

Keywords in the Australian context

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ABSTRACT: Borrowing the title of Raymond Williams' famous study, the following reflections – sometimes collective and sometimes individual – are based on a series of “Keywords”, specifically: “fear” “community” and “creativity”. By reflecting on the meanings these words have for us today, we attempt to capture their dialogical character, posing them as sites of contestation and struggle, and thereby developing a language of both resistance and hope in the face of neoliberal and neoconservative attacks on education. These reflections continue a series of arguments in defence of the profession first presented in the publication “Only connect”: English teaching, schooling and community in 2006.

KEYWORDS: Neoconservatism and education, neoliberalism and education, English education, community, creativity, Western cultural tradition.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades neo-liberal and neo-conservative rhetoric has come to dominate all facets of public and social life. This conservative triumph has been spectacularly evident in reforms promoting the privatisation of the public sphere, and the implementation of standards-based reforms focusing on individual performance and accountability. One sad consequence has been the loss of any language with which to advocate a democratic alternative to existing social conditions (cf. Giroux, 2003; Apple, 2006). Those of us who still identify with a vision of a genuinely inclusive social democracy have been reduced to speaking a subordinate discourse, self-consciously mouthing values and beliefs that other people do not seem to share, and thus becoming beset by self-doubt (if everyone else is thinking otherwise, how can what I am thinking and feeling be correct?).

Our aim in producing the book, “*Only connect*”: *English teaching, schooling and community*¹, was to find a language that would escape being compromised by this sense of irony and self-doubt. We believed that the difficulty in mounting a critique of such conservative ideologies was partly due to the way in which our own practices

¹ “*Only connect*”: *English teaching, schooling and community* (Doecke, Howie & Sawyer, 2006a) is an international collection of essays produced in response to the ascendancy of neoliberal and neoconservative values in education specifically in the early years of the 21st century.

and sensibilities have been shaped by their dominance.² Neo-liberals and neo-conservatives have positioned “us” as the “other”, as somehow failing the standards of ordinary human decency and common sense that they habitually invoke – an “othering” that teachers, teacher educators and academics have every right to resent. And yet for all the indignation that we might feel in response to their scorn and almost pathological bitterness, there is a sense in which we ourselves remain trapped by their logic of “us” against “them”. We need to find ways of thinking and feeling that are not structured by this binary, to find modes of thinking and imagining that are not simply reactive to their excesses and to articulate an alternative vision which engages a larger community.

As we argue in “*Only connect*”, globalisation and corporate culture have severely undermined Australian society, with the result that people are experiencing a crisis of values and threat to their identities (see Doecke, Howie & Sawyer, 2006a). This does not mean that globalisation is a juggernaut that will inevitably destroy national economies and local cultures. However, a critique of policies currently being implemented by governments has yet to gain any real purchase, and until that happens it is difficult to resist a sense of pessimism and gloom. With respect to education and schooling, neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideologues promote what Gunther Kress calls “education for stability”, identifying the cause of social and economic ills in the “failure” of the public school system, and seeking to restore traditional structures and values. According to Kress, this is as distinct from grappling with the need to provide young people with an education for “an era of instability”, involving aesthetics, ethics, creativity and “design” that might better equip them to negotiate the situations in which they find themselves (Kress, 2002, pp. 15-16). Words like “creativity” or “design” do not loom large in the vocabulary of neo-liberal and neo-conservative critics, and when they invoke aesthetics or ethics it is usually in the form of stale nostrums about “our Anglo-Celtic heritage”, the treasures of Western civilisation, and what “decent” people believe. For these ideologues, “aesthetics” means uncritically gasping in awe at the “great” works of Western civilisation³, while “ethics” means turning your back on the marginalised and most disadvantaged in society.

When it comes to language education, and specifically the place of English within the curriculum, there are signs that it is indeed timely to review existing curriculum and pedagogy and the role that schools might play in a period of instability and rapid social change. Inextricably bound up with the globalisation of culture, new information and communication technologies provide adolescents with a range of

² And yet, even in writing that sentence, we realise that “conservative” is not an accurate description of the Right, who no longer believe that the “Conservative commitment to community (is)...the source of individual identity and satisfaction” (Willetts, 1992, pp. 68-9), but rather seek to undermine in the name of neo-liberalism much of what has been won in the name of democracy over 200 years – the rights of workers to bargain collectively being just one example. We are hardly the first to argue that the modern conservative agenda is about conserving very little. Hamilton and Maddison (2007) place the argument about the disappearance of democratic institutions and practices into the contemporary Australian context.

³ And, just to anticipate the usual response to this sentence – for the record, we are each avid admirers of Shakespeare – Wayne, for example, having written two books and many articles on the teaching of Shakespeare. The question for us relates to the manner in which his work is rediscovered and reaffirmed by subsequent generations of readers, as something which is of moment to them.

semiotic modes to make meaning, to construct identities and to make sense of their place in the world (Kress, 2002). Such changes are not simply happening to local communities, but are being enacted by them. Bill Osgerby, in *Youth media*, describes the experiences of young British Asians who draw on “the discourses of “Britishness” and “Asianness” to construct identities that are cross-cultural and trans-national (Osgerby, 2004, p. 175), producing, in the form of a film like *Bend it like Beckham*, a feel-good movie that affirms young people’s hybrid cultural identities in a post-modern age. Equally significant (and more disturbing) are the ways in which such young people are obliged to negotiate a secondary school education and the demands of subject English that have become formalised and rigidified in the form of literacy continua that supposedly chart a student’s “typical progression” (to borrow the language of the National Statements and Profiles developed in Australia in the early 1990s). Kress’s most recent book, *English in Urban Classrooms*, which is the product of the work of a team of researchers who were attempting to capture how English is “produced” in a range of schools in London (Kress et al., 2005, p. x), provides a series of compelling accounts of the ways in which British-Asian students struggle to locate themselves within a curriculum that is narrowly focused on achieving standardised outcomes. The creativity with which British-Asian students engage with issues of identity and value in the course of their lives outside school receives hardly any recognition within schools which are tightly regulated and controlled by the Blair Government.

There is, in short, much to do when it comes to arguing the need for genuine curriculum development and reform in the field of English Education. Beyond the critique that is presented in “*Only connect*”: *English teaching, schooling and community*, we need to provoke debate about the kind of English curriculum our students need and then to set about developing a curriculum that will take them into the future. Several of the teachers who contributed to “*Only connect*” show that they are already engaging in work of this kind (see, for example, Bellis, 2006; McClenaghan, 2006), and we hope that more teachers will join this conversation, sharing their curriculum resources and – crucially – arguing a rationale for what they do that challenges the nostrums of neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideologues.

