Creativity, Schooling and the Commodity Problem

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Abstract

The present article uses extracts from conversations and interviews developed from ethnographic research in three school classes in Sweden (a former model, Social-democratic Welfare State) to identify and discuss different student experiences of school, schooling processes, teachers and the relationship between school, higher education and work. The article identifies a number of different ways in which students express these relationships and how their understandings of school affect their school role and relationships with teachers. A commoditised view of education and learning dominates. Students learn either for the sake of obtaining good grades or avoiding bad ones. There is no joy or reward in learning for learning's sake. The learning situation is an alienated one.

INTRODUCTION

This article has been developed from research conducted in three research projects. The first is Marianne Dovemark's recently completed PhD research on responsibility for learning, learner creativity and self-determination in an eighth grade comprehensive school class in Sweden. The second is a case study sponsored by the Swedish National Schools Agency between 1998 and 2000 carried out by Dennis Beach that researched efforts to transform the Swedish Upper-Secondary School after the 1994 Curriculum Reform and the decentralisation of education control through the 1995 School Development Agreement. The third is a recently completed European Union SOCRATES project termed the CLASP (Creative Learning and Student's Perspectives) project. This project had 9 European partners and three main aims: (i) to identify strategies teachers and students use to develop creative learning in educational contexts, (ii) to examine the effectiveness of incorporating student

perspectives into the teaching and learning process and (iii) to highlight the advantages of examining cross European practices. Within the CLASP project, data and analyses emanating from the other two projects were reanalysed and re-examined in a new case study school, called New School.

The present article focuses extensively on interview materials and conversation data with school students from the three projects. It identifies a number of different ways in which these students express their relationships to school, schooling processes, responsibility, their school role and their teachers, and interprets these against the cultural context of schooling in a modern day capitalist society. A futures perspective is suggested to be expressed by the students, which seems to be very compromised by ideas about the relationship between school, higher education and work and a commoditised view of education and learning, where education takes on objective characteristics of forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1997), seems predominant also in their expressed understandings of the value of school with negative consequences for learner creativity and self-determination. Alienation springs to mind as a condition behind the attitudes expressed.

Marx first described alienation in the economic and philosophical manuscripts, where he expressed how, due to the existence of private property and the division of labour and capital, workers experience the objectification of their labour under capitalism (basically the external expression of creative power through wage-labour) in a negative as opposed to what would be more natural, a positive sense, as under capitalism they become estranged from their labour, the labour process itself, fellow humans and their own species being because they are no longer in control of their own productive behaviour, which they sell in return for extrinsic rewards (also Beach, 1999a-c, 2001). This basic condition of alienation in labour is well captured by Engels in his descriptions of the working conditions of the working class in England from his time in Manchester. Engels wrote of alienation in labour as a form of demoralisation that was due to private ownership and control of labour and its products. He asked why a man works. For love of work or from a natural impulse? Not at all! He works for money, for a thing that has nothing whatsoever to do with the work itself (Engels, 1969).

Notwithstanding that the working class in Manchester had little choice but to work for wages and that they did so under material conditions (and threats) that seem to be a far cry from the conditions of the modern school, alienation is still a concept that we feel is relevant to the present text, in the sense that the text refers to what we describe as external pressure or coercion to work or learn in school under conditions in which there is no actual significance or value attached to the 'processes of the doing' of the learning in themselves. The learning activities the students describe are primarily extrinsically motivated and have primarily only an instrumental exchange value for the people involved in them. The learning lacks a genuine subjective use-value, as the course of action is not intrinsically satisfying but merely a means to another end. The education students describe seems to offer little beyond a qualification, grade or credit as a means to engage the emotions and the imagination.

NEW AIMS IN SCHOOL

In current European education policy, in line with the Lisbon agreement concerning ambitions for Europe's future position in the global economy, the importance of positively engaging every individual student is stressed and the call is for the development of individual responsibility and the mobilisation of self-regulated learning. However, such 'policy' has applied in Sweden since the late eighties and early nineties, as reflected repeatedly in national education policies, curriculum documents, local school development plans and official national reports and propositions (Lpo 94/98; Lpf, 94; Andersson, 1999; Lundahl, 2001, 2002; Dovemark, 2004), which all emphasise these things as of fundamental importance and necessary to produce creative, motivated, alert, inquiring, self-governing and flexible users and developers as opposed to (simply) recipients and reproducers of knowledge, for 'the new knowledge society' (Beach, 2004; Dovemark & Beach, 2004).

