

# Education as spectacle

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## Abstract

*Global economic and advanced capitalist agendas have taken on ideological dimensions that are flat, precise, and which assert ‘undeniable’ facts. These agendas are gradually shaping a society and its education based on consumerism and a global economic order which is “not accidentally or superficially spectacular, it is fundamentally spectaclist. In the spectacle ... goals are nothing, development is everything. The spectacle aims at nothing other than itself” (Debord, 1967, p. 10).*

*In this paper I argue, in line with Debord, that teachers’ work has moved from being predominantly controlled by technicist accountability and pedagogical conformity to become a form of decentred labour. Teachers’ work has been transformed into the role of spectator, one who is destined to simply monitor events in the classroom and in technologized environments, caught between the economic worldview and student consumer desire. In such a view, the teacher can do little more than watch while education, subjugated to economic dogma and digitized appearances, presents life as a spectacle of accumulation and desire.*

*Key terms: spectacle, accountability, political economy, spectator, technologization.*

When I began secondary teaching in New Zealand in the mid 1970s the career was seen as a vocation. By the early 1980s teachers were taking great pride in their vocation being recognized as a profession; at last they were considered to be ‘professionals’. In the 1990s development of curriculum and standardized qualification frameworks, coupled with a restructuring of education, soon meant that most teachers were being reduced to little more than technicist practitioners. Teachers were driven to apply existing formulas and recipes to a world of increasing accountability and a technicist response was often considered the safest option. “Just tell me what to do and I’ll do it” is a phrase I heard many times from teachers considered to be, at the time, at the peak of their profession. Now the world of education has changed again. In this new era education is becoming subsumed by the spectacle of the economy, while teachers, their specialist knowledge devalued, can only look on in the manner of spectators.

I will base my argument on five premises, the first of which argues that neo-liberal and new economic ideas are intent on using education as a means of producing the ‘economic citizen’ on a global scale, one who is driven to both produce and consume. My second premise suggests that accountability and the growth of an audit culture have given rise to the spectacle of international comparisons in education that are based on assumptions about what counts in education in terms of economic benefit. The spectacle of digital technology, my third premise, is ever present in the everyday interactions of the classroom, the relationship between the home and school and in the regular day to day running of teachers’ lives. This leads me to my fourth premise which suggests a trend in education to spectacularize most teacher-student interactions through pedagogies that owe more to the media of popular culture, including television, than to the meaningful transmission of knowledge and understanding. This trend sees information regarded as being adequate, rather than in-depth knowledge, and expects its transmission to be as entertaining as possible. Finally, using New Zealand as an example, I connect the notion of the popular with the Ministry of Education’s instruction to teach only what is relevant to students’ lives now, resulting in the one-dimensional spectacle that decentres the teacher and places them predominantly in the role of spectator.

## The spectacle of the economic imaginary

The early agricultural and craft-based subsistence economy was enough to satisfy individual needs and so was finite. With the industrial revolution international trade and infinite striving quickly became the sole option. Over the past thirty years the rise of neo-liberalism and its development into the new global

economic order has required the imaginative and aggressive creation of expansive consumer demand which plays on the spectacle of imaginary needs. The demands of the global consumer are seemingly insatiable.

The neo-liberal belief in the unconstrained market presupposes that it is the market that should decide and organize the political, economic, educational, legal, social and personal destiny of a nation (and the world), and not democratic institutions. Neo-liberalism combines economic liberalism and social conservatism, with the role of conservatism being that of a necessary brake upon the socially disruptive tendencies of the free market. Nevertheless, for those countries under the sway of Thatcher and Reagan, there persisted an encouragement to discard alternative lifestyles in favour of an exclusively economic understanding of freedom. Having the wrong attitude was actively discouraged and certain personality types became central to beliefs about economic progress, and “the individual is driven to adopt regimes of self-auditing and self-exploitation in an effort to survive” (Hind, 2010, p. 194). Neo-liberals see welfare as creating an incentive for laziness, and “unemployment is a function of the fluctuating level of collective laziness rather than the product of the inequalities of the ... ‘self-regulating’ market” (Badger, 2011, p. 32). In striving for happiness one must turn inwards, “away from the machinery of effectual change towards an ever more extensive regime of self-administered mind control” (Hind, 2010, p. 147).