As well as reflection on curriculum and pedagogy, you will find other types of conversation in “*Only Connect*” that attempt to locate English Education within the public sphere, affirming the centrality of English to a democratic society and a sense of community. Our opening chapters in “*Only Connect*” (see “The Present Moment” and “Starting Points”), where we each provide a perspective on our current situation, initiated this discussion, and what follows is an attempt to take this dialogue further.

We have called these reflections “Keywords”, borrowing the title of Raymond Williams’ famous study, where he shows how changes in our knowledge and values can be traced through changes in the language we use to describe our lives. Mark has chosen to write on “fear”, Brenton on “community”, and Wayne on “creativity”. By reflecting on the meanings these words have for us today, we attempt to capture their dialogical character, posing them as sites of contestation and struggle, and thereby developing a language of both resistance and hope in the way that we have suggested above.

The papers which follow were originally presented as part of a keynote panel at the Annual Conference of the English Teachers Association of New South Wales in December 2006. A version of this article has been published in *English in Australia*, the journal of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English.

FEAR (Mark)

The barely comprehensible images of the twin towers in New York on September 11, 2001 and subsequent events in Bali have reached deep into the Australian psyche. Commentators have noted that reason is taking a back seat in the public sphere, as a seemingly all pervasive sense of fear takes hold (for example, Dibb, 2007). “Be alert but not alarmed”, John Howard, the Australian Prime Minister tells his people...But this canny politician is experienced enough to know that such a statement draws fresh attention to the unstated dangers it seemingly seeks to disavow.

Debates about education, which have been taking place in Australia in recent times, highlight the ludicrous extent to which the cultivation of public fear has now reached. A senior federal politician (the Australian Treasurer, Peter Costello) and a prominent opinion writer (*Sydney Morning Herald* columnist Miranda Devine) have both suggested that law-abiding, hard-working teachers are imperilling Australia and weakening the nation’s defence against terrorism (see Lucy & Mickler, 2006, pp. 38-41).

Renowned sociologist Frank Furedi (2005) has suggested that such crude thinking is symptomatic of the times. In his recent book, *Politics of fear: Beyond Left and Right*, Furedi argues that the politics of fear has come to dominate public life in the West. The most concerning result of this for Furedi is the dominance of a regressive version of personhood that denies us adulthood, as it denies us autonomy and responsibility. Instead, an isolated and immature sense of the self is our inheritance. According to Furedi, the West is moving backwards. The Enlightenment model of an autonomous and responsible citizenry has been displaced by a more passive, disorientated individual (2005, pp. 2-4). The idea that we might understand ourselves in and through our relationships with others and a notion of the collective “good” has been displaced by a fearful, competitive “dog-eat-dog” mentality that has left individuals looking to secure their own social position by gaining an advantage over others. The idea and ideal of genuine community has all but disappeared from public discourse. That we have been enslaved by our fears is indicated by the way we seek to turn away from the other in many different areas of public life (see Doecke below), as if we now have, as a society, “enough freedom, equality and friendship for all the different social differences there are today and others that may come in the future” (Lucy & Mickler, p. 2).

Lest this seem overwhelmingly bleak and hopeless, Furedi optimistically offers as the way forward a renewed focus on social engagement. Furedi promotes purposeful public life as the way the West will move out of its current malaise. In a typical rhetorical flourish, Furedi calls for the humanizing of personhood through challenging what he describes as a prevailing paradigm of vulnerability (p. 163). In setting a humanist paradigm in opposition to the paradigm of vulnerability, Furedi pits such things as autonomy, reason, risk-taking, experimentation, a belief in change and a

futures orientation against dependence, risk-aversion, the distrust of change and the belief that individuals and communities are vulnerable and unable to cope (p. 164).

It is within Furedi's paradigms of humanism and vulnerability that I wish to consider English teaching and the work of professional English teaching associations. I do this in order to highlight the social significance of the work of our associations, and the shifting nature of their work. Central to this impulse is the desire to make a case for the necessity of reclaiming the legacy of the "Western cultural tradition" and the spirit of the humanist Enlightenment from critics of contemporary English teaching, who have been representing what is happening in Australia's classrooms as being anti-democratic, even anti-Western – Federal Education Minister Julie Bishop's recent remarks about a Maoist curriculum being an obvious example (see Patty, 2006). In short, I want to answer the critics and affirm the work of state and national English teaching associations by talking about English teaching as being about possibility and an open-ended, generative sense of the future.

Critics of English teaching in this country are undermining the humanistic impulse through deliberately promoting the vulnerability paradigm, yet at the same time claiming the mantle of cultural guardianship. By contrast, English teachers are firmly located in Furedi's humanist paradigm. For all the attempts to depict English teachers as radical ideologues and culture war warriors (for example, Donnelly⁴, 2007), English teachers enact on a day to day basis in their working lives the humanistic impulse of the Western tradition. In Australia, we believe that our professional associations are the public voice and face of these teachers and this impulse.

We are continuing the grand project of the Enlightenment, even as we might profess Frankfurt school (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002) or post-modern (Lyotard, 1984) scepticism about such a grand narrative. When we understand English not as an abstract, ahistorical ideal, but as something which is in the process of becoming; something we are in the process of realising, even if, in the present moment, we cannot see what it will eventually become, then we can – and do – live with contradiction and paradox.

How are we to recognise this?

Throughout 2005⁵ and 2006, contemporary English teaching (like much of contemporary education) has been represented in sections of Australia's media as being akin to a debilitating virus. Furedi's notion of vulnerability is very much foregrounded in this sort of commentary. Here's the editorial writer of the only national newspaper – a Murdoch-owned publication, *The Australian* – waxing pathological on June 9, 2006:

⁴ Kevin Donnelly is a regular commentator on education in the Murdoch national newspaper *The Australian*, and a particularly vehement critic of English and literacy teaching in Australia. He is a member of the Liberal party (in the odd Australia parlance in which capital "L" "Liberal" = "conservative") and a former staffer to a federal Liberal minister. He has carried out a number of consultancy-type projects for both state and federal Liberal governments, and his 2007 book, as noted below, was launched by the Liberal Prime Minister. Despite Australia's high performances in PISA, also as discussed below, Donnelly's consistent theme is the crisis in Australian education.