Studying new policies of self-determined learning in school

In the present article we discuss the 'new' policy ideas against data produced from student interviews and conversations in ethnographic research. Three classes have been focussed on particularly. A mixed ability class of 15 year-olds from an urban comprehensive school in West Sweden and two classes of upper-secondary science pupils; one from an upper-secondary school called Sci High and one from a school

called New School. All in all we have spent 1200 hours engaged in participant observation with the three classes. In addition subsidiary observations have been carried out in three other classes and over 50 formal interviews with students and a large number of field conversations have been done. The interview and conversation materials are focussed in the article. We ask the question what it means to students to learn in the schools of the new knowledge society.

We have found a number of different expressions by students about school and schooling processes relating to the above question. These concern amongst other things why students feel they have to go to school, what they feel they should do when they are there, how they feel work should be controlled, and by who, and finally what the true value of schooling is. These are issues examined also by Andersson (1999) and Giota (2001). The following captions describe the main ideas developed about why students go to school:

i. To learn things (a) for their own sake and intrinsic value or (b) in order to gain education qualifications. There were two distinct orientations, one toward the future, which composed over 70% of the data category, and one towards the here and now. The future orientation was also expressed in relation to:
    a. Future education or for a future job or career
    b. School marks and grades that can be exchanged for a good education in the future and a good job or career
    c. Help with things you need to know in tomorrow's society
ii. To meet and socialise with friends and have fun
iii. To learn respect and responsibility toward other people by taking initiatives in shared work and doing important things together with others in school

The first two data constructs (learning things and learning to socialise) comprise over 90% of the variation in the data we have classified as addressing student conceptions of why they go to school and learn and in this data a future orientation is particularly predominant, as is a utilitarian and pragmatic ideological attitude. However, what is stressed in this respect varies to some degree within the groups we have spoken to, particularly between Beach's group of upper-secondary school students on the natural sciences programme and Dovemark's mixed ability eighth grade group from the secondary school, even though the latter group also had its own significant variations

[1]. The third data set (learning social responsibility) is so small that it will not be considered further in the article.

In general our findings thus match those of both Andersson (1999) and Giota (2001), where the majority of students expressed school as *being instrumental for the future* and as *legitimating a dependency relation in the present as a platform for later autonomy, independence and a good life*. School is positioned as having a *citizenship role* in this sense as it is seen as being about developing one set of relations and practices in one context that have their orientation toward living life in a later one (Englund, 1995, 1999; Dovemark, 2004) and allowing a *'separation' of school and life*. Impositions are said by many students to be suffered in the school context in the anticipation that these will result in or be compensated by rewards in the future.

Formal and informal school

Many of the students we spoke with - particularly at New School where we deliberately focussed on this issue - talked about school as having two distinct sides to it. There is a formal side that comprises formal lessons, rules, books, teachers and so forth and an informal comprising breaks, friends, 'special spaces' and social relations between peers (see also Gordon et al., 2000; Bliding, 2004; Dovemark, 2004). They were described very differently by students. It was almost as if they were talking about different places. Formal school was described as an obvious place for learning facts for the future and the interviewed students talked about 'success in school being clearly related to success at learning these things' (Tom, Student, Sci High). The informal school was so different that it could almost be described as an antithesis of school. In connection to the informal school lessons and (formal) learning weren't mentioned at all. Dressing smart, having the 'right (trendy, popular, attractive, fun, 'dangerous') hairstyles, clothes and friends' was important to some students and 'being daring and challenging toward authority' were by others (also Dovemark, 2004 and Dovemark & Beach, 2004; Bliding, 2004)

The majority of formally successful students, including basically Beach's entire sample, saw the formal school as the most important component of school, something noticed also previously amongst successful students such as these in ethnographic research by amongst others Colin Lacey (1970), Stephan Ball (1981), Peter Woods

(1979), Lynn Davies (1984) and Tuula Gordon et al (2000). In Dovemark's school, in connection to the formal side of school, one of her interviewees, Magnus, expressed things in the following way. 'School is a place for learning new things that will be important later'. Another, Rita, suggested 'learning is necessary... for work and the future... You go to school... to learn... It's good to learn (so you can) get a good job...' (Rita).

