Education and Europe:
the Politics of Austerity
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Ken jones</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
<td>Guy Dreux</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On not addressing the crisis: neo-liberal reform and the new capitalist school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>Rosa Cañadell</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The destruction of public education in Spain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>Rosalind Innes</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Italian Education: Between Reform and Restoration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>Anna Traianou</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greek Education Reform: resistance and despair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>Nico Hirtt</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education and training – under the dictatorship of the labour market</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Also from Radicaled

The Great Reversal: Young People Education and Employment in a Declining Economy

Martin Allen and Patrick Ainley

Education Beyond the Coalition. Reclaiming the Agenda

Edited by Martin Allen and Patrick Ainley
Introduction: all change

Ken Jones

The notion of a European educational space ‘fabricated’ by social actors of many kinds, from policy-makers and bureaucrats to academics and social movements, was a valuable addition to the repertoire of educational researchers (Nóvoa and Lawn 2002). It encouraged them to break from the methodological nationalism that had confined the study of policy within the borders of national states. It put them in a better position to understand what was happening to education policy in the ‘single Europe’ created after the Maastricht Treaty of 1992. It alerted them to the rise of a transnational policy orthodoxy, developed particularly through the work of the EU and the OECD and embodied in systems of comparative assessment like PISA and mechanisms of governance like the Open Method of Coordination, which calibrated the policies of member states around European-level objectives (Laval and Weber 2002; Lange and Alexiadou 2010; Lawn and Grek 2012). Additionally, the idea of a European space had an effect on the way academics in education saw their own work: they were participants in the creation of Europe. Programmes of student and faculty exchange, cross-national research initiatives, the growth of professional associations like EERA provided a material basis for the thought that academics were now Europeans.

Martin Lawn has recently suggested that this work has proceeded through a deliberate exclusion of politics, in the sense of the explicit presentation of contestable programmes (Lawn 2013). He writes of an environment in which:
‘governance [of education] in Europe is developed through … public-private partnerships, knowledge-based organizations, agencies, associations and markets …. This activity is often out of sight and excludes politics. It thrives among a new elite of technocrats, professionals and academics, with expert knowledge or skills, who are working in public or private organizations. They meet in associations or through projects or networks. They are solving problems, problems in the governing of Europe, through the collection, classification, and analysis of data, the parallel creation of standards or the accumulation of knowledge about problems and development.’ (Lawn 2013: 20)

Lawn precisely and accurately evokes a milieu, its working practices and its achievements. He calls his sketch an ‘understory’, a record of what is happening in the low thickets of Europe-making governance, while the tall trees of the Council of Ministers are shaken by ‘melodramatic summits’ and ‘dramatic crises’. It is an attractive metaphor, but it may not be the best means of understanding the dynamics of the European educational space, and the relationship between ‘crisis’ and educational practice that is currently shaping it. In truth, there are very few understories in this space that are not affected by what is happening at the topmost levels of financial politics and crisis management; national, and local, practices are in many countries deeply affected by the decisions of the European Central Bank and the Council of Ministers; and at European level the work of experts cannot but be steered towards objectives that are part of a strongly contested agenda.

**Sketching a history**

The Europeanisation of education policy has taken place under the sign of a neo-liberalism that has impressed itself on EU policy as a whole. The model of a ‘Social Europe’ set out by Jacques Delors, in
the early years of his Presidency of the European Commission, was
eclipsed in the 1990s by the ‘single market’ established by Maastricht.
The project of European unity, as Peter Gowan has argued, became a
means of altering the balance of social and political power to the
detriment of working-class interests (Gowan 2011). It introduced
market competition to public services; it aimed to restrict labour costs
through promoting a freedom of movement that could create a
Europe-wide labour market. In establishing criteria for membership of
the Eurozone, it sought to control social spending, through restricting
budget deficits. The EU’s response to the financial crisis of 2008 has
accelerated the process of neoliberal unification. The 2012 Treaty on
Stability, Coordination and Governance, signed by all states except
Britain and the Czech Republic, gives the Commission and Council
greater power over the budget deficits of member states (EC 2012a).
Rules that bind budgets within EU limits are required to be
incorporated into national law (Zacune 2013). Sovereignty thus passes
from national to European level. At the same time, the death of the
social model has been announced – by the President of the European
Central Bank (Draghi 2012).

In this process of crisis-driven restructuring, it is the asymmetry of
the ‘European space’ that stands out. There is a marked divergence
between countries of the south – especially Greece, Italy, Portugal and
Spain – and most of those in central and northern Europe. The modest
growth rates of the north contrast sharply with the situation in the
southern part of the Eurozone, where the borrowing lifelines offered to
countries with otherwise unsustainable levels of interest repayment on
their deficits are dependent on programmes of fiscal austerity and
structural reform, including privatisation. Structural reform is at the
heart of the programme that the ‘Troika’ - the European Commission,
the European Central Bank and the IMF – seeks to impose on national
states, devising memoranda of understanding that intrude on the
prerogatives of national governments, and, much more explicitly than
the Maastricht criteria of the 1990s, make demands for cuts in social
spending, state reconfiguration, and labour flexibility (European Commission 2011: 2012b).

The space of Europe therefore needs to be thought in terms of relationships of domination and subordination, as power over macro-economic policy is force-migrated from the national level to the conference rooms of Brussels and Strasbourg. In this context, it is possible to speak of a process of uneven development which is antagonistic and competitive: the advantages accruing to some member states in the process of Europeanisation are gained at the expense of others. National governments, especially, in the countries of the south, become agents of this new phase of Europeanisation, and unevenness between states is thus translated into conflicts within them.

Education and training have been central to all stages of EU policy development, and subject to the stresses and failures that have marked it. The most dramatic effects of ‘Europe’ on education have been felt in the programme of cuts required by the troika, but there are also more long-standing influences. The Lisbon Declaration of the European Council in 2000 envisaged a continent that would be transformed into ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world’, with education at the heart of this transformation (Jones et al 2008: 32). The Education and Training Work Programme of 2002 re-emphasised the aim and set out the ambitious objectives for increased participation in education that went with it. Such work has resulted in an increasing Europeanisation of educational governance (Nóvoa 2013). At the same time it has given impetus to processes that are now well advanced in all member states, that assert economic goals as primary and demand a large-scale transformation of educational cultures to achieve them. Following the onset of crisis, the focus on the relationship between education and economic competitiveness has been intensified. The new programme ‘Education and Training 2020’, as António Nóvoa points out, responds to the failure of Lisbon to achieve global competitiveness
and increased social inclusion with policies that have ‘a tendency to reduce educational issues to the “needs of the economy” and to the preparation of professionals capable of joining the job market’ (Nóvoa 2013: 112).

**Locating our work**

All books have a history. This one is no exception. Its immediate origin is a seminar held at Goldsmiths, University of London, in May 2013 where most of the chapters collected here were presented.¹ Beyond the seminar, its history can be traced to the European Social Forums of 2002-2008, in which several of the contributors participated.

The Forums were an attempt to make sense of the processes of neo-liberal globalisation that were transforming the continent, and to co-ordinate and develop the surge of protest that had been expressed in demonstrations across turn-of-the-century Europe – Prague, Genoa, Barcelona. They were one of the outcomes of sharp social conflicts that began around 1995, the year of French strikes against welfare cuts and budget reduction. These conflicts activated two major constituencies of opposition – first, a precariat of insecurely employed workers, mostly young, and educated beyond the level of previous generations; secondly, a public sector working class which had expanded greatly in the second half of the twentieth century, but which was increasingly experiencing job insecurity and degraded conditions of work. Alongside an NGO sector concerned especially with issues of environmental and social justice, these were the protagonists of an oppositional movement that had a double

¹ ‘The Remaking of Education in Europe: national experiences and common patterns’. The seminar was organised by the School of Education at Birmingham City University and the Department of Educational Studies at Goldsmiths. It was supported by the Social Justice Special Interest Group of BERA, the British Educational Research Association.
perspective on Europeanisation. On the one hand, it proposed alternatives to neo-liberalism that had a continental reach; on the other it attempted to defend social gains and public traditions that had developed in the nation states of post-war Europe.

Though the impetus of the ESFs slackened after 2006, they had at least one major achievement to their credit – the launching in 2002 of the movement against war in Iraq. In other fields, they established networks through which information and analysis could flow. Thus, in education, organisations such as APED (Belgium), Cobas-Scuola (Italy) and STES-USTEC (Spain/Catalonia), developed wider connections and influence. The book *Schooling in Western Europe*, published in 2008, co-authored by some of the participants in the seminar and translated into several languages, was a reflection of these conversations and mobilisations (Jones et al 2008). Like the work of Isabelle Bruno and her colleagues (2010), it charted the neo-liberal turn of European education systems; it also tracked the conflicts that had attended it.

As we have seen, much has happened since 2008 to sharpen that turn, and in several cases to raise to a new level of intensity the conflicts that accompany it. This current volume is an attempt to take a provisional measure of what is happening. Its focus is on France, Greece, Italy and Spain - countries where the collision between neoliberalism and national educational cultures has been probably more powerful than in other European states. Central to this collision is the abrasive encounter between two educational and social models – the first basing itself on equal opportunity reform and a state that provided a measure of social security (higher in France than in the other countries), the second emphasising markets, choice and

2 For a recent example that continues the line of development established by the ESFs, see the manifesto of the European ‘Alter Summit’ held in Athens in June 2013. http://www.altersummit.eu/manifeste/article/the-manifesto
selectivity and lower levels of public spending. This is not merely a clash of programmes, of course, but of social forces. On one side stand organisations and institutions that were established in the course of movements and conflicts of several kinds: the war against fascism in the 1940s, the 1960s movements for radical change, the struggles against dictatorship which reached their climax in the 1970s. On the other side are governments that intend to inflict on them an historic defeat that will marginalise the politics of educational and social reform and radically reshape the institutions that it created. Rosa Cañadell, whose chapter evokes the ‘bewilderment and terror’ that attend the destruction of public education in Spain, conveys a very strong understanding of the stakes of these conflicts.

The book’s chapters track the conflicts across the four national terrains. A further chapter, by Nico Hirtt, locates educational troubles in the wider context of the restructuring of the European labour market and its polarising effects, while a later section of this introduction adds some comparative reflections on England. The ‘national’ chapters identify the particular histories with which neo-liberalism has collided and interacted, and the ways in which it has accordingly mutated into different, country-specific shapes. They all speak of major processes of transformation, in which the construction of a politics of austerity has ratcheted upwards an existing set of neo-liberal policy emphases. Processes of marketisation and privatisation are accelerating, at the same time as educational resources are restricted and social inequalities increased. The response that these policies have evoked, in Spain and in Greece, has been combative, tumultuous, desperate. In Italy and France, there has been an alternation of widespread militancy and periods of relative quiescence; in England, a long attritional conflict over education’s direction is now reaching a more acute stage.
Reform-restoration

From one perspective, perhaps that of the experts whose work is discussed by Martin Lawn, the Europeanisation of education is a way of bringing to order a set of disparate and often ineffective practices in the name of economic growth, competitiveness and social inclusion. Targets agreed at European level, constant comparative analysis of progress towards them and a uniform measure of cross-national performance (in the form of PISA) provide a framework in which the managers of increasingly autonomous educational institutions are encouraged and pressured to drive up standards, as measured by national tests. From this perspective, national systems of education are characterised by their weaknesses. They have been slow to adapt their curricula to new economic needs. They fail large numbers of their students, while adhering to the rhetoric of an impossible egalitarianism. They are subject to producer capture, by teachers and academics who unjustifiably defend tenure, over-staffing and unaffordable levels of pay and superannuation.

The chapters that follow present an account of education that is different and more complex. Their central perception is that we need to speak of a process of educational change that is combined and not linear. Change, as Rosalind Innes argues in her account of Italy, is a process of reform-restoration. The attempt to align education with new economic needs certainly connects to previous traditions of reform, in the sense that it intends to increase levels of educational participation and achievement; it is recognisably a continuation of a project of modernisation, even if it intends to complete that project in a different political modality. But the political forces that neo-liberalism empowers have interests that branch off from the universalist high road of modernisation, in particularistic directions. In Italy, the privatisation of schooling is a magnet for criminal activity. In Spain, as Cañadell shows, religious influence on the control of schooling has been strengthened, and there, as in England, ‘old’ ideologies of imperial and authoritarian periods have staged a revival. More
Introduction

fundamentally, as Hirtt argues, the attempt to link the economising of education to a promise of social inclusiveness that is key to the rhetoric of European reform is undermined by the polarising effects of economic growth on the labour market. In this sense, the future only offers a return to the precarity that welfare states were designed to mitigate.

Opposition to neoliberal reform is likewise complex. In its intellectual preferences, it is often traditional. As both Innes and Hirtt suggest, the critique of new orthodoxies of curriculum and pedagogy takes the form of an allegation of dumbing down which owes much to a continuing belief in humanist traditions of education. The charge levelled by Cobas-Scuola against new systems of assessment in Italy is that they are nothing but a ‘quiz’, that demands no depth of knowledge in the responses it evaluates (CESP/Cobas-Scuola 2013). In this context, Innes quotes the classicist and communist Luciano Canfora, who sees such systems as an attempt to purge from society the potential for critical thought, replacing it by parrot-like memorising.

As with intellectual preferences, so with more general political commitments. The past provides a yardstick with which to evaluate the present. Opposition to the neoliberal turn rests on the defence of traditions of education policy, in which the national state, through expanding education and enabling opportunity, has been a major force. Traianou’s account of the link between the widespread opposition to educational austerity and the place of education in Greek state formation is very clear in this respect. Moving from analysis to critique, Guy Dreux attacks the Hollande government for its willingness to relinquish the state’s capacity for educational initiative, pinpointing its willingness to let Brussels establish the terms of educational politics in France. Nico Hirtt extends the critique further, tracing the decline:
Ken Jones

‘From an education system in which the state transfers or instils the values, disciplinary knowledge and qualifications that it considers supportive of the common good, [to] a system in which worker-citizens are issued with an individual invitation to seek out whatever they consider useful for their individual careers.’

Positions like these have been accused of a nostalgia which presents the only alternative to neoliberalism as a return to exhausted traditions, established in the nineteenth century and incapable of addressing present-day needs (Gauthier 2003). If they escape such accusations, it is for three reasons. First, their defence of the state is nuanced, not unequivocal; for Hirtt, the state is ‘heavy, pervasive and bureaucratic’ but it also provides ‘forms of social protection, the conquests of social struggle’; for opponents of austerity, the question is how to defend these conquests, rather than defend the state per se.

Secondly, these social struggles, far from seeking to hold on to outdated models, have led to a continuous adaptation of state education – its institutional forms and its pedagogic and curricular practice – to emergent social needs. This is a record of innovation which is by no means exhausted, and it is more the work of the left than the right. The right has promoted some kinds of innovation, notably those associated with the marketisation of schooling, but in other respects, especially those associated with practice at the level of the classroom, its role has been unproductive, not to say regressive.

Thirdly, the left can respond to charges of nationalist nostalgia by pointing to its consistent internationalism. For the left, the problem with the EU is not just that it usurps the policy-making powers of national states, but that the supra-national entity to which it transfers them is itself undemocratic. The European Social Forums, and the other trans-European initiatives that have followed them, argued that the defence of gains achieved within the framework of the nation-state is indeed an important and pressing task – but it should to be
complemented by Europe-wide action. ‘Current policies weaken solidarity between European peoples’ and Europe must be reconstructed ‘on the basis of equality, solidarity, and authentic democracy’ (Alter Summit 2013). In this sense, opposition seeks to go beyond the EU, rather than regress towards exclusively national perspectives.

**England**

In Italy, writes Innes, ‘EU educational policy has often been conflated with the English system, which has been held up as the model of neoliberalism’. This is a lazy conflation. England may be an inspiration to politicians of education in other countries – ‘we want to do everything like you’, Sarkozy once told Gordon Brown (Jones 2010) – but the patterns and outcomes of education policy differ from state to state. No single state has a decisive influence on the EU’s work and there are some states – England most notably – that maintain an institutional and political distance from the European networks of governance that Lawn describes (Alexiadou and van de Bunt-Kokhuis 2013). English neoliberalism, like the neoliberalism of other countries, is *sui generis*, and austerity, in Innes’s words, ‘differently devastates economic and geographical areas of Europe.’

One of the tasks of analysis is to identify and explain such difference, both in terms of policy-making and the responses that it has triggered. Jenny Ozga argues that post-Maastricht Europe saw:

‘A shift toward decentralisation, devolution and deregulation as key principles of restructuring. In education – to a greater or lesser degree depending on context – these changes enhanced institutional autonomy and school-based management and were accompanied by enhanced parental choice of school, and by greater competition between schools ... These policy developments reflected the dominance of neo-liberal principles in the design of reform
Ken Jones

and restructuring programmes, so that decentralisation and devolution were pursued with the aim of enabling the market to operate effectively.’ (Ozga 2009: 150-151)

From this point of view, England might be seen as just one, local instance of a general tendency. The same point might be made about the cultural politics of education. English Conservatism has certainly had a strong cultural strand, in which nationalist themes of cultural unity have been prominent. But this, too, is replicated elsewhere. The 2004 ban on the wearing of the ‘veil’ in French schools has been replicated in Belgium and parts of Germany. The Berlusconi government of 2008-2011 attempted to have migrants taught separately from classes of native Italian speakers, and, as Rosa Cañadell notes, the Madrid government tries to downgrade the importance of ‘regional’ languages in education.

In major respects, then, English education policy has been heading for some time in the same direction as in other parts of Europe. However within this general tendency England has a special place. ‘The reliance on market mechanisms was especially strong in England’ Ozga writes (2009: 151). Likewise Grek et al, reviewing forms of educational regulation across Northern Europe, describe England as ‘the most advanced regulatory state’ (2009: 121). In relation to cultural conservatism, too, England is unusual in the consistency, across more than three decades, with which governments have sought to implement a curriculum organised around various motifs popularised by the right. Arguably, there has been no period since the 1970s when the right’s educational values have not had an influence on policy.

To explain why England’s status in these policy areas is ‘advanced’ and, as Ozga calls it, ‘extreme’, we need some understanding of English neoliberalism’s path dependency. It is a product in the first instance of Thatcherism, a political force that at a relatively early stage in the breakdown of the post-war settlement confronted and
defeated – economically, politically, ideologically – movements that sought to defend or further develop the terms of that settlement. Being the ‘first’ in Western Europe, it had to be the most aggressive. It could not persuade opponents, by pointing to some inexorable set of developments, across the continent, which demonstrated the necessity of change. It relied instead on breaking them.

Conservatism presented education as being in a state of emergency, a state that required strong intervention by government to restore the teaching of ‘moral values’ and ‘basic educational skills’. Given this analysis, policy change proceeded via confrontation. Institutions, organisation and practices which were thought responsible for the subversion of schooling were made the objects of media scandal, or closed down. A comprehensive framework of laws and external regulation greatly reduced the space for oppositional or non-conformist practice.

By the end of the 1980s, education had been brought to order. In the following decade, while Spain and Greece were still committed to policies that gave a central place to the autonomous work of teachers in bringing about a more egalitarian system, in England policy had struck out in a different direction. While France and Italy were experiencing mass strikes against job cuts and merit pay, English teachers were regulated as never before.

This strong and continuing ‘destructive’ element of critique in Conservatism has been accompanied by equal powerful projects of construction. Guy Dreux writes that neoliberalism is not simply an ideology, present in thought and language. It is also a ‘rationality’, which is:

‘embedded in an ensemble of techniques and practices which, without issuing explicit orders or demands, bring into being certain types of conduct. In this way, neo-liberalism creates a specific kind of environment, where the principle
of competition is generalised, and also internalised at the level of the individual. It is within this framework that individuals construct a sense of their own interests.’

Conservatism created such a rationality. It laid the basis for a new set of institutions and a new logic of action on the part of parents, teachers and students. The creation of this apparatus, by Conservatism and its New Labour successor, is a major achievement of English neoliberalism. The effectiveness of its systems, in areas of curriculum and assessment, inspection, and the management of schools is, as Innes and Traianou show, in stark contrast to those of Italy and Greece – where the resilience of opposition has held up some reforms, while the corruption and ineffectiveness of the state has vitiated others. At university level, the unfinished battles over autonomy, that Traianou depicts the Greek government fighting against the academy, were in Britain settled in the late 1980s. As these comparisons suggest, to speak of England as an ‘advanced’ case of neoliberalism is not so much to mark its progress along the road to an ideal model as to note a particular relationship of forces, that enables reforms of a kind that elsewhere remain formidably difficult.

**Coalition England**

The early part of this chapter referred to differences, in terms of the depth of the recession, between countries of the south – especially Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain – and most of those in central and northern Europe. Britain is a partial exception to this pattern. Its focus on austerity, through tax rises and spending cuts, has been stronger than that of Scandinavian countries, or of the Netherlands, Germany and Austria. This policy has been developed ‘at home’, without external political pressure. There is no need of a troika to enforce a programme of austerity: Britain’s government is committed to structural adjustment as a matter of principle. In political terms, the Conservative-led Coalition has implemented this programme with some success. The Labour Party has accepted its fiscal programme as
the basis for economic management after 2015, thus endorsing much of the case for cuts and state restructuring. Unlike in Spain or Greece, no new political force has entered the scene to express popular discontent. Trade unions have confined their activity to a few days of protest. Thus, with the exception of the student campaign of 2010 against a tripling of tuition fees, and of the riots of 2011 (whose political message was unclear) the Coalition has not been strongly opposed.

In terms of education, England is experiencing a less severe austerity than Spain or Greece. Cuts in spending, pay and pensions rights are significant, but are not at Greek levels, Youth unemployment is high, but has reached less than half the height of Spain – and so on, indicator by indicator. Nevertheless, in many respects, the programme of restructuring that accompanies austerity is more sweeping than that of other countries: the complete withdrawal of state funding for undergraduate arts, humanities and social science courses; the cutting of financial support for 16-18 year olds; the loading up of university graduates with as much as £45,000 of debt; the transfer of more than half of England’s secondary schools to private management; revisions in curriculum and assessment that most experts think will increase educational failure.