Of course, this selfishness does not go by that name; instead, terms such as ‘freedom of choice’, ‘democracy’ and ‘equality’ are used. For example, in their desire to stress equality as equal educational opportunities for all, governments of a neo-liberal persuasion frequently promote the notion that parents have been empowered through their democratic rights to choose a better school for their children. Collini (2010, p. 28) cynically suggests that “if all parents have a right to choose a ‘better’ school for their children, won’t we have to maintain in each locality a number of ghostly ‘worse’ schools to which no children are actually sent, whose function is to show that some schools are ‘better’ than others?”

Education is coming to represent a developed form of political economy and this is best reflected in the desire of governments to satisfy the demands of the global capitalist economy. Political economy draws, in particular, upon politics, economics and law and was originally regarded as *the* science of government. Certainly it helps in explaining how political institutions operate within the political and economic environment and how this influences economic policy, public policy, government fiscal policy and market protection, and how each of these influences the kinds of investment governments make in education and the expectations politicians have. Political economy, as a construct, came about through the influence of trade and market forces and these forces now fall under the banner of neo-liberalism. The movement grew out of the mistrust of the political process by those whose livelihoods depended on capital and an absolute faith in the democracy of the marketplace. In the 1970s and early 1980s business people in key nations began to promote the notion that politicians and civil servants were no longer needed to intervene in markets in the wider interest of their communities. If left to themselves, market forces would address the public interest simply because the market was the only way to discover the public interest; this idea was subsequently applied to education.

Neo-liberalism, coupled with psychological Darwinism, has set out to convince us that humans are, in essence, selfish and self-centred. All we seek is the happiness that is to be found in the marketplace, perhaps under the reassuring bright lights of the “well-stocked supermarket, we can express ourselves, in close proximity to others, with whom we rarely speak” (Hind, 2010, p. 136). Increasingly, with the growing privatization of public and health services, we are told that we are on our own, that we must take care of ourselves. The growing presence of financial literacy in primary schooling demonstrates the invasive nature of this kind of belief. We are left asking how we can help ourselves if we don’t concentrate all our energies on ourselves. In classroom practices, this leaves the teacher peripheralized: they can only watch from the margins. For governments, the answer seems to lie in forms of citizenship training for future recruits for the global economy, what I regard as “global economic citizens” (Thwaites, 2011, in review), and in New Zealand schools this training is done through the values and key competencies.

The notion of key competencies comes from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and their project: Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and

Conceptual Foundations, or DeSeCo. The DeSeCo project defines a competence as “the ability to successfully meet complex demands in a particular context through the mobilization of psychosocial prerequisites” (as cited in Rychen & Salganik, 2003, p. 49). As a result, we find a set of dialectical formulations falling into place as theoretical and conceptual mechanisms that have become a set of educational practices and outcomes designed to meet the demands of the globalized power structures. The OECD contends that specific key competencies are needed to bring about a broadening of general and vocational education and a reforming of education for social renewal. For the OECD, a competence is more than a domain-based skill, it must involve self-regulation, monitoring, and initiative-taking, it should also incorporate adaptation (Rychen & Salganik, 2001).

The OECD contends that specific key competencies are needed in school curricula to bring about a broadening of general and vocational education and a reforming of education for social renewal. In the interest of economic development and cooperation, the populations of OECD member states are told that students need to be prepared for complex and ever-changing work environments, and that students also need to develop self-awareness, be self-monitoring, and also self-managing. These and similar “mind-forged manacles”, as Blake (1992, p. 45), puts it have become a central aim of education. Educational effectiveness is becoming more and more defined through the potential for, as well as actual, economic productivity and the development of the ‘economic citizen’. As such, like the business model it imitates, education requires visible systems of accountability.

### **Accountability in education**

Educational discourse is becoming a global spectacle as systems of teacher and school accountability, clustered together with associated targets and benchmarks, have become powerful and pervasive forces, especially in the schools of those countries within the sphere of the OECD. In these countries it is argued that standards must be raised, for the sake of the life chances of the students and more especially for international competitiveness. Teachers, meanwhile, have tended to become more technician as they tick off the demands of curriculum documents (achievement objectives, key competencies, values), their school boards, modes of assessment, as well as various numeracy, literacy (both text-based and financial) and cultural competency add-ons. Not all of these come at the instigation of neo-liberal thinkers, and post-colonial theorists and advocates for social justice have also played their part in the degrading of knowledge in favour of an imagined spectacle of a ‘democratic’ and ‘equitable’ economic society. These requirements take on a symbolism that gets in the way of the delivery of disciplinary knowledge. The symbolic trappings are often unrelated to anything more than accessories that come between students and teachers as they juxtapose their roles of spectator and performer.

