

# Comparing Neo-liberal Projects and Inequality in Education

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**ABSTRACT** *In this article, I pay particular attention to some of the most important dynamics surrounding globalisation in education—the increasingly powerful discourses and policies of neo-liberalism concerning privatisation, marketisation, performativity, and the ‘enterprising individual’. While I demonstrate the truly international effects of neo-liberal policies—and the differential realities they tend to produce in real schools—I also suggest that we cannot simply read off the effects of these policies in the abstract. Their uses and effects are historically contingent. They are at least partly dependent on the balance of forces in each nation and on the histories of the ways progressive tendencies have already been instituted within the state. Yet, I also suggest that any analysis of these discourses and policies must critically examine their class and race and gender effects at the level of who benefits from their specific institutionalisations and from their contradictory functions within real terrains of social power.*

## Introduction

The August 2000 issue of *Comparative Education* was devoted to the issues surrounding ‘Comparative Education for the Twenty-first Century’. The issue was thoughtful and raised a number of important questions that deserve even more thoughtful and critical responses. Among the questions that Angela Little asked in her own contribution to the special issue were: ‘How will differential access to education provision and quality lead to the further marginalisation of young people? ... How will different forms of education serve to legitimate and reproduce social and economic stratification?’ (Little, 2000, pp. 292–293). These are questions that are not limited by geographical borders. As Michael Crossley reminds us, ‘It is now increasingly difficult to understand education in any context without reference to the global forces that influence policy and practice’ (Crossley, 2000, p. 324). In this article I wish to focus on one particular set of global tendencies and provide an analysis of the ways in which it may engage in the legitimation and reproduction that Little asks us to pay attention to.

We are living in a period of crisis. The crisis has affected all of our economic, political, and cultural institutions. But one of the institutions that has been at the centre of the crisis and of struggles to overcome it is the school. We are told by neo-liberals that only by turning our schools, teachers, and children over to the competitive market will we find a solution. We are told by neo-conservatives that the only way out is to return to ‘real knowledge’. Popular knowledge, knowledge that is connected to and organised around the lives of the most disadvantaged members of our communities, is not legitimate.

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During one of the times I was working in Brazil, I remember Paulo Freire repeatedly saying to me that education must begin in critical dialogue. Both of these last two words were crucial to him. Education must both hold our dominant institutions in education and the larger society up to rigorous questioning, and at the same time this questioning must deeply involve those who benefit least from the ways these institutions now function. Both conditions were necessary, as the first without the second was simply insufficient to the task of creating a critically democratic education.

Of course, many committed educators already know that the transformation of educational policies and practices—or the defence of democratic gains in our schools and communities—is inherently political. However, the mere fact that people recognise the connections between, say, education and differential power does not guarantee that acting on such knowledge inevitably leads to progressive transformations. There are *multiple* actors in the social field of power in which the means and ends of education are contested. It is exactly the differential relations of power that are currently moving education in particular directions in a number of nations that shall be my concern in this article.

### Right Turn

In his influential history of curriculum debates, Herbert Kliebard has documented that educational issues have consistently involved major conflicts and compromises among groups with competing visions of ‘legitimate’ knowledge, what counts as ‘good’ teaching and learning, and what is a ‘just’ society (Kliebard, 1986). That such conflicts have deep roots in conflicting views of racial, class, and gender justice in education and the larger society is ratified in even more critical recent work as well (Teitelbaum, 1996; Rury & Mirel, 1997; Selden, 1999). These competing visions have never had equal holds on the imagination of educators or the general citizenry nor have they ever had equal power to effect their visions. Because of this, no analysis of education can be fully serious without placing at its very core a sensitivity to the ongoing struggles that constantly shape the terrain on which education operates.

Today is no different than in the past. As I have argued elsewhere (Apple, 1996, 2000, 2001), in a number of countries a ‘new’ set of compromises, a new alliance and new power bloc has been formed that has increasing influence in education and all things social. This power bloc combines multiple fractions of capital who are committed to neo-liberal marketised solutions to educational problems, neo-conservative intellectuals who want a ‘return’ to higher standards and a ‘common culture’, authoritarian populist religious conservatives who are deeply worried about secularity and the preservation of their own traditions, and particular fractions of the professionally and managerially oriented new middle class who are committed to the ideology and techniques of accountability, measurement, and the ‘new managerialism’. While there are clear tensions and conflicts within this alliance, in general its overall aims are in providing the educational conditions believed necessary both for increasing international competitiveness, profit, and discipline and for returning us to a romanticised past of the ‘ideal’ home, family, and school.

In essence, the new alliance has integrated education into a wider set of ideological commitments. The objectives in education are the same as those which guide its economic and social welfare goals. They include the dramatic expansion of that eloquent fiction, the free market; the drastic reduction of government responsibility for social needs; the reinforcement of intensely competitive structures of mobility both inside and outside the school; the lowering of people’s expectations for economic security; the ‘disciplining’ of culture and the body; and the popularisation of what is clearly a form of social Darwinist thinking, as the

recent popularity of *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) in the USA and elsewhere so obviously and distressingly indicates.

