
Book Review

Seddon, Terri & Angus, Lawrie (Eds.) (2000) *Beyond Nostalgia. Reshaping Australian Education*. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

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In 1997 Terri Seddon suggested that English sociologists had narrowly focussed on the post Thatcher processes and effects of marketisation. What was required was a complementary examination of institutional change over time. Her point was that the great insight which Thatcherism took from economic discourse was the value of targeting reform at the institutional level. Recognising that social action is contained in, as well as constrained by, contexts, Thatcher neoliberal policy makers strategically manipulated policy levers (e.g. devolution of funding and the centralization of curriculum) to reshape the infrastructure through which English education was produced. The effect was a reconstitution of the social, organizational and discursive space within which action and relationships developed, producing a radical redefinition of the practical parameters and boundaries of educational work (see Seddon, 1997, p.181). Seddon argued that a scholarly approach which backgrounded the obdurate (re)production of particular and inequitable classed, raced and gendered educational benefits and bodies, and simply foregrounded neoliberal philosophy (ies), was missing important insights. Privileging the market as the mode of analysis would inevitably not only fail to adequately theorise the rhetorical shift from education as the prime means of producing public good to education as the means of making individualised economic subjects, but also how to intervene with/in.

This co-edited book (Seddon together with Monash University colleague Lawrence Angus) is the practical realization of her argument that 'if contexts shape behaviour and its outcomes, then changing contexts will change practice' (Seddon & Angus, 2000, p. xvi) applied to the Australian setting.

The editors have taken as a unifying motif the notion that educational political struggles are locked in an unproductive discursive battle between economy (the need to deliver benefits for the economy at the cheapest possible price) and care (the importance of holistic education, citizenship and social justice for all - children, young people and adult learners alike). The editors argue that this binary shapes

educational debates between both camps which take up, nostalgically and approvingly, the past, rather than using historical insights to inform futures thinking.

Seddon and Angus have collected together a series of established scholars, not all of whom work primarily as educational researchers, to write from their substantive and mature research projects, about the changed institutional context of Australian education. Each chapter in this collection then is a representation of a long-term research agenda, and each provides a useful and often elegant summary of the results of considerable academic labour and analysis. Some of the contributors to this collection have also addressed the concern about the unproductive binary of economy and care, but each provides some situated and specific clues and cues as to how this oppositional rhetoric not only might, but in some cases already is, under de and re construction.

The book is divided into four sections: (1) reinventing government, (2) education design and class formation, (3) redesigning education and (4) rethinking the education–government nexus.

In the first section on reinventing government, there are two contrasting and sometimes overlapping views of the state. Ian Hunter and Denise Meredyth argue, after Foucault and in concert with other Australian scholars of governmentality (e.g. Dean, 1999; Dean & Hindess, 1998), that there is no current crisis in education: what is often described in this way is another disturbance and adjustment in the ongoing negotiation of the most efficient role of government as managers of the population. They argue that there will be a continued necessity for the state to both continue to monitor and measure educational benefits accrued by the populace, as well as to ensure that the pastoral care of the population is managed. Using statistical and trend data, Gerald Burke then examines the way in which the Australian government, in concert with many others in the world, has emphasized the importance of education as the tool of economic growth. He shows that in Australia this has been effected by substantially shifting the burden of funding education to the private citizen.

The second section on education design and class formation begins with a chapter by Simon Marginson which refutes the prevailing political and institutional logic that competition via a quasi market produces a nirvana of efficiency, effectiveness and equity. Marginson's argument about education as a 'positional good' is elaborated elsewhere (e.g. Marginson, 1997a, 1997b), but this chapter is a succinct and highly readable summary, and as a stand alone piece it would make a helpful introduction to his work. Peter Gronn, writing from another angle, shows how particular schools have been strongly connected with Australian governing elites. According to Gronn, the construction of the tangle of privilege, professionalism and managerialism used to be based upon a 'meritocratic' system which privileged particular social and cultural capitals. Now, he says, there is a shift towards managerialism, and a particular elite formation which is produced but also potentially destabilised by a quasi market which encourages 'white flight' from ordinary public schools into selective public and high fee private schools. He speculates that a new form of self interested predatory elite may be the result with

concomitant damage to the socio-civic fabric. Mark Western concludes the section with a discussion of the educational (re)production of class relations, elite formation and social stratification. He proposes that these were discursively obscured by the practices and rhetorics of meritocracy, but are now transparent in the educational marketplace. He suggests that while the (re)production of classed relations is an enduring institutional feature, it is too soon to tell the political repercussions of current trends to decreased social mobility, the severing of the nexus between credentials and middle class careers under conditions of downsizing, the reduced access to higher education of lower socioeconomic groups and the potential reordering of the higher education hierarchy of professional and managerial courses and institutions.

