Connectedness - Isn’t it time that education came out from behind the classroom door and Rediscovered Social Justice.

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Introduction
Can you imagine studying something for twelve years and at the end you still haven’t mastered it? Imagine ... students sitting through long school years, through thousands of hours [it is estimated that students spend some 16000 hours in school] of instruction in reading and writing, math and history. All the autumns, winters and springs of their youth are dominated by a schooling that refuses to sink in. At the end, they are on their way to college still needing more work in language, math and social studies, or else they are flung unceremoniously into the job-world that has little room for them. Whichever direction they go, their education has not permitted them to find out who they are and what’s happening to them, and what they need to be free and whole. A disorientation towards reality accompanies the student’s weak possession of literacy and conceptual skills. (Shor, 1980, p. 195)

The problems of schools are so compelling and the urge to get in there and deal with what is happening to our children so understandably powerful we sometimes lose the capacity or do not have the time to step back and ask the critical questions about the organisation of the society in which we live. (Apple, 1996, pp. 109-110)

Most educators are committed to making schools a better place for their students. Therefore recent calls for improvement and changes in pedagogy are crucial. This analysis is informed by Gale’s (2000) various perspectives on social justice which he characterises as redistributive, retributive and recognitive. These distinctions are predicated on the persistent and predictable structural inequalities that continue to advantage and disadvantage social groups and that this inequality is neither the result of individual attributes of the student, nor of cultural or other deprivation but the very nature of the socio-political system.

Commencing with the recommendations of the recent Queensland study (Lingard et al., 2001a), the concept of a connected education is further developed through reference to the work of critical pedagogy to show that the calls for a more practical real life curriculum for at risk students is a masquerade that serves to further disempower marginalised youth and may create as many problems of disengagement and disconnectedness and student alienation as it seeks to solve.

The challenge to teachers and schools of a socially critical and connected pedagogy is advanced to explain the connection between social justice and connectedness in the classroom. A connected education, it is shown, can be intellectually challenging, relevant, cater for difference and socially supportive. This paper acknowledges the research that learning needs to be interactive and also needs to be relevant for it to be effective. But it also asks if teachers unintentionally ‘dubly’ disadvantage the already disadvantaged students by serving them up more of the “basics” as “busy work” instead of actively engaging their intelligence?

Rejecting a deficit or redistributive concept of educational reform it is suggested that there is an alternative - a socially just connected education where students will no longer see themselves as victims, objectified and exploited as innocent and docile victims of the system (Carlson & Apple, 1998).

The role of schools in developing democracy and social justice is discussed to demonstrate the crucial role that pedagogy plays in the production and reproduction of educational advantage and privilege. A socially just society, it is suggested not only provides work and sustenance for its members but also seeks to redress and eliminate oppression and domination.

I conclude by offering a new concept of a Generative Pedagogy 1 as a response to the issue of rediscovering social justice and equity through school connectedness and student engagement.

Students are the central premise of schools
The Australian education reform programs of the last thirty years have in most instances given primacy to the achievement of social outcomes for disadvantaged at-risk students over the achievement of improved intellectual results. Of all the social institutions, only schools are responsible for developing and distributing intellectual capacities to the total population. The central equity issue in schooling is then the distribution of such capacities across all schools and student cohorts. Research recently completed in Queensland indicates
that it is not sufficient for schools in socially disadvantaged areas, or any schools for that matter, merely to provide social support. Schooling must be socially supportive and intellectually demanding.

A range of thinking and learning styles needs to be combined to enable students not only to engage, but also to achieve improved outcomes, especially for students from disadvantaged and low socio economic backgrounds. These are the students various government and independent reports have termed most at risk of not completing 12 years of education or its equivalent.