The seemingly contradictory discourse of competition, markets, and choice on the one hand and accountability, performance objectives, standards, national testing, and national curriculum on the other has created such a din that it is hard to hear anything else. Even though these seem to embody different tendencies, they actually oddly reinforce each other and help cement conservative educational positions into our daily lives.

While lamentable, the changes that are occurring present an exceptional opportunity for serious critical reflection. In a time of radical social and educational change, it is crucial to document the processes and effects of the various and sometimes contradictory elements of what might best be called 'conservative modernisation' (Dale, 1989/90; Apple, 2001) and of the ways in which they are mediated, compromised with, accepted, used in different ways by different groups for their own purposes, and/or struggled over in the policies and practices of people's daily educational lives (Ranson, 1995, p. 427). I shall want to give a more detailed sense of how this might be happening in current 'reforms' such as marketisation in this essay. For those interested in international movements that support critical educational policies and practices, not to do this means that we act without understanding the shifting relations of power that are constructing and reconstructing the social field of power. While Gramsci's saying, 'Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will' has a powerful resonance to it and is useful for mobilisation and for not losing hope, it would be foolish to substitute rhetorical slogans for the fuller analysis that is undoubtedly required if we are to be successful.

### **New Markets, Old Traditions**

Historically, in a number of 'Western' countries, behind a good deal of the New Right's emerging discursive ensemble was a position that emphasised 'a culturalist construction of the nation as a (threatened) haven for white (Christian) traditions and values' (Gillborn, 1997a, p. 2). This involved the construction of an imagined national past that is at least partly mythologised, and then employing it to castigate the present. Gary McCulloch argues that the nature of the historical images of schooling has changed. Dominant imagery of education as being 'safe, domesticated, and progressive' (that is, as leading towards progress and social/personal improvement) has shifted to become 'threatening, estranged, and regressive' (McCulloch, 1997, p. 80). The past is no longer the source of stability, but a mark of failure, disappointment, and loss. This is seen most vividly in the attacks on the 'progressive orthodoxy' that supposedly now reigns supreme in classrooms in many nations (Hirsch, 1996; Ravitch, 2000).

For example, in England—although much the same is echoed in the USA, Australia, and elsewhere—Michael Jones, the political editor of *The Sunday Times*, recalls the primary school of his day

Primary school was a happy time for me. About 40 of us sat at fixed wooden desks with ink wells and moved from them only with grudging permission. Teacher sat in a higher desk in front of us and moved only to the blackboard. She smelled of scent and inspired awe [quoted in McCulloch (1997, p. 78)].

The mix of metaphors invoking discipline, scent (visceral and almost 'natural'), and awe is fascinating. But he goes on, lamenting the past 30 years of 'reform' that transformed primary schools. Speaking of his own children's experience, Jones says:

My children spent their primary years in a showplace school where they were allowed to wander around at will, develop their real individuality and dodge the

3Rs. It was all for the best, we were assured. But it was not [quoted in McCulloch (1997, p. 78)].

For Jones, the 'dogmatic orthodoxy' of progressive education 'had led directly to educational and social decline' (McCulloch, 1997, p. 78). Only the rightist reforms instituted in the 1980s and 1990s could halt and then reverse this decline (McCulloch, 1997). Only then could the imagined past return.

Much the same is being said on the US side of the Atlantic. These sentiments are echoed in the public pronouncements of such figures as William Bennett (1988), E. D. Hirsch Jr (1996), Diane Ravitch (2000), and others, all of whom seem to believe that progressivism is now in the dominant position in educational policy and practice and has destroyed a valued past. All of them believe that only by tightening control over curriculum and teaching (and students, of course), restoring 'our' lost traditions, making education more disciplined and competitive as they are certain it was in the past—only then can we have effective schools [1]. These figures are joined by others who have similar criticisms, but who instead turn to a different past for a different future. Their past is less that of scent and awe and authority, but one of market 'freedom'. For them, nothing can be accomplished—even the restoration of awe and authority—without setting the market loose on schools so as to ensure that only 'good' ones survive.

We should understand that these policies are radical transformations. If they had come from the other side of the political spectrum, they would have been ridiculed in many ways, given the ideological tendencies in our nations. Further, not only are these policies based on a romanticised pastoral past, these reforms have not been notable for their grounding in research findings. Indeed, when research has been used, it has often either served as a rhetoric of justification for preconceived beliefs about the supposed efficacy of markets or regimes of tight accountability or they have been based—as in the case of Chubb and Moe's much publicised work on marketisation—on quite flawed research (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Whitty, 1997).