The scale and speed of these changes owes something to the personal characteristics of Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education in the Coalition government. But the resources that Gove draws from are not entirely his own. His policies refer back to, continue and intend to complete the ‘revolution’ of the 1980s. Gove’s reference points – a free market, a strong state, an assertive reconstruction of a ‘national culture’ – are those of the Thatcher period. His abrasive style expresses all the antagonism of Thatcherism towards the project of educational reform developed in the mid-twentieth century. He has a sense of fighting an historic battle, against opponents whom it is important to defeat rather than accommodate.
Gove has the capacity to do this because of the relationship of forces that developed in education, following the political defeats inflicted on teachers in the 1980s, along with the incorporation of most students and parents into the business of personal survival in a highly competitive educational environment. Especially in the absence of a general challenge to the politics of austerity, his chances of success are high. In these conditions his faction can do more than fight the battles of the past; it can dream of a more complete accomplishment of neo-liberalism. ‘Hopefully,’ writes Dominic Cummings, one of Gove’s special advisers, ‘recent reforms will push the English system towards one in which the state provides a generous amount of funding per pupil which parents can spend in any school they wish, thus breaking down the barrier of private/state school, while the Department for Education does little more than some regulatory accountancy ... and has nothing to do with the management of schools, the curriculum, exams or teacher training’. Such a system would end a 150 year old project of state education. It would produce a new educational order based on what Cummings believes to be a truth of human nature: differences in intelligence are in part genetically given. Some groups of students, identified by their intelligence, will take more advantage than others of the opportunities presented by the school. School reform, therefore, according to Cummings, may improve average levels of performance, but it may also ‘increase, not decrease, gaps in performance’. For the development of knowledge and civilisation this ratcheting up of inequality is – he believes – no bad thing (Cummings 2013: 83).

A new vision?

Cummings, like Gove, would like Britain to leave the EU: the national state, not the transnational union is his chosen vehicle for neo-liberal reconstruction. That will not prevent his statement of aims from resonating in other parts of Europe. At present, confined by path dependencies from which they are unable to break free, mired in the conflicts that surround the public school and unable to scatter once and
Introduction

for all its defenders, neo-liberal policy-makers on what the English used to call ‘the continent’ have more restricted ambitions than he does. They find themselves speaking the prose of political calculation, rather than the poetry of possibility that Hayek evoked, of ‘a liberal Utopia, a programme which seems neither a mere defence of things as they are nor a diluted kind of socialism, but a truly liberal radicalism which ... does not confine itself to what appears today as politically possible’ (1949/1967: 194). That Cummings can write of such an Utopia that is only, it seems, another few steps away, says something about the achievements of neo-liberalism, Anglo-Saxon style. His paper also serves as a reminder. Neo-liberalism may thrive in crisis mode, but it has always been more than an instrument of urgent intervention. It contains a vision of a society in which inequality is the natural order of things, and excellence is created and demonstrated through unending competition, on a playing field that is never level. Cummings, displaying Hayekian principles of ‘courage’ and ‘intellectual adventurousness’ sets out a truth that opponents of neo-liberalism in education have intuitively understood: the policies they confront are not so much roads to improvement and the collective good, as the intended catalysts of a terrible reversal of fortune, in which the goals for which they fought and the traditions in which they have placed themselves are dismissed entirely from the field. It is this intolerable possibility that fuels the conflicts discussed in the pages that follow.

References


Introduction


Chapter 1

On not addressing the crisis: neo-liberal reform and the new capitalist school.

Guy Dreux

The presidential election of May 2012 saw the victory of the Socialist Party candidate, François Hollande, with his campaign slogan, ‘Time for Change!’ Popular feeling against the previous president, Nicolas Sarkozy, was clear and forceful; it had led several trade unions to set aside their usual caution and to call explicitly for the defeat of the candidate of the right. SNES-FSU, the main trade union among teachers in the different phases of secondary education - collèges and lycées – called at its April 2012 congress for the defeat of Sarkozy, rejecting the idea that his policies of school ‘reform’ should be extended for another five years. Analysis of the election results has since confirmed that a very large majority of teachers shared this position. Aiming to put a stop to policies that were perceived as a fundamental attack on the idea of education as a public service, they contributed massively to Hollande’s victory. Hollande himself had insisted during his campaign that education would be the main priority of his term in office. The hope and the intention of breaking from the past were thus given full expression during the election period.

1 ‘We do not imagine, we do not want to imagine, enduring another 5 years of these policies, whose effects, if we listen to candidate-President Sarkozy, will actually be accentuated if he is re-elected’, declared Daniel Robin, one of the three co-secretaries of SNES-FSU, in the middle of the election campaign. Le Monde 6 April 2012
However, Hollande’s promise of change was rapidly transformed into a reaffirmation of the general line of policy that had been followed for more than 20 years. In November 2012, Prime Minister Ayrault opened a conference on Higher Education and Research by introducing proposals for a new law – eventually presented to the National Assembly the following May:

‘Improvements in educational attainment and advances in research must become powerful levers of growth and development that support national recovery. That is the main issue facing this conference. But this is an ambition that extends beyond France; it is an ambition on a European scale, and has been ever since the Bologna Process (1999) and the Lisbon Strategy (2000) set course towards it. To construct a European space of higher education, and to transform the knowledge economy of the EU into the most competitive in the world: this is a programme, and an ambition, to which the government gives its full support.’ (Ayrault 2012)

Ayrault’s is an important declaration because it is the first time that a French political leader, speaking in an official capacity, has admitted in such clear terms that he lacks a specific, nationally-derived policy on these issues, and that his only ambition is to follow in the tracks of neo-liberal policies that have already been worked out at a European level.

A few months earlier, in the summer of 2012, the minister for national education, Vincent Peillon, began a process of consultation around a proposal for the ‘remaking’ of the school (Beyer 2012). His language was forceful: in his initial statement, the term ‘remaking’ (refondation) was repeated many times. However, the policy documents that followed Peillon’s announcement indicated that there would be no fundamental change in the patterns of school reform that had already been established under Sarkozy and his predecessors:

‘The school system must make itself fit for the future, taking full account of those powerful social tendencies which have transformed our environment, while the forms of schooling have remained static. … Through this consultation, we are appealing to
all social actors to reflect deeply on the role of the school, and how it might be orchestrated, harmoniously, with those profound changes that are affecting the very basis of our society.’ (Dulot 2012:3)

Thus, for the minister, Socialist though he may be, the priority is to create a school system adapted to the dynamic of capitalist development, rather than one that mounts a challenge to it.

Third in this trio of thinkers is the President himself. Hollande has carefully delineated the qualities that are required at the heart of school reform. In April 2013, speaking at a conference on entrepreneurship, he described them in these terms:

‘Stimulating the spirit of enterprise in our country is in the first instance the task of the school … We will introduce a programme of entrepreneurial education that will stretch from the first year of secondary education to the last.’

Hollande went on to discuss the relation of school to work. He envisaged a pathway running the entire length of secondary education, that would include first-hand exploration of the world of work, as well as information and teaching about it. He promised that this would involve ‘a greater number of work placements than at present, as well as the involvement of “economic actors” in the life of the school, and the initiation of students into the principles of economic life.’ (Hollande 2013)

We can gather from this that the ‘change’ heralded in Hollande’s election campaign will not take place. Campaign statements, cautiously worded though they were, have already been set aside: Hollande’s government has made a point of stressing that a central principle of its reforms will be continuity. The shift from one party to another, with a new government and a new majority party, has done nothing – or almost nothing – to suggest that leaders are ready to depart from the line of march that has already been determined at a European level. ‘What are we witnessing here?’ asks a campaigning group of academics. ‘It is
simple: the policies of François Hollande follow in the tracks of those of Nicolas Sarkozy – perhaps they are even worse. “Change” is only a matter of public image; the reality remains the same; in fact, things have got worse’ (Blay et al 2013).

The main change since 2008 concerns the ideological environment of education, in the general ideological context of the period. For more than 20 years, education policy has been defined in terms of its relationship to objectives set by economic policy and the requirements of the labour market. Reforms at the level of the school have usually been conceived and justified with reference to their contribution to strategies for economic development, designed within the Lisbon framework. This was the case before the crisis of 2008 and continues to be the case now. The crisis has functioned neither as an opportunity for a new round of reform, nor as a brake upon it. The Lisbon Strategy remains undisturbed, and the policies associated with it have simply been continued – in part, accelerated. The new ideological element since 2008 is the response of public opinion, as economic crisis has accentuated a long-standing crisis of education, worsening both the conditions of student life and the conditions of teachers’ work.

Over the last few years in France we have witnessed a rising consciousness of the transformation that is taking place. Not only teachers, but significant sections of public opinion, have become aware of a ‘family resemblance’ that is shared by policies across Europe (Fugier 2011); and at the same time that the overall logic of neo-liberal policies is better understood, social actors are becoming alert to the possibility of alternatives. There thus exists a paradox: policies continue to be devised and implemented even while their motivating philosophy and their effects are contested and criticised as never before. We need to understand this paradox – how is it that these policies can still be pursued, and, above all, why does it seem to be so difficult to resist the transformations that they bring about? Why and how, since the crisis of 2008, has education policy in France continued to conform to the dogma of the European Commission, even though it produces no positive effects.
The university: a case of continuity

In 2009, France experienced the most serious academic crisis in its history. For nearly six months, almost all its universities – 80 out of 83 – were involved in protests of an unprecedented kind. The movement was exceptional in its breadth and also in the diversity of its forms of expression: strikes that called a halt to teaching, demonstrations, happenings, teach-outs in public spaces and unending circular processions (rondes infinies) that proclaimed the determination of the obstinés who joined them. These mobilisations were a protest against the consequences of the LRU, a law introduced by the Sarkozy government, that reconstituted the governance of higher education around the notion of autonomy, understood in a neo-liberal sense.2

In making sense of this surge of action, it is worth noting first of all, the two-year interval between the parliamentary vote on the LRU – a law whose implications were not at first understood – and the mobilisations against it. This is not an incidental point. The delayed response was the effect of a specific strategy through which neo-liberal reform has been introduced, theorised in the concept of ‘incremental method’. The concept is defined by two economists close to the policy-making élite, in these terms:

‘Expressed in terms of a general method, the idea is always to go about things through a process of creation – without suppressing what already exists – in order to open new possibilities within the structure of the old system, without giving the impression that the basic principles of the system are being called into question … The advantage of this approach is that it leads social actors within the system towards a position where they themselves call for measures that will set them free and give them easier access to this new universe that has been created.’ (Aghion and Cohen 2004: 112)

2 ‘Loi relatif aux libertés et responsabilités des universités’ adopted by the National Assembly in August 2007.
The idea is thus not to destroy existing models of provision, for that always risks generating discontent and counter-action, but instead to encourage social agents and institutions to adopt new forms of behaviour.

This method, to which opponents of the LRU gave the title *saucissonage et enfumage* - salami tactics behind a smokescreen – is a general characteristic of the ‘reforms’ that have been put in place since 2007/8: they have never presented themselves as significant changes; on the contrary, they take care to appear as unimportant devices, technical and limited, which are only matters of common sense. The more general philosophy that motivates them is never set out explicitly. This is why the work of decoding and critical analysis that exposes the character and coherence of these reforms becomes an essential element of oppositional strategy.

The LRU embodies a significant ‘mutation’ in the operational logic of the French university system (Bruno et al 2010). Universities are placed in a situation where they have no choice but to respect and respond to the orientation and objectives selected and defined by the state, which nevertheless bestows on them the freedom – the ‘autonomy’ – to define the means by which they seek to attain these objectives. On the one hand, the state allows the university a greater degree of autonomy: freedom to make use of its property-based assets; greater discretion around salary levels; more opportunity to seek external funding, especially through business partnerships. On the other hand, the state imposes objectives and demands results, in terms of rates of success in examinations, number of staff publications, levels of student recruitment from home and overseas. In this sense, we can understand the LRU as an example of the application to institutions of public education of what economists term ‘corporate governance’ (Vinokur 2011). The basic idea is that the principal social actor – here, the state – concedes a certain level of autonomy to institutions in return for the power to evaluate the results they obtain and to quality-check rigorously and continuously the means used to obtain them.
On not addressing the crisis: neo-liberal reform and the new capitalist school

The LRU has thus introduced French universities to a logic of competition: the state encourages them to reorganise themselves, to establish partnerships with private-sector organisations, to develop strategies for recruiting the best students, to diversify and vocationalise their portfolio of courses. The law also ensures that the university is subject to systems of permanent evaluation that relate both to teaching and to research. Competition on one side, a bureaucracy of evaluation on the other: these are the two linked elements of a new system, which are widely criticised by academics, but which are the established characteristics of the neoliberal universe.

The outcomes of the LRU, so far as universities are concerned, have been largely negative. Anxious to recruit students in sufficient numbers, and to demonstrate that they can find them employment, universities have launched into a large-scale vocationalisation of their portfolio of courses. We have thus seen an explosion in the number of courses, so that there are now in France more than 10,000 undergraduate and masters programmes: making sense of the pattern of educational supply has become impossible. A further problem is financial. In 2012, nearly a quarter of universities experienced serious problems with their budgets. Inequalities between universities have increased and subjects of a ‘humanist’ type have encountered financial problems severe enough in some cases to threaten their very existence. Processes of social selection have been consolidated. Autonomy in relation to the management of staff has given rise to widespread precarity of employment – a condition which now affects more than a quarter of staff in universities and research institutes (PECRES 2011).

3 This is particularly the case for ethnology and anthropology. Cf ‘Université: Tristes ethnologie et anthropologie’ Libération 7th July 2013; ‘Vers la fin des filières d’anthropologie et de préhistoire en France’ Le Monde 20th June 2013.
Understanding failure and its aftermath

The failure of the mobilisations of 2009 needs to be analysed. We have already referred to a time-lag in comprehending the meaning of the LRU – a delay that is all the more regrettable because in 2007, at the point when the law was being introduced, only the students – or a section of them – protested; and in 2009, at the point when the first consequences of the law – changes to university statutes – were being felt, the only mobilisation came from academics, who as a consequence remained isolated. Even though parts of their critique and their demands touched on the education and training of teachers, most of their concerns seemed to stand apart from those of teachers at other levels of education. This suggests an important strategic principle: no single set of educational institutions, even the most prestigious, can alone organise an effective fightback. Academics, isolated as they were, emerged demoralised from their long strikes, feeling that even a social movement of great depth and force could be defeated. There were positives of course. The demonstrations of 2009 were linked without doubt to an accelerating understanding of the stakes of the conflict: they gave rise to the first attempts to organise struggle at a European level, notably through the creation of the collective Printemps 2010 which organised a counter-summit at the European Parliament in Brussels in March 2010. All the same, it remains the case that the 2009 defeat has lastingly weakened the movement in the universities.

Perhaps it is this defeat that has made it easier for François Hollande to elaborate the policies of neo-liberalism. The line currently followed by the minister of Higher Education, Geneviève Fioraso, conforms closely to that of Sarkozy’s LRU. Her own legislative programme, which passed through parliament in July 2013, wrote into the mission of universities a duty to participate in ‘economic growth and competitiveness, and in the development of an employment policy that takes into account the needs of different sectors of the economy and their likely trajectory’ (Ministère de l’Enseignement Supérieur 2013).
Fioraso’s law also specifies that universities must support processes of ‘dissemination, valorisation (knowledge application), and knowledge transfer from universities to socio-economic sectors’. The minister also intends to give particular support to programmes taught through the medium of English, so that French universities will become more attractive to foreign students. In another innovation, the new law encourages universities to place ‘at their users’ disposal, their digital services and resources … In those subjects whose pedagogical methods permit it, Higher Education Institutions should make available their teaching materials in digital form.’

The legislation also affects university governance: universities must give a more central role on their leading bodies to business leaders and regional politicians. At national level, a strategic council for research will be established, reporting to the office of the Prime Minister, with the power to lay down the general outlines of a national research strategy. Fioraso also means to encourage the reorganisation of universities into clusters, to make them a more visible presence and to enable a sharing of resources and a reduction in operating costs. These reconfigurations will go under the name of ‘university communities’, replacing the PRES - Pôles de Recherche et d'Enseignement Supérieur – established after 2006.

All this suggests to us that the present government has no intention of drawing any lessons from the mobilisations of 2009. But it is significant that the first protests against Fioraso’s programme – for instance, those of the collective Sauvons l’université, which had a key role in the struggle against the LRU – are developing arguments that signal a very precise understanding of the matrix from which current policy originates. The texts of the EU, notably the Lisbon Strategy of 2000, are frequently and directly cited.

Overall, current legislation on the university provides the government with an opportunity to confirm the match between education policy and economic/employment policies. This is a link about which Prime Minister Ayrault is emphatic:
‘We need to be able to construct a better chain of innovation, which leads from fundamental scientific discovery to concrete industrial application. I am therefore expecting this conference to engage with the (French) competitiveness pact, and out of it to construct a strategic agenda for research. This agenda will enable us to establish our priorities in relation to the development of new technologies, it will also help clarify the precise roles of research partners, and it should enable effective knowledge transfer and address issues of intellectual property.’ (Ayrault 2012)

It is in declarations of this sort that we can see how education policies are being formulated in terms that correspond directly to the economic priorities to which they are subordinated; and how they are called upon to play a part in strategies designed to achieve an exit from crisis. The crisis, understood from this point of view, accentuates rather than generates the pressure on education to contribute to a programme of national recovery that conforms to national and European models of policy.

The new capitalist school and the transformation of the state into a ‘corporate state’

2008-2012 in France can be interpreted as a period in which the pace of neo-liberal reform accelerated. The reforms enacted by the Sarkozy government belonged to a rhythm of change that Naomi Klein has captured in her concept of ‘shock doctrine’. Sarkozy’s education programme was rapid and many-sided. It universalised the notion of primary school report books that focused on pupil skills, and thus endorsed the skill-based notions of education promoted by the European Commission – itself under the influence of the employers’ organisation, the ERT. (Hirtt 2005; del Rey 2009). The autonomy – in the neo-liberal sense – of the college and the lycée was underlined. School choice was promoted, in a situation where previously the carte scolaire had allocated students to their schools on the basis of residential criteria - a shift in the method of allocation which reinforced tendencies towards ghettoization. (ben Ayed 2009). The system of exam-based competitive recruitment of teachers was also revised.
At the same time, the economic crisis has led the government to reduce funding and cut budget deficits. This turn towards austerity was the most original feature of the Sarkozy presidency, as well as the most immediately tied to economic crisis. Budgetary rigour was translated into a freeze on salaries and a cut in the number of teachers: over 5 years, between 2008 and 2012, the number of teachers was cut by 80,000, nearly 10% of the primary and secondary workforce.

There has been no *marchandisation* of the school however, at least not in the strict sense of the term: private enterprise has not replaced state provision. What is new about the situation is rather something that is an authentic and central element of the neo-liberal brand: the state itself is becoming the main agent and promoter of a logic of competition. It is the state which constructs the various frameworks of evaluation and determines the system of indicators that they use. It is the state, also, that sets up a system of league tables of comparative performance and thus creates a quasi-market environment. In the absence of a real privatisation of the school, the state acts ‘as if’ a real market exists. It promotes and generalises norms of competition – competition between schools; competition involving both pupils and teachers within them. Competition of these sorts is supposed to possess the traditional virtue of increasing the effectiveness of teachers and schools.⁴

Comparisons with other parts of the public sector are illuminating at this point. In hospitals, in police stations, in every public institution, the principles of New Public Management are well embedded, something which has been demonstrated by the work of Cassin, Gori and Laval in

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⁴ The justifications for these policies have not changed. Sarkozy wrote in 2007 that ‘our schools have not been quick enough in drawing the lessons of the global battle for intelligence’ – lessons which required an increase in the ‘intellectual quality’ of pupils, so that they could better respond to the requirements of the world of work.’ *Lettre de mission addressée à Xavier Darcos, ministre de l’Education nationale 5th July 2007.*
Everywhere, we can see the work of a state that intends to put the entire ensemble of public services at the disposal of business, in the process representing them either as economic assets or ‘brakes’ on competitiveness. Through this process occurs the transformation of the state into a ‘strategic’ or a ‘corporate’ entity. The question of school reform should be understood within this wider perspective, of fundamental changes in the nature of the state itself - it is this general set of transformations that has given us ‘the new capitalist school.’

The proletarianisation of teachers and the loss of autonomy of the educational field

These ever more direct links between the school and economic life, and the concurrent subordination of the school to the needs of the economy, have serious consequences for the teaching profession – in terms of its activity and status – as well as for the institution of the school. In this context, two processes stand out.

The first relates to what we can call the proletarianisation of teachers. According to Marx, the analysis of capitalist exploitation cannot be reduced to a lament for the pauperisation of the working class. It also involves an attempt to understand a process through which workers are dispossessed of their own intellectual and productive powers, to the advantage of capital. In this context, Marx distinguished between the tool used by the worker in an earlier historical phase of production and, in his own time, the powers of the machine. The tool is something that the worker ‘animates’ and ‘makes into his [own] organ’ through his skill and strength. Its handling depends upon the worker’s ‘virtuosity.’ The machine, by contrast:

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5 As well as being the title of a book *L’Appel des appels* is the name of a collective which brings together professionals, often civil servants from ‘métiers du lien social’, who compare their respective situations and the transformation of their professions – in order to organise resistance against neo-liberalism’s destruction of existing social ties.
On not addressing the crisis: neo-liberal reform and the new capitalist school

‘possesses skill and strength in place of the worker, is itself the virtuoso, with a soul of its own in the mechanical laws acting through it … The worker’s activity, reduced to a mere abstraction of activity, is determined and regulated on all sides by the movement of the machinery, and not the opposite.’ (Marx 1858/1973: 693)

We can transpose the shift analysed by Marx to understand the work of teachers in contemporary society. The proletarianisation of teachers is a process that does not involve a simple worsening of the material conditions of work, nor does it relate primarily to the loss of social status that teachers have experienced, in ways that have been recognised for more than twenty years. Rather, teachers are being proletarianised in the sense that to an ever greater extent they are being dispossessed of the meaning and the content of their work, their ‘mission.’

The transition from virtuosity to dependence can be tracked through the rise of neo-liberal policy. Competitiveness has become the basis on which the education system is regulated, its guiding principle. Every institution – school or university – is forced to see itself as an enterprise that exists to serve its customers and is thus compelled to develop strategies that can give it a secure place within the educational market. Uniformly, within each institution, management techniques have sought to internalise competitive logics, so that each individual teacher is subject to responsibilisation – in the name of ‘autonomy’ – and evaluation – in the name of effectiveness - with each teacher needing to demonstrate their contribution to the ‘value added’ by their institution. Thus the specification of the content of educational programmes depends less and less on the internal logic of academic disciplines, of knowledge constituted and shared by scholarly community. Instead, this content is strongly related to the system of competences advanced by the employers’ organisation MEDEF and by the European Commission. This is a logic that reduces knowledge and subject disciplines to the status of more or less useful tools to support the employability of pupils and students.
Competition providing the basis of regulation, New Public Management shaping the internal organisation of each institution, economistic utilitarianism underpinning the design of programmes – these are now the great ‘machines’, to use Marx’s term, that dictate, more and more precisely, the character, ordering and meaning of teachers’ work. They create patterns of work that are ever more prescribed, ever more abstract, ever more controlled and evaluated on the basis of norms that are totally remote from the world of ideas, knowledge and culture. Accustomed over a long period to the role of an ‘artisan’, equipped with their own instruments of knowledge, possessing a recognised social status, teachers are now becoming proletarians, whose work is controlled by machines. They are workers in an occupational setting where knowledge and meaning are in the hands of capital, or more precisely of the corporate state. This condition is what we call the new capitalist school.

