the negotiated curriculum (Boomer, Lester, Onore, & Cook, 1992).

For Freire, pedagogy is much more than the methods of instruction: it involves a political commitment to facilitating individual emancipation and social transformation (Ditchburn, 2012). But beyond some expressed desire for social justice, Freire insists that hope must be anchored in the struggles and practices that characterize the everyday life and culture of schools (Freire, 1994). Hence, the school curriculum should involve students in learning that not only develops a better knowledge and understanding of the oppressive and liberating features of society, but engages them in political action aimed at redressing injustices.

Freire's work has been a major source of ideas and practices for the development of critical pedagogy which according to McLaren (1999) is:

> …a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society and nation state. (p. 51)

Proponents of a socially critical view of curriculum and pedagogy claim that schooling cannot be isolated from the rest of society; that what happens in schools is intimately connected to cultural, economic and political factors beyond the classroom; and, that schooling exists for purposes other than the reproduction of dominant ideologies and views of the world. To engage in critical pedagogy means treating contemporary practices and structures of teaching problematically; excavating beneath the surface realities of institutionalized practices; and, working collectively for more emancipatory (or empowering) courses of action (McInerney, 2004). Shor (1992) argues that a Freirean pedagogy seeking to develop a critical consciousness is 'a student-centred dialogue which problematizes generative themes from everyday life' (p. 33) but also draws on topical issues and subject matter from academic disciplines.

6.5 Towards a Social Critical Curriculum: Stories from the Field

Although young people get to talk about injustices in some school programs, they are rarely positioned as social activists. However, if they are to critically engage with their community and the world at large it is essential that the curriculum embrace a view of learning that fosters active citizenship and the development of critical literacies. There are resources and strategies to guide schools in this endeavour, as illustrated in The New London Group's (1995) 'pedagogy of multiliteracies' and Shor's (1987) 'dialogic' model of teaching which draws extensively on Freire's 'problem-posing' approach to education. We are particularly attracted to a 'teaching for resistance' model of curriculum developed by a group of Australian educators (Education for Social Justice Research Group, 1994). Incorporating a Freirean view of praxis (reflection and action to bring about transformation) this approach consists of three phases:

- *consciousness raising*—becoming aware of the nature, causes and effects of injustices and of the possibility of socially just alternatives
- *establishing contact* with resistance movements in the community through literature, the media, the arts and organizations and developing the political skills to work for socially-just alternatives
- *taking social action* to bring about changes, for example, lending support to social reform groups, acting as advocates for the oppressed and taking strategic action to resist injustices, preferably in conjunction with community groups.

A feature of this model is that it challenges the dominant discourse on social injustice which tends to depict the oppressed as helpless victims reliant on the charitable deeds of outsiders. By contrast, a resister image, according to Moore (1994) 'invites solidarity [with the oppressed] and challenges the unjust power relations (p. 2). Viewed from this perspective 'the initiators of the actions for freedom are the resisters … [and those] who would support them join in their struggle and take their directions from them' (p. 2). This approach was developed and trailed with teachers and students in South Australian schools using cross-disciplinary approaches to investigate such topics as gender and divisions of labour, the politics of sugar, and racism and land. The research also contributed to the publication of an action manual for religious studies developed around five significant social justice issues: sexism, racism, multiculturalism, poverty and eco-justice (O'Donoghue, Moore, Habel, Crotty, & Crotty, 1993).

What does socially critical curriculum look like in practice? From what is a very complex and diverse field, we shall refer to studies which illustrate critically engaged forms of learning associated with:

- Critical cultural studies
- Critical place-based education
- Community-oriented curriculum
- Global education for social justice

6.5.1 Critical Cultural Studies

Historically schools have been organized around traditional subject-based studies, such as maths, history, English and science or curriculum areas, for example Society and Environment, the Arts, and Technology Studies. Despite the push for subject integration, and cross-disciplinary studies, notably by advocates of middle schooling (Beane & Apple, 1995), a competitive academic curriculum still prevails in many schools and students have few opportunities to study larger social/cultural issues or to negotiate significant aspects of their learning. A frustrated middle school coordinator in an Australian secondary school described the problem as follows:

> We have a toxic culture because the curriculum is teacher-driven as opposed to student-driven. There are decisions made to appease and motivate staff rather than serve the best interest of kids. Our kids don't have a true middle school experience because the curriculum is still subject/discipline oriented. We don't have a great deal of autonomy in the teams. It's a throw-back to traditional schooling methods where people feel you need to keep the lid on things. Our timetable isn't flexible enough to cater for middle schooling needs. Senior school drives the timetable (Teacher).

This is an issue than cannot easily be resolved when senior school syllabi drive a school curriculum but, as we have described in a previous study (Smyth et al., 2008), we believe that the field of cultural studies offers some scope for engaging young people around questions of everyday life. According to Giroux (1994a) school is no longer the sole pedagogical arbiter of cultural learning. Rather, young peoples' identities are fashioned by a multiplicity of factors which lie outside the perimeters of schools. Films, videos, music, theatre, work, social media, advertising, fashion, art, sport, consumer goods all help to shape students' identities, attitudes, values and interests. Schools need to find a curriculum space which is both receptive to these expressions of youth and popular culture and able to develop within students a capacity for critical analysis.

Giroux (1994b), claims that cultural studies can provide teachers with an analytical lens for 'addressing the shifting attitudes, representations, and desires of this new generation of youth being produced within the current historical, economic, and cultural juncture' (p. 298). This is more urgent than ever because the spread of 'electronically mediated culture to all spheres of intellectual and social life has shifted the ground of scholarship away from traditional disciplines designed to preserve a 'common culture' to the more hybridized fields of comparative and world literature, media studies, ecology, society and technology and popular culture' (p. 299). Smyth et al. (1999) regard critical cultural studies as a form of 'radical contextualism' which:

> … adopts a multidisciplinary perspective for close critical examination of social, economic and political practices and institutions which support and constrain them. (p. 74)

The challenge they pose for educators is to develop pedagogies that take diversity seriously and 'deliver compelling, complex, rigorous curricula' (p. 79) that is respectful of students' lives, and attuned to their interests and concerns. Drawing on Shor (1992) and Freire (1994), they suggest that a way of achieving this outcome is

for students and teachers to develop a curriculum (or modify an existing curriculum) around 'generative' themes from everyday life, 'topical' themes that have local, national or international significance and 'academic' themes that lie within traditional disciplines. They also propose an expanded notion of the objects or artefacts that are worthy of serious study including:

- *The canon*: the texts that are traditionally studied in schools, e.g. reference books, journals, novels, encyclopaedias and other traditional texts
- *Media culture:* community texts such as magazines, newspapers, video, TV, signs, music
- *Material objects:* what is associated with everyday life, e.g. sculpture, visual art, everyday commodities, shopping malls, architecture, technology hardware
- *Identities:* lived experience, imagination, autobiography (p. 80).

Although there may be opportunities for teachers to develop cultural studies courses around socially critical themes, many are constrained by subject syllabi, particularly in the senior years of schooling. In these circumstances, the challenge is to develop critical perspectives within the boundaries of prescribed courses. To illustrate what is possible, we shall refer to an interview with a newly appointed teacher during the course of research into the factors promoting student engagement in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods (Smyth et al., 2008). Stephen was a specialist English teacher and member of a humanities teaching team in a large senior secondary school. In the following portrait he reveals how he was able to tap into current events and popular culture as a means of engaging students in more authentic and relevant forms of learning (McInerney, 2009). What some might see as a distraction from the main game become 'teachable moments' for creative teachers such as Stephen.

The Key Thing for Me Is Associating with the Students on a Personal Level

> Last year I had a group of troublesome Year 9 students, mostly boys. On Tuesday evenings nearly all of the class watched OC, a popular TV drama revolving around the young adult community of Orange County, California. It was impossible to stop them from talking about it on Wednesday morning so I decided to set aside 15 min at the start of the lesson for discussion about the events of the previous episode. Most kids responded well but a few thought it was spoiled by having to analyse it. I find that kids tend to engage more with popular culture, like surfing. It makes it much easier to understand sub-cultures if you talk about the things that interest them. The manager of our humanities team often refers to me as 'the visual man' because I incorporate a lot of animation into my classes. Some of this is IT-based but I also make use of comics. We have a very large collection of good quality comics that kids can use in class. At our school kids tend to identify with special programs such as soccer, rugby and dance. Having their own logos and uniform helps them to establish a sense of identity within the school. Our dress code is fairly flexible and practical. Jeans are okay. This is handy for parents because they don't have to fork out a lot of money. We do a lot to engage kids through out-of-school activities like camping, fishing and canoeing. There's a lot more freedom in the outdoor activities and a lot of team building in

> sporting programs. There are many teachers at our school who go out of their way to support kids. They develop a reputation and kids look forward to going into their classes. Students talk about good teachers as being 'cool'. This might mean a number of things. For some it might mean they don't come down on them too harshly and for others it might mean they appeal to sporting or artistic interests.
>
> A lot of the kids that are into surfing are also in to hip hop so it helps to know some of the lyrics. Younger teachers have a bit of advantage because they are not that far removed from kids' ages and interests. The term 'awesome' is reserved for those teachers who allow kids to have some fun in their classes but kids know they have to work—they can't get away with doing nothing. Kids don't like 'mean' teachers. They like teachers who are flexible. Generally teachers at our school have a license to experiment with pedagogy, although this tends to disappear in the senior high school years. I find that kids are bored with the functionalist approach in the Vocational English course so I try to give them more control over what they are doing in the classroom. I also work more on an individual basis with kids and I allow for some free time in class when kids can go outside for a walk or play some sport.
>
> The key thing for me is associating with the students on a personal level. I am interested in who they are and what they do. Unfortunately we have a number of 'taggers' (graffiti writers) in the school and if you talk about a piece to them you give them some freedom in terms of what they're writing about in the creative writing session. One of the first things I did when I had the class was to get them to write an autobiography. This gave me an idea of who's who. Some kid's put a lot of emotion into their accounts. I also get them to read a lot in class for example the writing of Stephen King, an American author of horror, suspense, science fiction and fantasy books. They learn that a certain amount of profanity and coarse language is okay in certain circumstances. I throw in a few personal stories here and there and they see that I can be honest and open so they have a go themselves. (Based on a transcript of an interview with Stephen on July 27th 2005)

Several aspects of a socially critical approach to curriculum emerge from Stephen's narrative, notably:

- a willingness to take risks and experiment with non-traditional texts (such as comics) and pedagogies in an effort connect young lives and learning (Prosser, Lucas, & Reid, 2010)
- a respect for students' lifeworlds and the knowledge which they bring to the classroom
- a commitment to helping students read their world through a critical analysis of the media and popular culture
- an ability to relate to students in a personable way without resorting to laissez faire pedagogy
- a preparedness to create spaces within the 'official' curriculum for dialogues about social issues that might be considered off-limits in traditional classrooms.

6.5.2 Critical Place-Based Education

Aside from popular culture, young people's perceptions of the world—what they see and what they value—are greatly influenced by the place(s) they inhabit. In advocating for place-based approach to socially critical curriculum we acknowledge that communities are integral to curricula and community members are 'valid bearers

of knowledge' about the world (Gale & Densmore, 2003, p. 113). The merits of place-based approaches to learning have been well documented. [See for example, Smith (2002), Sobel (2005), Gruenewald (2003a, 2003b), Thomson (2006), Cormack, Green, and Reid (2006), McInerney, Smyth, and Down (2011)]. In contrast to much of the mandated curriculum, place-based education 'aims to enlist teachers and students in the first hand experience of local life and in the political process of identifying and shaping what happens there' (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 620). This is not to be interpreted as sanctioning parochialism; rather, as Smith (2002) points out, the intent is to use local knowledges to 'examine more distant and abstract knowledge from other places' (p. 593). In other words, the local becomes a point of entry into the regional and global community. Place-based learning enables students to make connections between school and their lifeworlds but it also has the potential to promote a more critical approach to citizenship, as illustrated in the following account adapted from Comber, Thomson, and Wells (2001) of an environmental project involving primary school students in southern Australia.

Critical Literacy Finds a Place

> Marg Wells, a primary school teacher in a low socioeconomic urban community, began to review her literacy practices in the light of her year 2/3 students' concerns about their neighbourhood. Her students came from a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, with an especially high proportion from South East Asia. Many lived in rented accommodation in the immediate vicinity of the school. But in what could be described as a process of gentrification, the suburb was undergoing extensive renewal with many housing trust homes being demolished or renovated. Students expressed concerns about their local environment, especially the lack of trees and open spaces, and poorly lit streets which posed safety issues. Aware that young children can often relay their thoughts better through a visual medium, Marg encouraged them to explore their feelings through drawings. Asked to nominate three wishes for improving the environment a student responded, 'I like the world to have water so people can grow' and another commented, 'I like the world to have tree'.
>
> Marg re-worked the curriculum so that the children could research the issues they had raised in their drawings. Literacy lessons were appropriated for real-world learning and action. She began with an orientation activity that involved a walk around the neighbourhood gathering information about the streetscapes and vegetation. Guided by Marg, the students extended their fieldwork investigations about trees into broader questions about the local area and called on the experience and knowledge of their families. They learned more about the urban renewal project and began to conduct opinion polls with family members and neighbours about issues such as demolition and relocation. With Marg's help they sent faxes to local authorities seeking more information about the plans for the area. Armed with ideas they designed their own plan for a park and sent it to the local council. They invited council personnel to the school and put forward a proposal for re-planting an area of the school.
>
> What had the children learnt from the experience? They gained a greater knowledge of their neighbourhood. They learned how to conduct research and how to use information technologies in context. They learned how to communicate their ideas to a community organization. Most importantly, they had an experience of social activism. By situating the children's literacies in the local community Marg offered these young people opportunities to develop skills for active citizenship as they researched, sought answers and designed better places. (Adapted from Comber et al., 2001)

In 'authorising locally produced knowledge' (Mills & Gale, 2001, p. 10), Marg Wells enabled her students to see how their everyday lives and experiences were being incorporated into the school curriculum. We believe that educational goals should connect personal achievement to public purpose by engaging students in learning that promotes community development, civic responsibility and a commitment to the welfare of others (Melaville, Berg, & Blank, 2006). However, we also agree with Gruenewald (2003b) that such learning needs to incorporate a critical dimension that encourages educators and young people 'to reflect on the relationship between the kind of education they pursue and the kind of places we inhabit and leave behind for future generations' (p. 3). Rather than endorsing the status quo, a critical pedagogy of place seeks to raise young people's awareness of inequitable structures and oppressive relationships within communities. Just as importantly, it invites young people to contemplate social action in support of the most oppressed and to work for a more just society. What we are arguing for is an approach to place-based education articulated by Gruenewald that combines a concern for the ecological and social wellbeing of communities with critical pedagogies that:

> … challenge the assumptions, practices, and outcomes taken for granted in dominant culture and in conventional education. Chief among these is the assumption that education should mainly support individualistic and nationalistic competition in the global economy and that an educational competition of winners and losers is in the best interest of public life in diverse societies'. (p. 3)

A critical perspective encourages young people to connect local issues to global environmental, financial and social concerns, such as climate change, water scarcity, poverty and trade. It invites teachers and students to question the established order, to view how things are from the position of the most disadvantaged, and to work for the common good rather than self interest. As outlined in McInerney et al. (2011) '[a] critical pedagogy of place not only interrupts the insular and prejudicial views of people but more importantly involves students in a political process of understanding and shaping communities' (pp. 11–12). When young people study the environment, heritage, culture and economy of their community from a critical perspective are prompted to ask:

- What are the best features of our community? What could be done to make it a better place for all?
- How safe/unsafe is our community? What might be done to make our community a safer and healthier place?
- What do monuments and public architecture tell us about the heritage that is most highly valued in this community? What groups are under-represented or rendered invisible?
- What might we do to ensure a more inclusive and accurate record of community heritage in our school and community?
- What is the quality of our local environment—the air, water, soil, native flora and fauna? What might we do to conserve our environment and resources to achieve a more sustainable future?
- To what extent does our school model and promote good environmental practices?

- What are the social, economic and cultural assets of our community? How fairly are they distributed? What can we do to work for a more just community?
- Who gets to make the decisions in our community? Whose voices are largely unheard? What might we do to achieve a more democratic society? (Adapted from McInerney et al., 2011, p. 12).

