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Educational relationships, reflexivity and values in a time of global economic fundamentalism.

Academic biography

Sue is Senior Lecturer and Head of Early Years, Children and Families at University College Plymouth, St. Mark & St. John. Sue's particular area of research is in the field of pedagogy of non-traditional learners, especially those undertaking professional status qualifications in Higher Education.

Abstract

This paper employs a critical ethnographic approach to reflexively explore the impact of global change on local practices in a small higher education institution in England. It explores how both teachers and learners are becoming unconsciously positioned in contradictory discourses which are driving changes in the identities of each. Having explored the contradictions embedded with global neoliberal discourse it goes on to explore their potential, and actual impact, on learning relationships and learning cultures at the local level. The paper concludes that if we fail to struggle to maintain a notion of values at the heart of learning and teaching relationships that there is little prospect of building sustainable learning cultures. Finally the paper offers a vision of learners and teachers working together to challenge dominant discourses and to develop and sustain learning relationships which are built on a shared commitment to emancipatory educational values. This counter-discourse will involve real freedoms based on informed choices which span the personal, cultural and structural domains of educational practice.

Keywords: Sustainable learning cultures, learning relationships, emancipatory educational values, global neoliberal discourse, global economic fundamentalism, educational practice.

Introduction and Overview

This paper will explore the challenges presented to higher education by the complex and multiple discourses which are driving paradigmatic changes in the meaning and purpose of education and the role of the University in England. I will examine whether or not it is possible to retain a notion of educational relationships based on values of justice, equity and social inclusion which resists the discursive demands of economic fundamentalism increasingly expressed in English educational policy. After Willis (2000) Carspecken (1996) West (1996) Thomas (1993) I will use a broadly critical ethnographic approach which seeks to go beyond fragments to explore how global neoliberal paradigms are driving changes in education which impact locally on educational relationships and learning cultures. The case study is focussed on my own practice as an educator struggling with the competing demands of managerialism, entrepreneurialism, marketisation, vocationalism, and widening participation. I work in a small University College in England which has a mission to deliver high quality, vocationally relevant, degree programmes. My role is to manage the design and delivery of foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes (some with additional, nationally recognised vocational qualifications) for workers in the social professions. Many of the students already have considerable workforce experience, are currently employed, and are in university for a limited period. This generates practical challenges in terms of the time available to develop sustainable learning relationships. Although findings and conclusions will not be generalisable I hope to contribute to knowledge and generate debate which spans the educational practitioner-researcher divide by offering an autobiographical account of the realities of working as a newly constituted 'knowledge worker' within HE in 2010. I will demonstrate the ways in which the adoption of a neoliberal discourse is driving change in academic practices and identities in higher education (Krejsler 2006; Henkel 2000); changing the nature and values of HE provision Griffin (1997) and ultimately limiting the possibilities of building emancipatory and sustainable learning relationships in HE.

Global Neoliberal Discourse

With a global overview gained from being economic advisor to President Clinton; Vice-President of the World Bank; recipient of a Nobel Prize for Economics; and experience of being a University Professor; Stiglitz (2002) concludes that a lack of government control of financial and capital markets in the 1990s has been a disaster. He further claims that national governments and the International Monetary Fund recognise that market liberalisation has gone too far, and free-market fundamentalism requires regulation (Stiglitz ibid). The profound effects of globalisation within a neoliberal governance framework have continued unchecked in the early 21st Century and inherent system weaknesses have emerged in the recent economic 'meltdown'. Within a context of economic risk and uncertainty the appropriate role of HE is being increasingly contested (Sugrue 2008:Epilogue). Delanty (in Blackmore 2002) outlines four different perspectives on possible future impacts on HE each of which relate to claims that "knowledge, the primary rationale for the modern university's formation is now the centre of the economy" (Blackmore 2002:3). Delanty identifies the four perspectives as: the elitist and entrenched liberal critique; the fragmentation of knowledge inherent from post-modernism; the privileging of agency and reflexivity from the perspective of marginalised groups; and the incorporation of HE into capitalist modes of production. Delanty's analysis supports Sugrue's (2008) claim "it is not only 'the economy stupid', it is stupid not to recognise society as the habitus of educational change" where the future is a struggle over ideas.

