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Chapter 2

Equality of Opportunity in New Times: The Politics of Learning and the Learner in the New World Disorder.

Peter Kell

In March 2005, Western Sydney was in the grip of what the media referred to as a week of riots. According to the press, police were attacked by gangs of rioting youths throwing, bottles, rocks and fireworks at police in the suburb of Macquarie Fields. The "riots" were reported as a spontaneous response to the death of two youths in a high-speed car crash as a result of being chased by police in "hot pursuit". The high speed chase in residential streets, a dangerous and highly controversial police practice was justified as being necessary as the car was allegedly stolen. The scenes of "mob violence" occurred in a suburb that was typified by high levels of unemployment, crime and drug abuse and seemed to represent the climactic eruption of the frustrations of those who lived in Macquarie Fields area suggesting that there was a level of desperation that government officials and police had underestimated. There was a growing sense that things were getting out of control after 4 days of street violence in Macquarie Fields also spread to inner City Sydney in the tourist area of Darling Harbour where groups of youths and police clashed.

The failure to understand and predict the response of the community to a death after pursuit would appear surprising as this was in fact the second major incident of this nature in less than two years. In 2003 riots erupted in Redfern, close to Sydney, after a young Aboriginal teenage boy T.J. Hickey died after being pursued by police. Even after successive enquiries the community in Redfern remained mystified as to how a boy on a bike could become impaled on a fence when police were in "hot pursuit". The riots at Redfern in response to Hickey's death were evidence of continuing poor relations between the Aboriginal community in Redfern and the police. It was also seen as protest, like those at Macquarie Fields by those who were clearly "fed up" with endemic and intergenerational poverty, inadequate health and housing government services and the steady erosion of opportunities for employment and education.

Reactions polarised with the Police Commissioner lamely suggesting that the Macquarie Fields protesters "lacked respect" for police. Predictably, the Opposition leader called for "tough measures" arrests and long sentences in an escalating auction on law and order between the government and the opposition. The New South Wales (NSW) Premier Bob Carr conceded that social disadvantage is "a reality" and that in the wake of this affair "I would want to make sure that this money is being spent in the right areas". The statements suggesting a continuation of the managerialist "value for money"

approach to welfare and services would hardly trigger optimism in Macquarie Fields as successive reviews of welfare spending has seen entitlements dwindle and surveillance of welfare recipients increase. Any sense of optimism about change in Macquarie Fields would have been crushed by the stunning response to the Redfern situation by the Minister responsible for Aboriginal Housing who claimed that he didn't want any Aboriginal Housing on what was referred to as "the Block", the historically significant area where the most disadvantaged Aborigines had lived in an Aboriginal controlled housing area. The response by Frank Sartor, a former Mayor of Sydney, was a "copy cat" tactic in mimicking the opposition's response to the Redfern situation that the area should be bulldozed and the inhabitants rehoused elsewhere. The irony tended to escape the media as Sartor announced an ambitious housing development scheme that would see Aboriginal housing disappear and be replaced by more prestigious general housing. But it did not escape Peter Walker a director of the Aboriginal Housing company who said that "I believe the government for whom Mr Sartor speaks are wanting no, to be blunt, no black faces on the Block" (Davies 2005, pg1)

Both the Macquarie Fields and Redfern riots are a barometer about how class, race and opportunity intersect in the urban landscape of contemporary Australia. Australia has traditionally prided itself on being and egalitarian country where everyone is entitled to a fair go and entitled to "climb the ladder of opportunity" as the former Federal Opposition leader Mark Latham, described. This ethos of equal opportunity has been at the heart of many of the myths about an Australian identity where Australians see themselves as fair and reasonable people, easy going and tolerant. Notions such as mateship and the sanctity of the "fair go" are central to this often false and distorted view of Australians and 'being Australian'.

Yet in contemporary Australia there are numerous examples where this benign image is replaced with angry, mean spirited and bigoted attitudes. It is many of these attitudes that are now manifested in the policy settings of governments. These policies generate populist images which now vilify refugees as "queue jumpers", Aborigines as "rorters enjoying special advantages", the unemployed as "dole bludgers" and the poor more generally as "losers". These attitudes have also generated a hysterical distrust of foreigners and created suspicion of the activities of leftist politicians, academics and unionist who are constructed as "elites" who are "out of touch" and unworthy of challenging the social order.

