

## **Neoliberal Multiculturalism Embedded in Social Justice Education: Commodification of Multicultural Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper investigates how conceptions of ‘diversity’ and ‘equity’ in U.S. education have become amenable to global neoliberal economic educational discourses that rest on competitive global market demands. The argument outlined in this paper suggests that the approach and knowledge about and for democracy and social justice education, particularly in prominent multicultural education scholarship and practice, is increasingly commodified and risks being embedded in market rationalities. Further, this paper tries to point out the possible dangers of surrendering the goal and scope of multicultural education to neoliberal educational principals, which increasingly mirror a human capital model of society and individual subjectivity. The paper seeks to illustrate how the discourse of neoliberal multiculturalism dictates a commercial and competitive sense of social justice which also further facilitates the repression of political difference—particularly for populations that do not identify with neoliberal educational reforms—while administering mechanisms of social control through neoliberal processes of subjectification.*

**Keywords:** *multicultural education, neoliberal multiculturalism, 21<sup>st</sup> century, commodification, subjectification, citizenship education.*

### **Neoliberal Economy and Educational Reform in the U.S.**

Postindustrial relations of production demonstrate a shift in labor processes from a blue collar oriented industry to an information and technology (IT) operated, predominantly white-collar flexible just-in-time manufacturing processes that require a smaller and yet highly informationalized work force. Neoliberal economies increasingly require capable and flexible human capital to be invested and reinvested into a

highly technological global economy. The postindustrial economy which is “based on knowledge demands more human capital as a condition for informational creativity and the efficiency growth of the service economy” (Santos, 2006, p.68). Educational institutions, school reforms and curriculum designs have thus been re-structured in these societies to orient and align their scope and goals to parallel the demands of production (Slaughter & Leslie, 1999; Slaughter, 2009) by inviting corporate interests to run and guide learning. As the quality of human capital gains significance, investing in IT research and the schooling of IT savvy individuals (the labor force of immaterial production) has undoubtedly become a fundamental postindustrial economic project. The need for human capital and postindustrial reliance on technology and technical know-how of production intensified the need for the establishment of schools as Research and Development (R&D) sites in order to facilitate the creation of learners (educational subjects) that continually learn, improve and consume economies of knowledge and information (Peters and Besley, 2006). As Michael Apple (2005) argues, these demands have pressured and have led schools to align their educational goals with so-called 21<sup>st</sup> century market demands, which, according to Apple, for Apple, classify schools as part of the infrastructure that supports direct accumulation, i.e., an infrastructure of global capitalism.

In economies that are highly dependent on information and technology, the market logic of sustaining the availability and the high quality of technically skilled labor or individuals educated for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has established itself as a fundamental factor of production and a social goal of postindustrial societies that strives for affluence and increased welfare. Education is therefore increasingly marketed towards that end. On the other hand, aligning education and learning with the neoliberal economy is not merely a material economic incentive to remain productive and efficient. This paper will argue that the human capital framework of postindustrial relations of production is also part and parcel of a neoliberal discourse of social control aimed at cultivating social subjectivities that align their conduct with competitive economic sensibilities (Olssen, 2006). Moreover, social welfare agenda of neoliberal reforms are embedded in a competitive regime of “free”

consumer subjects, who are mobilized under the “free-market” machine that selectively works as a social discipline and disposing mechanism to cripple populations that do not identify with neoliberal market principles.

Criticisms of free-market society and neoliberal economization of education have pointed out these processes of social polarization, characterized by homelessness, debt-ridden students, income disparities, surveillance of immigrants and people of color and the school-to-prison pipeline, which selectively dispose people deemed unwanted and inefficient for the functioning of neoliberal economization (Giroux, 2009 & 2010). In her essay, *Neoliberalism in the Academic Borderlands*, Antonia Darder (2012) sketches the social decay of our neoliberal moment:

In the efficient, cost-effective, and competitive neoliberal world, questions of difference have been neatly conflated and diffused by a hypocrisy fueled by racism, elitism and a tenacious disbelief in the equality of those who exist outside the narrow rationality of its profit logic. As a consequence, “deficient” subjects of difference, unable to march to the homogenizing and boot-strap neoliberal refrain, are conveniently tossed aside or criminalized and held behind iron bars, without concern for their numbers or their fate (2012, p.413).

The U.S. government invests in education with an effort to jump-start the stagnating 21<sup>st</sup> century U.S. economy by reforming schools and curriculum in order to revive the glory days of twentieth century U.S. exceptionalism and known as the American Century. Through these educational investments, the U.S. government also forefronts a false hope and promise of tackling social inequalities and bringing forth a more egalitarian social welfare system. However, these educational investments have done very little to tackle the social decay associated with the socio-economic depreciation of society. On the contrary, educational reforms have intensified the root causes of social corruption rooted in commercialism and marketization of society. In 2007, National Academies’ congressionally requested report, *Rising Above the*

*Gathering Storm* frames educational institutions as sites to re-develop U.S. scientific and technological leadership and a national workforce capable of competing in the global economy, especially in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education (National Academies, 2007). Educational policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act of 2001, which was revitalized in 2012 when the Obama administration launched “Race to the Top” (RTTT) forced many schools and educators to follow models of business management through standardized tests (Hursh, 2007). States and school districts—under accountability pressures from Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) reports—have set standards and aligned their curriculum to STEM education and began to ‘teach to the test.’ Test results not only determined whether a student received a diploma but also subjected schools to be liable for their test scores. If scores did not rise, schools were shut down or enclosed by venture capitalists and charter schools that carry out business models of school improvement. Both Saltman (2006) and De Lissovoy (2012) articulate that neoliberal education policies have established an ‘enclosure movement’ designed for the erosion of democratic and common spaces in public education. Saltman and De Lissovoy—rely on David Harvey’s (2003) Marxian conceptualization “accumulation by dispossession” whereby the capitalist economy intensifies exploitive social relations of production through dispossession of public spaces from their common character—to highlight the authoritarian processes of enclosures that are characterized by the economic logics of destabilizing and disciplining public spaces in order for private interventions to triumph. Saltman asserts that “privatization is one of the most powerful tools of accumulation by dispossession, transforming publicly owned and controlled goods and services into private and restricted ones” (2006, p. 32). Hence, neoliberal privatization represents the “enclosure of commons” in which civil rights and democratic freedoms enjoyed in public spaces are systematically crippled (De Lissovoy, Means, & Saltman, 2014).