What Rita and Magnus suggest about the value of schooling is very common in our data and concerns the value of learning things in the formal school with a tangible exchange rate value, both within the school sphere and between school, higher education and the job market [2]. Particularly the formally most successful students in our samples expressed this strong belief in education and voiced the idea that there is an obvious parallel between learning at school and getting a good qualification and a good job to follow (Beach, 1999a,b, 2001, 2003a,b; Dovemark, 2004; Dovemark & Beach, 2004). The most successful students in the school rarely mentioned intrinsic rewards and motivation. What was more common were comments like the following:

> I work hard so as to get good grades... to get into the upper-secondary science programme and then after that the university... I want to study medicine and be a doctor... (Klara)

Basically all of the formally successful learners we spoke with at the investigation schools described the value of school mainly in terms of mechanisms of exchange such as these, where compliance and 'hard work are anticipated to provide the foundations for good grades, a good qualification and the promise of a good job... providing you also have the ability' (Marcus). This was particularly clear in Beach's sample, where students also spoke about school being important for 'identifying and selecting the right people for valuable university places and positions' (Simon; New School) in the future labour hierarchy.

Getting right answers to specified questions and completing work in time to get good grades in the formal school is stressed here in a way that typifies students as reproducers of knowledge and dependent subjects in that school who are in need of help, assessment and correction by teachers as their instructors, controllers and mentors. In this context *education* takes on a particular subjective form and is described as being about *getting to the right answer* so grades can be set *according to*

performances (to represent) *the ratified skills and knowledge of individuals* (Pete). This is an idea about education and meritocracy that dates back in Sweden at least to education acts from the forties and fifties (also Beach, 1999a, b):

It is important to stress that it is the successful students in particular who express that they are tied to the view of knowledge and learning expressed here and that this seemed to influence their capacity for invention and creativity. Particularly for successful students, the demands of performance rather than creativity predominate (see e.g. Lpo 94/98; Lpf 94; Jeffrey, 2003; Jeffrey & Woods, 1997, 2003; Woods, 1995). They talked about the idea of school as a meritocracy as follows:

> You have to get good grades and I will cram for tests to get better grades if I have to... Understanding (is) sacrificed for the sake of cramming near exams... You go to school... to learn things you don't know... and teachers should get us to learn (to) help us get the good grades... they know we will need in order to get on. (They) should help us to learn things that are difficult... If we knew already and didn't need help we wouldn't need to go to school... We are here to get help in correcting things we don't understand (so) we can get them right in the future and pass exams... (Pete)

Performativity is a concept used to describe the kind of context learning in school comprises when it is characterised by practices that fit the above kinds of comments. This is because performativity refers to principles of governance that enable functional relationships to develop between education and selection through the institutionalisation of technologies and modes of regulation that employ judgements, comparisons and displays of ability by students as a means of incentive, control and exchange based on material and symbolic rewards and sanctions (Jeffrey, 2002).

Within performativity cultures specific performances serve as particular measures of productivity, quality or value in ways that are antagonistic toward creative forms of self-determined learning.

The main aim of education for students under conditions of performativity becomes finding and reproducing other people's answers to other people's questions when instructed to do so, not creating personal knowledge based on first hand experiences and interests, as in the socio-cultural and constructivist 'epistemology' of the current school curricula in Sweden (Lpo 94; Lpf, 94; Gustavsson, 2003; Dovemark, 2004). In this sense new policies are being opposed by older activities that express a distinct

compliance with hegemonic understandings of school. Value is attributed to the fetishist accumulation of grades with a high exchange value. Getting to right or wrong answers becomes the main aim of education and when students are engaging in school in this way (i.e. on the basis of an understanding of the value of accumulated labour) conditions of alienated learning predominate and the social relations of education ideologically reinforce the social relations of the basic capitalist production form.

Using schools as a meeting place

Not all students expressed the utilitarian holding toward school described above and also even those who did do so also (sometimes) expressed other values as well. The most common of these alternatives concerned going to school to meet and socialise with friends, going to school to have a laugh or going to school to be with a boy- or girlfriend.