⁵ See Sawyer (2006a)

...literature is routinely taught in both suburban public schools and elite private academies as “texts” to be read from a Marxist or feminist paradigm and treated as nothing more special than an episode of *Neighbours*⁶....[There is] a postmodern rot at the core of Australian academic and cultural life that seeks to divorce art from beauty, replace skills-based excellence with warmed-over sociology and inject a politicised, deterministic view of the world in which identity groups trump individuals in virtually every sphere of life.... At the heart of the matter is an abdication of responsibility by the traditional guardians of the culture. Many universities, once incubators of great thought, have been infected by the mould-like spores of cultural studies (Anon, 2006, p. 19)

You will, of course, notice the self-assured certainty of this extract, which is carried through the high modality of the language and disallows a dissenting view: “At the heart of the matter is...”, “have been infected”. The qualification of “many” in relation to universities makes this wild generalisation sound eminently feasible, if not reasonable. Interestingly, the supposed educational corruption of the young is emotively linked to other morally corrupting consequences of the so-called “permissive” society, another bugbear of the editor of *The Australian* and other self-described, conservative commentators⁷, including family breakdown (“seeks to divorce art from beauty”) and drug abuse (“inject a politicised, deterministic view of the world”).

Thus the right of *The Australian* to assume the role of moral guardian becomes a given. Indeed, it’s made out to be a matter of common sense, the mantle being one the paper has had to take on given the “abdication of responsibility” by those who should know better.

The impulse behind the argument being put forward by the editor of *The Australian* – and like-minded commentators who also suggest that they have been forced into the role of guarding “the culture” (for example, Donnelly, 2007) – is that educators are not to be trusted. We have enjoyed too much autonomy and the result has been a dumbed-down curriculum and lowered standards. The solution being put forward is the paternalistic intervention of the federal government and a “culture war”, which will apparently stop the supposed “long march” of the left through this Australia’s cultural institutions (Donnelly, 2007). If such reds-under-the bed paranoia seems excessive, think back to Furedi’s vulnerability paradigm. This helps us to see it as part of a coherent political strategy, which is being given voice by certain media commentators (cf. Lucy & Mickler, 2006)⁸.

Let’s, for a moment, accept the thrust of the argument being put forward by the editor of *The Australian* and others on its own terms. What does it reveal about *their* understanding of the Western tradition?

⁶ A well-known Australian soap opera.

⁷ According to Donnelly (2007), the rise of a counter-culture in the 1960s, along with the rise of feminism and the influence of Maoist political theory amongst the young, led to “a sense of rebellion as conservative values were denounced as middle-class, obsolete and socially unjust” (p. 14).

⁸ Given the argument being put forward by Lucy and Mickler, it is interesting to note that Kevin Donnelly’s latest book was launched by Prime Minister John Howard at Parliament House, Canberra. Donnelly was formerly Chief of Staff to federal Liberal minister, Kevin Andrews.

In the way that critics of contemporary English teaching seek to argue for what they call a “traditional” English curriculum and pedagogy, they might be said to champion Plato’s (2004) account of knowledge. That is to say, they might be said to ascribe to a belief in ideal forms. According to these critics and commentators, there is one true English – a timeless, unchanging subject which exists beyond the shifting world of sense experience. This subject, of course, is print-based, and combines attention to the so-called basic skills through drill and rote learning with the moral and aesthetic education to be attained from reading canonical literature.

The problem for critics such as the editor of *The Australian* is that Western thinking has developed well beyond this point. Even a thinker such as Aristotle, who retained an essential belief in Platonic forms, refused to deny the empirical facts of dynamic, natural processes (see Tarnas, 1996). For Aristotle, the change and movement evident in the world around us are not signs of a shadowy unreality – the Australian Prime Minister’s comment about the English curriculum being postmodern “rubbish” and “gobbledegook” (Welch, 2006) comes to mind here – but are the expressions of a striving for fulfillment.

This sense of an entity striving for fulfillment seems to me to be quite useful in understanding the subject we call English. In the way that Aristotle gave the process of becoming its own reality, it might be argued that English continues to actualise what it is potentially. Robin Peel (2000) has put this in terms of English being the shaping of a particular kind of person that societies have found they need, and which English is able to help produce (pp. 17-18). In this sense, English is – unlike other school subjects – not so much an identifiable field of study, as a set of practices concerned with the ethical formation of the literate and self-regulating individual. As time has moved on and society has changed, so too have the practices which constitute English. The history of the subject has not been defined by abrupt and radical change (as argued by Donnelly, 2007), so much as inevitable and necessary development (Howie, 2006). As a consequence, a crucial role for English teaching associations is to provide the avenues by which open ended dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981) takes place, allowing the subject we call English to realise its potential and possibilities in a democratic way. The Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) takes this role seriously, and has dedicated significant resources to it, as can be seen in its two most significant projects of recent times: Standards for the Teaching of English Language and Literature in Australia (STELLA) (2002) and the *Interface* series of publications. In both projects, diverse understandings of the subject are brought together in productive dialogue, with a view to supporting students in English classrooms – helping them to realise their full potential as human beings, and to live rich and productive lives in this new century.

Let me now return to the thinking of Furedi, and more particularly his call for the humanising of personhood, in order that we might begin to challenge the prevailing paradigm of vulnerability. How might English teachers and their professional associations contribute to this necessary enterprise?

One requirement, I would argue, is to reclaim what our critics call the Western cultural heritage. By continuing to question their invocation of tradition and their claims to guardianship, we can, as I have tried to do here, begin to locate – or perhaps, more accurately, relocate – our work within the humanist paradigm, as it has been

described by Furedi. In writing and speaking back to our critics we can highlight how we embrace the values and traditions of the Enlightenment in all that we do. The mantra of postmodern “gobbledegook” is a handy emotive turn of phrase. But it is a “straw man” criticism of contemporary English teaching.

If, under the influence of postmodernism and poststructuralism, we have sought to interrogate the Western canon, it is because we value it highly and take it seriously. Rather than seeing deconstruction as an act of destruction, as critics suggest it is, we might see it as an act of passion, which reflects an impulse to possess the text as much as it has possessed us and the desire to seek out other possibilities and new understandings⁹. This is a motivation that is fully congruent with the primary, driving force in modern, Western thinking and Western culture: a suspicion of absolutes (Tarnas, 1996). Indeed, one wonders how Western liberal democracy could have developed without this suspicion of absolutes (Lucy & Mickler, 2006). Contemporary English teaching, it could therefore be said, is not anti-Western, but is in fact impelled by the critical spirit of the Enlightenment and the democratic impulse.