Education has entered the serious world of audit culture. Stronach (2010) expresses concern over the commoditization of educational knowledge and performance in ‘indicators’ that deploy education as a fantastical ‘training’ for global competitiveness (p. 174). Education is now full of economic measures and terms (targets, value-added, Best Practice, evidence-based performance) as well as borrowings from business (private sector takeovers of state action in education and health, Total Quality Management, all forms of Quality Assurance, trademarks, and logos).

Accountability has become a key tool for social change and Hopmann (2008) claims that this is best reflected in the derivative from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) strategies of ‘no child left behind’, ‘no school left behind’, and ‘no state left behind’. A form of expectation management is in place, influenced by New Public Management theories in which education is represented as outputs, outcomes, efficiency, and what has to be achieved by whom. Accountability is often narrowly focussed on ‘academic standards’, or numeracy and literacy testing. Responsibility is in this way passed from the government, through its agencies, into schools and finally down to individual teachers. The classroom has become politicized and defined through crisis or success. Crisis becomes the fault of the teacher, while success relates to the quality of the school and the system of education in particular. In New Zealand, education has moved from a loosely defined set of educational targets, through curriculum guidelines, to the

curriculum framework and on to a curriculum document that not only defines the kinds of knowledge that should be taught, but, more seriously, now legislates for the behaviours and dispositions that are the expected outcomes of education.

Hopmann (2008, p. 438) outlines some implicit assumptions surrounding the measures PISA applies:

- that what PISA measures is somehow important knowledge for the future,
- that the economic future is dependent on the knowledge-base monitored by PISA, and
- that PISA measures what is learned in schools.

Hopmann (2008), citing Fertig (2004), states that “In short, PISA relies on ‘strong assumptions’ based on weak data that appeal to conventional wisdom” such as ‘education matters’ and school structures make a difference, “but offers no empirical and historical research supporting its implied causalities” (p. 439). Further, Hopmann cites Berliner (2005) who claims that the price we pay for simplistic forms of what counts and what is measured is “an impoverished view on educational reform, a system of accountability checks which places ‘statistical significance’ above other ways of looking at individual and institutional achievements. This very narrow conceptualization lends itself to remedial strategies: ‘evidence-based’ or ‘best-practice’ models, or ‘data-driven decision making’ that only make sense if it is assumed that assessment data are all that counts and that local conditions do not play a significant role, or at least can be overcome if one does as those who are successful do” (p. 441).

I suggest that the ongoing tributes paid to global business practices by education do little more than represent the capitalist economic ethos as a form of spectacle. Debord (1967) argues that “in societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation” (p. 7), and this is at its most obvious when new technologies take centre stage.

### **Technology as spectacle**

In schooling, as elsewhere, digital technology has moved beyond being the ‘next big thing’ to being the only thing, at least in the medium term, and its bricolage has come to dominate school life as well as home life. New generations of students are rejecting their physical engagement with the world in favour of digital interactions with iPods, iPhones, iPads and other computers. To me, this seems like avoidance of being-*in*-the-world in favour of an ongoing projection away-*from*-the-world. This repelling of the ‘real’ or physical world is producing a distancing, a process of distanciation, impacting not only on our spatio-temporal actions ‘in-the-world’ but also on our emotional ‘with-the-world’ and ‘with-others-in-the-world’. The likely consequence for societal subsystems is that we become disembedded, following our own logic without reflecting upon the presence-of-the-world or on society’s concerns and this tension reveals a dialectic of belonging and distanciation.

The New Zealand Ministry of Education promotes e-learning as the way to a bright economic future and it valorizes students for their digital understandings and potential value, praising them as ‘digital natives’. At the same time, many teachers are regarded as ‘digital immigrants’ simply because they do not feel a natural affinity with the technological spectacle. Perpetual virtual reality may not be the world that many educators want to inhabit for long periods of time. The spectacle of the virtual sets out in opposition to the actual rather than the real. The “virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 208)—in other words, real without being actual, for “the reality of the virtual is structure” (p. 209). For example, in regarding works of art and music as virtual Deleuze reminds us that, rather than embodying some confused determination, the virtual is “the completely determined structure formed by its genetic elements” (ibid). Nevertheless, the completely determined may lack a set of relations belonging to actual existence. We can conceive of an object without it being entirely determined or actually existing for its representation gives the appearance of an object. While *differentiation* might determine the content of the idea, it is the process of *differentiation* that expresses the actualization of this virtuality. Deleuze (1994) tells us “we call the determination of the virtual content of an Idea differentiation; we call the actualization of that virtuality into species and

distinguished parts differentiation” (p. 207). Differentiation thus relates to feelings of power, especially for the skilled and habitual user of digital environments.

