Introduction

Invoking the opposition between movement and stasis in modern life, Dennis Carlson, in his book *Leaving Safe Harbors* (2002) admonishes educators to move out of the “safe harbors” of settled educational practices and philosophies in order to better address the challenges posed to schooling by the dynamics associated with globalization and multiplicity. In this important book, Carlson offers a proper riposte to the atrophy of critical theoretical and empirical work within the field of Education and the Social Sciences in general. He also responds to the bellwether ringing in the popular press, such as that of Emily Eakin who maintains that “The era of big theory is over” (2003, p. 9). Indeed, with great assurance and self-satisfaction, Eakin insists:

The grand paradigms that swept through the humanities departments in the twentieth century—psychoanalysis, structuralism, Marxism, deconstruction, postcolonialism—have lost favor or have been abandoned. Money is tight. And, leftist politics with which literary theorists have traditionally been associated have taken a beating.

(Eakin, 2003, p. 9)

One is reminded here of a similar hand wringing and a similar denunciation of the amorphous Left in the *New York Times* in the late 1970s by the senior anthropologist, Marvin Harris who was invited by the newspaper to contribute an op-ed piece on the state of affairs in that beleaguered discipline on the occasion of the American Anthropological Association’s Annual Meeting. In his *New York Times* article, Harris suggested that:

anthropology was being taken over by mystics, religious fanatics, and California cultists; that the meetings were dominated by panels on shamanism, witchcraft and “abnormal phenomena”; and that “scientific papers based on empirical studies” had been willfully excluded from the program.

(Ortner, 1994, p. 372)

The *New York Times*, the newspaper that the late Edward Said liked to call the “newspaper of record,” has made it its business to periodically prognosticate upon the ridiculousness of the Left and its last days. Fortunately, Carlson puts us in completely different territory inviting us to
consider the seriousness of the malaise of mainstream life and mainstream schooling and our need to move beyond conventionalism and the institutional practices of confinement to embrace hope and possibility. Above all, *Leaving Safe Harbors* suggests movement like the movement in Herman Melville’s novel *Moby Dick*. It is the suggestion of movement in the context of stasis, where, as George Lipsitz (2004) notes, too many inner-city youth and their schools are “locked on this earth” (p. 1). They are locked in the bureaucratic deployment of schooling that is articulated to a hierarchical organization of society and unequal access to its social rewards, goods, and services. This process is analogous to what Melville lays out on the deck of the Pequod in his magnificent novel, *Moby Dick*. Arrayed around Ahab, on the deck, is the projection of social classification: first mate, Starbuck, second mate, Stub, third mate, Flask. Then there are the first harpooner, Queequeg, the second harpooner, Tashtego, and the third harpooner, Dagoo of third world, Native American and African backgrounds. We are familiar with this penchant for hierarchy and top-down leadership in the university and the school. We have, then, embodied in Carlson’s book, echoing Herman Melville, the announcement of a Shakespearean story of tragic proportions on schools that is about to unfold. This is the story of movement and stasis—the vigorous turn in education toward neoliberalism and its false promises of greater individual freedom and choice (movement) while consolidating and exacerbating the problems of access and inequality for the minority and working-class disadvantaged (stasis). But the matter goes further as we shall see in what follows.

**Movement and Stasis**

We must try to understand the context of this movement in stasis, this dizziness, this uncertainty that W. B. Yeats defined in “The Second Coming” as “the best lack all conviction” (1994, p. 154). However, we maintain here, against the grain of Yeats’ notion of movement as entropy, that the worst are full of conviction and pursue their orientation with a sense of direction. By this, we are referring to those neoconservative policy-makers, fully schooled in neoliberalism (we discuss this in the next section), that have begun to take hold of the organization of school knowledge at all levels of the educational system in the United States and elsewhere. This neoliberal framework emphasizes the universalization of the enterprise ethic throughout all social institutions, education included. The broad sweep of this project is articulated at a national level in the United States by the No Child Left Behind Act of the Bush regime. There are powerful forces at work at the local and regional levels, too, as illustrated in Chicago’s Commercial Club inspired policy initiative *Renaissance 2010*, which we will discuss later. These documents produced in the past few years are really benchmarks of an accelerated and deepening trend of the movement of resources out of the public institutions into private hands, and the steady corporatization and refeudalization of educational institutions in particular (Habermas, 1992).

We want to step back for a moment from Carlson’s specific reading of education and try to speak more broadly of the post-9/11 context in which we operate in schools, the ordeal of intellectual labor, and the character of the intellectual labor process in these new times. We want to talk about the context and network of new relations that define our times. This is the context of neoliberalism and the specific interpretation of globalization and multiplicity in the modern world undertaken by neoliberal policy-makers. It is a context that has generated a set of dynamics that has transformed modern subject relations to the state and society at the dawning of the twenty-first century. It is a world marked by movement and stasis but not entirely in the sense that is often invoked in the literature on globalization as a kind of technological determinism and associated binarism. By binarism we refer to the oppositional logic that is captured in, say, Zygmunt Bauman’s “tourist” versus “vagabond” or Anthony Giddens’ “radicals” versus “skeptics” (Bauman, 1998; Giddens, 2003). These binary oppositions, among other things, suggest that those
with access to technology are on the move, free of containment and those who are pre- or undertechnologized are marching in place while the world passes them by. Of course there is some truth to this. But what we are prepared to identify as well is the severe loss of theodicy and meaning in the educational enterprise generally—a process that is reflected in the broad tendency of neoliberalism to compromise educational institutions and practices.