Still, conservative commentators such as Kevin Donnelly continue in the name of the Western tradition to wage war on postmodern relativism in English. Donnelly ties himself in knots trying to convince us that some interpretations are closer to the “truth” – rather than being more useful, more supportable, more convincing or less harmful – than others. Donnelly also seems to believe that some interpretations – his own and those of which he approves – are not socially constructed. In making this case he demonstrates a level of intellectual confusion that would worry a teacher if it was demonstrated by a Year 9 student. He conflates [misunderstood] facts with interpretation. That a student might incorrectly recall the order of events in *Macbeth* is, according to Donnelly, in fact a “wrong” interpretation (p. 161). (I don’t know how things were in Kevin’s days in the classroom, but retelling the plot is not a particularly high order skill in secondary English classrooms today, and is certainly not accepted as an “interpretation”.)

Conservative critics of English and English teaching in this country are also prone to rewriting Western cultural history to fit their own world-view. George Orwell and Charles Dickens, for example, have been claimed by such critics to be authors who have a view of the world which opposes relativism, and which is broadly in accord with the beliefs of conservatives (see Morris, 2005). What the conservative critics neglect to remind their readers of is the fact that both Orwell and Dickens were champions of the “underdog” – passionate believers in social justice and the democratic ideal of measuring the civility of a society by its treatment of the most disadvantaged. At least, this is the Orwell I know from my teenage reading of *Down and out in Paris and London*, *The road to Wigan Pier*, and *Homage to Catalonia*, and the Dickens I remember from novels such as *Hard times* and *David Copperfield*. One can only wonder how these two great authors, who in their writing consistently gave a voice to the disenfranchised, the oppressed and the poor, would react if they could see the dismissal of any concern with social justice as misguided political correctness that is designed to make young people feel guilty about the achievements of Western civilisation (Donnelly, 2007, p. 1).

⁹ Belsey (1989) puts it this way: “Deconstruction in order to reconstruct the text as a newly intelligible, plural object is the work of criticism” (p. 105).

English teachers cannot afford to be wide-eyed and naïve about the current state of contestation surrounding English. The threat to our professional autonomy – as we see with the movement towards a national curriculum¹⁰ – is such that we must ask ourselves some hard questions about how we can best explain the complex endeavour that is English teaching to the public at large, when the language of our opponents and the narrowness of their thinking so much better suits the tenor – or is that terror? – of our times.

Furedi writes that “the politics of fear thrives on the terrain of misanthropy and cynicism concerning the endeavour of people to alter and improve their circumstances” (p. 167). Writing back to our critics for the profession, as has been done in *Only Connect* (Doecke, Howie & Sawyer, 2006a), has an important role to play in challenging the dominance of the fear-driven vulnerability paradigm. However, there is more to be done. The message I take from Furedi is the imperative to begin to think more about how we can work towards broader social engagement, particularly through our professional associations.

The challenge for English teaching associations is to at once talk to and beyond the profession. If we believe in the legacy of the Enlightenment, this is a challenge we cannot ignore.

COMMUNITY (Brenton)

The moral quality of education is inevitably affected by the moral character of educational institutions. If the school system is dealing unjustly with some of its pupils, they are not the only ones to suffer. The quality of education of all the others is degraded....An education that privileges one child over another is giving the privileged child a corrupted education, even as it gives him or her a social or economic advantage (Connell, 1993, p. 15)

The very best English teachers connect with the communities to which students belong. This may hardly appear to be a contentious claim, still less a way of naming the challenges with which the English teaching profession is currently faced. Yet a moment’s reflection will show that the word “community” is not the preserve of like-minded people, that people mean different things when they say this word, and that any attempt at definition will land you in the thick of fierce debate. What is meant by the word “community”? And how does it help to explain what English teachers do?

I want to inquire into the meaning of the word “community” by speaking from who I am and what I know, rather than offering a scholarly analysis of the changing meanings of this word. You will find a concise account of the word’s history and how people have used it over the past century in Raymond Williams’ *Keywords*, where he notes the way “community” grew to be distinguished from “the more formal, more

¹⁰ Commenting recently on the idea of national curriculum the editor (2007) of *The Australian* stated his belief that “it makes no sense for students who share a common culture to be taught different novels in different ways” (p. 18).

abstract and more instrumental relationships of state, or of society” (Williams, 1976, rpt, 1984, p. 76). More provocatively, Eric Hobsbawm comments on how notions of “community” have been invoked over the past few decades:

Never was the word “community” used more indiscriminately and emptily than in the decades when communities in the sociological sense became hard to find in real life – “the intelligence community”, “the public relations community”, the “gay community”. The rise of “identity groups” – human ensembles to which a person could “belong”, unequivocally and beyond uncertainty and doubt, was noted from the late 1960s... (Hobsbawm, 1994, rpt., 2002, p. 428).

Zygmunt Bauman quotes this passage in *Liquid Modernity*, arguing that these days communities tend to be “postulated”; they are “projects rather than realities, something that comes *after*, not *before* the individual choice” (Bauman, 2000, rpt., 2004, p. 169). The key difference between Bauman’s definition of the word’s contemporary usage, as opposed to the account which Williams gives of it, seems to lie in this notion of community as a function of individual choice, as an aspect of identity politics, as opposed to a sense of longstanding, local relationships and affiliation that inheres within its more traditional usage.

My understanding of community derives from my experiences of the social groups to which I have belonged. The meaning that I ascribe to this word is probably closer to Williams’ more traditional usage than Bauman’s concept, although there is no gainsaying the subtlety of Bauman’s analysis and the way it resonates in the contemporary world. The examples of community participation from my life invariably involved social relationships that pre-existed me. And engaging in those relationships was not necessarily a matter of personal choice. You are hardly in a position to choose your parents and upbringing, despite R.W. Connell’s wry observation that this would be one way for young people from working class backgrounds to overcome their socio-economic disadvantage (1993, p. 22). As I grow older I become increasingly conscious of the ways in which my upbringing continues to shape my sensibility, even though I have distanced myself from the values and beliefs of my childhood.

But even with respect to those instances when I might be said to have exercised my right to free association, when I joined a group of people in order to achieve some common goal or pursuit, I look back and wonder about my choice and the extent to which it was determined by factors beyond me. As Marx famously declared, it is not the consciousness of people that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness (Marx, 1969, p. 503). My sense of identity and community affiliation is shaped by the social practices and relationships that constitute my everyday life.