6.5.3 Community-Oriented Curriculum

Many young people experience schooling as an alienating and irrelevant phenomenon that is often disconnected from their lives and communities. From our observations, the traditional curriculum in high schools tends to ignore or devalue the rich literacy practices of communities and is often dismissive of the 'historically accumulated and culturally developed funds of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being' (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 139) in communities. In the next example of socially critical curriculum in action, we provide a glimpse of a community studies program involving two cooperating teachers who have been able to break down some of the institutional barriers between students and schools. Described in Smyth et al. (2008, pp. 62–63) the course takes students into the community so that they develop a great deal of knowledge and understanding about social structures, programs and primary care organizations such as schools, day care centres and hospitals. There is a strong vocational orientation to this learning but it does extend beyond the acquisition of community service employment skills. Most importantly, students engage in service learning and make a worthwhile contribution to the social and economic wellbeing of their communities. Not only do these teachers feel a strong responsibility to hang in with these kids, but they have also developed pedagogically engaging strategies that motivate students and encourage them to persist with their schooling.

'We Teach Differently in Here'

> Helen and Elizabeth, work as a team with a group of year 11 students enrolled in a Community Services program. Helen says that the girls have made a choice to do the course and they want to come to classes. 'We make things relevant and develop skills that people can use in their lives. The work is hands-on and varied. Within negotiated limits, kids can work at their own pace. We teach differently in here. We try to create a homely atmosphere. Kids can make themselves a cup of coffee at any time. Because it's a small class we get to know each other very well. We build up high levels of trust. The girls can talk about most things. Sometimes we hear things that we'd rather not know about', admits Elizabeth. 'We have considerable flexibility with the timetable and can use the time as we see fit. Most students will complete a TAFE course by the end of year 12. The topics for study are quite broad. For example *Who am I?* looks at their identity and place in the world. Students are involved in family research and have done some investigative work in the genealogical records office'.

> Helen and Elizabeth explain the extensive nature of community links in this course. Students have an ongoing association with a nearby special school where students work with severely disabled children, and a local aged care home where they were involved in as garden make-over. They have also spent time getting to understand the nature of the work in a day care centre and a youth refuge which a few girls have actually used themselves. Some girls work in a local primary school supporting kid's literacy and getting to know more about teaching methods, curriculum and reporting. Helen explained how the class had visited a funeral parlour and spoke to the director about funeral rites, grief counselling and the issues involved in organizing a funeral. This was especially relevant for some of the students because they had lost family members and friends through car accidents and suicide. Unravelling some of the myths about a taboo subject was seen as especially valuable by the teachers.
>
> 'We provide a lot of emotional support for these girls', says Helen. 'Students have their own space in the class—a place they can call home—and time for socializing with teachers and their peers. It's an advantage having two teachers working with the girls because the load can get very heavy'. Helen and Elizabeth have had two pregnant girls enrolled in the course and estimate that some 20 young mothers and pregnant girls would join the group with more support. They have put in a submission for a crèche for schools and tertiary institutions in the area.
>
> Students talked openly about positive aspects of the community studies course and their relationships with their teachers. A girl stated 'I like this course because you get a certificate out of it—for jobs this is important. The teachers keep you motivated and they push you along. I've worked in respite care and a hospital for disabled children. I feel a sense of pride in what I've accomplished at school. My mother is very proud of me. My parents have high expectations. They were a bit shocked about me working with disabled kids but I've learned a lot about autism, Down syndrome and other disabilities from the year 4 kids at the special school'. Another student comments, 'I'm enjoying this course a lot. I've had work experience in a hospital and a nursing home. I think I'd like to be a nurse. I know there are courses which can be done through TAFE or university. My friends out of school keep me motivated with my studies. They tell me to stay on at school and complete my courses … not to leave early like some of them did'. (Based on field notes and transcripts of an interview with Elizabeth and Helen, August 3, 2005) (Smyth et al., 2008, pp. 62–63)

6.5.4 Global Education for Social Justice

To this point, our case studies have centred mainly on the local arena, however a socially critical curriculum must necessarily engage with the phenomenon of globalization. As a result of growing interdependence among nations, the world has evolved into a globalized system with profound effects on individuals and society. Australians are connected to the world through the environment, culture, economics, politics, communication, technology, migration and travel. Consequently it is no longer possible (if it ever was) to isolate the causes and effects of economic, social and political changes to events and processes at local, regional or national levels. For example, high levels of regional unemployment and welfare dependency in Australia are likely to be the direct result of decisions made by a transnational company in North America to shut down a local factory and relocate their business in a low wage country. Issues of global justice, ecological sustainability, and human rights ought to occupy a prominent place in a school curriculum but they have been

marginalized by an emphasis on instrumental learning and the acquisition of basic skills. Railing against the repressive effects of market-driven school reform and high stakes testing in the United States, Hursh (2007) argues for the reassertion of deliberative democracy and deeper sense of commitment on the part of educators to community engagement and social justice. Rather than producing workers for a global economy he argues that schools and teachers have a prime responsibility to 'engage students in continually working to question how we best develop a world that supports human welfare and planetary health' (p. 515). Given the gravity of the environmental, social, political and moral issues confronting humanity today we suggest that it is more urgent than ever that students take a profoundly critical look at the direction *their* world is moving. To cite examples of particular relevance to young Australians:

- Australia's environment and economy are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Having experienced severe droughts, bushfires and rising summer temperatures in recent years many Australians are coming to the realization that global warming is a fact of life yet government and community responses to the problems are typically plagued by indifference, denial and inaction.
- Fuelled largely by the export of mineral resources to China, Australia has experienced a period of economic prosperity over the past decade but the wealth and social opportunities generated by this boom are very unevenly distributed. Moreover, when the Rudd government announced a tax on super profits from mining to help finance Australia's health, education and welfare budgets it was met with a massive, well-funded, and ultimately successful, campaign from wealthy mining barons to get rid of it
- In spite of the perception of Australia as an advanced Western society, high rates of poverty, homelessness, unemployment, welfare dependency and ill-health prevail in many low socioeconomic communities. One-in-eight Australians reside in households with incomes below the nationally recognized poverty line (Australian Council of Social Services, 2012).
- Australia likes to trumpet its human rights record yet for more than a decade asylum seekers arriving by boat have been subjected to long term, and sometimes indefinite, detention often in remote and inhospitable locations. Despite being a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention, the Australia government has shirked its legal and moral responsibilities to these people.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can expect to live substantially shorter lives than other Australians – up to 20 years less in some cases. Babies born to Aboriginal mothers die at more than twice the rate of other Australian babies, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience higher rates of preventable illness such as heart disease, kidney disease and diabetes (Oxfam Australia, 2013).

What we are arguing for in this chapter is a socially critical curriculum which:

- provides opportunities for students to develop a knowledge and understanding of the ways in which their lives and communities are influenced by global issues

- promotes an understanding of the causes and effects of local and global injustice
- educates young people about human rights, the plight of refugees, world trade, global poverty and the environment
- models democratic and inclusive practices, and
- encourages political action in support of those who are oppressed by unjust structures and practices (Education for Social Justice Research Group, 1994).

For the remainder of this section we discuss resources and strategies that facilitate global perspective in the curriculum. We begin with the work of Bill Bigelow and his colleagues in the United States school reform organization, *Rethinking Schools*. Bigelow has taught high school social studies in Portland, Oregon, since 1978 and has developed a reputation for his contribution to critical teaching and dialogic learning. Inspired by Paulo Freire's exhortation that 'pedagogy needs to be more political and the political more pedagogical', Bigelow argues for a socially critical alternative to the 'official', high-stakes-driven curriculum which has largely sidelined social, environmental and economic issues of global significance. In *Rethinking Globalization*, Bigelow and Peterson (2002), claim that teachers can assist students to gain an understanding of social justice by getting them to connect their everyday habits to global concerns, such as climate change, water scarcity, poverty and trade. One of the most outstanding illustrations of how this can be achieved is Bigelow's (1997) account of 'making visible the invisible' by encouraging students to look at the human lives behind the labels of consumer goods. Beyond explaining injustices, Bigelow and Petersen suggest that teachers can encourage students to think about what action they can take to make a difference within their own communities. Promoting students as agents of social change, they claim, is fundamental to the task of building democratic communities and a better world. It is also crucial to the task of re-engaging young people in education. All too often students are positioned as passive consumers of knowledge rather than active creators of knowledge in their own right (for a fuller explication of this see Smyth, 2010).

Reviewing *Rethinking Globalization*, Gough (2002) argues that the book encourages teachers and students to look beyond the outward signs of oppression to investigate the historical and political circumstances that produce injustices. 'Is this book biased?' Bigelow and Peterson ask in their introduction. In their response they distinguish between a 'biased' curriculum and a 'partisan' one. Teaching they claim is biased when it ignores multiple perspectives and does not allow interrogation of its own assumptions and propositions. Partisan teaching on the other hand, 'invites diversity of opinion but does not lose sight of the aim… to alert students to global injustice, to seek explanations, and to encourage activism' (p. 5).

Bigelow and Peterson (2002) argue that 'a deep global literacy must come to be seen as a basic skill in every school' (p. 8) and suggest that it is more urgent than ever that students take a profoundly critical look at the direction the world is headed. They pose the following critical questions:

> How is the reach of the global market impacting cultures everywhere? What are the consequences of the vast and growing inequalities of wealth and power? Is this the best we can do? What alternatives can we imagine? (p. 8)

We believe it is possible for teachers to create spaces within the officially sanctioned curriculum to engage students in learning about these questions, whether students study stand-alone subjects such as economics, English literature history, geography and social studies or a broad curriculum area, such as Society and Environment. Moreover, there are resources to promote socially critical global perspectives within and across the curriculum, including:

- the *New Internationalist* (NI) magazine which reports on the issues of world poverty and inequality and the radical changes necessary to ensure a greater measure of global justice
- *Global Perspectives, A framework for global education in Australian schools* (Asian Education Foundation, 2008)— a practical and philosophical guide to global perspective across the curriculum, and
- many community, faith-based, indigenous and non-government groups and organization that support the work of educators and schools in working for social justice and ecological sustainability.

6.6 Concluding Comments

To bring this chapter to a close we want to highlight those elements of a socially critical curriculum which contribute to the development of the socially just school—the central theme of this book. We do so with reference to Nancy Fraser's (2005) re-framing of justice around notions of distribution, recognition and representation. According to Fraser, 'the most general meaning of justice is parity of participation' (p. 5) in spheres of economic, cultural and political life—a radical democratic interpretation of the principle of equal moral worth 'that requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life' (p. 5). The issue of justice in education is inseparably linked to the curriculum. As Connell (1993) has argued so persuasively, 'a curriculum necessarily intersects with the relationships of inequality in society that constitute social interests' (p. 35). It can work in hegemonic ways to preserve entrenched inequalities arising from the classed, gendered and racialized experiences of students or it can be a referent for progressive social change (Freire, 1993).

Although there are limits to what schools can achieve in reducing economic inequalities, realization of curricula justice demands that, first and foremost, schools serve the interests of the least advantaged (Connell, 1993, p. 43). Importantly, the curriculum itself should be regarded as a key element in distributive justice. Simply redistributing resources without confronting the fundamental issues of class, patriarchy and racism within the curriculum will not ensure social justice in schooling. According to Connell, an inclusive common curriculum 'must be provided to all students as a matter of social justice' (p. 46).

Teachers and schools can promote recognitive justice in education through curricula and pedagogies that: build relationships based on mutual trust, respect and

care; engage students in the acquisition of critical literacies; and, and utilize local funds of knowledge to enhance student learning. Place-based education can play an important role in advancing the principles of recognitive justice by engaging students in forms of learning that promote community development, civic responsibility and a commitment to the welfare of others. However, as we have pointed out in this chapter, place-based learning needs to incorporate a critical dimension that seeks to raise young people's awareness of inequitable structures and oppressive relationships within communities. Just as importantly, it invites young people to contemplate social action in support of the most oppressed and to work for a more just society.

If young people are to become active and politically informed citizens educators, then as educators we need to foster and model democratic practices in schools. Giving students a say in what they learn and how they learn is surely one of the most fundamental aspects of representative justice. Schools that are committed to democratic ideals take seriously what students have to say about the content of the curriculum, the conditions that affect their learning, the approaches to teaching, and the fairness or otherwise of assessment and reporting practices. Goodman (1992) argues that teachers can play a pivotal role by creating 'islands of democracy' in their own classrooms and by designing learning experiences that promote democratic sensibilities among young people.

We are conscious that schools alone cannot overcome the inequalities and social injustices that oppress many young people but we believe that educators have agency and a capacity to fashion socially critical curriculum that go some way to ensuring a greater measure of distributive, recognitive and representative justice in education. In Chap. 7 we examine the crucial role of school leadership in promoting socially critical curriculum and the ideals of the socially just school.

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Chapter 7
Socially Critical Leadership

7.1 Introduction

As we mentioned earlier, at the time of the writing of this book Australia was in the midst of a Federal election campaign and issues of national leadership are very much to the fore. In keeping with a presidential style of electioneering that has come to characterize Australian politics in recent years, much of the media attention has been on the leaders of the two major parties and voters' perceptions of their capacity to manage, if not solve, the country's economic, social and environmental problems. Not only is this expectation of leadership impossible to fulfil but, according to Aigner and Skelton (2013) in their recent publication on social leadership in Australia, it is divisive, unproductive and disempowering for citizens. They argue that effective leadership is not about management, entrepreneurialism or dictatorship but exercising authority in ways that enable people to connect with each other and work together to resolve their own problems. Foster (1989) expressed the idea in these words:

> While management might be an essential tool for modern society (and then again it may not be), leadership occurs as a form of communal life concerned with how lives should be lived, not how they should be controlled. (p. 38)

Leadership of the kind envisaged by Foster embodies a higher sense of moral purpose and commitment to democratic practices and sustainable futures than those contained in the short-term, 'political fixes' that pass as policy-making in Australian politics today. These are hardly radical ideas but they do challenge us to think differently about what leadership means, not just within the realms of government but in businesses, community life and educational institutions, including schools.

In this chapter we discuss the role of educational leadership in advancing the ideal of the socially just school. We are mindful that much is expected of leaders in shaping the culture of schools, the quality of teaching and learning, and authentic engagement with communities and, in many ways, their work has become more complex and challenging in 'unstable environments' (Blackmore, 2008) and

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postmodern educational contexts (Shields, 2004, 2012). Over the past two decades, their roles and responsibilities have also become more closely aligned to the corporate values and practices of the neoliberal state (Gerwitz & Ball, 2000; Grace, 2000; McInerney, 2003; Smyth, 2001). As their pedagogical attributes have been debased, many school leaders struggle to balance responsibilities for implementing centrally imposed directives of State and Federal education systems with a commitment to community-based and democratic forms of schooling. However, there are critically minded educators and scholars who care deeply about the fate of marginalized youth and who are determined to do what they can to rectify the injustices they see around them. Notwithstanding the tensions, many believe that it is possible to exercise educational leadership that embodies an overriding concern for social justice, inclusivity and democratic practices. Their stories, and those of the school communities committed to these ideals, need to be told.

In what follows we want to expand on the notion of socially critical leadership (Gunter, 2001; Smyth, 1989) and its intimate connection to the quest for socially just schooling. Versions of socially critical educational leadership have been described as 'emancipatory leadership' (Corson, 2000), 'democratic leadership' (Gale & Densmore, 2003; Glickman, 1998), 'pedagogical leadership' (Male & Palaiologou, 2012; Sergiovanni, 1998; Smyth, 2001), 'inclusive leadership' (Ryan, 2006), and 'leadership for social justice' (Shields, 2004; Stevenson, 2007; Theoharis, 2007). It is this latter conception that will occupy most of our attention in this chapter. Though largely discredited by the school effectiveness movement and contemporary education policy, the idea of leadership for social justice is now considered a legitimate area of study, as evidenced in the number of articles on the issue in education journals in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and elsewhere. [See, for example, the writings of Capper, Theoharis, and Sebastian (2006), Jean-Marie, Normore, and Brooks (2009), Normore, Rodriguez, and Wynne (2007), Jenlink and Jenlink (2012), Shields (2004), Ryan (2006), Ryan and Rottmann (2007), Smyth (1996, 2006), and Blackmore (2008)] Our contribution to the field will focus on the features of school leadership that promote a socially critical approach to social justice and schooling, especially those embodied in the idea of educative leadership (Smyth, 2001), 'leadership as public pedagogy for social justice' (Jenlink & Jenlink, 2012) and 'advocacy leadership' (Anderson, 2009).