What is crucial in tracing the trajectories of these policy reforms that have proliferated private enclosures of public spaces in education is the fact that neoliberal school reforms employ social justice education as its

public representative. When the Obama administration pushed RTTT reforms, Linda Darling-Hammond's social justice agenda to increase the quality of education for minority students had quickly appeared as the education advisor to the RTTT campaign. In her book, *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future*, Darling-Hammond points out the racialized opportunity gap in the U.S. and how education has perpetuated the social disparities rather than eliminate them. The RTTT campaign and Darling-Hammond's solution was to re-enforce a national standards based education reform and assessment—known as the Common Core Standards (CCS)—that is storming U.S. schools today. CCS is designed to level the playing field for minorities by providing every student with access to the same quality/standard of education. Darling-Hammond (2010) outlines how this will allow the U.S. to better compete in a world economy but more importantly stresses the significance of establishing national standards-based education policy and assessment to address educational inequality. However, the CCS not only recreated (on a national scale) the high-stakes test environment of NCLB, but also the accountability regime of CCS high-stakes testing further limited and narrowed curriculum while punishing schools.

However, national security, global competitiveness and social justice agendas remain highly attractive and the neoliberal multiculturalism embedded in these economic initiatives cloak neoliberal reforms that aim at the economization of society, which is the predominant economic mechanism that supplies the standardization movement in U.S. education. Education policy initiative to increase STEM scores and quality education standards across the nation mobilized \$4.35 billion in federal dollars to “reform” public school systems and curriculum (U.S. Dept. of Education). These education funds were transformed into a private entrepreneurial enterprise, as investment in the learner vis-à-vis the nation to “add value” to compete in the market to rise above others was carried out by privatizing education. Kenneth Saltman (2007) characterizes this as the nation's “largest-ever school voucher experiment” (2007, p. 137). The seemingly social justice agenda of neoliberal schooling project is also not too far isolated from the nationalistic discourses that facilitate the neoliberal economic reforms to

manifest a sense of natural consequence of a highly competitive and unsecure world. Schooling to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century skills to ensure U.S. global competitiveness and hegemony is marketed by education policy reform campaigns as a project that will raise the tide of prosperity; 'raise all boats' and provide economic opportunity, security and equity for "all" U.S. "citizens."

Hence, schools within this neoliberal regime have significantly been influenced to facilitate the production of subjects who live, desire, learn and master the skills and knowledge necessary for the postindustrial global neoliberal economy. Students tend to and are often encouraged by school programs and teachers to choose majors that yield better employment opportunities when they graduate. In addition to students' choices, educational institutions, instead of thinking and operating in basic research terms, also begin to "think in terms of applied research funding and commercializable results" (Etzkowitz, Webster & Healey, 1998). Schools and teachers get *Taylorized* with utmost importance as schooling is increasingly regarded as the key social institution that sustains the competitive edge for high-tech postindustrial societies in the global market. As McLaren and Jaramillo point out, in this economic regime "all student are treated as monolithic, heterosexist, Eurocentric and middle class entity" (McLaren and Jaramillo, 2007, p. 80). To view evidence of this economic logic prescribed for schools that is intentionally intended to cut across social difference, one can glance at 2012, U.S. Congress legislation currently under consideration that would enhance economic competitiveness by supporting K-12 STEM education called, *STEM Education: Preparing for the Jobs of the Future* (U.S. Congress). The legislation proposes to award state educational agencies to expand STEM, professional development for STEM teachers and materials used in the STEM curriculum, award grants to states, Indian tribes or tribal organizations, nonprofit organizations, or institutions of higher education to develop effective STEM networks that coordinate STEM education. The legislation also included tax credits for STEM teachers, grants for computer science education and curriculum for preparing students for success in the global economy. While the legislation initiative limits learning and curriculum to only a particular set of skills, i.e., STEM, it also portrays itself as a social justice policy

initiative to increase educational attainment of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills by Native American tribes. These policy initiatives merely overlook the socio-political difference of Indigenous American nations (Richardson, 2012) and other individual sensibilities that cannot always be reconciled in one single overarching framework, such as STEM, 21<sup>st</sup> century citizens, and so forth.

## **Multicultural Education Educators Against Neoliberal Reform**

Multicultural education is not oblivious to the neoliberal reform movement in education and the economic pressures that threaten democratic channels of education policy and practice. Carl A. Grant's (2012) essay, *Cultivating Flourishing Lives: a Robust Social Justice Vision of Education*, grapples with the challenges our neoliberal moment brings forth for educators who are concerned with the meaning and content of social justice education and particularly the aim and scope of transformative education. Grant acknowledges that much of the debate in MCE is centered on 'quality education for all,' which for Grant disregards to ask what education is, and more importantly, what purpose it serves. Grant argues that in the U.S. education is increasingly designed to accommodate 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and jobs and represents economic motives in defining its service and goals. Grant (2012) adds that "today, discussions of the purpose of education, while presenting in society's mainstream discourse, are often isolated and/or reduced to employment and employability, consumerism, and voting" (p. 911). To counter this instrumental and economic role of education, Grant proposes that multicultural education can show commitment to students' flourishing lives that "recognizes that there are variety of good lives, and not all of these lives are focused on the accumulation of wealth and status" (p. 915). Grant's proposal stresses a very significant turning point in transformative education research and MCE literature and signifies the realization of an emerging neoliberal economic discourse, urging scholars of education to acknowledge that education in our neoliberal moment is under siege by economic discourses.

In *Facing Accountability in Education: Democracy and Equity at Risk*, Christine E. Sleeter (2007) puts together a collection of essays in which

MCE scholars are trying to raise awareness about how neoliberal policy and accountability standards exert more inequalities in educational settings by disadvantaging already poorly performing social groups, and mainly students of color. In Sleeter's more recent work she traces the processes that have led to the marginalization of MCE in educational contexts. Sleeter draws attention to neoliberal education reforms that have dominated U.S. schools since the 1990s and argues that these reforms have been "deliberately context-blind. Although racial achievement gaps have been a focus of attention, solutions have emphasized offering all students the same curriculum, taught in the same way based on the language, worldview, and experiences of White English-speakers" (Sleeter, 2012, p. 562).

