

Policies and Politics of Contemporary Schooling

The system didn't work for me. They weren't very accommodating. They just let me slip through the cracks.

Student, at a focus group interview

We have like a farewell day for the year twelves and there's a bit of live music that happens and we stand around and there's tears and hugs and all of that. One girl who'd had a very difficult life—had been fostered I think twelve times by the time we met her—she was crying and she said, "If not for here I would be dead", and she meant every word of it.

Kristin, Mathematics teacher

Abstract This chapter expands on the philosophy of inclusive, democratic education that infuses the pedagogical landscape at Music Industry College. It also further develops the complex policy context of alternative schooling in an era of neoliberalism, performance metrics and teacher accountability and performativity. It connects to contemporary research on global education reform and educational philosophy, in order to make a compelling case for more socially just schooling.

Keywords Education policy · Democratic schooling · Equity · Economic rationalism · Neoliberalism · Social justice

In this chapter, we explore the globalised and local policy contexts of schooling in Australia, in order to understand the milieu within which MIC exists. The first part of the chapter considers how social justice has been reframed as equity and co-opted by policy levers driven by neoliberal, neoconservative and economic rationalist ideals. We then consider how MIC walks a tight line between compliance and subversion of the policy imperatives framing schooling. We conclude the chapter with some discussion about possible implications for social justice and contemporary schooling.

The globalised context of education policy has been well covered by others,¹ and for this book, we draw on the useful notion of a *global education policy field*.² While we are writing a book about a particular alternative school in a local context, it is important to acknowledge how the globalised nature of education policies and politics impacts on the configuration of Australian schooling. Ball³ argues that global policy networks result in policy flowing across the boundaries of nation states and educational sectors. What happens in the USA and the UK, in particular, influences educational developments in Australia. This is clearly demonstrated through the growing influence of neoliberalism and a resurgent neoconservative movement⁴ on education policy-making and practice.

One of the most prominent examples of the global education policy field can be seen in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a triennial comparative assessment of 15-year-olds' reading, mathematics and science performance, administered by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The resulting PISA leagues tables cause much consternation throughout the world, with *PISA shock* a common response from countries such as Australia, which continues to see a steady decline in the overall comparative performance.⁵ We are not particularly interested in the interrogation of international leagues tables, which has been well covered by others.⁶ What is of interest to us in this book is how the OECD explicitly compares quality and equity in educational systems. For example, in the 2012 PISA round, Australia was evaluated by the OECD as being both high quality and high equity, despite the persistent narrative of declining performance. However, this sits uncomfortably with research evidence, including the work of Teese and Polesel, which describes a much more complex picture of an educational disadvantage⁷ than that offered by flattened international comparisons.

A further instance of the global education policy field comes from what Sahlberg⁸ calls the *Global Education Reform Movement* (GERM), which promises improvements in quality and efficiency in education systems through standardised performance benchmarking and policy borrowing.⁹ As Ball notes, “the rhetoric of reform often also manages to couple improvements in social justice and equity, of a particular kind, and the maximisation of social, educational and economic participation, to enterprise and economic success”.¹⁰ There is no doubt that within the global education policy field, “social justice and equity are being transformed through the national and global reworking of education into a field of measurement and comparison”.¹¹ Such activities are part of a drive to reconstitute education as a primary driver of economic development and growth in a globalised market.¹² Ball¹³ describes the collapsing of social and economic purposes of education into an all-consuming focus on economic competitiveness, which comes at a significant cost to the social purposes of education.

Pusey¹⁴ labels this kind of approach as one of the *economic rationalism*, where the state—in this case, enacted through the policies of the Australian federal government—seeks to rationalise its social policy-making through a primarily economic design. This includes health, social security and education, which are all being remade through input–output driven models of efficiency and market-based mechanisms. Much of what we refer to as neoliberalism is actually a combination of classical liberal ideology—freedom of the individual rational human subject arising from the enlightenment—mixed with economic rationalism. In the age of late Capitalism, the convergence of liberalism, economic rationalism and neoconservatism provides a potent mix for schooling. And we would suggest not a healthy one at all for ensuring a quality public education system committed to principles of democratic participation and social justice.