Connectedness is not new and has been promoted as a valuable pedagogical strategy since the early twentieth century by progressive educators. More recently The Centre for Applied Educational Research at the University of Melbourne developed a checklist for 20 Strategic Intentions for Middle Years education. Five of their priorities clearly relate to the issue of school-community connectedness. Schools, the Centre suggests, should

- Emphasise active student centred learning and the development of autonomous learners
- Emphasise higher order thinking and in-depth learning
- Develop and implement a plan to create links between the home and the school
- Make use of off-campus learning and learning resources in the wider community, and
- Make school less bureaucratic and more community conscious

(Mitchell, 2002)

In Apple’s view (1996) students are central to schools, not existing knowledge, staff or assessment. The Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (Lingard et al., 2001a) was concerned with how student learning, both academic and social, could be enhanced. The QSRLS represents the largest and most detailed school reform study, undertaken in Australia. Its crucial finding was that improved student outcomes required quality classroom teaching and assessment practices and curricula relevant to students’ futures. The current educational emphasis on a credentialled society defines quality student outcomes in terms of academic results from limited, standardised testing of basic skills saying very little about what has been learnt and how well it has been learnt. It is not fair to students who cannot afford to leave school earlier than year 12, given the new structures of work and further education, nor to those for whom schooling is successful in traditional terms, to perform the selecting and sorting functions of the normal secondary school years when that sorting is based on old job and societal structures. (Brennan, 2001, p. 23).

The QSRLS defines quality student outcomes in terms of a sustained and disciplined inquiry focused on powerful, important ideas and concepts that are connected to students’ experiences and the world in which they live.

The key finding of the QSRLS should be no surprise. To achieve improved educational outcomes for all students but especially for those labelled as disadvantaged, ‘at-risk’ or as the have nots (Feeney, 2000), schools and the teachers in the classroom must shift attention from the emphasis on so-called basic skills to higher order thinking. Quality learning experience is acknowledged as what the best teachers have always provided for their students – intellectually challenging material that is relevant and connected to children’s lives, recognising that children learn in different ways and have different needs, all done in a supportive class room environment. (Lingard et al., 2001b, pp. 103-105).

The QSRLS seeks to provide a framework and a common language by which we can usefully describe and then discuss what teachers do in the classroom. It does not pretend to be an exhaustive list of pedagogical practice but a ‘discussion starter and a window into the usually private space of teachers’ work’ (Lingard et al., 2001a) behind the classroom door.

The presence of intellectually challenging material, connectedness or relevance, recognition of difference and social supportiveness – contributes to the practice of what the QSRLS calls a productive pedagogy.

Secondary schools in the compulsory years ought to be able to provide an education that engages all students and that is of the best possible quality, at the forefront of educational innovation. ... For students to attend school when it is a compulsory institution in a democracy means that society has a large investment in the wide range of what schools can offer a community. (Brennan, 2001, p. 20).

The QSRLS research found that it was students most at-risk of failure, those from socially, culturally and economically disadvantaged conditions who were the least likely to be exposed to the intellectually challenging and relevant material. Those most at risk of failure are therefore condemned to mediocrity.

‘Schools not only reflect social inequality, they actively contribute to widening that inequality during the secondary years’ (Brennan, 2001, p.13). Connectedness is an ‘education into the deepest and broadest implications of daily life [and] expands consciousness; it animates an understanding of what any small part of life means.’ (Shor,
Is it possible, argue critical pedagogues, for teachers to embrace a ‘pedagogy which empowers students to intervene in the making of history … [and] prepares students to be their own agents for social change, their own creators of democratic culture? (Shor, 1980, p. 48).

What sort of Connected education?
Apple (1996, pp. 99-100) writes that ‘few people who have witnessed the levels of boredom and alienation among our students in schools will quarrel with the assertion that curricula should be more closely linked to real life.’ Who actually decides which vision of real life; whose values are to be taught? The construction of a real life on the basis of preparation for often non-existent paid work may create as many problems of disengagement and disconnectedness and student alienation as it seeks to solve. Linking what is done in the classroom almost exclusively to its utility to the workforce and the economy can serve to produce results in student outcomes opposite to those intended. A false construction of real life ignores or pushes to the margins systemic unemployment, low wages, youth exploitation, part-time, casualisation, non-unionisation etc. A student engagement and curriculum integration that prepare students for this “real life” is a partial fiction, as it institutionalises as official knowledge perspectives that benefit those who are already the most powerful groups in society (Apple, 1996, p. 100). ‘Schools’ purposes have narrowed too far to a “human capital” argument whereby schools are only valued for their contribution to the economic life of the nation and the future job prospects of individual students’ (Brennan, 2001, p. 5).