Similarly, critical race theorists Jori N. Hall and Laurence Parker (2007) argue that neoliberal reforms benefit certain student populations while disinvesting others, Tey argue that "White students and their families have social and physical capital advantages...access to advantages that Blacks and other minority groups lack, regardless of class" in coping with neoliberal educational re-structuring (p. 136). Pauline Lipman's (2011) work on neoliberal educational reforms supports this idea and shows that neoliberal reforms call for opening education to market principles across school systems and endanger minority populations by fostering further disinvestments. Lipman (2011) argues that neoliberal educational policy features mayoral control of school districts, closing "failing" public schools or handing them over to corporate-style "turnaround" organizations, expanding school "consumer choice" and privately run but publicly funded charter schools, weakening teacher unions, and enforcing top-down accountability and incentivized performance targets on schools, classrooms, and teachers (e.g., merit pay based on students' standardized test scores). These policies eliminate schools that are deemed to be not performing in accordance with science and math demands of the U.S. economy. Moreover, students of these schools and their communities (mainly students of color and working-class), face further disinvestment and are deemed inefficient. Lipman further shows that in the United States, the neoliberal restructuring of education is deeply racialized. It is centered particularly on urban African American, Latino, and other communities of color, where public schools,

subject to being closed or privatized, are driven by a minimalist curriculum of preparing for standardized tests, which assess and penalize marginalized students and their schools by holding them accountable for standards that show no accord and consideration of their social realities. The resulting consequence is further disinvestment in these populations and portrays their “failure” as mere inability to compete and a natural consequence of “objective” competitive market relations.

In Christine Sleeter’s (2007) work we witness illustrative examples of how teachers who implement pedagogies that “use standards strategically” (p. 21) subvert neoliberal reforms and constraints. Sleeter shows how educators can work around the standards to create more collaborative and culturally responsive pedagogies than what the NCLB standards would usually permit. Even though Sleeter later argues that such an approach can create *college-going* cultures for historically marginalized identities—which equates access to college with attaining ‘power,’ and addresses individuals through an economic rationale, she offers a critical lens to approach how economization impacts educational practice and policy. Such MCE work as Grant (2012) proposes, challenges mainstream discourse about the purpose of education and hence pushes MCE to reconsider neoliberal economic discourses that threaten to capture the desire for transformative social justice education. The purpose of this paper is therefore an attempt to offer MCE educators another critical lens to re-examine the conceptual premises for analyzing neoliberal economic discourses that are increasingly becoming all too common in educational settings and particularly in social justice discourses.

## **A Global Flat World: Neoliberal Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education**

Critical education scholars have raised their concerns about the educational reforms and practices in our neoliberal moment in parallel to multiculturalism, suggesting that the transformative social justice scope of multiculturalism has become captured by a neoliberal socio-economic and educational dispositive that sets up administrative terrains of controlling social justice discourses (Darder, 2012; Giroux, 2009).

Multicultural education attempts to pose a subversive, progressive and transformative educational experience and practice but these hopes are hindered by being encapsulating in a discourse of “neoliberal multiculturalism” (Mitchell, 2003; Hale, 2005; Melamed, 2006; Darder, 2012). Katharyne Mitchell’s (2003) essay, *Educating the National Citizen in Neoliberal Times*, raises attention to how this neoliberal discourse is co-opted in multicultural educational discourses. Mitchell argues that the spirit of multiculturalism in education has shifted from a concern with the formation of tolerant and democratic national citizens who can work with and through difference, to a more strategic use of citizenship and diversity for competitive advantage in the global marketplace. This shift is directly linked with and helps to facilitate the entrenchment of neoliberalism as it supports a privatization agenda, reduces the costs of social reproduction for the government, and aids in the constitution of subjects oriented to individual survival and/or success in the global economy. Neoliberal multiculturalism, as Darder puts it, is a

Conservative ideology of multiculturalism that deploys a meritocratic justification linked principally to economic benefit to justify inequalities. As such, those who practice neoliberal multiculturalism enact a structure of public recognition, acknowledgement and acceptance of multicultural subjects, based on an ethos of self-reliance, individualism, and competition, while simultaneously (and conveniently) undermining discourses and social practices that call for collective social action and fundamental structural change (Darder, 2012, p. 417).

Indeed, the discourse of multiculturalism often entails an economic rationale in the United States. The ‘social justice education’ discourse—broadly defined by multicultural education texts as democratic educational practices that strive to provide equal access and opportunity for underrepresented students in learning and educational attainment—is particularly vulnerable and at risk of being co-opted into a neoliberal economic discourse. As the social welfare agenda of neoliberal reforms seek to pursue the fictitious premise of ‘raising all boats’ within a market driven coalition, social justice discourses are being captured by this

liberal promise. The United States context offers a compelling example of how neoliberal economic reforms and policies operate through social justice education discourse in schools and education initiatives.

The Bush administration's 2002 *National Security Strategy* (U.S. Dept of State), suggests a multicultural movement in which the U.S. takes the lead in opening markets as well as minds to accept greater inter-economic and cultural exchange. In this regime of freedom, multiculturalism provides the inclusive doctrine that will include all the world's poor in the expanding circle of development. The document outlines an economic re-structuring of U.S. schools as well as schools around the world in accordance with principles of social "freedom" and "opening" of local economies to investment. Jodi Melamed's (2006) essay title, *The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Multicultural Neoliberalism*, suggests that such neoliberal discourses that preach 'inclusive pluralism' revise a racial logic.. Melamed argues that:

Like racial liberalism, contemporary neoliberal multiculturalism sutures official antiracism to state policy in a manner that prevents the calling into question of global capitalism. However, it deracializes official antiracism to an unprecedented degree, turning (deracialized) racial reference into a series of rhetorical gestures of ethical right and certainty. Concepts previously associated with 1980s and 1990s liberal multiculturalism— "openness," "diversity," and "freedom" — are recycled such that "open societies" and "economic freedoms" (shibboleths for neoliberal measures) come to signify human rights that the United States has a duty to secure for the world (2006, p.16).