Education has become reconstituted as a “central arm of national economic policy”¹⁵, where equity is rearticulated as improving school performance while simultaneously bracketing out socio-economic factors.¹⁶ In this *neosocial*¹⁷ market of education policy, equity is reduced to an input–output model of economic productivity¹⁸, where “equity is articulated with performance and is conceived as both the achievement of a certain level of performance and a weakening of the relationship between performance and personal, social and economic circumstances”.¹⁹ In the process, equity becomes framed as delivering efficiency and productive

outputs, where young people are supposedly given the same chances to compete in the market for employment, housing, health, and so on. This relies on economic rationalist policies, which in turn require reforming schools and other education systems.²⁰ As such, schooling becomes reduced to a component in the production of human capital, where global competition, efficiency and productivity are linked to the output of education²¹. There are serious implications for social justice when schooling becomes “closely hitched to the shifting imperatives of the global market”.²² As Held explains:

Education has so far been largely out of the market, seen as a public service. But more and more schools run for profit and educational enterprises intended to reward their investors financially are being developed. The classroom is being commercialised as never before, and “privatisation,” which is often corporatisation, is the predominant trend for more and more previously governmental activities. The media steadily reinforce the message that markets are better, freer, and more glamorous than any other ways of organising human life. The ideal of everyone an entrepreneur is pervasive.²³

Further, there is an argument is that equity will be achieved, not through social democratic policies of redistribution or recognition²⁴ of difference approaches, but rather through a mantra of “quality, transparency and accountability”.²⁵ Such drivers are meant to ensure that there is not only high quality but also high efficiency in the system. Of course, accountability itself is not a bad thing. However, the kinds of bureaucratic and restrictive accountabilities that are arising through the contemporary education policy landscape are at odds to the democratic accountabilities²⁶ that are a keystone of professional growth and community responsibility. As Biesta says:

The predicament here is whether we are measuring and assessing what we consider valuable, or whether bureaucratic accountability systems have created a situation in which we are valuing what is being measured, i.e. a situation where measurement has become an end in itself rather than a means to achieve good education in the fullest and broadest sense of the term²⁷.

Furthermore, there is an increasing prevalence of standardised testing regimes and a heavy emphasis on improving teacher quality²⁸ as policy levers. Equity becomes framed through the notions of fairness and

inclusion,²⁹ where access to a consistent standard of education is guaranteed regardless of socio-economic factors. Social justice is thus marginalised in favour of advancing entrepreneurial behaviour in a competitive global economy,³⁰ and schooling is a central component of increasing nation states' economic productivity. Indeed, "education has been defined as an industry, and educational institutions have been forced to conduct themselves more and more like profit-seeking firms".³¹

Additionally, there has been a conflation of equity with the notion of schools as education providers in the market, offering choice and catering to the particular demands of consumers who seek to maximise return on their investment.³² As "equity in policy is a flexible and contestable concept, capable of being rationalised in multiple ways and towards multiple ends"³³, it seems unsurprising that there would be a capturing of equity as the *tailoring* of education to meet consumer demand in the marketplace. This re-articulation of social justice as economically defined equity³⁴ relies on various technical and numerical mediations, representations via statistical and graphical means such as leagues tables. Like Sellar and Lingard, we are convinced that the narrowing scope of what counts as equity and social justice "must be countered by reinvigorating attention to the impact of school and social contexts on educational opportunities and outcomes".³⁵

We also agree with Smyth, who argues that Australian education has been consumed by the notions of "privatisation, individualisation, competition, choice, devolution of responsibility, the user-pays ideology, and self-management".³⁶ There is a significant body of research³⁷ that demonstrates the pervasive effects of these policies on education in Australia and abroad. One effect is the ceaseless intensification of education as a site of work preparation and inflating credentialisation, which means that young people are coerced into cycles of "continuous economic capitalisation of the self".³⁸ The public is collapsed into the individual and the debates shift from education as a social good to one of schooling as a site of work preparation.³⁹ Young people become part of the *human capital*⁴⁰ that is developed for exploitation within the market.