But these neoliberal logics are even broader in reach and implications. Indeed, it might be argued that, instead of the end to the game of totalization announced in the aforementioned *New York Times* article, we, modern citizens, more than ever, are being seduced, inducted, incorporated into ever-larger discursive systems and materialisms, led forward as much by the state as by multinational capital. We are being seduced by large-scale programs of renarration of affiliation and exclusion, holding out the possibility of identity makeovers, place swapping, and material exchange and immaterial rewards. Our daily lives are being colonized by massive systems of textual production that transgress the customary boundaries between private and public life and that seem to have, at the same time, the ambition to conquer all of global and planetary space. Here, we are referring to the “U.S. war on terrorism,” the new interoperable information technologies, such as digital face and eye-retina scanning, aimed at gaining fuller access to human characteristics for the purpose of sorting human bodies in a vast domestic and international project of surveillance and human capital extraction, the rise of state-driven post-Fordist authoritarianism in the name of national security, the human genome project and the dream of human perfectibility, the aspirations of corporate American sports such as basketball and football to conquer the globe, one brand name after another, and one world series at a time. However, against these manifestations of the logics of neoliberalism we are also witnessing a growing resistance, as educators, teachers and students, and disadvantaged citizens fight back against gentrification, school closures, and the wholesale transfer of resources from the public school sectors to private ones. As neoliberal policies and their effects are better understood, the denizens of the inner city of New York or Chicago are demonstrating that they are not entirely “locked on this earth.”

How might we understand these developments? How might we theorize their conjunctural relationship to schools? What general organizing principles or terms might we deploy to both sum up these developments and identify their dominant vectors? It is not enough, as Carson suggests, to offer vain formulations at the level of abstraction of the mode of production. We need to pay proper attention to patterns of historical incorporation and the work of culture and identification practices in specific institutional contexts and programmatic applications.

**Neoliberal Re-articulations**

We have identified the dominant (but often underdiagnosed) complex or network of relations now affecting schools as neoliberal re-articulations and transformations. It is this context of neoliberal hegemony and moral and cultural leadership itself and its relationship to what Michel Foucault has called government (i.e., the regulation of conduct of populations through systems of administration and self management of everyday life1) that we must examine in order to better understand the specific impact of current political, cultural, and economic forces on education, understood here as the promise of the public good. By examining the nature and the conditions under which neoliberalism operates, some current trends in education such as privatization, accountability, entrepreneurialism, and decentralization, among others, can be better understood and confronted with new democratic educational policies that enhance the public support for education at all levels and contribute to the development of more equitable educational conditions. Consequently, we will start by defining neoliberalism and discussing its relationship to globalization. Secondly, we will discuss how neoliberalism has redrawn the limits between private and public spaces and has reoriented educational institutions. Finally, we will assert the
need to safeguard education from neoliberalism’s relentless investment in accumulation and consumer-driven individualism and reconnect education to its critical dimension—a critical dimension linked to a working conception of social justice.

How do we define neoliberalism? One way of talking about neoliberalism as it has arisen in the social science and political science literatures of the last two decades has been to define it in terms of the universalization of the enterprise ethic. This is to see its logics in the context of multinational capital’s strategic translation of globalization (globalization is understood here as the rapid intensification of migration, the amplification of electronic mediation, the movement of economic and cultural capital across borders, and the deepening and stretching of interconnectivity all around the world) and the corresponding withdrawal and disengagement of the state in a broad range of economic and political affairs. Within this framework, neoliberalism can be broadly understood as a new form of liberalism which integrates eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notions of free market and laissez-faire into, potentially, all aspects of contemporary life.

Foucault offers a thorough analysis of the neoliberal governmentality in his 1979 lectures at the Collège de France and concentrates on two variants of post–Second World War neoliberalism: the Ordo-liberals or “Freiberg School” in Germany and the Chicago School of Human Capital in the United States. The Ordo-liberals support “the active creation of the social conditions for an effective competitive market order” (Olssen, 2006, p. 218). They believe “the market mechanism and the impact of competition can arise only if they are produced by the practice of government” (Lemke, 2001, p. 193). Consequently, they devise social policies not oriented toward compensatory functions, but aiming at universalizing the entrepreneurial form within the social arena and the redefinition of law to guarantee its success. Whereas the Ordo-liberals intend to govern society in the name of the economy, the Chicago School theorists, on the other hand, omit any difference between the economy and the social. In this model, the economic encompasses all forms of human action and behavior (Gordon, 1991). Furthermore, the Chicago School neoliberals highlight the importance of the individuals’ skills, knowledge, and abilities in the process of production. In their view, individuals are self-governing entrepreneurs who rationally assess the benefits and risks of their actions, make choices, and accept their consequences. Moreover, they argue the market is the organizing and regulative principle underlying the state. The state keeps controlling individuals, but without being financially responsible for their social burdens (i.e., unemployment, poverty, disease, etc.).