The struggle over ideas is always located within discourse as it is here that "the performative power to bring into being the very realities it claims to describe" exists (Bourdieu & Wacquant 2001 in Fairclough 2001:6). By exploring the contradictions in neoliberal educational discourse it is possible to question the ways in which hegemony is achieved as it operates to normalise and legitimise relations of domination. Hall's work (in Jessop, Bonnett et al 1988) explains how the contradictions between social authoritarianism and neoliberal 'free' market ideologies are accommodated and normalised within neo-conservative and neoliberal discourses. Similar contradictory patterns can be exposed in current discursive formations around higher education policies and these will be explored later. By examining these changes it is possible to demonstrate how policy formations subordinate educational purpose to meet the needs of capital, and to demonstrate how they are being normalised as rational, purposeful and beneficial (for examples see Leitch 2006: DIUS2008). My own concern is that based on contested assumptions of *particular interpretations* of the need for change, universities in the west are undergoing radical reforms which are changing the meaning, purpose and values of education, and that these changes threaten the pedagogical and research roles of the university and their potential to make alternative claims to knowledge (Griffin 1997; Krejsler 2006; Bansel 2007). I argue here that this undermines the potential for developing and sustaining the types of learning cultures to which many academics and students may aspire.

The Impact of Change on Educational Values

Potential threats to emancipatory educational values are evidenced in global policy interventions which are now being purposively directed at all levels of education in the west. These can be evidenced from early years learning and the 0-3 curriculum and throughout formal, non-formal and informal education across the life-course. The potential to generate a new global hegemonic educational paradigm is well underway and cannot be ignored in terms of its potential impact on learners, teachers and learning relationships. In respect of HE, Hanson (2007) uses critical discourse analysis to demonstrate how discourses on

management and leadership are being used to drive ideological change within universities in the United Sates, where leaders are being urged to "overhaul the traditional architecture of education" (O'Banion in Hanson 2007:551). In Australia, Graham (2007:207) explores how discourses of freedom aim to constitute the ideal subject/citizen to make the 'right' educational choices and "potentially exonerate the state from responsibility to assist its citizens when in need". In Europe, Krejsler (2006:212) demonstrates how discourses are changing "the strategic space within which academics and other stakeholders can operate and construct legitimate subjectivities". Reich (2004) notes the effect is to change perceptions of higher education as a public good to a much more individualised concept of public interest where competition, vocationalism and consumerism are driving private interests and investments in education in the hope of a private profit from that investment. Reich (2004:10-11) claims that in the UK "the most prestigious brands of higher education increasingly are available only to those who can pay for them" with only 10% of students from the bottom half of the income ladder attending the most prestigious top 100 universities

Griffin (1997) suggests changes in HE link to logic of the market and have emerged as a result of crises in knowledge and the loss of faith in the concept of 'enlightenment'. She further claims that policy is now driving change in academic activity and with it the very character of higher education. Crucially for me, she argues the likely impact of change is on value systems and this is potentially more serious than the threats to financial, organisational and other structures in western economies (Griffin 1997:2-11). Griffin's analysis is supported by Bansel (2007) who demonstrates how neoliberal discursive formations are also changing learner educational values by complex processes which map personal choice, freedom, and labour, to markets. Given these profound analyses of change, it is important for educators to explore the nature

and extent of the impact of global change at the local level. Blackmore (2002:11) claims there is "little collective opposition to the radical restructuring of the sector" and I reflect on possible reasons for this. One possible explanation is the separation of theory and practice by academics who are critically evaluating and exposing global discursive change, but who are failing to appreciate the practical impacts from a local practice perspective. For me this raises questions about whether or not academics need to move from individualistic and insular forms of text-based resistance to more publically accessible and collective forms of action in the struggle over educational values and educational relationships.

