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3. 'GOOD' EDUCATION IN A NEO-LIBERAL PARADIGM: CHALLENGES, CONTRADICTIONS AND CONSTERNATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps there is no single answer to the question of what constitutes a 'good' education within schooling systems. If there were, one would hope that it would have been found by now. In his book looking at the big questions in life, contemporary philosopher Simon Blackburn gives an insight into the difficulties of answering this type of complex, philosophical question; 'There will be many answers in different contexts, rather than one big answer, and it is progress to realize this.' (2009, p. 1). Nevertheless, it is an inescapable reality that education matters, and providing a 'good' education matters. So while there are still students for whom the current systems are failing (Mounk, 2017), the question must continually be placed in the way of those who are responsible for delivering education, from policy makers, to academics, to educators themselves. Why? Because, in the words of the late South African president Nelson Mandela, 'education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world' (de Villiers, 2015, para 1).

NEO-LIBERALISM: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

It is important here, before getting too far into this discussion, to define what is meant by the term *neo-liberal* or *neo-liberalism*, and its relationship to education. Ross and Gibson (2006) cite neo-liberalism as the 'prevailing political economic paradigm' (p. 2) globally. It draws from 'proponents of neoclassical economics, social conservatives, libertarians and liberals' (Anderson & Donchik, 2016, p. 324) and the past thirty years has seen its 'language, ideas and policies' impact not only the economies of countries, but also their cultures (Denniss, 2018, p. 2). Glendinning (2015) defines neo-liberalism in the following way.

(T)he outlook of a community of ideas that seeks the limitless extension of the norms of conduct of one domain of life to the whole of life. Its emancipatory claim is that it will achieve the optimal flourishing of the whole of life by co-ordinating and controlling it in terms dictated by the norms of that one domain. The guiding assumption of every neoliberal community of ideas is

that human flourishing in life in general requires that one particular domain of life – the interests of one particular community of ideas – should rule. Neoliberalism in our time is, that is to say, understood as an economic neoliberalism. It is construed as an ideological conception that says every problem has a market solution or a solution within the logic of the market (p.9 & 10).

The belief is that any market solution will be better than that which could be offered by any other, as ‘the profit motive of companies, combined with consumers’ ability to choose the product that suits them best, will result in the best possible social and economic outcomes’ (Denniss, 2018, p. 33). In this sense, Apple (2017) describes the world as being like one ‘vast supermarket’ (p. 149), where consumers choice lays in what companies offer, without there being the option of any alternatives (Denniss, 2018). What does all of this mean for education?

Education is ‘an inherently political act’ (Aasen, Proitz & Sandberg, 2014, p.721) and has therefore been profoundly influenced by decades of working within a neo-liberal paradigm. This influence can be seen in the determining factors of such critical questions in education such as ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘where’ and ‘how’, being drawn from ‘who ultimately gains the most from the ways that schools, the curriculum, and practices are organized and operated’ (Aasen, Proitz & Sandberg, 2014, p. 721). In this sense, education has come to be about those elements that are commonly attributed to neo-liberalism – marketisation, competition and profit (Apple, 2017). This chapter will interrogate the influence of these elements on education, but will also consider some other possibilities put forward by those who have a different view about where education should be heading. Neo-liberalism may have narrowed global policy agendas (Denniss, 2018) and as a result, pose a genuine threat to ‘truly public education’ (Apple, 2017), however ‘the simple fact is that the world is full of alternatives’ (Denniss, 2018, p. 17).

GOOD EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A ‘good’ education should expand ‘everyone’s freedom’ to live better lives, through the development of the capacity to think for oneself (Warnock, 1973). Biesta and Safstrom (2011) describe it as ‘a liberating process, a process aimed at the realisation of freedom’ (p. 541). While the result of ‘good’ education should be equivalent for all, this does not dictate that everyone should receive the *same* education (Warnock, 1973). In fact it espouses an opposing notion. Noddings and Slote (2003) identify the inarguable fact that each community has a different set of traditions and values, therefore providing a universal or *one-size-fits-all* schooling system will not work. It is this notion of different sets of traditions and values that has made the seemingly simple task of defining what education actually is, and in turn what ‘good’ education is, problematic. To educate someone implies that

something of value is being passed on, however what is considered to be of value is very different between individuals, communities and nations (Soltis, 1968). The result of this is that in the pursuit of providing a description or definition of education, a value-laden explanation is produced; and anything value-laden will sit comfortably with some but not all. This simple notion lays bare the complexities of working to understand what it means to provide a 'good' education.