Yet, no matter how radical some of these proposed 'reforms' are and no matter how weak the empirical basis of their support, they have now redefined the terrain of debate of all things educational. After years of conservative attacks and mobilisations, it has become clear that 'ideas that were once deemed fanciful, unworkable—or just plain extreme' are now increasingly being seen as common-sense (Gillborn, 1997b, p. 357).

Tactically, the reconstruction of common-sense that has been accomplished has proven to be extremely effective. For example, there are clear discursive strategies being employed here, ones that are characterised by 'plain speaking' and speaking in a language that 'everyone can understand'. (I do not wish to be wholly negative about this. The importance of these things is something many 'progressive' educators, including many writers in critical pedagogy, have yet to understand. See Apple, 1988, 1999.) These strategies also involve not only presenting one's own position as 'common-sense', but also usually tacitly implying that there is something of a conspiracy among one's opponents to deny the truth or to say only that which is 'fashionable' (Gillborn, 1997b, p. 353). As Gillborn (1997b) notes

This is a powerful technique. First, it assumes that there are no *genuine* arguments against the chosen position; any opposing views are thereby positioned as false, insincere or self-serving. Second, the technique presents the speaker as someone brave or honest enough to speak the (previously) unspeakable. Hence, the moral high ground is assumed and opponents are further denigrated (p. 353).

It is hard to miss these characteristics in some of the conservative literature such as Herrnstein and Murray's publicising of the unthinkable 'truth' about genetics and intelligence (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) or E. D. Hirsch's and Diane Ravitch's latest 'tough'

discussion of the destruction of 'serious' schooling by progressive educators in the USA (Hirsch, 1996; Ravitch, 2000) [2]. Similar claims can easily be found elsewhere as well.

## Markets and Performance

Let us take as an example of the ways in which all this operates one element of conservative modernisation—the neo-liberal claim that the invisible hand of the market will inexorably lead to better schools. As Roger Dale reminds us, 'the market' acts as a metaphor rather than an explicit guide for action. It is not denotative, but connotative. Thus, it must itself be 'marketed' to those who will exist in it and live with its effects [quoted in Menter *et al.* (1997, p. 27)]. Markets are marketed, are made legitimate, by a depoliticising strategy. They are said to be natural and neutral, and governed by effort and merit. And those opposed to them are by definition, hence, also opposed to effort and merit. Markets, as well, are supposedly less subject to political interference and the weight of bureaucratic procedures. Plus, they are grounded in the rational choices of individual actors. Thus, markets and the guarantee of rewards for effort and merit are to be coupled together to produce 'neutral', yet positive, results (Menter *et al.*, 1997, p. 27). Mechanisms, hence, must be put into place that give evidence of entrepreneurial efficiency and effectiveness. This coupling of markets and mechanisms for the generation of evidence of performance is exactly what has occurred. Whether it works is open to question. Indeed, as I shall show shortly, in practice neo-liberal policies involving market 'solutions' may actually serve to reproduce—not subvert—traditional hierarchies of class and race. Perhaps this should give us reason to pause?

Thus, rather than taking neo-liberal claims at face value, we should want to ask about their hidden effects that are too often invisible in the rhetoric and metaphors of their proponents. I shall select a number of issues that have been given less attention than they deserve, but on which there is now significant international research.

The English experience is apposite here, especially as proponents of the market such as Chubb & Moe (1990) rely so heavily on it and because that is where the tendencies I analyse are most advanced. In England, the 1993 Education Act documents the state's commitment to marketisation. Until recently, governing bodies of local educational authorities were mandated to formally consider 'going Grant Maintained (GM)' (that is, opting out of the local school system's control and entering into the competitive market) every year (Power *et al.*, 1994, p. 27). Thus, the weight of the state stood behind the press towards neo-liberal reforms there. Yet, rather than leading to curriculum responsiveness and diversification, the competitive market has not created much that is different from the traditional models so firmly entrenched in schools today (Power *et al.*, 1994). Nor has it radically altered the relations of inequality that characterise schooling (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000).

In their own extensive analyses of the effects of marketised reforms 'on the ground', Ball and his colleagues point to some of the reasons why we need to be quite cautious here. As they document, in these situations educational principles and values are often compromised such that commercial issues become more important in curriculum design and resource allocation (Ball *et al.*, 1994, p. 39). For instance, the coupling of markets with the demand for and publication of performance indicators such as examination league tables in England has meant that schools are increasingly looking for ways to attract 'motivated' parents with 'able' children. In this way, schools are able to enhance their relative position in local systems of competition. This represents a subtle, but crucial shift in emphasis—one that is not openly discussed as often as it should be—from student needs to student performance and from what the school does for the student to what the student does for the school. This is also

accompanied too uncomfortably often by a shift of resources away from students who are labelled as having special needs or learning difficulties, with some of these needed resources now being shifted to marketing and public relations. 'Special needs' students are not only expensive, but deflate test scores on those all-important league tables.