The chapter is organized in the following manner. First, we examine the concept of educational leadership, the changing political, social and economic context of schooling, and the roles and responsibilities of school leaders in an increasingly marketized approach to education. We highlight the paradoxes involved in the shift towards local school management, the re-centralization of curriculum, the imposition of standardized testing regimes and the ascendancy of bureaucratic leadership. Second, we explain why social justice must become a major focus of educational leadership and identify key assumptions and features of a critical approach to social justice. Third, we elaborate on the elements of socially just leadership around notions of advocacy, educative leadership and public pedagogy. With reference to an Australian example, we show how a community-engaged school has been able contest the more corrosive aspects of managerialism by creating spaces

and structures which nurture a collective view of leadership, promote a culture of debate about teaching and learning (Hattam, Brown, & Smyth, 1995) and develop culturally relevant curriculum for young people.

7.2 'When Morals and Markets Collide': Educational Leadership in Neoliberal Times

According to Ball (1994), 'the realization of leadership is always set within a framework of possibilities and constraints' (p. 84) arising from the political, social and economic context of schooling and public policy. Responding to changing times has always been an issue for schools but Blackmore (2008) argues that teachers and educational leaders are now confronted with rapidly changing environments marked by a great deal of instability and insecurity at global, national and regional levels. She refers to a generalized anxiety due to 'terrorism, global warming, food costs, media, and migration' (p. 19) and 'a sense of increased risk due to the growing interdependencies between nation-states, communities and individuals' (p. 19). The effects of financial and technological change on young people are particularly acute. In the 'new work order' and globalized economy, 'work is becoming more deregulated and education and training increasingly self-funded' (Blackmore, 2008, p. 19). The prospect of school leavers gaining full-time work is extremely slim, especially in disadvantaged communities where youth unemployment already exceeds 25 %. Although a good deal of faith has been placed in information and communication technologies to deliver on the job front, a digital divide reinforces patterns of disadvantage in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods (Angus, Snyder, & Sutherland-Smith, 2003).

In addition to economic and technological changes, Jean-Marie et al. (2009) point to the growing complexities of a 'new social order' (p. 2) in the United States in which schools are expected to 'prepare children and communities to participate in a multicultural, multiethnic, multi-religious and multinational society (p. 2). Australia too has become a culturally and linguistically diverse society with increasing numbers of migrants from South East Asia, the Middle East, South and Central America, and Africa. Their claims for recognition and respect sit alongside those of indigenous communities whose knowledge and traditions have historically been undervalued in schools and institutes of higher learning. Amongst other unsettling trends for the status of educators and the roles of schools are 'the changing social relations of gender due to women's increased economic independence and diversified familial patterns [which] are challenging traditional masculinities and femininities' (p. 19).

Perhaps the greatest influence on schooling and educational leadership has been the widespread adoption of neoliberal policies in OECD countries, including Australia. A belief that the market should be the organizing principle for all political, social and economic decisions, including those to do with health, welfare and education, now underpins a good deal of thinking in government circles. One of the key strategies of the neoliberal project has been to reinvent schools around a narrow set

of utilitarian, market-driven reforms, foremost amongst these being ‘the devolution of risk and responsibility down to self managing schools and individuals’ (Blackmore, 2008, p. 19). A culture of managerialism with an emphasis on choice, competition, efficiency and business principles now prevails and the roles and functions of schools are being redefined according to economic imperatives rather than cultural and civic responsibilities enshrined in the notion of the ‘common good’. Symptomatic of this shift is the emphasis attached to national testing regimes, benchmarks, league tables, mandated curricula, vocational education, entrepreneurship, and moves towards performance pay for teachers and school leaders.

Correspondingly, preferred models of educational leadership are now being framed around instrumental and scientific principles rather than those promoting socially critical and democratic practices (Gunter, 2001). According to Sergiovanni (1998, p. 36), these ideas have coalesced around three modes of leadership (a) *bureaucratic leadership* that is largely preoccupied with management systems and an emphasis on supervision, evaluation and incentives style (b) corporate *visionary leadership* that provides a powerfully spoken sense of what must be done, and (c) *entrepreneurial leadership* that applies market principles to schools. Other models of leadership can be found. Discussing the impact of a market-driven school reforms in the United Kingdom, Gerwitz and Ball (2000) suggest that a corporate managerial approach exists alongside a long-standing ‘welfarism’ model with its public service ethos, emphasis on collective relations, and commitment to equity, care and social justice. Similarly in Australia, a participatory model of leadership emerged from the participation and equity goals of the Disadvantaged Schools Programme introduced by a reforming Labor government in the 1970s.

In the current political context, it appears that school leaders are caught in a situation where ‘morals and markets collide’ (Stevenson, 2007, p. 769)—where their views of what constitutes an ethical and pedagogically grounded approach to leadership are in conflict with managerialist discourses that are largely dismissive of the social context of schooling. To illustrate the dilemmas we have selected extracts from transcripts of interviews with school principals conducted in March 2001, a time when governments in most Australian states and territories were embarking on a more devolved model of public education, commonly referred to as local school management (McInerney, 2005; Smyth, 1993). Pseudonyms have been assigned to participants in this study and to others referred to in this chapter. Discussed in detail in McInerney (2003), a commonly expressed view of principals was that their independence and authority were being undermined by a move toward a corporate culture of leadership involving a more authoritarian mode of decision-making. Phillip spoke about the shift in these words:

> I believe there is a change in the culture of leadership from collaborative, cooperative decision making—where there’s involvement … participation … to one where the predominant style of leadership is around the leaders making the decisions and the workers implementing the decisions. You are being paid to lead and strength of leadership means doing things … like don’t involve anybody in processes … to work through issues … to get different perspectives. If you believe in it strongly, do it, work your way through the anger and antagonism and disillusionment that will result … wear that, because that shows strength in

> leadership and then at the end everything will be alright because people will understand that you have made a positive and informed decision and they'll all come on board.

Just how far a participatory model of leadership had been devalued can be gauged from Xavier who recounted the advice he received from a senior education officer when he was applying for leadership positions.

> I was told by a superintendent that basically I needed to go back and look at a different leadership model … I needed a model that would be more appropriate to decisive decision making. The examples I gave in the application were very democratic models. This was six months after I had finished a Master of Education Management degree.

So much for higher learning! [for an alternative see Down and Smyth (2012)]. Participants in this study spoke of the ways in which labels were being used by senior education bureaucrats to categorize their leadership styles according to the level of compliance with managerialist practices. Margaret related how a colleague, who missed out on a leadership position, was accused by the chair of the panel of being an 'old-fashioned' leader. 'Being old-fashioned', it was explained, 'was being too democratic and talking too much about social justice'. On the other hand, principals who enthusiastically embraced system goals were often portrayed in the official department press as progressive, entrepreneurial and innovative leaders.

From our conversations, it was abundantly clear that these principals were under increasing pressure to redefine their roles in terms of corporate responsibilities and business values, rather than some outdated commitment to social justice. Frank summed up the change as follows:

> You've now got people [and organizations] … putting up papers suggesting that principals shouldn't even be teachers; that we should pluck them out of breweries and supermarkets because they are good business managers.

Frank's fear have been realized as the 'rise of the generic manager' has well and truly taken hold in Australian public education. Whilst we are not aware of any brewers who have attained the rank of principal we can report that a former assistant police commissioner, with no experiences of teaching, was appointed as the CEO of a state education department in 2013. We could well ask what sort of a public outcry would ensue if a former school principal was placed in charge of the police department.

Educational leadership is complex, demanding and highly specialized work than cannot be left to non-educators, especially those who have little or no knowledge of pedagogy, curriculum and the sociology of schooling. What Shields (2004) has to say about roles and expectations of US school leaders in a pluralistic society is equally true of Australia.

> Educational leaders are expected to develop learning communities, build the professional capacity of teachers, take advice from parents, engage in collaborative and consultative decision making, resolve conflicts, engage in effective instructional leadership, and attend respectfully, immediately, and appropriately to the needs and requests of families with diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Increasingly, educational leaders are faced with tremendous pressure to demonstrate that every child for whom they have responsibility is achieving success—often defined as performance to a designated standard on a single, standardized test. (p. 109)

A recent inquiry into school leadership within Western Australian public schools (Hinton, 2013) drew attention to the multi-dimensional and complex nature of leadership exercised by principals and deputy principals. To quote from the report, they include responsibilities for:

- the development of a culture of high expectations of educational outcomes, leading teaching and learning, including continual improvement in curriculum development and delivery;
- student outcomes, measured internally and externally through NAPLAN testing, statewide testing and international measures;
- the delivery of education to meet the specific needs of individual students, including those with particular learning needs (refugees, students with disabilities, including mental health issues) and at risk students generally;
- student welfare in an increasingly complex and socially diverse community;
- risk management at multiple levels, including student attainment and safety delivery of public policy objectives at a school-based level;
- broadening the diversity of educational programs, e.g. early childhood, VET in
- schools;
- establishing links between the school and local communities, including parents and other stakeholders and managing the expectations of these groups;
- managing structural changes to education provision, including pre-primary enrolments, moving year 7 to high schools, raising school leaving ages, inclusion of students with special needs;
- selection, management, mentoring, professional development and performance management of teachers and other school staff; and
- managing and developing the school and its physical resources.

The Hinton report (2013) noted that principals were deeply concerned that an emphasis on their administrative and financial roles following the move towards local school management had detracted from their key task of educational leadership. Given the heavy workload and demanding nature of the work it is not surprising that education systems in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States are finding it difficult to attract and retain suitably qualified and experienced educators to fill leadership positions, especially in those schools serving low socioeconomic and culturally diverse communities. Stevenson (2007, p. 769) claims that relentless and rapid system change in the United Kingdom and a lack of support at institutional level has contributed to significant levels of alienation and disaffection amongst headteachers. If there is a leadership crisis we suggest that a significant part of the cause can be traced to the reconfiguration of principal roles in the neoliberal state. Not only are principals and senior teachers expected to perform as 'super leaders' but the very notion of school leadership has been re-fashioned to meet the organizational goals and policies of State and Federal governments. In effect, school leaders have become part of an intellectual class which serve as 'deputies or functionaries' of the state by performing 'the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government thus organizing spontaneous consent' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12).

As a counter to hegemonic leadership, we propose a socially critical and organic alternative committed to participatory forms of decision making and socially just curriculum. Smyth (1989) sums up the imperative as follows:

> … if schools are to be more critical and inquiring communities necessary for a democratic way of life, then the leadership within them will have to be more educative and pedagogical in various ways, rather than bureaucratic and authoritarian. (p. 5)

With these words in mind we now turn to the major theme of this chapter—educational leadership for social justice.

7.3 'Overcoming Pathologies of Silence': A Critical Approach to Social Justice and Schooling

Why should a commitment to social justice be a prime concern of educational leadership? What is encompassed in the notion of critical approach to social justice and schooling? We begin with Connell's (2012) assertion that '[e]ducation is dangerous … because schools and colleges not only reproduce culture but they shape the new society that is coming into existence all around us' (p. 681). Connell goes on to state:

> … social justice in education not only concerns equality in the distribution of an educational service … but the nature of the service itself, and its consequences for a society through time. (p. 681)

Connell draws our attention to the emergence of new forms of inequality in education and society. As we have discussed previously, neoliberal policies have enshrined a market-based approach to education where schools are defined as businesses and forced to compete against each other and students are defined as competitive individuals. In these circumstances:

> [e]ducation becomes a zone of manufactured insecurity, with 'achievement' through competition as the only remedy. But in a zero-sum competition, achievement for one means failure for all the rest. (p. 681)

We agree with Jean-Marie et al. (2009) that school leaders have a social and moral obligation to foster equitable school processes and outcomes for the least advantaged students in schools. Lest we are under any illusion about the extent of inequality and injustices in Australian society consider the following appalling statistics:

- Despite 20 years of economic growth and wealth creation, more than two million Australians, including 575,000 children, are living below the internationally accepted poverty line (Australian Council of Social Services, 2012).
- Students of low socioeconomic status (SES) are significantly under-represented in higher education institutions—16 % nationally, with rates as low as 8 % in the GO8 [Group of Eight elite] universities (Bradley, 2008).

- In the State of Victoria, less than 50 % of young males from low SES backgrounds complete school to the end of Year 12 (or equivalent), with the figure barely rising to 57 % in remote areas, and 60 % in metropolitan areas, and with females being only slightly better in each category (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2009).
- The majority of early school leavers come from circumstances of poverty or culturally marginalized groups, including refugees, Indigenous, ethnic and linguistic groups (Blackmore, 2008).
- Governments in Australia spend less on education and active labour market programs such as training than a majority of developed OECD countries and what is spent on education flows proportionally to the more advantaged students (Argy, 2007).

In the light of this damning evidence, a concern for social justice must remain an issue for schools and educational leadership. Social inequalities not only visit classrooms on a daily basis but are likely to be reproduced in schools which do not respond to the politics of exclusion operating around poverty, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disability and other factors. Moreover, schools that maintain a hegemonic curriculum and engage in sorting and streaming and assessment practices that discriminate against students are complicit in the reproduction of injustices (Connell, 1993).

Before we turn to key elements of a socially critical view of leadership it is important that we set out our assumptions and understandings of a critical approach to social justice that is informing our writing. We do so with particular reference to a schema we discuss below proposed by Ryan and Rottmann (2007, pp. 12–16) in their introduction to a themed issue on educational leadership and policy approaches to critical social justice in the *Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations.*

1. *'Social institutions are human creations'* (p. 12). As Ryan and Rottman (2007) point out, humans are the architects of the institutions in which they live and work and although they do not have free rein over their construction they do have some capacity to change them. This idea corresponds closely with Freire's (1996) belief that men and women are not mere 'objects' who are acted upon but are 'subjects' who can choose to act themselves and hence have a capacity to act on and change their world.
2. *'Societal institutions consistently disadvantage some communities more than others'* (pp. 12–13). Social disadvantage is not an accident nor is it simply the result of individual failings and deficiencies, rather 'patterns of disadvantage are deeply embedded in the fabric of everyday life' (p. 12) and the social structures associated with class, gender, racism, sexual orientation and other forms of oppression. From a socially critical perspective, any meaningful attempt to eliminate injustices can only come about when these structures or patterns are transformed.
3. *'Patterns of disadvantage are not always visible'* (p. 13). This message was brought home to us quite strikingly during an interview with a high school leader in a low socioeconomic community. Improving school retention and student engagement were major priorities for the school yet the impact of poverty and

financial insecurity on young people's lives and educational opportunities was largely unacknowledged. 'We don't talk about social class in our school' we were in effect being told. According to Shields (2004), an unwillingness on the part of educators to critically examine the relationship between gender, class and racism in the reproduction of educational inequality amounts to 'pathologies of silence'.

4. '*Social justice involves more than resource distribution and economics'* (pp. 13–14). Historically, Rawl's (1973) theory of distributive justice has been a key reference for those seeking to ameliorate educational disadvantage. However, simply redistributing material goods and services without confronting and transforming underlying oppressive structures will not ensure a fairer school system for marginalized students. As Fraser (1997, 2005) and Young (1990) have shown, the nature and causes of injustice have cultural, social and political dimensions that can only be redressed through wide ranging measures and policies. In this context, Fraser's (2005) reframing of justice around notions of distribution, recognition and representation is especially helpful in understanding the nature of injustices that permeate schools (Keddie, 2012).
5. *'Social justice is not consistent with the idea of desert'* (p. 14). We challenge the liberal view that people, irrespective of their socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, will be justly rewarded for individual effort and hard work. Schools as they are currently constituted are far from being meritocratic institutions. As Ryan and Rottman (2007) point out, children in poverty are less likely to receive the same rewards enjoyed by their economically privileged peers with the same level of scholastic effort.
6. *'Social justice favours equity over particular versions of equality'* (pp. 14–15). From a socially critical perspective, justice is not guaranteed by treating everybody the same. This is a recipe for sustaining existing inequalities. In the context of schooling, we believe that students should be treated equitably so that those with the greatest need are accorded the greatest share of resources. The equality we advocate is equality of outcomes in education.
7. *'Social justice involves all aspects of education'* (p. 15). Matters of equity and social justice can never be an add-on but are fundamental to what good education is about (Connell, 1993). Politics permeates all aspects of schooling. A particular stance taken on social justice can have profound implications for, the ways in which resources are allocated to students, how students are grouped and tracked, the choice of curriculum content and pedagogies, principles underlying assessment and reporting practices, school decision-making structures, and school leadership practices.
8. *'Social justice calls for hope'* (pp. 15–16). Notwithstanding the impediments, we are motivated by 'a politics of possibility' (Giroux, 1985) founded on the belief that people have agency and a capacity to change institutional practices and structures for the betterment of humanity. Our research therefore extends beyond critique of those policies and structures leading to unjust relations to more optimistic accounts of the ways in which educational leadership can improve the education and life chances of all young people, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, ethnic and racial backgrounds, gender, and sexual orientation.