The re-structuring proposals are designed to "unleash" and capture the productive potential of all individuals, stressing the social freedoms associated with transforming their economies, needless to say, are not merely altruistic attempts to foster experiential education. The educational freedoms are acceptable only if the learning coincides with the demands of the neoliberal market. MCE scholars mentioned in the previous section have already placed attention to this emerging

economic discourse which threatens to create greater social disparities based on social membership/capital. However, MCE texts fail to offer reconceptualizations of how we may define democratic education that is not co-opted by the neoliberal discourse. Charles R. Hale's (2005) work, which illustrates a market driven multicultural movement, may shed light as to how MCE texts are constrained by neoliberal multiculturalism, which acts as a veil; a 'wolf cloaked in sheep's clothing' so to speak. Hale argues that neoliberal governance includes the limited recognition of cultural rights, the strengthening of civil society, and endorsement of the principle of intercultural equality, which makes it appealing to social justice concerns MCE scholars advocate for. Hale asserts:

It is often assumed that the central tenet of neoliberalism, like the unadorned cognate from which it derives, is the triumph of an aggressively individualist ideology of "economic man." In contrast, I suggest that collective rights, granted as compensatory measures to "disadvantaged" cultural groups, are an integral part of neoliberal ideology. These distinctive cultural policies (along with their sociopolitical counterparts), rather than simply the temporal lapse between classic liberalism and its latter day incarnation, are what give the "neo" its real meaning. To emphasize the integral relationship between these new cultural rights and neoliberal political economic reforms, I use the term "neoliberal multiculturalism (2005, p.12).

Although MCE texts are critical of neoliberal educational reforms that result in further disinvestments in historically marginalized students, conceptions such as citizenship and pluralism commonly used in MCE to identify social justice goals render its discourse vulnerable to neoliberal economization that tries to encapsulate individualism into nationalistic and competitive market mechanisms. MCE discourses that mirror neoliberal economic discourses about social justice run the risk of reducing social justice discourse to mechanism of capital or commodification. By equating 'justice' as something that can be bought and consumed, MCE discourses are inclined to equate 'justice' with economic opportunity and market freedom and thus become less critical

of neoliberal economic educational re-structuring. The aim of social justice education is then limited to a neoliberal multiculturalism, i.e. generating more opportunity and capital for under-represented groups in order for them to buy their way into justice and social membership.

Social justice discourses in MCE often stress the importance of increasing educational attainment of under-represented students and providing them equitable educational experiences and economic opportunity structures. Social justice discourses MCE texts use to strategize social justice are based on providing individuals with meaningful educational experiences and opportunity structures that help them become successful in schools and be effective participants in society. For example, in *Educating Citizens in a Multicultural Society*, James Banks (2007) argues that “effective citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must have the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to compete in a global world economy that is primarily service and knowledge oriented...if the current levels of educational attainment among most US youths of color continue, the nation will be hard-pressed to meet its labor needs with its own citizens” (p.12). Banks’ multiculturalism serves to depict students as factors of production that need to be improved. This is largely because Banks’ idea of multiculturalism is captured by the economic and nationalistic neoliberal discourses that promise jobs, skills and prosperity for marginalized populations. For Banks, community or individual “empowerment” through multicultural education is quality education for “all” students to become effective “citizens” in a global economy. This discourse—articulated within a consumer regime of competition—advocates that the economic dynamics that condition our social world in our so-called “Flat World” necessitates an educational commitment to science and math education in order to increase social welfare, intercultural openness, and tolerance. The notion of success and effective participation in MCE texts are captured by neoliberal economic discourses which embark on reforming educational policy and practice based on the basic liberal principle that there is a positive and direct correlation between investment in education (particularly Science and Math) and economic growth. The neoliberal economic reforms carried out in schools are often justified under the rationale of advancing the economic productivity of the nation, which ultimately increases

opportunities for “all” factions of U.S. society. Hence, economic reforms are justified as means to generate more capital for the poor and allowing them to become effective members/consumers of society.

James Banks’ work consistently emphasizes that the goal of MCE in “helping students develop democratic racial attitudes is essential if the United States is to compete successfully in an interdependent global society and to help all students become caring, committed and active citizens” (Banks, 2008, p.xi). The underlying MCE assumption in Banks’ statement hastily surrenders MCE to a human capital model of education and accepts it as a necessary discourse for social justice education. Banks assumes that by becoming economically valuable to the nation, students gain recognition and justice. Banks further states that “multicultural education is to help students to acquire the reading, writing and math skills needed to function effectively in global and ‘flat’ technological world—that is, one in which students in New York City, London, Paris, and Berlin must compete for jobs with students educated in developing nations such as India and Pakistan” (Banks, 2008, p.19). Banks openly provides a multicultural justification for the domination of curriculum and teaching practices by Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs and efficiency.

Moreover, Banks’ statement suggests that MCE must play its role as an economically viable pedagogy in the competitive race for global hegemony and, in essence, purchase social justice. In other words, by improving STEM education, MCE justifies its own existence and generates the necessary attention to be a viable economic learning tool. However, this tendency merely commodifies MCE’s social justice aim and scope. The competitive rush to purchase justice through enhancing national economy is further emphasized in James A. Banks’ ‘series forward’ to Linda Darling-Hammond’s (2010) book, *The Flat World and Education*. Banks argues that the “United States faces a national crisis because students in other nations such as South Korea, Finland, Japan, and the United Kingdom are outperforming U.S. students in math and science achievement” (Banks, 2010, p. ix). Banks’ statement is a stark example of the mainstream discourse that is haunting education research and policy, reforming schools, curriculum and practice in

accordance with a global economic vision. Thus, Banks' strategy for MCE to become feasible often asserts the role of a mediator to guarantee that domestic social tensions over race, class, gender and culture do not disrupt the process of creating STEM educational projects and subjects that embrace neoliberal citizenship identities, i.e. loyalty to support U.S. economic hegemony and committed to schooling for information technology.