Going to school in order to have fun, have a laugh (cf. Willis, 1977) and be with your friends is a well-known from the analysis of student responses to schooling processes (Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Ball, 1981; Woods, 1979; Wakeford, 1969; Griffin, 1985; Davis, 1984; Giota, 2001) and was also evident in our data, even if it was far less prevalent there than going to school in order to learn for the future was, perhaps because of the bias in the sample towards 'high-performing' conformist groups. Using school for fun or for socialising in these ways was also mostly reserved for activities in the informal school, particularly by the most successful students and even then was in the majority predisposed to students who rejected, had been rejected from, or were outside the formal school ambition of high levels of individual success and a long academic/theoretical education career. In fact perhaps it could be said that electing to engage in these kinds of activities in school was 'a form of self-selection out of the main academic demands of the formal school' (Liz, teacher) [3]. Students said the following:

> The breaks are good but not the lessons... School is boring (with) too few breaks... We meet in the Cafe, listen to music and play pool... It's fun playing pool but lessons are not much fun... We all have our faults but school has thousands of them... Sometimes school is like a prison... you can bunk off and clown about sometimes (to break) the boredom of it all... But school is mostly shit to be honest... (Tea, Johny, Faton, Sven and Behije)

> Sometimes school is fun but (usually) it's boring. The breaks are great and some of the lessons too. I hate some of the lessons like hell though. But music is great fun... Sometimes school is great and sometimes it's not at all... It's a good thing you have your mates and that there's the café and that... You can arrange what to do outside of school... It doesn't just connect you know... It's an insulting place to be and we would rather die than be like (swots) you know... It's not what we want (Aida)

The above can be interpreted to suggest that, as Willis, (1977), Burgess (1983), Davies (1984), Andersson (1999), Beach (2001), Giota (op cit.) Dovemark (2004) and may other investigations also express it, the content and form of the formal school does not always reflect the interests and commitments of many of its students. The students express quite clearly that they are bored, alienated and dejected within the formal school, which in their terms does not in any meaningful way link up with their life values, interests and desires.

The majority of investigations suggest as Andersson (1999) does, that a third of pupils express negative valuations of their school experiences and find very little of positive value in the formal school, which at best provides an arena in which friends are met and recreational (and even subaltern) activities are planned and pursued and, above all, selection processes occur based on school performances and student responses to the performance demands of the formal school. Our investigation compliments these other contributions, but is more systemic in its analysis and explanations. It links theoretical ideas to concrete practices and shows how doing well in school also involves quite intricate forms of self-denial. Even the expression 'lowering your-self to be like them' was used to describe what was needed in order to be a successful pupil. Friendships and socialising seem to suffer unless spaces can be found for both socialising and 'work'. Grade pressure and other performance demands compromise social identities, social relationships and learning practices (also Vygotsky, 1926). Particularly for successful students 'school is for getting a qualification and (later) a good job' (Toby). The aim is to 'get good grades so you can get into the education you desire and through it (more) good grades and finally a good job with good pay to follow' (Pete).

However, the students are clearly not acting simply as empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge according to the accounts of practices presented by the students. Many of them are thoroughly in the know with regard to the operations of

the school and the successful ones (in particular) seem to be active in trying not only to measure up to teacher standard setting but also to influence the standards that are set and what these are based on (Dovemark & Beach, 2004). Measuring up is an important concept here. It involves students making assessments of what is required of them, devising ways of responding and evaluating the success of these responses. It is about finding out 'what it takes to do well' (Carole):

> School is really just how it is and it is up to you whether you accept that or try to change it... The school sets standards that you are asked to measure up to... There's nothing odd or special about it... It's just the way things are. School is for socialising generations of citizens with the right knowledge and values... Teachers are the ones with power because (they) set the grades... You do what you have to and perform to their requirements (and) your best abilities on tests and so on (and) we work hard and try... to influence work and teachers to get good marks... (Kate)

> It is not so much to do with using your imagination ...and piecing things together... it is (more) a repetitive activity involving learning the right answer or way of finding it and practising this until you know it more or less by heart and can recall it when required... It's about applying yourself to coming to know something that you might be asked to carry out or might need to do in an examination or something... You can try to anticipate (and influence things) and also prepare yourself in the best way to get a good result... (Dick, Andy)