Discursive Contradictions

Griffin (1997) claims that higher education is now located in a discursive landscape where it occupies a dual position in relation to globalisation and where its meaning, purpose and direction are being redefined in two distinctive ways. Firstly it is required to satisfy the pedagogic and research demands of global corporations. One of the effects is to construct crises around the importance of scientific, technological, mathematical and engineering (STEM) skills as these are seen as crucial to the knowledge economy. This move effectively diminishes the importance of research in the Humanities which deal with cultural, philosophical and ethical concerns and it increases the likelihood that universities will increasingly be split into research and non-research institutions (Blackmore 2002:8). The alternative standpoint explores discourses from a lifelong learning framework in which HE is seen as the pinnacle of educational achievement. This is evidenced by policies aimed at widening access, participation, and lifelong learning which by implication are allied to notions of equality, inclusion, social justice and increased consumer choice (Griffin ibid). For Blackmore these contradictions create an unstable terrain for HE and particularly for research.

Griffin claims that contradictions between the two perspectives are resolved by focussing on assumptions of meritocracy and credentialism. Two immediate contradictions emerge for me. Firstly, from the notion that meritocracy is possible in societies where inequitable socio-economic structures enable or constrain both educational and employment opportunities. Inequality in education continues to disadvantage working class students who participate in the educational marketplace, but on unequal terms (see Crozier & Reay 2008; Iannelli & Paterson 2005). Secondly, the notion that credentials gained from an elitist and (class) stratified educational system offer equal credibility in the employment market when this is clearly not the case (Reay, David & Ball 2001; Iannelli & Paterson 2005). Griffin (1997) and Bansel (2007) both demonstrate the ways in which discourses of freedom, choice and equality obscure the creation of a new set of educational values and educational relationships which are supportive of a neoliberal discourse which is likely to "confirm, rather than challenge, patterns of disadvantage" (Morley2001:132). I would therefore argue that this indicates a profound dilemma for sustainable learning as educational values are being incorporated into the economic base by economic fundamentalism and a new educational paradigm is emerging which situates the responsibility for educational failure in the individual. Individual educational failure can then be used to justify both economic stratification and other forms of social inequalities.

The Struggle Over Ideas

If Sugrue (2008) is right and the future is a struggle over ideas, one of the key struggles for educators is to question the assumption of their own neutrality in relation to neoliberal discourse with its notions of freedom, fairness and choice within the educational marketplace. From this perspective the call to 'think globally and act locally' takes on a new significance. Foucault's concept of dispersed forms of power is relevant here, as it prioritises a "struggle concerning the status of truth and the role it plays in the socio-economic and political order of things" as he claims that it is at the locality that the specific intellectual achieves significance (in Smart 2002:68). As a specific intellectual working at the intersection of power and discourse like Griffin (1997) and Foucault (in Rabinow 1986:375) "what interests me is much more morals than politics, or in any case, politics as ethics". One of my moral imperatives as an educator is to enable students to learn to question the rules by which "the true and false are separated and specific effects of power [are] attached to the true" (Foucault in Rabinow 1986:16). This is particularly relevant given my educational relationship with students in the social professions, where underpinning knowledge for practice requires they both understand and practice within anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory frameworks. Enmeshed in the contradictions of supranational discursive practices I now reflect on the possibilities available to me to challenge neoliberal discourse within educational relationships and learning cultures at the local level.