A curriculum that is superficially connected to the “world of work” is not enough. Especially when over 15% of Australian youth 19-25 are neither working nor studying. The hands-on practical needs then to be combined with the critical and theoretical. Apple (1996, p 102) suggests that this combination is crucial for marginalised youth whose lives are controlled by decisions of dominant groups and legitimised by a neo-liberal social justice vision based on a deficit theory that blames the victim. The recent renewed calls in Victoria for the re-introduction of technical schools confuses a practical curriculum with connectedness. Moreover the report into the new practical Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) warns that such a new program will be:

‘… difficult to accommodate within the existing institutional culture of secondary schools [as it is] a significant departure from the dominant forms of teaching and learning since the 1950’s [and] schools will need to undergo significant and substantial change. It is imperative that [there be a] shift in institutional culture [and that the] challenge to current institutional cultures be recognised and embraced.’ (Henry et al., 2002, p. 4)

Critical pedagogy, together with recent reports from the OECD and UNICEF, argues that schools should never be mere training grounds for the industrial or economic needs of a nation. If schools overly focus on the problems and needs of a practical everyday life, the essential skills of critical reasoning are often ignored, further disempowering students. A practical hands-on curriculum is not necessarily an engaging curriculum. Apple (1996, p. xv) asserts that many of these programs result from powerful conservative lobbies blaming education for unemployment, loss of traditional knowledge and values and just about everything else that is wrong with society. But he concludes that ‘education is not just preparation for life but life itself.’ (Apple, 1996, p. xvi) The pressure now is on schools to respond to the market regardless of the social justice cost. The result of this is that innovative and critical pedagogy that might better serve the needs of students and their communities is rejected for the existing traditional curriculum.

A socially just connected education must enable students to have more control of their lives, learn about individual and collective rights and be connected to a more participatory social vision than that of providing the human capital needs of industry and business. Students must be empowered to inquire, act and reflect on the issues that are of concern to them and to positively transform situations where they see disadvantage or unfairness in their own and other’s lives.

Connectedness and social justice in the classroom
Connectedness then is a bridge between community need and private action. Its focus is a society where the needs and contributions of everyone are respected and valued. Such a connectedness is based on the following beliefs:

- In our current society, inequity exists and people come from places of privilege and disadvantage.
- Local community networks are where people first learn about inclusive and representative processes.
- Real and lasting improvement in many areas of social need can be achieved only through structural change. Band-aid or quick fix solutions will not necessarily address the underlying issues. (Stegley Foundation, 2001)
Therefore a “critical” connectedness must:
• come from the students’ own concerns about what is unfair in society, and inspire enthusiasm among all those involved
• create real and lasting change, by tackling the main causes of the problem
• get students involved in the community to tackle issues of social justice, responsibility, tolerance and cultural diversity
• create awareness and understanding of the needs of others through personal contact
• allow everyone involved in the project to take greater responsibility for their own lives
• share the results with others, inspiring them to take further action
• consider the effects on the environment, society and economy (both positive and negative);
• help students to express their views, become critical thinkers and learn how to put problem solving skills into action in order to challenge the world around them (Zyngier & Brunner, 2002, p. 33)