The second process has to do with the loss of autonomy of the educational field. Pierre Bourdieu developed a general theory of sociology that understood a social system as an entity organised around several different value structures, conceptualised as ‘fields’ (Bourdieu 1984). The theory suggests that societies are not entirely ordered around a single norm. Rather, different kinds of human activity – economic, intellectual, political, artistic – represent different modes of functioning, that rest on values and principles of hierarchical ordering which are distinct and irreducible: fields. Each field constructs institutions that are specific to itself. The autonomy of a particular field resides in its capacity to organise itself independently in relation to its own self-defined ends, and to secure general recognition of the validity of its principles and objectives.

The current transformation of schooling can be interpreted as a loss of self-defining capacity on the part of the school. Throughout its history, the school has fought to maintain its autonomy, against the Church, and against the power of the state. This autonomy has been tested around two related questions. The first was the school’s capacity to determine independently, at each level of the system, the content of educational
knowledge that it taught. The second was its capacity to identify and select appropriate knowledge, on the basis of its own values and objectives. Now, however, it is clear that the school is no longer capable of achieving acceptance of its right to cultural autonomy, and its own specific values and objectives. To an increasing extent, it has to provide proof of the efficacy of its own actions and to justify its forms of organisation in relation to values of profit and performance that are borrowed from the economic world rather than internally generated. This condition, based on justification external to the educational field, that Bourdieu called ‘heteronomy.’

The proletarianisation of teachers and the loss of autonomy of the educational field are not unrelated. It is important to keep in mind the nature of these transformations if we are to develop appropriate forms of resistance.

**Neo-liberal ‘rationality’**

It is undeniable that since 2008 understanding of the meaning of current education policy has grown stronger. Intellectuals will tend to believe that this is an effect of their efforts to analyse and decode national and European policies. It is also undeniable that in France, particularly, the legitimacy of mainstream education policy has diminished. One explanation for this is that policy has simply not produced the effects that it expected and announced. Educational inequalities, for instance, are to an ever greater extent correlated with inequalities of wealth. For a long period, children’s success or failure tended to be determined by the cultural capital of their parents. This has changed. Economic capital, in the form of parental income, has become in an ever-greater number of cases a determining factor (Careil 1998, Meuret et al 2000, Laval et al 2011). The ghettoization of some institutions, the precarity of a large section of the university workforce, the degree of inequality between institutions are developments whose interaction amplifies the effects of socio-economic inequality and in the process contradicts the claims of policy.
In this on-going situation, we need to return to the paradox set out at the beginning of the article: how can neo-liberal policies continue to prosper, even though their outcomes are negative and important sections of public opinion critique and contest them? In approaching this problem, we need to keep in mind an essential point: neo-liberalism as we have addressed it here cannot be reduced to an ideology. It exists in the form of what Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval call a ‘rationality’ (Dardot and Laval 2011). It is embedded in an ensemble of techniques and practices which, without issuing explicit orders or demands, bring into being certain types of conduct. In this way neo-liberalism creates a specific kind of environment, where the principle of competition is generalised, and also internalised at the level of the individual. It is within this framework that individuals construct a sense of their own interests. Caught up in a system of competition, they act in ways that contradict their own overt convictions, but that conform to their notion of their own interests. France is full of parents who are truly sorry for having had to choose the school that was best for their own children, full of academics who criticise the research assessment system but who sit on assessment panels, and full of teachers who really believe that all educational institutions should be equal but who prefer to work in the best primary schools, collèges or lycées.

It needs to be emphasised, therefore, that it is not thanks to the willing support of the population that neo-liberalism continues to work. It is not simply an ideology, in the sense of a set of ideas that would disappear if its believers ceased to believe. It is, rather, a technical-practical ensemble which structures representations and collective imaginaries, and gives rise to particular kinds of conduct. For this reason, neo-liberalism may be resilient enough to survive even when it seems to have been discredited. It may be an illusion to think that neo-liberalism will vanish from the scene, thanks only to the failure of the policies it has initiated.

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On not addressing the crisis: neo-liberal reform and the new capitalist school

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Chapter 2

The destruction of public education in Spain

Rosa Cañadell

We are witnessing, bewildered and terrified, the destruction of public education. Budget cuts mean financial constraints on the daily functioning of the schools, a freeze on new building, and increased class sizes. There are longer school hours for teachers, successive reductions in pay and freezing of exams for teacher promotion. Replacement teachers, who are in any case on temporary contracts with reduced hours and pay, are not provided for the first ten days of teacher absence, while thousands of teachers are thrown out of the system and condemned to unemployment. The draft of the new Education Act, the LOMCE (the Ley Orgánica de Mejora de la Calidad Educativa – the ‘Act to Improve the Quality of Education’) proposes standardised testing at the end of each school stage and lowering the age at which children are streamed by ability. It raises the grades needed to gain university scholarships and proposes stratospheric increases in university fees. In Catalunya the LOMCE entails a reduction in the educational role of the Catalan language. These are some of the strategies pursued by our governments, central and regional, that will definitively dismantle the public education which cost so much to build after 40 years of dictatorship and neglect by the state.

The excuse for all this is the famous ‘crisis’ and the alleged lack of public money, which prevents the State from fulfilling its obligation to its most vulnerable citizens: pupils, children and young people at a formative stage. But, as numerous voices have pointed out, this inability of the State
to carry out the constitutional mandate to provide public education for each and every citizen is not real. The money exists. The problem is how it is collected and how it is used. Thus, as has frequently been argued, what matters is how to confront this crisis and on what terms to come out of it, which is a political choice, not something imponderable that falls from the sky. The measures that have been applied since the beginning of this crisis do not serve as a means of exit, but are ideal for dismantling all public services, imposing extortion on workers and the lower classes and increasing the rate of profit for capital.

In addition, this neoliberal strategy is not just about reducing public funding for health, education, social services, etc. It also serves other objectives that are also part of the neoliberal doctrine, for which the crisis is the excuse, not the cause. Think-tanks funded by financial networks, alongside companies and political institutions, regard public services as an obstacle to their interests. Any instrument capable of compensating inequalities, which is free, universal and non-discriminatory and which at the same time provides a source of public employment, with guarantees to its workers, is accused, against all the evidence, of low productivity, high cost. It is presented as undynamic and obsolete. Over the past decades, the attacks of business lobbies have been unceasing. A stream of negative propaganda contrasts the public sector with the alleged "efficiency, effectiveness and productivity" of the private sector. This belief, often transmitted through media controlled by big business or private foundations and business schools, has tended to influence public opinion and has paved the way for the government to attack, weaken and eventually bring about the dismantling of the public sector.

As for education, the goal is not just a temporary reduction of the budget, but the implementation of a major paradigm shift that has been on the cards for some time and for which the crisis acts as a perfect excuse. Behind all the cuts, proposals and counterproposals, hides a discussion which is much deeper, much more ideological and much more fundamental for the future of education in general and for the future of
The destruction of public education in Spain

our society. But this debate is usually not visible as such, and despite its importance is not conducted openly. It is the issue which underlies specific debates around the crisis and the deficit, one of whose functions is precisely to mask discussion of the long-term restructuring that is going on.

Seven paradigm shifts - 1) Privatisation

The growth of privatisation is one of the basic elements of the new educational model. This takes the form of the consolidation and expansion of Spain’s dual network of schooling. There has been an increase in the number of centros concertados, the state-funded private schools. There has also been an increase in the phases of education that receive public funding in these private schools, as well as an increase in the amount of funding allocated to them. All this without providing clear and effective regulations for private schools, which receive public funding to fulfill the obligations that are supposed to bind them. These include free, non-selective admissions, no segregation of students by gender - there are subsidised schools run by Opus Dei which are single sex, which is against the law - admissions only if there are insufficient places in public schools, and secularism.

Despite these breaches, the subsidised schools continue to grow in number. They charge fees to parents, select their students and have a religious ethos. The result is a greater amount of public money controlled by private employers, greater social division (in terms of social class and cultural background) of students between public and private schools, as well as ideological control by the religious schools of a large number of our children and young people.

Alongside the growth of concertados there is increasing privatisation and outsourcing of all educational services: meals, transport, cleaning, assessment, training, etc. Some educational sectors have been taken over
and run by private companies: education 0-3 years, adult education, vocational training, education on-line, etc.

2) School Autonomy

Autonomy in education is nothing new. It has long been the practice of teachers who have sought new teaching strategies beyond the official guidelines to meet the needs of students, always diverse and distinct. Nor is the Proyecto de Centro, the school development plan, new - though it is now linked to the new autonomy. The LOGSE, the Education Act of 1990, placed an obligation on all schools to develop their own educational project and curricular project. In short, autonomy has long been practised in schools and school development plans were invented years ago.

Why is all this now being revived? What is new? What’s new is that behind the banner of autonomy there is a hidden aim - to implement the hierarchisation of relationships within the school, enhancing the role of the headteacher as manager of staff. Everything and everyone will be evaluated. Resource allocation will be linked to ‘better projects and better results’; staff careers (read working conditions) to student results. None of this solves the problems experienced in schools. What the teachers have been demanding is that the Administration provides the necessary resources to put into practice what has been collectively decided: sufficient teachers and professional staff to meet the new requirements (immigration, disruptive behaviour, integration, special needs), smaller class sizes in schools that educate many students with difficulties, enough time to coordinate and reflect together, appropriate training to meet the new challenges.

What our education authorities propose under the name of autonomy is very different from what the schools need. It implies a new conception of public education, with very adverse consequences. The first is the dismantling of the ‘public system’ understood as a whole. Instead, each
school is considered as a separate entity to be awarded various teaching resources according to the students’ results, which implies the creation of public schools of different categories: those which are lucky enough to have students with few difficulties will have better results and, therefore, more resources, which will make them more attractive to motivated families. Students with more opportunities and better resources will be concentrated in these schools. It is a process that will increase social fragmentation between public schools, adding to that already existing between public and subsidised private schools, making even more impossible the equal opportunities which every public service is required to offer.

Finally, it puts at risk a rounded education, understood as a combination of knowledge, norms and values: if what is going to determine teachers’ salaries and the reputation of the school is the profile of students’ results according to external examinations, all the work of education will end up focusing on preparing students for the tests. There is a danger, too, that it will reduce the motivation to work with students who have more difficulties, whether social, psychological or learning. Teaching these students requires a lot of effort, and a test-based system means such effort will not be rewarded. This could lead to the gradual neglect of the most vulnerable sector of students.

3) Authoritarian Management

In order to implement this new autonomy a new authoritarian management of the public schools is proposed. It aims to strengthen the authority and functions of the headteachers so they can make decisions about the management of the schools independent of the staff, the parents’ associations and the consejos escolares, the school councils or governing bodies. According to Antoni Verger of the Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona, the LOMCE is ‘notable for its marked managerialist approach to educational change, promoting models of school management that emulate the private sector’ (Verger 2013). It is
obvious that a management which acts like management in the private sector will move towards an authoritarian model that will eliminate the participation and the decision-making capacity of the educational community in the management of the school, making more difficult the teamwork which is precisely the best guarantee of the proper functioning of a school. Moving towards this system requires some changes in the current structure of the public school, which will definitively end its democratic management and also atomise resistance.

Decisions will be confined to the management, restricting participation by staff in both pedagogical and organisational decisions, as well as restricting parents’ input into discussions about the direction of the school. Given that education is a collective task in which participation and teamwork are essential, to place excessive power in the hands of one person does not guarantee any improvement in teaching in the classroom and can create many problems: arbitrariness, submission, imposition. All this means limiting the pedagogical and ideological pluralism of the teachers, which is one of the strengths of our public schools because educating for democracy and for exercising power is needed by the entire educational community. Conversely, trying to improve students' school performance through hierarchical organisation and individual incentives is a serious mistake and a wasted effort.

4) School Choice

‘Freedom’ in education, as recognised in our legislation, does not automatically imply the ‘right’, as is claimed, to choose a state-funded school. In fact, in a public service such as education, the right to choose should not exist. First because it is not possible for an Administration to ensure all individual preferences. Secondly, because public money should not be used to satisfy personal interests, but should serve to ensure equality of provision for all citizens. Thirdly, because the right to choose is the privilege only of those few who have the opportunity to choose, either because their money allows it (and they can afford a private school...
or a state-subsidised private school) or because their social situation allows them to have access to more information with which they can find appropriate strategies to enrol their children in the school of their choice. It is well established that, even on a level economic playing field, the strategies of choice are very different depending on cultural level and social conditions. Among the popular classes proximity and staying together with friends, neighbours and siblings take precedence, while among the better educated classes the priorities are school performance and the social level of the other students.

So choice is simply a strategy to place education within the market and, like everything that works according to the laws of the market, the negative effects always fall on the poorest classes. If this freedom of choice is also subsidised with public money (as it is with the centros concertados) we are faced with a system in which the state, rather than ensuring equality, clearly favours the most privileged social sector and leaves in the hands of private capital a double benefit: the selling of knowledge and the direct control of what should be learned by future workers.

To support the right to choose is clearly to support inequality in education. To have choice requires difference and this automatically implies the existence of some schools which are considered better and others considered worse. The goal of education that seeks equality of opportunity is exactly the opposite: the differences between schools should be minimal and the necessary resources (financial, human, training, etc.) should be allocated to the worst schools so they can improve. It is not competition between schools that will raise the quality of teaching but the opposite: it is the exchange of experiences, working together, the involvement of parents, and the necessary human and financial resources which can raise the level of the education system as a whole.
5) Examinations and Incentives

The examinations proposed in the draft of the LOMCE would have a highly punitive character for teachers and would end up being a series of obstacles for students. First, they would devalue the work that the teachers do and put into question the student assessments that every teacher carries out in their classroom. Secondly, they seek to link the salaries of teachers to student results. Finally, they aim to establish rankings among schools. Thus, those schools which, benefiting from the cultural composition of their students, get good results will be in demand, which will allow them to select their students based on ability, which in turn further affects their results. In contrast, those schools with a population marked by economic instability, social difficulties, and cultural gaps, will see their best students go in search of schools favoured by these ‘rankings’ and their situation will worsen to the point of falling into an educational well which is virtually impossible to get out of. The task must be to support by action or omission ghetto schools, which suffer many difficulties, in order to achieve equal opportunities. It is clear that exams are positive and necessary, but only as long as they test in order to improve, not to classify or to penalise.

6) Business in School

Another phenomenon is the growing penetration of the schools by business. It is an attempt at ideological colonisation by business elites seeking the educational domestication of their future workers and the sanitising of their problematic public image.

Catalunya has already launched the ‘Catalunya, School of Entrepreneurs programme’, which aims to instil an ‘entrepreneurial culture’ in all stages of education, from kindergarten to high school and vocational education and training. It seems almost a joke that, amid the overwhelming crisis, with unemployment continuing to grow, as companies, especially SMEs,
The destruction of public education in Spain

have to close, strangled by lack of credit and customers caused by increased poverty, our Minister of Education proposes that schools become a ‘factory of business’. We have the best-educated young generation in our history, but their opportunities are rationed. Many of our highly trained young people have to leave the country to find success. Why do we want to create more entrepreneurs if those we have, have no chance to succeed?

Another form of penetration by companies in non-university education is the agreements with foundations that depend on large companies or big banks. An example is ‘Empieza por Educar’ (‘Start by Educating’) which, in the public schools which join the programme, is being allowed to take over the direct teaching during school hours of students ‘in disadvantaged conditions and with learning difficulties.’

This agreement introduces into the schools teachers, trained by the foundation itself, who do not meet any of the requirements needed to teach in the public system. In addition, the foundation, which presents itself as a ‘nonprofit body,’ is directly related to banking and financial speculation and not to the world of education. Chaired by Patricia Botín (CEO of Santander UK) and backed by Banco Santander, La Caixa and other foundations and companies linked to the world of finance, its executives have extensive experience in business consulting, investment and financial products (some of dubious legality) - from Goldman Sachs to Coca Cola and Microsoft.

The foundation is a subsidiary of the multinational ‘Teach for All’ programme implanted under different names in 13 countries, from the United States to India, to Latin America, a programme whose participants include JP Morgan, Morgan Stanley and Deutsche Bank. Initiatives like these constitute a very important step towards the privatisation of public

1 See http://www.empiezaporeducar.org/
education, an open door for businesses or multinational corporations into our education system - a clearly biased ideological invasion.

7) Labour Flexibility

If the paradigmatic model is the private company, the status of teachers is an inconvenient hindrance. Indeed, for the competitive private company it is essential to have workers who are docile, multifaceted, flexible and faithful interpreters of management instructions, and nothing ensures that better than perpetual uncertainty about keeping the job.

There is thus a correlation that is not at all accidental. If the public school is put in question, as a public service regulated by the principle of public good and not by fluctuations in supply and demand, the same approach should be taken to the teaching force, as this forms the backbone of the institution we still call the ‘public school’. That is why the defence of the civil service status of public school teachers is not simply a trade union priority, let alone a ‘corporate demand,’ but the defence of a basic pillar of education as a public service.

Cuts and a new draft Education Act

With the crisis as an excuse, the cuts in education, like cuts in other public services, are extremely aggressive and seriously affect the most vulnerable sectors of the education community: non-tenured and substitute teachers, students and families with more difficulties and fewer economic resources. But also, as is repeatedly proved, these cuts are totally useless in overcoming the crisis or mitigating the deficit.

What in fact is being achieved is the dismantling of public education, which is the real purpose of this programme. This is the worst of times for the public school, with overcrowded classrooms, lessons without teachers because substitutes aren’t provided for the first ten days, thousands of teachers in the street without work, teachers having to work
more for less pay, parents who cannot afford day care, children without school meals and young people finding it difficult to pay the new rates of fees for universities and FE. Furthermore the cuts specifically target programmes which were aimed at students with major difficulties: for example, compensatory education, or the PROA programme for school support for pupils with learning difficulties.

It's not just the cuts, there is the already drafted new Education Bill (the LOMCE), presented in May 2013 to the Council of Ministers, with very worrying proposals, some extremely reactionary, such as the old state exams and the old separate and unelected status of headteachers, which take us back to pre-democratic times. The proposals seek a re-centralisation of, and greater control by the State over, the Autonomous Communities (the regional governments in Spain). They promote segregation among students and propose the complete disappearance of democracy in the functioning of the schools. The reduction by 10% of that part of the school curriculum which the Autonomous Communities decide, together with the new state exams, do not seem to be educational measures which will help reduce low achievement at school, rather they are an attempt by the Ministry to gain more control over the content of education.

The introduction of two separate exams at the end of the fourth year of secondary school, - different according to whether students have completed the end-of-school vocational courses or the more academic Bachillerato programmes - mean the creation of two distinct qualifications giving access to two routes of studies, which does not help at all with the need to open up the education system and make it easier to move between different post-compulsory options. It seems, rather, that the students who opt for the vocational exam will have much more difficulty in accessing a Bachillerato or a higher vocational course, increasing educational divisions. And to add another exam at the end of the Bachillerato, in addition to the tests that each university has the
power to impose, also involves increasing the difficulties of accessing university studies.

It also creates a new cycle of Basic Vocational Training, which students can enter at age 15 and which will not give the option of obtaining the Graduado, the qualification at the end of compulsory secondary education. This move opens the door to the marginalisation of students who have difficulties in learning, for whom the educational system has no answer except to choose the easy way of keeping them in compulsory education in a lower category and turning them out at age 16 without a realistic possibility of re-entry. Instead of allocating resources to support these students with more difficulties, there is a giant step back towards dismantling the universality and homogeneity of compulsory basic education to 16 years.

Finally, the Bill also removes local authorities’ power to “approve and evaluate the school’s educational and management plans, as well as its rules and functioning”. At the same time it increases the ‘professionalisation’ of the headteacher’s role and provides more resources to schools which propose improvement projects. This consolidates a totally hierarchical management model and stimulates the creation of public schools of different categories, aggravating competition within the system of public schools.

In short, an increasingly neoliberal and segregated model of education, less participatory and more authoritarian. A counter-reform which does not include educational policies against school failure or drop-out. Changes that, together with all the cuts, will only increase educational inequalities. To which it should be added that many of the proposals of this new Bill from the Partido Popular (the national governing party) are already in place in Catalunya, where the regional government, allegedly of the left, passed in 2009 the Llei d’Educació de Catalunya (LEC), guided entirely by neoliberal educational principles.
The destruction of public education in Spain

Struggles, Demonstrations and Resistance

Faced with this situation, teachers, parents, students and society in general have organised in opposition. There are endless protests and demonstrations, the length and breadth of the State, to collectively defend a public education of quality and the resources necessary to make it a reality. It is very important that the protests have extended beyond the working conditions of teachers and have been taken up by the public as the demand for education as a basic public service.

Protests this year, 2013, include:

- February 7: large demonstrations throughout the Spanish state during a ‘week of struggle’ against the cuts and the LOMCE organised by parents’ associations, students’ unions and teachers’ unions.
- April 22 to 28: week of struggle in Catalunya against the cuts, the LEC and the LOMCE, involving numerous primary and secondary schools, with a demonstration on the 28th.
- May 9: General strike in education throughout the Spanish state and large demonstrations against the cuts and the LOMCE.

A feature of all the mobilisations were the mareas, the tides or streams of participants wearing tee-shirts in different colours for each area of public services – green for education, except in Catalunya where the symbol of education is yellow.

In these times of fierce attacks on all social and labour rights, achieved through so many hard-won efforts, it is more important than ever to disseminate information and spread awareness of the significance of this attempt to destroy a model of public education which is democratic and
secular, with universal access and compensation for inequalities. We are gambling with the future of our society.

It is essential to reverse this situation and win back the right to an education which enables social equity and a human, technical and vocational education for all future citizens. It is imperative to give our youth all the tools necessary not only for their future employment and careers but also to be able to analyse, engage in and improve society.

And this requires waging this struggle in all areas. Inside the school it is important to restore democratic and participatory functioning, with joint decisions about pedagogic, organisational and working condition issues. We must revive the claustrum, the assemblies of teachers in a school, sharing information and with the power to take decisions, through collective struggle and passive disobedience if it is needed. It is also vital to revive solidarity among teachers as a group, both inside and outside the school, in place of the competitiveness that governments want to develop. It is important to defend the rights of all students and all teachers, especially the most vulnerable. Finally, it is important to strengthen the involvement of the entire school community: alongside the assemblies, we need discussions and joint mobilisations with students, parents, teachers and workers. It is also necessary to strengthen alliances between schools in the same local authority, district or locality, and between schools and other organisations: meetings, neighbourhood associations, parents.

It is important also to situate the demand for a particular model of public education within more global policies, both for the defence of all public services, and for the defence of the rights of all workers against job insecurity and the worsening of working conditions: general strikes, demonstrations like that of 15 May, trade union mobilisations. We must make it clear that our demand is not only for more resources, but also for an educational model that moves away from the neoliberal paradigm. It is
not enough to win the battle of resources, it is also necessary to win the battle of ideas.