My concern is to reflexively explore the ways in which global policy discourses aim to change all aspects of knowledge production in order to establish a new regime of truth in respect of what counts as education. Bansel (2007) demonstrates how neoliberal educational discourses actively construct the notion of the self-governing subject where strategic choices are made by individuals and where fiscal and social capital are accrued on the basis of educational choice and achievement. He demonstrates how this weaves together the economy, educational choice, and the social and emotional aspects of life into broader life narratives (Bansel 2007:284). Using the Foucauldian concept of pastoral power (in Smart 2002:127) is it possible to theorise how both governance and self-governance creates new subjects through discourse and I reflect on how neoliberal discursive

formations around lifelong learning can operate as an 'individualising technology' of power. I am therefore concerned to challenge the notion that education and lifelong learning are only useful when they constitute the person as an active agent in relation to economic activity. Current discursive contradictions indicate a tautology where policyscapes are designed to recreate the unequal system that policymakers claim they wish to challenge, by making academics and learners responsible for socio-economic relationships and structures over which they have no control. These contradictions appear both logical and natural while promoting a particular notion of education where continuous vocational learning for competitive economic advantage becomes the only rational choice for individuals. The problematic in terms of developing sustainable learning cultures is that participants are expected to compete in an environment which obviates social inequalities. The logical outcome increases the likelihood of the 'battery raised child' and the 'oven-ready worker' who is "mobile and always becoming other through engagement with, and investment in, education training and learning" (Bansel 2002:285; see also Morley 2001).

The Impact on Academics in Learning Relationships

All of the above indicate a problematic rationale for sustainable learning relationships and cultures as educational purpose is corrupted and subordinated by discourses which seek to embed the inevitability of global competition and markets within those relationships. At the local level the impact on the everyday lives of both learners and teachers in HE is already profound. It is through the lens of a teacher, with eleven years experience of constantly changing demands within a small HEI, that I now reflect on their impact on my own role. I will focus primarily on the impact of the discourses of managerialism and accountability, and vocationalism and

widening participation as key intersecting and contradictory forces.

Neoliberal discourses are now recontextualising educational values, and Fairclough (2001) highlights the ways in which the dialectics of discourse restructure patterns of social relations. He notes that a prime example is in the way in which management has colonised organisations such as universities. Henkel (2001) demonstrates the impact of performativity, managerialism and entrepreneurialism in terms of changes to both institutional practices and academic and researcher identities. Krejsler (2006:210) frames this as a transition from a democratic Humboldtian university discourse in favour of a market and efficiency oriented discourse, and Cowen 1996 (in Morley 2001:134) indicates a double jeopardy in terms of both markets and surveillance, where universities are required to satisfy both business and research councils and demonstrate 'good' performance, that is, performance which meets the needs of the capitalist economy as expressed in policy discourse. Newman (2004:18) argues that this move from bureaucratic to managerial systems of governance is accompanied by a change in values from public service to entrepreneurial and managerial criteria to mark success. Effectively then managers in public sector organisations become 'empowered' to act - provided they do so within the boundaries set by policy discourses. This involves a field of power "in which government struggles for dominance by promoting particular definitions of 'truth', for example over the effectiveness of targets, or of inspection and audit in enhancing accountability" (Newman ibid). Within my institution there have been several notable effects which include constant reorganisation of structures, increased control over systems of work, and changes to the educational programmes we offer.

During the last ten years reorganisations of the management of schools and faculties have taken place three times, and each time I have found myself in differently configured management relationships. Each reorganisation has sought to maximise efficiency and effectiveness and with each change there has been a noticeable increase in the centralisation of power and control. It has also been noticeable that each reorganisation has also taken into account the need to organise in ways which more efficiently meet the expectations of external regulatory and funding bodies (eg: Teacher Development Agency; National Health Service; Children's Workforce Development Council; National Youth Agency; and local employers). It is interesting to note the extent to which the cultures of the different schools vary and the extent to which those cultures are related to external funding bodies and inspectorates. Complex accountabilities are therefore evidenced in my institution where funding and accountability act as both 'stick and carrot' and each are interwoven with complex policy discourses and competing political priorities.