The fourfold challenge of connectedness

The first challenge to teachers who wish to contribute to a connected education for their students is how teachers and their students get connected to the real world in an organic and authentic manner that not only values the students’ culture and needs but also adds value to their learning experiences in terms of the mandated curriculum. Secondly, schools will need to accommodate the result of such a radical and transformative change in the space and place that the school would/could occupy in the community. Thirdly a connected curriculum challenges the social justice of an education system over-determined by the primacy of the requirements of university admission. If the ‘tail of the test wag[ging] the body of the curriculum’ (Apple & Beane, 1999, p. xii) is to be replaced with a more empowering pedagogy teachers and schools will need to begin to question their own practices in the classroom. The final challenge is for society itself. Society will need to accommodate an engaged, empowered and perhaps enraged generation of critically reflexive learners demanding not just “sex, drugs and rock’n’roll”, not concerned just with the redistribution of goods and services, but social justice and equity not just for the few but for all. This social justice may demand a rethinking of present arrangements that are currently accepted as just, giving status to action that is currently thought to be counterproductive and centering concerns thought to be pivotal (Gale, 2000).

Recent calls for education reform seek to increase equality of opportunity ‘to break out of the cycle of unemployment, underemployment, marginalisation and reduced participation in our society’ (Feeney et al., 2002, p. 60). They see this as a necessary condition for democracy.

Together with their teachers, students will have then acquired control over not just the content but the delivery of their curriculum.

Democratic schools - engaging with difference and connectedness

‘Surely it is an obligation of education in a democracy to empower the young members of the public to participate and play articulate roles in the public space’ (Apple & Beane, 1999, p. 8). The investigation by Thomson (2002) of the “rustbelt schools” of Adelaide recognises that a teaching practice that includes both class and culturally appropriate teaching and assessment is the key factor for success for all students not just those who come to school with the social and cultural capital acknowledged by the school system as appropriate. Knight suggests the test or benchmark of a democratic education is not just the difference it makes to the lives of the students but also to the community to which the student belongs (Knight, 2002, p. 103).

Gale (2000) has characterised this approach as redistributive social justice, which falls short of delivering social justice as it does nothing about the unjust social arrangements that are the cause of the problems it highlights. There can be no social justice involved when this individualisation of the democratic process actually promotes the interests of the dominant group in society (Gale, 2000, p. 264). Gale states that the social justice interests of groups, not just individuals, must be taken into account so that their views are seriously engaged in decision making processes. ‘Self determination does not mean separate determination’, he writes (Gale, 2000, p. 266), echoing conditions that are better described as apartheid or separate development.

Juxtaposed to this educational apartheid, a connected pedagogy actively promotes democracy that … rests on a recognition of the importance of a fully political and educative notion of democracy that captures the collective struggle by citizens to build institutions in participatory ways. It is based on a commitment towards participatory movements that are grounded in multiple “emancipatory” projects that are themselves critically reflexive. (Carlson & Apple, 1998, p. 9)

This democracy has two complementary but divergent conceptions of equality. The first is the equalisation of the life conditions of the learners, the distributive justice of equality of opportunity and the underlying assumption of liberal deficit models of education reform and social justice. The second conception of equality is that of fairness - the extent to which a society acts to ensure that everyone in it has
“equal encouragement” to achieve success in society (Knight, 2002, p. 103). This second conception is not a resource issue but one that is closely tied to the practice of pedagogy, to what happens behind the classroom door, the school and the education system. ‘Only reforms that recognise these conditions and actively engage them are likely to make a lasting difference in the lives of the children, educators and communities served by schools’ (Apple & Beane, 1999, pp. 12-13). A connected critical pedagogy not only challenges social inequality but also changes the conditions that create them in the first place.

An alternative to deficit
Ramsey (2001) recently surveyed the last 200 years of teaching and education in Australia. He concludes that schools should focus on doing what they do best - responding to local and regional needs. Bureaucracies are good, he suggests, at ensuring that inputs like teacher numbers, class sizes, buildings and equipment, are allocated fairly. But this traditionally ensures nothing more than equal mediocrity rather than uniformly high levels of performance. ‘Schools,’ he says, ‘are good enough, rather than as good as they could be’ (Ramsey, 2001, p. 4).