Few people can now bear to be technology-free for any period of time and schooling reinforces this trend as it comes to rely on digital technologies in its programmes which then require parents to acquire the latest digital gadgets. Even aesthetic perception is mediated by the technologized spectacle. It has reached the point where students are now encouraged to use iPhones in the classroom to give ongoing feedback to their teacher, to use iPads both at school and at home so the teacher can check on their progress or ensure that homework is being done, to be contributing to the class Facebook or blog, or creating their personal portfolio or CV. This means that teachers, in order to deliver spectacular performativity, are themselves expected to be frequently online, whether checking homework, writing reports, or simply marking the class roll in a set time frame. That this should be a cause for concern seems to elude many educators anxious to keep up with the trend. Children are being trained to be online for most of their waking hours in preparation for entry into a compulsive and digitally addicted workforce on leaving school. Their teachers are instructed to follow suit.

New technologies enable us to access vast amounts of information very easily and to communicate with others. But the information cannot reliably reach a general audience, the public, “without passing through some kind of editorial filter” (Hind, 2010, p. 155). To a large extent such filtering remains beyond the reach of general scrutiny and the general population is rarely aware of the decisions of editors. What we believe to be public opinion in fact takes much of its form from editorial decisions, often made in the private and not public interest. Hind (2010), with reference to de Tocqueville, points out that “in a democracy public opinion is sovereign. But the sovereignty of public opinion is empty if the public cannot independently establish its own opinion” (p. 171).

Apple’s iPhone is appealing to many members of the public because it has elements of spectacle about it, a cross between Disney entertainment and the penny arcade. Apple ensures unrelenting control over its products and how they’re used (Kahney, as cited in Wu, 2010, p. 278). The iPad, iPhone and iPod give the appearance of being able to do many things and offer an unlimited variety of functions that can be acquired from the ‘app store’, but “the inescapable reality is that these machines are closed in a way the personal computer never was” (Wu, 2010, p. 291). They have become a form of enclosure. New Zealand schools have been quick to adopt the iPad as the preferred platform for the spectacle of e-learning.

Malecki (1991) relates technology to economic development and he compares regional benefits with local, national with international ones. He reminds us that “policies that have the greatest impacts on spatial structures have been aspatial policies” (p. 379). In Malecki’s terms, the aspatial, that which is not related to types of space, can also be the technologies likely to generate economic benefits and so become part of a policy for economic development. The spatial structures that feel the impact of these policies tend to be aligned with the division of labour, but a policy that fails to consider specific spaces while redefining space in terms of the purely economic, simply reinforces the breakdown of the public. The technological decentring of space is producing what Augé (2008) calls “empirical non-places, meaning spaces of calculation, consumption and communication” (p. viii, Introduction).

Increasingly, consumption is only becoming possible with the aid of codes such as cell phones, credit cards, the customer cards issued by supermarkets, airlines and other consumer outlets, email addresses and online passwords. Baudrillard (2008) tells us that “we live in a world where there is more and more information and less and less memory” (p. 79). Information devours its own content as it devours it too fast and this mismatch of signification becomes codified yet has nothing to do with signification. The consumer’s world is one of discontinuities as the conditions of purchase change as often as the products they seek to purchase. Happiness, for the global economic citizen as a consumer, is to be found in the spectacle of the marketplace.

While the commercial opportunities offered by digital technology are virtually limitless, socialization is also now measured by a society’s exposure to media messages. It is easy to see why technology has become so important to those who manage schooling. Stiegler (2010), in his new critique of political economy, implies that knowledge and memory have now been confiscated by technology. Further, Stiegler now sees

human becoming as being necessarily equipped with a technological prosthesis and a human metamorphosis appears to be already underway (as cited in Negri, 2011, p. 115).