External bodies have always regulated the internal working of the University but expansion of control mechanisms now extends to employment focussed QUANGOS, publicly funded national organisations, and employers. Controls continue to be introduced in the name of accountability and quality and these extend powers already established (eg: those of HEFCE, QAA and Research Councils). Newman's (2004) work is helpful in exploring how network governance complements systems of hierarchical and market governance as an intersecting, and sometimes conflicting form of power. An example of this was during the process of an application for Taught Degree Awarding Powers within the case study HEI. Ironically this generated a huge increase in bureaucratic systems and policy frameworks which continue to exert managerial surveillance over operational performance at the programme level. At all levels of educational provision it would appear that complex educational processes are being reduced to the notion of 'what counts is what can be measured' and this has profound implications for the development and sustainability of learning relationships and cultures.

One of the clear impacts of change in HE is also evidenced in the ability of employers to influence practice within HE, and this supports Griffins (1997) analysis that educational values are threatened by neoliberal market discourses. Priestly (2008) notes however that educational discourses on learning, curriculum, and pedagogy are now becoming irrelevant in the new discursive environment, and Blackmore (2002:3) asks if there is space for the 'public intellectual' in a knowledge based society to "work within/against governmentalities marked by performativity and corporatisation?" According to Priestly (2008) this is unlikely as he argues that educators now appear to be set beyond the new power formations . In my own experience, multiple and complex accountabilities would indicate that Priestley is correct. For example: in delivering programmes to students who are currently working in children's services I am accountable in respect of the government's key skills agenda; for QAA educational standards; to CWDC for national endorsement of one programme and to their contractual providers for two other programmes; and finally to various funders concerned with workforce development. HEFCE also exerts power in the allocation of student numbers and this has acted to restrain particular forms of organisational growth. In practice these accountabilities have generated debates about timetabling and patterns of delivery, locations of delivery, entry qualifications, relationships with alternative providers, quality and standards of external provision of Foundation Degrees, and the different levels of fees charged in HE and FE. These competing pressures are likely to increase during a period when caps on fees and student numbers are taking place in an environment of reduced

public expenditure. New forms of competition are also likely to emerge, not just between HE and FE, but between HEIs.

What is not currently *directly controlled* by employers and external partners is curriculum. Direct and indirect pressures do however already exist and are growing. Firstly in terms of national occupational standards which indirectly impact on the curriculum content as they require certain types of knowledge for certain types of skills development. Secondly there is an explicit threat to curriculum in the requirement to involve employers in the creation of Foundation Degrees. This is already happening in the case study HEI, where partnership on a Foundation Degree involves local authority staff in both the design and delivery of curriculum. While this might be viewed positively, as a form of mutual accountability, Newman (2004:25) is more pessimistic and believes that reciprocal systems of accountability might lead to an 'accountability vacuum'. This view is supported by my own pedagogical experience and from anecdotal evidence from students who have completed Foundation Degrees in FE rather than in HE. Anecdotal evidence clearly indicates that these students feel less well-prepared for independent study at Honours Level than those who have completed two years of study in HE. Both developments *potentially* limit professional autonomy over curriculum content - *if* we fail to recognise that contradictions and distortions in policy are always negotiated by the educator as 'street level bureaucrat' (see Evans and Harris 2004). What is clear however that the choice to study for two years in FE and complete a final year top-up in HE has a profound impact on the nature and extent of learning relationships and cultures where fractured programmes of study apply.

Competition in the educational market-place for postgraduate study and CPD has also had an impact on the institution. Competing to deliver 'in-service' masters level study for outside organisations is now part of the landscape in my institution. Effectively the employer-contractor sets educational priorities in line with government priorities, and HEIs are forced to compete to deliver educational programmes to support policy objectives within a proscribed curriculum. A theoretical choice about contracting exists but in practice the need to generate income is now embedded within HE accounting. Ironically HEIs are being forced to adopt managerialist behaviour in order to secure their own survival and are then forced to promulgate managerialist doctrine across other public sector organisations as discourse spreads virus-like across the public domain. Particularly notable in this respect are the discourses and ideologies surrounding leadership and management which form both part of the contract culture, and are also embedded within occupational standards for newly constituted workers (eg: Early Years Professional Standards (CWDC): Youth Work National Occupational Standards (NYA): Social Work National Occupational Standards (GSCC): and Teaching via the National College of School Leadership). Quite simply, it is now impossible to detach managerialist 'standards' and discourse from curriculum.