Yet capitalism requires winners and losers, which makes for some uncomfortable tensions with an education system that seeks to uphold equity and democratic principles at its heart. Less focused on, but perhaps even more concerning, is that the youth labour market is rapidly changing, and in many places, jobs simply do not exist for graduates.⁴¹ So the argument that schooling is inextricably linked to developing skills

for the workforce is not only reductive, but also potentially dangerous for young people who already face multiple issues of disadvantage and marginalisation. There are significant effects from the collapsing of the political into the technical, where quality, efficiency and competition are used as depoliticising tactics.⁴² The *what works* mantra is a clear example of this, where efficiencies in education systems are unquestionably good and thus, whatever is going to produce the best outcomes should be accepted by all.

However, the limited view of school as a place where young people learn to become workers is deeply worrying for us, given that we see education as a social institution where “different groups with distinct political, economic, and cultural visions attempt to define what the socially legitimate means and ends of a society are to be”.⁴³ The very question of what education is for,⁴⁴ and who gets to decide, sits at the heart of the project of contemporary schooling. Schooling is not a “passive mirror, but an active force, one that also serves to give legitimacy to economic and social forms and ideologies so intimately connected to it”.⁴⁵ Nor are schools sealed units, where their outputs can be understood separate from their contexts.⁴⁶

Bernstein describes schools as involving both an instrumental order—curriculum and knowledge transmission—and an “expressive order, which controls the transmission of the beliefs and moral system”.⁴⁷ We are most interested in the notion of an expressive order, where the legitimisation of particular social values is encoded into the rituals, practices and social relations of schooling as an institution. Bernstein writes extensively on ritual in education, whereby students are enculturated (not always with their consent) into the social system. Similarly, Bourdieu might consider this to be simply part of the uneven acquisition of cultural capital,⁴⁸ which is required for successful economic, political and social participation.

Thomson argues that schools are part of the policy milieu, where “whole scale economic, cultural and social changes and economic, cultural, social and even foreign policy can be seen in the day-to-day-life of schools”.⁴⁹ In her book, *Other People's Children*, Delpit⁵⁰ describes how the cultural lives of marginalised and disadvantaged students are often at odds with the cultural capital expected by society.

The obsession with school reform that privileges market-based measures produces a “skewed and distorted distribution of who is able to access and benefit from education”.⁵¹ There is an inherent assumption

that all young people start from the same point in terms of access to cultural, social, economic and political capital. But we know this simply is not true. As Mills and McGregor explain, “for those young people who may lack the social and economic capital to successfully navigate a competitive society premised on ‘freedom of choice’, the accumulated consequences may be devastating, leaving them with little capacity to change their circumstances”.⁵² There are serious consequences for young people who find themselves on the margins of society, with lifelong implications for health, economic dependency, as well as capacity to engage fully in their communities.

Along with Francis and Mills, we are concerned that the quasi-marketisation of schooling and several decades of economic rationalist education policy has created an education system in Australia that “is inherently damaging: damaging both in its institutional impact on children/young people and teachers as individuals, and in its fundamental perpetuation of social inequality”.⁵³ At its worst, schooling might be considered as a form of violence against young people,⁵⁴ including physical and psychological harm driven by “increasingly technocratic, standardised, regulated, ordered, inspected and test-driven schooling systems aimed primarily at classification and ranking”.⁵⁵ Perhaps one of the most alarming aspects is in the rise of standardised testing, which Au argues⁵⁶ in his book, *Unequal by Design*, has its origins in the eugenics movement, as a function of commodifying, sorting and categorising young people. The policies of standardisation actively work towards maintaining, not removing, educational inequality.