We believe that conventional forms of educational leadership predicated on corporate managerialist values are not up to the challenge of ensuring more equitable schooling outcomes for young people in 'unsettling times' (Blackmore, 2008). What we are arguing for is a socially critical orientation to leadership, the hallmarks of which are:

- a willingness takes a stand for the educational rights and entitlements of the least advantaged students in the school system
- a determination to contest the taken-for-granted structures and pedagogies within schools which dehumanize relations and discriminate against some young people whilst advantaging others
- a resolve to dismantle tracking policies, compensatory education programs and those practices which seek to sort and stream students according to their perceived abilities
- a rejection of deficit views of students and the differential expectations of their academic ability based on social class, gender, and ethnic/racial backgrounds
- a preparedness to speak out against the injustices and inequalities that pervade public education systems and society at large

A social justice imperative underlies all of these aspects of socially critical educational leadership—an issue that we now discuss in some detail.

7.4 Taking a Stand for Social Justice: Socially Critical Educational Leadership

There is a tendency amongst some writers in the field of leadership studies to refer to social justice leaders rather than leadership for social justice. [See for example, Stevenson (2007), Theoharis (2007), Capper et al. (2006) and Connors and Poutiatine (2010)] Whilst acknowledging the crucial role of principals, headteachers and school administrators in promoting a social justice agenda, we believe that we need to understand the notion of educational leadership as a collective and shared process not something invested exclusively in individuals. We agree with Ryan (2006) that school improvement is rarely achieved by 'individual people doing remarkable things in isolation' (p. 9). It is more likely to happen with 'people working together in many different ways and roles, using the multitude of different resources that are available to them' (p. 9). We share Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond's (2004) view that it is necessary to move beyond a consideration of the roles, strategies and traits of individuals who occupy formal leadership roles to examine how leadership is grounded in the day-to-day practices of schools.

However, we also need to exercise caution in endorsing distributive, participatory and/or transformative models of educational leadership. Foster (1989) argues:

> the idea of leadership as a transforming practice as an empowerment of followers, and as a vehicle for social change has been taken, adapted and co-opted by managerial writers so

> that now leadership appears as a way of improving organizations, not of transforming our world. … Transformational leadership has gone from a concept of power to a how-to manual for aspiring managers. (p. 31)

Gunter (2001) makes a similar point in claiming that that transformational leadership amounts to a 'top-dog theory' that meets the needs of management control (p. 98). The point we want to emphasize is that seemingly enlightened approaches to educational leadership can be appropriated in unscrupulous ways to justify what may well be turn out to be unjust practices.

With this cautionary note in mind, we now look more closely at the elements of educational leadership motivated by a concern for social justice. According to Jenlink and Jenlink (2012), a social justice stance constitutes an ethical, moral and political position that serves to guide a leader's actions and decisions. It is informed by an understanding that if we want to achieve 'a socially just, democratic society, we must work to define that society, in part through our education systems and schools' (p. 4). What does this entail? Nieto (2000) says 'a concern for social justice means looking critically at why and how our schools are unjust for some students' (p. 183). This necessitates an analysis of 'school policies and practices that devalue the identities of some students while overvaluing others' (p. 183).

In a similar vein, writers, such as Theoharis (2007) and Ryan (2006), stress the need for educational leaders to address and eliminate the marginalization experienced by young people in schools associated with race, class, gender, disability, and sexual orientation. They attach particular importance to the removal of discriminatory practices and efforts to foster a culture of inclusion that is embedded in the curriculum and the day-to-day activities of school. Others such as Glickman (1998) advocate for participatory and community engaged approaches to educational leadership. According to Gale and Densmore (2003), democratic educational leaders seek to establish conditions that are 'conducive to the development of social learning and culturally-responsive organizations' (p. 134). Inspired by Freire's (1996) philosophy, Corson (2000) discusses the notion of emancipatory leadership and Shields (2004) makes a case for dialogic leadership. These and other orientations, are worthy of serious consideration but we shall confine our discussion to the following:

1. leadership as public pedagogy for social justice (Jenlink & Jenlink, 2012)
2. advocacy leadership for social justice (Anderson, 2009)
3. educative leadership for social justice (Smyth, 2001)

7.4.1 Leadership as a Public Pedagogy for Social Justice

The idea of leadership as a public pedagogy for social justice, outlined by Jenlink and Jenlink (2012), owes a good deal to Giroux's (1988) theorizing around the idea of teaching as intellectual labour. Rejecting the notion of teachers (including educational leaders) as technicians whose primary job is to implement agendas

set by others, Giroux redefines their roles as the transformative intellectuals who 'must take active responsibility for raising serious questions about what they teach, how they teach and the larger goals for which they are striving' (p. 126). Central to the category of the transformative intellectual is the importance of 'making the pedagogical more political and the political more pedagogical' (p. 127). 'Making the pedagogical more political in Giroux's terms means inserting schooling directly into the political sphere by arguing that schooling represents both a struggle to define meaning and a struggle over power relations' (p. 127). Within this perspective:

> critical reflection and action become part of a fundamental social project to help students develop a deep and abiding faith in the struggle to overcome economic, political and social injustices. (p. 127)

Making the political more pedagogical involves 'utilizing forms of pedagogy that are emancipatory in nature' (p. 127), for example giv[ing] students an active voice in their learning experiences and 'developing a critical vernacular that is attentive to the problems experienced at the level of everyday life' (p. 127).

Drawing on these ideas, Jenlink and Jenlink (2012) suggest that a concern for social justice and democracy should lie at the heart of educational leadership in schools today. This concern, they argue, is 'animated by the question of whether schools are to serve and reproduce the existing society or to adopt a more critical role of challenging the dominant social order so as to develop and advance society's democratic imperatives (p. 1). Failure to take a stand for social justice effectively ensures the reproduction of the existing society with all of its inequities. Taking a social justice stance, they state:

> requires that the educational leader interrogate social structures and cultural practices that contribute to injustice, bringing democratic practices to bear so as to mediate cultural dominance, political ideologies and asymmetries of power that work to reproduce cultures and social structures that foster injustices and inequities in educational settings. In this sense, the educational leader's work is a form of public pedagogy guided by an agenda of social justice; a pedagogy that works to transform inequities and injustices, forming a more just and democratic school. (pp. 1–2)

A public pedagogy of social justice, in their view, contests 'the hegemonic forces in the school that oppress individuals: teachers or students or others placed in asymmetrical relationships of power' (p. 4). From their perspective, 'leadership that takes a social justice stance takes the form of a public pedagogy to counter the historical and structural injustices in educational settings' (p. 4). This notion is particularly instructive because it provides 'a theoretical basis for understanding educational leaders' work as a form of intellectual labour, as opposed to defining it in purely instrumental or technical terms' (p. 14) and 'it moves to the foreground the role leaders play in producing and legitimating various political, economic, and social interests through the pedagogies they endorse and utilize' (p. 14). Importantly, it alludes to the need for socially critical educational leadership that advocates on behalf of the most marginalized students, families and communities.

7.4.2 Advocacy Leadership for Social Justice

The notion of advocacy is well entrenched in the Westminster legal system where the practice of acting for, or on behalf of others, is a common practice in civil and criminal law suits. We identify with a growing body of socially committed researchers who see themselves as having an advocacy role in representing the lives of and experiences of the least young people in educational settings (Smyth & McInerney, 2012, 2013). There is in some quarters a growing recognition that a crucial role of educational leadership is to advocate on behalf of traditionally marginalized and poorly-served students. Jean-Marie et al. (2009) spell out the breadth of the task in these words:

> school leaders must increase their awareness of various explicit and implicit forms of oppression, develop intent to subvert the dominant paradigm, and finally act as a committed advocate for educational change that makes a meaningful and positive change in the education and lives of traditionally marginalized and oppressed students. (p. 4)

The idea of advocacy leadership has been a prominent theme in the writings of former teacher and principal, Gary Anderson. Against the backdrop of a growing culture of managerialism and the manifest failure of bureaucratic, high stakes accountability systems in the United States, Anderson (2009) writes about the need to re-theorize educational leadership around a commitment to social justice, democracy and community engagement. In his view, a market-based approach to school reform in the United States and elsewhere has turned many principals from educational leaders into 'entrepreneurs of the market' and their relationships now 'mimic' those of business leaders more so than educators. Educational leadership, according to Anderson, now involves 'transactions' (inauthentic ways of relating in a market economy) rather than 'relationships', which are based on personal relating (Anyon, 2011). In this situation the influential stakeholders from white, middle class professional and business backgrounds wield the greatest parental power in schools and have most to gain from 'the expanded use of accountability, efficiency and management procedures that are their own cultural capital' (Apple 1996, cited in Anderson, 2009, p. 14).

Anderson argues that current leadership theories are largely dismissive of the ways in which neoliberal education policies and school practices have exacerbated educational inequalities and diminished educational opportunities for the most disadvantaged students. What he proposes is a notion of advocacy leadership which he explains as follows:

> An advocacy leader believes in the basic principles of a high quality and equitable public education for all children, and is willing to take risks to make it happen. Advocacy leaders tend to be skilled at getting beneath high-sounding rhetoric to the devil in the details. They are sceptical by nature. They know the difference between the trappings of democracy and the real thing. They refuse to collude in so-called collaborative teams or distributed leadership endeavours that are inauthentic. For instance, they know when a site-based leadership team is rigged against low-income parents. They know when parents of children with disabilities are being railroaded in individual educational plan (IEP) meetings by school professionals. They know the hard ball politics of influential parents and the ways they

> work the system to get privileges for their children at the expense of others. They are not seduced by business models yet they don't close off any avenue of new ideas. They are sceptical of the idea that we can avoid the difficult give-and-take of politics by replacing politics with market based choice policies. (p. 14)

Advocacy as conceived by Anderson encompasses advocacy for children at multiple levels of the education system, and greater authenticity within the classroom, school, and society (p. 26). Beyond school boundaries, advocacy leadership seeks to build alliances with progressive community-based groups working to improve schools and the social and economic infrastructure of neighbourhoods (Anyon, 2011).

What does advocacy leadership look like in practice? When the then Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, announced the imminent closure of the federally-funded National Partnership for Literacy and Numeracy in 2012, $500 million was to be effectively withdrawn from the system to support literacy and numeracy improvement in the country's most disadvantaged schools. Deeply concerned about impact this decision would have on his school and the public education system in general, Paul Rose, a secondary school principal in regional Victoria, voiced his criticism through a national daily newspaper *The Australian.* As reported in the article (Ferrari, 2012), his school stood to lose $265,000 or about $230 per student a year under the new arrangements. What follows is an edited version of a statement (available online) prepared by Paul Rose (2012) for release to the media.

> My name is Paul A. Rose. I am the principal of Ballarat Secondary College, a four site, multi-campus college in Ballarat, Victoria. Our school has 1100 students, has the lowest socio-economic index of any secondary school in the town, operates the only school based re-engagement program in the city of Ballarat that is specifically designed for young adolescents who have spent twelve months or more out of education, has the largest Koori (Indigenous) student population in the Grampians Education Region and has the largest population of students with physical or intellectual needs in our region.
>
> Our school is a very special place. It is living proof of why public education is central to the building of a modern, inclusive society. For the overwhelming majority of our students, public education is the only way to move forward in their lives, gaining the skills and abilities so needed for success in society. Our students rely on an education system that recognizes their right to basic skills, be they academic, social, sporting or emotional, their right to be able to extend their basic skills in a manner that encourages future success and raises the general social and emotional IQ of our society. On average, students come to our school with literacy and numeracy levels three years below the expected standard. Our aim is to help these young people "catch up" by the time they have reached Year 10, so that they can undertake their final two years of schooling in a way that puts them on as level a playing field as possible with students across the state. To make up this deficit, our teachers are trying to find ways in which students can make one and a half year's progress each year in literacy and numeracy.
>
> This is a Herculean task. It requires very special teachers with a high level of passion and commitment. It requires support staff that can work closely with individual students, assist teachers in the classroom and free up teacher time to spend with individuals and small groups. It requires additional liaison with parents and guardians because the catch up task cannot be done by school alone. It requires assistance and a positive outlook from parents, guardians and the home. It requires specialist equipment and training in its use for all teachers, their support staff and of course the students and their home supporters. Our school raises about $20,000 of discretionary funds a year from our local community. This is barely enough to replace the table tops on a rotating schedule, let alone buy the quality equipment that will make classrooms vibrant places of learning.

> Our school needs additional funding. We need this additional funding to provide the educational basics: more teachers, and more specialist teachers of literacy and numeracy, technology, visual arts and performing arts. With these teachers we can expand the curriculum offerings so that each child has the chance to shine in those areas of interest and ability that we all have. We need this additional funding to provide breakfast for many of our students and to engage them in social and developmental programs with qualified counselors in an environment that is supportive of their physical needs and their social health. We need this additional funding to employ qualified Indigenous teachers and mentors for our Indigenous students, to break the cycle that so many years of neglect have entrenched in our society.
>
> We need this additional funding to address the welfare needs of our students and to involve their parents in programs inside the school, where they can learn with their children so that the cycle can be broken. We currently employ both social workers and youth workers but we need to increase the number of these valuable staff as the home and community life of our students becomes more distressed and, unfortunately, more violent. We need access to speech therapists to support the almost 60 % of our middle years students who have a language disorder. We need this additional funding so that our students can come to know the positive world that exists outside the schools grounds. Excursions, visits to other schools, to science experiences, to universities where they can experience another way of learning are so important and so lacking in our curriculum. We have fourteen year old students who have never been to our state capital one hour away by train. Where we can't take our students to the learning experience, we need to bring the learning experience into our school.
>
> We need this additional funding to provide our staff, teachers and support staff, with the basic amenities of teaching; a decent desk, a place to work collaboratively with colleagues to plan for and review student progress, pleasant surroundings in which to hold meetings with parents and members of the community, access to a quality professional library and research materials. We need this additional funding to give our students to chance to train to an industry standard, in the classroom, on the sporting field, in the workshop, in the rehearsal studio or in the art studio.
>
> Our society is bifurcating along the line of social class. The only effective way to address the growing gap is through a strong, well supported public education sector that is funded effectively and appropriately for the task that has been assigned to it—building a coherent, inclusive society.

Public criticism of education policy is a risky business for educational leaders. Although many principals may privately raise concerns about educational injustices, most are fearful of publicly opposing government policy as Paul has done. Advocacy leadership expressed by him combines a deep concern for the education and welfare of the most marginalized students in his school coupled with an eloquent and vigorous defence of public education which he believes is vital to building an inclusive and fairer society. Unlike the educator mentioned previously in this chapter, Paul locates the cause of educational disadvantage within the inequitable structures in an Australian society which he believes is 'bifurcating along the lines of social class'. He backs up his case for a greater share of funding for educationally disadvantaged students with a well-grounded knowledge of the sociological dimensions of schooling, curriculum and pedagogy. He has a clear understanding of the human and material resources needed to (a) improve learning for young people and (b) provide professional support for teachers. Through his advocacy for the most marginalized young people, particularly indigenous students and those with disabilities, Paul reveals himself as educational leader who places issues of social justice to the forefront of his work.