Reflections on my own role support Fairclough's (2001:3) analysis of "how people become unconsciously positioned within a discourse" and I now see how dialectic processes within discourse have transformed my role and identity. Despite my value commitment to emancipatory educational practice I sometimes feel powerless to resist the tide of change as it engulfs my daily practice. I now reflect on the mechanisms by which those at the centre have retained their overall power "by constituting newly autonomous subjects [while retaining] control over the environment in which actors act autonomously" (du Gay 2000 in Newman 2001:19). In the belief that I was acting to widen access and participation within a value framework of equality, inclusion and social justice I have become *partly constituted* both as a proletarian knowledge worker and a quasi-entrepreneurial

programme developer (see Henkel 2001:2). I have found myself enmeshed within policy discourses which require me to simultaneously promote the illusions of education for equality and progress, while reflexively considering the impact of change on my own academic identity and practice. This recognition inevitably has implications for my role in contributing to a sustainable learning culture.

Theories are available to a reflexive educational practitioner who refuses to fully reconstitute themselves or be reconstituted, within current policy discourses. Foucault's work demonstrates how the specific rather than universal intellectual has a much more immediate understanding of everyday struggles, and as such, has an important role in "detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time" (Foucault in Rabinow 1986:75). It is here that the potential for the development of sustainable learning cultures might be built – but only if we reflexively explore the separation of facts from values and deconstruct the power and impact of hegemonic neoliberal discourse. This is no easy task. I recognise that personal reflection is an insufficient response and the time to engage in reflexive and sustainable learning which goes beyond the self is rarely available in the day to day demands of the knowledge factory which HE is becoming. The need to "unearth the *social* unconscious embedded into institutions as well as lodged deep inside of us" (Wacquant in Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:49) is however an important starting point. The complex web of power immanent in current educational discourse combined with the multiple and fragmented nature of organisational and academic life all mitigate against the hard work of creating the necessary space to develop and sustain the genuine learning cultures to which many academics aspire. Brookfield (1995:207) claims that "critical reflection is not just a process of hunting assumptions of power and hegemony" but is also one which places the teacher under an obligation to

develop a critical pedagogy which enables students to understand and challenge domination and I reflect on the fact that if this is not possible between colleagues, how might it be possible with students?

The Impact on Students in Learning Relationships

The threat to values from managerialism and accountability intersect closely with issues of vocationalism and widening participation which are an important part of multiple educational discourses where 'meanings and effects are made invisible or silenced' (Bansel 2007:284). While the academic culture of the university is being redefined by managerialism and accountability so are its students, in two different ways. Vocationalism and widening participation are both implicated in the introduction of fees where investment in education is being redefined as investment in access to employment and the management of personal risk. The discourse of 'widening participation' also obscures the narrowing of opportunities to study particular subjects even as its language promotes notions of inclusion. For example: recruitment to courses such as sociology, philosophy, geography and history appear to have been damaged by both the discourses of derision and the notion that they are not directly linked to employment opportunities. In the case study HEI as elsewhere, these programmes are closing.

As students become discursively redefined as 'consumers' of education they increasingly expect a tangible return on their investment in the form of access to well paid employment. Educational opportunities are also being limited to knowing how/doing rather than knowing that, as employers seek to purchase skills and competencies rather than knowledge and understanding (Cameron in Morley 2001:135; Barnett et al 2004). Discourses on learning also extend their reach into in-service learning which creates an environment of continual upgrading of qualifications and skills. Self capitalisation is being

encouraged amongst mature and experienced workers in order to retain their labour market status and the driver of this change is the expectation that workers will need to unlearn and re-learn what they already know several times throughout their working lives. These changes are based on *the assumption* of a correlation between education and labour market prospects (Bansel 2007:286) despite the lack of evidence to support this assertion (Wolf 2002). Within the discourse of widening participation and access to HE, the illusionary construct of more satisfying, better paid work and a more equal, socially just society are being produced - even as the breadth and depth of educational opportunity is reduced. "The employability discourse is a one-way gaze with truth claims that problematise the capital of students while leaving the cultural and social capital and employment practices of employers untouched" (Morley 2001:137).