Not only does this make it difficult to 'manage public impressions', but it also makes it difficult to attract the 'best' and most academically talented teachers (Ball *et al.*, 1994, pp. 17–19). The entire enterprise does, however, establish a new metric and a new set of goals based on a constant striving to win the market game. What this means is of considerable import, not only in terms of its effects on daily school life, but in the ways all of this signifies a transformation of what counts as a good society and a responsible citizen. Let me say something about this generally.

I noted earlier that behind all educational proposals are visions of a just society and a good student. The neo-liberal reforms I have been discussing construct this in a particular way. While the defining characteristic of neo-liberalism is largely based on the central tenets of classical liberalism, in particular classic economic liberalism, there are crucial differences between classical liberalism and neo-liberalism. These differences are absolutely essential in understanding the politics of education and the transformations education is currently undergoing. Mark Olssen (1996) clearly details these differences in the following passage. It is worth quoting in its entirety

Whereas classical liberalism represents a negative conception of state power in that the individual was to be taken as an object to be freed from the interventions of the state, neo-liberalism has come to represent a positive conception of the state's role in creating the appropriate market by providing the conditions, laws and institutions necessary for its operation. In classical liberalism, the individual is characterised as having an autonomous human nature and can practice freedom. In neo-liberalism the state seeks to create an individual who is an enterprising and competitive entrepreneur. In the classical model the theoretical aim of the state was to limit and minimise its role based on postulates which included universal egoism (the self-interested individual); invisible hand theory which dictated that the interests of the individual were also the interests of the society as a whole; and the political maxim of *laissez-faire*. In the shift from classical liberalism to neo-liberalism, then, there is a further element added, for such a shift involves a change in subject position from 'homo economicus', who naturally behaves out of self-interest and is relatively detached from the state, to 'manipulatable man', who is created by the state and who is continually encouraged to be 'perpetually responsive'. It is not that the conception of the self-interested subject is replaced or done away with by the new ideals of 'neo-liberalism', but that in an age of universal welfare, the perceived possibilities of slothful indolence create necessities for new forms of vigilance, surveillance, 'performance appraisal' and of forms of control generally. In this model the state has taken it upon itself to keep us all up to the mark. The state will see to it that each one makes a 'continual enterprise of ourselves' ... in what seems to be a process of 'governing without governing' (p. 340).

The results of Ball and his colleagues' research document how the state does indeed do this, enhancing that odd combination of marketised individualism and control through constant and comparative public assessment. Widely publicised league tables determine one's relative value in the educational marketplace. Only those schools with rising performance indicators are worthy. And only those students who can 'make a continual enterprise of themselves' can keep such schools going in the 'correct' direction, a discussion to which I shall return shortly.

Yet, while these issues are important, they fail to illuminate fully some of the other mechanisms through which *differential* effects are produced by neo-liberal reforms. Here, class issues come to the fore in ways that Ball *et al.* (1994) make clear.

Middle class parents are clearly the most advantaged in this kind of cultural assemblage, and not only as we saw because schools seek them out. Middle class parents have become quite skilled, in general, in exploiting market mechanisms in education and in bringing their social, economic, and cultural capital to bear on them. 'Middle class parents are more likely to have the knowledge, skills and contacts to decode and manipulate what are increasingly complex and deregulated systems of choice and recruitment. The more deregulation, the more possibility of informal procedures being employed. The middle class also, on the whole, are more able to move their children around the system' (Ball *et al.*, 1994, p. 19). Yet, in many nations class and race intersect and interact in complex ways. Because marketised systems in education often *expressly* have their conscious and unconscious *raison d'être* in a fear of 'the other' and these often are hidden expressions of a racialisation of educational policy, the differential results will 'naturally' be decidedly raced as well as classed (Omi & Winant, 1994; McCarthy & Crichlow, 1994; McCarthy, 1998).

Economic and social capital can be converted into cultural capital in various ways. In marketised plans, more affluent parents often have more flexible hours and can visit multiple schools. They have cars—often more than one—and can *afford* driving their children across town to attend a 'better' school. They can as well provide the hidden cultural resources such as camps and after school programmes (dance, music, computer classes, etc.) that give their children an 'ease', a 'style', that seems 'natural' and acts as a set of cultural resources. Their previous stock of social and cultural capital—who they know, their 'comfort' in social encounters with educational officials—is an unseen but powerful storehouse of resources. Thus, more affluent parents are more likely to have the informal knowledge and skill—what Bourdieu (1984) would call the *habitus*—to be able to decode and use marketised forms to their own benefit. This sense of what might be called 'confidence'—which is itself the result of past choices that tacitly but no less powerfully depend on the economic resources to have actually had the ability to make economic choices—is the unseen capital that underpins their ability to negotiate marketised forms and 'work the system' through sets of informal cultural rules (Ball *et al.*, 1994, pp. 20–22; see also Bernstein, 1990, 1996).