Education is inarguably influenced by what is considered to be 'valued' by society - politically, economically and also socially (O'Hear, 1981). Physical and menial work, and anything that is considered to be 'unskilled', is low paid and held in low regard by society (the reciprocity between these two concepts would be interesting to explore further). At the other end, professional and so-called 'high skilled' positions are rewarded by higher incomes and greater social status. As a consequence, curricula in many countries have, in recent years, shifted to contain greater amounts of 'academic' work, while the more traditional, 'hands on' and creative subjects have disappeared. This has been precipitated by the development of standardised curriculum frameworks, such as those recently developed and implemented in Australia and the UK, where curriculum is an 'extrinsic imposition' rather than something that is designed by schools and their wider communities (Silbeck, 1984). Beista (2010) attributes this 'academisation' of curricula to the political, economic and social influences of the past two decades, rather than having anything to do with what is 'good' for education.

Almost 40 years ago O'Hear (1981) warned that societies 'dismissed at their peril' this external influence on education. He argued that this influence would have ongoing and lasting ramifications. With the focus being directed towards a purely academic curriculum and subsequent standardised outcomes, schools do not always have the flexibility or capacity to provide what all of their students need. For those students seeking and able to engage with the academic curriculum, all is good. However, the story is different for students who do not fit this mould. For some, this type of education is inappropriate and may in fact alienate rather than engage, as Bantock (1963) candidly pointed out more than 50 years ago:

Drag a lad...through the process of education and what do you produce in him, in the end? A profound contempt for education and for all educated people. It has meant nothing to him but irritation and disgust. And that which a man finds irritating and disgusting he finds odious and contemptible (p. 78).

The consequences of this can be significant, for both the individual and society (Mounk, 2017). But rather than questioning the ramifications of 'academatising' the curriculum, governments are punishing the young people for whom the system does not work. In many countries, young people must be engaged in some type of formal education program or working, or they will be financially penalised as they cannot access any welfare support (see for example the Australian Governments 'earn or learn' policy; in England and in the majority of states in the USA, you must be either in education or working until age 18). These punitive systems have been put into place to keep young people at school, but do nothing to address the

‘why’ of these policies needing to be there in the first place.

Given this, perhaps the focus for governments should not be on dictating the ‘what’ (in other words standardising the curriculum), but rather on the ‘how’ – how can we deliver to all young people across the globe an education that is ‘good’ for them, one that gives them what they need to become engaged, contributing and content members of a healthy society? Biesta (2015) provides a contemporary approach to this question in his ‘three domains of educational purpose’.

Three Domains of Educational Purpose

According to Biesta (2015), there are three domains of educational purpose, and each of these needs to be considered for education to be ‘good’. It has been represented like this.

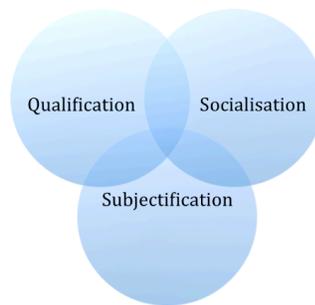


Figure 1. The three domains of educational purpose (Biesta, 2015, p. 78)

Each of these domains has its own, very distinctive description, as provided in the table below.

Domain	Definition
Qualification	The transition and acquisition of knowledge, skills and dispositions. It allows people to ‘do’ something, it qualifies them.
Socialisation	The representation and initiation of people into traditions and ways of ‘being and doing’ – cultural, professional, political, religious traditions and so on. The way we identify with and are identified by these.

Subjectification	The positive or negative impact on a person of the education they receive, the qualities of being ‘a subject’ – autonomy, independence, responsibility, criticality and the capacity for judgment.
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Table 1. A description of the domains of educational purpose

While it is acknowledged that this is one scholar’s representation of the complex notion that is ‘good’ education, it does provide an illustration that aligns with work others have done in this area over the millennia (for example see Plato, 2016; Freier, 2005; Peters, 1970). Of significance is its assertion that the purpose of education must consider the whole person, both as an individual and as a member of the community/ies in which they live. The *domains of educational purpose* provides a model on which to begin the discussion on the complexities involved with trying to deliver a ‘good’ education, particularly under the current neo-liberal paradigm.

Where ‘good’ education fits within the context of Biesta’s model will depend on what the needs of the particular child or young person and their community are. Nevertheless, this seemingly simple model makes a number of challenges to delivering a ‘good’ education glaringly apparent. The first challenge is the current educational climate, one that is replicated in many countries across the globe. Currently, the focus of education is on the domain of *qualification*, where there is excessive pressure on students (and teachers) to not only achieve to a set of standards, but to continually improve their results (Biesta, 2015). This expectation is set around a very narrow number of subject areas, and even within these subjects around a very narrow set of skills and understandings. Biesta (2015) believes that this strong focus on *qualification* is coming at the expense of the other two domains, meaning that students are not receiving all they need to, to be deemed to be getting a ‘good’ education.