Building upon Foucault’s arguments on the neoliberal forms of government, Thomas Lemke (2001) contends that neoliberalism is not merely an economic theory, but a political rationality seeking “to render the social domain economic and to link a reduction in (welfare) state services and security systems to the increasing call for personal responsibility and ‘self-care’” (Lemke, 2001, p. 203). The rationalizing principle is the market, whose existence and functioning depend on certain political, legal, and institutional conditions that must be created by the state (Bourdieu, 1998; Burchell 1996). As Barry et al. (1996) contend, “‘Neoliberalism . . . involves less a retreat from governmental ‘intervention’ than a re-inscription of the techniques and forms of expertise required for the exercise of government’” (p. 14). That is, far from losing its capacity for regulation and control, the neoliberal state has been reorganized and restructured in such a way that keeps its traditional regulatory functions, but has transferred its historical responsibility for social welfare to the individuals (Klees, 2002).

In the 1970s, these theoretical ideas found the propitious conjunctures in the United States and Great Britain, where stagflation and the collapse of the Bretton Woods system of international exchange led to the removal of capital controls (Stiglitz, 2002). Alongside the extensive deregulation of the economy and capital markets, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher’s neoliberal policies resulted in the overturning of Keynesianism and the disinvestment of the state in projects of welfare for the poor and the common good. These practices, promoted in policy
documents endorsed by international institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, the OECD and numerous national governments, have come to be praised worldwide as the proper approach to development (Thomas, 2001).

These neoliberal policies imply the systematic reordering of state priorities in which the state’s accumulation function is predominant in the modern system of rule at a distance, subordinating the processes of legitimation and democratic involvement of citizens. Given that the neoliberal rationality changes the concept of citizenship as a means of political empowerment to one of economic empowerment, the relationship between citizens and state, as well as the political foundation of government, end up being transformed (Blanchard et al., 1998). Consequently, “democracy in the form of accountability mechanisms regulating citizen–government relationship is also altered” (Xing, 2001, p. 90). In relation to this, it is being argued that by submitting every aspect of political, cultural, and social life to the market rationality, neoliberalism has rendered democratic institutions irrelevant (Brown, 2003). Other scholars, though, contend that liberal democracy has not vanished but, rather, it has been redefined. In this vein, it is asserted that neoliberalism and liberal democracies manage to coexist because “democratization has been restricted to certain liberal rights and formal state institutions” (Patomäki & Teivainen, 2002).

Neoliberalism not only redefines economic and political relations, but also operates decisively through culture. For instance, McChesney (1999) contends that “it is precisely in its oppression of non-market forces that we see how neoliberalism operates not only as an economic system, but as a political and cultural system as well” (p. 7). Culturally, neoliberalism works by “creating a subjectivity that fits within the prevailing . . . rationality” (Fitzsimons, 2002, p. 1). Indeed, in the neoliberal culture, individuals are encouraged to behave according to the ideal of the entrepreneur, a person capable of rationally choosing the optimal course of action to maximize his/her interests. That is, neoliberalism:

reconceptualizes the individual by expanding on classic liberalism’s faith in the individual as rational chooser within markets. Under neoliberalism the individual is no longer merely a rational optimizer but conceived as an autonomous entrepreneur responsible for his or her own self, progress, or position.

(Lipman & Hursh, 2007)

In sum, neoliberal subjects become “entrepreneurs of themselves” (Foucault, 1979, as cited in Lemke, 2001, p. 198).

Accordingly, in a culture where the market is regarded as the ethic guiding all human action, the subject’s identity is constructed in and by the market. As Davies (2005) puts it:

The neoliberal self is largely defined in terms of income and the capacity to purchase goods. The desire for goods can be satisfied to the extent that the worker produces whatever the economy demands. This emphasis on consumerism makes the worker compliant to whatever must be done to earn money, since to lose one’s job, to be without income, is to lose one’s identity. In order to hold their jobs, neoliberal selves are necessarily flexible, multiskilled, mobile, [and] able to respond to new demands and new situations.