Although, multicultural education scholars—such as Sonia Nieto—affirm that the goals of multicultural education involve “tackling inequality” and promoting access to an equal education, raising the achievement of all students and provide them with an equitable and high-quality education (Nieto & Bode, 2008). Nieto tries to stress the negative impact of the lack of native and foreign language instruction in U.S. schools; she embeds multiculturalism and multilingualism as an economic resource when she states that MCE has “implications for everything from national security to our role as a global leader” (Nieto & Bode, 2010, p. 3). By multiculturalizing educational content useful to a neoliberal global world, Nieto proposes that MCE can police global cultural tensions and foster economic growth for U.S. capital, which eventually will benefit all factions of society. Another statement by James Banks clearly illustrates this neoliberal welfare discourse. Banks (2008) claims that “because of the negative ways in which students of color and their cultures are often viewed by educators and the negative experiences of these students in their communities and in the schools, many of them do not attain the skills needed to function successfully in a highly technological, knowledge-oriented society” (p. 2). Concern for cultural caring is once again situated within a global neoliberal economic discourse of competitiveness and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. As a result, MCE risks being trivialized by a neoliberal economic discourse which *multiculturalizes* economic mechanisms that target to take over educational discourse. Hence, cultural competence and sensitivity is reduced to a factor of productivity and a skill set to promote efficient, culturally competent investments and workers.

MCE texts that have been trivialized by neoliberal economic discourses often resort to ‘high-quality education’ not only as meaningful and

culturally sensitive learning but also as an enabling tool for marginalized students to obtain STEM education or access to power, i.e. schooling and economic opportunities presented by 21<sup>st</sup> century market and society. Sonia Nieto's work once again exemplifies this discourse. Nieto states that "too many young people will continue to face harrowing life choices because they are not receiving a high-quality education" (Nieto & Bode, 2008, p.10). Nieto's instrumental view of learning and education as a gateway to power and higher social status, not only represents a territorial political framework of democracy and desire that over-generalizes difference, but also justifies an economic neoliberal educational discourse that defines what is valuable in education. As a result, the discourse of 'social justice through educational attainment' has become synonymous with postindustrial economy and as a meta-narrative it describes educational attainment as a given entitlement to power, status and opportunities. Sonia Nieto (2005) believes that 'educational attainment' and 'increased economic opportunities' are the "democratic equalizer" of U.S. society. Nieto's argument associates investing in education with social capital and democracy. Associating economic opportunity and productivity with attaining 'power,' MCE carves a commodified location of power residing in increasing income and social status of historically under-represented populations. This assumption renders MCE amenable to neoliberal emphasis on educational attainment and scientific literacy as profitable investments in human capital and social welfare.

The neoliberal economic discourses that target the production of human capital through STEM skills and capital attitudes is therefore merely *multiculturalized* by MCE's approach to how economic and nationalistic demands require MCE. This MCE discourse is enunciated and gets woven into a desire for social justice to "empower" marginalized groups through 'access' to a so-called "quality education," economic "prosperity" and "democratic" representation. However, it neglects to question the socio-political cost of "prosperity" and "justice" defined solely by neoliberal discourses, which result in the eradication of social difference and subjecting individuals to a neoliberal economic learning regime.

## **Multicultural Neoliberal Education and the Repression of Social Difference**

MCE educators are not blind to the racial dynamics associated with neoliberal educational reforms and have raised concern and critiqued the racial dynamics of economization of schools and learning. However, MCE texts that rely on notions of citizenship to advocate for social empowerment neglect to see that neoliberal reforms pursue doctrines of multiculturalism, which are seemingly cosmopolitan and advocate for a citizenship rationale to justify the neoliberal changes in educational and social life. Neoliberal economic discourses that aim at constructing an acceptable political territory for individual differences resort to citizenship and multiculturalism to justify economic reforms. Slavoj Žižek's (1997) examination of multicultural capitalism points attention to this discourse:

The ideal form of ideology of this global capitalism is multiculturalism, the attitude which, from a kind of empty global position, treats *each* local culture the way the colonizer treats colonized people—as 'natives' whose mores are to be carefully studied and 'respected'...multiculturalism involves patronizing Eurocentrist distance and/or respect for local cultures without roots in one's own particular culture. In other words, multiculturalism is a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a 'racism with a distance'—it 'respects' the Other's identity, conceiving the Other as a self-enclosed 'authentic' community towards which he, the multiculturalist, maintains a distance rendered possible by his privileged universal position (p. 44).

Based on Žižek's emphasis, when we reflect a critical lens on James Banks' work, it reveals that his assumptions about individuals often situates them as self-enclosed and explicitly outlines a global cross-cultural task for multicultural education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Namely, exerting MCE as a tool to help teachers and students to navigate the global and culturally diverse world. Hence, Banks (2004) exerts a "privileged universal position" for democracy when he states:

Cultural, national, and global identifications are interrelated in a developmental way, and that students cannot develop thoughtful and clarified national identifications until they have reflective and clarified cultural identifications, and that they cannot develop a global or cosmopolitan identification until they have acquired a reflective national identification. We cannot expect Mexican-American students who do not value their own cultural identity and who have negative attitudes toward Mexican-American culture to embrace and fully accept Anglo or African- American students (p.295).

Banks' assumption on how to navigate difference is limited to a multiculturalism that relies on "multiculturalist" visions of democracy and cosmopolitanism. It rejects homogenous citizenship and yet embraces a differentiated form of social membership under a governing citizenship. Banks categorizes cultural identities (making them feasible) by situating them into three interrelated categories which work for developing cosmopolitan identity. Banks' assumption continues on the Eurocentric Enlightenment cosmology that depicts the territory of the 'self' unified under his/her culture which is protected and recognized by belonging to a civil general will (e.g. a nation) in order for democratic government to emerge.

Focusing on Native American peoples in particular, Troy A. Richardson (2012) argues that such multiculturalist emphasis on cultural diplomacy and cosmopolitanism in the global world overlooks the political difference of First Nations peoples. Richardson argues that Banks chooses colonial perspectives that adopt developmental cosmopolitan and national identifications. Richardson further claims MCE texts:

Provide for both as acknowledgement of Indigenous socio-political difference, establishing a legal framework to recognize and address it, and a dismissal of such difference as based on primitiveness. This conflicted colonial perspective creates contemporary situation in which the sovereignty and self-determining powers of Native peoples might be acknowledged, but only as part of an earlier

historical era. Yet, because this earlier era is perceived through a lens of primitiveness, contemporary claims of sovereign and self-determination by Native peoples are regularly considered as past their time (p. 467).