In contrast, educational reform in Finland has considered social justice as an end in itself,⁵⁷ recognising that successful outcomes need not be motivated by a need to compete. In this instance, prioritising social justice places education out of the reach of the global race to win at all costs. Noddings comments on the state of affairs in the USA where the need to “out-innovate, out-educate and out-build the rest of the world”⁵⁸ is seen as a twenty-first-century solution to return to the greatness achieved from the twentieth-century race to the top. We agree with Keddie, who says:

A distributive understanding of justice has been the predominant focus within equity and schooling policy and practice since its inception. This focus continues to be extremely important in pursuing social justice particularly given that schools continue to perpetuate class disadvantage through

the inequitable distribution of education's material benefits and given that poverty and early school leaving continue to be the most accurate predictor of educational disadvantage and future economic and social marginalisation. However, such a focus is also recognised as limited—a purely distributive approach fails to consider how matters of cultural disadvantage constrain students' educational outcomes.⁵⁹

In Australia and elsewhere, where “neoliberal power and market-dominated society have become practical reality”,⁶⁰ education goals are driven by a culture of competition which is at the heart of the ideology and discourse of government policy. The ideologically driven rationale is that we need to achieve economic success over others (we need to compete with China; we need to be top five in the world). The commodification and marketisation of everything, including education, means that schools, their students and their teachers, are bought and sold in the marketplace, and must take on mechanisms of competition. In releasing any social responsibility, such a neoliberal governmentality purports that all that is required is to create opportunity and the natural competitive spirit of citizens ensures that the rest will follow. The flawed assumption with this is that the playing field is not level at the outset. Self-interest is encouraged and social responsibility becomes further reduced.

It is unsurprising that there has been an intensification of young people disengaging from school at the same time as a “hardening of educational policy regimes that have made schools less hospitable places for students and teachers”.⁶¹ Furthermore, it seems clear to us that “the current political context in Australia is not conducive to retaining and supporting young people with complex material, social and personal needs in mainstream schools”,⁶² which might explain in part the enormous proliferation of alternative schooling in recent times.⁶³

Australia has become a “leading celebrant of the neoliberal view of schooling”⁶⁴ over the past three decades, and this has significant implications for the lives of students and teachers working in Australian schools. Successive policy shifts have “enshrined a market-based approach to education where schools are defined as businesses and forced to compete against each other and students are defined as competitive individuals”.⁶⁵ This view encourages self-interest and the rampant promotion of competition over and above a spirit of co-operation, generating inequality and a range of associated issues for students and teachers. As Connell states, “Education becomes a zone of manufactured insecurity, with

‘achievement’ through competition as the only remedy. But in a zero-sum competition, achievement for one means failure for all the rest”.⁶⁶

In Australia, an important policy shift occurred after the 1996 federal election of the Howard conservative coalition government, which included the disbanding of the Schools Council (itself replacing the Whitlam era Schools Commission in 1987) and shifting the emphasis from education to employment, training and youth affairs. Of particular note is the renaming of the commonwealth’s Equity section as the Literacy and Numeracy section.⁶⁷ This signalled a significant change in focus from equity-based interventions such as the Disadvantaged Schools Programme⁶⁸ to an emphasis on improving literacy levels as addressing educational disadvantage. The rise of international comparative testing such as PISA, as well as national standardised testing regimes such as NAPLAN, was able to thrive in Australia as a result of this shift. Added to this has been a relatively recent move from a concern for quality teaching to an emphasis on quality teachers.

Through these policy shifts, equity in the Australian context has come to be framed in individualistic and market-based ways, where decentralisation, choice and competition⁶⁹ are expected to deliver egalitarian educational outcomes for all students. The most recent review of school funding, referred to as the *Gonski*⁷⁰ review, placed equity at the centre of its remit, claiming that “all Australian students should be allowed to achieve their very best regardless of their background or circumstances”.⁷¹ Similarly, the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*⁷² positions access to high-quality schooling and educational equity at the heart of its policy imperative, claiming that “as well as knowledge and skills, a school’s legacy to young people should include national values of democracy, equity and justice”.