The majority of students I teach are now the target of credentialism and widening participation discourses (e.g. youth workers; early years workers). In neoliberal global discourse notions of the mobile worker often position the subject as free, mobile, and operating within career systems where flexibility may lead to portable and multiple career opportunities (Bansel 2007). This is not the case for the majority of students I teach. Their motivations and work patterns are often characterised by risk, and particularly the risk of unemployment and changing occupational patterns. Entry into their work roles has often involved unpaid voluntary work and a high level of vocational and value commitment to the services they provide. Entry into HE can be a disempowering rather than an empowering experience for them as it is always one which risks denying or diminishing their often considerable experience of practice and sense of vocation. They are being forced into higher education *in order to maintain* their occupational roles, where changing government priorities are requiring that they gain (previously unnecessary) higher educational qualifications. Current

discourses fail to recognise that "the professional imagination resides in forms of democratic governance and not just unaccountable audit and managerial cultures that lack the embodiment and internally developed legitimacy necessary to engage real professional commitment" (Gleeson, Denis, Knights & David 2008:15). Involuntary entry into HE therefore threatens intellectual autonomy and professional values for both learners and teachers, where those values seek to empower learners and create and sustain learning cultures. A critical pedagogy is increasingly important if educators in HE are to defend the notion of education for liberation rather than for domestication.   Massification makes this increasingly problematic as "innovation that increases efficiency [is] more valued than innovative pedagogical strategies that require time to develop" (Barnett el al 2004:152).   Conversations with colleagues indicate that increasing demands for managerialist and administrative work, combined with demands for entrepreneurialism are increasingly putting pressures on pedagogical innovation. In my institution one of the ways in which this has been addressed is in small research grants for pedagogical research and innovation.   Staff are also increasingly developing team teaching which offers the potential for generative discussion about the content, design, delivery and assessment of modules. The very tight operation of staff resourcing models and employment of hourly-paid staff who are not resourced for full participation in development work, all increase the problems of developing sustainable learning cultures.

My own experience also indicates that the pressure of massification makes it increasingly likely that the focus of educational relationships will move from learning to teaching. In an increasingly commodified relationship this is evidenced by demands for more directive teaching and where only essential and limited reading is deemed practicable by students. This undermines the full potential of 'reading for a degree' and increases the likelihood of

'dependent' learners. Current discourses then not only run the risk of limiting what can be learnt, but also of limiting the capacity of the student to engage meaningfully in a learning culture. Given the struggle of the competing demands of learning, employment, domestic and caring commitments this is hardly surprising. A key challenge for critical pedagogy is therefore to develop a shared understanding of the way in which power seeks to constitute both teacher and learner as objects of discourse rather than autonomous, reflective agents capable of creating counter-discourses which fulfil both potential and aspirations (Giroux 2007).

Conclusions

In aiming to make sense and meaning of the "wider social structures, structural relations and structurally provided conditions of existence" which are not always obviously present in fieldwork (Willis 2000:34) I have reflexively explored the impact of global neoliberal discourse on my own role within a small HEI. Using theoretical and policy literature, and autobiographical experience informed by learning relationships with both colleagues and students (after Brookfield 1995) I have sought to expose how the contradictions immanent within neoliberal educational discourses generate a dialectic space from which antithetical challenge is difficult but possible *if* educators are willing to focus on a debate around educational values which support the building of sustainable, emancipatory learning cultures and relationships.