(p. 9)

As the neoliberal subject’s survival is no longer dependent on society (it is now his or her responsibility), he or she does not have the same commitment to the social. Consequently, skills for individual survival (i.e., ability to earn money, flexibility, competitiveness, etc.) replace those essential values for maintaining the social fabric (i.e., solidarity, fairness, and compassion, among others). In this context, then, the neoliberal subject is one who chooses for her/himself among different social, political and economic alternatives, not one who strives with others to transform
or organize those (Brown, 2003). The implications are, thus, political quiescence, social demobilization (Kurtz, 2004, p. 279), and the loss of a sense of community from which the independent autonomous chooser is cut off and thrown into the consumerist global jungle.2

Neoliberalism strategically addresses the new post-Fordist subject, the new cultural citizen of mobile privatization who exists within the self-contained unit of the home, of the school, and so forth, and who mediates his or her environment through the new smart technologies driven by computer hardware and software—the smart Zenith TV and VCR that we can program, the remote control, the cell phone, video/digital games (hand-held or console based), and the ultimate phenomenon since 9/11 of the flag car as the symbol of the nation riding on the back of the mobile patriotic citizen—the moving ground, so to speak, of a popular post-Fordist authoritarianism. These new technologies have helped to elaborate a discursive order and rearticulate time, duration, and the rhythm of production, consumption, and leisure in the constitution of our everyday lives—mobile and sedentary. Further, the mobile digital gadgets, such as the cell phones, the car navigation system, lap-tops with wireless Internet connection, iPods, and so forth, which are already widespread in the United States, complicate the existing negotiation process between movement and stasis by allowing continuous streams of electronic navigation, communication, transaction, entertainment, and information retrieval for people on the move. In these digital appliances, the representation of others and environments looks simple, effortless, fast, and shape-shifting. Because these devices provide prompt information about environments and others, users require less direct contact with their fellow citizens and need to take into account less and less of a meaningful relation to their locales and environments.

In the context of what Raymond Williams called “mobile-privatization” (1975, p. 26), we are now experiencing the evolution of the ability to look out from within, to be vicariously active, to move while staying in place, to intercourse with the world while hiding in the light and in a state of retreat. To these technologies, we can add the surveillance camera, the fax machine, scanning machine, the PC; the cable network uplinks in the school that allow us the illusion of control over our physical environment while we measure and monitor, often ourselves, from the safety inside.

It is through these new social densities associated with electronic mediation, computerization, and the new digitally and genetically driven biometric technologies of surveillance, identification, and verification that neoliberalism operates as a supported master code translating the new terminologies of the Age associated with globalization, movement and stasis, place-swapping, and identity make-overs.

**The Unmaking and Remaking of Schools and Universities**

The university and schooling are not inured from these dynamic material practices associated with neoliberalism. Indeed, neoliberalism has a privileged position in the educational field “as a technique of government, regulation and social control” (Silva, 1994 as cited in Gandin, 2007, p. 182). It is not surprising, then, that the market ethic has been introduced into the educational arena, replacing the public good ethic (Gandin, 2007). Education, as Molnar (1996) points out, has been colonized by marketization; school reforms are being discussed in commercial terms, and expressions such as “future consumers,” “future workers,” and “future taxpayers” are being used in reference to children and school youth. In sum, education is seen “as a product to be evaluated for its economic utility and as a commodity to be bought and sold like anything else in the ‘free market’” (Apple, 2000, p. 111).

The subordination of education to economic ends is evident when one looks at recent educational reform initiatives—not only in the United States, but internationally—whose main rationales are arguments favoring a tighter link between “education and the wider project of ‘meeting the needs of the economy’” (Apple, 2006, p. 23). To this end, neoliberal efforts in
education aim at reorganizing schooling so the needs of the local and global economy are met by producing human capital sufficiently skilled, adaptable, and flexible. In addition to conceiving schools as producers of “human capital,” neoliberalism has an equally critical cultural agenda: “It involves radically changing how we think of ourselves and what the goals of schooling should be” (Apple, 2006, p. 23). Under neoliberalism, then, educational institutions are expected to form students for market competition by transforming them into entrepreneurs and by convincing them that “competition is a natural phenomenon, with winners and losers” (Gandin, 2007, p. 182).

Nancy Cantor and Paul Courant (2003), for instance, identify three dimensions of neoliberalism or the universalization of the enterprise ethic that are transforming the life world of schools and universities understood as institutions for the optimization of the public good and molding culture, economy, politics, and ideology into a template of a new educational order. These three neoliberal tendencies can be identified as follows. First, there is virtualization, or the process of managing the university as an on-line community and a paperless world. Second, there is vocationalization, or the insistence on consistently derived and derivable returns on education. The third tendency in the process of educational neoliberalization is the practice of fiscalization or bottom-line budgeting as the ruling measure of viability of all departments and units of educational institutions. Cantor and Courant understand these trends as fiscal and budgetary dilemmas, we see them here as deeply cultural in the sense that they set off particular configurations of interests, needs, desires, beliefs, and system-wide behavioral practices in the life world of universities and schools with respect to ethos and milieu and the organization of knowledge, the regulation of individual and group relations in these institutions, and the sorting and sifting of social and cultural capital.

