

Editorial: Education for Social Change

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This issue of *Information for Social Change* is a Special Issue on 'Education for Social Change'. The concept of 'education for social change' suggests something positive, forward-looking and radical – but it need not be so. The social change that is the reference point could be concerned with what Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels called the 'real movement which abolishes the present state of things' (1846, p.57). The 'present state of things' being that we live in capitalist society, the message is clear: education for social change should be about education for the transformation of society, the abolition of capitalist society, the movement towards socialism and the nurturing of communism. In this sense, 'education for social change' is thoroughly *anti-capitalist* education, infused with the values of equality, co-operation and social progress.

Of course, once the notion of social progress, and indeed other values with close ties to the Enlightenment are mentioned, then many postmodernists would cringe and object. For some postmodernists, social progress is a myth, a chimera. At the very least one should take a critical attitude towards 'progress' as a possibility for contemporary societies, according to such postmodernists.

Whilst the postmodern attitude and scepticism regarding social progress can be allied to reaction and quietism (though some postmodernists I know argue that this need not be so), what is clearer is that for New Labour's education policy 'education for social change' has a more sinister and Orwellian meaning. This can be seen most readily in the development of policy for the schools system in England, which will be the focus for the rest of this Editorial discussion.

When New Labourites talk about 'modernising' and 'reforming' schools in England it sounds like that they have a form of education for social change in view which is progressive and uplifting. When they talk about 'radical' change for the education system the message is even more misleading and degenerate. For when representatives of the New Labour government pontificate about education in these ways what they actually have in view is something entirely *retro*, and in some cases antiquated, in terms of the development of capitalism. Thus, measures which encourage the commodification and marketisation of schools, for example (e.g. Education Act 2002) fit neatly into this retromodern perspective. In

practical terms, this involves inviting in private sector operators to run educational services, including services such as equal opportunities and school improvement as well as frontline education services such as teaching. It also includes the management of educational services, for example, running Local Education Authorities (LEAs). Currently, nine LEAs in England are run by companies (see Farnsworth, 2006, p.489). In the outsourcing of educational services in England and in the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) for schools, state revenue is transformed into private profit via the magic of money. Companies siphon off state revenue in often complex and secretive (under the terms of financial confidentiality) ways and turn it into profit. Companies like Serco and W.S Atkins do not want to *own* schools or LEAs; they are not interested in outright privatisation. They want to run them on a contract in such a way that profits can be delivered, and New Labour (as with other governments) is struggling both with the appropriate models and legislative frameworks for facilitating this whilst fending off political opponents and resistance regarding this policy.

Sir Michael Barber poses the issues facing New Labour in its 'reform' of public services in a recent article in the *Financial Times* (Barber, 2006). Barber outlines three models for public service delivery in a contemporary situation where, according to him, people want better public services but do not want to pay higher taxes. Barber notes that if governments want to satisfy demanding yet penny-pinching and hyper-critical customers in the realm of public services, then they should pursue all three of these models, to varying degrees.

The first model is what Barber calls the 'command and control model' which involves targets, heavy inspection and monitoring and diktats. In schools in England, this can be seen in the consolidation of Tory education policy under New Labour, with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the National Curriculum and SATs all retained. New Labour brought in additional 'command and control' aspects of education policy such as the Numeracy and Literacy Hours for primary schools.

The second model is:

...to create quasi-markets, as in current health and education reforms in the UK: devolution of responsibility to schools, GPs and foundation hospitals; more choice for parents and patients and the introduction of alternative providers of schools and health services. The aim is to recognise that while these services are different from businesses in that they are universal and equitable, they are similar in management terms (Barber, 2006).