7.4.3 Educative Leadership for Social Justice

It should be quite apparent by now that the attributes of educational leadership required to promote the ideal of the socially just school have little do to with charismatic/heroic/visionary leaders imposing their view of what schooling should be on others—no matter how well intended. Nor has it much to do with management per se. Clearly school leaders need to manage resources wisely and exercise their administrative roles in a responsible manner but the kind of leadership described in this chapter is 'first and foremost educative' (Smyth, 2001) insofar as it is primarily concerned with stimulating dialogue about teaching and learning in schools. This is especially important today when so much of the focus is moving from the relational and pedagogical aspects of schooling towards compliance with mandated curriculum and other accountability regimes. The 'educative' view of leadership outlined by (Smyth, 2001) involves a more complex process of investing people with an enabling capacity to:

> move from a situation of dependence and non-reflectivity, to one of becoming active inquirers into their own and others practices by acquiring new lenses for critically assessing their circumstances and their role in determining them. (p. 240)

The inclusive approach advocated by Smyth (2001) speaks of a need 'to incorporate all school participants in an active and inclusive process of questioning, challenging, and theorizing about the social, political and cultural nature of the work of schools' (p. 240).

An Educative View of Leadership: Insights from Wattle Plains School

By way of an illustration of educative leadership for social justice we shall return to Wattle Plains, the school we featured in our account of community engagement and democratic decision making in Chap. 4. To recap a little, Wattle Plains was one of the sites chosen for research into school-based forms of teacher development in the late 1990s—a time when state education systems in Australia were moving towards more devolved models of schooling (Smyth, McInerney, Hattam, & Lawson, 1998). Subsequently the school was the subject of a critical ethnographic study of school reform around the notion of social justice and education (McInerney, 2004, 2007). Although some 13 years have elapsed since this research was undertaken, we believe the study is worth revisiting for what it has to say about the elements of a socially critical approach to educational leadership and curriculum reform in the context of a rising tide of neoliberalism. Though not without its tensions and contradictions, the educational leadership we encountered at Wattle Plains was quite remarkable for its focus on teaching and learning, its commitment to participatory modes of decision-making and its preparedness to confront injustices and stand up for the rights of children. Our recounting of this complex story is necessarily brief but we want to highlight several aspects of an organic and pedagogical view of leadership

committed to socially just schooling drawing on excerpts of conversations with school leaders and teachers.

When we first visited in 1998, Wattle Plains School had an enrolment of 900 students and incorporated a Child Care Centre (pre-school), Junior Primary School (Reception to Year 2) and a Primary School (years 3–7) with all leadership personnel working cooperatively across the campus. The curriculum was based on seven areas of learning—the arts, English, health and physical education, mathematics, society and environment, science and technology—and languages other than English were offered in Polish, Vietnamese and Spanish. Committee structures and leadership practices supported a whole school focus on social justice, curriculum and pedagogy. *Collegiate Teams* of 10–12 teachers and school support staff, spread across year levels, met twice monthly to discuss curriculum and school priorities. All teachers elected to be a member of one of the five a *Curriculum Committees* (The Arts, Science, Information Technology, Literacy, Multiculturalism, Aboriginal Education and Success Oriented Learning) which were required to monitor the impact of teaching and learning on girls, Indigenous students, children from a non-English speaking background and students who were recipients of government assistance. These forums were complemented by a *Change Committee* whose tasks were to ensure a whole school approach to curriculum reform and coordination of training and development and the *Leadership Group* made up of the principals, deputy principal and coordinators of curriculum committees which met regularly to discuss broader curriculum issues and feed ideas into other decision-making forums.

There seemed to be a strong belief that any changes in policy and practice at Wattle Plains should be preceded by informed discussion and research. In other words, change for its own sake was considered unproductive and unenlightened unless there was some evidence that it would lead to improvements in teaching and learning. ‘People here are not afraid of data,’ explained co-principal, Margaret, when she spoke of the extensive use of community surveys in evaluating curriculum initiatives, documenting student achievements and generating ideas to guide curriculum reform. However, David, the literacy coordinator, suggested that ‘data collection should not be confined to quantitative research methods. You should also value anecdotal data and we did that using Y charts for students participation and evidence of success-oriented learning environments’. This was a school that interpreted data through ‘a lens of equity’ (Theoharis, 2007, p. 252).

Leadership at Wattle Plains was not just the prerogative of a privileged few ‘office-bearers’. ‘Leadership and power are shared in our schools’, said Sally, the Junior Primary Principal, ‘If teachers haven’t got any power they don’t share it with the kids.’ According to Sophie, the student counsellor, there was a general recognition that all staff had a right and responsibility to take on leadership roles, even if ‘some people need to be cajoled into giving training and development sessions in an area of their expertise’. She expressed a view of the organic nature of leadership in the school. ‘Leadership is actually about tapping into the wealth of skills that are in this place’, she claimed. ‘It’s not about having to build them from scratch, because

you can't. It's about connecting people in terms of knowing their strengths and skills and giving the opportunity to run with them. It is about influencing the school culture and promoting a shared vision of what we want the place to be like'. Whilst this could be described as a distributive form of leadership it was:

> less about the delegation of risk and responsibility, and more about building the leadership capabilities of students, teachers and parents through the redistribution of resources in order to create conditions that enable a sense of agency. (Blackmore, 2008, p. 29)

Sally believed that educative leadership of this kind was more intent on sustaining a dialogue about teaching and learning than it was in exercising bureaucratic power and hegemony over others. Her view resonates closely with Smyth's (2001) contention that leadership is not something that is exercised in a vacuum, rather 'it exists in the context and culture of the school and is grounded in instruction and pedagogy' (p. 236). Viewed from this perspective, leadership has little to do with exercising power and authority over others and much to do with enabling those with the best ideas to come forward. An illustration of how this occurred at Wattle Plains involved the painting of the murals on the school grounds and buildings—a project largely initiated by Boris following his passionate plea to the staff about the need to revitalize the learning environment and 'to get kids painting for the sheer joy of painting'. He was quite clear about the curriculum value of the murals which, he said, should 'enhance the school with colour and aesthetic value and be compatible with the surrounding area'. Boris was insistent that 'the murals should not be seen as simply a decorative add-on' but should evolve from the work that teachers are doing in the class. Having won over the staff, he arranged for them to be released for a whole day professional development activity to plan and paint the first mural, during which time he gave instructions about the geometry of the design and technical aspects of the art work. Boris then worked with individual teachers and groups of students to prepare a whole set of murals for the school grounds and buildings. The project took on a community dimension with a number of parents helping class groups, whilst others painted sections of the seascape on the school perimeter fence.

Previously, we described Wattle Plains as a 'dialogic school' (Smyth et al., 1998) where teachers had the courage to confront and debate the bigger issues associated with their daily work. Co-principal, Margaret, stated that the school had worked to create an environment in which public disagreement was permissible. 'It is part of the culture of this school to have really feisty debates about educational issues', she said. 'People feel safe to do that because the culture we're trying to develop in this place is about learning rather than protecting your back or getting a smack for being wrong'. She gave an example to back up her claim.

> We have some tricky issues like the teacher a few years ago [who] wanted us to adopt an ABCDEF mode of reporting because it was a less time-consuming process for teachers. We could have told him to shut up, or not to put it on the staff meeting agenda … We didn't do it that way … [Rather,] we asked, what kinds of information do kids need to be able to improve their learning?… In the end, when it went to the vote, he didn't vote for his own idea … Why would you [grade] unless it provides valuable information to parents that will progress kids' learning?

Establishing authenticity in this instance involved a whole school debate which was ultimately quite productive in reaffirming the value of descriptive comments, portfolios, and work samples as the basis of the school's assessment and reporting practices. It highlights the prominence that was given to educative dialogues and to an understanding of the need to muster sound arguments to support educational ideas and practices, rather than falling back on some position of authority.

The educative dimension of leadership in the school had been enhanced through more empowering approaches to educational decision-making which encourage innovation and healthy debate whilst sustaining trustful relationships. 'The principals trust you', said Sandy. 'They know that you're willing to learn and to practise new things and to share and that you can come to them and tell them what you're doing and ask for help.' Co-principal, Margaret declared 'part of the leadership skill for principals is not what you know but how you engage people in the conversation … and knowing when to push it forward … and being prepared to trust people to do something even if you think it may not work.' This invariably involved a conscious effort to engage people in meaningful discussions about the curriculum as well as a certain amount of pushing and prodding when it came to moving them forward. Just as importantly, the participatory nature of these dialogues enabled teachers, students and parents to exercise a high level of autonomy in making decisions about school priorities.

Acting strategically and politically was a widely accepted practice at Wattle Plains. Rather than slavishly following the latest trends, or allowing those at a distance to drive the school's agenda, curriculum decisions were generally made by participants on the basis of informed research and rational thinking, rather than some knee-jerk reaction. Invariably the question that was asked when a new idea presented itself was: how might this improve students' learning? Commenting on the school's attitude towards department policies co-principal, Sally remarked:

> We tend not to get emotional and resist system requirements. We let system requirements try and improve what we do. We don't just chop and change because of system requirements because no decent learning happens at all. We ask: 'Are they useful, and how can they enhance what we are choosing to do?' not, 'Let's stop what we planned, and do this bit, and then go back to what we had planned.'

Educational leadership at Wattle Plains revealed what Stevenson (2007) describes as 'an ability to "mediate" the external policy environment and to align it with the values and vision of the school (p. 771). They were skilful in obtaining resources from the education system to drive an agenda firmly fixed on equity and social justice.

To conclude, although Wattle Plains had taken some major steps towards the ideal of socially just schooling, it was tempered with an understanding of the immensity of the task and the numerous impediments to grassroots reform. Not the least of these involved the ambiguities and tensions associated with the school's participation in state-mandated literacy and numeracy testing programs, the difficulties of keeping the education of girls on the agenda, the barriers to the development of critical literacies, and the marketization pressures on schooling. Teachers had to walk something of a tightrope in struggling to sustain an emancipatory alternative,

whilst engaging in a productive and creative way with a neo-liberal discourse rooted in functional rationality (McInerney, 2007). However, educational leadership at Wattle Plains had been able to create dialogic spaces where teachers, students and parents could come together to discuss and decide curriculum priorities against a rising moral ascendancy of managerialism (Smyth, 2001, p. 181).

7.5 Concluding Comments

In this chapter we have described key features of educational leadership that contribute to the development of the socially just school. Our account has proceeded from a critique of contemporary forms of leadership, incorporating bureaucratic, instrumental and managerial practices, to ethnographic and theoretically informed descriptions of organic, indigenous approaches to leadership committed to participatory forms of decision-making and social justice. Sustaining this kind of educational leadership in neoliberal times is fraught with tensions and difficulties but we are encouraged by educators who have taken a stand for the educational rights and entitlements of the least advantaged students, who reject the deficit labels attached to students arising from social class, gender, and ethnic/racial backgrounds, and who are a prepared to speak out against the injustices and inequalities that pervade public education systems. Socially critical educational leadership of the kind we have described attaches a great deal of importance to 'teachers making sense of what they do through problematizing their teaching in the social and political context in which it occurs'; (Smyth, 2001, p. 250). We pick up this theme in the next chapter when we explore the features of a socially critical approach to vocational education and work.

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Chapter 8
Socially Critical Approach to Work

8.1 Introduction

> It's tough getting an interview. When I go for the interview normally I'm like the third or the second best. Someone always just beats me. So when they say "Just not the best", I'm wondering what else they want. They don't really tell you what they were looking for. They say, "Oh you were good, you had everything we needed but this guy is just better than you". I don't know why. Someone always just beats me (Lucas, 15 year old student).

We first met Lucas in August 2011 as a participant in a larger ethnographic study into the conditions supporting young people in 'getting a job' (Down & Smyth, 2012). Lucas was a thoughtful and mature young person who had a clear idea about his future—he wanted to be an electrician. He was one of only 16 students guaranteed a place in a pre-apprenticeship program at a specialist electrical course. Lucas attended the local high school in a community described as low socio-economic-status (SES) or 'disadvantaged'. Approximately half of the students undertake studies orientated towards vocational education and training (VET). Under the umbrella of Industry Links, the courses in years 11 and 12 have components of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) certificate studies, work experience and school-based instruction in numeracy, literacy and job preparation. When we interviewed Lucas in 2011 he had commenced a pre-apprenticeship course in the electrical trades and was well on the way to realising his ambition of becoming a qualified electrician. Although the school supported him, it was clear that he had to find his own work experience placements in the field. In the process, he approached approximately 200 potential employers before finding an employer willing to supervise his work experience.

Since finishing his pre-apprenticeship with TAFE in 2012 and graduating from high school, Lucas has struggled in vain to secure a full-time apprenticeship in the electrical trades. In his words, 'When I got my Cert 2 [Electro Technology] I thought I would be able to get a job but everyone else also has a Cert 2. The problem is you're trying to get ahead of everyone else but everyone else is also trying to get ahead'. This has been a very frustrating time for Lucas and his family. In what could

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be described as an example of 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2006), he was led to believe that there were plenty of opportunities for electricians in the job market especially given the hype about skills shortage in the economy. Lucas assumed it would be relatively easy to gain an apprenticeship once he completed school. When we last met with Lucas in March 2013 he described how he spends much of his time searching online for vacant positions. When he does get an interview for a job, he invariably misses out. 'Someone always beats me', he says.

A number of issues arise from Lucas's predicament.

First, young people today are facing an increasingly precarious labour market as the forces of globalisation, technology and neoliberalism destroy jobs faster than they can be created (Aronowitz & DiFazio, 2010). Despite mounting evidence to the contrary, young people are told that education is a panacea to 'getting a job'. Whilst it certainly may help, the power of schooling to remedy social and economic problems such as unemployment is illusory for growing numbers of young people (Grubb & Lazerson, 2004). In Lucas's school community for example, youth unemployment is about 20 % with official statistics showing that 37.3 % of 15–19-year-olds are neither 'earning nor learning' (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, p. 17). Recent Council of Australian Government (COAG, 2008) figures confirm a 'worrying picture' nationally where 27.3 % of 17–24 year olds are not fully engaged in full-time work or study with 41.6 % of poorer students and 60 % of Indigenous students 'falling through the cracks' (Maiolo, 2013). Ominously, these figures exclude the many school leavers including Lucas who do not register with Centrelink, the Commonwealth government agency responsible for managing the unemployed. Neither does it account for the manipulation of data that occurs to hide the real number of unemployed particularly in times of crisis (Baker, 2013). Contrary to what Lucas was told, few apprenticeships or jobs actually exist in the electrical trades. Governments constantly talk up the importance of schools in skilling young Australians—making them job ready—but the permanent full-time jobs simply do not exist and if they do there is intense competition for the few remaining positions available. Compounding the problem is the erosion of structured on-the-job training highlighted by a 33 % fall in apprenticeship and trainee commencements in the first 3 months of 2013 due in large part to a $1.1 billion cut to Commonwealth schemes to encourage the take-up of apprenticeships/traineeships (Ross, 2013) and the withdrawal of State government subsidies for young electrical apprentices in Western Australia (Perpitch, 2012, p. 2).

Second, there appears to be few employment support mechanisms for young people once they leave school. Whilst Lucas was able to avail himself of career counselling services at school, he now relies extensively on family networks and his own initiative. Aside from the largely inadequate Newstart Allowance, Centrelink renders little assistance to job seekers.

Third, it is difficult to see how young people in these circumstances can cope financially without a good deal of family support. Lucas has very little spare cash but at least he has a roof over his head and a supportive family, so he is probably better off than some other kids.

Fourth, notwithstanding the skills he learnt in the VET course, Lucas views school as 'something you have to do'. For him, school was largely irrelevant to his needs and interests. It was not until the senior years when he was able to do a more practical vocational course that he saw some relevance of his schooling to 'getting a job', albeit an emaciated view of 'becoming educated' (Smyth & McInerney, 2014).