Events such as Macquarie Fields and Redfern are important reminders that while neo-conservatives and the financial market 'experts' enthusiastically promote the virtues of de-regulation and the markets that there are people who have missed the benefit of economic growth. Indeed much of the rhetoric of both political parties has seen the acceptance of market economy and the development of an efficient and competitive economy as the core rationale of government and the public sphere. This instrumental view has seen attacks on the legitimacy of a comprehensive social welfare system and its erosion to the status

of a “safety net”. The notion of social security as an entitlement, a notion that grew out of the despair of rebuilding in post war Europe and Australia has had its legitimacy undermined by zealots of the market. The market ideology has portrayed social securities as creating dependency on government welfare and enervating an entrepreneurial spirit. Their criticism has created a situation where a distorted concept of reciprocal obligation now sees an absurd situation where the “unemployed” are “working for the dole”. This blaming the victim is one of the central platforms in conservative left and right government responses that question the legitimacy of the citizenry to claim benefits. Meaningful jobs and options for training that leads to real jobs are increasingly more difficult, particularly in those areas like Macquarie Fields and Redfern where poverty is institutionalised and intergenerational.

The riots in Redfern and Macquarie fields has also reminded Australian’s that they are not immune from the sort of riots that have occurred in Toxteth and Oldham in Britain and Los Angeles in the United States. It has also reminded them that inequality is ever present in Australia and also closer to those who have not had to encounter the reality of impoverishment and the reactions to dispossession. The growth of gated communities patrolled by security companies is evidence of the fractures between rich and poor and the way in which the frontiers between classes are being encountered and barriers erected. This desire for separation that is both physical and abstract represents an unwillingness to do anything about social justice.

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Last year I moved to Wollongong, 70 kilometres south of Sydney, which is a steel milling and mining area. The steelworks used to have 30,000 employees but now in the face of international competition and global markets has downsized to a workforce of some 6,000. The university where I now work has a workforce nearly equal to the steelworks and the city of Wollongong markets itself as the “innovation city” that is built on science and knowledge. A few of the old mines operate in the hinterland to fuel the steel furnaces but the miner’s League halls and other artefacts of the Illawarra mining heritage are relics of a disappearing era. Nowadays coal is imported to Wollongong from New Zealand. The region was also one of the major destinations for post-war migrants from Southern Europe who came to work in the steelworks and their presence is evident in the architecture, the streetscape and the faces, sounds and smells of the city.

However like all cities making the transition from an industrial era to a post industrial economy, social differentiation becomes increasingly polarised. New money has arrived in the region as Wollongong has become a desirable and cheap beach side location for Sydneysiders. The former mining villages overlooking the blue Pacific are now inhabited by the super-rich occupying million dollar sea-side villas. The image of the carefree holiday spot is also tarnished by struggles about the ecological impact

of rampant development by green groups and Indigenous organizations that struggle to retain the natural and cultural heritage of the area.

While not all suburbs are on the rich list there are others at the other extreme of the socio-economic scale. Depressed suburbs with large cohorts of public housing such as Port Kembla, Berkeley and Warrawong are permanently anchored at the very bottom of the socio-economic indicators in NSW. This manifests itself in numbers of young people who have few options and are increasingly locked into a welfare dependent cycle. The pension day procession sees groups of young people in a pilgrimage to the welfare agencies that operate an increasingly residual welfare system.

This is the marked contrast in lifestyle and opportunities in which learners will be learning. It also frames the way in which the notions and currency of "lifelong learning" are negotiated in various institutional settings. This chapter explores the nature of the challenges in the contemporary moment in responding to claims for social justice in education. The chapter looks at the shifts in strategies historically adopted by the state in responding to disadvantage. The chapter argues that attempts to develop a community based response to equity and social justice are undermined and challenged by aspects of neo-liberal globalisation that has spawned and given licence to a white politics and a consumerist greed termed "aspirationalism".

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As a response to the new politics of the state, education and training are now positioned within a punitive framework that blames the learner for the social conditions in which they find themselves. "Reciprocal obligation" means that many of the welfare recipients are dragooned into training or education under the threat of losing their welfare payments and being condemned to a life without the safety net. The rhetoric of "learning or earning" exhibits a new level of intolerance to the needs of those who find the post-industrial economy has passed them by. It situates learning as part of the state function to ensure discipline and legitimacy in a period where hope exists in diminished quantities.