> There is a right answer I think, like in English there's ways of putting sentences together which are right and ways that aren't ...and in maths there are ways of taking you to the right answer and ways that won't... Although there is a lot of repetition (it) gives me satisfaction to work out the correct solution to something tricky. There are right ways and wrong ways with little between... Freedom to determine what you will study actually gets in the way... because we waste time experimenting with blind alleys when it would be easier to just be given the correct approach or idea... so we could learn it and how to apply it when we need to or are asked to... (Gemma)

> Getting things down 'off pat' is important... (Like) being able to recognise potentials as potentials and such... If you know what the little figures mean you know how to add them and multiply and divide them... without having to think about it almost... This is important when things go as quickly as they do... We have to be good at exams (and) need good grades to get on... It's as simple as that... (John)

These statements do not fit well with policies of creative and self-determined learning in the 'new' social-cultural and constructivist curricula (Lpo 94/98 and Lpf 94). In creative and self-determined learning as described in these policy documents, learners

must become free from external determinations so they can reflect over experiences, fabricate their own knowledge and determine the course of their own learning themselves. This is exactly and specifically what formally successful students in our samples were not doing. Formal curricula say one thing but in practice the processes involved in schooling are based on the reproduction of very different values (Cole, 2003; Beach, 1999b, 2003b, 2004).

Drop-outs, mainstreamers and the commodity problem

Conversations with programme drop out students from the individual programme at New School help give further leverage on the questions we are interested in. These students are outside the 'normal school' for various reasons (regular absenteeism and insufficiently complete comprehensive schooling are the most common ones) and in their own terms, 'only come to school when they feel like it' and more or less 'do what they want when they are there' (Eric). Their responses provide clear contrasts to the more accommodated statements and actions of successful students. Like some of the Trade and Commerce programme students at Sci High (Beach, 1999a,b, 2001), they emphasise that in contrast to the ways they had lived education previously, there is some freedom of choice and a reduced feeling of alienation within the programme they are now involved in and they suggest therefore also that a more authentic holding towards schooling is possible within the schools we have visited, even if this is first only after differentiation out of the streams of intense academic learning and competition has been completed.

Students who have 'fallen outside' the competitive mainstream express a freedom that other students don't express, like that expressed by Willis 'lads' (Willis, 1977), according to our research. As they put it, they no longer see themselves as dependent on the material reward of qualification and credentials in their education and are therefore also able to develop a different subjective holding towards its practices than are students whose ambition is to be formally successful in the academic streams and who describe education as something to be developed and delivered by teachers *whose job it is to see to it that they serve us with what we need...* (e.g. Kenny) *and make us work to show what we're capable of* (Pete). Here issues of time and study management coupled to good guidance (or even piloting) and being able and willing

to *sacrifice things that get in the way of you getting good grades* (Klara) are central to success and concentrating on getting good grades is the main aim.

This is not so for the outsider group. They were able to feel free of these common fetishist relations of production. And although they are often described as simply lacking something by teachers and other students (e.g. a stable background, cultural capital, interest and motivation, adequate qualifications, prior knowledge) we could more objectively simply say that these students often had other priorities in their lives that were experienced (and lived) as more important than formal success in school was, with this being an end of it. For instance, one girl (Gail) helped look after her grandmother after school and also worked at weekends at a local supermarket to help 'bolster the domestic budget, her social life (and) her consumption needs' (Gail) and reduce her 'economic burden on her immediate family' (Gail). This of course had effects though on her school performances.

Such kinds of extended social skills as those suggested here, which include empathy, career, commitment and social (and consumer) responsibility are highly valued according to the national school curricula, but in school practice they are not even of marginal positive value. Quite the opposite, according to Beach (2001, 2003a), they are negatively valorised and tend in fact to work against the students who show them. For instance, instead of feeling rewarded and positively appreciated in school, Gail described how she came to feel *dumb, lazy or both*... because of her extra commitments. She described her response as follows:

> They made me feel stupid and guilty... So why go... I couldn't care less about the grades... They can't punish me... Staying away (throws) it back in their face... They have insulted me often enough now it's my turn... I don't have an interest or time to do school work and have more important things to do... I rarely read... not even for tests and examinations... I go to lessons if I feel like it (but) usually do other things there than we are supposed to... I am biding time (waiting) to get out...