This second model is connected to the various *marketising* education policies of the UK government. These policies seek to

deepen competition between schools in various ways (who market their products) and to turn parents and students into customers competing for places and qualifications. Again, the education policies of the Conservative administrations of the 1980s and 1990s, with increased parental choice, league tables (for SATs, GCSE and A-level results), funding linked to pupil numbers and devolution of budgets to schools, facilitated the development of education quasi-markets in the schools system. And again, New Labour consolidated and built upon these 'reforms'. The Schools White Paper of October 2005 (Her Majesty's Government, 2005) was a key marketising document for New Labour in terms of deepening parental choice and instituting Trust schools as 'independent state schools'. As Jane Coles (2005 and 2006) has indicated, New Labour rhetoric about 'choice' and 'diversity' camouflages attempts to develop educational marketisation further, which, if left unchecked, would only exacerbate divisions, inequalities and injustices in the schools system in England. However, the backlash against the White Paper, from within and beyond the Labour Party, resulted in a watered-down Education and Inspections Bill and a Consultation on a strengthened Code of Admissions which have the potential to significantly curtail the marketising measures within the White Paper.

Barber's (2006) third model involves the government contracting out or delegating to services providers, and holds them responsible for service performance. Outsourcing of LEAs to companies can be included here. This model has been applied sparingly within the schools sector to date, and given the hostility of trade unions and, in some cases parents' groups to this policy, then we may have to wait for David Cameron's Tories to take it further; in this case 'building' on New Labour 'reforms'.

What I have called the 'business takeover of schools' involves principally the third model. However, the *capitalisation* of schools, policies and processes which reconstitute schools as value creating and profit-making centres which produce educational services as *commodities* (see Rikowski, 2005), also involves the second model. The capitalisation of schools incorporates both marketisation and commodification of educational services, a point often ignored by the educational Left. Indeed, in terms of setting contracts where money is clawed back from companies if targets are not met, there are elements of command and control too.

In essence, the capitalisation of schools establishes a situation where schools are under the command of capital yet not owned by individual companies. The capitalist state regulates competition and contracts that can ultimately be taken away from particular

companies and handed to others if service targets are not met. Whilst these arrangements are complex and appear to be 'modernising' processes and practices, they unleash capital into areas that were previously embedded within the domain of the state, albeit a capitalist state. It therefore constitutes a kind of primitive capitalism, an opening up of a new frontier to capital. Thus: the process is thoroughly *retro*-modern.

Retromodernism is where policies are presented as 'modern' and 'reforming' but are essentially throwbacks to a situation where capital and its representatives have more power and control, or where value creation and profit making are nurtured and developed. This can also be seen in education policy regarding the Academies in England. These schools are sponsored by 'philanthropists' of various kinds – including business ones. Sponsors put in £2 million towards start-up costs and then gain considerable power over staff conditions, and, most importantly, school ethos, with the power to insert religious and business-oriented values and prejudices into the curriculum. Notions of philanthropy and charity permeate the Academies as throwbacks to the nineteenth century, and further back. Again, purportedly 'modern' policies are thoroughly retro. The same is true of the Trust schools, which are echoes of the Tories' Grant Maintained Schools, themselves reminiscent of the old Direct Grant Schools and further back to some of the old grammar schools that were turned into private schools. Thus: not so much back to the future as forward to the past (see Baker, 2005).

Education for progressive social change, on the other hand, is not tied to mortgaging our children's future to capital and its human representatives. Rather, it is tied to human progress and a future beyond capital. It is a truly modern, not retromodern, system of education that puts the well-being of all at the centre of its activities and not the demands of capital, the capitalist or ruling classes or ruling elites at the top of the educational agenda. Education for progressive social change is subversive of the constitution of the vast majority of current educational practices, processes and institutions. It is also education for environmental and social sustainability. It is an education that has a future.

The Contributions

Of course, it cannot be expected that all the contributors to this issue would agree with all or even most of the above. Indeed, these ideas reflect the experiences and biography of a particular person and his encounters with capitalist society and educational institutions, and with a very particular family background and

educational, social and political experience, and how he reacted to and made sense of these. Nevertheless, the articles in this Special Issue all touch on aspects of the above account on the notion of education for social change.

This is most clear in the first article, by **Dave Hill**. Hill indicates how neoliberal and neoconservative education policies not only reproduce, bolster and aid the capitalist system to maintain itself and to expand, but also play a key role on the constitution of the class system. Hill discloses some uncomfortable data on income and wealth distribution in the United States and the United Kingdom, and how the education systems of these countries function to maintain and indeed extend these inequalities, as well as to legitimise them. He unravels the various capitalist plans and agendas for education and how the current education system functions ideologically to support a whole host of divisions: class, 'race' and gender divisions being particularly important. Finally, Hill also examines how contemporary, globalising, neoliberal and neoconservative capitalist education impacts on those who work in education institutions. Yet he ends on an optimistic and positive note by indicating how groups of workers have resisted these trends.