The focus on the *qualification* domain presents the second challenge – what content should be taught? This is an issue that could be a chapter in itself, however the important point to note here is that the content in education in many countries has become ‘standardised’, meaning there is set content that students are expected to be taught and set standards that students are expected to achieve, regardless of circumstances. An example of this can be seen in Australia, which is a country of eight educational jurisdictions, each with its own unique set of circumstances. In this multicultural nation students from countries all over the world learn alongside the nation’s indigenous students, in classrooms situated in skyscrapers to single classroom schools hundreds of kilometres from anywhere. Students arrive at school each morning having come from a variety of communities and environments. The lived experiences, understandings and interests of these students vary greatly, as is to be expected. However once at school they are all delivered the same curriculum at the same time, and have the same expectations placed on them to achieve certain sets of standards at certain points during their schooling years. Australia is not the only country where this occurs; any system that operates using a standard set of

curricula faces this issue. Mulcahy (2008) is sceptical of the intentions of those who make the decisions about standard curricula, the 'powerful interests' who dictate what is taught in schools. Author Thomas Frank (2016) also raises questions, describing education in the United States as being ruled by those he identifies as the 'political elite'. This area needs critical study. Artiles, Harris-Murri and Rostenberg (2006) agree, arguing that questions need to be asked about the content being taught to students, and the way that it perpetuates rather than challenges current inequities in the education system, especially against those of minority racial and ethnic groups, and those with disabilities. Harris (1979) took this a step further and labelled the process of determining what will be 'included in' and what will be 'left out' of the curriculum as *political manipulation*. It is about what is valued by Frank's (2016) 'political elite' at a given point in time.

The final challenge to be discussed here is one that exists around the 'socialisation' domain. The very definition of this domain raises issues - what 'traditions and ways of 'being and doing' are students being initiated into? Each students' individual circumstances will dictate that the 'traditions and ways of 'being and doing' they experience or will experience as they grow will be unique in some way. Even if students live in similar circumstances, what this means and looks like in one community is going to be distinctive from what it means and looks like in another. This once again poses challenges for education systems that are insisting on delivering standardised curricula and standardised outcomes. As with the *qualification* domain, what is included into and excluded from this domain derives from what is valued at any given point in time by those with the power to make these decisions (Freire, 2005).

Controversy about what is included in or excluded from curriculum, across each of Beista's domains, is not new. Early last century Dewey (1934) acknowledged that different societies have different needs, and therefore it should be they who determine what is taught within their schools. Decades later, Silbeck (1984) explored this notion further and developed the concept of 'school based curriculum development'. Here, the 'planning, design, implementation and evaluation' (p. 2) of a curricula is undertaken by the school itself; not in isolation, but in conjunction with 'the larger educational environment, and the wider social and cultural environments' (p. 2). This way of thinking accepts Blackburn's (2009) theory that big questions, such as what constitutes a 'good' education, may not have a single, 'one size fits all' answer, and also negates many of the issues raised about education delivery in this section. Curriculum development undertaken by schools and their communities, with consideration of Beista's three domains of educational purpose, may be one way of steering education towards that which could be considered to be 'good'; good for all students. Be that as it may, any shift towards this type of curriculum development and delivery is unlikely in the current global neo-liberal climate. There are a myriad of reasons for this and while it is not possible to explore all of them here, three of the most significant impacts of neo-liberalism on education, 'good' education, will be scrutinized; current educational discourse, measurement and education, and value. A failure to question the impact

of these constructs on schooling presents 'threat to the strive for good education' (Beista, 2015, p. 84).

THE IMPACT OF CURRENT EDUCATIONAL RHETORIC ON 'GOOD' EDUCATION

There are two reasons why it is important to explore the changing use of language in educational rhetoric. First, words matter! Language plays a critical role in shaping the way things such as education, are understood, (Denniss, 2018; Berg & Englund, 2014; Arduin, 2013), both by those working in the profession, and by society at large. A direct consequence of this, and the second reason for this exploration, is that language is used as a tool by those who want to affect change in the way something is understood (Kloch, 2012). It follows then that any change in educational rhetoric is going to have an influence on the way education is viewed and understood, and these changes have been made by those with the power to do so, in an effort to affect this change. Two examples of the changing language of education will be explored here; the shift from 'good' to 'effective' education, and the increasing use of the terms 'learning' and 'learner/s'.

Noticeably absent in contemporary rhetoric on educational policies and schooling systems is the term 'good' education. Instead, the term 'effective' education has become part of the vernacular used by governments, policy makers and now those working within educational systems. The significance of this new terminology can be seen in the establishment of centres such as the Institute for Effective Education (based at the University of York in the UK) and the biannual journal published since 2009 by Taylor & Francis entitled 'Effective Education'. While this may seem a small and insignificant shift, the move from talking about 'good' to talking about 'effective' education has worked to deviate the focus from *what* students are achieving, to one that is concerned with *whether or not* students are achieving; 'we no longer talk about the inherent value of educating our children, but of the increase in skills and productivity that their education will provide' (Denniss, 2018, p. 14). The logic behind this change in rhetoric sits within the context of the current neo-liberal agenda for education.