Of course, it needs to be said that working class, poor, and/or immigrant parents are not skill-less in this regard, by any means. [After all, it requires an immense amount of skill, courage, and social and cultural resources to survive under exploitative and depressing material conditions. Thus, collective bonds, informal networks and contacts, and an ability to work the system are developed in quite nuanced, intelligent, and often impressive ways here (Fine & Weis, 1998; Duneier, 1999)]. However, the match between the historically grounded *habitus* expected in schools and in its actors and those of more affluent parents, combined with the material resources available to more affluent parents, usually leads to a successful conversion of economic and social capital into cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1996). And this is exactly what is happening in a number of nations (Lauder & Hughes, 1999).

These claims, both about what is happening inside schools and about larger sets of power relations, are supported by even more recent synthetic analyses of the overall results of marketised models. This research on the effects of the tense but still effective combination of neo-liberal and neo-conservative policies examines the tendencies internationally by comparing what has happened in a number of nations—for example, the USA, England and Wales, Australia, and New Zealand—where this combination has been increasingly powerful. The results confirm the arguments I have made here. Let me rehearse some of the most significant and disturbing findings of such research.

It is unfortunately all too usual that the most widely used measures of the 'success' of school reforms are the results of standardised achievement tests. This simply will not do. We need to ask constantly what reforms do to schools as a whole and to each of their participants, including teachers, students, administrators, community members, local activists, and so on. To take one set of examples, as marketised 'self-managing' schools grow in many nations, the role of the school principal is radically transformed. More, not less, power is actually consolidated within an administrative structure. More time and energy is spent on maintaining or enhancing a public image of a 'good school' and less time and energy is spent on pedagogic and curricular substance. At the same time, teachers seem to be experiencing not increased autonomy and professionalism, but intensification (Apple, 1988, 2000). And, oddly, as noted before, schools themselves become more *similar*, and more committed, to standard, traditional, whole class methods of teaching and a standard and traditional (and often mono-cultural) curriculum (Whitty *et al.*, 1998, pp. 12–13). Only directing our attention to test scores would cause us to miss some truly profound transformations, many of which we may find disquieting.

One of the reasons these broader effects are so often produced is that in all too many countries, neo-liberal visions of quasi-markets are usually accompanied by neo-conservative pressure to regulate content and behaviour through such things as national curricula, national standards, and national systems of assessment. The combination is historically and politically contingent; that is, it is not absolutely necessary that the two emphases are combined. But there are characteristics of neo-liberalism that make it more likely that an emphasis on the weak state and a faith in markets will cohere with an emphasis on the strong state and a commitment to regulating knowledge, values, and the body (Apple, 2001).

This is partly the case because of the increasing power of the 'evaluative state' and the members of the managerial and professional middle class who tend to populate it. This signifies what initially may seem to be contradictory tendencies. At the same time as the state appears to be devolving power to individuals and autonomous institutions which are themselves increasingly competing in a market, the state remains strong in key areas (Whitty *et al.*, 1998, p. 36). As I claimed earlier, one of the key differences between classical liberalism and its faith in 'enterprising individuals' in a market and current forms of neo-liberalism is the latter's commitment to a regulatory state. Neo-liberalism does indeed demand the constant production of evidence that one is in fact 'making an enterprise of oneself' (Olssen, 1996, p. 340). Thus, under these conditions not only does education become a marketable commodity like bread and cars in which the values, procedures, and metaphors of business dominate, but its results must be reducible to standardised 'performance indicators' (Whitty *et al.*, 1998, pp. 37–38; see also Clarke & Newman, 1997). Not only is this evidence of what Broadfoot has called 'performativity' (Broadfoot, 2000, p. 365), but it is ideally suited to the task of providing a mechanism for the neo-conservative attempts to specify what knowledge, values, and behaviours should be standardised and officially defined as 'legitimate' (Apple, 2001).

In essence, we are witnessing a process in which the state shifts the blame for the very evident inequalities in access and outcome it has promised to reduce, from itself on to individual schools, parents, and children. This is, of course, also part of a larger process in which dominant economic groups shift the blame for the massive and unequal effects of their own misguided decisions from themselves on to the state. The state is then faced with a very real crisis in legitimacy. Given this, we should not be at all surprised that the state will then seek to export this crisis outside itself (Apple, 1995) [3].