For an aspiring teacher who happens to be Left-wing in their outlook, the issue of how they reconcile their socialist, egalitarian and radical views with the disciplines and self-restrictions necessary to function as a teacher in England today is a crucial one. **Alison Tuffs**, in the second article, poses the question of whether such reconciliation can be reached, or indeed is worth reaching. Ultimately, the question is to teach or not to teach. On the other hand, should education become the preserve of rather conformist folk imbued with the spirit of technicism, just doing 'what works'? Should only pragmatists and rule-followers teach in our schools? Tuffs explores these issues through drawing on personal experience, a range of philosophers (especially those from the Anarchist tradition) and educational research. In the process, Tuffs raises further significant questions about the ways schools actually work. Tuffs concludes that maintaining educational ideals is essential for Left-wing teachers: even if so many forces and factors within the educational system seem to undermine these. Furthermore, for progressive educational change to take place, such teachers, in substantial numbers, are a necessity in our schools today.

In the third article, **Glenn Rikowski** argues that education for progressive social change is linked to a politics that hammers away at capital's weakest link, which, for him, is labour power: the capacity to labour. This is because capitalist society *depends for its*

existence and expansion on the transformation of labour power into actual labour in the capitalist labour process for the creation of value, surplus-value and ultimately profit. Unfortunately, for the capitalist and for human representatives of capital, labour power is a social force in the possession of labourers. It is under the rule of potentially hostile wills. This makes it capital's weakest link: labour has to be coaxed, cajoled and ultimately forced out of labourers for the system to survive; and it is this fact that makes labour power, our capacity to labour, which resides within us, capital's weakest link. Capitalist education and training play key roles in the social production of labour power. Thus, a politics of human resistance can be generated that focuses on the critique of the form that labour power takes, and critiques of its social production through education and training and to explore ways in which labour power might figure in non-capitalist production (together with the associated education and training). This politics of human resistance, argues Rikowski, should be the focus of socialist strategy and thinking – an unlikely prospect at the current time.

However, to shift education and training away from supporting the constitution of contemporary society and towards a concern with human well-being and social progress is not easy. In the next article, **Zapopan Martin Muela-Meza** describes how, in contemporary society state and capital are fusing. He argues that this poses a threat both to democracy and human progress. The forces of commodification and marketisation, nurtured by the corporate state, threaten to hollow-out substantive democracy in contemporary society. This applies to both education and library and information services. Corporations, like capital, are essentially, without and 'beyond' ethics. After Nietzsche, they are 'beyond good and evil'. Muela-Meza's solution is the re-establishment of the public domain, to force corporations under the rule of law; to force them to adopt ethical practices which are alien to their existence. He calls on library and information workers to engage in this struggle, to redefine knowledge, and to rethink their roles and their practices in line with the development of a renaissance and extension of the democratic impulse. He also argues for the 'freeing' of knowledge and information – vital to an education for social change – from the grip of corporations.

Dionyssios Gouvias argues that attempts to recast education for social change in the language and rhetoric of 'lifelong learning' and the 'Learning Society' might be tempting for both education policymakers and teachers and for those on the educational Left. However, this beguiling rhetoric is ultimately linked to the maintenance of social class divisions and indeed a host of other social and economic divisions, including the 'digital divide'. Gouvias

explores these issues through an analysis of how the European Union views lifelong learning and the Learning Society, focusing in particular on a number of EU sponsored projects aiming at nurturing these. His conclusion is that the official EU governmental apparatus' outlook on lifelong learning and the Learning Society is set within a discourse where human capital production, neoliberal principles and individualism predominate and squeeze out conceptions of 'social solidarity and collective action': key ingredients for an education for progressive social change.