Lately I have been thinking about the time when my daughter first went to primary school and the kind of community we experienced there. This goes back to around 1990. My wife and I still clung to the idea that we should send our daughter to a local state school, even though policy at both a state and federal level was already promoting the notion of choice. In our case, this meant “Muddy Creek Primary School” (I have obviously changed the name), a school which at that time was part of the Disadvantaged Schools Programme (or DSP), a funding scheme introduced by the Whitlam Labor Government in the 1970s to address social inequalities in education.

There was a lot of talk around about the importance of parent participation, and I soon found myself, as parent and house husband, helping to write proposals for a range of initiatives to be funded through the DSP. The only university graduate in the community, I think the parents saw me as someone who could advocate on their behalf, and I was soon elected as Vice President of the Mothers' Club (the name was subsequently changed to the Parents and Friends' Association). In this role I became an active member of the School Council and its various committees and working parties.

My story about my involvement in Muddy Creek Primary School does not have a happy ending, and I do not wish to idealise the community I found there. Yet I continue to value my experience of this school community. I continue to believe in the *potential* of such communities and the work its members can do together.

As well as kids who were home grown, there were children from places like South Korea, Iraq and a crumbling Eastern Europe, who all rubbed along together pretty well. A number (including my daughter) joined the school orchestra, which was funded by the DSP, sawing away at their violins on special occasions, under the tireless direction of a woman who insisted that every child could learn a musical instrument. On Monday morning there would be a school assembly, when the Principal would announce "The Pupil of the Week". Parents were rostered to work in the canteen, and every year a small group from the P&FA organised the Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day stalls.

Children, parents, teachers – they were all participating in the cultural life of a northern suburbs, primary school. The parents wanted their children to experience success at school, but what they wanted most was for them to be happy. Their kids chatted loudly to them about the things they had done as they sauntered home together at the end of the school day. Everything had its meaning within the life of the community. "Culture is ordinary," Raymond Williams affirms (Williams, 1989), and the ordinariness of the everyday lives of the children, parents and teachers at Muddy Creek Primary School showed me how we enact the values that bind us.

What I experienced at a personal level has been discussed by R.W. Connell and others who conducted an evaluation of the Disadvantaged Schools Programme at about the time that I was actively involved in this school community (Connell, White & Johnson, 1990; Connell, 1993). The work achieved by the DSP, driven by a view that success in schooling is largely determined by where people are located in the social structure, is what Ken Rowe has subsequently dismissed (in his crudely ideological manner) as "ideological" (Rowe, 2003). The Kennett Government in Victoria was similarly dismissive of the work being done in such schools, because it closed down Muddy Creek Primary School, along with other state schools, as part of the great neo-liberal reform of "schools of the future" (Caldwell & Hayward, 1998).

My point is to draw a contrast between the idea of community that was enacted (however problematically) by a disadvantaged school community like Muddy Creek Primary School and what followed. If we fast forward to David Kemp's landmark paper of 1996, "Schools and the Democratic Challenge", where, as Federal Minister for Education in the newly elected Howard government, he maps out the educational policy that this government subsequently implemented, we find him invoking a notion

of “partnership between schools, and parents, and schools and communities” (p. 3), asserting that this is essential to their “success”. Why has this seemingly innocuous statement proved to be so socially destructive? The key thing for Kemp was “success”, by which he meant something that could be measured by statistical data. This neo-liberal agenda means that teaching and learning in schools have become increasingly mediated by standardised testing and other crude indicators of “performance”. By definition, such indicators seriously compromise teachers’ efforts to attend to their students’ individual needs. They denote an abstract standard of performance rather than what students in specific communities can actually do. Instead of responding to the uniqueness of individual students, teachers are obliged to classify their performance, which means that they run the risk of not seeing what they do at all.

“Schools and the Democratic Challenge” constructs parents as consumers who make choices about the best educational product to purchase for their children. Kemp paints the following scenario:

Increasingly the Commonwealth will be focusing on ensuring that parents and communities have access to information about educational outcomes while ensuring that schools and school systems have the flexibility to apply resources that improve learning outcomes. Such accountability is essential to support the growing demands of parents for choice in education. The provision of such information is a prerequisite to building the partnership of schools and parents, and schools and communities (Kemp, 1996, p. 4).

Needless to say, I cannot recall any “growing demand” for “choice in education” by the parents who worked at Muddy Creek Primary School. Many were hardly in a position to exercise a choice at all, certainly not when it came to opting for a private school education instead of their local state school. I am not claiming that they weren’t susceptible to being treated as consumers. During the decade since Kemp first propagated his neo-liberal worldview in “Schools and the Democratic Challenge”, I have seen plenty of evidence of consumer behaviours at the state schools I have visited, even when there appears to be a complete absence of consumer choice. The tensions that ran beneath the surface at Muddy Creek Primary School, as the P&FA struggled to raise funds for a few, modest, extra-curricular activities, now manifest themselves in fairly dramatic ways. These days, I have got over my surprise when in some state schools I encounter signs addressed to parents, informing them that any shouting or other aggressive behaviour will lead to their being evicted from the school grounds. This is against a backdrop where parents everywhere agonise over the right school to send their children. Neo-liberal politicians and media pundits howl about declining standards in the state school system, while parents who can afford it drive past their local schools in order to deliver their children to a school of their choice.

What am I supposed to do vis-à-vis this situation? I am using the first-person singular here deliberately, as any confrontation with this new policy environment inevitably involves a sense of personal helplessness and anxiety. For all the shiny look of this neo-liberal world, as happy consumers drive up each day to drop their sons and daughters off at the school of their choice, I suspect that we are all victims of fear and anxiety. Such consumer behaviour reflects a rootlessness and anomie from which we are all trying to escape. How else do you explain the fact that many independent schools market themselves as achieving far more than high “literacy” and “numeracy”

outcomes (the key information, according to Kemp, that will allow parents “to choose the most appropriate school for their child”, [1996, p. 9]), but as providing such things as “small classes, personal attention, Christian Values, a safe environment, kind, firm discipline, caring family atmosphere, parental involvement” – all in all, as being “a private school for the community’s children’ (Comber, 1997, p. 24). When you look at the advertising material for private schools, you cannot avoid being struck by the way they promote a sense of belonging to a community. And yet what kind of community is this, where everyone looks the same, where difference is excluded, and everyone is confined within what Alex Kostogriz and I (borrowing from Husserl) have called a “We-horizon” (Kostogriz & Doecke, 2007)?