Effective education takes a 'technical and quantified' approach to policy and is focused on terms such as 'evidence-based' and 'what works' (Gorur & Koyama, 2013). This is in an attempt to 'impose order within a field that is complexified by the inter-related, the local, the specific and the idiosyncratic' (Gorur & Koyama, 2013, p. 634). Through the use of quantifiable evidence, the complicatedness of what happens in the classroom is sorted and factors are isolated to 'discrete and definitive' problems that can be *solved* using strategies from a 'what works' list. While this may seem a sensible way to look at educational improvement, it does expose a significant flaw of shifting the language from 'good' to 'effective' education, something Biesta (2015) has identified as being a 'mistake'. He describes the issue thus.

The point here is that although 'effectiveness' is a value, it only refers to the degree in which a particular course of

action is able to bring about a desired result, but it does not say anything about the desirability of the result. For this, we need to embed questions about effectiveness within a large discourse about what is educationally desirable — in other words, what makes education good. (p. 80-81)

Along with the shift to talking about ‘effective’ education, has come what Biesta (2013) describes as the ‘learnification of educational discourse and practice’ (p. 5). Globally, educational conversations are about ‘learning’; students have become ‘learners’, teachers have become those that must ‘support’ and ‘facilitate’ learning and schools have become ‘learning environments’. On the face of it, this once again seems like reasonable language to use when talking about education. However the impact of this is similar to the one discussed above. The ‘learnification’ discourse has shifted the focus of educational discussion from the questions that really matter – What are students learning?, Why are they learning?, and Who are they learning it from?. In short, the discussion has moved away from the content, the purpose and the relationships of education (Biesta, 2015). This shift to talking about learning presupposes the assumption that all learning is inherently good and holds the same value (Biesta, 2013). It is easy to dispel this assumption. Can a child learning that their low socio economic standing denies them access to some experiences be considered good? Can a young person learning how to make illicit drugs be considered good? Is learning about the capital cities of African nations as important or relevant as learning to be empathetic? Does learning about Quantum theory hold the same value as learning how to iron a shirt, or learning to be patient? The answer to all these questions is obviously no, not for the individual involved in the learning or for society as whole; the content, purpose and relationships of education matter. For this reason ‘the language of learning is *insufficient* for expressing what matters in education’ (Biesta, 2015, p. 76).

A consequence of the current educational rhetoric is the need to measure. If the discourse is tied to the effectiveness (or not) of education, then the only way to know whether it is effective (or not) is to measure it. If the discourse is tied to student learning (or not) in education, then the only way to know whether students are learning (or not) is to measure. This has led to one of the most significant changes to education under neo-liberalism; the insatiable desire to measure (Muller, 2018).

THE PARADOX OF METRICS

Neo-liberalism views all costs and benefits associated with any organisation, whether they are part of the free market or a government run institution, as being measureable (Denniss, 2018), and this impacts every facet of every organisation or institution operating within this paradigm (Denniss, 2018; Muller, 2018; Cukier & Mayer-Schonberger, 2013). Yet this idea is not a new one. In his latest book, Muller (2018) describes the introduction of this type of thinking into the realm of public administration. The mid 19th Century saw legislation pass through

parliament in Victorian Britain that reformed the structure of business. Not long after this, Robert Lowe, a liberal parliamentarian, recommended a 'new method for government funding of schools, which would be based on "payment by results"' (Muller, 2018, p. 29). The three areas to be measured were reading, writing and arithmetic. From the outset this approach of standardised measurement received criticism. Nevertheless, despite subsequent years of research and a growing body of evidence that refutes its effectiveness, the concept of 'education as machinery, tailored to the measurable production of reading, writing and computation' (Muller, 2018, p. 31) has ensued, and now forms a large part of much of the educational reform across the globe (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012).

The question has to be asked – Why, if something has been shown to be ineffective, does it still hold such sway over those with the power to develop and enact educational policy? Muller (2018) cites two main reasons. The first is centred on the concept of 'social trust', both in relation to the level of security those in positions of power feel about their status, and the trust that society has for those who are in these positions. If social trust is lacking, using quantitative standardised data to inform decision making 'replace(s) reliance on the subjective, experience based judgments of those in power (Muller, 2018, p. 40), which in theory, should help to rebuild social trust. The second reason is accountability. Without a 'bottom line', not-for-profit organisations and institutions (such as schools) cannot be held accountable for success or failure. Developing and implementing standardised measures creates a 'substitute bottom line' (Muller, 2018, p. 42) by which these organisations and institutions can be held to account, particularly in relation to the funding they receive (Denniss, 2018).