In this chapter we want to draw on C. Wright Mills's (1971) notion of the 'sociological imagination', in particular the distinction he makes between 'personal troubles' and 'public issues' to help frame up a socially critical approach to work. According to Mills, personal troubles refer to the 'character of the individual and … his immediate relations with others; they have to do with the self and with those limited areas of social life of which he is directly and personally aware' (pp. 14–15). Thus, personal troubles 'properly lie within the individual as a biographical entity and within the scope of his immediate milieu—the social setting that is directly open to his personal experience…. trouble is a private matter' (p. 15). In contrast, public issues are 'matters that transcend … the individual and the range of his inner life. They have to do with the organization of many such milieux into the institutions of … the larger structure of social and historical life. An issue is a public matter' (p. 15). Put simply, Mills argues that individual biographies can only be properly understood when examined in the wider context of the social institutions and structures in which they are located and that give their lives 'understand[ing] … significance and meaning' (p. 178). For instance, when talking about the issue of unemployment, Mills argues that because 'the very structure of opportunities has collapsed … the correct statement of the problem and the range of possible solutions require us to consider the economic and political institutions of the society, and not merely the personal situation and character of a scatter of individuals' (p. 15). This is a framework in which analysis of individual biographies is located in relation to key social and economic structures. In practice, it offers a powerful mechanism to reveal what is really going on within young lives in ways that move beyond 'deficits' and victim blaming discourses (Valencia 1997, 2010). This kind of sociological analysis is the foundation on which we seek to build a socially critical pedagogy of work based on the experience of young people such as Lucas.

8.2 Callous Capitalism and Endless Insecurity

Lucas's story and many thousands like it reveal a great deal about the transformation of capitalist work conditions since the 1970s especially the advent of 'flexibility' and the 'intensification of insecurity' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 84). Beck (2000) explains how 'every location in the world now potentially competes with all others for scarce capital investment and cheap labour supplies' (p. 27). Under free-market fundamentalism or neoliberalism this 'new geography of livelihoods' (Ross, 2009, p. 1) is rendered as 'self–evident' and 'comes to be seen as an inevitability' that 'cannot be resisted' (Bourdieu, 1998, pp. 30–31). As Couldry (2008) has argued, the term neoliberalism

'identifies under one label a range of discourses as a form of "common sense," that absolutely legitimates the market and delegitimates the social' (p. 4). We live in a world, Grossberg (2005) argues, in which 'there can only be one kind of value, market values; one kind of success, profit; one kind of existence, commodities; and one kind of social relationship, markets' (p. 264). Of particular relevance to this chapter is the manner in which the commitment to market values has 'led inexorably towards a global production system of network enterprises and flexible labour practice' (Standing, 2011, p. 26). Standing elaborates in the following way:

> A central aspect of globalization can be summed up in one intimidating word, 'commodification'. This involves treating everything as a commodity, to be bought and sold, subject to market forces, with prices set by demand and supply, without effective 'agency' (a capacity to resist). Commodification has been extended to every aspect of life—the family, education system, firm, labour institutions, social protection policy, unemployment, disability, occupational communities and politics' (p. 26).

International agencies such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have been instrumental in promulgating the neoliberal agenda including: trade and financial liberalization; deregulation; the selling off of state corporations; competition; cuts to public services; and a shifting of the tax burden from the top to the bottom. The collateral damage is clear for all to see, among them: 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey, 2003, p. 20); 'hyperrationalization' (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 44); 'unpredictability', irreversibility', 'disorderliness', and 'complexity' (Urry, 2003, p. 138); 'personal helplessness', 'ineffectuality' and 'vulnerability' (Bauman, 2002, p. 18); and 'the politics of fear' (Hinkson, 2006, p. 25). Little wonder then, that McLaren and Farahmandpur (2005) describe neoliberalism as 'undeniably one of the most dangerous politics that we face today' (p. 16).

Pursuing these themes in the Australian context, Paul Sheehan (2013) a columnist with the Age newspaper effectively cut through in his analysis of how 'callous capitalism' has progressively sacrificed the number of full-time jobs in the relentless pursuit for greater flexibility and higher profits. As Sheehan put it:

> Australia is one of the most advanced large capitalist societies in the world, to the point where we are in the midst of an enormous social experiment. We think this country is fixated by trends from abroad but Australia is a pace-setter when it comes to work and working culture. We have opened our economy so much to globalism, corporatism and free markets that we have reached the tipping point where most people in the workforce no longer have full-time permanent jobs. In the age of corporate hyper-efficiency, and Frankenstein human resource departments with management pseudo-science invoking 'key performance indicators', the very idea of having a mostly permanent full-time staff is becoming a concept of luxury. Corporations, private and public, are increasingly outsourcing, offshoring, subcontracting, casualising or downsizing their workforce. Or all of the above. The most soulless corporations engage in a practice called 'managing out', where the bottom 20 per cent of staff, as measured by KPIs, are pushed out of the company. Call it the imperatives of the unforgiving marketplace. Call it structural change. Or the rising velocity of innovation, or the accelerating cycle of obsolescence. Call it gimlet-eyed greed. Just don't call it by that impregnably pompous corporate euphemism of 'challenging'. It is callous capitalism, the logical extreme, the point where the unceasing quest and pressure and need for greater operating efficiencies and lower costs has reached the point where it is biting into social capital (p. 1).

Statistical data further reinforces the extent to which these global forces have radically transformed the demographic composition of the Australian workforce to the point where part-time, casual work has become normalised. In Sheehan's (2013) words:

> The dry numbers tell a dramatic story. They reveal a tipping point. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, about 11.5 million people are in the Australian workforce. Of these, 2.8 million are working part-time. Another 2 million are employed as independent contractors or small business operators. An estimated 300,000 full-time employees are working on contract (the estimates vary but the upward trend is clear). Then there are the 700,000 officially unemployed. The total of these part-time workers, contractors, contracted employees, self-employed and unemployed come to 5.8 million. Or roughly the same number of full-time permanent employees. … Add to this mix the 900,000 employees who want more work and are classified as underemployed (p. 2).

Sheehan's analysis provides a refreshingly honest and plainspoken account of what's actually going on in the labour market and in whose interests. Such views are unusual in an era when the mass media is controlled and manipulated by corporate interests such as Rupert Murdoch's media conglomerate for the purpose of shaping, disseminating and preserving free-market principles. In this context, Sheehan brings much needed clarity to the fundamental contradiction of global capitalism, namely, its voracious appetite to increase efficiencies and extract profits by slashing costs, mostly labour and 'asset stripping rather than creating new jobs and building new assets' (Bauman, 2004, p. 10). In this competitive environment, Bauman argues that:

> One of the most commonly offered recommendations to the young meanwhile is to be flexible and not particularly choosy, not to expect too much from jobs, to take the jobs as they come without asking too many questions, and to treat them as an opportunity to be employed on the spot as long as it lasts rather than as an introductory chapter of a 'life project', a matter of self-esteem and self-definition, or a warrant of long-term security' (p. 10).

In short, the globalisation of capital combined with technological transformations have unleashed hitherto unimaginable changes to the mode of production resulting in a radical expansion of the capacity of the economy to produce commodities with less and less labour. The propensity of global capital to destroy rather than create jobs has been compellingly argued by Aronowitz and DiFazio (2010) in their aptly titled book *The jobless future*. The crux of their argument is that a combination of 'technological change' and 'sharpened internationalization of production means that there are too many workers for too few jobs, and even fewer of them are well paid' (p. xxxiv). Putting it another way, there has been a gradual 'proletarianization of work at every level below top management and relatively few scientific and technical occupations' (p. 16). The reality is that global capital needs only a small number of core workers and a large contingent of people working in part-time, casualised and marginal jobs primarily in the service sector. These low-wage, part-time workers have become, in the words of McLaren and Farahmandpur (2005), an army of 'contingent', 'disposable', 'temporary', and "footloose" laborers' (p. 44).

To fully understand the reasons behind these developments we need look no further than the emergence of what Standing (2011) describes as 'Chindia'—'a convenient short form metaphor' (p. 27)—to describe how China, India and the ex Soviet bloc entered the global economy adding 1.5 billion to the labour force thus trebling the labour supply. Since 2000 other emerging market countries including Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia and Thailand and others have added to the labour supply (p. 28). Standing points out that there are now one billion youth aged between 15 and 25, the 'largest cohort in history' with a majority living in developing countries and all searching for 'precarious jobs' (p. 66). As we have argued (Down, 2009; Down & Smyth, 2012), the promise of the neoliberal 'knowledge economy' to create more high-skilled, high-wage jobs especially in the communications and information industries, for so long the cornerstone of the developed economies, has been shattered by 'the global auction for cut-priced brainpower' as workers from the emerging economies such as China, India, Russia, and Eastern Europe compete for a diminishing number of decent, well-paid middle-class jobs (Brown, Green, & Lauder, 2011 p. 5).

Thus, the promise that the 'knowledge economy' would create unlimited opportunities provided students 'put their collective noses to the grindstone and learned math, science, and the elements of computer programming' is rapidly unraveling (Aronowitz & DiFazio, 2010, pp. xii–xiii). For those young people who have bought the promise there is a crisis of legitimacy and motivation because the education system by itself 'cannot provide job opportunities, reduce inequalities in wealth, or enhance family life' (Cuban, 2004, pp. 125–126). For this reason, participating in higher levels of education (or more accurately credentialing) is more 'like running up and down an escalator' given that 'qualification inflation' inevitably leads to a 'devaluing of all qualifications' (Allen & Ainley, 2010, p. 4). Furthermore, even with qualifications there is no guarantee of getting a job because 'casualised, low-wage, contract and unskilled jobs are increasingly the only ones available; if they can find those!' (p. 4). As Grubb and Lazerson (2004) argue, the 'education gospel' linking education, jobs and rewards is largely rhetorical but it does serve a purpose in maintaining faith in an education system and educational practices 'whose purposes are dominated by preparation for economic roles, … and one that is responsive to external demands—in this case, to demands for the essential skills employers want' (p. 3). The reality is that only a minority of young people will succeed in the competition for the best jobs (Brown et al., 2001). In short, young people are immersed in a 'rapidly mutating and crisis-ridden world' (Best & Kellner, 2003, p. 75) in which 'flexibility' and 'insecurity' are 'the cornerstones of the economic system' (Standing, 2011, p. 24). In this context, we argue that a socially critical approach to work is absolutely essential to the task of illuminating the precarious nature of work and the collateral damage caused as well as creating 'a place of knowing conducive to transforming the oppressive dehumanization of the present neoliberal moment' (Porfilio & Malott, 2008, p. xvii).

8.3 Collateral Damage and the Rise of the Precariat Class

Given these momentous transformations in capitalist work conditions we believe there is a moral and ethical onus on teachers to educate young people about the changing nature of work and the impact it is having on their own identities, subjectivities and imagined futures. Bourdieu (1998), commenting on the collateral damage of globalisation, provides a nice segue into this line of argument when he states that 'You cannot cheat with the *law of the conservation of violence*' (p. 40). What he is getting at here, is the way in which:

> All violence is paid for, and, for example structural violence exerted by the financial markets, in the form of layoffs, loss of security, etc., is matched sooner or later in the form of suicides, crime, and delinquency, drug addiction, alcoholism, a whole host of minor and major everyday acts of violence (p. 40).

Without doubt today's youth have been the main causalities of a period of unbridled free-market individualism and competitiveness. Giroux (2013) fittingly describes it as 'a culture of cruelty' in which 'Debt, joblessness, insecurity, and hopelessness are the defining features of a generation that has been abandoned by its market-obsessed, turn-a-quick profit elders' (p. 136). Like Bourdieu, Giroux (2012) has written extensively about the anti-democratic and authoritarian tendencies of neoliberalism and the ways in which it is damaging young lives. In his words:

> When I refer to a culture of cruelty and a politics of humiliation, I am talking about the institutionalization and widespread adoption of a set of values, policies, and symbolic practices that legitimate forms of organized violence against human beings and lead inexorably to hardship, suffering, and despair (p. 14).

Bauman (2011) describes what Giroux is saying here as collateral damage or 'collaterality'. In his view, it presents potentially as one of the greatest crisis facing humanity at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Bauman puts it this way:

> I am sure, however, that the explosive compound of growing social inequality and the rising volume of human suffering relegated to the status of 'collaterality' (marginality, externality, disposability, not a legitimate part of the political agenda) has all the markings of being potentially the most disastrous among the many problems humanity may be forced to confront, deal with and resolve in the current century' (p. 9)

In the case of Gen Y, Bauman (2004) argues that a large part of the cohort (especially those 'put at disadvantage') 'has, or feels as if it has, gone by the board and been left behind. Peculiar also is the widespread feeling of confusion, puzzlement and perplexity' (p. 15). Under these conditions, many young people no longer look to school as a place in which their creative spirit can be developed. Rather, we have produced a generation of what Pope (2001) describes as 'stressed out, materialistic and miseducated students'. There is a crisis of motivation as evidenced by a general malaise—low quality work, absenteeism, sullen hostility, waste, alcohol and drug

abuse and cognitive illness created by a loss of meaning and purpose in education (Kincheloe, 1995, pp. 124–125). Bauman (2004) believes that whilst depression—'a most unpleasant, harrowing and incapacitating mental condition'—is the most widely recognised symptom of a malaise that 'haunts the new generation' (p. 9) other 'maladies and affliction' are apparent (p. 10).

Returning to the main argument being mounted in this chapter, Stacey (2013) believes that Gen Y have been unfairly targeted by 'Australia's tycoon's, rent seekers and bubble class executives' as a new generation of 'unproductive workers'—'brats', 'disloyal', 'grabby', 'venal', and 'a nightmare in the workplace' (p. 1). We are in agreement with Stacey when he argues that:

> The drive for productivity through casualization has created employment conditions that stress young people out, give them breakdowns, make it impossible to start families, eviscerate social cohesiveness, and essentially make a mockery of the idea of community (p. 2).

Stacey (2013) argues that it is a bit rich of employers to disparage youth when '[t]he economy created for them is rigged' and they are treated 'like widgets powering their passive investments' (p. 2). As Stacey explains:

> Blaming Gen Y for the current lack of loyalty in the jobs marketplace—for employing all the strategies at their disposal to find a way to survive—is like blaming the Viet Cong for fighting in tunnels, or impoverished Cornish gold miners of the 19th century for spiriting away a few nuggets in their secret orifices (p. 2).

Guy Standing's (2011) best selling book *The precariat: The new dangerous class* provides another way of thinking afresh about these problems. What we like about Standing's contribution is the way in which he articulates so powerfully the link between labour market flexibility, insecurity and the rise of a new precariat class. Standing argues that whilst the precariat class is not homogeneous it does share a number of characteristics, among them: 'their labour is instrumental (to live), opportunistic (taking what comes) and precarious (insecure)' (p. 14). Furthermore, it leads to 'a precariat existence, of living in the present, without a secure identity or sense of development achieved through work or lifestyle' (p. 16). Thus, 'the precariat is defined by short-termism, which could evolve into a mass incapacity to think long term, induced by the low probability of personal progress or building a career' (p. 18). Standing goes on to argue that this state of affairs is dangerous politically, socially and economically because it results in the four A's—anger, anomie, anxiety, and alienation (p. 19). By way of summary:

1. *Anger*: 'stems from frustration at the seemingly blocked avenues for advancing a meaningful life and from a sense of deprivation' (p. 19).
2. *Anomie*: 'is a feeling of passivity born of despair. This is surely intensified by the prospect of artless, career-less jobs. Anomie comes from a listlessness associated with sustained defeat, compounded by the condemnation lobbed at many in the precariat by politicians and middle-class commentators castigating them as lazy, directionless, undeserving, socially irresponsible or worse' (p. 20).

3. *Anxiety*: 'People are insecure in the mind and stressed, … alienated from their labour and work, and are anomic, uncertain and desperate in their behavior. … The precariatised mind is fed by fear and is motivated by fear' (p. 20).
4. *Alienation*: 'arises from knowing that what one is doing is not for one's own purpose or for what one could respect or appreciate; it is simply done for others, at their behest' (p. 20).

For these reasons we have argued vehemently against the marketisation of schools and narrowly conceived human capital formation approaches to education and job preparation. Like Standing (2011) we have tried to demonstrate that the commodification of education is 'a societal sickness' (p. 71) which is taking us in the wrong direction because it is disconnected from the needs, desires, dreams and aspirations of students to 'become somebody' (Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson, & Wurst, 2004). The dilemma, Bauman (2004) argues, is that 'we do not really know how to tackle this trouble. We lack perhaps even the tools to think about reasonable ways of tackling it' (p. 15). On this note, we want to now provide some scaffolding around seven key ideas to help build a socially critical approach to work.