Changing tack, **Phil Badger** and **Glenn Rikowski** indicate how a critical moral education might play a significant role in education for social change. Moral education is usually viewed through a very conservative lens in government and education Establishment circles. Badger and Rikowski make a case for an approach to moral education that transcends both 'traditional' and 'market' forms of moral discourse. They argue that moral education needs to be allied to the development of critical thinking skills and a renaissance of social studies in the curriculum. Furthermore, Badger and Rikowski propose that what we need is an education system and experience that attempts to generate a 'critical mass rather than an enlightened few'.

In her article, **Susan Devine** illustrates how difficult it is as a parent and for teachers to provide moral guidance in a society that is changing so rapidly. In these circumstances, she argues, we should be equipped with the conceptual skills and resources to carve out 'own moral sense'. Ultimately, we must become our own moral educator.

Ethics is also at the centre of **Ruth Rikowski's** article. From a philosophical analysis of the nature of ethics, Rikowski examines how ethical issues are at the heart of a range of issues in the teaching of Information Technology (IT). She explores types of ethical issues encountered in teaching IT, how to teach ethical issues in IT and when to teach these issues. Rikowski concludes by arguing that although many of these problems can be addressed with some success in contemporary society and its education systems, some, such as the digital divide will require more drastic action: i.e. the struggle for radical social change which moves beyond capitalist society.

Continuing on the theme of IT, **Paul Catherall** argues for the need to bring critical perspectives to bear on the headlong rush by further and higher educational institutions to adopt a plethora of web-based learning resources and virtual learning environments (VLEs). He notes the resistance by some academic staff to these developments,

as they fear that a top-down, technology-driven IT policy may have some negative effects for learning and the cultivation of a community of learners and scholars. As Catherall notes:

As a consequence of the rise of e-learning and VLEs, many educationalists have begun to seriously question what has become a moot feature of educational practice.

In this context, Catherall explores five critical perspectives on e-learning and VLEs: the digital divide; the standards debate; academic objections to e-learning; the commercialisation of academia that e-learning appears to engender; and organisation and deployment challenges posed by e-learning. He touches briefly on the counter-arguments to these critical positions on e-learning, but concludes that 'objections to fundamental e-learning concepts and the systematisation of education ... cannot easily be dismissed'. However, despite these objections, Catherall indicates that e-learning will not be just a mere fad but will 'remain a major feature of the modern educational context'. Whilst there are clearly some negative consequences of e-learning, it is also the case that it has the potential to be allied to projects of radical change within education and beyond. This is the political challenge and opportunity afforded by e-learning, which we ignore at our peril.

Helen Raduntz's article begins by providing an analysis of the marketisation of education via a Marxian perspective. Then, through uncovering the 'inner dynamics of the capitalist economy' she indicates how education functions as a crisis management tool for the contradictions and crises thrown up by these dynamics. Raduntz uses these opening sections of her article to pursue the direction of educational change in contemporary society. In the process, but coming from a different angle, she reaches a similar conclusion to Zapopan Martin Muela-Meza: that education is becoming integrated into the capitalist economy.

The final article, by **Victor Rikowski** indicates how education is being redefined and restructured to the detriment of original and critical thought. Really existing education is becoming *anti-educational*. Its impulse is to seek and to nurture in the student conformity, compliance, mediocrity and job-readiness. Teachers, examiners and students themselves need to struggle against these trends. From a student perspective, Victor indicates the poverty of student life and educational experience today, despite all the apparent advances (e.g. IT usage in the classroom). He challenges all of us to rethink educational aims and policy for human and individual progress.

The issue also contains some extensive and intensive e-dialogues (**Rich Gibson** and **Glenn Rikowski**, and **Alpesh Maisuria** and **Spyros Themelis**) and e-interviews (**Peter McLaren** and **Mike Cole** are interviewed by **Glenn Rikowski** in separate e-interviews). These e-dialogues and e-interviews provide further insights and significant topics for debate regarding Education for Social Change.

There are also a number of reviews, and two poems by **Gregory Rikowski**. Finally, there is a short Epilogue by **Glenn Rikowski**.

Conclusion

Whilst the articles, e-dialogues and e-interviews in this Special Issue on education for social change do not agree on a single analysis of the issues let alone the solutions, they do indicate a range of questions that require consideration in the project of education for progressive social change. Furthermore, in their various ways, they indicate that education (founded on the necessary library and information resources) must play a vital role in struggles for human and individual development and progress today.

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