Social justice may not so much be about money and resources as many well intentioned reports and reforms suggest. Schools can’t be expected to bridge the gap of the economy, culture and society. Rather it’s a commitment that goes beyond funding. ... I wished the problems that [students at risk] faced were just about money ... they are about culture, about curriculum, about hours of schooling, flexibility, about home based teaching. They were about listening to the needs of families and responding to them. They were about so many things that were off the agenda of your typical suburban high school that I came to the horrible conclusion that by advocating for more investment in those schools I was actually working against all the things that those parents were trying to achieve! You don’t train people in at-risk communities to the lowest expectations and lowest quality, you [have to] train people at the highest quality levels. (Bootsman, 2001, pp. 1-3)

There is a viable alternative to the deficit-thinking paradigm. It is not necessary to identify a single pedagogy to be universally applied, rather to stimulate discussion about an education within the context of social justice. Teachers of course cannot do it on their own - but without a change in the way they teach, improved student outcomes for those needing the most assistance will never be achieved.

What makes a socially just education?
The perception that education can transform ‘the personal and social fortunes of people who are disadvantaged’ (Feeney et al., 2002, p. 7) is based on the assumption that schools can make a difference through compensating these children at risk for their alleged deficits. Knight’s survey (2002) of various reform programs with the avowed aim of reducing social inequality in Victorian school education since the 1950’s showed that all were informed by various deficit understandings of social justice. Knight (2002, p. 102) suggests that so long as education reform is based on a deficit model of social justice the nature of the real problem is obscured and unrealised. Social advantage, the structural reproduction of society is maintained and enhanced by the curriculum that is increasingly irrelevant to at risk children.

A socially just pedagogy must be inclusive, engaging and enabling students in valued and worthwhile activities, linking learning not just to the community but also empowering students to use their own authentic knowledge, values and culture to take control over their own lives. (Gale, 2000). It must not only recognise and respect difference but celebrate it as ‘a source of strength and vitality in the community’ (Kemmis & Lynch, 2002, p. 3). The crucial role that pedagogy plays in the production and reproduction of educational advantage and privilege cannot be ignored. Recent Australian studies (QSRLS) conclude that there is a viable alternative to the deficit thinking paradigm adopted by international reports (OECD, 2002; UNICEF, 2002) and the governments that act on their advice.

The OECD reports that ‘students from a lower socio-economic background attending schools in which the average socio-economic background is high tend to perform much better than when they are enrolled in a school with a below-average socio-economic intake – and the reverse is true for more advantaged students in less advantaged schools’ (OECD, 2002, p. 88).

This important factor, reinforces the QSRLS conclusion that it may not be the socio-economic status per se that determines the outcome of education, but how that status is mediated at school through pedagogy that makes a difference. The higher the level of intellectual demand expected of students by teachers, the greater the improved productive performance and, hence, improved student outcomes. The corollary of this is that improved student outcomes for those most at risk may have less to do with increased teacher and school resources and more to do with the teachers’ pedagogy.

Reforms that focus on the individualistic success of the disadvantaged are silent on how we can achieve the development of a society that is not only productive but is also socially just. Pedagogies that only obliquely

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connect with student sensibilities are not pedagogies of social transformation but rather those of individual adaption. Practical and even progressive teaching and curricula are not always socially critical. A socially just society not only provides work and sustenance for its members but also seeks to redress and eliminate oppression and domination - the cause of the disadvantage in the first analysis (Knight, 2002).

A connected critical pedagogy addresses equally the value of active involvement of students' learning in the community and community involvement in the school with the students. This is not just a contribution to individualistic development, but also and equally important, a contribution to community development and empowerment.

Education is more than mere instrumentalism that either serves the interests of the economy and/or the social mobility of some at the expense of others. Education is the means to a dualistic end - serving the interests of both the individual and their families and the communities in which they live.