**Virtualization**

The first trend that we will discuss here is *virtualization*. Virtualization of educational processes involves the rise and intensification of virtual interactions in more and more of our institutional activities. It is driven forward by our on-line proclivity towards information craving, speed, efficiency, optimization, and maximization which, now, as a set of dispositions, is rapidly displacing face-to-face interaction and embodied decision making and community feeling in our institutions. Education in its virtualizing tendency is susceptible to the “Internet paradox”—the other side of deregulation as the centrifugal logic of neoliberalism and laissez-faire—that is, “dependence on a social technology that often breeds social isolation” and insulation of knowledge and disciplines as much as it facilitates interaction (Cantor & Courant, 2003, p. 5). We now know more about each others’ group and society by the proxy of images than by experiential encounter. This is not a Luddite argument, it is, as Cantor and Courant suggest, the proper concern that “the delivery of education solely on the Internet may rob students of the experience of the clash of ideas out of which emerges empathy with others and a desire for compromise” (p. 5). For some, the arrival of the Internet heralded yet another clean technological break with the past. But unlike car manufacturers and fashion designers, we in the humanities and in the social sciences need the past for more than nostalgia and the ephemeral. We cannot jettison it ruthlessly bringing on stream the latest gizmo or style. We need to study the past to better understand the present and the future. This raises questions bearing upon the status and nature of the contemporary public sphere and the fact that we seem to have a multiplicity of strongly insulated publics in educational institutions in the Nancy Fraser sense—publics where conversations are shorn off by essentialism and tribalism (Fraser, 1997). Virtualization has not lived up to the promise of universalizing or flattening out our particularisms. Indeed, it may have heightened these latter tendencies, breeding new nationalisms that glow in the dark—each man turning his key of endless data, in his own door, to use the imagery of T. S. Eliot (1954): “And each man fixes his eyes before his feet” (p. 53). The fact is that virtualization within the university setting as an example has been
more often than not dominated by the will to power of university administrations which now use “the” network for information and image control, surveillance, unidirectional communication, edicts, and coercive demands on actors lower down. The promise of openness of the virtual network capacity has been replaced too often by the elaboration of defensive shields sealing off administrative personnel from the rest of campus.

**Vocationalization**

In the neoliberal scenario, vocationalization is now a ruling logic in curricular arrangements and the overall calculation of educational actors. According to Mulderrig:

> education is positioned in terms of its relationship with the economy and broader state policy [where] an instrumental rationality underlies education policy discourse, manifested in the pervasive rhetoric and values of the market in the representation of educational participants and practices.

(Mulderrig, 2003, as cited in Hill, 2003, p. 7)

This commodification of education is further advanced by policy documents that acknowledge the relevance of lifelong learning, a key component developing workforce versatility which accommodates the needs of flexible production and “ensures that responsibility for employment tenure belongs to individuals themselves, ensures the possibility for companies to offset responsibility for social and fiscal payments, and enhances the freedom of business in a global environment” (Olssen, 2006, p. 222). In this context, information replaces knowledge in the interests of an ever-changing system of production, and educational goals are assessed in terms of the quantitative appropriation of skills and information for the labor market. We are living in the era of a new Taylorism in which knowledge production processes are being bent out of shape for the purposes of information delivery, strategic planning, and value extraction from culture (see, for example, the strategic plans on globalization of the University of Illinois for both the Chicago and Urbana campuses (www.uillinois.edu/president/strategicplan)).

At all levels, education has become a market commodity. As Miyoshi (1998) warned us a few years ago, in his essay “Globalization’, Culture, and the University,” transnational capital has overridden the line between the university and its outside, enveloping its sinews, reorganizing its infrastructures, closing the distance between education and economy in the privatization of the organization of knowledge. As Miyoshi maintains, university students and administration seek to empty the rigorous and complex content out of curricular knowledge in the humanities, relabeling it and putting it up for sale. The goal is to maximize returns on investment as in the marketplace:

> Higher education is now up to the administrators. And, sooner or later, research too, will be up to the administrators. Of course, we know that administrators are merely in the service of the managers of the society and the economy who exercise their supreme authority vested in the transnational corporate world.

(Miyoshi, 1998, p. 267)

This investment in the enterprise ethic within the university has meant that on many campuses there has been an eroding of support for humanities and humanistic social sciences. For example, as Cantor and Courant have pointed out, “representation in superior humanities programs at public universities has dramatically declined between 1982 [and the present]” (2003, p. 5). Indeed, it is precisely these courses that provide the best preparation for democratic citizenship and critical thinking. And it is, indeed, the case that humanities disciplines have
consistently produced forms of knowledge that operate as a check on the worst aspects of societal modernization and industrialization. In undertaking our deep investment in the enterprise ethic, we have sacrificed this critical investment in knowledge for taking the pig to the market. One is reminded here of the Ohio State Journal of 1870, whose editorial cautioned educators and professionals at the time of the founding of Ohio State University:

the lawyer who knows nothing but law, the physician who knows nothing but medicine, and the farmer who knows nothing but farming are on par with each other. They are all alike starved and indigent in the requirement of true culture.