Our struggle is therefore about achieving budgets that enable a proper functioning of the public schools and decent working conditions for teachers, but equally it is about the recovery of democratic organisation, the revaluing of the public school over private education, with the phasing out of state subsidies to private schools. It is about constructing an education that can provide a comprehensive academic, technical and ethical formation, that promotes cooperation and solidarity, the desire for study and culture, and the ability to critically analyse social phenomena and act to promote equity, non-discrimination, non-violence, respect for all cultures and concern for the environment.

We must never forget that school is not only a space for the transmission of the dominant ideology, but also a space of resistance and confrontation, and it reflects not only the values of hegemonic groups but also the practices of subordinate groups. Schools in general enjoy a certain relative autonomy, which allows them to cease being faithful servants of the dominant groups and work for alternative values, contents and objectives. We need to regain some of the principles that authors of critical pedagogy and resistance have left us (Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Stanley Aronowitz, Michael Apple, Paul Willis and Peter McLaren), and remember that ‘any genuine pedagogical practice requires a commitment to social transformation in solidarity with subordinated and marginalized groups’ (McLaren 1984: 198).

In short, we must not allow an education at the service of business to be put in place, much less allow companies to dictate what needs to be taught in the classroom. We must not allow goals and values to be implemented which so blatantly serve the neoliberal ideology which is precisely what has led to the current crisis, inequality, poverty and lack of democracy. It is vital that teachers regain their genuine authority and educate our children and young people in a system of values which helps
them to live with dignity and to improve an ever more unequal and unjust society.

For another world to be possible
Another education is necessary

Translated by Richard Hatcher

References


Chapter 3

Italian Education: Between Reform and Restoration

Rosalind Innes

‘Ci sono popoli, come ci sono individui, che hanno tratto forza di rinnovamento dalla nausea di se stessi, cioè del loro passato’.
(There are peoples, as there are individuals, who have drawn the strength for their revival from the very nausea for themselves and their past.)

Benedetto Croce, 1924

One of the most useful objectives of meetings like today’s\(^1\) lies in the identification of convergences and points of contact between different systems, as well as the underlying reasons for the continuing vast differences between them. From such analysis can emerge a sense of those weak points in the international policy chain where conflict and resistance have been generated. Examining these aspects together can also help us throw light on elements in our own more familiar educational practices that have previously perhaps been shadowed or unmarked.

Reflecting on the contradictions arising from the present phase of austerity and the generalized crisis of the euro-zone could also open a space to imagine what a mature or post neo-liberal European education system might look like in both the best and worst case scenarios. It could be that our collective reflection, rather than concentrating on the diverse ways in which

\(^{1}\) The Goldsmiths seminar of 17th May 2013.
European policies have been translated into practice in our specific countries (Jones et al 2008), will shift to a closer examination of emerging patterns within a new division of labour in what Beck has called a German Europe, as well as the impact of this new geo-political configuration on educational policies. The relationship between the massive emigration of young graduates from the restructured/restructuring countries of southern Europe to Germany in particular (Giaculli 2013, Die Spiegel 2013b), amidst continuing relentless cuts in education in the ‘South’ together with a return to apprenticeships at a younger age, certainly calls for an analysis of how Italian education policy is influenced by changing class composition not just in the ‘peninsula’ but in Europe as a whole.

However, the scope of this chapter is different and perhaps constitutes a necessary pre-condition for the analysis of this emerging phase. In Italy, EU educational policy has often been conflated with the English system, which has been held up as the model of neo-liberalism. However, as austerity differently devastates economic and geographical areas of Europe and at least the ‘adolescent’ phase of neo-liberalism seems to be over, the ways in which this conflation comes unstuck could provide elements for reflection on the extent to which the English model is specific to its Lockean heartland (Van der Pijl 2006) and perhaps to an era which is now past. Italy, in this perspective, has much to teach us.

The chapter attempts to identify some of the underlying factors which have contributed significantly to the general failure of the ‘neo-liberalization’ of Italian education over the past two decades and to explore their relationship to the policies of the current austerity paradigm in terms of essential continuity. The period of so-called ‘reform’ has always been at the same time a period of restoration, as most of the major critical theorists of neo-liberalism have long made clear (Harvey 2005, Castells 1996). Hence the title refers to a constant conceptual and temporal interplay between the two components, one as a function of the other, rather than to a linear process clearly demarcated by a period of ‘good’ modernizing reform followed by
one of ‘bad’ restoration as some discursive constructions would have it.\(^2\)

This does not mean that there is no empirical basis for the widespread perception of the present austerity measures as a more direct return to the limited opportunities and narrower access of the elitist period prior to the advent of mass education, as a ‘restoration’ of old privileges and old ways. However, the effective simplicity of such a perspective tends to detract from a closer examination of the nature and effects of the neo-liberal reforms and the extent to which such a result is compatible with their premises and policies from the outset. The contemporary framing of educational austerity measures as a kind of Troika-imposed emergency regression to be met with sacrifice and common endeavour forecloses closer examination of this continuity. At the same time, by evoking the past, it tends to displace analytical attention from the new emerging configuration whose European parameters could herald even greater and more complex forms of subordination than those experienced previously. Therefore, in this chapter, I attempt to sketch a broad outline of the path which has led to the present crisis, focusing on some of the unresolved structural elements which have

\(^2\) This perspective on the neo-liberal project is obviously particularly dear to those who have invested more in its ideological construction. In Italy this role has been played by the centre left (PD – Partito Democratico) including its major union, the CGIL. The right, on the other hand, after substantial collusion in the project but little ideological enthusiasm for it, now tends to construct the austerity phase in terms of a necessary return to concrete and practical issues, a back to basics approach, the elimination of useless frills, privileging strong work-based learning and younger apprenticeships. In a recent radio interview (Radio Anch’io, 17/7/2013) Maurizio Sacconi, a former minister in the Berlusconi government, castigated the whole reform project as well as a generation of ‘bad’ ‘distracted’ and ‘self-referential’ teachers and parents for its ‘educational disasters’, its encouragement of ‘competences completely out of touch with the world of work’, its encouragement of attendance in low-quality university courses created as a result of the infamous Italian university interpretation of the Bologna Process. He called for a change of direction in favour of the German dual system.
determined the failure of ‘liberal reforms’ and which will certainly play a significant role in determining the architecture of any new configuration.

To these ends I will first provide an extremely schematic overview of some of the salient features and problematic issues which have emerged over time in the Italy of neo-liberalism, focusing particularly on the recent period of economic crisis. The phase leading up to and including the present austerity, with its massive and unprecedented cuts in educational spending, has resulted in a harshening of pre-existing tendencies, including an acceleration of the processes of verticalization in governance and a considerable thinning of democratic and collegial work-place practices. The deep-rooted systemic crisis in which Italy finds itself has reached a kind of crossroads. Strong forces are pushing for its resolution through the usual litany of structural reforms which include the dismantling of social welfare and other residual aspects of the Fordist social contract and further deregulation of the labour market, as well as the completion of the technocratic neo-liberal European package in educational policy. The resistance to this process is largely in defensive mode or disarray and broad sectors of the population, pushed to breaking point by austerity, have completely lost faith in the existing political forces and their eternally unfulfilled promises. Following analysis of these tendencies, I will then look in greater detail at several of the enduring fault lines and sites of conflict and resistance in Italian education, in the context of the country’s wider structural crisis. Precarity and the related questions of evaluation/selection/merit/competition - which are at the centre of the present impasse – are my focus here.

The Context

In 1995, Italy had just emerged from the political turmoil of the Clean Hands campaign, which had followed in the wake of the 1989 geo-political revolution and a major economic recession and effectively eliminated an entire stratum of key figures in the ruling elite, including the main political parties. Berlusconi was but a newcomer to public politics. Berlusconismo was still in the incubation phase and although some symptoms had been
picked up by the most attentive observers, its ruinous long-term effects had not yet been registered. The Maastricht Treaty (1992) had been signed and the entire country was gearing up for entry into the EMU. Important labour market reforms had been passed, increasing flexibility, and the unions had committed to wage moderation in return for promises of increased future investment in innovation and improved redistribution policies, in what has been termed a two-stage program of political economy (Fumagalli 2013). History has shown this highly significant agreement to be just the first in a series of unfulfilled promises to the union movement and workers generally, made over the following 15 years, a phase which also coincided, with important consequences for our present concerns, with the increasing importance of cognitive and immaterial labor to value extraction processes world-wide. The second, investment-based, stage of reform never eventuated. Further deregulation followed. The long-term failure to invest in innovation and research, coupled with the fatal trend towards competition and growth based on lowering wages rather than increasing productivity meant that the economy faltered; demand for highly qualified labour has been and remains low (Tridico 2013). Even before the recession graduate unemployment was high and the queue of precarious teachers was growing fast (Bertagna 2009).

In this context, Massimo D’Alema - a central figure in Italian centre-left politics, as the Communist Party mutated into the Democratic Left and then the Democratic Party - wrote a text entitled A Normal Country. He envisaged a future where the torment of the specificity/ the difference / the laboratory /the pilot experience, the *ritardo storico* of Italy would finally be erased by the stabilizing confines and governance of the EU and a new era, governed by clear rules and regulations, could begin. His was not just a sort of forlorn hope, a message in a bottle as it were, but the broad outline of a political programme, a mission statement for the transformation of Italy into a serious normal neo-liberal state which included, for our purposes, the institution of a normal education system based on the English model. Although this latter project was pursued at formal policy level in a relatively bipartisan manner by both centre-left and right-wing governments over the next decade and a
half, structural impediments rooted deeply within Italian economic, cultural and educational traditions, as well as concerted resistance, noble and less noble, by varying actors, has led to its essential failure. What has occurred has been a long period of disarticulation of the existing order without the effective constitution of another; or perhaps it would be more accurate to register the emergence of a hybrid form of neo-liberalism, cynical, opportunist, always-already austere, the bottom line and without the spin.

In retrospect, from the current vantage-point of the most profound crisis Italy has experienced in the post-war period, including a crisis of representation, the seeds of a fatal distance from the real, destined to increase exponentially over the next 18 years, were already present in D’Alema’s text. His political party, notwithstanding its numerous re-inventions, continued to pursue his goal, with more enthusiasm than the right, who perhaps were more in tune with the deep popular sentiment and the hegemonic material practices of the country. But time has told that it was an empty dream. The re-shaping of the education system and the country as a whole, or perhaps more correctly as an assemblage of fragments, has panned out very differently from the initial neo-liberal blueprint. None of the anticipated and tirelessly invoked ‘liberal reforms’ heralded in the name of free-market competition and implying the elimination of entrenched practices of corruption, corporatism and clientelism, has been enacted successfully. Rather there has been a process of ineffectual liberalization and privatization, leading to the formation of private monopolies (CNEL 2007, in Tridico 2012) and systematic asset-stripping. Italy remains one of the least liberal countries in Europe according to the PCI (Perceived Corruption Index) and EFI (Economic Freedom Index) and it has extremely low levels of productivity, innovation, research (Tridico, 2012). It has an extensively

3 Liberal is used here in its classic economic sense. For an interesting critique of the theories of some of the main neo- liberal theorists of expansive austerity, including, in Italy, the so-called ‘Bocconi Boys’, see the article by Paul Krugman in the New York Review of Books (2013), bearing in mind that Mario Monti is an ex-president of the private Bocconi university in Milan.
deregulated labour market, and massive precarity, with less than 40% of the labor force being eligible for any kind of welfare (Fumagalli, 2013). Promises of flexibility, creativity and the knowledge economy, the so-called sexy side of neo-liberalism, which contributed so much to its incontestable success in countries like England but have now somewhat lost their powers of seduction even there, have never held any sway in Italy. From beginning to end, for the 99% it has been a rather dismal affair, a long slow sufferance which has also accentuated historic imbalances such as the north/south divide and consolidated the economic and to some extent the social control of the mafial’ndranghetacamorra across the country. This history has impacted significantly on the response to the crisis relative to that of other countries in the so-called PIIGS zone. These have had different neo-liberal trajectories, enjoyed at least brief periods of relative boom, and consequently different and more ‘indignant’ responses to austerity.

An example of this difference is the question of student debt, an issue which is becoming increasingly important in the crisis in neo-liberal countries characterized by high private debt and a consumer credit-based economy, but is relatively absent in Italy - data from the ECB family wealth survey show Italy has lowest private debt in Europe (ECB 2013). Student loans do not exist as such, although they were envisaged in the 2010 Gelmini law, and promoted by the technocratic Monti/Profumo duo – Prime Minister and Minister of Education between 2011 and 2013 - who branded them as empowering democratic forms of access, partly to make up for the recently announced 92% cuts in student scholarships, and partly to fulfill their commitment to the complete neo-liberal package. The OECD also recently reminded Italy of its duty in this regard (Going for Growth, 2013). However, in a context where soaring graduate unemployment and austerity have already decimated enrolment figures, taking them to pre-1970 levels, the

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4 I use this in a symbolic rather than empirical sense. The real figures for the winners and losers of this process in Italy, precisely because of its specific nature, may be different from the classic neo-liberal model to which this slogan refers.
lowest in Europe, the promise of personal debt in return for what is perceived as a very tenuous stake in future prosperity is unlikely to be received as a convincing solution (Technica della scuola 2013). On the contrary, together with its unspoken other, its ugly flip side, higher university fees, it is likely to be seen as the final straw, or the worst of both worlds. This, as we will see, is how neo-liberal policies pan out generally when essential conditions for their success are absent and antithetic others are not eliminated.

Moreover, the acceleration in the erosion of family savings, recently identified by some observers as a significant target of the austerity program (Die Spiegel 2013a), can be partially explained by the already high costs incurred by families in maintaining students, particularly the great many enrolled in universities distant from their homes. Many of the so-called university towns including Bologna, Siena, and Perugia are economically dependent on their student populations, who pay exorbitant and undeclared rents. Rents in turn often stand in for the absence of welfare in helping people survive and make ends meet. They also aid the growth of a complicit consensus regarding tax evasion and illicit practices generally. That these latter elements constitute at conservative estimates more than 30% of the GDP (Bank of Italy 2012, in Veltri 2012) must give pause in interpreting any economic and social data in Italy as well as constituting grounds for serious consideration in the drawing up of new forms of welfare, based on a more universalistic framework. As one analyst of these processes has written, ‘Fiscal evasion and elusion…play an indirect and unrecognized role in social stability along the same lines as that carried out by criminal organizations within local communities: income redistribution and essential services in return for loyalty, social cohesion and control of excess’ (Fumagalli, 2013).

As far as normalcy is concerned, it quickly became the custom for politicians and other leaders to gesture towards this regrettably impossible ideal - and simultaneously to foreclose further interrogation of an extraordinarily variegated range of issues by prefacing their futile denunciations by phrases like this: ‘in a normal country, a minister
accused/convicted of collusion with the mafia would resign’; ‘in a normal country 30% tax evasion would not be tolerated’; or ‘in a normal country 75% rates of student cheating in National Tests would tend to compromise the reliability of the results.’ The obvious unstated corollary, of course, was that Italy ISN’T a normal country - so the minister doesn’t resign, tax evasion continues with impunity, cheating is un-interrogated or utilized to confirm existing stereotypes; further discussion is futile and a kind of fatalistic anormalcy reigns.

This process has been documented elsewhere and the broad framework of a ‘blocked’ Italy, familiar to scholars, has become well-known also to the general public through films such as *Gomorrah* and more recently Bill Emmott’s *Girlfriend in a Coma*. Indeed, the failure of the wider ambition of setting Italy on the road to normalcy has become a kind of public spectacle across Europe and the world signified by the ‘bio-politically grotesque’ (Chiesa & Toscano 2009) actions of Berlusconi, while the pathetic ineptitude of the centre-left and the recent devastating austerity program carried out by Monti and his unappealing team of bankers and professors from largely private universities constitute the complementary sub-text. Most explanations for the eternally blocked nature of Italian society draw on Tommaso de Lampedusa’s famous statement ‘changing everything so everything remains the same’ which brilliantly condenses the underlying

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5 In the presentation of the latest (2013) Invalsi test results much was made of the success of new improved anti-cheating strategies which were said to have led to a reduction in cheating in the north of Italy, though it remained a serious problem in the south in the areas correlated with widespread criminal activity’. This latter comment seems a little out of date and perhaps somewhat gratuitously ideological in the light of widespread knowledge of the ‘financial’ turn in many mafia organizations and their attention to the more lucrative areas in the north of the country as well as Germany and Spain. Moreover, the data is strongly contrasted by online surveys which estimate nationally uniform cheating in Invalsi tests, including ‘help’ by teachers, as around 75 %. (*Invalsi. Copioni al Sud. Twitter e Facebook non concordano, differenze poco significative. Al Nord I prof aiutano di più* in OrizzonteScuola.it 17(07/13))
mechanism of power – the work of a complex and intricate web of tightly connected corporatist groups engaged in the defence of their own interests, with none willing to concede an inch in the direction of the collective good, leading to a constant jostling of position and expenditure of energy while everyone essentially remains in the same place. A modern version is provided by a prominent sociologist in these terms: ‘Beyond social, historical and political explanations... the most useful framework to understand the Italian situation is that of the power network, where power is reduced to an elite which is only capable of extending its own interests at the cost of those of the nation’ (Carboni 2007).

However, perhaps a further explanation of the specifics of the Italian crisis lies in the dynamics of its relationship to the EU. Many countries have invoked the imperative of Europe to push through reforms which are unpalatable domestically, together with often unveiled criticism of the high-handed top-down practices of the bureaucrats in Brussels, to shield themselves from local electoral fall-out. If Italy adds something to this pattern of behaviour, it is the peculiar mixture of formal acquiescence and unperturbed pursuance of dominant practices locally, which recalls the old adage ‘francia o spagna, basta che se magna,’ 6 a strategy along with its corollary, the art of ‘arrangiarsi’, used historically by inhabitants of the Italian peninsula to adapt to and survive foreign rule. The failure of Berlusconismo7 to respond adequately to the crisis of the eurozone by rising above amply-documented levels of decadence and self-interest, meant that the powers that be lost patience and decided on a policy of direct governance

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6 The literal meaning of this is that it is irrelevant who rules, France or Spain. The important thing is that we manage to survive to eat.
7 Berlusconismo includes of course not just the individual himself, his party (Il Popolo della Libertà – PDL), and his peculiar form of mediatic populism, but also its specular opposite and complement, the anti-Berlusconi opposition, headed by the PD, (what Beppe Grillo derisively terms PDL and PD-minus-L, a kind of tweedledee/tweedledum duo).
in the form of the Monti Group.\textsuperscript{8} When his Troika-driven austerity program was interrupted by Berlusconi’s decision to withdraw support, the country returned to the polls, with the eventual result a tenuous ‘emergency’ alliance between the two major parties somewhat similar to the Greek situation, with a formally pro-Europe platform surrounded by discontent, discourses of suspension of democracy and an evident lack of serious intention on the part of the major players to engage in real co-operation. In a context where many Italians were too disgusted to vote at all and the highest single party vote went to the comedian Grillo’s rebellious 5 Star movement, the exclusion of the latter from this unprecedented bipartisan government has also been disquieting. It remains to be seen if the unholy alliance will be capable of carrying out the policies imposed by the EU and the ECB, including the educational reforms which are the subject of this paper, or whether, as appears to be the case, it will merely be another depressing episode in a tired soap opera which has long exhausted its natural screen life, and morphed into a surreal parody of itself, with its eternal protagonists taking on increasingly decadent and grotesque roles.

The Current Crisis

As we have seen, the economic crisis of 2009 was the culmination of a long process of decline rather than a bolt from the blue, or a sudden break down in a well-oiled machine, as it may have been experienced elsewhere. Current comparative data confirm this reading. The persistent historical lags between Italy and its comparators, around indicators such as numbers of graduates and lack of social mobility, have not improved but worsened in recent years, leading the Treellle (2012) to suggest that this latter inversion indicates an incapacity of the system to break with the determining influence of family

\textsuperscript{8} Although the origins of the ECB letter to the Berlusconi government are open to discussion, it is widely held that lack of faith in his government’s capacity to fulfill the programme outlined there led to his downfall and replacement by Monti. The English version, \textit{Letter of the European Central Bank to Silvio Berlusconi} by Jean-Claude Trichet, Mario Draghi, can be found on voltairenet.org 5/8/2011
origins. Inequality also remains alarmingly high, particularly for a country not considered to be a strong market economy such as the US. Spending on education is currently the lowest in Europe, except for Greece, yet further cuts have been announced. The new education minister has warned that choices will have to be made within current budgets, which means that investments in one sector of education will have to be balanced by cuts in others (La Tecnica della Scuola 2013).

Although backed up and supported by numerous other measures and interventions regarding public service workers generally, the Gelmini law 2010 undoubtedly was and remains the symbol of the ‘counter-reform’, the final devastation of public education in the popular imagination. However, despite the fact that it managed to alienate almost everyone it touched - teachers, students, researchers, parents, administrative staff, historians and geographers, organizations for the disabled, to mention just some of them - it has not been challenged by the Monti or Letta governments. Indeed, along with the frontal attack on the union movement carried out by Marchionne, Monti applauded it as one of the Berlusconi government’s greatest achievements and a model for future reform (Monti 2011). Developed within the familiar formula of the ‘more with less’ package, it involved rationalization of resources, reduction of and greater selection in spending, and greater efficiency and competitiveness. Needless to say, not all of its proposals - including pilot programs of merit pay, which were heralded with great acclaim in tandem with similar measures within the public service - had sufficient financial cover to be implemented and some were scrapped. Its main results can be summarized as follows:

9 A succession of governments over the last decade has offered differing ideological takes on neo-liberal reform. Nonetheless, there has been a more or less total identity of position on actual policy and cuts, in a kind of good cop /bad cop routine in relation to different interlocutors. http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2013/09/02/scuola-precari-scendono-in-piazza-siamo-esasperati-letta-come-gelmini/699438/
Management of Educational Workers and Cuts

- verticalization in governance, with increased powers for head teachers, often over a number of institutes owing to processes of amalgamation;
- reduced democracy and role of collective agency within the workplace;
- increase in the utilization of agencies external to education, linked particularly to work placement and apprenticeships and local enterprise initiatives;
- increased utilization of businesses in direct educational roles especially for technical and professional students;
- frozen salaries, with a block on increments continuing until 2015;
- non-replacement of teachers retiring, with the loss over 5 years of 81,614 teachers against an increase of 90,900 students;
- loss of 17.5% of ATA positions (administrative, technical and auxiliary staff).