As discussed in Chapter 1, education has been entrusted with the responsibility of preparing a nation's citizens to become active and contributing members who will work to 'improve the society' (Cramer, Little & McHatton, 2018) in which they live. While there are those who consider this an unfair burden to place on a single construct without regard for the factors that impinge upon it (Muller, 2018; Goldstein, 2015), if education is perceived to be not driving improvement (with an acknowledgement that what this look likes for different groups with different agendas will be, unsurprisingly, different), then it must be reformed. Half a century ago, lobbying in the USA from an eclectic coalition of 'business groups concerned about the quality of the workforce; civil rights groups distressed by differential group achievement; and educational reformers disturbed by what they saw as the failure of public schools to educate, demanded national standards, tests and assessment' (Muller, 2018, p. 90). The ensuing time has seen education reform globally move towards greater standardisation and measurement (Cukier & Mayer-Schonberger, 2013), climaxing in what Muller (2018) describes today as 'metric fixation'. 'Metric fixation concerns the relationship between measurement and improvement' (Muller, 2018, p. 17), where there is a causal assumption that if something is measured, it will be improved. It should be noted here that what is being discussed is measurement that has 'high stakes'. That is, it has 'important consequences for test takers, on the basis of their performance' (UNESCO, 2018). The unfettered confidence that governments have placed in the

ability of this type of measurement to drive improvement (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012) has had ‘significant impacts’ on curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, and consequently the work that teachers and schools do (Cramer, Little & McHatton, 2018). It has become an evidence-based profession.

Recent years have seen a push from policy makers and governments for evidence-based practice, based on teachers becoming evidence-based professionals (Biesta, 2007). A belief exists that using a list of strategies that have been *shown to work* (what has become known as ‘best practice’) through the collection and collation of numerical data, will lead to improved student outcomes (Meyer, 2017). The conviction of this thinking can be seen in the adulation given to John Hattie for his work in ‘Visible learning’ (2008), where he constructed league tables of educational strategies in terms of their effectiveness (using the effect size measure), beginning with the *most effective* strategies for classroom teachers at the top and the *least effective* at the bottom. While there are those who lament this type of prescriptive pedagogy (see Veck, 2014), the success of this book has demonstrated a desire for a list of ‘what works’ - strategies that are guaranteed to improve student outcomes. Production of this hierarchy of strategies (whether by Hattie or anyone else), requires a tightly defined and quantifiable set of measures so that those things that work are easily discernible through the achievement of higher scores, and those that lead to poor levels of achievement can be labelled as ineffective. Fortuitously for Hattie, quantifiable data on educational achievement is readily available across much of the globe. Somewhat ironically, this is a result of the perceived need for accountability.

The sentiment that schools should be accountable for the work they do has been a feature of education systems around the world for a long time (Hutchings, 2017). However, what form this accountability takes has shifted across the centuries and decades, as the views and values of those with the political and cultural power to directly influence education, change. Neo-liberalism has seen the adoption of the position that education should be managed as ‘a productive system, in which inputs are transferred into outcomes’, and it is these outcomes that are measured for their productivity and effectiveness to determine the quality of the schooling (Scheerens, Luyten & van Ravens, 2011a, p. 36). As Muller (2018) succinctly describes it, educational ‘(p)erformance is ... equated with what can be reduced to standardized measurements’ (p. 17). Consequently, the quality of education is currently being critiqued through the lens of only those things that are ‘objectively measureable and practically controllable’ (Scheerens, Luyten & van Ravens, 2011b, p. 4), which means what is measured is selected on this basis, rather than being selected because it accurately reflects a student’s understanding or the quality of the education they are receiving (O’Neill, 2002). Muller (2018) identifies three problems associated with measuring in this way; i) Measuring what is most easily measureable will rarely measure what is most important, or important at all; ii) Measuring the simple when the outcome is complex leads to deceptive results; and iii) Degrading information quality through standardisation strips away the context of what is being measured, such as the history, context, and meaning, and this results in information that appears more certain and authoritative

than it actually is (p. 23-24). This last point is echoed by Cukier & Mayer-Schonberger (2013), who caution a reliance on numerical data alone, as numbers 'are far more fallible than we think' (para 2). An old adage springs to mind here - 'Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted'.

Many aspects of education cannot be measured. Unterhalter (2017) claims that this has created a tension between 'what is easily measurable, but may not be significant, and what is of major importance, but cannot be measured' (p. 2), with the latter being obscured or disregarded all together. There has been, and continues to be, much written about what is being missed because of the way student outcomes are being measured today (see any of the references from Biesta, Meyer or Hutchinson used in this section), and this is not the place for an in-depth discussion on the topic. Nevertheless, it is important. Why? Because the data being collected from students is being used to make what Meyer (2017) describes as 'far-reaching and often highly consequential pronouncements' (p. 18) about the quality of educational institutions and the work their educators do.