Indeed, the earlier statement made by Banks gives political recognition to cultural identifications and individual differences only as a 'past' or a 'self-enclosed authentic territory' that needs to develop into a new cosmopolitan reflective national identity. Eva Marie Garroutte's (2003) work on "Indians" illustrates the limitations of how national discourses in the U.S. construct such narrow depictions of social difference. Garroutte shows the paradox of national discourses that try to locate identity and individual differences in "culture," which results in fixed and constraining territorial descriptions of biology or legal status. Political territory of culture in the U.S. produces cultural difference as "a mysterious something that only exists apart from intentional human activity. It can never *come into being*; it must forever *be preexistent*. It cannot be *chosen*; it can only be *given*—at the time of birth, or very close to it" (p. 69).

Limited descriptions of the development of cultural identity thus repress traditional forms of social membership. Community based methods of recognizing social membership has been superseded by an externally imposed neoliberal nationalist discourse. Moreover, the identifications and signs to locate individual differences remain to be culturally incompatible methods of acknowledging difference. Michael Yellow Bird's (1999) research on indigenous "identity" in the U.S. suggests that the language of citizenship functions as a national identification of individual differences is oppressive and represents counterfeit identities that are misleading, inaccurate, and used to control and subjugate the identities of Indigenous Peoples, ultimately undermining the right to use tribal affiliation as a preeminent national identity. His analysis asserts that these labels are highly erroneous for social groups and individuals who continue to resist European American colonization and that Indigenous scholarship must be decolonized through the use of more empowering descriptors (Bird, 1999). Similarly, Gomez-Pena's (1993) work on border identities problematizes the language we use to signify

difference and asserts that “Latino” is a colonial category, and its use affirms not diversity but the ethnic and racial divisions created by the power of colonialism.

Indeed, neoliberal multiculturalism contributes to a colonial discourse about social difference through its emphasis on cosmopolitanism and blatant belief in the economic merits of restructuring education based on 21<sup>st</sup> century neoliberal economy. For example, in *The Flat World and Education: How America’s Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future*, Darling-Hammond (2010) treats neoliberal economic reforms as neutral economic tasks isolated from their socio-political context. She urges that U.S. schools and educational policies need to learn from other successful developing nations such as Singapore, which she identifies as a “learning nation,” which promotes so-called “autonomous” schools. Darling-Hammond later describes these schools as part of a governmental project that resulted in “expanding investments during the 1990s, improved school conditions and curriculum, allowed greater access to the private schools established in the colonial era”(2010, p.183). While her suggestion sympathizes with privatization of education—which in our earlier discussion has proven to create greater educational disparities and exclusions in the U.S. and around the world—Darling-Hammond’s analysis is also detached from the social context of these societies as she overlooks the historical socio-political context of how these former “colonial era” schools have functioned and continues to serve and represent particular oppressive political discourses in those countries that have experienced historical exploitation. By suggesting increasing access to colonial private schools, Darling-Hammond dismisses that historical experience, which is highly problematic for social groups and individuals that do not agree with the mission of ‘autonomous private schools’ in a ‘learning nation.’

Largely due to Darling-Hammond’s depiction of private schools as venues for individuals to access an “improved” education, she supports the continuation of colonial discourses that assign colonial schools the authority to structure the passage to prosperity and establish their *right to know* the needs and desires of individuals they target. The ‘colonial schools’ that were set up to sustain an exploitive relationship perpetuate

their colonial agenda in our neoliberal moment by instantiating what John Willinsky's work refers to as colonial "mythologies" (Willinsky, 1998, p. 254). Willinsky illustrates how historically colonial era schools that were set up at and about colonies institutionalized the knowledge about the colony, setting up 'imperial archives,' literature that produces a 'colonial nostalgia' and other forms of textual signs that seeks to create a dichotomy between primitive and civilized, East and West, and so on. Colonial schools extend and perpetuate colonial relationships, largely because the foundational mission of these educational settings is directed at schooling appropriate colonial subjects. Hence, many postcolonial texts that investigate the constraining mechanisms of colonial discourses on subjectivity and political membership argue that education carried out through colonizers knowledge "annihilate[s] a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves" (Thiong'o, 1981, p. 3, 28).

The colonial project is clearly much more than just economics and unlike what Darling-Hammond's argument suggests, colonial schools are not merely instrumental institutions to create economic incentives or infrastructures. These educational experiences involve the processes of subjectification which target the creation of individuals who embrace and begin to embody certain characteristics that facilitate colonial economic relationships. An investigation of colonial relationships therefore as Frantz Fanon's later work on colonial subjectification processes suggests that we need to approach education as institutional mechanisms that operate within a regime that "includes not only the interrelations of objective historical conditions but also human attitudes toward these conditions" (Fanon, 1967, p.84). Today we are witnessing similar discourses that target reforming individual attitudes towards 'learning 21<sup>st</sup> century skills' required to be granted citizenship. So far, I've tried to demonstrate how social justice education is trivialized in James Banks' and Darling-Hammond's arguments for a multicultural citizenship education and how their conceptions of social justice

education operate under a political territory that undermines individual differences and social justice education by co-signing MCE to neoliberal multicultural citizenry. The next section will try to argue that the eradication of individual differences through discourses of citizenship is tied to neoliberal processes of subjectification, which target fostering individuals who embody neoliberal economic sensibilities.

## **Neoliberal Processes of Subjectification in Multicultural Education**

The nationalistic neoliberal multiculturalism discourse in the U.S. not only silences and overlooks the individual political differences that do not identify with the nation, but also targets the ontological transformation of subjectivity through economic discourses. MCE texts influenced by this discourse tend to rely on a 'human capital model' of education in defining the pursuit and desire for learning, social justice and caring. Specifically, the human capital framework not only has taken over as the dominant language for understanding education, but also functions as a measurement and sorting technique designed to control populations through laissez faire administrative mechanisms. Neoliberal economic discourses, as Ivan Illich (1978) suggests, foster movements to contribute to the production of an understanding of self as an industrial 'tool' in need of continuous optimization through types of educational investment. Reflecting on Darling-Hammond once again, particularly because her work strongly advocates for economic prosperity and social equity on the basis of a neoliberal discourse, which allows this paper to *argue that the neoliberal economic discourses not only aim to re-structure educational institutions or the language about diversity and equity, but also instantiate processes for reforming individual sensibilities*. Linda Darling-Hammond's (2010) *The Flat World and Education* mirrors a neoliberal economic discourse which suggests social justice, multicultural caring and equity in U.S. society and educational settings are only possible if schools are committed to providing competitive quality [STEM] education to diverse and marginalized populations.