Student educational experience

- bigger classes;
- reduction in welfare regarding meals and transport, lack of essential materials and IT tools leading to reliance on parents for everyday items;
- reduction in class time, especially for technical and professional institutes with a modular program, favoring earlier exits from school on 2+2+1 basis (whereby only those seeking entry into higher education would continue for the final year);
- reduction in choice of texts, based on agreements with publishers limiting new editions and making compulsory the use of accompanying software - which not all schools or families are equipped for;
- impoverished curricula, with important subjects such as history and geography being reduced or eliminated and hundreds of experimental courses, projects and options being cancelled completely, leading to only 20 basic curriculum possibilities, equal and compulsory across the nation;
- reduced flexibility in timetables and thus a limited range of choice;
impoverished quality in primary schools with the return of a single teacher for all subjects, instead of the previous modular system with 3 teachers working over 2 classes;
• an initial reduction in specialized teaching staff for students with learning problems and physical disabilities. This was corrected by intervention of the Constitutional Court, but the use of precari to cover staffing difficulties has increased educational problems;
• 30% reduction in laboratory activities;
• introduction of national tests – implemented by Invalsi, the national institute for the evaluation of education and training - for final middle school exams in Maths and Italian;
• for technical and professional institutes, substantial reduction (up to a third) in class time in major subjects;
• more stringent conditions for student progress through the school, including automatic failure for less than 5 out of 10 for behaviour.

Evaluation : Why are the stakes so high?

In parallel with reforms of this sort, the introduction of mechanisms of school and student evaluation has become a preoccupation of governments. The establishment of a form of nation-wide objective evaluation of student performance, common to most European schools and regarded as essential for data collection of all kinds, has been envisaged in Italy since 1999. However, its history has been tortuous to say the least 10 and no solid system is yet in place. Apart from being a kind of bottom line for an effective neo-liberal system, it would seem that this Invalsi project has taken on symbolic dimensions that go far beyond its immediate confines.

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10 See for example ‘L’evoluzione normative riguardante l’invalsi in ‘L’INVALSI e la valutazione del sistema scolastico italiano’ (Pileggi 2008) which chronicles in great detail the essential failure of a ‘15 year attempt’ to establish a functioning system.
Following Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, we could say that the social engineering it implies is emblematic of a society struggling with the transition from the dominance of disciplining practices to those of control. Drawing a straight line in curved space or squaring the circle are more prosaic metaphors which come to mind in attempting to convey the difficulties involved in such a project in Italy. I will try to unpack some of the issues involved in this contested and implausible process.

We can begin by trying to understand the role of evaluation in the transition from school to university. The Gelmini law was perhaps even more crucial for its transformative impact on the university system. Higher education is outside the brief of this paper, but we can note that Gelmini’s effects there - sharp verticalization, unprecedented forms of national evaluation, new recruitment procedures, increasing precarity, reduction in number of courses, rationalization of management leading to amalgamation and possible closure of a number of universities – are massive. The effects are felt outside the university. As well as creating the conditions for forms of privatization, fee increases and tighter enrollment policies obviously have an important impact on the school system and student choices and possibilities.

For our purposes, one of the most important of these concerns is the increasingly direct and articulated relationship between the final school leaving exam and university entrance (De Nicolao 2013). 11 If this is ever

11 Until 2013 there had been no direct relationship between the two. ‘Mass access’ remains the rhetoric and to some extent the reality. But with increasing numbers of faculties devising their own entry exams for quota systems - which are often contested in the streets and courts with varying degrees of success - this is the first year where final school exam results were to have been included (to a marginal extent) in the calculation of scores in these entry exams. Given the wide variation between schools and high levels of subjectivity inherent in the present locally-based system these results had never before been taken into consideration by the universities. The exam in its present form is obviously inadequate for this task and students immediately began to protest about the injustice of its inclusion this year. The education minister, commenting on the
enacted as planned it will lead almost inevitably to the replacement of the existing final state school examination by an Invalsi-type external exam, with enormous consequences at all levels of the present educational architecture and ethos.

It would mean a fundamental change in the nature of selection processes. Up till now these have mainly taken place outside the formal apparatuses at difficulty of inserting this component into university entrance scores remarked ‘it is obviously easier to obtain higher marks in some schools than others ‘ (Il Messaggero, 29/08/13 ). Random cheating is already endemic across the board and it is destined to increase in a context where the stakes are much higher and concern life chances. However, the problems are also structural. Students are graded according to the parameters of a particular type of school and much less is expected of students in less academic schools, with consequently higher results and thus better chances of entering coveted faculties such as medicine. The present experiment also led to polemic over the higher results achieved by southern students in the school leaving exam, in contrast to those obtained in the Invalsi tests. The final outcome of this attempt to include school scores was however, disastrous. A decree law abolished the policy on the day when the university entrance tests were taking place, to the glee of its antagonists and to the disappointment of those who would have benefited and are now taking legal action against its abolition. (Since this article was completed, the story has taken another twist. Legal action was successful: for this year only, marks gained in final school examinations can now be counted towards university entrance exams. Those who were initially excluded from gaining from the injustice can now benefit from it. ‘Torna il bonus maturità ma solo per quest'anno’ La Stampa 26th October 2013.)

12 Here, I refer broadly to the post -68 conquests which guaranteed mass access to all university courses, regardless of the mark obtained in the final leaving school certificate examination, or the nature of the courses undertaken to obtain it. Previously, only those with a classical education could enrol at university. However, this significant cultural revolution did not impinge greatly on the content , the baronial control, or the transmission format of tertiary education , which due to lack of funds , increased numbers and broad indifference went into a general decline, leading to the sharp decrease in quality registered in the
the same time as such apparatuses have continued to formally uphold the abstract promises and conquests of post-68 mass access. It is this tightening of the screw on these formal though to some extent already emptied rights, while the dominant dynamics of clientelism and consequently extremely low application of the Bologna process. Moreover, the historic conquest of mass access did not greatly disturb the wider mechanisms governing the society at large. In practice, this meant that whilst extremely important, these formal guarantees alone have proven to be very limited in effecting real changes in social mobility; students and families have also engaged in a kind of self-selection determined by personal assessment of one’s ‘chances’ in a given field. For instance, if a student doesn’t have relatives with a pharmacy it is probably not worth entertaining the study of this discipline, given the tight corporatist monopoly on licenses for this sector. The choice of faculty and university, whilst formally including all options, has thus been based on personal factors in a clientelist labour market rather than on institutionalized competitive or meritocratic criteria. What now appears as an attempt to curtail even this formal right of entry to any chosen course in a substantially unchanged wider playing-field where success still depends on who you know rather than what you know is seen as a return to a pre-68 past. Another related consequence of uncontrolled mass access in this context is lack of management in numbers of graduates in key fields such as law and architecture, with consequent massive unemployment in these areas. Teaching likewise has been affected, with exorbitant numbers of precari amongst the teaching profession, due also, until recently, to the lack of any specific teacher training schemes which usually imply some sort of planning based on expected requirements. Entry to the public administration teaching profession is based on a specific degree and a public concorso (competition). The failure of this unwieldy method (with its own logic and momentum which is totally unrelated to changing requirements in numbers of teaching staff) to cope with the huge demand for teachers in the 1970s led to the extension and exacerbation of the precari problem which has never been resolved. Instead it has been met with such a complex history of legislative patching up (accompanied by endless lengthy court cases at every step on the part of those excluded from the latest alternative measure) as to deny comprehension to even the most determined.
Rosalind Innes

social mobility are left untouched, that is perceived as intolerable by many and explains at least partially the resistance to evaluation.

It is perhaps intuitively obvious that in the country described above - where the economic programme of neo-liberalism has meant an erosion of the conquests of the Fordist era, and widespread impoverishment and precarity; where invoked reforms of oligarchic practices have been unsuccessful due to the efficacy of potent lobbies; and where practices of meritocratic access in any field are virtually unknown - that attempts to introduce forms of external objective evaluation in schools have been met with widespread hostility, scepticism and opposition. Such evaluation simply has little credibility in this context and many players, including teachers, students and parents are profoundly suspicious, seeing its role as yet another and perhaps crucial way of transforming the basis of public education towards more selective, discriminating and anti-pedagogical practices. The forms of this resistance range from the historic defeat of the slipshod attempt at the imposition of a form of merit pay in 2000 which brought about the fall of the education minister, Luigi Berlinguer, to the strikes of 2013 against the administration of the Invalsi tests. They include the participation of thousands of teachers in a vast range of oppositional practices, from boycotts and refusal to participate in the administration of tests, to conferences, publications and petitions signed by many prominent intellectuals including Luciano Canfora, an internationally acclaimed classicist. Canfora, in a May 2013 interview declared:

‘The real problem lies in the attempt to transform citizens into the subjected, which is typical of authoritarian regimes. If students are deprived, in their most formative years, of the habits of critical thinking, the capacity to think historically and make distinctions, they are transformed into nothing more than parrots with mnemonic capacities – i.e subjected and not political subjects. Invalsi and all the other quizzes which surround us are instruments to obtain this extremely negative result.’ (Canfora 2013)
In 2002 the Treelle, perhaps the most significant local think-tank on education, involving representatives of various elites, major political parties and the Confindustria, stated, ‘In Italy, differently from other European countries there is still no efficient evaluation system for the objective assessment of educational results and quality’. The report went on to describe current teaching practice as being too ‘private and discreet’ with teachers nurturing a ‘pronounced diffidence’ towards systems with an explicit recognition of merit and strong leadership roles. It concluded that any attempt to impose a European-type evaluation system would meet with corporatist resistance and a total lack of a ‘culture of evaluation’ (Treelle 2002). The Eurydice report (2008) on autonomy in schools also registers Italy as still being ‘on the periphery’ in terms of evaluation, the only European country with no external system of evaluation. In 2012 the Treelle found that Italy ‘is still in the initial stage of a serious culture of evaluation’ and that the educational debate was still ‘too national, overly tied to an outdated tradition which is too provincial to deal with current challenges’ (Treelle 2013). It also warned that reliable results could only be obtained by external agents and noted that even though efforts had been made to control manipulation of results, the evident north/south disparity shown in the externally-controlled PIRLS survey, was significantly absent from the Invalsi results. The latter in contrast with the international data, also showed better results for private schools compared to state schools, suggesting that the goal of objective data collection is a somewhat complicated agenda.

Constant admonitions of this nature and increasing external pressure to conform to European norms have led to a greater determination to implement a system of external evaluation. Inroads are being made here, with the national system Invalsi gradually being implemented in the face of continuing considerable resistance in the form of strikes and boycotts. It is interesting in this context to note that along with the grassroots unions and more militant sectors, recently there has also been significant criticism from the mainstream CGIL, who label the current attempts to impose the Invalsi system as ‘authoritarian’ and ‘threatening’, and from independent researchers such as Vertecchi and Israel, who criticise the improvised nature
of this system. In the eyes of these authoritative and by no means anti-European observers, what is presented as the necessity of external evaluation is better read as an attempt to introduce a formal, paper mechanism that can avoid a further bad showing - an ‘exhibition of efficiency’, as Vertecchi (2013) caustically puts it - within the formidable apparatus of governance which is the European educational data system (Lawn 2007). This ambition seems to have outweighed any attempt at serious reflection regarding the mechanism’s real effectiveness, reliability and overall viability. As Vertecchi (2013) pointed out, the potentially positive systemic effects of a well-prepared, tailor-made evaluation system have been ignored in the present model, which is clearly based on attempts to condition teachers and selectively cut costs. Once again, it would seem that, rather than drawing on experience from abroad to design a local model that could avoid the documented failures inherent in many existing systems, the choice has been to enact a reductive and mortifying policy aimed at achieving determinate and often undeclared results in the name of finally aligning Italy with EU requirements. The full Invalsi/Anvur package would lead to further reductions in university enrolments, particularly in courses that ‘count’, and an epochal re-making of education along class lines. Moreover, it is by no means certain that the substantial funds required for this project are available. If corners were to be cut, as feared by many, the whole project would be a ‘mortification’ of the system, according to its director recently (Italia Oggi, 12/03/13). (Though further staff cuts seem difficult as already 80% of Invalsi workers are precarious researchers engaged in on-going industrial action.)

**Pedagogy and Privatization**

The proposal to link the Invalsi results to teacher assessment and selective pay differentials, as well as to condition school funding, made by the Berlusconi government in 2009 but not, as yet, approved, has only served to

13 ANVUR is the state organisation charged with evaluating universities and research.
increase widespread distrust regarding evaluation’s real objectives. Moreover, while some of the diffidence towards external forms of evaluation in a context of such fundamental ambiguity about their aims undoubtedly touches corporatist chords within the teaching body, it would appear that this general scepticism is well founded.¹⁴ However, opposition to Invalsi, whilst nurtured to a large extent by this deep-rooted suspicion, has most often been expressed in terms of its detrimental effect on the quality of education. It has been seen as having a devastating wash-back effect on teaching practices, contributing substantially to widespread dumbing-down and the reduction of critical capacities. Basically, in line with international critical literature, it is viewed as an instrument in the creation of a malleable, conformist mentality compatible with the needs of an obedient workforce trained to solve problems within the box but not pose questions outside it. I think the profoundly different pedagogical traditions of Italy, including the significant virtual absence of progressive education with its intricate relationship to neoliberal cultural forms, provide one important factor in rendering this a fairly mainstream opinion. The prevalence of a high culture or a classical approach in Italian education, which even in its present wearied and lacklustre form contributes to the widespread conviction of the need for ‘critical thinking’, is another and has greatly influenced the scepticism regarding the function, impact and utility of the cardinal forms of objective, measured, external evaluation of both teachers and students characteristic of the English neoliberal matrix but totally extraneous to the Italian tradition. Here, the centrality of oral expression and oral examinations at both school and university levels, also contributes to a downplaying of the importance of

¹⁴ Further evidence for this scepticism was provided in the recent Decree Law of the Letta government (September 2013) which effectively calls for the ‘punishment’ in the form of compulsory unpaid training of teachers who have students with low Invalsi scores. The blatant injustice of such a measure has been decried by all and sundry, including all the unions and most commentators and it is unlikely to survive. However it does give an idea of the confusion which reigns in this field.
written ‘tests’ and would be a major factor impeding a complete turn to an *Invalsi*-type final leaving examination.

However, the classical, critical principles so dear to opponents of an often caricatured neo-liberal model\(^1\) have not been adapted adequately over time to meet changing conditions and to cater to the needs of all students: many either fail or drop out of the system (*Treeille* 2012). Others find ways around the system’s demands, through formal attendance in private schools which are often merely a means of obtaining a diploma through payment and thus function as an important safety net for the system and a way of coping with potential discontent. These *diplomifici* not only serve as alternative forms of inclusion when the state system fails but are also lucrative businesses. They could act as a braking lobby against a functioning evaluation system which would effectively cancel their existence. On the other hand, however, were a system of evaluation such as *Invalsi* to be extended further, alongside the maintenance of the current system of peaceful co-existence, with the private sector providing an essential back-up for state schooling, then despite the diffusion of illicit practices, attendance at private schools would no doubt increase, as would profits. In this sense, proposals to institute serious systems of evaluation which are not accompanied by serious policies of controls over these notorious bodies can only be met with diffidence. Moreover, although these schools are popularly seen as options for the ‘rich and lazy’, there is also an element in this cynical appropriation of accreditation which somehow speaks a truth about a society which has been rendered culturally homogenous more by wider social and symbolic

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\(^1\) The critique of the American neo-liberal education model offered by theorists such as Henry Giroux and Dick Hedges is of immense value both in its own context and in more general terms. However, as is often the case in Italy, when this critique is merely transposed without adequate attention to the specificity of the local situation, whilst being formally persuasive, it does not ‘ring true’ for the conditions at hand and thus is curiously specular to the ideology of the propagandists of neo liberalism… neither really address the ‘native’ reality.
processes and mechanisms, social networks and the media, (Beradi 2004: Giroux 2013) than by a school system which is seemingly unable to interpellate many of its students. Italy has the highest level of inequality and the lowest level of social mobility in Europe (Treellle 2012) and it could be argued that those utilizing these private schools have perhaps a clearer perception of the values of this society and the nature of the playing field than those who accept the false meritocratic rhetoric at face value and remain excluded and suffering in a sentiment resembling Wendy Brown’s ‘wounded attachment’ (Barchiesi 2012) to outdated ideals. Private schools also have a significant stake in maintaining high levels of precarity, as their staff are often unpaid (legally and illegally), working for free, to obtain points along the Kafkesque road to full time employment. Their prevalence in the south, (including a veritable hub in the area of Caserta, geographically close to the stronghold of the camorra depicted in Saviano’s famous text and film, where the national figures of 4 to 1 in favour of public schools are reversed, with a 2 to 1 majority for private institutions) together with the relative lack of interest exhibited by private ‘clean’ capital in educational projects, raises disturbing questions about the origins and direction of privatization in Italian education .This does not mean, of course, that serious private schools do not exist as an option, especially for pre–school children, but these still concern a relatively small percentage of students, along with Germany, the lowest in Europe.

**Precarity**

Precarity is at the centre of the Italian crisis. It is the term used to name a generation which is locked into a state of always/already contingency, without a future and not much of a present when the lack of a system of universal welfare presents the alternatives of family dependency (if this is an option) or underpaid and often illegal labor if it is not. It also describes the economic and social insecurity of many workers of all ages and qualifications, both before the economic crisis and, now, in even greater numbers. It has become symptomatic of an entire social order in decomposition. ‘Precarity’, a contemporary buzz word, is also a theoretical
minefield (Standing 2011) seemingly empirically obvious but actually subject to constant slippage according to context, one of those slippery terms like ‘ideology’ and ‘culture’ in other eras, signifying at times one specific aspect and at others very different combinations of an infinitely variegated set of component parts - feminine, migrant, affective, cognitive, immaterial, etc. For example, in the Italian situation many *precarì* are highly educated and engage in cognitive labor. They thus have much greater cultural capital than the members of the English precariat, as designated by the Bourdieu-inspired categories of social, economic and cultural capital devised by the authors of the recent Great English Class Survey (Savage and Devine 2013). The particular version of the concept of precarity developed within post-autonomist theory in Italy, France and elsewhere is to my mind the most theoretically rich; it is also perhaps more familiar to foreign academics. But the experience and struggles of many precarious workers, particularly teachers in this context, are largely lived within the confines of a narrower notion of precarity which is the flip-side of the guaranteed, stable, permanent employment of the Fordist era, constantly invoking but substantially eluding its more fortunate counterpart. The origins of the autonomist reading of precarity lie in the early autonomist struggles and texts regarding the *emarginati* in the 70s which had their radical impulse in a contrast not only with the suffocating discipline of Fordist labour but also with the workist ethic of the Italian Communist Party. This fundamental double-edged critique has persisted, leading to the development of very different theories and politics around precarity which go beyond the public/private dichotomy; while outside the scope of this article, they need to be

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16 See the work of Hardt and Negri, particularly *Commonwealth* (2009). The semantic/conceptual confusion around the question of precarity has a parallel in a similar confusion which has been generated around the concept of the ‘common’. This concept is at the centre of their discourse and is also a key element in many local and territorial struggles across the country. The widespread propagandistic embrace of the term common or ‘bene comune’ by a vast range of actors, including the PD/CGIL, has led, on one level, to an emptying of its theoretical content, as just about everything has now been
distinguished to avoid confusion with present uses of the term. The practice of the main trade unions lies instead, within the Fordist /workist framework, and has until very recently, constructed the notion of precarity as a temporary emergency, to be overcome by the usual means of complex mediation and governance, where the union role has been central. This is a very different perspective from seeing it as characteristic of capitalism generally, interrupted only by the Fordist interlude, as many within the operaista school now suggest (Nielson & Rossiter 2008). The present crisis, however - which has brought to the fore the no longer bearable tensions between the included and the excluded, the garantiti and non-garantiti (Asor Rosa 1977) throughout the society as a whole, leading to increasing demands for forms of universal welfare - has led to some signs of change in the position of the union movement (Bologna 2013).

Precarity: Teachers

Italy has the highest rate of precarious teachers in Europe, with over 15% of its teaching staff on temporary contracts, essentially doing the same work as their counterparts but lacking important rights such as holiday pay, sick leave and wage increases. It is an historic problem dating from the period of mass schooling in the 60s and 70s, when the system was unable to cope with a sudden dramatic demand and despite considerable variation in numbers and numerous attempts at its resolution, remains substantially open. A significant cost-reducing mechanism as well as often serving through careful orchestration to divide the teaching body, precarity initially functioned in a way more reminiscent of a reserve army of labor, but, over time, it has been assimilated in the popular imagination to wider processes of neo-liberal deregulation of the labour market, where it is common for the same work to be carried out by individuals with quite different contracts and conditions termed a ‘bene comune’ in a branding manner reminiscent of advertizing. On another level, this terminological appropriation/sublimation masks the essential conceptual continuity in contexts such as that of the PD/CGIL with the realm of the ‘public’ and thus effectively represses the far more radical content the concept of the common has in other discourses and political contexts.
e.g. in social services, and among medical and nursing staff. However, the eternal carrot of stabilization, along with what is experienced as daily injustice, have meant that the numerous struggles, within mainstream unions and without, on the part of precarious teachers have been conducted with the aim of obtaining permanent contracts within an essentially Fordist framework.

Such extensive precarity obviously has numerous negative repercussions for students and the system generally, including lack of teacher continuity, an aging staff and entry problems for young graduates and Europe is pressing more strongly for its resolution. However, it is feared by many that the solution will come at a high price, probably being linked to the imposition of forms of career, pay and fiscal differentiation for all teaching staff, which has been more or less successfully resisted until now.

Conflicts, Conclusions and Open Questions

The term sometimes employed in Italy to describe the sporadic forms of often radical conflict which emerge seemingly suddenly and from nowhere in a situation of apparent calm is ‘karstic’, of geological origins and extremely appropriate in capturing the latent subterranean qualities of an ever-present but not always visible lack of satisfaction with the state of things. When the Monti Group proposed increasing teachers’ work time by a third for the same pay, mobilization was vast and fast, extending rapidly throughout the country and forcing its withdrawal. Other examples could be given and much more time would be necessary to document the considerable protest which has accompanied this process at all times and at all levels. My focus here has been different. Basically it has been an attempt to identify some of the profound underlying mechanisms at work within struggles over educational reform and elsewhere in Italian society at the present moment, and to signal the emergence, after a long period of erosive, apparent stasis of what seems to be a tendency for a quick authoritarian solution. It is in this sense that the process of reform/restoration in Italy seems to be moving towards a final settling of accounts of many outstanding issues. However,
after the failure of the Monti emergency government, and the inconclusive compromises of the current Letta period, it remains to be seen just what form this will take.

The debate over evaluation has raised many issues in different countries of selection, differentiation, inequality and intellectual and pedagogical impoverishment. Perhaps only in Italy does it constantly return to fundamental questions of democracy. This has strong links to recurrent questions in Italian history. As Giorgio Israel made clear in a recent article on the Invalsi apparatus, ‘this is the culture of the State, something which could only happen in a country which does not have an open and liberal vision of culture in its DNA and which is still weighed down by fascistic forms of leadership’. Perhaps this Italian specificity could also provide an occasion to illuminate profound aspects of other neo-liberal systems.