The bleakness of this is termed a "politics of diminished hope" by Henry Giroux (1997) who argues that there is a new harshness that demonizes and pathologizes young people as undisciplined, lacking respect and sees them as menacing and intimidating. Giroux describes the environment in which many young people live:

> As the national government dismantles services that have traditionally have constituted a safety net for the poor, the children and the aged the state becomes hollow as most compassionate functions are eliminated. Within the ascendency of the hollow state" and the changing economic and political conditions, kids have become the enemy of those in power

> and the state apparatuses that address their problems are increasingly reduced to the police, the justice system and the armed force, the other agencies of military surveillance (Giroux 1997, pp.73-74).

In the post September 11 environment the monitoring and surveillance capacity of the state has been escalated and the politics of the contemporary moment has portrayed those at the bottom of the socio economic scale as the most threatening and menacing. It is an environment where the tensions associated with the regimes of control that characterise places such as Redfern and Macquarie are almost inevitably going to erupt in explosive and dramatic circumstances that are evident in recent times. The new politics of the state also sees the welfare system and the education system increasingly integrated to the defence capacity of the state. In the United States Lockheed Martin an aeronautic company who manufacture jets and missiles also holds major contracts for the provision of welfare services, a service provider that would not traditionally associated with welfare. During the Iraq war the link between education and defence was starkly illustrated in the statements of captured US soldiers who justified their presence in Iraq to their captors on the basis that they were in the Army to "get an education" that they could not pay for. In the US a term in the Army provides relatively generous educational entitlements under the GI Bill for ex-soldiers on discharge. It is one of the prime reasons that poor rural whites, Afro-Americans, Latino Americans and newly arrived immigrants join the US armed forces and find themselves on the frontline and often in the body bags.

The link between educational performance in building sustainable and peaceful communities has been explored around the notion of social capital. Putnam's (2000) major study on social capital concluded that "informal" social capital is a more durable predictor of achievement than "formal" institutionalised social capital. This suggests that the level of social trust in any community, evident in the frequency with which people communicate together, is more important than formal structures and projects which promote positive student outcomes. Putnam argues that even in communities with material advantages there can be a failure to do a good job of educating children because they don't connect with each other. The relationship between social capital and this explanation of educational achievement is one that has significant popularity with the World Bank who sees the concept of social capital as important in capacity building to alleviate poverty. Putnam summarises the case for social capital in education as:

> "In short, parents in states with high levels of social capital are more engaged with their kids' education, and the students in states with high levels of social capital are more likely that students in less civic states to hit the books than each other"(Putnam 2000, pg 302)

The Putnam thesis has several dangers as it suggests a return to nostalgic views of an authentic community. This fails to account for the class based and racial perspectives that typify community formation. It also suggests that social capital will make up for deficiencies emerging from impoverishment and that the role of the state and its redistribution capacities can be substituted by better

social capital. It is a position that supports the increased privatisation of the public sphere and the normalisation of the residual state. Nevertheless, Putnam's position suggests a challenge for achieving equitable outcomes that is not simply running programs but is related to the nature and character of the communities that kids, parents and students live in. In some ways Putnam's thesis on social capital identified some of the flaws apparent in state intervention strategies designed to respond to inequalities in that they have failed to respond to broader community contexts preferring to focus internally on schools and curriculum.

In the post 1939-45 war, responses to social justice and equity in education and training have largely sought to un-couple the educational and institutional settings from the social and economic forces that were responsible for inequality. This has historically seen a reformist approach based on compensatory programs operating within the schooling and educational system to meet the needs of those groups and individuals who have been identified as "disadvantaged". In the post-war era the social justice effort revolved around increasing participation rates of all students in achieving post secondary outcomes. This was attempted firstly in the introduction of comprehensive education throughout the 1950s. A part of this challenge was to abolish the sort of streaming that saw working class kids go into technical high schools and take up low paid and of the dangerous blue-collar jobs while middle and upper class kids went to high school then to university and then to high paid white-collar jobs (Jackson & Marsden 1972). The promise of equity and prosperity from the comprehensive system did not eventuate as the inequalities of the long post war boom became starkly evident. From the 1960s inequality was expressed in terms of meeting the needs of "disadvantaged groups" such as Women, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, non-English Speaking Background (NESB) and disabled students and was aimed at increasing participation levels (Connell et al 1992).