However, as Mills and McGregor argue, the Melbourne Declaration also “established a policy framework of intent that reflected global education trends and promised to raise the competitive edge of Australia’s results from international tests”,⁷³ buying into the argument of education as a tool for economic development. While these notions of equity might appear to be uncontroversial, whether related specifically to schools funding or more generally to the goals of education, the question is more about how they play out in the policy arena. For example, the ongoing controversy surrounding the Gonski report clearly demonstrates that the question of what counts in schooling and who should pay

for what, the very notion of a public education, and so on, are far from settled.

We find it of significant concern that the “option” of alternative schooling means that public schools are given the opportunity to abrogate their responsibility to educate all students, regardless of their backgrounds and needs. So, in this regard, we are very aware of the dangerous road that a simple exaltation of successful alternative schooling (like MIC) might become. Rather, we consider our work to fit within a broader project that might be described as a struggle to reconstitute and re-imagine mainstream schooling in counter-hegemonic ways that work in the interests of those who are least advantaged by the system.⁷⁴ We would prefer a schooling system where MIC did not have to exist, because the students who have found themselves there never needed to look for an alternative in the first place.

What interests us most about MIC is how it operates as a *socially just school*,⁷⁵ rather than how it operates as an alternative school. Smyth and colleagues describe the hallmarks of a socially just school as starting from a primary commitment to engage with young people from where they are, not from where schools or governments wish them to be. For us, this is an important difference from schooling-as-usual, as it means that all young people are “entitled to an educationally rewarding and satisfying experience of school – not only those whose backgrounds happen to fit with the values of schools”.⁷⁶ We are also interested in listening to young people and treating them as being “at promise” rather than “at risk”. This fits with the leadership style of the school principal, Brett,⁷⁷ who made the following comments in relation to mainstream schooling in Australia:

We ask kids to comply and if they don't they're the problem so we sack them, and I genuinely don't believe there's any such thing as a bad kid, they're just good kids in bad situations.

Also of interest to us are the ways in which MIC is able to “work within and against the grain of policy simultaneously”.⁷⁸ In other words, how does the school manage to jump through all the hoops required for regulatory authorities, while also ensuring that the diverse needs of students are addressed through the curriculum, pedagogy and school culture? We have written about this in some detail previously,⁷⁹ although what is important here is the claim that situated, meaningful and contextualised

curriculum, pedagogical and relational work can be done in schools like MIC, which work in some way to alleviating the effects of disadvantage and marginalisation that young people face. However, like Hayes and colleagues⁸⁰ are careful to establish, we feel that schooling can make *some* but not *all* of the difference to the lives of young people.

We are also interested in the notion of what makes for a *meaningful* education, understanding that the term is a contested one, given to subjective difference and personal accounts. McGregor and colleagues describe a meaningful education as the building of bridges between “personal contexts and needs and a desired future”.⁸¹ Perhaps more significantly for the students who find themselves at MIC, a meaningful education is one that will “resonate with the needs and aspirations of young people who find themselves on the outside of mainstream schooling pathways”.⁸² Our project has demonstrated that commitment, community and culture and curriculum connectedness⁸³ are the important factors for reconnecting young people to schooling in meaningful ways. We also recognise there is a clear need to deliberately blur the boundaries between the political, philosophical and personal⁸⁴ in order to understand the complex interplay of the experiences of students and teachers that exist within school communities.

Our purpose in this book is to critically hold the philosophy and practice of MIC up against current trends in educational policy, politics and ideology, and we illuminate how the positive climate of culture and community, together with the connectedness of the curriculum, offer a particular example of participatory democracy-in-action. We engage with the topic of democratic community recognising that many ingredients at MIC meld together as components of a just system deliberately put into place through careful governance and the purposeful intentions of Brett⁸⁵ through his leadership and vision for the school.