References


Rosalind Innes


Rosalind Innes


Tecnica della scuola (2013, May 11) Saccomanni: ‘Ogni ministero dovrà trovare le risorse al proprio interno.’ [online]


Since 2010 Greece has been in social and political turmoil. The draconian austerity measures imposed under the bailout agreement with the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank (referred to in Greece as ‘the Troika’) have led to an increase in the unemployment rate to 27.6%, with youth unemployment at 64.9% (Hellenic Statistical Authority, May 2013). There have also been drastic reductions in salaries for state employees, from teachers to manual workers. The anger and despair of the Greek population, not only at the austerity measures but also at the political system as a whole, has been expressed through general strikes, mass rallies, and street clashes. The forms of political representation and political loyalties formed in the post-Junta (post-1974) period have come under severe question. The depth of the political crisis is clearly evident in huge losses in support for the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and for the Centre-Right New Democracy (ND) party, the rise of the Left and the coalition party SYRIZA, and the emergence of the extreme-Right Golden Dawn party as a political force. The political crisis reached its peak in the election results of 2012, when the mainstream parties struggled to finally form a PASOK-ND coalition government.

教育改革在危机中

Within this context, the ‘modernisation’ of the Greek education system is seen by some as central to solving the current crisis. Early on, Anna Diamantopoulou, Minister of Education (PASOK) made this point clear:
‘The multifaceted and multi-layered crisis that we experience can become the catalyst for change of our enduring problems. I am deeply convinced that the time has come. The Prime Minister [George Papandreou] has put education as the dominant priority of the national plan for the regeneration of the country. We change education, we change Greece: to change our educational system, to change attitudes, to change Greece’ (Diamantopoulou 2011a).

With the full entry of Greece into the European Union in 1981, along with a gradual shift on the part of successive PASOK and ND Greek governments in the direction of neo-liberalism, the discourse of ‘modernisation’ has increasingly been linked with ideas about the marketisation of education and with efforts to make the Greek education system more ‘effective’ by introducing structures and forms of accountability similar to those that operate within capitalist organizations, and indeed within other Western countries.

The Greek Higher Education System has been the first sector to experience the introduction of aggressive neo-liberal reforms. These have been creeping in since 2005 – mainly, though not exclusively, as a result of the so-called Bologna process.¹ In 2011, two-thirds of the Greek Parliament voted in favour of the Framework Act for Higher Education. This Act challenges the high degree of autonomy traditionally enjoyed by Greek universities, by introducing changes to their management, to the

¹ The Bologna process refers to a series of agreements between European countries designed to ensure comparability in the standards and quality in Higher Education in order to increase its international competitiveness. This task links with the target set by the European Council in 2000 (Lisbon Strategy) to make the European Union the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world.
structure of degrees and courses, to funding, and to accreditation and quality control. Celebrating this, Diamantopoulou wrote in her Twitter account: ‘history has been written today […]’. (Diamantopoulou 2011b). To understand the nature of this ‘historic moment’, we need to take into account the fact that, only a few days earlier, an OECD report on the state of Greek Education had insisted that Greece must take action ‘in order to address the unsustainable cost-structure of the system and the inefficiencies that are inherent in an outdated, ineffective centralised education structure’ (OECD 2011: 4). The report also stressed that one of the major problems in implementing reforms in education was the limited capacity of the Government to steer the system: ‘Real change can only be achieved through persistent, consistent implementation year after year, with careful attention to capacity building’ (ibid.). It was, then, in response to OECD demands that ‘history was made.’

Blocking ‘reform’ in HE

Previous attempts to introduce similar neo-liberal reforms in higher education, especially in 2006-2007, were opposed by two massive waves of university occupations and strikes by lecturers. In June 2006, just before the summer exams and holidays, two-thirds of university departments were occupied by students and continuous demonstrations disrupted the centres of Athens and Thessaloniki. The New Democracy Government was forced to postpone the parliamentary debate about the proposed ‘reform’ until the following November. Times Higher Education reported:

‘Greek Universities are at a standstill as lecturers and students protest against a government plan to revise the constitution and end the state monopoly in university education. They also opposed abolition of the university sanctuary and the strict period of studies. Students blocked reform attempts in 1991, 1992, 1995, 1998, and 2002.’ (16th June 2006)
Anna Traianou

The second wave of similar protests, which started at the beginning of the new academic year in 2006, was accompanied by a series of occupations by secondary school students, and coincided with strikes of primary and secondary school teachers over pay. Fearing that a wider social movement was developing against the government, the parliamentary debate on reform was rescheduled initially from November to January 2007. It finally came before parliament in 2011.

Partly as a result of resistance, this ‘reform’ of the higher education sector has not been fully implemented yet. Greece is perhaps one of the few European countries still resisting compliance with neo-liberal European Union policies. The distinctive features of the Greek education system, resulting from its socio-cultural context, have continued to play a crucial role in shaping the ways in which it has responded to pressures for such reform. Given this, it is worth exploring the context of the resistance to these changes, the reasons behind recurrent attempts of successive governments to implement them, and their current state of implementation.

Socio-cultural features of the Greek Education system.

After the establishment of the modern Greek state in the 1830s, educational and political clientelism became one of the core mechanisms through which governments were able to establish and sustain their power, and this came to infuse the broader structure of society (Mavrogordatos 1997; Bratsis 2010). Continuing into the 20th century, the exchange of goods or services for political support helped to strengthen party loyalties and the power of the party in Government. Given that capitalism in Greece developed without industrialisation but with a strong merchant/transport sector, and in a rather slow fashion in comparison with much of Europe, the political party in power served as the main mechanism for the accumulation and distribution of wealth by offering well-paid jobs in the public sector (Tsoukalas 1981; Mouzelis 1987). In this context, it has been pointed out that the salary bill for
government officials in the 1880s was greater than the yearly profits of the largest capitalist enterprise in Greece at that time (Tsoukalas 1981). Recruitment to public sector posts was on the basis of academic qualifications, and this gave the education system central importance. Until the early 1960s, fees were charged for attendance at state secondary schools and Higher Education Institutions, and this system therefore mostly privileged the ruling classes. Attrition from secondary education remained high during this period (around 50 per cent, see Frangoudakis 1981). The situation began to change in the 1960s. The growth of the construction and manufacturing sector, the influx of peasants into the large cities, and the erosion of local economies created the need for a more skilled and diversified labour force. As a result, state education provision expanded and the number of students who graduated from higher education started to rise (3.1% in 1971, see Kassotakis 1981). In post-1974 Greece university qualifications became the main mechanism for social mobility. Students from working-class backgrounds were often able to find a permanent post in the public sector or a relatively secure job in the still small private sector, if they possessed a university degree. It is not surprising, therefore, that the university became the most important institution for the satisfaction of ‘social expectations’ and a core institution in the Greek society (TPTG 2008).

A constitutionally-determined ‘free education for all’ at all levels was one of the achievements of the student movement and the short-lived liberal government of 1964. Along with it came a centrally controlled school system aimed at safeguarding equality of opportunity in education, and these have been the two important mechanisms for maintaining the legitimacy of the post-1974 State. Here, ‘equality’ is interpreted as equal input (common schools, common curriculum, and so on): ‘an equality achieved by educational rather than social measures’ (Persianis: 1978 55). It is significant, in this context, that, until the present day, the formulation and implementation of legislation, the administration of financial support to all sectors of school education, the approval of
primary and secondary school curricula and textbooks, the appointment of teaching staff, and the coordination and evaluation of regional educational services have all been controlled by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (GMERA). There are state-prescribed textbooks for each school subject, appropriate to each year group, which are distributed free to all pupils. This is often considered to be one of the most positive features of the system because it enables all pupils who attend school to have ‘equal’ and ‘free’ access to the same learning materials (Spinthourakis 2004).

There has been a strong bias towards the humanities in the Greek school curriculum, with religion continuing to influence its structure and content. This bias is not unrelated to the perceived need at the time of the establishment of the modern Greek state to build and maintain a national identity by drawing on the ancient ‘glorious past’ and on the Orthodox Church, which played a key role in maintaining the Greek language during the years of the Ottoman occupation. There is an important sense then in which the majority of schools in Greece are faith schools, but only one faith is represented: that of the Orthodox Church (Traianou, 2009). It is also necessary to emphasise that the project of developing a national identity was initially aimed at differentiating Greeks from both their Balkan and their Turkish neighbours, and this part of ‘cultural politics’ remains a central feature of the current education system. During the years that followed the end of the civil war (1949-1974) – which were characterised by political instability, corruption and restriction of political rights – the emphasis on the development of the Greek-Christian identity through education was used as a state control mechanism for the reinforcement of conservative political ideologies. This kind of state control was of course particularly evident during the years of the military dictatorship (1967-1974).
The early PASOK years

An attempt to break away from past attitudes and democratize the education system was made in the early 1980s, during the first period when PASOK was in power. Behind PASOK’s promise to expand education provision were progressive social forces (including the student movement during the years of the dictatorship) which for at least fifty years had been making demands for educational reform based on the principle of equality of opportunity. In the 1960s and 1970s the notion ‘free education for all’ had a tremendous popular impact, lending support to the idea that knowledge is the key to social power (Frangoudakis 1981). In general, PASOK promoted welfare policies and introduced progressive institutional changes not only in education but also in health care, and in industry through promoting trade unions. An important aim of PASOK’s political agenda was to increase the number of students in compulsory, post-compulsory education and higher education. For this reason, it established the Integrated Lykeio (a kind of upper secondary comprehensive school), and modified the school curriculum, the content of textbooks, and the entry examination system to upper secondary and tertiary education. It upgraded the status of technical-vocational schools and introduced 3-year technological higher education institutions (TEI) for those students who wished to obtain a vocational higher degree. It institutionalized the broad participation of parents and representatives of the local community in the so-called ‘local committees’, whose main aim was to facilitate the operation of the school and to improve communication between schools and local authorities.

‘A TEI in every village, a University for every city and 15% of GNP for education’ was the slogan of Andreas Papandreou, the Prime Minister during the ‘high period’ of PASOK reform (1981-1990). In order to widen participation in higher education, PASOK established new university departments, and new technological institutions throughout Greece, this leading to a dramatic increase in the number of students, from 26.7% in 1993 to 58% in 2005, (GMNERA 2005). PASOK’s
policies were also successful in increasing the number of students studying at secondary level and in vocational schools, though the majority of secondary school students continued to opt for the upper general secondary school with the aim of continuing on to university.

Despite the reforms, there remained problems of several kinds. There are still not enough university places to accommodate all candidates. Partly as a result of this, a large number of secondary school graduates continue their studies abroad. Moreover, despite these changes, the Greek education system retained its highly competitive and academic nature. Entry to Universities is structured through the national Higher Education entrance examination, where secondary schools students are assessed in a number of subjects relevant to their choice of discipline which are heavily burdened with content knowledge.

While PASOK preserved the centrally controlled character of school education, it gave to higher education an unprecedented degree of autonomy. It introduced a democratic system of extensive participation of students and members of academic staff in the administration of higher education institutions (Parliamentary Act No 1268/1982 amended thereafter). For example, Rectors, Vice-Rectors and Heads of Department were appointed by an electoral body in which the votes of the student representatives from the youth sections of the political parties were given almost equal weighting to those of academic staff (40%, see Gouvias 2012). Students also contributed to decisions made by the Departmental General Assembly and the Senate, which controlled, among other things, the content and structure of studies. In addition, the University space was acknowledged as a place for the free exchange of ideas and democratic dialogue, and was protected from intervention by the police (‘Academic Sanctuary’). Many commentators interpreted this autonomy and democratisation of higher education as a direct product of the struggles of the student movement, especially during the years of the military dictatorship (1967-1974) and indeed afterwards: universities were the
site for significant levels of leftist radicalism post-1974 (Sotiris, 2013: 2011). However, autonomy did not extend to financial matters: budget allocation remained the responsibility of the state (Ministries of Education and of National Economy), with the spending of each department being controlled by an independent auditory mechanism, subordinated to the Ministry of Justice.

Towards 2000

From 1974 to 1986, the number of people employed in the public sector doubled; by the 1990s the number of public employees was estimated to be in excess of 700,000 (Charalambidis et al. 2004). However, the increase in public employment waned thereafter, and unemployment rates started to rise, especially among university graduates, including graduates from teacher education courses. Until 1997, university graduates who wished to become school teachers were appointed automatically through a directory of employment, a system which appeared impermeable to clientelism. Over the period of university expansion, however, the number of graduates began to exceed the number of positions to be filled each year, creating a waiting list, which led to long gaps between graduation and employment in schools, in some cases up to fourteen or fifteen years. This changed with the 1997 Education Act, which introduced a points system for the hiring of school teachers so that it became a competitive process: appointment depended (and still depends) on the extent of a teacher’s qualifications (MA, PhD, knowledge of foreign languages, knowledge of ICT and so on) and the results obtained in national examinations concerned with subject knowledge, pedagogy, and lesson planning. This change in the system through which teachers were appointed seems to signal the beginning of an era where ‘lifelong training’ and ‘precarity’ would be legitimized through an ideology of meritocracy (also TPTG 2008). The introduction of the examination system reduced the relative value of the simple possession of a degree in favour of an individualized record of performance.
Many unemployed teachers found jobs in the so-called *frontistiria* - private preparatory schools, designed especially for those students who plan to take the national higher education entrance examination. These schools operate in parallel with state schools. They offer supplementary schooling, usually in the evening, especially but not exclusively, for those students who aim to secure place in ‘elite’ schools (such as Medicine, Law, Modern Greek Language) or ‘elite’ universities (e.g. University of Athens and the University of Thessaloniki). The need for the *frontistiria* relates to the vast amount of content that students have to cover in preparation for the University entrance examination and the insufficient time available to teachers to prepare them. The continuing existence of this highly organized private education sector (*parapaideia*) raises important questions about equality of opportunity. How to tackle it has been a perennial topic of negotiations among teachers’ unions and Ministers of Education, with the former asking for a reform of the examination system and an increase in the spending on education so that more teachers are employed in order to offer the necessary support to the students.

Alongside the stabilising of private provision, clientelism continued to operate in multifaceted ways, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, creating new networks or maintaining existing ones. The fact that, post-1974, the Greek political scene has been dominated by two political parties (PASOK and ND) helped to strengthen this. The election of Rectors was sometimes turned into a corrupt game of internal politics between the candidates and the student representatives of the political parties. Decisions to establish new higher education institutions were often driven more by local interests than national planning. In addition, the number of places in higher education offered was used by both PASOK and ND as a means to attract voters (Pshacharopoulos 2003), though in order to avoid a fiscal crisis, state expenditure on education as a proportion of the GNP remained at low levels (between 3.5 and 4 percent) so that expansion was underfunded. In 1996, reflecting on the inability of his political party to
challenge the central mechanism through which it sustained its power over the years, George Papandreou, Minister of Education, wrote: ‘… PASOK has shown itself to be incapable of cutting the Gordian knot between centralisation, clientelistic relationships and bureaucracy… instead of changing these foundations of governance we used them. And these absorbed us and weakened us’ (Papandreou 1996a:18-19).

It is not surprising, therefore, that the 1990s witnessed a general demand for the reform of educational provision. Critics pointed to a number of well-established problems: under-resourced schools; an over-burdened curriculum; a secondary school system which functioned primarily as a preparatory level for higher education; the continuation of the key role of over-crowded private schools and private preparatory schools that prepared candidates for tertiary exams; the increasing numbers of students delaying university graduation; and the high level of unemployment among those who did graduate. Concerns were also expressed about the overall quality of higher education provision, the frequency of student demonstrations, the gratis provision of university textbooks and incidents of abuse of academic sanctuary by some students and members of the public.

**From clientelism to neo-liberalism**

Unlike many other countries, where the deep change in social policy from ‘welfare’ to ‘markets and choice’ was put on the political agenda by pressure groups belonging to the political right (Jones 2003), in Greece this shift was associated with the adoption of a neo-liberal orientation by the socialist party. After the 1996 elections the shift in PASOK’s policies in a neo-liberal direction was exemplified by the Government’s open support for the gradual privatization of Greece’s large public sector and its decision to enter the Economic and Monetary Union of Europe (in 2001). It soon began to introduce measures in accord with European policies in an attempt to reduce the national debt and inflation, and to ‘accelerate modernization and the rate of economic growth’ (PASOK,
This emphasis on ‘modernisation’ was perceived by many Greeks as promising a better political, as well as economic, future by securing and bolstering the position of the Greek nation within the European Union. The ‘neo-liberal turn’ was approved by the electorate twice (in 1996 and 2000), thereby giving PASOK a mandate to promote it further.

Thus, since 1996 Greece has experienced a gradual ‘retreat’ by the state from its obligation to finance and support education alongside a continuing flow of education policies aimed at making compulsory and higher education more effective and more accountable in economic terms. When ND came into office after the 2004 general election, it not only retained some of the basic principles of PASOK education policy but stressed even further the need to improve links between education and the market, by enhancing student outcomes in terms of employment skills and competencies, promoting privatization, and strengthening assessment and accountability procedures at all educational levels (ND manifesto, 2003). European Union policies, especially the Bologna process (1999) and the Lisbon strategy (2000), have played a crucial role in this project. Around the same time, a few research-intensive technological universities which had been successful at making links with the industry using European research funding, began to call openly for a more entrepreneurial university. Of particular political importance in this context has been the campaign since the 1990s for the amendment of Article 16 of the Greek constitution, which explicitly states that higher education provision is the sole responsibility of the state. Amending the article is a precondition of the full establishment of private universities. (There has been tremendous resistance to those proposed changes from the majority of Rectors and, of course, from the student movement.)

The right to ‘free education for all’, one of the most important positive features of the Greek education system, has been a crucial mechanism for maintaining the legitimacy of the post 1974-state. Partly because of this, both PASOK and ND governments have been very reluctant to push
forward too far their privatization agenda, fearing that any challenge to the electorate’s belief in their children’s entitlement to free education could jeopardize re-election. It can be argued, then, that delay in the implementation of neo-liberal education policies is the result, at least in part, of a concern with preserving party interests rather than commitment to a common goal for education.

The ‘modernisation’ of compulsory and post-compulsory education

The new rhetoric of the ‘market school’ has particularly influenced a sector of the system – a variety of state and private secondary and post-secondary institutions of technical, vocational, continuing and distance education provision. When European funding became available to be spent on Greek state schools and universities, the government took this as an opportunity, primarily, to link the management and operation of vocational institutions to the needs of the market. (‘Operational Programme for Education and Initial Vocational Training’, 2000-2006). Using a reformed management structure, the Greek state maintains the power to monitor these institutions and is responsible for the certification/accreditation of their degrees. However, the more immediate role of supervision lies with national bodies that include representatives of employers’ associations, teachers, parents, political parties, and so on. Employer representatives (e.g. the Association of the Greek Industrialists, ΣΕΒ) are encouraged to make explicit proposals to government about the curriculum of this new market school.

In the compulsory education sector the emergent policy preferences of the 1996 socialist government were reflected in the 1997 Education Act (modified in 2001). This Act introduced the ‘Unified Curriculum Framework’, in primary (Dimotiko) and secondary education (Gymnasio). It defined the content to be covered during the compulsory years of schooling, in much the same way as does the National Curriculum in England and Wales. Most importantly, for the first time in the history of the Greek education system this framework included guidelines for
pedagogy and assessment. Progressive ideologies about learning, teaching and assessment were linked with the achievement of ‘objectivity’ and ‘reliability’ in teachers’ judgments about pupils’ progress (Paragoueli-Vouliouris 1999:6). Concepts such as ‘goals’, ‘objectives’ and ‘target setting’ were introduced as important pedagogical tools for the effective delivery of the curriculum, and emphasis was placed on the development of pupils’ ‘creativity’ and ‘critical thinking.’

For the government, these changes were presented as a ‘paradigm shift’ in Greek education: a necessary response to the need for ‘modernisation’ (Hellenic Pedagogic Institute 2009). For the teaching profession, the Government’s rhetoric signaled a gradual loss of teachers’ control over the teaching process in favour of control by external indicators. However, very little of the content of this legislation has been implemented in practice yet. This is because the Greek bureaucratic system is largely dependent on the political party in Government and in this sense it is much weaker than other bureaucratic systems, such as the British one. Moreover, there is a regular turnover of Ministers of Education, and a tendency for each new minister to amend the work of her or his predecessors, partly as a response to pressures from protesters but also because education goals are often dictated by loyalty networks. As George Papandreou, then Minister of Education, commented: ‘One of the major obstacles to the success of educational reform in Greece has been the discontinuity brought about because of political changes, including changes of Ministers of Education even within the same government’ (Papandreou, 1996b). As a result, the implementation of laws is, generally speaking, a very slow process.

**Intensification**

Since 1997, however, there has been a tendency for school education to become more intensive. In 2001, revised textbooks for both teachers and students were introduced to schools (these were modified in 2006). The new textbooks were characterised by an increase in the amount of subject
knowledge to be covered, and thereby made greater academic demands (Koustourakis 2007). This change in content was accompanied by a further increase in the number of subjects taken in the school-leaving exams (at the end of the Gymnasio and General Lykeio) for entry to University. By contrast, the school leaving exams for entry to vocational institutions (Vocational Lykeio, and other vocational schools) remained easier.

By strengthening even further central control over what is to be taught and how, the Government deepened the separation of high-achieving students from average- or low-achieving ones, channeling the latter into vocational education and producing in this way an even more diversified labour force. For many commentators, the secondary school students’ resistance against the privatization of higher education in 2006-2007 was also an expression of their accumulated discontent with the intensification of studies and the anticipation of precarious and devalued labour. As Greece was entering recession in 2008, and youth unemployment levels were rising (24.3 per cent in September 2008), the killing by the police of a fifteen-year-old student, Alexis Grigoropoulos, on 6 December 2008, prompted a new wave of social unrest (Karamichas 2008).