8.4 Towards a Socially Critical Approach to Work

In this section we want to begin the task of mapping a set of emergent ideas arising from Lucas's story and those of his peers involved in an ongoing ethnographic study into the conditions supporting young people in 'getting a job' (Down & Smyth, 2012). Drawing on the discussion so far as well as the stories of young people themselves we are able to extract a constellation of key ideas as the basis of a socially critical approach to work. These include:

8.4.1 Creating Schools as Hospitable Places for Learning

By this we mean that schools must become less like places of incarceration (e.g., factories, prisons and institutions) and more like relational learning communities in which all students are treated with dignity, trust, respect and care. We (Smyth, Down, & McInerney, 2010) call these places 'relational schools' given that the focus is on building relationships, challenging entrenched inequalities and ensuring that all students have fulfilling and rewarding experiences at school (p. 199). Whilst the relational dimension of education seems self-evident to many, under the influence of neoliberal ideologies schools have been usurped as training grounds for human capital formation and job preparation. In this kind of education system, competition, league tables, rote memorisation, prescribed content, accountability and test scores become the means and ends of education. In short, students are 'overtested and undereducated' (Allen & Ainley, 2010). Under these

circumstances, we argue that a socially critical approach to work must encompass a more expansive vision of education based on an 'ethic of care' in which students are given opportunities 'to care for themselves, for other human beings, for the natural and human-made worlds, and for the world of ideas' (McMurtry, 2002; Noddings, 2005, p. xiii; Spring, 2007). Students themselves are very clear what they want from their education: 'Students want respect from their teacher; they want classroom pedagogy relevant to their interests; and they want a teacher with enthusiasm and openness' (Margonis, 2004, p. 51).

8.4.2 Developing a Capabilities Approach to Education

Given the major shifts in the global labour market described earlier, in particular the 'deskilling' and 'displacement of labour' (Aronowitz & Di Fazio, 2010, p. 91), there is a strong case for developing a capabilities approach to education rather than low level competency based skills training. Aronowitz and Di Fazio argue that in the global labour market, 'It is the knowledge component—the conceptual, the theoretical—that is now the basis for the scientific, technological, and social relations of production' (p. 95). Hence, whilst 'skilled work still exists … it is increasing only at the margins of the new production process' because as new technologies 'perform not only the manual work but increasingly can perform the tacit knowledge component of the skilled worker' less skilled labour is required (p. 102). Drawing on Amartya Sen (1992) we argue, therefore, that a capabilities approach to education is going to be far more useful in these precarious times because it is about assisting people to: (i) identify the kind of lives they want to lead; (ii) providing them with the skills and knowledge to do that; and (iii) helping them understand and confront how their political, social and economic conditions enable or constrain them (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 74).

8.4.3 Understanding the Complexity of the Labour Market

At the heart of a socially critical approach to work is an understanding of the ways in which the labour market is changing and the consequences for individual lives, subjectivities and possible futures. In this chapter we have identified and explained some of these changes using the lens of 'callous capitalism', 'insecurity', 'collateral damage' and 'rise of the precariat class' to help illuminate the changing nature of the global labour market, why it matters and for whom. In essence, we believe students deserve an empowering education that is capable of helping them to understand how the world came to be this way and how it might be different. The purpose is, therefore, to assist students like Lucas to make sense of how 'personal troubles' are not their fault, but rather 'public issues' (Mills, 1971). In other words, we want to shift the focus away from victim blaming approaches in which individuals are made accountable for their

'labor market fates' (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997, p. 28) and onto 'the real culprits—the organisation of work, the nature of labour markets and the economic consequences of globalism' (Down & Smyth, 2012, p. 208). Specifically, this kind of socially critical approach to work assists students to comprehend the changing nature of work, structural unemployment, trade unions, power relations, health and safety, child labour, industrial legislation, and wages and conditions (Simon, Dippo, & Schenke, 1991).

8.4.4 Moving Beyond the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of Tracking

A socially critical approach to work seeks to interrupt the process of tracking 'whereby students are divided into different categories so that they can be assigned to various kinds of classes' (Oakes, 1985, p. 3). Traditional high schools are organised on the assumption that students should be divided between 'non-academic' (low status) and 'academic' (high status) for the purpose of delivering different kinds of school knowledge to different classes of students. We argue that this artificial division of school knowledge serves no useful purpose other than legitimating existing power relations, social practices and social inequalities (Connell, 1993; Oakes, 1985; Teese and Polesel, 2003). As Standing (2011) argues 'There are signs that commodified educational systems are being restructured to stream youth into the flexible labour system, based on a privileged elite, small technical working class and a growing precariat' (p. 72). A socially critical approach to work questions this contrived division of knowledge and advocates for integration between academic and vocational education in ways that 'provide the academic and real-world foundations students need for advanced learning, training, and preparation for responsible civic participation' (Kincheloe, 1995; Oakes & Saunders, 2009, p. 6). We reject an education that limits working class students to what Kincheloe describes as the 'sixth circle of educational hell—the realm of the low achiever' (p. 248). We believe all students have a right to the kind of education that empowers them 'to realize that, rather than being its passive victims, they can take control of economy and society' (Allen & Ainley, 2010, p. 9).

8.4.5 Going Beyond Menial, Piece-Rate and Poorly Paid Jobs

A socially critical approach to work advances the view that all young people have a right to be engaged in meaningful, secure and rewarding work. The focus shifts from preparing students for menial, piece-rate and poorly paid jobs to articulating a vision of a critical democratic approach to vocational education and training, in particular an understanding of good versus bad work (Kincheloe, 1995, 1999). This involves helping students to explore the difference between *labour* (or 'getting a job') as a means of simply making a living, and *work* that involves 'a sense of completion and fulfillment' (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 66). Standing (2009) expands on

this line of argument when he argues that work 'captures the positive side of productive, reproductive and creative activity, in which the conception and execution aspects are combined, in imagery made famous by Braverman (1974)' (p. 7). Standing explains how in performing work 'a person has agency, a sense of self-determination. … human rights and real freedom' (p. 7). On the other hand, labour is about 'maximizing efficiency and competitiveness' and under the influence of modern technologies results in 'greater intensity of labour' leading to '[s]tress, burnout, [and] loss of control over time' (p. 7). In developing a socially critical approach to work we share Standing's vision of giving everyone the opportunity to pursue 'creative and dignifying work around a set of self chosen activities' and 'promoting 'occupational citizenship' conducive to building new forms of civic friendship and social solidarity in the Global Transformation' (p. 10).

8.4.6 Confronting 'Deficit' Thinking

A socially critical approach to work abandons all forms of deficit thinking. The deficit thinking model is based on the assumption that students fail to find jobs because of internal deficits or deficiencies rather than locating the problem within the education system itself or the broader structural forces shaping economic and social inequalities (Valencia, 1997, 2010). These 'deficits', Valencia (2010) argues, manifest themselves in a range of pathologising discourses such as 'limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior' (p. 7). We argue that such views are problematic because they conveniently blame the victim and excuse institutional practices from any responsibility for the circumstances in which students find themselves through no fault of their own (Shields, Bishop, Mazawi, 2005). Furthermore, deficit thinking assumes that schools are fair and democratic places in which all students are provided with similar opportunities, treatment and learning conditions. We know from decades of research that schools are in fact manifestly unequal places with the rewards of education allocated primarily on the basis of class, gender and race (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1981). A socially critical approach to work seeks to shift the focus from deficit views of student identities and 'toxic' forms of labelling (Hudak, 2001, p. 14) to the social processes responsible for 'steering' young people into 'unequal fates' (Connell, 1993, p. 27). With this shift in mindset we believe schools are better placed to engage in the 'hard curricular, structural, personal and relational work required' to help *all* students find success in school, work and life (Swadener, 1995, p. 42).

8.4.7 Developing Critical Citizenship

Finally, a socially critical approach to work appreciates that whilst education has a crucial role to play in preparing students to participate in the world of work it must also develop forms of critical citizenship. Giroux (2012) puts it this way:

> While I believe that public education should equip students with skills to enter the workplace, it should also educate them to contest workplace inequalities, imagine democratically organized forms of work, and identify and challenge those injustices that contradict and undercut the most fundamental principles of freedom, equality, and respect for all people who constitute the global public sphere (p. 9).

Translating these sentiments at the school level, Simon et al. (1991) advocate a critical pedagogy of work education that encourages students to do a number of things, like: 'question taken-for-granted assumptions about work; comprehend workplaces as sites where identities are produced; see this production as a struggle over competing claims to truth and to correctness; and envisage ways in which the quality of their working lives can be improved' (p. 15). As Giroux (2001) argues, we need to urgently reclaim the moral, ethical and political purposes of education by creating 'a sense of critical public citizenship' informed by a spirit of 'educated hope that keeps alive forms of political agency capable of realizing a life outside of the dictates of the marketplace—and which are crucial to a substantive democracy' (p. 2). Herein, lies the educative purpose of a socially critical approach to work.

8.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have tried to engage in some critique of the neoliberal project as it moves inexorably towards the commodification of all aspects of economic, social and political life. Of particular interest to us is the manner in which dominant human capital discourses have seized the public imagination around the role and purpose of education. We have argued the importance of pausing and reflecting critically on these developments and the ways in which they are causing significant damage to the lives of young people in terms of the kind of education they receive and their future life chances. We have provided a vigorous critique of 'callous capitalism' especially as it relates to the transformation of the nature of work and the emergence of flexible labour and insecurity, all of which have profound and long lasting consequences for youth and their well being. Of major concern is the rise of what Standing (2011) describes as the precariat class and the dangers it poses around the four A's—anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation among disillusioned youth. In this context, Standing believes that unless these worries can be moderated there is a real risk of 'veering into irrational fears and incapacity to function rationally or to develop a coherent narrative for living and working' (p. 155). Furthermore, young people are railing against an education system that has no intrinsic value or purpose other than the need to acquire credentials to compete in a fragile and competitive global labour market in which decent jobs are rapidly disappearing anyway. In this context, Grossberg (2005) argues

> It has become common to think of kids as a threat to the existing social order and for kids to be blamed for the problems they experience. We slide from kids in trouble, kids have problems, and kids are threatened, to kids as trouble, kids as problems, and kids as threatening (p. 16).

To avoid this kind of victim blaming approach to the problems of youth we have identified seven key ideas on which to build the foundation of a socially critical approach to work—creating schools as hospitable places for learning; developing a capabilities approach to education; understanding the complexity of the labour market; moving beyond the self-fulfilling prophecy of tracking; going beyond menial, piece-rate and poorly paid jobs; confronting 'deficit' thinking; and developing critical citizenship. Underpinning all of these ideas is a view that if we are going to help young people negotiate a complex and fragile labour market then it will require a new kind of politics capable of linking 'private troubles' and 'public issues'.

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Chapter 9
Critically Educated Hope

9.1 Introduction

In this closing chapter we want to draw together the threads of the book while providing the reader with a platform from which to act. Unless we do this, we will consider ourselves to have failed since our agenda has been both to understand the world of schooling and young people in a radically different way, while at the same time leaving behind some tools with which to change that world, we hope radically, and for the better.

Our opening proposition in this final chapter is that at their quintessential best, schools can be transformative places of hope and possibility. Sadly, they tend in far too many instances to be places of fear, incarceration and 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2006)—by which we mean, schools mouth the platitudes of ostensibly existing to provide productive pathways for young people, while wilfully refusing to equip them with the intellectual resources with which to analyse, confront and puncture rampant humbug.

So, our agenda here is both expansive, while at the same time being quite circumscribed. In this chapter we will pursue Freire's (1998) notion of 'critical hope' as expressed in *Pedagogy of Freedom* (p. 70)—both the aspect that involves 'indignation' as well as the 'courage' to work for a more socially just world. For Freire, and people like Webb (2010) and Giroux (2004), 'educated hope' (p. 38) is an idea that is deeply rooted in a sense of 'incompleteness' and the 'constant search' (Freire, 1972, p. 64) for ways to construct a more fulfilling world. Freire's (1972) defining notion in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was one of how to bring into existence a collaborative communion with others for social justice.

The way we will do this here, is firstly, by exploring what it might look like for young people—those who are the most marginalized—to confront the ruthless pursuit of rampant 'individualism, materialism, consumption, and personal acquisition' (Smyth, 2011, p. 3) central to neo-liberalism, and examine the way it is deforming and disfiguring their lives and the communities in which they live. Secondly, we will point to what schools look like that are able to find the space within which to put a

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very different inflection on schooling, where: (i) teachers are treated and act as intellectuals; (ii) students position themselves as activists of their own learning; and where (iii) communities present as politically engaged and connected.

Along the way, we will try to also convey a sense of how young people might gain a sense of 'control of destiny' (Syme, 2004, p. 3) by puncturing notions of 'hope deferred' and 'mythical hope' (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) through pursuing instead a critical pedagogy of 'audacious' hope.

9.2 What Is Critical Hope?

Both Maxine Greene and Paulo Freire through their respective writings pursue the notion of 'critical hope'—each around the idea of the need to create space in which to construct the conditions for a very different form of education to what mostly transpires at the moment.

Perhaps we will start with Greene (2005) who argues from a poetic and aesthetic perspective for a 'possibility of awakening' (p. 80) in order to overcome the increasingly stultifying and anaesthetizing context in which we are forced to live. Greene's analysis is both accurate and extremely disturbing, when she poses the question: 'How do we deal with the crumbling of the taken-for-granted, of the reliable and the predictable?' (p. 77). She is referring of course to our increasing powerlessness as we are forced more and more to become 'spectators of multiple tragedies, distanced, unable to grasp others' pain' (p. 77)—that is to say, the feeling of being pushed along by events not of our own making. In the educational domain, the collective reaction to this 'new school conservatism' and its complicit forms of educational policy-making, seems to have produced a situation in which 'the common response is to retreat' (p. 78), where teachers are 'often immobilised by feelings of helplessness' (p. 78). As Greene put it: 'The experience may be like that of being in a closed room with the windows shut against the "world" others are seeing and accepting' (p. 78).

Her counter argument to the question of how 'we move the young to reach beyond themselves for the sake of their future and the community-in-the making we call democracy' (Greene, 2005, p. 77), is for what she calls a state of 'wide-awakeness that resists apathy and withdrawal' (p. 80). As she puts it, we need a set of 'new beginnings' that constitute a sharp break with the status quo, in which:

> The new educator must be awake, critical, open to the world. It is an honour and responsibility to be a teacher in such dark times—and to imagine, and to act on what we imagine, what we believe ought at last to be (p. 80).

Greene's (2005) response to the way out of this miasma is interesting. In her book *Releasing the Imagination* Greene (1995) argues that what is needed is a 'shifting [of] perspectives', or a different way of 'seeing'—what she refers to as seeing the world 'big' versus seeing it 'small'. In this she invokes a character called Felix Krull from a novel by Thomas Mann (1955)—and it is worth citing it at some length:

> At the start, the young Felix asks himself whether it is better to see the world small or to see it big. One the one hand, he says, great men, leaders and generals, have to see things small and from a distance, or they would never be able to deal as they do with the lives and deaths of so many living beings. To see things big, on the other hand, is "to regard the world and mankind as something great, glorious, and significant, justifying every effort to attain some modicum of esteem and fame" (pp. 12–13). To see things or people small, one chooses to see from a detached point of view, to watch behaviours from the perspective of a system, to be concerned with trends and tendencies rather than the intentionality and concreteness of everyday life. To see things or people big, one must resist viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in integrity and particularity instead. One must see from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening if one is to be privy to the plans people make, the initiatives they take, the uncertainties they face (pp. 10–11).

The reason Greene is so interesting and helpful to us here, is because she points to the diminished focus that comes with current dominant thinking 'small' policy perspectives—the technical, the testable, the measurable, the manageable, the verifiable—all of which 'screen … out the faces and the gestures of individuals, of actual living persons' (p. 11). Along with Greene, we are arguing the need to reinsert the large or 'big' perspective that reasserts the primacy of context, not as background 'noise', but as the essence—the messy, the contingent, the emotional, the tragic and the traumatic—along with a discussion about how these get to be constructed and the forces that sustain and maintain them. In other words, our emphasis is squarely on the 'relational'.