Darling-Hammond claims that empowering disadvantaged social groups occurs within the framework of economic opportunity, particularly

through attaining knowledge skills that are profitable and economically desirable in a competitive 'Flat World.' Darling-Hammond argues that in public schools where the majority of students will be of color by 2025, remain "inadequate to meet today's demands for the kinds of learning needed in the labor market" (2010, p.16). She proposes that these schools and students should be transformed by "standards, curriculum, and assessments focused on 21<sup>st</sup> century learning goals" (2010, p. 26). By comparing US test scores with other developing or developed countries, Darling-Hammond stresses the difficult task accountability measures, such as "No Child Left Behind" and "Race to the Top" have grappled with over the last decade to bring up U.S. educational standards for better STEM education. Her work acknowledges that these accountability measures exert enormous pressures on schools, especially those that belong to marginalized sectors of society. However, Darling-Hammond also regards these reforms as consequences of a 21<sup>st</sup> century "reality" and efforts to close the achievement gap between low achieving marginalized students and the mainstream groups relies on a national educational awareness that "recognizes that its human capital will determine its future" (2010, p.5). Darling-Hammond offers her readers a glimpse of what she calls "high-achieving nations" such as Singapore and Japan. She exemplifies how successful developing countries manage economic programs that invite 'citizens' to be part of a "learning nation," which promotes competitiveness, better human capital investments and strengthens the knowledge economy. She argues that the U.S. can learn from these experiences to compete in the global economy.

Foucault inspired education scholars that critique neoliberal discourses of subjectification and the instrumental role of learning as investment, argue that within this competitive territory "it becomes necessity to compare oneself with others and to ask whether one has a better portfolio. The submission to a permanent economic tribunal therefore does not only condemn the entrepreneurial self to productive learning but also to a competitive process of lifelong learning" (Simons, 2006, p. 537). Educational initiatives based on competition calls individuals, schools and governments to re-formulize their practices through what Darling-Hammond stresses as a "teach less, learn more" (2010, p.186)

educational strategies that encourage innovation and higher educational attainment as an employment skill. Darling-Hammond's work fails to see that the norms of a 'learning society' reflect the competitive ethics of human capital model of education that act as exclusionary administrative mechanisms to enforce economic discourses to shape the ethics of social caring and multiculturalism.

Individuals in MCE texts are envisioned as subjects who respond to and organize their world and agency through these competitive economic discourses. Individuals are depicted as conducting action and thought embedded in competitive economic principles, which only value capital as their foundational principle of society and individual desire. This subjectivity entails the construction of a consciousness about an external rule or norm. In our case, the norm Linda Darling-Hammond is embedded in is administered by the competitive rule of neoliberal political economy which places 'learning' 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (STEM knowledge, optimization of human capital) as the norm of a 'learning society.' Michel Foucault's reading of neoliberal governmentality, stresses that it is against this external world or territory, the individual learns how to live and ultimately becomes a subject subjugated through his/her actions. Foucault (1988) argues that in neoliberal governmentality, 'technologies of the self' or "voluntary self-control" of individuals entails a normalized sense of investing in their human capital to treat their knowledge as commodity and actions as profitable market oriented arrangements. The economic autonomous individual, Darling-Hammond encourages to 'learn' therefore sustains and establishes the authority of neoliberal governance by embodying the neoliberal multicultural citizen who uses his/her 'rational choices' to obtain a better life and "becomes the correlate of governmentality" (Foucault, 2008, p. 271) as an element that may be placed, moved, articulated" (Foucault, 1977, p.164) for financial optimization and governance. Largely because as Foucault (2001) describes "governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself" (p.203). The emergence of postindustrial production and the neoliberal political economy around

human capital models introduces a new set of ‘technologies of self’ as techniques of power which allows governments to rule *with* the subjects rather than *over* them. In other words, power in postindustrial societies administers subjects through their active participation into production by investing in skills and habits for optimizing their capital—treating the “body as a machine” (Foucault, 1978, p.139) to work, to reform and ‘continuously improve’ (a typical charter school motto) for the expansion of capital. Subjects conceive themselves as unfinished economic projects for fulfilling the needs of economic production by continual optimization of human capital.

The ‘learning society’ described by Darling-Hammond describes for us the “distinctions and differentiations that distinguish between the characteristics of those who embody a cosmopolitan reason that brings social progress and personal fulfillment and those who do not embody the cosmopolitan principles of civility and normalcy” (Simons & Masschelein, 2006, p. 423). In James Banks work for instance, we see more clearly how this neoliberal technology of self operates to hierarchize society by bringing forth an ethics of ‘voluntary self-control and investment.’ Banks argues that in order for marginalized groups to find their place in society and to succeed in education, they must subject themselves to “attain the skills needed to function successfully in a highly technological, knowledge-oriented society” (Banks, 2008, p. 2). Banks statement assumes a social territory in which successful social members need to make ‘rational’ choices as individuals who must act as capital driven investors.

In Sonia Nieto’s work, this neoliberal cosmological (territorial) inscription of self-care is also apparent when she claims that “our world is increasingly interdependent, and all students need to understand their role in a global society, not simply in their small town, city or nation. Multicultural education is a process that goes beyond the changing demographics in a particular country. It is more effective education for a changing world” (Nieto & Bode, 2008, p. 60). Consequently, Nieto aligns MCE with neoliberal economic ethical universalism, which associates low quality of life with the lack of economic incentive (ethics) and investment (self-care) on behalf of the individual, community and the

state. As a result, in MCE discourses privatized economic neoliberal solutions appear practical, objective and ethical and the disparities between social groups materialize as objective disinvestments that require more “learning” or neoliberal intervention.

The prevalence of these neoliberal norms in MCE texts not only stem from the its commodified assumptions about the location of power, i.e. money, status, education, but also from essentializing the viability and vitality of “all” individual desire and difference to given roles appointed by a global neoliberal economic discourse. Nieto’s vision of the “world” resorts to a perceived “reality,” constructed by neoliberal discourses which assigns a territory for the subject, whose investments in capital determines his/her success or failure. This capitalist cosmology ultimately diminishes individual agency to repressive discourses constructed merely by the pursuit of capital and render MCE discourse amenable to neoliberal agendas. Human capital model of identity formation, learning and social membership that inhibit a territorial cosmopolitan location in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are granted civility and normalcy through MCE discourses that neglect to question neoliberal economic discourses.