### **Education as spectacle**

Debord claims that “the reigning economic system is a *vicious circle of isolation*” (1967, p. 15) and this is reflected in the ways that teachers are increasingly becoming separated from their vocation and their students. Regulations, accountability and national curricula have separated teachers from their students. As a result, communication between them has lost its professional pedagogical meaning as the economic imposes its own pedagogies. The economization of education has expanded curricula to global proportions, to a spectacle, and this has led to a loss of unity in localized teaching programmes. Teachers have become spectators, looking on at the spectacle they had little part in creating. The irony is that, as economic growth is promoted for its own sake, both teachers and pupils take on the role of spectators of the economized school site.

Capitalism’s never-ending monologue of self-praise and its totalitarian dominance of all aspects of life have now culminated in its attempts to turn education into a self-portrait of itself. This reflects Debord’s claim that, “the society based on modern industry is not accidentally or superficially spectacular, it is *fundamentally spectaclist*. In the spectacle—the visual reflection of the ruling economic order—goals are nothing, development is everything. The spectacle aims at nothing other than itself” (1967, p. 10). We might, therefore, consider that the spectacle of education is able to subjugate human beings to itself simply because the economy has already subjugated them. The first stage for Debord was the “degradation of *being* into *having*—human fulfilment was no longer equated with what one was, but with what one possessed” (ibid). Possession has now become accumulation, of money, property, qualifications, technological competence, literacy and numeracy credits on academic records, and so on. *Having* has become *appearing*—the appearance of being educated, technologized or influential.

The education of the spectacle sees information and behaviours (such as key competencies) that posture as knowledge, as appearances of the real; but appearances are never ‘real’, they simply appear to be so. In a Kantian frame, appearances become phenomena determined by the structure of our minds. But what structure are we mindful of when the spaces we perceive are digitized, mediatised, economized and technologized? The thing-in-itself becomes even less knowable because the virtual *a posteriori* lacks a physical practical experience and for the teacher their reasoning and duty to national directives with regard to technology and the economic becomes a form of categorical imperative. The teacher imagines they ‘hear’ the moral command “you should incorporate new digitized technologies in everything that you do”—a rational response is required. And so the digital spectacle is allowed to infiltrate personal pedagogy, not necessarily from choice, because there seems to be only one option.

The Media are having an increasing impact on how the world is perceived, even to the extent that this influences the world of perception in the arts. Today, the world that surrounds the artist usually reaches them in “mediatised forms that are themselves effects, aspects and driving forces of the global system” (Augé, 2008, p. xviii). The same is true for teachers. This means that both artists and teachers become spectators without paying too much attention to the politics of the spectacle before them. It begins to feel natural, so that holding the position of the spectator becomes the essence of the spectacle, and as such the teacher’s position as spectator means that they eventually become their own spectacle.

Students no longer seem to be able to simply listen: they need pictures, preferably moving ones, to accompany sound or speech. Music teachers report that their students have difficulty listening to a piece of music unless it is accompanied by film footage of some sort. A colleague, who teaches at a prominent girls’ high school with a national reputation for the musical excellence of its performance groups, recently told me that she now has to put on muted videos as a backdrop to her chamber groups playing at school assembly. Even though the video content is usually unrelated to the music, and often sets up a counter-text to the musical intent, the desired result is often achieved, with younger students sitting quietly and giving the appearance of listening to the music. The unique forms of solitude generated by new technologies and the

media suggest that our landscape, whether visual or aural, has been emptied. Our gaze reflects on the spectacle that has been emptied of content and meaning because our gaze has also dissolved into the landscape (Augé, 2008).

### **The teacher as spectator**

Teachers have been dispossessed of the pedagogical relationships that traditionally bridged the distance between teachers and students—that distance traversed between the knower and the known. Rather than spectacularizing educational performances, Stronach suggests that national testing and global comparisons have, in fact, mobilized “a whole series of simplistic understandings and redemptive ploys” (2010, p. 32) and it is these that have become the spectacle. We begin to see a one-dimensional vision slipping back into place, that of comprehending words and numbers (but now also including key competencies) so that the economic society can operate like some well-oiled machine.