What sort of social justice is envisaged by the redistributive view of social justice where the imperative is to reduce the gap between the haves and have nots? Gale (2000) suggests that it relies purely on the individual's instrumental value to the future good of society and the economy. A fixation with people's assets (or their lack of assets) and only minimally with social processes and procedures only reproduces inequality. Emphasis on educational opportunity and empowerment as if it is a material good tends to limit social justice to quantifiable and measurable outcomes (Gale, 2000, p. 260).

The overwhelming subtext of reform programs like Bridging the Gap (Feeney et al., 2002) is the tendency to confine its recommended intervention to the economic spheres of life and ignore the cultural politics of social institutions (Gale, 2000, p. 260). As important as it is to have a clear perception of "who has what material conditions" these are only the first steps in the process of achieving social justice. The redistribution in a more equitable manner of the necessary goods and services for individual advancement must not be discounted as irrelevant, but they are to be seen as "part of the project not the project itself" (Gale, 2000, p. 267).

Within schools this means how students themselves are identified and by whom, as at risk and the extent in which all those people and communities involved in schooling are also involved in determining their own development and education's purposes (Gale, 2000, p. 268).

Then our students may no longer see themselves as exploited, objectified innocent and docile victims of the system. Together with their teachers, students will have acquired control over not just the content but the delivery of their curriculum. A critical, socially just pedagogy reinforces the central role that student connectedness and engagement have with improved and successful outcomes for marginalised and at risk students. Students' work restructuring the school and its curriculum must be recognised as a fundamental principle of school-level innovation in secondary schools. Unless the central relationship among students and between students and teachers is rearranged to include [active student participation] then most innovation will not be sustainable. . . . What is clear is that . . . school change can only be accomplished with significant student participation . . . and an engagement with . . . the community on the basis of changing purposes of secondary schools. (Brennan, 2001, pp. 22-23)

The results of innovative social justice programs of the Education Foundation in Victoria are practical evidence that cognitive social justice requires the representation of the interests of groups not just individuals so that their views are seriously engaged in the decision making process (Davidson, 2002a; 2002b; Vetere, 2002; Zyngier, 2001).

Towards a new generative pedagogy
What I tentatively term Generative Pedagogy extends the definition of Productive Pedagogy as described by the QSRLS (Lingard et al., 2001a) by combining it with agency. A generative pedagogy will also include the crucial element of action for social justice and social change if teachers and schools are to effectively engage the most marginalised and at risk students (Shor, 1996).

Generative Pedagogy is derived from Giddens' (1994, p. 93) notion of a generative politics where social reflexivity or agency is the key connecting link between education and questions of combating poverty; absolute or relative; redressing the degradation of the environment; contesting arbitrary power; reducing the role of violence and force in social life (Giddens, 1994, pp. 293-294).

Giddens explains that generative politics exist in the space that links the state to reflexive mobilisation in society at large. Generative politics is based on individuals and groups taking action to create and increase social justice, making things happen rather than having things done or happening to them. In Giddens' words "[g]enerative politics is a defense of the politics of the public domain . . . the main means of effectively approaching problems of poverty and social exclusion . . ." (Giddens, 1994, p. 15)

The allusion to space and further that 'the whole population lives in the same 'discursive space' . . .[that] produce major new political dilemmas and contradictions' recalls de Certeau's (1988) notion of the spaces and cracks available for political action and counter hegemonic opposition in a reproductive society. Structural responses, no matter how much they seem to champion social justice and equity are too often couched
in the discredited language of deficit. For them the solution seems to be resource based - more money, more teachers, more computers and more schools.

The deficit model adopted by many proponents of social justice is another form of the oppression and violence where treating the learner as a victim inhibits the full development of the potential of the learner.

The response of various reports and reform programs (Zynigier, 2003a, 2003b) is to provide solutions to the future welfare of ‘at risk’ populations mainly through the provision of additional resources and reworked programs to promote equal treatment and equality of opportunity on the assumption that this will then lead to improved and equal results for all. This is done with the belief, according to Knight, that it will even out the life chances for children at risk including indigenous children in Australia (Knight, 2002).