(Alexis Cope quoted in Cantor & Courant, 2003, p. 6)

In regards to schooling, Richard Hatcher (2001) claims that global capitalism needs to ensure that schools produce effective and flexible workers and that they “subordinate to the personality, ideological and economic requirements of Capital” (Hill, 2003, p. 8). To guarantee this, neoliberalism creates institutional practices and rewards for enforcing the market rationale and competition in education. For instance, World Bank loans to given countries have been conditioned to the implementation of school reforms in line with neoliberal formulations. Similarly, the No Child Left Behind Act in the United States contributes to the support of a “global” neoliberal agenda pushing towards an increased presence of market dynamics in education by rewarding managerial practices in schools and by setting rigid standards they should meet in order to receive financial support.

**Fiscalization**

Vocationalization is closely tied to the process of fiscalization of the university and schooling, the application of “bottom-line” budgeting, and the proliferation of surveillance and control mechanisms—compulsory and nationally monitored tests, publication of schools’ and districts’ performances, and “policy emphasis on ‘shaming and naming’, closing, or privatizing ‘failing’ schools” (Hill, 2001)—that are arising everywhere as illustrated by the No Child Left Behind Act.

As we live in a context of chronic budgetary crisis within the economy generally and within education, there are increasing demands for accountability and fiscalization. For instance, in view of the strict limits placed by the state on public funding, income generation has become an increasingly powerful imperative among tertiary institutions (Henkel, 2005). Johnstone (2002) states that governments worldwide have to supplement their revenues, “not only with ‘cost sharing,’ but also with sale of faculty services, sale or lease of university facilities, vigorous pursuit of grants and contracts, and fund raising” (p. 4). Concomitantly, research agendas are being made the target of rationalization as public funding in universities becomes oriented to “strategic” researches (Rip, 1997), that are “likely to make at least a background contribution to the solution of recognized current or future practical problems” (Henkel, 2005, p. 160). From this perspective, basic or “pure science” may receive funding only if it is responsive to socially and economically strategic needs. Besides, “the pathway to innovation is now seen as often beginning in industry rather than the university and as entailing more variable, complex, uncertain and interactive patterns of communication and collaboration between the university and industry” (Henkel, 2005, p. 160). More importantly, these institutional constraints are “an insidious way of lessening academic independence” (Musselin, 2005, p. 146) as the nature of the relationship between universities and academics changes under the influence of a managerial perspective that dictates criteria and norms to be applied to academic activities, and ensure that these criteria and norms are respected.
The pervasive measuring, accountability, and feasibility pressures have forced the humanistic disciplines to be on the defensive. Neoliberals have proven themselves particularly adept at blurring and bending political, ideological, cultural faiths to achieve means-end rationalities. We live in such a time on campuses across the United States in which the pressure of rationalization has placed humanistic programs in doubt, forcing them to establish new codes and rules of the game. Programs, particularly in the humanities disciplines, that will never be profit making enterprises are feeling the pressure of the bottom line. We are trapped in the marketplace logic of student credit hours and sponsored research objectives: more teaching, less time off, and less pay. Our relevant models are now the business school, the law school, and the natural sciences, wherever and however money is to be made there lie self-justification and validation. The immediate casualties are interdisciplinary research, collaborative writing projects, and innovative curricula projects. The more long-term casualties are our students who now see us less as models of thoughtfulness than as purveyors of knowledge fast food.

Likewise, disinvestment in public schooling has “destabilized and weakened its very own immunities as a secular institution in protecting and developing the public good” (Paraskeva, 2007, p. 154). Scholars such as Jurjo Torres Santomé (2001), Michael Apple (2003), among many others, concur, pointing to the ill-fated effects of disinvesting in public education (i.e., deficient infrastructure, lack of material and intellectual resources, low-quality teacher education programs, etc.). In João Paraskeva’s view, state disinvestments in public education acted as the needed sign “for the market forces to hijack public schooling from a public social domain to an economic private sphere” (p. 154). Ultimately, education as a public good is being compromised to privatization.

Alongside all of these transformations, neoliberalism in education functions by curtailing any kind of critical thinking. Education is reorganized in a way that intends to produce skilled and flexible workers, but in so doing hinders a critical engagement with their reality (Harvey, 2000). Acknowledging the importance of critique for overcoming those constraints and engaging questions about the purposes of education within a democratic society, we will analyze the implications of suppressing criticality in the educational field. We will also provide current examples that have arisen as alternatives to neoliberalism, which defy the neoliberal instrumentalist view of education and advocate for change for students and teachers, school and society.

Opening Critical Spaces in Education: the Resistance against Renaissance 2010 and the Citizen School

In addition to increasing social class inequalities in educational provision and inflicting a loss of democratic accountability in educational institutions as a result of new public managerialism (Hill, 2007), the neoliberalization of education has contributed to the loss of critical thinking within a culture of performativity (Ball, 1999; Mahoney & Hextall, 2000). Neoliberalism hinders criticality not only by subduing the educational experience to standards of performativity and measurability but, also, by redefining education in an instrumental way, by operationalizing the centralization of curriculum (Gandin, 2007) and, overall, by constructing a discourse so powerful and pervasive that it becomes almost impossible for anybody to even imagine an alternative outside market hegemony (Paraskeva, 2007). Regarding the latter, Apple (2006) argues what makes the neoliberal discourse in education so compelling is that it addresses parents’ concerns about their children’s future in a global economy whose common traits are low wages, capital flight, and insecurity.