**Education reform in the years of the ‘TROIKA’**

The neo-liberal agenda has thus been taking shape for some time in Greece, albeit implemented only in part. However, in the conditions of the current economic crisis neo-liberal change is being accelerated. The depth of the difficulties experienced by young people on the labour market is being used by politicians to justify further education reform, even though the changes proposed are unlikely to stem the growth of a precariat (Standing 2011, see also Innes in this volume). This is particularly evident in the Government’s latest proposed reforms of the education system, those relating to the post-compulsory sector (Geniko and Vocational Lykeio), which went through Parliament at the end of
August 2013. An important aspect of the ‘Pupil first – the new School’ is the introduction of an optional fourth year apprenticeship route in the vocational Lykeio (ΕΠΑΛ), which aims to strengthen further the links between the school and the local labour market (http://www.minedu.gov.gr/neosxoleio-main.html, accessed 24 August 2013). From 2013-14, ΕΠΑΛ students will have the option either to graduate and take the entrance exam for higher technological institutions or to obtain a diploma by doing what is, in effect, unpaid work for a year in local businesses. Commenting on these changes, Konstantinos Arvanitopoulos, Minister of Education in the Coalition Government, said:

‘I believe that the proposal for the new school reinforces the secondary and post-secondary free education provision. The reformed General Lykeio, and the innovative four year Vocational Lykeio, opens routes for education which will lead to the acquisition of academic knowledge and vocational rehabilitation.’ (interview to Sunday Ethnos, 25.08.2013)

Another important element of the 2013 Act is a revised examination system for entry to Universities, which allows the end-of-year examination results for each of the three years of the General Lykeio to count towards entry into higher education. Although this system appears meritocratic, the danger is that it will heighten the demands for parapaideia, making further financial demands on families that are currently struggling to survive on severely reduced salaries. Teachers and the teachers’ unions have argued that this new system will only increase educational inequalities by encouraging students, especially those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, to opt for the apprenticeship route, hoping that in this way they may be able to find employment. In doing so, they will forego the chance of going on to higher education.
In a recent interview about the proposed new school, the president of ΟΛΑΕ (Greek Federation of Secondary School Teachers) Themis Kotsifakis made this point clear:

‘The proposal for the new Lykeio is based on the so-called “tripled” educational model, it encourages the separation of students into three categories… The proposed new Lykeio is examination results-driven and as a result it will drive down the quality of teaching with the potential for teaching to be focused exclusively on the preparation of students for examinations, it will raise the demands for parapaideia and will increase the number of students who leave school.” (www.alfavita.gr/arthon/na-συγκροτήσουμε-ενιαίο-μέτωπο-υπεράσπισης-της-δημόσιας-εκπαίδευσης accessed August 19, 2013)

**Teachers**

Other planned changes relate to the evaluation of teachers’ work. As in many other parts of Europe, since the late 1990s secondary school teachers have been criticised for declining results in the school-leaving examinations (Gouvias 1998). In 2002, the PASOK government passed an Act for the evaluation of teachers’ work; an essentially neo-liberal attempt to measure the effectiveness of teachers and schools. The Act included the publication of a detailed manual of responsibilities (*Kathikontologio*, in Greek) for each institutional role within the education sector, such as the regional administrative director, school advisors, and schoolteachers. Whereas in the 1980s, school advisors operated in an advisory role, with the new Act they became responsible for working collaboratively with the headteacher and the regional administrative director to detect weak practice and ensure that it was improved. Soon after the proposals became law, a discussion paper was circulated which described the competencies that should be demonstrated and the obligations that must be met by teachers and schools (GMNERA, 2002a; 2002b). This paper challenged the principle of tenure –
something teachers possessed by virtue of their status as public servants - by pointing out what could be done if they were found to be not ‘up to standard’: they could be asked to attend regular professional development courses to improve their performance, be temporarily suspended from their teaching duties and be assigned administrative roles, or be made redundant on the grounds of ‘teaching incompetence’ and ‘administrative inefficiency’ (GMNERA, 2002b: 16). While these moves have been postponed, so that there is no evaluation of teachers’ work at present, the idea has not been abandoned. It presages a further shift in the definition of the teacher’s role: making them accountable for their work according to competencies and standards. The assessment of teachers’ work, and of their professional development, is high on the present government’s agenda, especially in relation to the education and appointment of new teachers. With the 2010 Act, the appointment of new teachers will be followed by a two-year probationary period under the supervision of a “mentor”. At the end of that period they will be assessed in terms of teaching competency, and if they are successful will become permanent; otherwise they could be transferred to other public services. Emphasis is also increasingly being placed on the professional development of in-service teachers.

Interlinked with these changes in regulation and management, there have been since 2010 rapid and violent changes in the working conditions of teacher, which further threaten their tenure of appointment. These changes are the result of emergency measures passed for the treatment of the economic crisis (Parliamentary Act 3833/2010), and include reduction of salaries (currently up to thirty per cent) and levels of recruitment across the whole of the public sector. For example, by the end of December 2013, 25000 civil servants are to be placed on a reduced salary pending redeployment or redundancy. Over the past three years, teachers’ salaries, too, have been cut back up, by to thirty per cent, and a number of schools, mainly secondary though more recently primary and nursery, have been merged or closed. At the same time, the Government has
increased class sizes (up to 30 pupils), has ‘frozen’ the appointment of new teachers and closed a number of local primary and secondary education authorities in order to ‘release’ teachers and relocate them in schools where there is a perceived shortage of teaching staff.

Perhaps the most dramatic of these changes took place in the summer of 2013, when the Government announced that from the 2013-14 school year subjects such as music and the arts would not be taught in the second and third year of the Gymnasio; it also reduced the weekly teaching hours of other subjects such as modern Greek. The overall aim of these changes is to create a ‘reserve pool’ of teachers who can be reallocated to other schools (both secondary and primary) or to administrative posts. Starting in the school year 2013-14, teachers with a ‘light’ workload in their present schools could be asked to ‘deliver’ teaching in up to four schools.

Anxiety and the fear of redundancy are the predominant feelings among the majority of secondary school teachers who are currently on strike. This is despite reassuring words from the Minister of Education: ‘There are not going to be redundancies, no teacher will be left without a job’ (Konstantinos Arvanitopoulos, interview in Sunday Ethnos 25.08.2013). As in other European countries like France, the proletarianisation of teachers has been intensified. Teachers are gradually losing their status, autonomy, and sense of purpose (Guy Dreux, in this volume).

The Entrepreneurial University

As we have seen, since 2005, reform has radically reshaped the Higher Education Sector (for example, the Parliamentary Acts of 2005, 2010, 2011, and 2012). While the Greek state continues to assume a regulatory role in terms of ‘structures’ and ‘legal frameworks’, there has been a dramatic withdrawal from its obligations to provide financial support to HE, and as a consequence from its role in safeguarding constitutionally free HE provision. These changes amount to a redefinition of academic ‘autonomy’ of a neo-liberal kind. Equally significant in this process is the
Government’s retreat from the principle of democratic participation, by shifting decision-making from the members of academic communities, including student representatives, to ‘outside experts.’

With the new Act, a top-down management model is introduced. The ‘University Council’ will consist of professors elected within the institution and ‘outside experts’ (i.e. academics from other HE institutions in Greece and abroad and/or representatives of professional associations and local businesses). This aims to enhance ‘transparency’, ‘accountability’ and ‘effectiveness’ as well as claiming to deal with nepotism. The Council will be responsible for drawing up a strategic plan for the development of the institution in local, national and international terms, and for its financial viability. Meanwhile, Senates have become much smaller, with reduced power, being responsible primarily for drawing up the learning, teaching, research and quality assurance strategies of the institution. Student representation has been reduced to a single representative for the whole student body instead of one representative per department. Other changes in the management of the Universities include the merging of departments into schools, so that the power of decision-making over courses, the structure of degrees and allocation of funding is shifted upwards, from Department Assemblies to the Head of School. This will enable Heads of School to introduce much more flexible courses, and/or to close courses down more easily.

Much of the emphasis in the new Act, however, has been on the funding system. Universities are now asked to generate as much income as possible through external funding, tuition for postgraduate studies, sponsorships, donations and market-oriented research. More significantly, for the first time, state funding is clearly linked to performance. In this, the Hellenic National Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (HQAA) will take over many of the functions of the Ministry of Education, being given new responsibilities, including allocating funding, on the basis of a list of indicators of ‘quality’ such as the number of graduates per year, the number of students who graduate within the time
Greek Education Reform: resistance and despair

limits for their courses, the amount of research funding attracted by each School, the number of doctorates awarded, and so on. The setting up of quality assurance processes has, of course, increasingly dominated the European agenda of intergovernmental cooperation, and similar funding systems have recently appeared in many EU countries such as Germany and Finland (Gouvias 2012, 2007).

Despite earlier assurances – ‘there can be no privatisation; there can be no fees for undergraduate courses’ (Yannos Mitsos, adviser to Minister of Education, Anna Diamantopoulou, 2011) – it is clear that the direction of travel is towards the imposition of student fees. For funding purposes, the Act has adopted a minimum three-year degree type for undergraduate studies (amounting to 180 credits on the European Credit Transfer system). Rectors and students have warned that these changes, as well as the introduction of sponsorship from commercial enterprises, will pave the way for the introduction of tuition fees, initially for those students who will go into a fourth or fifth year. Alongside these changes in the types of degree, and the fear of privatisation in the still-public HE sector, another important element of recent legislation is the stress on ‘individual differences’ and ‘needs’. Higher Education Institutions are now asked to set up Life-Long Learning programmes which will be offered at School level, aiming to attract students from a ‘wider social strata and age groups’ (GMNERA, 2010 in Gouvias 2012: 296). The emphasis in the Government’s rhetoric here is on ‘the flexibility of the content and the mobility of student/learners, so that the skills acquired will meet the demands of the market economy’ (ibid.). A simplistic version of human capital theory underpins this agenda. Individuals are induced to invest ‘in their future well-being by accumulating credits, learning units and so on in order to survive in a world of economic uncertainty’ (Gouvias 2012: 300). It also signals a change in the character of the ‘student’, from being a member of a collective group to a ‘customer’ who caters for his/her own needs. Academic knowledge is devalued and growing precariousness of future employment is likely to lead students to gather as many qualifications as possible.
As mentioned earlier, the state has not succeeded yet in changing Article 16 of the Greek Constitution. However, drawing on European Union legislation on labour mobility and qualification recognition (directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications), the 2005 Parliamentary Act allows the recognition of degrees by private institutions which act as franchises of foreign universities, the argument being that graduates from such colleges should have the same job opportunities as the ones available to those from Greek public universities. In November 2012, the Troika demanded that the Greek Government fully legitimise not only undergraduate degrees but also postgraduate qualifications (MAs and PhDs) offered by such colleges, the only restriction being that holders of such qualifications will not be allowed to gain posts in public Higher Education Institutions (Sotiris, 2013). This will inevitably introduce competition between state and private higher education institutions.

Finally, several aspects of the 2011 Act aim at disciplining political activity within universities and among students. ‘Academic Sanctuary’ has been redefined and linked with Article 15 (1) of the ‘Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union’ on the protection of the ‘right to work’. From now on, strikes of academic and non-academic staff, and student occupations, which are seen to violate the right of University employees to enter the workplace, can be repressed by the police without the consent of university senates. Under the new legislation, not only will students find it more difficult to protest but demonstrations will be subject to police intervention.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the 2011 Act (and that of 2012) has generated stormy reactions from rectors and students. In 2011 Yannis Mylopoulos, Rector of Greece’s largest university, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and one of the most outspoken opponents of the proposed ‘reform’, warned in a letter to Diamantopoulou that the measures could not take effect without the cooperation of institutions, and that there would be strikes disrupting universities once the academic year began.
Indeed, at the beginning of the 2011-12 academic year more than 80 schools and departments were reported to be under occupation by students, in order to put pressure on the Government to withdraw the legislation. The senate committees of the occupied institutions postponed the examination period in an act of solidarity with the students. 700 academics with international reputations signed a statement expressing their support, asking for withdrawal of the law and for a dialogue with the academic community to bring about legislation to preserve the self-government of universities, adequate finances for higher education and respect for European tradition.

While in the 2011-12 academic year elections for the new University Councils were blocked by academics and students, in the following year the Government finally managed to hold them by introducing an electronic voting system. However, the economic pressures the country is now facing could help spur universities to adopt the changes as a means of survival. Over the past three years, state funding for HE has been reduced by up to 70 percent; academic salaries have been cut by 20-30 percent and more than 700 elected academics are waiting for their appointment, which may take up to five years. New appointments have been frozen until 2016, and there are further Government plans to reduce the number of non-academic staff who work in universities, as part of the demands made by the Troika to reduce the number of civil service employees.

Finally, as with schools, the restructuring of HE is taking place in a rushed way. ‘Plan Athena’ is the recent Government plan for the ‘spatial restructuring’ of Greek higher education, which involves the merging or closing of departments and technological educational institutions. At present students are uncertain about their future and the value of their degrees and plan further protests for the 2013-14 academic year.
The uncertain present and the unpredictable future

The wave of ‘reforms’ is endless, unpredictable and uncontrollable. Some of these are the product of years of political hesitation on the part of the two main political parties, and resistance from students, teachers and academics. Many of the latest ‘reforms’, though, have been prompted by the Troika and the OECD, as a result of the current economic crisis. Generally speaking, they have been announced in the summer when schools are closed, in order to minimise organised resistance. As I write this, the new school and academic year is about to begin: there is concern on all sides about what it will bring. In 1981, Anna Frangoudakis, Professor of Sociology at the University of Athens, commented on the direction of the education reforms proposed by the progressive social forces of the 1960s and 1970s. She wrote: ‘Greek society is disconcerting. Nothing seems to happen the way one predicts’ (1981: 7). Her words seem even more true today: it is uncertain what will happen next, not least because of the rise of new political parties, SYRIZA on the Left, and Golden Dawn on the far-Right.

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Greek Education Reform: resistance and despair


Chapter 5

Education and training – under the dictatorship of the labour market

Nico Hirtt

Ever since the Lisbon Summit of 2000, the dominant conception of European education has been scaled down to the point where it is seen mainly as an instrument of economic policy. From time to time, other voices qualify this main idea: education systems should ensure ‘the personal, social and professional fulfilment of all citizens’ while ‘promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue.’ (European Council 2012b: 393/5). But for the most part the ‘primary role’ of education and training as the ‘main engine of growth and competitiveness’ is not in question; nor is the ‘essential role that investments in human capital play in terms of an economy recovery based on job creation’ (European Council 2013:1).

One would have thought that the bursting of the dot.com bubble in 2000/1, which saw the NASDAQ lose 60% of its value in one twelve-month period, then the great recession of 2008, followed by the present crisis in public finance in Europe would have to some extent tempered the optimism of those who believed that investment in human capital would guarantee growth and prosperity. Unfortunately, the champions of neoliberalism do not let go of their principles so easily. For the Director of CEDEFOP (the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training), ‘Supporting people to acquire the skills that lay the foundations for innovation and match future employment needs is one of the preconditions for surmounting the crisis’ (CEDEFOP 2011: 1).
The theoretical position from which such statements are made is clear: if
employers are given ‘a better opportunity to recruit skilled workers’, then
this will encourage businesses ‘to offer more opportunities to their staff
and to increase their involvement in the development of the workforce’
(European Council 2012b: 2-5). This claim rests on an acceptance of the
theory according to which economies that possess greater quantities
of human capital ‘keep seeing more productivity gains’ (OECD 2010: 10).
The economists Eric Hanushek (Hoover Institute, Stanford) and Ludger
Woessman (Munich University) are among the main promoters of this
rhetoric; their work is much cited by European authorities, and by the
OECD. What their research demonstrates, however, is nothing more than
a correlation between skill levels in a particular country (as indicated by
international studies such as TIMMS or PISA) and the rate of growth of
its GDP. Hanushek and Woessman admit that ‘it is difficult to establish
conclusively that this is a causal relationship’ (2008: 667), but this does
not prevent them constructing economic models in which rates of growth
are linked, through a first degree equation, to average levels of skill and
average length of schooling, on the basis of data from the period 1960–
2010.

It is this construction that provides the OECD with the crystal ball in
which to calculate that ‘having all OECD countries boost their average
PISA scores by 25 points over the next 20 years implies an aggregate gain
of OECD GDP of USD 115 trillion over the lifetime of the generation
born in 2010’ (OECD 2010 : 6).

Doing ‘better’ with fewer resources

Hanushek and Woessman are also proponents of the thesis according to
which the level of funding of education does not influence its quality.
Most notably, they claim that the level of academic support for pupils (the
teacher/pupil ratio) is not linked to pupils’ average performance. It should
not surprise us that this claim has been well received by ministries of
education that are chronically short of financial resources, and by
international organisations whose role is to enforce policies of austerity.
Education and training: under the dictatorship of the labour market

Notwithstanding its acceptance in these quarters, the research of Hanushek and his colleagues, which is based either on comparative studies between countries or on long-term chronological data, suffers from a serious weakness: its conclusions are in complete contradiction with the outcome of policies that have aimed to reduce class size. Several different kinds of research have converged on the same conclusion: in the USA, in the framework of the STAR project (Kruger and Whitmore 2000), in England (Blatchford et al 2011), in France (Piketty and Valdenaire 2006), in Sweden (Wiborg 2010). All these studies demonstrate that in comparable geographical and social situations (same country, same period, same kinds of pupils and teachers) smaller class sizes improve overall performance and reduce the gap between pupils from different social groups, in particular differences linked to social origin.

All the same, Hanushek and Woessman continue to insist that it is possible to do more with less: ‘the binding constraint seems to be institutional reforms, not resource expansions within the current institutional systems’ (2008: 659). It follows from this that we should put quality before quantity of teaching – but this is ‘quality’ understood in a particular way: high-quality teaching is that which responds closely and lastingly to the needs of the economy. In order for this to happen, education systems need to ‘improve the identification of training needs’, and then ‘increase the labour market relevance of education and training’ so that they provide people with the ‘right mix of skills and competences’, (European Council 2011: 2). It follows that ‘all the people involved in the education process (will have to) face the right incentives’ (Hanushek and Woessman 2008: 659). Let us now move on to exploring what labour markets want from workers and from education and training systems.

The crisis is over!

The discourse on the crisis, designed for public consumption, can be summarized as follows: with the onset of the Great Recession in 2008, there was a serious economic crisis, and unemployment increased among
all categories of workers. But everything will be better tomorrow. Growth will resume its course, employment will increase, and once again there will be a need for workers who are ever more highly skilled and able to play a part in a ‘knowledge society’. This idyllic vision is on display in the publications of CEDEFOP, the EU agency responsible for analyzing the future development of the European labour market. In the years of crisis and recession after 2008, CEDEFOP’s record has been one of consistent and misplaced optimism. It has repeatedly over-estimated the rate of growth in employment, predicting a smooth unbroken upward movement, resistant to the effects of crisis: for the years 2011 and 2012 it envisaged growth of the order of 0.85%; according to the latest Eurostat figures, there was actually a fall in employment of 0.1%.

It seems that economists, at least those who have the ear of the European Commission and the European Council of Ministers, have learned nothing since the 1970s. For 40 years, they have persisted in seeing ‘crises’ as conjunctural events, accidents along the path of progress of an economy that is fundamentally in good health. It has not occurred to them that these lurches and sudden upheavals are symptoms of a system that is profoundly ‘sick’, symptoms that are the visible products of the deep and turbulent contradictions of the capitalist economy.

**A knowledge society?**

If the promises of employment growth can be called into question, what about the structural distribution of these jobs, in terms of the level of training they require? Is it the case that the economic and technological context demands, and will continue to demand, ever greater numbers of highly skilled workers? CEDEFOP (2012) certainly thinks so. It has developed a detailed analysis of the occupational structure of the European economies since 1990 - based on workers’ level of qualification – and projected towards 2020 the trends that emerge from this analysis. At first sight, the description presented by such analysis looks uncontestable. The category of highly skilled workers has grown, rising from 22.3% to 29.8% between 2000 and 2010; it will rise further, to 37% by 2020. On
the other hand, the number of jobs available to workers with lower levels of qualification is constantly falling – 30.6% in 2000, 23.4% in 2010 and a projected 16.4% in 2020. ‘Young people with low or no qualifications will find it increasingly difficult to get a good job,’ concludes CEDEFOP, logically enough (CEDEFOP, 2012b: 12).

Given this analysis, it is therefore very surprising to read, a few pages further on in the same report that, ‘The demand forecast’s findings show that most job growth will be in higher- and lower-skill occupations with slower growth in occupations requiring medium-level qualifications. (CEDEFOP, 2012b: 29).

Experts thus assure us that there is an ever-decreasing number of jobs for the less skilled; on the other, they say that such jobs are growing in number. What explains this apparent contradiction? Explanation lies in the fact that CEDEFOP’s analysis is not based on the level of education that the jobs demand, in terms of their technical nature, their complexity, their specialisation, but only on the actual level of qualification of the workforce employed to do the jobs. When fewer low-skilled workers are employed, this does not necessarily mean that the level of qualification intrinsically required by the work process has risen; it might also suggest that highly skilled workers are being made use of in jobs that do not intrinsically demand their level of qualification, either because there is an excess of skilled workers on the labour market, or because there is an under-supply of less skilled personnel.

**Job polarisation**

Since the end of the 1970s, some researchers have noted a process of labour market segmentation: on the one hand, a limited number of technical-professional posts, with a high level of expertise and a salary to match; on the other, an ever-increasing supply of jobs that are less well paid, and that require only a low level of qualification. These tend to be in expanding service industries, such as fast-food outlets, supermarkets and large-scale distributors (Coomb 1989:10). This ‘polarisation’ thesis has
been confirmed in more recent decades, and is now largely accepted, and well described. ‘Over the last decades’, note two CEDEFOP researchers, ‘some consensus has been achieved in the literature that, besides a general trend of expansion of highly-skilled employment, continuing polarisation is affecting labour markets in most developed economies (Ranieri and Serafini, 2012: 49).

David Autor, an American specialist in this area, published in 2010 a study called ‘The Polarization of Job Opportunities in US Labor Markets’. His findings suggested a significant shift in occupational structure since the 1980s. The pattern of development that Autor identifies in the 1980s is in line with present-day rhetoric about the characteristics of a ‘knowledge society’: a growth in skilled labour, a fall in less skilled job categories. The following decade is different. It is one of labour market polarisation; the graph dips in the middle, as intermediate categories of employment are removed from the labour market, while the number of high-skilled jobs continues to expand, and low-skilled occupations experience a modest growth. Finally, in the 2000s, the graph shows a sharp rise in the number of low-skilled jobs, while the level of high-skilled employment has reached a plateau (Autor 2010:3).

In Europe, a similar kind of development seems to have happened, though it has tended to lag behind that of the USA: ‘while the share of knowledge- and skill-intensive occupations increased almost constantly between 1970 and 2000, occupational polarisation has clearly emerged across Europe only since the end of the 1990s’ (Ranieri and Serafini 2012: 53). Between 2000 and 2008, the number of workers in low-skilled employment rose by 3.9 million, representing one of the highest rates of growth, almost at the same level as the rate of increase in highly-skilled jobs, and far above the rate of growth in ‘intermediate’ jobs.