Any failures in both participation and achievement were attributed to ethnocentric perspectives about "cultural deprivation" that somehow saw the linguistic and intellectual capacities of certain groups as inadequate and deficient. These interventions contained paternalistic assumptions based on the simplistic and mistaken notions of the need to "assimilate". These programs assigned blame to the individual, identified them as incapable and vilified them for being different from ambiguous notions about a mythical collective Australian identity. The recognition of the multicultural composition of Australian society saw the paternalism of these positions challenged by notions of self-determination in the case of Indigenous education and the processes and nature of participation were increasingly subject to negotiation. This challenge resulted in the growth of "needs based" approaches and involved greater control and participation of "disadvantaged" groups, including the development of peak bodies representing such groups (Connell et al 1992). However great these achievements were in lifting participation rates there were differentiated outcomes that characterised the system into the 1980s and

led to the realisation that working with groups and individuals was futile if inequalities are institutionally and structurally perpetuated.

As a consequence equity initiatives in the late 20th Century sought to develop "whole school approaches" and featured attempts at developing curriculum reforms that favoured pluralistic responses and perspectives (McCrae 1988: Connell et al 1992). While certain initiatives recognised the links between "community disadvantage" and school performance the paradigm associated with social justice favoured state intervention on behalf of groups with "special need programs". In large parts the system remained unreformed and the social arrangements that created inequality, such as, the message systems of classification, "hidden curriculum', pedagogy and evaluation, that were observed by critics such as Basil Bernstein, remained unchallenged (Bernstein 1975).

The advent of managerialist discourses in education in the 1980s also saw the replacement of the term special needs groups with the unfortunate terminology of "target groups" and the instrumental nature of managerialism also specified the importance of "outcomes" as measures of the validity of such programs. The existence of compensatory programs, regardless of how effective or ineffective they were in meeting their objectives, were highly controversial with a backlash against such initiatives and arguments in favour of the "mainstreaming" of such programs and their participants. Responses by managerialists included claims that self managed schools freed of bureaucratic restraints would be able to respond to the needs of all children better. These claims neglected the historic tendencies and structural inequalities that were exacerbated by unrestrained management in a climate of scarce resources (Walford 1993)

Criticisms of equity programs also claimed that special advantage was given to groups and that equity meant "people getting the same things". This is the same sort of logic that also claims that spending money on hospitals discriminates against well people. These backlashes were motivated by some of the factors discussed in the next section. The "mainstreaming" of programs for special needs/target groups revived assimilation and eroded much of the headway made in the last part of the 20th Century.

This backlash has been against both the concept of multiculturalism and many of the gains made by groups and individuals such as Aborigines, migrants, the disabled, the unemployed and the poor. It has been replaced by notions of "inclusion" that suggest that the needs of all children or learners need to be met on an individualised basis. Inclusion suggests the cultural, linguistic and learning needs of all students should be treated equally and incorporated in the process, programs and practices of learning. However inclusion assumes that individuals are able to independently negotiate and secure responses when the evidence of their own alienation and marginalisation suggests that this process has in fact not happened. While inclusive strategies contain worthy and laudable aims in developing a pluralistic

response in diverse settings, such objectives cannot be seen as independent from social, political and cultural forces that challenge community and school-based attempts at equity. It is important to understand the social context of learning in the contemporary moment and to understand the interrelationships between race, class, and status that define the boundaries of how equality and opportunity are defined and developed in the 21st Century.

Politics of Whiteness and Backlash Politics

The nature of "backlash" politics is not simply the expression of pleadings to restore a balance but a more complex expression of racial identity and the preservation of privilege and advantage over "others". Backlash politics invoke the politics of whiteness where racial identity becomes a signifier of resistance to the encroachment of minority rights. Giroux argues that a new politics arises as a new discourse of race appeasing "white anxiety and undermining the legacy of racial and social justice" (Giroux 1997, p 93). This discourse of whiteness is seen as an ambivalent signifier of resentment that gives expression to a mass of whites who feel victimized and who are bitter and resentful of the current social order. Anxieties are triggered by the omni-presence of gay, black, Indigenous, immigrant and non-Anglo ethnics and in particular illegal non-white immigration.