The third section on redesigning education consists of three case studies. The first by Jane Kenway and Lindsay Fitzclarence focuses on a regional educational 'market' in which schools must compete with each other for students. The authors show how ongoing trajectories of school hierarchies are imbricated with new market driven forays into school promotion, niche curriculum and image management. Using interview data with students and parents, they show how sophisticated young consumers 'read' themselves and their local institutions as both subjects and objects of consumption. This situated empirical work could well be another stand alone piece and a useful introduction to the author's work (e.g. Kenway, 1995; Kenway & Bullen, 2001) because the analysis of the dilemmas faced by schools, students and parents is economically and powerfully drawn, and the analysis of the micropolitics of stratification are complemented by a theorization of consumption as part of the contemporary context. The implications of the argument go well beyond schooling. Marjorie Theobald's subsequent chapter on the history of the nineteenth century quasi market and the establishment of compulsory public education is a provocative, and perhaps surprising, reminder - in a book on contemporary education - that teachers' work is powerfully gendered by and through institutional norms and practices that suture together schooling, the family, the state and the market. Finally, editors Terri Seddon and Lawrence Angus focus on vocational education in a senior secondary college and a TAFE institute. Their story is perhaps one of the more optimistic in the collection as they demonstrate that 'bottom-up' institutional re-design, in which teachers continue to debate important and ongoing educational and pedagogical issues, occurs at the same time as the work of teaching is being reshaped by new 'top-down' vocationalist and market driven agendas. Their emphasis on everyday situated agency is one that asserts that innovation and resistance are possible and actual.

The final section on rethinking the government-education nexus begins with Anna Yeatman. She proposes that the new contractualism is a particular version of the continuing trend towards democratic individualism. She suggests that two views of 'the individual' are at stake; that of the sovereign individual, and that of an individual who is socially embedded. Neoliberalism privileges the individual as an economic unit detached from communities, and institutional governance has moved to appoint executives whose decisions are binding on those subordinate. Yeatman argues that this is a backlash against the trend to more relational forms of governance that built on the individual embedded in social contexts to acknowledge

diversity and difference and institute more participatory forms of decision-making. This is a very helpful analysis that combines a theorization of ongoing change, that of the individualization of government, with a conceptualisation of the stark differences in political regimes. Of all of the chapters, this is perhaps the one that indicates how insights from Foucault and from postcritical policy sociology and cultural studies might be put together. I for one look forward to her forthcoming book which elaborates further. Yeatman's theorisation is then taken up as a practical agenda by the editors as they attempt to draw together the various contributions.

In and as conclusion, Seddon and Angus argue that the political reality for governments is that they will have no choice but to have the social and economic well being of the community on their agendas, as well as a consideration of how it is that the institution of education might contribute. The institution of education will thus continue to be a site for action and debate. Seddon and Angus take the position that explicit institutional actions around questions of context, access, control, and content are necessary to produce citizens, social practitioners and productive workers and that such actions must move beyond the binary of cost and care. They end by writing, perhaps unsurprisingly, for a focus on teachers, saying as a last challenge to the reader,

The critical question for the future is how practitioners' teacherly capacities that sustain effective learning (that is caring, competence, inquiry, social learning and community building) might be integrated with the organizational capacities of managers and the emerging agendas around life long learning and community development (p. 209)

As a textual montage, the cumulative contribution of this volume to Australian educational politics is one marked by nuanced analyses and thoughtful hints towards a renewed progressive educational practice. While the editors may not have convincingly achieved their goal of providing a coherent trail for moving beyond the binary of care and cost, they can rely on most readers understanding that one of the drawbacks of the genre of the edited collection is the difficulty of providing a continuous explicit argumentative thread. There is also little space in a collection of this kind to tease out the underlying epistemological issues that emerge from juxtaposing scholars from diverse traditions, but this remains a productive possibility for readers. The grouping of diverse chapters and the editorializing in both beginning and end have nevertheless elaborated sufficient common points to make the overall argument.

The only niggle I have with the book arises from its 'placed' perspective. Some of the chapters are written from a national perspective, but others are specifically located in the state of Victoria. This state had an atypically harsh 'crash-through' version of neoliberalism. While the situation in Kennett's Victoria is spelt out for the reader, the editors say little of how this state might differ from others. The slow attrition and wind-down presided over by both Labor and Liberal governments in South Australia, the impact of radical right-wing racialised politics and the commitment of the state education system to progressive education projects in Queensland for example, both suggest that not all Australian educational

institutional contexts are the same. Indeed one of the case studies, that of Kenway and Fitzclarence, shows the importance of going beneath the state context to also pay attention to local and regional differences. Their chapter implicitly says that geographies matter. Perhaps then in the introduction and conclusion, the editors might have included some comment about the complexities of the Australian federal and institutional context(s), and noted possible further research agendas that might be taken up to further the work begun in this collection.

In sum, this is an important contribution to Australian scholarship. In bringing together a number of Australian researchers with a focus on both current policy agendas and continuing institutional manipulations and settlements and disruptions, Seddon and Angus have concretely illustrated the benefits of a dual analytic focus on markets and institutions. They have achieved what Seddon previously argued as a less reductionist social and economic framework that better comprehends the dynamics of social life and acknowledges the powerful impact of social organisation on the production of sociality, individual and social responsibility and capacities for social practices in all social institutions (Seddon, 1997, p.185)

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