Traditionally, students have been the spectators of the teacher’s performance. But their own performance has now taken on the role of ‘performativity’—the optimizing of their overall performance—and pupils, formerly intended to be emancipated through their spectatorship, have become the performers, each with an individual monologue to demonstrate their economic potential and worth. Teachers have tended towards becoming spectators, collectively, as they perform their technician and observatory functions and roles. The teacher’s presence is seen as necessary for the success of the student performance, even if only standing by, watching, observing; their role of spectator has turned them into ‘standing reserves’ (Heidegger, 1977). The teacher is a spectator and, because they are a member of the audience, they are held responsible if the performance fails—they must simply have been a ‘bad’ audience. Therefore, even the spectator can be held accountable, and those who watch the teachers have also become spectators through their official systems of surveillance.

The teacher has been encouraged to become facilitator in what is widely touted as a democratic pedagogy in schooling. They are instructed to be there to serve the needs and desires of their students. For example, the official Ministry of Education website for *The New Zealand Curriculum* has posted under the heading ‘Principles that underpin key competencies’:

Relevant: Learning is relevant to students’ lives now and also supports their development as life-long learners (as opposed to learning relevant only to a limited range of possibilities from the past) (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Such a rejection of the past can best be described as historical nihilism, a suppression of individual and cultural uniqueness and the affirmation of who we are. It now appears that education, to be regarded as effective, should teach only what is necessary for a more productive economy and develop student outputs that define an ‘economic citizen’—citizens who both produce and consume. This might be seen to disregard most aspects of a student’s activity and interest and of their desire for a consciousness of the world. The goal of education now seems to be a project in which the commodity contemplates itself in the world it has created. The pressure to teach what is relevant to students’ lives implies that Student A, as a consumer, has unusual power over the Teacher, B, who is expected to search the market to produce what their specific student-consumers desire. The scenario thus becomes A instructs B how B shall instruct A. If our students are indoctrinated, through the curriculum, into the global economic order so that they identify only with being-economic-in-the-world, this will be simply because education has played its part in removing choice and installing a false consciousness; there is nothing else the students can be. Their minds are no longer free to wander and wonder; instead, their learning has been confined to a uniform space.

In education, social separation is now reflected in the spectacle of illusion and truth, achievers and non-achievers, in the myriad of empirical ‘case studies’ that feed ‘best-evidence synthesis’ projects, and through the ‘what is permitted’ being prioritized over the ‘what is possible’. Why is it that we always focus on the gap between rich and poor, or between the white and the ‘other’, when speaking of the outcomes of school

achievement? Would it not be better to focus on the gap between those who feel ‘fulfilled’ by their education and life chances and those who feel ‘unfulfilled’?

Further questions worth consideration include:

- Who is the *author-ity* in curriculum content?
- In the spectacle of education, how might we define what knowledge and knowing are?
- With the impact of popular culture and the demand to make the curriculum “relevant to student’s lives now”, and as teachers struggle to validate their presence in classroom settings, who is the knower in relation to the known?
- Has knowledge now moved to the periphery of processes and desires?
- Who is to be transformed in the pedagogical process—the student or the teacher?

## Concluding discussion

In this paper I have claimed that global economic and advanced capitalist dimensions have taken on ideological pretensions that are flat, precise, and which assert undeniable facts. Historical choice has been removed and teachers, as spectators, have been overtaken by an economic worldview where the ideology is total and offers no alternative to entrenched pedagogies that support ownership and profit. The extent to which the ills of education (such as, poor standards of literacy and numeracy) are a spectacle manufactured by those focussed on securing research funding and sustained academic careers can only be surmised. The impact of the lack of a well-rounded education is likely to be felt for some time to come. Stronach (2010) claims that “a world reduced only to its manifestation as contemporary spectacle ... is a lost world in which sign, test, image, and manipulation are triumphant; ... it is the notion of ‘spectacle’ which gives purchase on the nature of those international league tables” (p. 27). Curricula have become a ‘jumble’ of symbolic objects designed to represent the collective consciousness, which is turning teaching and learning into a performance of deciphering in the service of the spectacle of education.

Teachers should urgently reassess their pedagogical role and consider the educational distribution of the sensible. They need to restore the harmonious relationship between the occupation of teaching and the pedagogical and subject knowledge teachers are equipped with. Teachers need to question the ‘fact’ of their being in a specific time and place where they practise their particular pedagogical vocation, and replace this with their desire to be professionals, with the capacity for feeling, saying and doing they feel is appropriate to their activities. Such questioning might bring about teacher emancipation and break the fit between ‘occupation’ and ‘capacity’, disrupting the identity of spectator to reveal the gap between the poetics of teaching and the relentless rhetoric of the economic.

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