Technology and science education, educational attainment and meeting the demands of a competitive neoliberal world-order, increasingly condition how MCE discourses understand empowerment and social justice. Social justice education—in Darling-Hammond’s (2010) words—rests in “reconceptualizations of the content and skill needed for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (p. 282). This neoliberal lens of empowering students as they learn 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and become competitive and affluent consumers and investors, trivializes multicultural education discourses that are co-opted by the economic vision of neoliberal policies and reforms. Linda Darling-Hammond argues that ‘cultural deficit theories’ about underrepresented populations fail to see “the rate of success when marginalized populations are given the same opportunity structures and economic incentives as their White counter parts” (2010, p.14). The aim of this paper is not to try to defend ‘cultural deficit’ theories, and I do agree that poor learning settings and poor school conditions do hamper “success,” but to define success and the means to

achieve equity in purely economic terms as posited by Darling-Hammond, legitimizes neoliberal reforms in education. Critical social justice scholarship and transformative educators must re-think these formulizations of justice which are increasingly embedded in the market. Critical and democratic counter narratives to capitalist reproduction of society, as Karl Polanyi's canonical historical analysis of capitalism and liberalism suggests, requires us to overturn the belief that affluent society must be embedded and subordinated to market mechanisms. Rather, the path of democracy for social justice education must be to direct and submit national and global economies to the will of democratic politics. Polanyi insists that private enclosures rob people's share of the commons and places emphasis on the common, social and democratic understanding of social justice to dictate power relations in society rather than market driven enclosures and incentives. For Polanyi no society can exist without an economy and vice versa; "a market economy can exist only in a market society" (Polanyi, 2001, p.74). The task of democracy and multiculturalism is to dis-embed social relationships and individual sensibilities from market driven reforms, rather than trying to reform the market for market driven social initiatives that are bound to fail and result in further social polarization and repression.

Because unless social justice education refrains from envisioning democratic individual and his/her welfare through a market driven lens, as Foucault argues, its form of conceptualizing power and individual agency "categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize...It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects" (Foucault, 1983, p. 212). By embracing the neoliberal call for stressing the importance of preparing students to live and succeed in a global economy with a presumption that it will lead to a social justice, multicultural education collaborates with neoliberal discourses to constraining individual desire and difference to a mere economic race or war between 'haves' and 'have-nots.' MCE's language for advocating social justice and individual empowerment is co-opted by neoliberal discourses that promise to empower subjects through life-long learning and investing in human capital. Consequently, MCE texts end up normalizing (multiculturalizing) neoliberal mode of empowering subjects,

which necessitates a continual venture to improve and customize self-entrepreneurial skills. This dictates and conditions individual perceptions on social justice and aligns equity with a national concern for what is needed and desired to increase [human] capital.

Multicultural education cosigns to a neoliberal discourse that persuades social justice debates to construct a form of social fetishism in which learning, quality education and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning-citizenry are transformed into objects of power. Multicultural education scholar Christine Sleeter recommends that teachers use MCE content which is highly motivating to students when it focuses on their own historical and cultural experience in order to make content meaningful, accessible and “to help students from diverse groups attain the knowledge and skills needed to reach high levels of achievement on standardized tests” (Sleeter, 2005, p.7). For MCE to work, it must submit to a political economy of learning that grants a “better” life to the margins that do not have access to the White mainstream privileges of quality education, job opportunity and capital. As a result, MCE literature appoints neoliberal goals for its audience and practitioners. The only conceivable and enduring desire within a competitive neoliberal reasoning, demands that individuals transform their ontologies to be “flexible, to be in continuous training, life-long learning, to undergo perpetual assessment, continual incitement to buy, constantly to improve oneself to monitor our health, to manage risk” (Rose, 2007, p.154). By co-opting to neoliberal economic discourses about empowering individuals, racing the nation to the top and prosperity for all citizens, MCE instrumentalizes its ontological assumptions about identity, race, culture and individual differences. “Essentially the learners become the entrepreneurs of their own development...Not only must the individual learn, but they must learn to recognize what to learn, and what and when to forget what to learn when circumstances demand it” (Olssen, 2006, p. 224). Solving social disparities and challenging stereotypes are thus treated as an economic issue that can be solved by increasing economic investments, achievement and opportunity structures.

## Conclusion

This paper tried to illustrate that the economic neoliberal reforms in education have encapsulated MCE into a social justice discourse which adopts commodified notions of democracy that prioritizes the commercial 21<sup>st</sup> century citizenship agendas for social justice. MCE's conceptualizations of equity, empowerment and activism are increasingly based on global market assumptions of economic development and social welfare, which render social justice education theory and practice amenable to being embedded in economic human capital models of education. Understanding how power relations operate in our neoliberal moment thus becomes a critical realm of investigation, especially in schools where educators are facing accountability measures and multiculturalism is increasingly identified through cosmopolitan human capital discourses that equate empowerment with 'competition' and 21<sup>st</sup> century skill attainment. When seeking transformative education discourses, a critical approach urges educators to be more skeptical of the neoliberal economic structures and neoliberal social discourses that aim at capturing individual conduct and educational practice.

To begin the work of refusing to cosign our definitions of equity and democracy to economic market principles, social justice educators must first critically question what accounts for justice, success and opportunity in our neoliberal moment. We must investigate the social and economic structures and discourses that influence where and how we pursue learning as well as how we define social justice education. Do we merely provide 21<sup>st</sup> century education skills and free access to competitive degrees to all students? This paper offers educators a critical lens with which to question why market driven "realities" have become so dominant in our perception of success, social justice education, multiculturalism and citizenship. An examination of the writings of leading multicultural education educators suggests that the hope and potential for transformative education is hindered by the neoliberal categories that MCE educators use to conceptualize democracy. In essence, the shortcomings of multicultural education as a potential transformative education experience are not just problems of implementation or lack of consciousness of individuals, but reside in the

very economic structures and neoliberal social discourses multiculturalism is embedded in. Re-conceptualizing social justice education through a strong critique of neoliberal economic structures and discourse is perhaps the most crucial and fundamental dimension of challenging neoliberal economization of education.

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