Gandin (2007) and Hill (2004) refer to the centralization of curriculum as another aspect contributing to the compression of critical space in education. The efforts to centralize the curriculum, which might seem to contradict the neoliberal creed of choice and devolution, in
reality, operate to regulate and control the form and substance of what is taught in educational institutions. This apparent contradiction can be understood if one considers the neoconservative influence over education in countries such as the United States and Great Britain. The conservative agenda for education in these countries seeks to delimit what traditional knowledge and values need to be included in the school curriculum, what texts are “legitimate” and how different social relations (i.e., gender, race, and class) are conveyed to the students (Apple, 2006). For instance, Paraskeva (2007) claims that neoconservatism transformed and distorted the meanings of “specific key concepts and agendas that historically were deeply rooted within the marrow of a progressive educational and curriculum body, such as social justice and freedom, [reframing them] to assume a marketwise cultural meaning” (p. 146). In the same vein, Apple (2000) posits that, for example, equality is no longer regarded “as linked to past group oppression and disadvantage. It is now simply a case of guaranteeing individual choice under the conditions of a free market” (p. 19). In this context, then, student failure is no longer analyzed in relation to the policies and educational practices implemented but, rather, it is increasingly seen as the student’s fault.

The neoliberal curriculum is not only increasingly centralized but, also, it is more and more “depoliticized.” For instance, Hill (2004) shows that the British teacher education curriculum has been purged of any “critical, sociological, and political examination of education and society” (p. 516). To illustrate this, he shows how the focus on, and the time for, issues such as race, gender, sexuality, class, and special needs have been drastically reduced, alongside “policy responses and political analysis of classroom and school pedagogy, and of national policy and legislation” (p. 516). In sum, school teaching and teacher education have been “largely dethorized, technicized [and] deintellectualized” (p. 517).

Under neoliberalism, critical space—understood as “the potential and actuality for criticism of the existing society and the search for and promulgation of alternatives” (Hill, 2004, p. 515)—is not only being compressed by “(de)(re)meaning” (Paraskeva, 2007, p. 146) key progressive concepts or by subtly silencing certain voices within the educational discourse but, also, by explicit repressive or “witch-hunting” (McLaren, Martin, Farahmandpur, & Jaramillo, 2005) practices aimed at marginalizing “those who have challenged the viability of the market as a mode of social organization” (Gabbard, 2003). In relation to this, Peter McLaren et al. (2005) provide different examples of disciplinary actions in the United States applied by schools and the police against teachers and students expressing opinions against the supremacy of the market and/or American policy.

Neoliberalism is, indeed, pervasive and seems to have embedded its logic in every social area. However, it is not instituted without resistance. Chicago’s Renaissance 2010 serves as a case in point. This plan, announced on June 24, 2004 and sponsored by the Commercial Club—a group promoting the interests of Chicago’s corporate elite—aims at introducing markets and competition into public education, “shifting control away from elected school councils and towards the unelected Commercial Club, and substantially reducing the power of the teachers’ and other school employees’ unions” (Lipman & Hursh, 2007, p. 164). To put it directly, Renaissance 2010 “exemplifies the increased corporate control of schooling under the neoliberal turn” (Lipman & Hursh, 2007, p. 165). And, it mirrors and complements national neoliberal agendas such as the No Child Left Behind Act, according to which schools that persistently fail to reach the test score benchmarks can be turned over “to a private company” approved by the Department of Education or restructured as a charter school (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Despite its promises of improving the performance of Chicago public schools, this plan showed the reality of neoliberalism: increased inequality within the system, lack of democratic community participation in local schools and worsening conditions for teachers and students. Consequently, Renaissance 2010 is facing a broad-based resistance by teachers’ unions, local school councils, parent organizations, community organizations and progressive teacher educators and school...
reformers. Even if the resistance practices have gained partial victories and basically have consisted in stopping some school closings, they have been strong enough in effect to put recentralizing neoliberal reforms under public scrutiny. More importantly, “this resistance has forged new alliances across communities and social sectors that had not been working together” (Lipman & Hursh, 2007, p. 173).

The resistance against Renaissance 2010 shows that anti-neoliberal democratic struggles have taken root in education and that public education can potentially be recovered from corporate and financial interests. For instance, the “Citizen School” project—an educational initiative of the municipal government of Porto Alegre, Brazil—is being developed “to build support for more progressive and democratic policies in the face of the growing power of neoliberal movements at a national level” (Apple, 2006, p. 25). This project aims to create schools:

Where everyone has guaranteed access, that is not limited to transmission of content; a school that is able to articulate the popular knowledge with the scientific knowledge. A school that is a public space for the construction and experience of citizenship, that goes beyond merely delivering knowledge and transforms itself into a social-cultural space, with a pedagogical policy oriented toward social transformation, where the student is the subject of the knowledge and where the pedagogy takes place in an interdisciplinary perspective, overcoming the curricular fragmentation present in schools. A school that has the necessary material resources to implement this policy, where the participation of the whole community can lead to the construction of an autonomous school, with a real democratic management, where all segments of the community have their participation guaranteed.