In Australia this has been exploited by the popularisation of the term "the battler' which operates as a code for the white working class. In America the sense of embattlement and alienation is represented in the notion of "white trash" who author Dorothy Allison refers to as "all the working class poor who fall out of the middle class-the middle class boys gone bad" and suggests that the white trash label is "the difference between thinking your life is hopeless and *knowing* that it is". Cult figures lacking sophistication who have been labelled white trash elites include in the US Heidi Fleisch (ex-prostitute and consort to US political figures), Tanya Harding (ex-US ice skating champion who conspired in the assault of a rival skater), John Wayne Bobbitt (notable only for having his penis severed by his ex-wife) and in Australia Chopper Reid (ex-criminal and bike gang member turned best selling author) and Sam Newman (football and TV personality). These individuals represent a backlash against what are seen as comfortable elites. The mix of celebrity bad boy/girl stunts and unselfconscious loser image all combine to resonate with a resentful dispossessed and powerless group that are now referred to disparagingly as "white trailer park trash"(Friend 1994).

The politics of whiteness seeks to erode and de-legitimise the progressive gains made by minority groups, and others outside a right wing political spectrum and argues for "equal treatment". The justification of these claims of unfavourable treatment and discrimination of whites in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary is given licence by claims of "political correctness". Political

correctness challenges both the language and intent of social justice and equality and challenges attempts to change the way issues are expressed. Those challenging the cause of equality have trivialised the language concentrating on “smaller parts of the larger project of changing culture” (Kalantzis & Cope 1997, pg 34). It is this climate that saw critics obsessed with terms such as the use of chairperson, a non-gender specific term, replacing the term chairman. In other examples these changes challenged many long held assumptions, such as, the Australia Day being termed Invasion Day by Indigenous people. The Commissioner for Equal Opportunity Chris Puplick saw political correctness as “a retreat by an entire society from fundamental notions of tolerance” (Kalantzis & Cope 1997, pg 36). The impact of this was clearly an attempt by conservative forces to undermine and question the legitimacy of both the language of change but also those proposing and supporting change.

Aspirationalism: The politics of fetish and consumerism

In Australia new class lines are being forged around consumption. This is a shift from earlier perspectives on class that were based on background, education and employment. A new set of informal criteria have been established around how people spend their money and what they buy. These new class arrangements are characterised by an emphasis on new contemporary notions of “style” and “chiche”. This obsession with style has seen a new hierarchy established around “brand labels” or product logos as markers of class. This is a contrived hierarchy is part of a “hard sell” by the corporate sector that markets a linkage between high status and the possession and consumption of certain goods and services. It is also aligned with an increasing preoccupation with celebrity status and the notion of “lifestyle” options. While not everyone is motivated by what the stars dress in, eat and do, there is an increasing shift towards materialism and private consumption evident in the public discourse.

Justified by the rubric of public choice theory this shift sees a concentration on personalised and individualised notions of achievement and advancement collapsing the purpose of life into taken for granted notions such as “getting on” and “advancing up the ladder of opportunity”. The metaphors of this new “Aspirationalism” are focussed on achievement and advancement through material gain and the accumulation of commodities that are recognised as markers of prestige. The extension of the boundaries of what constitutes the private sphere are colonising and undermining what constitutes the state’s responsibility to the collective and public sphere. Fuelled by uncertainty over government and state provision and a perspective that sees issues as matters of individual entitlements, traditional redistributive approaches are challenged. Aspirationalism in real terms means both an increased privatisation of functions of the state with user pays options and a diminishing amount of direct state services. Increasingly the state functions are centred on the provision of schemes such as “tax credits”, “rebates”, “vouchers” and “one off contributions” that amount to payments to individuals rather than

programs. These schemes have questionable relevance to those who most need government support and tend to be contrived around the need to build political loyalty rather than meet the needs of the most needy. Indeed in an environment that is increasingly driven by individualism the legitimacy of entitlement is under question and challenged. A backlash politics of envy sees the entitlements of some of the poorest and most powerless under challenge. It is a climate that sees single mothers, some unemployed and Aborigines conspiring to make false and unnecessary claims on the social welfare budget and a climate in which entitlements are viewed as a “safety net” or last option for the really impoverished and desperate. Paradoxically, it is a climate where the white politics described by Giroux has justified a stripping out of state welfare support programs to rectify what is mistakenly seen as the special advantages given to the “poor” through the welfare system. This realigning the balance is now enshrined as public policy under the guise of assisting the “battler” but sees increasing amounts of the state resources being directed to “middle class welfare”. It also sees growth in private schooling, private health, private superannuation and all manner of private “optional extras” representing an increasing privatisation of the public sphere.