These intentions resonate with Apple and Beane, who explain how “democratic schools, like democracy itself, do not happen by chance. They result from explicit attempts by educators to put in place arrangements and opportunities that will bring democracy to life”.⁸⁶ From collected narratives of experience, we learn how the curriculum content, which is purposefully adapted to the needs and interests of the students, the positive social and mutually respectful relationships, and the cohesive culture at MIC, all work harmoniously together to create a democratic community that works for the good of the collective social life and

for each individual student and teacher. The concepts of democracy and social justice are mutual in that:

Each holds within itself the notion of both individual rights and the good of the community. While justice is often related to individual rights, it is tempered by the term “social”; while democracy is often related to the protection of individual rights, community reminds us that individual rights are bounded by concerns about ways in which we must live together in society.⁸⁷

From our perspective, social justice and democratic community form a core of the moral purpose of schools and “deeply democratic communities focus on how people live, work, and interact, how they develop relationships and learn together in these relationships”.⁸⁸ This comment is poignant and contrasts with school structures based on a lack of trust, separateness and an “us against them” mentality, where teachers teach and students learn, and forms of authority that demand rigid impersonal relationships. The current rise of no-excuses and zero-tolerance school behaviour policies in places like the UK are a trend that we would hope to not see in Australia.

As Giroux⁸⁹ argues, it is not enough for knowledge and habits of good citizenship to be taught, but a deep engagement with critical citizenship should be at the heart of schools as democratic public spaces. The depoliticising effects of contemporary market-based education policy actively work to undermine democratic approaches through reframing the social and the political as purely economic.⁹⁰ We wish to work against such undermining by viewing schooling, and in this book the example of MIC, as democratic public spheres. McLaren argues that if we are to view schools as democratic public spheres, they need to engage students in “meaningful dialogue and action and to give students the opportunity to learn the language of social responsibility”.⁹¹ He continues, to say that a democratic commitment involves a “fundamental respect for individual freedom and social justice”. It seems clear to us that a commitment to both social justice and democratic participation is a necessary pre-condition for reconfiguring schooling in ways that run counter to the current reform agenda.

In acknowledging both the rights of the individual and the good of the community, a democratic education will effect societal and personal transformation. Importantly, the type of personal transformation

we witness at MIC is where the students are empowered as the agents of their own change.⁹² This is unlike many dominant and authoritarian education contexts where the power relations control and manipulate the direction and “becoming” of the student for the purpose of social control, for religious, ideological or moral persuasion, or where curriculum is tightly controlled in order to serve the economic needs of the state and when “educating for human capital”.⁹³ In contrast, we found many narratives of personal agency, empowerment and transformation through the MIC experience.

In observations from initial research, we had described how the students and teachers at MIC have “opportunities to speak to power, reframing the school’s institutional discourses and working continually towards an ethic of social justice and care”.⁹⁴ The democratic and respectful treatment of young people at MIC creates an environment of acceptance for diversity and for different types of learners. As one example of many, the following extract is from an interview with Jeremy, a Year 11 student:

Could you tell us about your first six months here? What has happened for you? Perhaps you can compare it with the other types of schooling that you’ve done and what has happened for you since you’ve been here?

Well they’ve been really welcoming. I have Asperger Autism and I’m not as sociable as most people here so I think people have been more...they haven’t exactly noticed that I’ve got that thing that’s holding me back a bit and so it’s been really nice having that. They don’t mention it. I’m treated like the rest of the class, where at my old school it was very much, “Jeremy, do this!”, and then the rest would do another thing. They would single me out a lot.

So were you comfortable at your last school?

No.

Similarly, when Trey spoke with us about her arrival at MIC, she said:

It’s a very, very welcoming community. Straight off the bat we go on an orientation week camp. So before we even go to school we all get sent off to the Sunshine Coast for three days together to get to know each other, and then on the next week when we start classes we have some friendships. So it was very welcoming, very easy to get to know people. Even if you

didn't do the same genre or the same singing voice as someone else, everyone was still really supportive. And we had an Open Mic session on camp, so you just sign up and go for it. And hearing like that diversity of music and the range of voices and the different things, it's amazing. And you can pick out the people that, "I want to collaborate with her" or "I want him to play guitar for me", and through that you go up and you would say that, and it's just instant friendship.