Having tried to capture some of the complexities of the present moment, I can hardly pretend to feel confident about challenging the hegemony of neo-liberal ideology. It would be laughable to say that it is a matter of choosing one political party over another (yet another illusory consumer choice). My mortgage, my superannuation, my productivity as it is measured by the university’s performance management scheme – all these practices construct me as a neo-liberal individual who is struggling to imagine life differently. We are all *living* neo-liberalism, even when we hold other values. “Schools and the Democratic Challenge” reflects the common sense of our era, and it is hardly surprising that other values have a certain inauthentic ring about them, when they are so much at odds with our day-to-day practices, with the things that we are obliged to do in order to survive.

Yet it remains a start to *name* the common sense espoused by Kemp, Howard and others, as neo-liberal ideology, and to gesture towards alternative worldviews. As English teachers, we can situate our professional practice within traditions of curriculum and pedagogy that embody visions of community that contrast with neo-liberal constructions of the individual and society – I need only instance Leavis’ ideal of the “organic community”, which he presented as a critique of a “mass civilisation” of consumer manipulation (see, for example, Leavis & Thompson, 1933, rpt. 1977). Although such versions of English teaching demand rigorous historical analysis and critique, they still show that people are capable of thinking differently about the relationship between English teaching, schooling and community. As we say at the start of “*Only connect*”, “any serious intellectual work involves tracing the complex network of relationships that stretch beyond here and now, enabling us to understand the present as a moment in history” (Doecke, Howie, & Sawyer, 2006b, p. 1).

But the imperative “to connect” involves more than a heightened awareness of “the present moment”, as though we are doomed to live through this era, interpreting the world without changing it. If I retrace the steps of my discussion, I think they illustrate the primacy of social relationships, of the networks and communities to which people belong. Even young entrepreneurs go to bed at night knowing that their government will always look after their welfare (Rupert Murdoch tells them so) (cf. Harvey, 2005). In his early attempts to articulate a vision of socialism, Marx explicitly distanced himself from utopian dreaming, arguing that the social relationships that provided a basis for true, human sociability and community life were in front of our very eyes (Marx, 1967, pp. 262-263, cf. Lukács, 1971). And I think the same holds true now, even though neo-liberals are busily privatising public spaces and dismantling the social infrastructure that supports the provision of a free, secular education.

My relationships with others have formed the inescapable context for my sense of self. Everything does not unfold around *me* with *my* entry into the world. My primary awareness is of my relationship with others; they have always been there, a condition of my life. As Levinas writes: “The word *I* means *here I am*, answering for everything and for everyone” (Levinas, 1981, rpt. 2004, p. 114).

The very best English teachers connect with the communities to which students belong. But it is clear that this responsibility cannot be conceived solely in traditional terms. Neo-liberalism is more than an idea but a set of practices that have materially reshaped our professional lives (Harvey, 2005). The potential of an English classroom in a state school is that it provides a space for discussion and a vigorous exchange of ideas across social boundaries. However imperfectly, it has given us a way to resist being trapped within a “We-horizon”, in which we speak only to people who look just like us. The imperative “to connect” means engaging with difference, with otherness. It means testing our values and attitudes in conversation with strangers. It means welcoming those strangers into our midst, and recognising how our lives are enriched by their presence.

Even when neo-liberal governments are brutally undermining the social fabric by segregating students into different groups, we should continue to accept our responsibility “to connect”.

CREATIVITY (Wayne)

In late 2000 I wrote about a research project in which I had been engaged which studied the work of highly successful teachers of the New South Wales (NSW) Higher School Certificate¹¹ (Sawyer, with Ayres and Dinham, 2000-2001). In that piece I related one lesson observation of Luke (a pseudonym), a brilliant and inspiring teacher of English. I tried to do so in a way that showed what Luke taught me in that lesson as well as what he taught his students. I came to that lesson with some preconceptions which Luke unknowingly challenged. His lesson could not be categorised as an example of one pedagogy (or one ‘right’ method of teaching) rather than another, but sophisticatedly blended a range of approaches in order to achieve his aims. These days I would call this shaping of the curriculum – in this case at the point of delivery – genuinely *creative* work.

But I do not want to be sentimental about this word and how we might define it. As Raymond Williams is appropriately the *éminence grise* presiding over an article on “keywords”, it may be pertinent to consider his views on creativity, elaborated perhaps best in his seminal work, *The long revolution*. And if we agree with Raymond Williams (1961, rpt.1973, p. 47) that “art” is “the organization of experience”, then the kind of shaping of curriculum that Luke and those like him engage in should be considered to be a form of creative work. Williams, in fact, goes further – “art” is “the organization of experience, *especially in its effect on a spectator or audience*” [my italics] (1961, rpt. 1973, p.47). Thus, for Williams, art is essentially defined as an act of communication. Like James Britton (1970, rpt.1978), Williams argues for the

¹¹ In Australia, education is primarily the responsibility of the states, though the current national government is fighting to change that. In NSW, the Higher School Certificate is the Year 12 school exit credential.

connections between everyday communication (such as gossip for Britton) and art (the “poetic” for Britton). Using what was then relatively recent brain research, Williams argues that “all human experience is an interpretation of ...reality” (1961, rpt. 1973, p. 36) and art therefore exists as a heightened form of such communication. His description of how art falls along this continuum is highly suggestive for the educator:

Everything we see and do, the whole structure of our relationships and institutions depends, finally, on the effort of learning, description and communication. We create our human world as we have thought of art being created. Art is a major means of precisely this creation (Williams, 1961, rpt. 1973, p. 54).

Learning, description, communication – artistic creation is here defined as essentially an educative act. Does the reverse hold true: that the educative act is necessarily artistry? The art, which Williams describes, is “the process of making unique experience into common experience...the process of communication is in fact the process of community” (Williams, 1961, rpt. 1973, p. 55). The educative act – describing and communicating, building relationships within a community – is thus potentially genuinely creative. As sophisticated shapers of curriculum at the artistic end of Britton’s and Williams’ continua, teachers like Luke are behaving as artists, or artisans – and the linked etymology of these words is relevant.

Williams of course is clearly interested in another set of linked etymologies – those of “communication” and “community”: “the artist...is not the lonely explorer, but the voice of his community” (Williams, 1961, rpt. 1973, p. 47). One of the things which we discovered in the course of the research in which Luke participated was that these outstanding teachers – who were chosen basically because they achieved results which were highly atypical for the student cohorts they were teaching – did not, as a rule, exist in splendid isolation. This was not true of every teacher in the study, but it was true of enough of them to raise an interest in the specific functioning of groups in the secondary school

Thus, at the completion of this research, I became part of another project, which studied the operation of effective groups in high schools – subject Faculties or programme groups. Our findings about English Faculties in this latter research strongly confirmed a notion of the creativity inherent in a community. It is to this latter research that I now turn.