The measurement agenda is being driven by the global desire for educational improvement, improvement that can be seen in measureable student outcomes. In part, this is a result of the growing participation in, and reliance on, international comparative studies (Biesta, 2010), such as the *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* (PIRLS), the *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS), and perhaps the most well-known and utilised, the *Program for International Student Assessment* (PISA). The OECD conducts PISA every three years to produce league tables that enable (and encourage) countries to examine their performance across narrow aspects of English, Mathematics, and Science through making comparisons with other countries, and tracking their own performance over time. The stakes attached to this test are high. Consequently, many countries have developed and implemented their own testing regimes in a bid to boost student achievement in the assessed areas (UNESCO, 2015). And why wouldn't they? The higher up the PISA table a country is, the more successful their education policy and systems are considered to be.

Unfortunately, there is a flip side to this agenda. Reliance on testing and assessment has impacted the work of all educators across all sectors of schooling; the culture of testing and assessing is evident in every classroom in every school across much of the world (Peim & Flint, 2009). Hursh and Martina (2016) even go as far as saying that schools are no longer places of shared and collaborative teaching and learning, but are instead 'places where teachers and students focus on passing the tests' (p. 190). This focus on 'the test' has implications for the data these tests produce. Social psychologist Donald Campbell outlined his concerns in 1976, in what has become known as Campbell's Law (see Sidorkin, 2016, for a discussion on this). While this law pertains to the issue of using quantitative data for broader social change, he comments specifically on the challenge of using standardised testing in education:

[A]chievement tests may well be valuable indicators of

general school achievement under conditions of normal teaching aimed at general competence. But when test scores become the goal of the teaching process, they both lose their value as indicators of educational status and distort the educational process in undesirable ways' (p. 85)

This challenges the validity of any data drawn from high stakes testing, where the focus for schools is acquiring the best possible scores in the areas being measured, rather than on delivering what could be considered 'good' education.

Students are not the only ones who are being 'tested'. This appetite for improvement has led to the development of sets of standards for schools and the people who work within them, standards that are supposedly measureable and against which schools are audited. How this is actualised varies between countries (see Ehren, Perryman & Skackleton, 2015, for a discussion on this in Europe, Baxter & Clarke, 2013, for a discussion on this in England, and Codd, 2005, for a discussion on this in New Zealand), though in each case the results of these audits are available for public viewing, whether in the form of league tables or reports. Whatever the form, the effect is the same - schools are working to ensure they are scoring well against the set standards, and if they do not, they have to do more to improve in these areas for the next round of audits. These types of standards are also set for systems at the national level. The OECD produces an annual report known as 'Education at a Glance' - a document that compares around 40 nations against 30 measureable indicators. Gorur (2015) describes these indicators as statistics that are deliberately selected with the purpose of informing governments and policy makers about the state of their education systems; the standards in this publication are there to directly influence the educational debate, and in turn educational policy, at both a global and national level.

There can be little doubt that students, schools, educators and the systems they work within are being exposed to increased levels of accountability through ongoing assessment, in the form of student testing regimes, audit style evaluations for schools and teachers, and global performance league tables. While there are those who see this as a step in the right direction (Benjamin & Pashler, 2015; Roediger III, Putnam & Smith, 2011), there are many who lament this regime of measurement, insisting it is moving education away from achieving its ultimate goal of being 'good'. Slee (2011), in his unmistakably frank manner, describes why:

They (educational power brokers and policy makers) speak of teaching and learning and simultaneously distract students from their education with rote training for a battery of standardized tests... Neo-liberal governments speak of educating flexible and adaptable students to become global citizens and restrict educational choices through narrow traditional curriculum. They emphasise the need for autonomous learners and disqualify the role of mistakes (or failure) in learning. They urge creativity and reify uniformity and standardization (p. 4).

When viewed in this way it is not difficult to conclude that this measurement agenda has had a negative impact on both students and teachers alike (Hutchings, 2017). However, it is perhaps the consequences for those students and schools who are on the margins that are of most concern.

Globally, governments and organisations such as the OECD and UNESCO make claims that the measurement agenda will benefit not only high performing students and schools, but also those who are considered low performing. This is achieved, according to the rhetoric, through standard measures being able to identify where the shortfalls lay so that systems, schools and teachers can work to improve these areas for students. Research from England has found that schools that do raise their rates of academic achievement, as measured by high stakes systemic testing, also see success in other measured areas, such as student attendance rates and parent satisfaction data (Day, 2011). However, two points need to be made here. The first is that increases in student achievement tend to be fleeting; improved results are not sustained over longer periods of time (Muller, 2018). The second point is that schools that have achieved improvement in their results tend to be schools that were doing reasonably well in the first place (Muller, 2018). The consequences of the measurement agenda undoubtedly impact, most significantly, those students and schools who are low performing (Cramer, Little & McHatton, 2018; Razer, Friedman & Warshofsky, 2013; Ainscow, 2010).