Of course, the state is not only classed, but is inherently *sex/gendered* and *raced* as well (Fraser, 1989; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Middleton, 1998). This is evident in Whitty *et al.*'s



arguments. They point to the gendered nature of the ways in which the management of schools is thought about, as ‘masculinist’ business models become increasingly dominant (Whitty *et al.*, 1998, pp. 60–62; see also Arnot *et al.*, 1999). While there is a danger of these claims degenerating into reductive and essentialising arguments, there is a good deal of insight here. They do cohere with the work of other scholars inside and outside education who recognise that the ways in which our very definitions of public and private, of what knowledge is of most worth, and of how institutions should be thought about and run, are fully implicated in the gendered nature of this society (Fraser, 1989, 1997). These broad ideological effects—e.g. enabling a coalition between neo-liberals and neo-conservatives to be formed, expanding the discourses and practices of new middle class managerialism, the masculinisation of theories, policies, and management talk—are of considerable import and make it harder to change common-sense in more critical directions.

Other, more proximate, effects inside schools are equally striking. For instance, even though principals seem to have more local power in these supposedly decentralised schools, because of the cementing in of neo-conservative policies principals ‘are increasingly forced into a position in which they have to demonstrate performance along centrally prescribed curricula in a context in which they have diminishing control’ (Whitty *et al.*, 1998, p. 63). Because of the intensification that I mentioned before, both principals and teachers experience considerably heavier work loads and ever escalating demands for accountability, a never ending schedule of meetings, and in many cases a growing scarcity of resources both emotional and physical (Whitty *et al.*, 1998, pp. 67–68; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000).

Further, as in the research in England, in nearly all of the countries studied the market did *not* encourage diversity in curriculum, pedagogy, organisation, clientele, or even image. It instead consistently devalued alternatives and increased the power of dominant models. Of equal significance, in general it also consistently exacerbated differences in access and outcome based on race, ethnicity, and class (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000).

The return to ‘traditionalism’ led to a number of things. It *delegitimated* more critical models of teaching and learning, a point that is crucial to recognise in any attempt to think through the possibilities of cultural struggles and critical pedagogies in schools. It both reintroduced restratification within the school and lessened the possibility that detracking or destreaming would occur. More emphasis was given to ‘gifted’ children and ‘fast track’ classes, while students who were seen as less academically able were therefore ‘less attractive’. In England, the extent of this was nowhere more visible than in the alarming rate of students being excluded from schools. Much of this was caused by the intense pressure to demonstrate higher achievement rates constantly. This was especially powerful in marketised contexts in which the ‘main driving force appeared to be *commercial* rather than *educational*’ (Whitty *et al.*, 1998, p. 80).

A number of analyses of these worrisome and more hidden results demonstrate that among the dangerous effects of quasi-markets are the ways in which schools that wish to maintain or enhance their market position may engage in ‘cream-skimming’, ensuring that *particular* kinds of students with particular characteristics are accepted and particular kinds of students are found wanting. For some schools, stereotypes were reproduced in that girls were seen as more valuable, as were students from some Asian communities. Afro-Caribbean children were often clear losers in this situation (Gewirtz *et al.*, 1995; Whitty *et al.*, 1998; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000).

So far I have focused largely on England. Yet, as I mentioned in my introductory points, these movements are truly global. Their logics have spread rapidly to many nations, with results that tend to mirror those I have discussed so far. The case of New Zealand is useful here, especially as a large percentage of the population of New Zealand is multi-ethnic and

the nation has a history of racial tensions and inequalities. Furthermore, the move towards New Right policies occurred faster there than elsewhere. In essence, New Zealand became the laboratory for many of the policies I am analysing. In their exceptional study, based in large part on a conceptual apparatus influenced by Pierre Bourdieu, Lauder & Hughes (1999) document that educational markets seem to lead to an overall decline in educational standards. Paradoxically, they have a negative, not a positive, effect on the performance of schools with large working class and minority populations. In essence, they 'trade off the opportunities of less privileged children to those already privileged' (p. 2). The combination of neo-liberal policies of marketisation and the neo-conservative emphasis on 'tougher standards', creates an even more dangerous set of conditions. Their analysis confirms the conceptual and empirical arguments of Ball, Brown, and others that markets in education are not only responses by capital to reduce both the sphere of the state and of public control. They are also part of an attempt by the middle class to alter the rules of competition in education in light of the increased insecurities their children face. 'By changing the process of selection to schools, middle class parents can raise the stakes in creating stronger mechanisms of exclusion for blue collar and post-colonial peoples in their struggle for equality of opportunity' (Lauder & Hughes, 1999, p. 49; see also Brown, 1997).

The results from New Zealand not only mirror what was found elsewhere, but demonstrate that the further one's practices follow the logics of action embodied in marketising principles, the worse the situation tends to get. Markets *systematically* privilege higher socio-economic status families through their knowledge and material resources. These are the families who are most likely to exercise choice. Rather than giving large numbers of students who are working class, poor, or of colour the ability to exit, it is largely higher socio-economic status families who exit from public schools and schools with mixed populations. In a situation of increased competition, this in turn produces a spiral of decline in which schools populated by poorer students and students of colour are again systematically disadvantaged and schools with higher socio-economic status and higher White populations are able to insulate themselves from the effects of market competition (Lauder & Hughes, 1999, p. 101). 'White flight' then enhances the relative status of those schools already advantaged by larger economic forces; schooling for the 'other' becomes even more polarised and continues a downward spiral (Lauder & Hughes, 1999, p. 132).