Baxter has used Stanley Fish's (1989) concept of the “interpretive community” to explain the effectiveness of the operations of a Faculty group (Baxter, 2001; Baxter and Sawyer, 2006; Sawyer, Brock and Baxter, forthcoming, 2007¹²). Fish defined an “interpretive community” as “sets of institutional practices” (1989, p. 153) in which “assumed distinctions, categories of understanding and stipulations of relevance and irrelevance were the context of consciousness of community members” (1989, p. 141). In other words, in an interpretive community there is a remarkable unanimity of values, attitudes, practices and schema for interpreting any practice, event or phenomenon and conventions of behaviour. The concept of the interpretive

¹² The following discussion is based on the work detailed in these references.

community locates practice not in the written syllabuses or rules as much as in the work itself and the sense of a common enterprise. It also accounts for the dynamism observable in the operation of an effective English Faculty. Interpretive communities are engaged in an almost continual quest for improvement and questioning of established practices.

Teachers in the English Faculties we observed were not operating alone. Nor, on the other hand, were they mechanically carrying out the pre-determined programmes and modules of others. Instead, they were operating in Giroux's terms as "transformative intellectuals" – they "exercise power productively in collaboration with others" (Giroux, 1994, p. 165), thus gaining enhanced control over the production of knowledge and its pedagogy in their classrooms. In other words, curriculum is the result of shared and deliberative intellectual work, and the testing ground of its success is the extent to which it meets the needs and interests, and stretches the capacities, of students.

Traditionally, literature on pedagogy tends to understand the practices of the teacher in terms of their isolated practice in the classroom as the crucial element in teaching and learning. In the Faculties we observed, the more appropriate characterisation of classroom pedagogy was as a manifestation of the Faculty itself. The effective teacher existed not as an independent, isolated classroom figure, but as a group participant – a mediator between the Faculty or group and the students. In these Faculties, classroom teaching enacted Faculty policy, practice and professional discussion. Faculty culture did not end when the teacher entered the classroom, but continued into the classroom. The teacher was the embodiment of that Faculty culture. Pedagogy as conceived by these teachers reflected the Faculty, rather than being solely a matter of the independent interaction of the teacher and students.

Giroux (1994) also characterises the teacher not only as intellectual, but as artist. A Romantic conception of the artist again posits the teacher as the isolated, albeit heroic, individualist. But of course art is not necessarily about individual genius. Rather, the artist is equally well thought of as working within a tradition. A more contemporary figure than Williams, such as Csikszentmihalyi, actually positions creativity not as a phenomenon of individual enlightenment, but as, in effect, a function of communal work and even of tradition:

Creativity results from the interaction of a system composed of three elements: a culture that contains symbolic rules, a person who brings novelty into the symbolic domain, and a field of experts who recognize and validate the innovation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 6)

Csikszentmihalyi defines "creativity" as "a process by which a symbolic domain in the culture is changed" (1997, p. 8). What the creative person changes are memes (units of cultural information), but memes "must be learned before they can be changed" (1997, p. 8). Among the defining aspects of creativity are two key issues:

1. that "centres of creativity tend to be at the intersection of different cultures, where...individuals...see new combinations of ideas with greater ease" (1997, p. 9) and
2. that "creativity generally involves crossing the boundaries of domains" (1997, p. 9)

Hence – and this is the key conclusion in this context – “creativity does not happen inside people’s heads, but in the interaction between a person’s thoughts and a sociocultural context. *It is a systemic rather than an individual phenomenon*” (1997, p. 23).

Csikszentmihalyi’s work throws up two scenarios for the research projects I have discussed above. One is that a teacher like Luke operates in a culture and tradition formed from the Faculty and external Syllabuses, and so on, out of which he/she creates new combinations of ideas about pedagogy and curriculum that meet the needs, interests and abilities of his/her classes. However, complementing this figure of the teacher-as-artist or teacher-as-intellectual is an idea of the organic Faculty as the manifestation of intellectual and creative/artistic work. Indeed, one of the notable trends in the Faculties we observed was the way teachers spoke about pedagogy as if it were the logical extension and manifestation of their collegiality. Instead of a model of the English teacher as a charismatic individual, the programmes and units of work as expressions of individual, intellectual creativity and the classroom as a site of individual expression, we saw Faculties operating as if the act of teaching was a result of putting into practice commonly understood beliefs, values and practices – the teacher-as-artist, as Williams’ “voice of his community”.

If both Williams and Csikszentmihalyi are right, then creativity arises out of communal work. Of course, the very notion of community is what neoliberalism most centrally devalues. Democracy becomes re-defined as “the freedom of individuals from constraints”, and the assumption is that “free markets alone provide the foundations for...acceptable societies” (Baudot, 1991, pp. 39, 41), while “citizenship is portrayed as an utterly privatised affair whose aim is to produce competitive, self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain” (Giroux, 2002b, p. 429). This is the very re-definition of democracy that Maddison (2007) argues is occurring in the current Australian context. But at this point I am not going to make any simplistic leap of equating lack of a communal vision with lack of creativity – tempting though that move is. Rather, I want to ask a question about what creative teachers like Luke and creative Faculties like those discussed above offer to public culture and I would like to discuss this in terms of “hope”.

There is a significant literature these days around the connections between education and hope. In general terms, neo-liberalism’s valorising of individualism and the consequent loss of a sense of community is itself often, unsurprisingly, connected in a range of disciplines with a zeitgeist of hopelessness (Andrews, 1998, Layard, 2005, Seligman, 1994). But when one reviews the literature which specifically connects education and hope, it is striking how much of it sees the rise of neo-liberalism as the key phenomenon crowding out hope (Albert, 2006; Giroux, 2002a, 2004; Inglis, 2004; Thrupp and Tomlinson, 2005). A key manifestation of hope, then, in the face of the pressures from neo-liberalism, is an enhanced vision of democracy which stresses notions of equity. And, again, one of the other striking features of the literature connecting education and hope is the degree to which education and hope in their turn are connected with such a vision of democracy (Freire, 2004; Giroux, 1989, 1997, 2005; Halpin, 2003).