CEDEFOP recognizes that this development is likely to continue into the future: ‘most job growth will be in higher- and lower-skill occupations with slower growth in occupations requiring medium-level qualifications’ (2012b:29).
How information technology contributes to polarisation

To understand these processes of polarisation, we need to look at the role of ICT. Contrary to widespread belief, ICT does not inexorably substitute for work at a lower level of skill, but rather takes over routine tasks – tasks that can easily be defined, described and disaggregated, so that they can be encoded into a programme to be carried out by a computer, or by humans acting under the direction of a computer. As Autor writes:

‘Routine tasks are characteristic of many middle-skilled cognitive and production activities, such as bookkeeping, clerical work, and repetitive production tasks. The core job tasks of these occupations in many cases follow precise, well understood procedures. Consequently, as computer and communication technologies improve in quality and decline in price, these routine tasks are increasingly codified in computer software and performed by machines or, alternatively, sent electronically to foreign worksites to be performed by comparatively low-wage workers.’ (Autor 2010: 4)

Such routine tasks are often those carried out by averagely skilled workers, while non-routine tasks tend to be found at the two extremes of the occupational spectrum. So far as the skilled end of the spectrum is concerned, they consist of abstract tasks that call for problem-solving abilities, for intuition and persuasiveness. But there are also many more ‘basic’ jobs, especially in the service sector, which are not easily computerised. Before cleaning a classroom, for instance, the chairs have to be put on top of the desks and for this to happen the desks have to be cleared of everything that has cluttered them up – packing material, empty ink cartridges and so on – but at the same time nothing that is educationally useful, a book or a calculator that a pupil has left behind, must be thrown away. Decisions about what to keep or what to throw in the bin can be taken by anyone, skilled or not, who possesses a minimum of common sense. But they are very difficult, if not impossible, to programme into a machine. As Autor puts it:
‘For the task to be machine-executable, it must be sufficiently well defined, or “canned,” so that a non-sentient machine can execute it successfully, without the aid of “common sense”, by rapidly and accurately following the steps set down by the programmer. Consequently, computers are highly productive and reliable at performing the things that people can program them to do—and inept at everything else.’ (2010: 11)

Moreover, the work of a taxi-driver, a security guard, an air hostess on a low-cost airline in Europe, a McDonalds worker in Madrid or Paris cannot be outsourced to New Delhi. In the OECD’s summary, ‘highly skilled workers are needed for technology-related jobs; low-skilled workers are hired for services that cannot be automated, digitised or outsourced, such as personal care; and mid-level skills are being replaced by smart robotics’ (OECD 2012a: 21).

**A little over-qualification, that’s OK**

For most of the twentieth century, the labour market developed in response to the rising levels of qualification required by technical relations of production. States, in turn, responded to this development by extending the period of schooling, and by encouraging populations to increase their level of qualification. Now, however, the labour market has fragmented and polarised: the kind of employment which demands only a low level of skill is on the rise, while the rate of unemployment is also increasing. In this situation, workers are compelled to accept jobs that require a level of education below what they actually possess.

In terms of official categorisation, the rate of over-qualified employment in Europe is between 10% and 30% (Qintini 2011, OECD 2011b). In present labour market conditions CEDEFOP envisages ‘a rapid increase in people with high-level qualifications employed in jobs traditionally requiring lower skill level, certainly in the short term, and a sharp fall in jobs for people with low or no qualifications’ (CEDEFOP, 2012a, 14). From the point of view of the worker, this amounts to a sharp fall of around 20% in the salary that s/he might expect (OECD 2011b: 211).
From the point of view of the employer, the balance sheet is more qualified. Some research insists on the benefits of over-qualification, in terms of productivity and innovation. ‘Over-qualification,’ states CEDEFOP, ‘is not necessarily a problem. Better qualified people (...) may be more innovative and (able to) change the nature of the job they are doing. Highly skilled people may also find it easier to transfer skills gained in one sector to a job in another’ (2012:13). On the other hand, over-qualification has salary costs. An over-qualified worker is around 15% more expensive to employ than a worker whose qualifications exactly match those required by the job (OECD 2011b: 211). As long as the rate of over-qualification seems reasonable, the balance of advantage is tipped in favour of the over-qualified, at least from the point of view of the individual employer. On the other hand, from the macro-economic point of view, too high a level of over-qualification results in an unacceptable upward pressure on the wage levels of the low-skilled sector. In the US context, Autor has shown that the steep rise in low-skilled jobs in the 1990s led to the recruitment of over-qualified workers, with the result that wages in these sectors have risen more quickly, or fallen more slowly, than they would otherwise have done.

From the perspective of those who only think of education in economic terms, too high a level of qualification amounts to an enormous wastage of state resources: is it really necessary to invest so much in education, if the skills thus created are not put to use? It is no longer possible to foster the illusion, held since the 1970s, that a general, humanist education was going to become a universal norm. More than a decade ago, the OECD set the record straight on this, making clear that, ‘not all will pursue professional careers in the dynamic sectors of the “new economy” – indeed most will not – so that curricula cannot be designed as if all are on an identical high-flying track. The knowledge that many will use in work, society or leisure may be far from advanced’ (OECD 2001: 29). In that case, on what basis should education programmes be designed?
Low skilled but multi-competent

The surplus of skilled workers is not the only reason for the recruitment of overqualified labour. It is something that also stems from the very nature of new types of employment which are unskilled or thought to be so. They are very different from the industrial or agricultural jobs which were once taken on by the great mass of workers who possessed only elementary education. Today an ‘unskilled’ office worker is unlikely to possess a diploma in typing or shorthand, or in telex operating, or secretarial work, or translation and interpreting. Nonetheless they are expected to use a computer keyboard, to word-process documents, to produce spreadsheets and data bases and to manage a mail box. They are expected to answer the phone, courteously, and possibly to do this in several languages. It is difficult to describe all this in terms of a fixed and formal category of ‘skill’, at least in the usual sense of the term: the work requires just a few basic skills. But it is exactly at this point that the problem lies. Employers, as reported by international organizations, complain of the difficulty they have in finding such workers, who are at one and the same time unskilled, and therefore cheap, and multi-skilled in terms of the range of tasks that they are asked to carry out.

To know how to read, write and calculate, to have a driving licence – it is a long time since qualities like these were explicitly recognized as qualifications. The new types of ‘unskilled’ service sector work require that we add to our list of what should be universally agreed as basic skills. The European framework of key competences sets out eight basic skills, that ‘all young people should acquire as part of their education and their initial training, and that adults should be able to develop and update, thanks to lifelong education and training’ (Commission Européene 2009: 19). The skills are well known. Communication in mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence; basic skills in science and technology; digital skills; the capacity to learn how to learn; social and civic competences, a sense of initiative and enterprise; cultural awareness and expression. For the OECD, ‘this set of skills and competences becomes the very core of what teachers and schools should care about’ (Ananiadou and Claro 2009: 6).
Education and training—under the dictatorship of the labour market

Here, thus, is the solution to the problem: to remove from educational programmes all those qualities that have become useless, now that the secondary school is no longer reserved for elites. No need for Latin and Greek, for philosophy or literature, as long as students have learned how to ‘communicate’. No need to study theory, and the laws of physics or biology, once students have acquired ‘basic skills’ in science and technology. No need for history and geography, a little ‘cultural awareness’ can take their place. No need for economics – for most students at least – once they have developed a sense of ‘enterprise’. No need even to learn computer programming, as long as students have picked up ‘digital skills’, understood as the basic techniques involved in operating a computer in a workplace context, as well as the rudiments of software programmes. Add to this, a few sentences in one or two foreign languages, a bit of ‘cultural awareness’ and the capacity to learn – company regulations, work procedures, a set of instructions – and you have an excellent and completely flexible worker.

Adaptable and flexible

The choice of the eight key skills listed above is justified in the first place by their capacity, real or imagined, to support qualities of flexibility and adaptability in the workforce. The jobs of tomorrow, whatever end of the skill spectrum they occupy, will have in common the fact that they will consist of tasks that cannot easily be reduced to a set of programmable procedures. For precisely this reason, they contain an important element of unpredictability, and therefore call for initiative and adaptability on the part of workers.

This demand for flexibility is underlined both by economic instability and by the unpredictability of the technological environment. It is impossible to predict the development of the technical relations of production and thus of the knowledge and know-how that will be required of workers in ten or fifteen years. In its Bruges Communiqué of 2010 the European Council of Ministers noted that the students of 2020 will ‘have occupations that do not exist today …We need to improve the capacity of
vocational and educational training to respond to the changing requirements of the labour market’ (European Council 2010:2).

In these conditions, the role of the school is no longer to support the acquisition of discipline-based knowledge but rather to transmit generic capacities (‘transversal skills’) as well as to develop individuals’ capacities to update knowledge and know-how in relation to the changing needs of their job and the changing expectations of their employers. The role of the state is no longer to enable everyone to acquire the kinds of knowledge that embodied the possibility of emancipation; it is not even to ensure that each young person has a qualification that allows them access to the labour market: that task, now, is left to the individual’s own resources. The state’s only responsibility, from now on, is to create the conditions in which individuals pursue a lifelong quest for ‘employability’: a ‘lifelong approach to learning, and education and training systems that are more responsive to change and more open to the wider world’ (European Council 2009: 119/3). In this perspective, education’s sole task is to prepare European citizens ‘to be motivated and self-sustained learners’ (European Council 2012b: 393-6) - though the responsibility for organising their learning falls to individuals, who must take control of their own training, ‘in order to update their skills and safeguard their value on the labour market’ (CEDEFOP 2012a: 22).

**Competencies versus knowledge**

In the context of this search for flexibility, the term ‘competence’ takes on a new importance and a new meaning. In the traditional use of the term, ‘competence’ designates an ensemble of skills of different kinds, of attitudes, of experience – it is this ensemble of qualities which goes to make a good doctor or plumber, a good builder or a good airline pilot. However, under the double pressure of the pursuit of maximum flexibility on the part of the learner, and optimal, measurable output on the part of the education system, a reconfigured concept of ‘skill’ has come into being, where the only thing that matters is the final product: what a pupil has remembered, understood, mastered, formalised counts for little, as long as they demonstrate that they can successfully complete the task in
hand. Teaching is thus transformed into a kind of unending process of assessment, in situations which pupils have possibly not encountered before, but which can be from the teacher’s point of view perfectly standardised. This focus on skills throws overboard the fundamental question asked by research into teaching and learning - how properly to transmit a particularly body of knowledge? – in favour of a different question, in which the sole criterion of value concerns the student’s capacity to make use of knowledge – ‘did he successfully complete this task?’ The shift is seen by the OECD in terms of an ‘innovative concept related to the capacity of students to apply knowledge and skills’ (Ananiadou and Claro 2009:7).

Until the last few years, a skills-based approach was presented as a form of constructivist pedagogy. This was especially the case in francophone countries, where it claimed to be a pedagogy centred on the learner that gave ‘meaning’ to his learning – a claim which was deliberately misleading, and strongly contested (Hirtt 2009). Today the mask is slipping. Policies seem to have returned to a distant past, deriding the kinds of pedagogic reform that only yesterday they were promoting. But we would be wrong to read this recent shift in the dominant pedagogic discourse as a ‘right turn’ or a ‘return to academic rigour’- the choice of one or the other of these value-laden terms depending on the position initially adopted towards the skills agenda. In reality, only the outer garment has changed – that is to say the discourse that accompanied skill-based reforms, giving them a kind of pseudo-progressive guarantee. At a deeper level, the level at which the notion of general or transversal skills has had an impact on the way that knowledge is constructed in education, ‘skill’, in the form of a demand for ‘basic skills’, is more of a force than it has ever been. The motivation for this change is not a secret: for CEDEFOP, it is a reorientation that ‘increases the flexibility’ of workers and of the labour market, ‘in a context of continual employment transitions and rapid changes in the workplace … it is probably more important to gain transversal, generic skills that ones which are bound to a particular employee function and a particular work process’ (CEDEFOP 2012b: 23).
In this perspective, the school is only ‘there’ so that it can lay the basis for future learning, which, in turn, will be determined only by the demands of working life. In the OECD’s words, ‘compulsory education is where people should master foundation skills and where they should develop the general desire and capacity to engage in learning over an entire lifetime’ (OECD: 2012c: 26).

**General skills and vocational skills**

There are tensions within the dominant discourse of vocational education. We have just seen CEDEFOP arguing for the primacy of generic skills above the demands of any particular job. However, other texts, even ones produced by the same official bodies, set out a contrary argument: that policy should track the development of particular occupational demands, so as to align vocational education more closely with them. The European Council, in its Brussels Communiqué of 2010, believes that ‘we must regularly review occupational and education/training standards which define what is to be expected from the holder of a certificate or diploma’ (European Council 2010: 2). The Council thus recommends ‘closer collaboration with stakeholders’ – state, educational institutions, businesses – to anticipate new skills requirements; it also hopes that initiatives will develop at national, regional and local level, that will ‘improve teachers’ knowledge of work practices’ (ibid: 8). Programmes of education and training, says the Council, should be focused on the ‘outcomes of learning’, and made ‘more responsive to labour market needs’ (ibid: 9).

The tension between this discourse and that of generic skills reflects a real contradiction, one which sets employers in growth industries (services, technology-intensive businesses) against declining sectors, such as metal-working, construction and ship-building). For employers who recruit managers and designers in hi-tech businesses - and likewise for those who hire bar-staff to work on TGVs - the problem is not one of finding people who have exactly the right set of pre-determined qualities. Such a strategy would be futile in the former case, where what is required in any event is a serious level of training within the business itself, and
irrelevant in the latter case, where no particular qualification is required. It is, in addition, a matter of regret for employers that workers sometimes lack a sense of initiative, that they respond too mechanically to unexpected situations, that they are slow in acquiring new kinds of knowledge and know-how suited to the nature of their job, that their ways of communicating and expressing themselves are not always well suited to the nature of the job. In this context, employers demand of the education system that it develops the generic skills of the future workforce.

Conversely, in more ‘traditional’ businesses, which recruit lathe operators, welders, bricklayers, engravers, joiners, plumbers, vocational know-how is a primary need, and carries more weight than vague considerations of adaptability and other competences of a social sort. However, the constant discourse of employers in these sectors, when they claim to be calamitously short of skilled labour, must be treated with a certain scepticism. It often implies less the existence of a real shortage of labour, than a rise in demand on the part of employers, resulting from the difficulties of the sectors that are hardest hit by economic crisis and from the competitiveness gap that separates them from sectors that can recruit from a vast reservoir of low-skilled labour.

The ambivalent discourses of organisations like CEDEFOP and the European Council are evidence of the strains in a position that seeks both to give priority to key skills and to address the lack of moderately skilled labour. It is a position that faces two ways, situating itself between two opposing fractions of European capital. But these tensions do not so much lead to policy contradictions, as to a ‘doubleness’ of policy. The emphasis on basic skills speaks to the initial phase of education – from primary to lower secondary – whose outcomes are tested by PISA; the second emphasis, which focuses on vocational preparation, relates to the 14+ age group.
Does employability create jobs?

No-one would dream of challenging the claim that the best trained workers have a better chance of finding work than others have: from 2008, the start of the recession, to 2010, the rate of unemployment among those possessing only a lower secondary school certificate rose from 8.8% to 12.5%, while that of workers with an upper secondary school certificate increased to a lower point, from 4.9% to 7.6%. Unemployment among those with degree-level qualifications increased from 3.3% to 4.7%. There exists, therefore, a clear correlation between the level and quality of education and the chances of escaping unemployment. But on the basis of this observation, which at the level of the individual is perfectly reasonable, some people over-hastily conclude that there exists a similar positive correlation between the overall level of certification in a society, and its overall employment rate.

The OECD and the European Commission like to play on this belief, claiming that high rates of unemployment can be explained in large part by the difficulties that employers encounter in finding an adequately skilled workforce. But this is a claim that collapses when confronted with the full statistical picture. As even the Commission’s own figures show (European Commission 2009) unemployment rates are negatively, not positively, correlated with the number of unfilled jobs. In other words, countries where there are a large number of jobs are not those where there is a high level of unemployment, but, on the contrary, ones where there is relatively little unemployment.

According to Eurostat unfilled posts at present amount to 1.5% of total EU employment: 98.5% of jobs are already filled. The number of unfilled vacancy is falling, while the rate of unemployment increases (DARES 2010: 17) In these conditions, it is difficult to see how a better match of worker training to market demands could reduce a current cross-European level of unemployment of 10%. In the figures compiled by the French employers’ organisation, MEDEF (2013), the four occupational groups where there is a high level of job vacancy are hotel and catering workers (11611), salespersons (5277), kitchen staff (5157) and drivers (4969), all
Education and training—under the dictatorship of the labour market

jobs that with some exceptions – head chef, for instance - do not necessarily require a formal qualification. Next on the list are 4628 business managers, 4432 engineers and technical staff – two job categories that are highly-skilled. The list goes on to include home helps (4081 vacancies), security workers (3338), domestic workers (3302) and miscellaneous unskilled jobs (2928). In summary, of around 47000 jobs deemed difficult to fill in the fourth quarter of 2012, only 9070, 19%, needed a high level of qualification. How can it be thought possible that this number can be reduced through some miracle of training? The reality is that the shortage of jobs affects to some small extent every occupational category, but the most qualified workers are able more easily to escape the threat of unemployment, by accepting jobs for which they are over-qualified. At lower levels of qualification this is harder to achieve. The OECD notes that ‘an upper secondary education is no longer solid insurance against unemployment and low wages’ (2012a:1). CEDEFOP confirms that ‘Weak employment demand due to the current economic downturn means that, although people are becoming better qualified, some may not find jobs in line with their expectations and qualifications’ (2012a:1).

When employers in some sectors complain that they cannot recruit sufficiently qualified workers, that usually means that as at other times of crisis, they are raising the level of demands that they are making on their staff, while also taking advantage of inter-worker competition to force down wages. They would certainly like to find skilled workers, ones with five years experience, with their own transport to the workplace, their own equipment and clothing and with all this a willingness to be taken on at the salary level of an unskilled worker. When the bar is raised so high (or so low, according to viewpoint) the most skilled young workers – skilled in terms of the competences defined above – would rather accept other kinds of job, which are in salary terms, at least, comparable, such as team leader in a McDonalds or as a TV salesman for Sony.
**Competition between workers and between schools**

In a strong sense, the whole idea of the flexibilisation of the labour market comes back to the issue of sharpening the competition between workers. This is the context in which we should understand the project of achieving a trans-European mobility of labour. Such mobility permits employers across Europe to recruit their workforce from a much more extensive reservoir, putting a much greater number of would-be workers into competition with each other for the same posts, and thus obtaining at lowest cost, workers who closely match the company’s expectations. This mobility of employment must be developed on the basis of an education system that promotes learner mobility. For the European Council, this constitutes ‘an essential element of lifelong learning’ (European Council 2009: 119).

Competition between workers must also take place ‘in the head’, at an ideological level. This is why it becomes necessary, from the nursery school onwards to encourage ‘more workplace and entrepreneurial learning experiences’ (European Council 2011: 70/1), which will be part of the ‘lifelong approach to learning’ that the European Council desires, and which will entail that education and training systems become ‘more responsive to change’, developing an openness to the ‘wider world’ beyond the school (European Council 2009: 119).

These are claims that need to be explored in all their educational dimensions. First, to take into account the ‘whole lifecourse’ means that the school should no longer aim only to transfer knowledge, but also and above all to ‘teach how to learn’. It has to ‘prepare European citizens to be motivated and self-sustained learners’ (European Council 2012b: 393-6). From an education system in which the state transfers or instils the values, disciplinary knowledge and qualifications that it considers supportive of the common good, we are moving towards a system in which worker-citizens are issued with an individual invitation to seek out whatever they consider useful for their individual careers. From now on, ‘they have to take responsibility for their learning to keep their skills up-to-date and maintain their value in the labour market’ (CEDEFOP
Fundamentally, there isn’t a great difference between these two kinds of regime, since the pursuit of the ‘common good’ on the part of the state, and the ‘personal careers’ of individual citizens have generally been conflated, under the sign of Capital. In the former instance, though, there still exists a regulative state - heavy, pervasive, bureaucratic but also providing forms of social protection, the conquests of social struggle. In the latter case, there are only individuals in competition with one another, each prepared to trample on their own rights as long as they can gain some advantage over the other. At the same time, the state progressively offloads any responsibility for education to the private sector, since ‘the responsibility for continued learning falls to individuals’ (CEDEFOP 2012: 22).

Secondly, in order to improve the ‘responsiveness to change’ of education systems, the EC, the European Council and the OECD all argue that systems based on centralised state management should be abandoned, in favour of networks of autonomous institutions, locked into intense mutual competition. Business leaders complain about ‘the slowness of training systems in responding to their needs and adapting to changing skill requirements’. In particular, they think that education and training systems are ‘overly bureaucratic’ and that ‘there is not enough flexibility at local level to design training programmes’ (Froy 2013: 63). They hope that the interplay of autonomy and competition will improve the ‘responsiveness of education and training systems to new demands and trends’ (European Council 2011: 70-2).

Thirdly, Council recommends an ‘opening up to the world’ on the part of educational systems. The ‘world’ should be understood here in a restrictive sense: the term refers to the totality of interests with a stake in the capitalist economy: the ‘world’ equals ‘private enterprise’. These stake-holding groups should form partnerships that can ‘ensure a better focus on the skills and competences required in the labour market and on fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in all forms of learning’ (European Council 2009: 119/4). The OECD recommends work-based training, on the job or in ‘sandwich’ form, for ‘vocational education and
training but also for more academically oriented university programmes’ (OECD 2012a; 27). It adds: ‘when employers are involved in designing curricula and delivering education programmes at the post-secondary level, students seem to have a smoother transition from education into the labour markets’: in other words, workers certificated on this basis are better able to adapt to the demands of their employers, and their skills can be more effectively and profitably made use of.

However, organising vocational education along the lines of the German ‘dual system’ comes up against strong resistance on the part of employers themselves. A CEDEFOP survey of European businesses in 2005 revealed a reluctance to involve themselves in training programmes, for ‘fear that the employees would be taken on by their competitors’ (CEDEFOP 2012a: 30).

**Conclusion**

Ever since the school was first given the role of educating the children of the working class, it has adapted its form and content to changes driven by politics, or by industrial-technological development. While its role in an earlier period was primarily ideological, its mission has over the decades become more explicitly economic and social. The 50s, 60s and the first years of the 70s saw the massification of secondary education, in the context of an ongoing shortage of skilled labour.

Today, in the time of crises, networks, and an explosion of certification, the school and its students are submitted to a double set of pressures: the polarisation of the labour market; the pervasive demand for adaptability and flexibility. In the name of these requirements, education has broken with the structural regulation that developed in the era of massified schooling; knowledge has been displaced as the reference point of schooling, in favour of a vague set of general competences; the democratisation of schooling, in the sense of its egalitarian mission, has been reduced to a promise of universal employability. Supported by the OECD and the EU, these changes are presented as ‘innovative’ and
‘democratic’, against opposition which has too easily allowed itself to be locked into a defence of the school of the past. The first victim of the changes is the school itself. Individualisation of the training offer, the spread of entrepreneurial ideology, the growth of quasi-market principles of organisation, cuts in state funding and the emergence of public-private partnerships – all open the door of education ever more widely to intrusion on the part of the private sector. But the main victims are the young, who are graduating from the new kind of school. They will have been made into adaptable workers. But this adaptability is not a matter of developing an understanding of change; instead the school sets out to break their capacity to resist change. And rather than being a form of cultural emancipation, it is a stripping away of culture, a deprivation.

Translated by Ken Jones

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Education and training—under the dictatorship of the labour market


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Nico Hirtt


136
Education and training—under the dictatorship of the labour market


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