At MIC, a climate freed from the need to compare and compete contributes to the positive school community vibe. In place of competition, a spirit of co-operation is fostered. This goes against the grain of the neo-liberal agenda and indeed against a broadly accepted, traditional reliance on competition as a coercive motivator in many mainstream schooling contexts. Many of the MIC students report thriving in the spirit of co-operation and appreciate not being forced to compete with each other.

As we described in Chap. 1, the range of identities, personalities and backgrounds are varied and complex but at MIC, Emo, Heavy Metal, Goth and Nerd⁹⁵ co-operate and exist collaboratively, and we appreciate that in many individual stories, our young participants have railed against being forced into competitive modes of being. We find it particularly poignant that this group of young people readily choose modes of co-operation while rejecting earlier school training in compliance with the world of competition.

The school is accredited through the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA), which oversees the credentialing of school systems and senior certification in the state. The school is required to undertake regular accreditation reviews as an independent school, demonstrating that its curriculum aligns with state-mandated syllabuses. Financial audits and curriculum reviews are a requirement in order to keep the doors open. The governance structure includes a school board, to whom the principal, Brett, reports on compliance, policy and other governance matters. Thomson⁹⁶ argues that school principals are policy mediators who are active agents engaging in dynamic, tactical practices that cross the political and policy landscapes into educational contexts. Our previous commentary on Brett's leadership and the school's policy tightrope walking bears this out.⁹⁷

Perhaps the most important thing that we take from the ways that teachers and students work at MIC within the policy and political landscape of schooling is that they manage to both work within and against

the grain of policy. In other words, what needs to be done (in the sense of being accredited as a school, credentialing graduates with a high school diploma, and so on) is managed, while what really needs to be done (the relational and affective work of building a rich learning community, as well as the commitment to democratic civic life within and beyond the school) is foregrounded.

We believe that the pursuit of social justice cannot be an empty one, and given the current context of contemporary schooling, a project that requires dedicated and unwavering commitment. As Connell argues, “social justice requires moving out from the starting-point to *reconstruct the mainstream* to embody the interests of the least advantaged in a generalised way”.⁹⁸ It is not enough that schools like MIC can exist, although we are very glad that they do give the current policy and political climate, but something needs to change with schooling more broadly. From our perspective, it is this argument of reconstituting the mainstream that drives our work with MIC and other places. And this why the following chapters deal directly with the experiences of teachers and students, plus the school community more broadly, in order to understand some of the ways that they navigate their experiences at MIC. In doing so, we hope to illuminate some possible avenues for a hopeful reconstruction of schooling.

NOTES

1. For example, see: Ball (2012, 2016), Biesta (2010), Lingard and Sellar (2013), Lingard et al. (2014), Rizvi and Lingard (2010), Rose (1999).
2. Lingard and Rawolle (2011).
3. Ball (2016).
4. For a full critique of neoliberal/neoconservative modernism and education, see: Apple (2004, 2006, 2013, 2014).
5. For a starting point on the media-focused discussion on PISA, see: Riddle and Lingard (2016), Riddle et al. (2013).
6. See: Lingard and Sellar (2013), Lingard et al. (2014).
7. Teese and Polesel (2003).
8. Sahlberg (2006).
9. The distinction between policy borrowing and policy learning is well made by Lingard (2010).
10. Ball (2008, p. 17).
11. Lingard et al. (2014, p. 711).
12. Sahlberg (2006).