### **Remembering National Specificities**

Having said this, however, we need to be cautious not to ignore historical specificities and comparative realities. Social movements, existing ideological formations, and institutions in civil society and the state may provide some support for countervailing logics. In some cases, in those nations with stronger and more extensive histories of social democratic policies and visions of collective positive freedoms, the neo-liberal emphasis on the market has been significantly mediated. Hence, as Petter Aasen (1998) has demonstrated in Norway and Sweden, for instance, privatising initiatives in education have had to cope with a greater collective commitment than in, say, the USA, England, and New Zealand. However, these commitments partly rest on class compromises and ethnic similarities. They are weakened when racial dynamics enter in. Thus, for example, the sense of 'everyone being the same' and hence being all subject to similar collective sensibilities is challenged by the growth of immigrant populations from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Greater sympathy for marketised forms may arise once the commonly understood assumptions of what it means to be, say, Norwegian or Swedish are interrupted by populations of colour who now claim the status of national citizenship. For this reason, it may be the case that the collective

sensibilities that provide support for less market oriented policies are based on an unacknowledged *racial contract* that underpins the ideological foundations of a national 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1991; Mills, 1997). This, then, may also generate support for neo-conservative policies, not because of neo-liberalism's commitment to 'perpetual responsiveness', but rather as a form of cultural restoration, as a way of re-establishing an imagined past when 'we were all one'.

Because of this, it is important that any analysis of the current play of forces surrounding conservative modernisation is aware of the fact that not only are such movements in constant motion, but once again we need to remember that they have a multitude of intersecting and contradictory dynamics including not only class, but race and gender as well (Arnot *et al.*, 1999; Apple, 2000). It should go without saying that these dynamics will have their own rhythms and specificities in different nations with different histories of their articulations and interactions. Indeed, I would argue that how these interact is one of the most important issues of research in comparative education.

Most of the data I have drawn upon come from schools outside the USA, although they should make us very cautious and give some very serious thought to whether it is wise to proceed with similar policies in the USA and elsewhere. Yet, the USA still sits at the centre of much of the discussion in this literature. For example, charter schools and their equivalents in the USA and England are also put under critical scrutiny. In both places, while we need to be careful not to overstate this, they tend to attract parents who live and work in relatively privileged communities. Here too, 'it would appear that any new opportunities are being colonised by the already advantaged, rather than the "losers" identified by Chubb & Moe' (Whitty *et al.*, 1998, p. 98; Wells, 1999). This is expressly ratified in McNeil's recent study of the ways in which the emphasis on 'performativity', on the use of industrial models, on reductive forms of accountability, and on the standardisation of curricula and teaching, all systematically reproduce social divisions and actually create new ones in urban schools in the USA (McNeil, 2000).

In sum, then, the overall conclusions are clear. '[In] current circumstances choice is as likely to reinforce hierarchies as to improve educational opportunities and the overall quality of schooling' (Whitty *et al.*, 1998, p. 14). As Whitty *et al.* (1998) put it in their arguments against those who believe that, what we are witnessing in the emergence of 'choice' programmes is the post-modern celebration of difference

There is a growing body of empirical evidence that, rather than benefiting the disadvantaged, the emphasis on parental choice and school autonomy is further disadvantaging those least able to compete in the market ... For most disadvantaged groups, as opposed to the few individuals who escape from schools at the bottom of the status hierarchy, the new arrangements seem to be just a more sophisticated way of reproducing traditional distinctions between different types of school and the people who attend them (p. 42).

All of this gives us ample reason to support Henig's insightful argument that

... the sad irony of the current education-reform movement is that, through over-identification with school-choice proposals rooted in market-based ideas, the healthy impulse to consider radical reforms to address social problems may be channelled into initiatives that further erode the potential for collective deliberation and collective response (Henig, 1994, p. 222).

This is not to dismiss either the possibility or necessity of school reform. However, we need to take seriously the probability that only by focusing on the exogenous socio-economic features, not simply the organisational features, of 'successful' schools can all schools

succeed. Eliminating poverty through greater income parity, establishing effective and much more equal health and housing programmes, and positively refusing to continue the hidden and not so hidden politics of racial exclusion and degradation that so clearly still characterise daily life in many nations (and in which marketised plans need to be seen as partly a structure to avoid the body and culture of ‘the other’)—only by tackling these issues together can substantive progress be made.