I have sought to expose the key contradictions embedded within neoliberal discourse as it weaves across the structural, cultural and personal domains and explored how networks of power can operate in ways which appear both natural and normal if we fail to reflexively consider the contexts in which learning relationships exist. I have questioned the neoliberal notion that widening access to HE automatically correlates to improved economic performance, to increased personal freedom and choice,

or to decreased personal risk within the employment market. In exploring the changes within HE where management, pedagogy and research are being redefined in favour of private sector values and global business interests I have reflexively explored how my own values and practices are implicated in these changes which seek to legitimise dominant interests. I now reflect on the educational possibilities and practical challenges which arise when discourses are deconstructed and counter-discourses are sought from within a framework of emancipatory educational values as I seek to explore the potential of building sustainable learning relationships.

As a 'widening participation student' of the late 1980s I sought to makes sense of my own experience through an emancipatory educational experience and was able to do this in an era of 'new right' change in the UK. My commitment to value-driven reflection on community education and community development learning (community work) enabled me then, and continues to enable me, to use theory to inform my practice as an educator in 2010. 'There is nothing more practical than a good theory' and for me this has been true as I have actively sought new reflexive understandings of my own practice. The struggle over ideas, language and values in practice generally enables me to resist a drain in my humanity or a reduction in my vocational commitment to emancipatory education. Many theories have informed this struggle and the important lesson for me has been to avoid the shibboleth of the cosmic jigsaw of modernity, where everything neatly fits together. If the struggle over ideas is to have any meaning in the future my experience indicates that educators must start with their own values and practices at the local level. This requires a willingness to reflexively explore the social assumptions which are deeply imbedded inside of ourselves, our relationships with colleagues and students, and the institutions in which we work. Developing and sustaining learning cultures at a time of epistemological and ontological fragmentation and

insecurity indicates new struggles for a new type of knowledge worker. These struggles over values, ideas and practices will only be made meaningful by the collective commitment of all parties to build shared visions of the 'ideal' which are generated in meaningful, respectful and sustainable learning cultures.   New ways of developing and sustaining new learning cultures to meet these challenges would appear to be the key to the future of emancipatory educational practice.

In an age of post-modern fragmentation anti-imperialism, anti-psychiatry, feminism, queer theory, anti-racism, anti-capitalism and critical discourse often appear as different perspectives. I would argue that if we start from a values perspective we might view them differently. All are concerned to unmask and challenge the operation of power in its multiple guises. Whether we use the concept of patriarchy, cultural imperialism, false consciousness, hegemony, or discourse to describe this, for me the core issue is to set aside our differences in order to develop a shared value understanding of the ways in which oppressions arise. We then need to go further in order to translate our understandings into practical commitments to challenging oppressive practices, for as Marx famously asserts 'the point is not merely to understand the world but to change it'. In the efforts to distance ourselves from the language we share with oppressors, academics have also inadvertently distanced ourselves from each other and from our students.   A key challenge for all academics is to develop a shared language with each other and with our students so that we can develop anti-oppressive learning relationships and cultures. After Marx, language has always been understood as practical consciousness and one of the key challenges for educators is to enable students to understand what is implied by taken-for-granted thoughts, feelings, words and the potentially discriminatory practices which arise from them.

If we are to develop sustainable learning cultures this can only be achieved by genuine dialogue and critical reflection aimed at developing clarity about our values and understanding and critically exploring discursive changes which threaten them. Meaningful learning cultures will always involve informed choice and real freedom to choose the sort of person we wish to become, the sort of organisations we wish to create and sustain and the type of society we wish to work towards. It is through dialogue that a new discourse centred on an ethic of care and respect for each other and for the planet, may emerge. The policy and organisational challenges will be to invest in a diverse post-compulsory educational sector with different, but equally valued organisations, each making their unique educational contribution to social and economic justice. The alternative is to accept the inevitability of the discriminatory and oppressive discourses contained within neo-liberal economic fundamentalism. To misquote Pilger "when academics suppress the voice of their knowledge, who can (students and) the public turn to?" (Pilger 2002: 155).

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