13. Ball (2008, pp. 11–12).
14. Pusey (1991).
15. Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p. 96).
16. Sellar and Lingard (2014).
17. Rose (1999).
18. Savage (2013).
19. Sellar and Lingard (2014, p. 2).
20. McInerney and Smyth (2014, p. 241).
21. Down (2009).
22. Down (2009, p. 52).
23. Held (2006, p. 112).
24. These policies draw in some part on Nancy Fraser's (1997, 2010) notions of justice as having elements of redistribution (economic), recognition (cultural) and representation (political). Many of the previous equity programmes were heavily invested in a politics of redistribution, or what is commonly known as compensatory education.
25. Kenway (2013, p. 287).
26. Biesta (2015).
27. Biesta (2015, p. 83).
28. Lingard et al. (2014).
29. Sellar and Lingard (2014).
30. Liasidou and Symeou (2016).
31. Connell (2013b, p. 102).
32. We expand on this issue at some length in Chap. 6.
33. Savage (2013, p. 188).
34. Lingard et al. (2014, p. 711).
35. Sellar and Lingard (2014, p. 4).
36. Smyth (2016, p. 314).
37. For example, see: Apple (2004, 2006, 2013), Connell (2013a, b), Davies and Bansel (2007), McGregor (2009), Olssen and Peters (2005).
38. Rose (1999, p. 161).
39. Ball (2008, p. 189).
40. For a useful discussion on schooling and human capital, see: McGregor et al. (2017).
41. Down (2009).
42. Clarke (2012).
43. Apple (1993, p. 49).
44. Biesta (2015).
45. Apple (2004, p. 39).
46. Connell et al. (1982).
47. Bernstein (2003, p. 49).
48. Bourdieu (1991), Bourdieu and Passeron (1990).

49. Thomson (2002, p. 181).
50. Delpit (2006).
51. Smyth et al. (2014, p. 4).
52. Mills and McGregor (2014, p. 16).
53. Francis and Mills (2012, p. 252).
54. For a highly detailed and sobering account of schools as damaging, violent institutions, see: Harber (2004).
55. Harber (2002, p. 14).
56. Au (2009).
57. Sahlberg (2011). See also Connell (1993).
58. Noddings (2013, p. 2). The strong warning is given not to repeat the horrors.
59. Keddie (2012, p. 267).
60. Connell and Dados (2014).
61. Smyth (2006, p. 279).
62. McGregor et al. (2015, p. 609).
63. te Riele (2007).
64. Smyth (2016, p. 307).
65. Smyth et al. (2014, p. 139).
66. Connell (2012, p. 681). Also see discussion from Smyth et al. (2014, p. 139).
67. Henry (2001).
68. Connell et al. (1982).
69. Henry (2001).
70. Named for the chair of the expert review panel, David Gonski, a prominent Australian business leader. The *Review of Funding for Schooling* was commissioned by the Federal Labor government in 2010 and has caused much subsequent controversy.
71. Gonski et al. (2011, p. 29).
72. MCEETYA (2008, p. 5).
73. Mills and McGregor (2016, p. 116).
74. Connell (1993).
75. Smyth (2016), Smyth et al. (2014).
76. Smyth et al. (2014, p. 3).
77. For a more detailed account of Brett's leadership, see: Riddle and Cleaver (2013).
78. Thomson et al. (2012, p. 4).
79. Riddle and Cleaver (2015a).
80. Hayes et al. (2006).
81. McGregor et al. (2015, p. 613).
82. McGregor et al. (2015, p. 611).
83. See Riddle and Cleaver (2013, 2015a).

84. Smyth et al. (2013).
85. See Riddle and Cleaver (2013) for detail of Brett's intentions for a democratic community at MIC.
86. Apple and Beane (1999, p. 10). See also Furman and Shields (2005) for further discussion on democratic schooling.
87. Furman and Shields (2005, p. 126).
88. Furman and Shields (2005, p. 133).
89. Giroux (2005).
90. Clarke (2012).
91. McLaren (2007, p. 253).
92. We unpack these in some detail in Chap. 3.
93. See discussion, Apple (2006, p. 32).
94. Riddle and Cleaver (2013, p. 374).
95. These are terribly clichéd subcultural labels, but we use them here to make the point that diversity and difference are strengths of the school community.
96. Thomson (2002).
97. See Riddle and Cleaver (2013, 2015b).
98. Connell (1992, p. 139).

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