The recent UNICEF (2002) report focussing as it does on the need to “get them young” defines alleged student shortcomings in social and cultural capital as the real issue to be resolved, ignoring the effects of school structures, curriculum irrelevance and disjuncture and disengagement of students.

So long as educators and administrators work on the premise that ‘education has the ability to transform the personal and social futures of the disadvantaged’ as a group, we will continue to operate in the deficit mode of thinking. Individuals from among the at risk and marginalised will no doubt benefit, but while there are no serious work choices for the disadvantaged youth and a decline in alternative pathways for ‘at risk’ students then students in the privileged group of society will continue to succeed in a schooling system that serves to extend their social advantage at the expense of the majority (Knight 2002).

We are witness to a rise in student disengagement from school and the curriculum and decreased student interest in social values and civic responsibility. At the same time we see a retreat to the deficit model of responding to social justice and disadvantage relying on the provision of increased resources. The structural inequalities that continue to advantage and disadvantage social groups are persistent and predictable. The inequality is not the result of individual attributes neither of the student, nor of cultural or other deprivation but the very nature of the socio-political system. A generative pedagogy emphasises that without the engagement of schools with the broader social, political and economic conditions then the ability and opportunity of teachers, students, parents and other community members to work together to make things happen, rather than have things done to them by others, will be seriously limited (Gale and Densmore, 2003, p. 3).

A Generative Pedagogy is different because it implies an active social justice element entrenched in the curriculum and the pedagogy of the classroom. Without this, the institutional response to students’ disengagement/disconnection from schooling remains confined to structural and programmatic solutions. Not just in relation to curriculum content that is presented by the teacher in the classroom but also in the national and systemic reactions to the social justice issues of equity and disadvantage.

Three final questions to all interested in education

1. Is it possible to change schools without a concomitant change in the social and economic conditions?
2. Is school reform more about raising the achievement level and scores in “high status knowledge” rather than improving the lives of the children?
3. Who is the real beneficiary from any changes we make to education?

Students are the first to discern whether the focus on ‘real life’ is a strategy for oppression or empowerment. ‘If it does not connect in a powerful way to their daily experiences, many students simply will return to the cynical bargain to doing enough just to get through.’ In order to reintroduce a generative pedagogy into schools, teachers will need to decide how to combine a socially just curriculum and teaching with an emphasis on student habits while acknowledging the role of dominant knowledge as “the cultural capital of the dominant”

Every “reform” must be then tested against this principle of who benefits from the change, how does the reform relate to the relations of exploitation and domination that provide the social context of schooling?

In the end we are talking about the lives and the futures of our children (Apple, 1996: 118).

Endnote

1. From a discussion with Assoc. Prof. Trevor Gale about Giddens’ concept of generative politics.

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JAPANESE DR
Warriors
try to sleep
before war
in a night of storm.

Towards morning
after wind falls
tumbled branches
are still
but
water drips
through
half-drowsing,
from gutter
to gutter
down bamboo pipes.

Dawn and the bugles
clear as the thin line
of gold beneath a purple bruised sky

NICOLA KNOX
NEUTRAL BAY, NSW

all the pretty colours
she used to love
all the pretty colours
all the maddest shapes
but now
when she looks up
feels strange about the sky.

anyway hauls the basket of smelly clothes
towards the laundry
loads it up, pushes buttons...sighs
pads back along the hall

turns the toaster upside down
bangs and scrapes, then pushes the crumbs
down the plug hole with her sore fingers
scratches her chin
all his sox, the red checked swimming shorts...

blinking into the cupboards
can’t find any teabags
won’t look in the afternoon mirror
stares out the window

she doesn’t know whether
he is due back at 6
or if he left a year ago

...she used to love all the pretty colours
all the maddest shapes
and the T shirts and socks
and red and white and blue
but he left
and America bastardised the star
and now

she can’t hang out the washing
and she can’t
look up

KIM MANN
HENLEY BEACH SOUTH, SA