As discussed previously, one of the effects of the measurement agenda has been the narrowing of what is delivered as curriculum and, consequently what is assessed. The way it is assessed has also been constricted. This phenomenon has narrowed the view of what is considered at a school, system and global level to be a high level of educational attainment. A result of this, whether deliberate or not, has been to 'discourage participation of learning of some groups of learners' (Ainscow, 2010, p. 75), particularly those who are interested in areas that sit outside those that fit the current depiction of educational success. Along with fewer academic disciplines being considered under the educational attainment umbrella, the increased reliance on standardised forms of assessment has led to fewer types of assessment being undertaken by students. The result of this has been twofold. Some students, for a myriad of reasons, cannot access or complete the assessments tasks at all, and therefore their data is not collected, which in turn means it is not counted. Other students, for reasons such as social class, disability, or ethnic background, cannot access the content of the assessment tasks in the same way as many of their peers. For this group of students the data collected does not accurately reflect their ability in the areas being measured (Cramer, Little & McHatton, 2018). For both groups of students it can be argued that their 'voices' are not being heard when it comes to policy decisions being made using the data collected from these standardised assessments. Many regard them as students who are failing or low achieving, when rather it is the assessment regime itself that is failing these students (Fischman, DiBara & Gardner, 2006).

Data that measures a very narrow set of standard outcomes across a very narrow set of curricula, and does not include all students in an adequate way in its collection process, is used by governments and policy makers to determine areas of

educational need and future educational development (Meyer, 2017). In addition, this data has enabled the creation of national and international league tables with the highest performers at the top and the lowest at the bottom (Hardy & Boyle, 2011). This has ensured that a large number of ‘the world’s schools will always be wanting at various levels of deficiency’ (Meyer, 2017, p. 19). In an era of educational choice for parents, schools and systems vie for positions that are higher up the league tables. The result of this is significant for ‘low-attaining students, students who demand high levels of attention and resources, and those who are seen not to conform to school and classroom behavioural norms (Ainscow, 2010, p. 76). These students become ‘unattractive’ to ‘higher performing’ schools and as a result often end up attending schools that sit much lower down the league table. This cycle of low achievement is then perpetuated – poor results lead to ‘poor performing’ schools which in turn lead to poorer results and so on (Hutchings, 2017). Arduin (2015) describes the measurement agenda as ‘a tool to compare and differentiate those who succeed from those who fail’ (p. 108), and for those schools who fail, some form of sanction or penalty shall ensue (Muller, 2018; Cukier & Mayer-Schonberger, 2013).

For all of the reasons discussed here, Beista (2010) concludes that ‘the current culture of accountability is deeply problematic’ (p. 59). This debate is not new. A century ago Dewey (1916) was arguing against the push for education to be viewed as a pure science, where a contrived set of standards was to be established and students measured against them (this was despite his desire that educators have a broad understanding of the sciences and their influence on education). 2000 years earlier his predecessor, Aristotle, was also espousing the belief that the most important things in nature (in us) could not be reduced to a set a quantities, but rather to understand them required, as described by Meyer (2017), ‘sustained reflection and contextually sensitive discernment’ (p. 18). Without this, ‘it may alter the way we think about and practice education – from a civic good, anchored in liberal and emancipatory learning reflecting a community’s historical and cultural commitments, to a global commodity, weighed, measured, and sold in the global marketplace’ (Meyer, 2017, p. 19).

The critique of high stakes testing presented here does not assume that all data is bad. In fact the opposite is true. ‘Data can help improve things, if it’s the right data used in the right way’ (Cukier & Mayer-Schonberger, 2013, para 18). Low stakes testing, where data is collected through various forms of assessment and judgment is allowed, can inform teachers of their students’ progress and provide them with the information they require to make necessary adjustments to the curriculum and/or teaching methods (Muller, 2018). The inclusion of judgment is important here. Teachers, as professional educators, need permission to make judgments as ‘(u)ltimately, the issue is not one of metrics versus judgment, but metrics as informing judgment, which includes knowing how much weight to give metrics, recognizing their characteristic distortions, and appreciating what can’t be measured’ (Muller, 2018, p. 183).

INCLUDING INTO WHAT? REIGNITING THE 'GODD EDUCATION' DEBATE

The current reform agenda in education relies on data obtained from high stakes testing. This is despite growing bodies of research that show sustained improvement in results is not occurring, whether considering the achievements of individual groups of students, or in the 'closing of the gap' between the highest and lowest performers (Cramer, Little & McHatton, 2018; Muller, 2018; Sidorkin, 2016; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012). Yet governments continue to spend large sums of money on the development and re-development of standards and the testing regimes required to assess them, and the 'measurement continues unabated' (Muller, 2018, p. 98). Paradoxically, there may well be improvements in aspects that are not part of the current measurement regime, such as the creative arts, critical thinking, or the capacity to work collaboratively. Nevertheless the status quo remains, and data from high stakes assessment drives the prevailing education reform agenda. Any paradigm shift away from this will require a change in what societies, governments and the global community value in their education systems.