In this Greene (1995) continues to be helpful both in her questioning, as well as the suggested course of action:

> How is the teacher to cope with this? How is she or he to avoid feeling like a chess piece or a cog or even an accomplice of some kind? The challenge may be to learn how to move back and forth, to comprehend the domains of policy and long-term planning while also attending to particular children, situation-specific understandings, the unmeasurable, and the unique. Surely, at least part of the challenge is to refuse artificial separations of the school from the surrounding environment, to refuse the decontextualizations that falsify so much (p. 11).

In other words, Greene like Freire, is arguing for another kind of school—one that is not diminished by being restricted to or limited by serving the needs of the economy, engaged in the metaphorical equivalent of the educational Olympic games, cheering on individual winners while wilfully relegating the rest to a category of under-performing losers who have to 'lift their game'. Greene, like us, has an altogether different view of what schools exist for and what they might look like.

9.3 Confronting Deformity

While we hear much these days from politicians, educational policy makers, and their accomplices in some parts of academia, about the urgency of school 'reforms'—in reality, there is nothing reformist about them at all. Rather, what these school

reform approaches constitute is 'more of the same' policies we have had over the past four decades that have so demonstrably 'failed' young people in respect of their schooling and that have educationally damaged them. It is no exaggeration to describe these as polices that 'deform' schools, in the sense that they produce forms of distortion and disfigurement as far as young people are concerned.

The hopeful and optimistic aspect lies in the fact that these policies are not immutable—they exist only as long as we allow them to inhabit our thinking and our classrooms. Dominant tendencies can be undermined, usurped and extirpated if only we have the courage to think differently and to embrace alternatives and speak them into existence. This is where, to invoke the thinking of arguably the most significant sociologist of all times—Charles Wright Mills (1971)—whose advice was to 'take it on big'. That is to say, being prepared to think and act expansively on big issues and ideas, when the prevailing view is to think 'small'. As we indicated at the start of this chapter, there are three prominent ways in which this might happen: where: (i) teachers are treated and act as intellectuals; (ii) students position themselves as social activists; and (iii) communities present as politically engaged and connected. We will now discuss each of these in a little more detail.

9.3.1 Teachers as Intellectuals

The starting point for the kind of alternative we are arguing for in this book has to commence with a rehabilitation of what it means to be a teacher—or to put it another way, the way we envisage the work of teaching. If we go along with the view that teaching is prima facie a transmission process in which the teacher is involved in the technical act of taking knowledge created by others, and conveying it unproblematically to students, then what we are endorsing is a passive or docile view of the work of teaching. To use Freire's (1972) terminology, the teacher has a 'banking' (p. 46) role (see also Smyth, 2010, pp. 70–71) of depositing knowledge, while the role of the student is to dutifully 'withdraw' it. This is essentially a model that is predicated on a high level of passivity by both teacher and student and an acceptance of the status quo by both. There is a clear demarcation between the 'conception' of knowledge (usually allocated to someone distant from the classroom), and who is entitled through being given authority to engage in the act of creating it, and the 'execution' of it by teachers, who follow a formula or model, for its transmission and absorption by students.

The conception of the teacher-as-technician is one exemplified in the words of Greene (2005) as someone who 'prefer[s] to remain within the limits of what is thought "normal", the agreed-upon, the unquestionably true' (p. 77). As Greene (1995) presents it, a 'vision that sees things small looks at schooling through the lenses of a system—a vantage point of power or existing ideologies—taking a primarily technical point of view' (p. 11).

Elsewhere in pursuit of this, Smyth (2011) points to the counter-distinction made by Kohl (1983) of the intellectual as a person who is engaged in transforming dominant theoretical and practical traditions:

> Kohl (1983) claims that an intellectual is a person who 'knows his or her field, has a wide breadth of knowledge about other aspects of the world, who uses experience to develop theory, and questions theory on the basis of further experience' (p. 30). But, even more important than that, Kohl (1983) argues that an intellectual is above all 'someone who has the courage to question authority and who refuses to act counter to his/her own experience and judgement' (p. 30) (pp. 16–17).

Being intellectual really embraces Greene's notion of 'wide-awakeness' and 'imagination' which she depicts as the capacity to envisage another world—one that is less scripted, not fearful of dialogue, and that is committed to 'break[ing] through the crusts of the conventional and routine, to light the slow fuse of possibility' (Greene, 2007, p. 1). 'Imaginative capacity' is the state of mind 'that allows us…to experience empathy with different points of view, even with interests apparently at odds with ours' while 'breaking out of the confinements of privatism and self-regard into a space where we can come face to face with others and call out, "Here we are"'(Greene, 1995, p. 31). For her it is 'the recovery of imagination that lessens the social paralysis around us and restores the sense that something can be done in the name of what is decent and humane' (p. 35). This necessitates a preparedness and a willingness to have the courage to 'render our experience unfamiliar and mysterious' (Greene, 1995, p. 35 citing Warnock, 1978, p. 207), or as Shor (1980) put it 'extraordinarily re-experiencing the ordinary' (p. 93).

The kind of 'critical pedagogy of imagination' that Rautins Ibrahim and Obraj (2011), among others, are arguing for, requires that we re-envisage students in other than diminutive and compliant ways. As Katz (2008) reminds us, 'childhood has become a spectacle—a site of accumulation, commodification and desire—in whose name much is done' (p. 5). However, we need to remember Steedman's (1998) point, as paraphrased by Katz, that 'children are not just repositories of adults' desires and fantasies, but are also subjects and social actors in their own rights' (p. 9).

The concomitant follow-on in the schema of the socially just school that we are animating here is, therefore, to regard young people as being capable, competent and mature authors of their own lives, or as Mason and Danby (2011) put it 'experts in their own lives' (p. 185). Smyth (2011) contends that this constitutes a situation that is difficult for authoritarian systems to accept, namely—of 'students-as-activists in their own learning' (pp. 55–104).

9.3.2 Students as Social Activists

It may sound a little strident to be using a term like 'student activism' when having a discussion about students in the context of their everyday school lives. However, given the increasingly dark and difficult times in which we live, where everything is

beholden to and regulated by market mechanisms, at least in Anglo-western countries, our call for a new way may not be such an aberrant idea after all. As the recipients of nearly four decades of the unrelenting damaging effects of neoliberalism—distorting effects of sorting and sifting through testing regimes; rampant consumerism through school choice and hierarchies of league tables; stultifying curriculum that has accompanied calls for a return to the 'basics'; the stratified effects of the vocationalization of schooling; and the ways schools are 'failing' the increasing number of young people who see themselves as having no other option than giving up on school—students would not be wrong in believing that all of these conspire to make the present moment an apposite one for a paradigm shift. What is clearly needed is a major move of schooling in the direction of enabling students to connect what goes on in school and the community in which it is located, with their aspirations and passions for fulfilling lives, something that is seriously out of sync at the moment.

If we are to have schools that are truly more socially just places, then the paradigmatic reclamation will have start and occur through young people acquiring a more authentic voice in their learning and the contexts in which it occurs, than has hitherto been the case.

So, when we talk about student activism, we are using this term as a more politicised version of student voice—one that brings with it heightened levels of ownership over learning by young people. It is probably fairly clear by now that we have given up on the official policy process having either the political will or the imagination to change things for the better for young people—they have too much to lose and their head is in another space, with no sign of that changing anytime soon.

That being the case, what we have in mind is something that is more akin to what Postman and Weingartner (1971) call in the title of their book 'the soft revolution'—interestingly, with the sub-title 'a student handbook for turning schools around'. The essence of their argument goes like this:

> The soft revolution is characterised by a minimum of rhetoric, dogma and charismatic leadership (p. 4)… When you are making a soft revolution, you do not always need a large organisation … The basic metaphor of the soft revolution is judo … When you are using judo, you do not oppose the strength of your adversary. You use your adversary's strength against himself, and inspite of himself (in fact, because of himself) (p. 5).

Postman and Weingartner (1971) argue that 'when you are using judo as a metaphor for effecting change, you must have a realistic grasp of how things stand' (p. 8) in order to change them. In other words, the starting point to undermining what is currently going on has to be an understanding that things are so 'obvious' that 'many people act as if they do not know about them' (p. 8). The reason for this is because things have been working for them, there is very little reason to want to change—that is how power works, it is largely opaque.

They give an example of a 'radical experiment' in which a group wanted to change what was occurring in some New York high schools because students were switching off in alarming numbers. The strategy was to shift power to students within the existing system of schooling so as to improve motivation, engagement and learning success. The starting point was to expose the architecture of the

existing system to a public meeting of parents. There were eight points articulated that are seen to hold existing programs in place, that we still find readily recognizable today regardless of the world in which we live:

1. that knowledge is best presented and comprehended when organized into "subjects";
2. that most subjects have a specific "content";
3. that content of these subjects is more or less stable;
4. that a major function of the teacher is to "transmit" this content;
5. that the most practical place to do this in is a room within a centrally located building;
6. that students learn best in 45-min periods which meet fives times a week;
7. that students are learning when they are listening to the teacher, reading their texts, doing their assignments, and otherwise "paying attention" to the content being transmitted, and, finally;
8. that all of this must go on as a preparation for life.

The alternative set of propositions put to the public meeting for consideration was based on the fact that despite all its known qualities, the extant system was not working for large numbers of students. What was argued for was an alternative set of assumptions, along the following lines:

1. that learning takes place best, not when it is conceived as a preparation for life, but when it occurs in the context of real daily life;
2. that each learner, ultimately, must organize his [her] own learning in his [her] own way;
3. that "problems" and personal interests are a more realistic structure than are "subjects" for organizing learning experiences;
4. that students are capable of directly and authentically participating in the intellectual and social life of their community, and
5. the community badly needs them to do this (Postman & Weingartner, 1971, p. 9).

To put some practicality to this proposition, in brief here is how the idea might play out:

> This community, like so many others, has serious problems with traffic control, crime and law enforcement, strikes, race relations, urban blight, drug addition, garbage disposal, air pollution, and medical care. Students would be formed into teams, each team consisting of a teacher, a high school senior, perhaps a lay member of the community, and ten or twelve students. Their task would be to select one of these problems for study, with a view toward inventing authentic, practical solutions to it. They would do whatever they needed to do in order to learn about the problem and communicate to others their own solutions. These doings would amount to their curriculum (pp. 9–10).

As Postman and Weingartner (1971) go on to describe it, if the issue was crime and law and order, students would spend their time in police stations, criminal courts, and other places where people were knowledgeable about the problem, accessing the topic from a number of vantage points—police officers, prison warders, mental health workers, ex-convicts, insurance people, judges and officers of the judiciary, business people, and town officials.

Thus organized, the classroom became 'a place of assembly when students need[ed] to assess their findings and to plan for additional inquiries. But most of the students' "school life" would be spent outside of the school, where the realities of the problems being studied are to be found' (p. 10). The realism, authenticity and seriousness of purpose came from the fact that the whole process was predicated on the basis of being 'a serious attempt to offer solutions and to communicate these to the appropriate people' (p. 10). The means of communication, therefore became crucial—writing letters and reports to convince people of what they had found; producing a test for a radio or television broadcast; or making a film for presentation to the community—'the possibilities are almost inexhaustible' (p. 10). The role of teachers in all of this was one of 'making arrangements for the students' daily and weekly activities and helping them to access appropriate people and venues, and generally assisting students with their learning 'internship' (p. 10).

The sense in which this little example is illustrative of a 'soft revolution' that is deploying the principles of judo, is worth briefly reflecting upon.

It is clear that for the community concerned, like any other, educational change is not going to occur easily. The previous generation has a heavy vested interest as gatekeepers and decision makers in sustaining a system with which they are familiar, regardless of its manifest inadequacies and failings. To jettison the current educational model would be tantamount to admitting that their own success within it was in some way fraudulent, despite the fact that many of them may also have suffered as a result of it. The untried unknown is just too scary! As Postman and Weingartner (1971) put it 'it is not uncommon [in respect of these matters] for people to be believe in two contradictions. The 'dropout' rate might be rampant, there might be riots in the cafeteria, and the police car outside the school a common occurrence—but still there is a reluctance to admit to the real problem, that schools switch many young people off.

For meaningful change to occur, what people need to be assured of is that the 'alternative' on offer does not constitute abandoning the current system—even though that is probably what is required. In other words, the proposed alternative is not about 'scrapping' a system in which people have a continuing 'emotional and intellectual stake, but merely to extend it' (p. 13). What is being placed on offer does not require a 'repudiat[ion of the] past' (p. 13), but rather the making available of an alternative for 'those who want it'. What needs to be assured is that 'no one would be forced into the program. Only those who wished to join it … [it] would be an "experiment"' (p. 13).

The logic operating here is that what is being pointed to is that a single way of learning does not work for all young people; that there are alternatives; they can be rigorous; they are not being mandated; and that, as a matter of fact, they may just produce better results than the current system for these young people in ways that constitute handing over real power to them rather than ineffectually continuing to bear down on them—all in a context where there might be real prospects of a collective sense of betterment, not only for the young people concerned, but also for a clearer understanding of some protracted social issue.

9.3.3 Communities that Are Politically Engaged and Connected

What flows nicely out of the example just discussed is the notion that communities are not simply repositories of convenience in which schools happen to be located—they are active and activist sites in which relational work is and can be done, indigenous leadership is being developed and pursued, and where schools, teachers and students and members of the community are forming arrangements for the pursuit of mutually beneficial local solutions to pressing social problems.

Often the kinds of communities we work in are officially designated as being 'disadvantaged'—meaning, that they are presented as unmitigated 'basket cases' in need of remediation and 'fixing up'. We think that this kind of labelling tells us more about the 'outsiders' doing the labelling than the 'insiders' to whom the labels are being directed! It may well be true that these communities have protracted 'issues' that have to be dealt with, but they are often ones not entirely of their own making (for example, brought on by massive de-industrialization and global restructuring), and what is rarely looked to are the strengths and enduring qualities that in many ways make these quite vibrant, resilient even admirable communities. They are certainly not the aspirational deserts often portrayed in government documents and neighbourhood renewal projects, nor are they places that need to be beholden to having solutions laminated on them by outside 'experts' who think they know best in what amounts to a 'suffocating paternalism', to borrow an apt phrase (Armstrong, 1948 cited in Fletcher, 2002, p. 124).

Presenting communities as if they are bereft, dysfunctional, and therefore incapable of either analysing the situation they are in or being able to suggest what might need to be done, is a political strategy for constructing a hegemony that serves only to reinforce stereotypes and solidify the position of power by those who insist upon such constructions.

The kind of qualities and strengths often possessed by these communities and that are overlooked, include: 'honesty' in the way they are direct in naming situations as they see them; 'compassion' in the form of empathy for members of the community experiencing difficulties because most people in these places have suffered the same kind of setbacks themselves; 'solidarity' in the way they fiercely support one another especially when disparaged by outsiders; and, 'fortitude' which in the words of Eric Fromm (2010) means the capacity to 'say "no" when the world wants to hear "yes"' (p. 27).

Often the most poignant question to be asked in communities of the kind we are referring to is 'who gets to speak here?' (Smyth, 2011, p. 135). As Smyth summarized it, the oft touted notion of 'community capacity building', often a paternalist portrayal or at least dependent one, gets to be turned around when the emphasis is on dialogue rather than monologue, and where the real underlying commitments of these communities is acknowledged such that they are seen as being:

- relational—in regarding people as more important than organisations, institutions, political systems or physical structures
- inclusive—in being hospitable to the most marginalized and excluded
- participative—in that the community sets its own agenda and where ‘indigenous’ (or local) leadership is fostered and encouraged
- connected—in having a concern to build networks of association
- socially just—dealing with how inequities get to be constructed, sustained and maintained, and how to interrupt hierarchies of privilege
- sustainable—in acknowledging strengths that exist in communities in order to build capacities for the future (p. 136).

9.4 Last Words…

In some ways it is superfluous to even suggest that a conclusion to a book like this might be possible, let alone for us to try. This is the kind of book in which its reading is only the beginning of a much more complex and exciting journey of actually doing it. By that we mean that the real measure of whether not we have been able to fire your imagination around pursuing a reinvigorated sense of ‘critically educated hope’ as we have called it here, is to return to our schematic diagram in chapter one and to address the question: ‘Am I better equipped now to pursue what is meant by the notion of the socially just school, than I was when I started my reading?’

We hope that your answer is in the affirmative, and we wish you well in pursuing what can only be a better school for all of us!

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