Drawing on Giroux, Australian educator Peter McInerney, in an important book, explores “how a ‘politics of possibility’ can be brought to bear in creating a more

socially just society in, and through, public schooling” (McInerney, 2004, p. 1). He uses Williams’ (1983, p. 249) well-known phrase about the importance of “making hope practical, rather than despair convincing” to underpin a view of the ways in which public schooling can enhance democratic practices and promote the growth of a civil and tolerant society (2004, p. 1). In the face of neo-liberalism, governmental retreat from public education, the disruption of the “social democratic” settlement of Australian society and all the attendant consequences for educational disadvantage, McInerney holds to a sense of “practical hope”. In studying the practices of one local high school in a highly disadvantaged community in South Australia, he identified a number of specific practices which “made hope practical”. These included (among other things): school structures which emphasised distributive leadership and collegial teams, school cultures which emphasised debate around teaching and learning, strong teacher professional learning, democratic classrooms with room for student voice, a culture of reform for social justice and an innovative, rigorous, broad and balanced curriculum (McInerney, 2004, pp. 101-199).

My point here is that these characteristics are the very characteristics of the groups and Faculties we encountered in the research projects discussed above. These groups and Faculties – and teachers like Luke – created (and I use the word advisedly) cultures of hope for their students, especially those in disadvantaged communities¹³. In a recent project on boys’ education (Munns, Arthur, Downes, Gregson, Power, Sawyer, Singh, Thistleton-Martin & Steele, 2006) which also focused on work in disadvantaged communities and which again showed the contribution that the genuinely creative teacher makes to their students and to the public culture, we saw again such cultures of hope manifested in the ways which McInerney describes (see also Sawyer, 2006b).

In contrast to these creative teachers and manifestations of hope, stand those who would denigrate Australian education, especially by arguing that it is being dumbed down. Donnelly (2007) is not alone here; he is simply the most ubiquitous and repetitive. The teachers I describe here are not dumbing down anything or anyone. The charges of lowered standards are of course patently false as the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) studies, which have been conducted in the first few years of this century, show, with Australia seen as a world leader in teaching literacy and Australian teachers achieving among the best results in the OECD.

What do English teachers want for their students? The creation of functionally literate citizens; the creation of citizens who are capable of critiquing a range of (canonical and non-canonical) texts; the creation of citizens who can critique the language of the media and of those in power; the creation of citizens who can, in turn, create their own texts in a large range of forms and media – these are the ambitions of an intelligent, modern curriculum. As I argued in “*Only connect*” (Doecke, Howie and Sawyer, 2006c, pp. 21-22, neoliberals object to this formulation of the role of English. They appear to want to confine the range of literacies which are taught in schools to the solely functional. . Hiding behind all the bluster about leftist teachers replacing Shakespeare with *Buffy the vampire slayer* is a view of the world that appears to not

¹³ It needs to be pointed out that Luke himself was not a teacher in a disadvantaged community, but many other teachers in that first project (Ayres, Dinham and Sawyer, 2000) from other areas of the curriculum were.

want citizens to be critical consumers of media in particular (Shakespeare, by the way, has since 2004 been the *only* compulsory author in NSW high schools for Years 7-10, which hardly suggests that canonical texts are being “neglected”). Any attempt to argue for the importance of a critical citizenry is immediately attacked as party-political and “dismissed as either irrelevant or unprofessional” (Giroux, 2000, p. 4). And, finally, what do the purveyors of the “dumbing down” myth actually have to offer education themselves apart from the culture of complaint and profound distrust?

My keyword was “creativity”. I see it in teachers like Luke. I see it manifested in Faculties and groups who are achieving outstanding outcomes for their students, particularly in disadvantaged communities and I see it in the students who leave my university each year, usually to teach in those very communities.

CONCLUSION

Mark argued above that the true inheritors of the Enlightenment and the ideals of Western democracy are the modern English teachers who have a broad, liberal sense of their subject and do not want to close it off because all the key ideas that have ever been thought were already thought before they were born. This is the theme on which we want to close. The Enlightenment project and the democratic project are worth defending. It is easy to confine the definition of democracy to the 3 to 4-yearly trip to the ballot box. Then democracy is regarded as achieved when representatives are elected. But, as Lucy and Mickler (2006) argue, democracy is never “achieved”, but is always a work in progress; when have we ever achieved enough liberty, equality and fraternity?

In Australia today, we see strong echoes of Thatcherite educational agenda that began with the Black Papers of the 1970s: a sense of crisis in public education; the crisis being blamed on teachers, teacher educators and “insiders”; the solution in the form of a more centralised (national) curriculum; increased testing regimes; the possibility of league tables of results; “choice” of schools promoted through vouchers. Part of the effect of this regime in England has been a residualisation of the comprehensive school. The comprehensive ideal itself is brought into question in the name of the market.

Public schooling is one of the great democratic institutions which valorised the ideal that education was both available to all and was a key responsibility of the state to provide and support. What is the neoliberal commitment to that democratic institution today? One of the spins around neoliberalism and education in Australia is the push for performance pay for teachers – a re-run of a 19th century policy, “payment by results” and a policy that would appear to encourage teaching to the test, a narrowing of curriculum and more disadvantage for the already disadvantaged.

The Enlightenment’s great legacy was, of course, reason. Reason values argumentation, evidence, rational conclusion – not repetitive, ideological bluster. When we argue that Australian teachers make a strong, positive difference to their students, the actual evidence supports that view. Of course, if people are told often enough that standards are declining, especially when the media, and politicians are “on message” almost daily, then the lie becomes the truth. Orwell, so often claimed

by neoliberals and neoconservatives as *their* man, would have despised such claims. The question of “Who best represents democracy?” is a question worth asking of the contemporary scene – those English teachers with a vision of their students as active, informed, critical citizens or those who simply distrust educators? Who contributes most to the health of the body politic – creative teachers or those who seek to undermine their work and the public’s confidence in them?

Trevor Gale (2006) wondered in *Only connect* how we ever arrived at the conclusion that teachers were the problem. We would add to that the question, “Are we going to let ourselves be convinced that one of the most successful education systems in the world needs radical fixing?”

The Enlightenment also taught us that it is through our connections to others – our sense of community and collective endeavour – that we are strengthened as individuals. These connections provide the sense of belonging and responsibility to something larger than the self that foster the dynamism and creativity of Faculty cultures that allow good teachers to be most effective, and give parents who might otherwise be described as marginalised on various socio-economic indicators the confidence and drive to agitate for a “fair go” for their children and the local school. The imperative of the Enlightenment is for any society that wants to be called democratic and decent to continue to engage with the “other” – to cast the ever-increasingly wide net that will draw those at the margins to the centre and ensure the “ongoing democratisation of ever more diverse and hitherto obscured areas of society” (Lucy and Mickler, p. 135).

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