VALUE AND 'GOOD' EDUCATION

The concept of value is ambiguous; on the one hand it can be used to refer to goods in terms of their worth, while on the other it can be used to describe conceptual notions such as Plato's ideas of 'the true', 'the good' and 'the beautiful' (Brezinka, 1994). An in-depth interrogation of value is beyond the scope of this study (see Hall, 1952, for an example of this) however it is necessary to provide a working definition for this discussion. The Oxford Dictionary defines value as being 'Principles or standards of behaviour; one's judgment of what is important in life'. The determination of what is 'important' is influenced immeasurably by past histories, family, the Zeitgeist, group memberships and context-dependent experiences (Bergman, 1998). Values cannot be developed without direct influence from the situation in which one, or a society, finds itself (Williams, 1979). Values matter, in a big part because they 'serve as criteria for selection in action' (Williams, 1979, p. 16). This means that any shift in value is going to have consequences for 'the direction of societal development (Williams, 1979, p. 34). Understanding value in this way makes it clear that a reciprocal relationship must exist between what occurs as education and what is valued.

Education, as identified earlier in this chapter, has come to mean the 'knowledge and understanding' of something, something that is considered to be of value by society (Peters, 1970). In this sense, the influence of societal values on education can be clearly seen; if something is considered as being of value to know and understand by society, then it will become part of the education that its citizens receive. As Arduin (2015) puts it, 'societal values form the bedrock of an education system' (p. 106). Of course, there are many things that influence what society values, and while that needs to be acknowledged, it will not be explored here, except to share this sentiment of Furlong expressed so succinctly by Arduin (2015), 'the values that underlie a society's approach to, and definition of, education are inextricably political and, therefore, complex and ambiguous' (p. 107).

Understanding what society does value in education is not an easy task. Even if those with the authority over education systems seek this information, there is a strong chance that they will end up with something that 'represents values of adults rather than those of children and youth, or those of pupils a generation ago rather than those of the present day' (Cahn, 1970, p. 214). Current government policy makes the assumption that academic achievement is what is valued most highly in education by society (Jacob & Lefgren, 2007). This has created a need for the collection of evidence to ensure this is happening to the highest possible standard, leading to the current climate of standardisation and measurement. What is interesting here is that while the value attributed to academic achievement has led to a culture of standardisation and measurement for many educational systems, this has in turn had a significant impact on what is considered of value within education. It can be argued that what is now held up as being valuable in education has shifted over recent decades to fit what can be measured. This is a situation where society is valuing what it can measure rather than measuring what it values (Biesta, 2010). Warnock (1973) lamented the consequences of this more than four decades ago when she wrote 'it must surely be putting the cart before the horse to argue for a certain kind of education on the basis of the examinations which are possible at the end of it' (p. 115).

Placement of value on things that are standard and measurable presents an issue for a construct such as education, which has been entrusted with the task (rightly so or not) of improving social inequality. Aristotle, as Peters (1966) cites, identified that 'Injustice results just as much from treating unequals equally as it does from treating equals unequally' (p. 118). These words, though penned millennia ago, identify a significant problem with value being placed on standards that can be easily measured – it assumes all students are equals, when in fact they are not (Cramer, Little & McHatton, 2018). The reliance on data that treats all students as equals has led to education becoming an increasingly unequal construct, where the gap between the highest and lowest performers is increasing. This is in stark contradiction to the premise that education can help overcome, or at least reduce, inequalities within society. Until value shifts from the treatment all students as equals to that of all students as individuals, the capacity for education to make a difference in a climate of growing inequality is negligible.

CONCLUSION

Despite the difficulties that the pursuit of 'good' education is facing under the neo-liberal reform agenda, it is clear that within this climate education is seen as something that is valuable, something that is worth pursuing. The money governments globally pour into their education systems every year attests to this. But this alone is not enough. 'Good' education must promote the growth and development of the whole person, with consideration of the community in which they live – so they have the opportunity to become contributing and content members of a healthy society. Peter's (1966) adds another element to this debate -

the issue of fairness. Fairness raises issues not only about the quality of the education being delivered, but also about the distribution of its delivery. Is education being provided equitably? Is it fair? This question of fairness sits aptly at the end of this chapter, as fairness is, in itself, something that is 'intrinsically valuable, something worth wanting for its own sake' (De Marneffe, 2013, p. 52). The only way that the provision of education can be considered fair is by providing it in a way that is inclusive of everyone, regardless of his or her circumstance. This brings the discussion now into the realm of inclusive education.

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