This project shows that new progressive spaces in the field of education can be constructed as an alternative to the neoliberal creed. The relationships among communities, education, and state can be rearticulated in participatory ways. A new language for education not reduced to instrumental accountability, but committed to egalitarian policies and practices can be created. Here, those “locked on this earth” mobilize to speak back to power exemplifying movement in the context of constraint and transformative will and efficacy in the context of slender resources. As Paraskeva (2007) posits, “we have the right of a ‘pedagogy of indignation’ and the right to refuse to participate in kidnapping the very gracious concept and practice of public schooling as public good” (p. 156). Or, as Apple (2006) concludes, “this is not time for pessimism. . . . The possibility of constructing and defending much more democratic schools does exist” (p. 26). It is our task to imagine and elaborate this possibility, working toward the broad realization of transformative educational change.

Conclusion

As we have shown, neoliberalism has reoriented educational institutions and has given a new meaning to learning and the goals of education. Equally important, “the commodification of education rules out the very critical freedom and academic rigour which education requires to be more than indoctrination” (McMurtry, 1991, p. 215). As Jurjo Torres Santomé (2008) asserts, the school curriculum conveys information “that neither reveals nor problematizes the structural causes underlying the cases it appears to denounce” (p. 198). The lack of sustained critical approaches to addressing social issues in educational institutions prevents students from realizing the human potential for the recreation of their own life world. Neoliberalism in education not only compresses critical spaces, but also hinders the likelihood of building democratic school
communities as competition “stymies the potential for system-wide policies designed to equalize opportunities” (Marginson, 2006).

Having said all of this about neoliberalism and education, then, our greatest challenge is to create the conditions “for solidaristic, movement-style relations” (Marginson, 2006, p. 219) and counteracting a neoliberal language that “destroys social responsibility and critique, that invites a mindless, consumer-oriented individualism to flourish, and kills off conscience” (Davies, 2005, p. 6). We need to stop the neoliberal appropriation of education by safeguarding the autonomy of the teaching learning process, the autonomy of intellectual production, and fostering the reproduction of critical scholars and the conditions for widening access for those who are severely disadvantaged by the current formulas and who are being shunted around from bad educational options to worse ones. Educational discourses and practices need to be reconnected to a progressive emancipatory project based upon solidarity and social justice. These are the central issues at stake even as we set out with Carlson from the “safe harbors” of educational practice and custom, seeking movement in the context of constraint, and refusing the stasis of administrative containment and neoliberal myopia.

Notes

1 Foucault argues that government refers to “the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed . . . [it] is to structure the possible field of action of others” (1982, p. 221).

2 Many corporations such as Nike, Starbucks, and Disney have appropriated Keynesianism by rearticulating it as an ironic substance or residue in the form of philanthropy and thereby morphing it into the role of state-like promoters of ecumenical feel good affiliation, self-help forms of involvement in community, and so forth. Disney, in fact, provides a super model of community (“of the way we are supposed to be”) in the form of the fabricated town, Celebration—the new urbanist heaven in Central Florida, that Andrew Ross insightfully calls “Privatopia” (see his The Celebration Chronicles, 1999). For as the state disinvests in the public sphere, corporations move into, and redefine, community in neoliberal terms, absorbing philanthropy into cause-related marketing and the building of new synergies and brand share. From this development, if we were, then, to follow the ideological direction of, say, Teach for America and the No Child Left Behind Act, by this logic, IBM, Xerox, and, earlier, Ross Perot can do more for schools than the government, the state, or we, the intellectuals in the university—“the bright but useless ones.”

3 As Lambeir (2005) argues, “lifelong learning is the magic spell in the discourse of educational and economic policymakers, as well as in that of the practitioners of both domains” (p. 350).

4 In relation to this, some scholars contend that the discourses on lifelong learning represent “a form of biopower” (Marshall, 1995) or self-regulation aiming at reducing the “time lag” between individual skills and economic and technological innovation (Tuschling & Engemann, 2006, as cited in Olssen, 2006).

5 A similar argument is found in Brown’s (2003) work, where he posits that neoliberalism involves a normative rather than ontological claim about the pervasiveness of economic rationality and takes as its task the development, dissemination, and institutionalization of such rationality.

6 In relation to this, Jones’s (1992) book provides a thorough description of the World Bank’s instrumental role in promoting Western ideas about how education and the economy are—or should be—related. Terms such as “external inducement” (Ikenberry, 1990), “direct coercive transfer” (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996), “exporting ideas,” or “policy pusher” (Nedley, 2007) serve to illustrate the promotion of fiscal discipline and other neoliberal measures in poorer countries through donor agencies that condition their loans to the adoption of such measures. For instance, the World Bank demands curricular and structural change in education when it provides loans, alleging that those changes contribute to rationalizing and equalizing the delivery of this social good (Weiner, 2005).
References

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