In education this sees a transfer of resources out of the pubic sector and into the private sector. In Australia the federal government sees its role as “looking after” private schooling and has shifted funds to private schooling in amounts that have seen overall outlays on private school exceeding all expenditure on universities. In the US this has seen state governments, such as South Carolina, Arizona, Minnesota, Iowa, Florida, Pennsylvania and Illinois introduce tax credits for private education that are viewed by teacher unions and civil rights groups as an attempt to re-introduce racial segregation by promoting “white flight” to wealthy private schools. At the very least these “voucher line states” have contributed to a segmented system where the poor are reliant on an under resourced sector (Economist 2004)

Increasingly, these shifts are also evidence of fracturing along religious lines with private education being an important vehicle for both mainstream religions and new popular charismatic and evangelical movements, as well, as religions such as Islam and Buddhism. There are key questions about the role that the state occupies in sponsoring religious schooling and the extent to which this contributes to the segmentation of communities and the way in which religious values impinge on and contradict civic norms. Mostly this charge of not sponsoring secular “civic values and undermining national unity” is directed at non-Christian religions such as Islamic schools with most Christian schools escaping scrutiny on these claims. Nevertheless, in countries such as Australia these sensitive issues have not been confronted and the public private dilemmas have been expressed as a need for governance that enables private and public partnerships (Caldwell & Keating 2004).This position fails to responds to the increasing shift of state resources into the hands of the better off and aspiring middle classes.

What can be done?

The temptation to negativity when neo-conservative George W. Bush and his Australian partner John Howard commence terms with big majorities is overwhelming but there is an urgent need to re-energise and revitalise debates around education to respond to the development in class and identity formation that are outlined in this chapter. Too often debates in education are about the merits of testing, which method of literacy teaching is better and whether schools should be ranked on performance. These issues are important and should not be under-estimated, however, the issue about social justice and equity are equally if nor more important in establishing the nature and character of any system and the sort of society we all want to live in.

Education has progressively been uncoupled and depoliticised and collapsed into an individual action of consumer choice without consideration of collective social and cultural responsibilities. It is part of a global trend and there needs to be interventions that promote the (re)politicisation of education and training beyond considerations of efficiency that have dominated the reform agenda. It can start with a level of disobedience and contest at the corporate level. The development of simple local action can promote a “bottom up” alternative to some of the social outcomes of globalisation.

This might include some steps that are outlined by Kell, Shore and Singh (2005).

The depoliticised nature of education needs to be challenged and questions about the purpose and rationale of the system need also to be questioned. There needs to be a more rigorous questioning of the past and explorations of policy and practice. This might mean challenging and reclaiming the language of such terms as innovation, change, equity, equality and social justice. It will mean re-looking at what we mean by “being equal” and what “special needs” might mean. This also means that civic values need to be promoted rather than corporate imperatives that identify “target groups” but forget the structural inequalities that are inbuilt into systems.

A key challenge is the civil rights of students and workers in the context of post September 11th where polarisation and demonising has created opportunities for the stripping of human rights and the removal of access to basic international law. This is important in an environment of global uncertainty where white politics, aspirationalism and backlash politics in education combine to affirm the marginalisation of groups such as Muslims, refugees, Aborigines and Indigenous peoples, as well as, migrants and unskilled workers. Consumerism contradicts a rights based approach because interaction is collapsed

into an exchange value and this prevents the development of equitable and enduring relationships based on reciprocity rather than exploitation.

It is critical to engage with the “whiteness” of education systems and society generally and the way in which it privileges certain power elites, viewpoints and a certain orientation of the world. This means dismantling the euro-centric approaches that dominate the market based knowledge production. It means replacing the “low” mono-cultural products with “high” multicultural products emerging from indigenous and minority communities, as well as, across borders in the region.

Inclusion needs to be situated in the processes of globalisation and it needs to be understood that global forces create the situation where everyone will need the intervention and help of the state. It means that in the climate of neo-conservatism nobody is immune from the forces that contribute to disempowerment, alienation and impoverishment. Recent protests by the wealthy and privileged in England about “fox hunting” suggest rank is no protection in the face of the globalisation of rural occupations. To cite Marx- “You mightn’t be interested in the war but its interested in you!”.

The challenge of achieving social justice with education and training is one that merges aspects of human rights, re-distributive justice in economic terms as well as responding to the tensions around race and identity that have emerged in response to aspects of globalisation. This is the new environment in which learning and the learner is being imagined and one that requires a vigorous and systematic response by teachers, learners, workers and citizens.

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