These empirical findings are made more understandable in terms of Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of the relative weight given to cultural capital as part of mobility strategies today (Bourdieu, 1996). The rise in importance of cultural capital infiltrates all institutions in such a way that there is a relative movement away from the *direct* reproduction of class privilege (where power is transmitted largely within families through economic property) to *school-mediated* forms of class privilege. Here, ‘the bequeathal of privilege is simultaneously effectuated and transfigured by the intercession of educational institutions’ (Wacquant, 1996, p. xiii). This is *not* a conspiracy; it is not ‘conscious’ in the ways we normally use that concept. Rather it is the result of a long chain of relatively autonomous connections between differentially accumulated economic, social, and cultural capital operating at the level of daily events as we make our respective ways in the world, including as we saw in the world of school choice.

Thus, while not taking an unyieldingly determinist position, Bourdieu (1996) argues that a class habitus tends to reproduce the conditions of its own reproduction ‘unconsciously’. It does this by producing a relatively coherent and systematically *characteristic* set of seemingly natural and unconscious strategies—in essence, ways of understanding and acting on the world that act as forms of cultural capital that can be and are employed to protect and enhance one’s status in a social field of power. He aptly compares this similarity of habitus across class actors to handwriting.

Just as the acquired disposition we call ‘handwriting,’ that is a particular way of forming letters, always produces the same ‘writing’—that is, graphic lines that despite differences in size, matter, and colour related to writing surface (sheet of paper or blackboard) and implement (pencil, pen, or chalk), that is despite differences in vehicles for the action, have an immediately recognisable affinity of style or a family resemblance—the practices of a single agent, or, more broadly, the practices of all agents endowed with similar habitus, owe the affinity of style that makes each a metaphor for the others to the fact that they are the products of the implementation in different fields of the same schemata of perception, thought, and action (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 273).

This very connection of habitus across fields of power—the ease of bringing one’s economic, social, and cultural resources to bear on ‘markets’—enables a comfort between markets and self that characterises the middle class actor here. This constantly *produces* differential effects. These effects are not neutral, no matter what the advocates of neo-liberalism suggest. Rather, they are themselves the results of a particular kind of morality. Unlike the conditions of what might best be called ‘thick morality’ where principles of the common good are the ethical basis for adjudicating policies and practices, markets are grounded in aggregative principles. They are constituted out of the sum of individual goods and choices. ‘Founded on individual and property rights that enable citizens to address problems of interdependence via exchange’, they offer a prime example of ‘thin morality’ by generating both hierarchy and division based on competitive individualism (Ball *et al.*, 1994, p. 24). And in this competition, the general outline of the winners and losers in the world of conservative modernisation *has* been identified empirically.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have paid particular attention to some of the most important dynamics surrounding globalisation in education—the increasingly powerful discourses and policies of neo-liberalism concerning privatisation, marketisation, performativity, and the ‘enterprising individual’. While I have sought to demonstrate the truly international effects of neo-liberal policies—and the differential realities they tend to produce in real schools—I have also suggested that we cannot simply read off the effects of these policies in the abstract. Their uses and effects are historically contingent. They are at least partly dependent on the balance of forces in each nation and on the histories of the ways progressive tendencies have already been instituted within the state. Yet, I have also suggested that any analysis of these discourses and policies must critically examine their class *and* race *and* gender effects at the level of who benefits from their specific institutionalisations and from their contradictory functions within real terrains of social power.

I have also had another agenda here. All too often, analyses of globalisation and the intricate combination of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism remain on a meta-theoretical level, disconnected from the actual lived realities of real schools, teachers, students, and communities. While such meta-theoretical work is crucial, its over-use has left a vacancy. At the same time that progressives develop their theoretical agendas, the forces of conservative modernisation predictably fill that vacant space with much more (seemingly) grounded claims about the supposed efficacy of their ‘solutions’ to what they define as ‘our’ educational problems. Unless we speak critically and specifically to their construction of these problems and to the solutions they propose internationally, I fear that comparative education will slide into irrelevancy—as one more arcane academic specialisation that can be ignored as not speaking to the reconstructions we are witnessing all around us. As Pierre Bourdieu reminds us, one of the most important activities scholars can engage in during this time of economic rationalism and imperial neo-conservatism is to analyse critically the production and circulation of these discourses and their effects on the lives of so many people in so many nations (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 29). I would urge us to take this role even more seriously than we have in the past.

## NOTES

This article is based on a longer and more detailed analysis in Apple (2001).

- [1] For alternatives to these policies that demonstrate the practicality of more critical and democratic possibilities, see Apple & Beane (1995, 1999).
- [2] For a critical analysis of the logic of their claims and of their historical inaccuracy, see Apple (in press).
- [3] In this regard, we might say that this speaks to the failure of some parts of what is called ‘signalling theory’, especially those aspects that assume that the state is necessarily successful in legitimating itself by sending signals of its commitments to, say, equality of opportunity and enhanced educational possibilities for the full range of its citizens. On signalling theory, see Fuller (1991).

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