In line with Lundahl (2001) this kind of response may contribute to 'problems' in school in terms of relationships with teachers and the 'award' of high grade points (Beach, 1999a, 2001; Dovemark, 2004), but these problems and low grades are not obtained on the basis of the 'ignorance, ineptitude and lack of motivation' that teachers and researchers sometimes suggest may be in play. Quite the opposite to being an

outcome of a lack of interest and ability the outcome is based on a presence and attentiveness to something beyond blind compliance to school's demands on life and life-values and an active commitment to defend and uphold others. This is seen particularly when the responses of students like Gail are contrasted to comments by successful students like those on the upper-secondary science programme. They describe, as we suggested earlier, how they suffer imposition, show capabilities and feel they should be rewarded for this.

> We're not here for the fun of it if that's what you think... I want to get a good university education... and this means getting the right grades in the right subjects because at the end of the day if you want to get anywhere you will have to have... certain minimum marks... Like I want to go into computer software design. I can't do this without good grades... It would be the same if I wanted to do medicine... Studying successfully demands (we) show we know what... is important... (Tess)

> Good learning is about having clear directions and applying yourself... Although sometimes you know without really knowing how or why in most subjects it's about applying yourself... Luckily I enjoy maths although it can get a bit boring... Learning is about being self-disciplined and able to make sacrifices in order to learn what the teachers say is important to know... (Joan)

> You plan... and scheme out how to get those good grades... What things they will ask... how and what the most economic way of answering is... You might even stay home from a test if you... don't feel prepared... if you think you'd be better waiting... Mainly it is about working hard to answer questions teachers give you and to find out about things they say are important... If you do that, well then you'll also be successful... (Trev)

These were amongst the most successful students in their respective classes, yet the kinds of examples they give of what moves a student to learn are a far cry from a student who is motivated to fabricate his or her own knowledge and who learns things because he or she feels like it and will not do things just because a teacher demands it. These responses would fit in well with self-determination of the kind Gail showed and was, in her terms, abused for. Indeed it seems as though you valorise your own personal class-cultural knowledge and values at your peril and that the social and discursive construct of education management and research of the ideal type of versatile, flexible and successful learner described in new policy texts is actually quite strongly discriminated against in practice [4].

An interesting question we asked of students in the light of the above was what they think about a statement like this, which suggests so strongly the impossibility (almost) of self-determination *and* formal success in the modern school. When asked this the students in our investigations gave different responses, but by far the majority of science students from Sci High and New School basically agreed with it and expressed that 'it was imperative for high quality in their learning (that the teacher made them accountable) and set high targets for them to attain' (Pete). Moreover, all of them were clear about independent and creative learning not being facilitated if teachers simply 'leave the students to make all the decisions about what to learn and how' (Janet). But one interesting further dimension of the student perspective on creativity in learning also emerged. This was that the very idea of creativity could itself become a fetishised cultural commodity (Willis, 1999; Beach, 1999c, 2003a). One student, Klara, gave a common expression from students along these lines when she said that freedom in learning presents a great opportunity for you to show what you can do (and) be rewarded for it... Those who don't take this chance... only have themselves to blame... In these alienated situations taking an active responsibility becomes a new feature of performance and a new factor in student differentiation (Lundahl, 2001; Dovemark & Beach, 2004).

Contradiction, inauthenticity, self-denial, disingenuousness

The capitalist cultural and (educational condition) is described as one that is rife with contradictions (Brosio, 1994; Dovemark, 2004). And certainly many contradictions have been expressed already, concerning the present situation. For instance, current Swedish national school curricula (Lpo 94/98; Lpf 94) as well as creativity policies elsewhere (Jeffrey, 2003; Jeffrey & Woods, 2003) suggest that students should plan their own studies as part of the development of a self-monitored and self-determined learning in which they make/fabricate knowledge for themselves based on their own interests. But yet they are also judged on their school performances in content areas controlled and determined by others and often come to question the new situation because of these performativity requirements and the difficulties experienced in time management brought about (in their experience) when these performativity discourses collide with discourses of individual freedom.

Successful students have been said to show the clearest, most entrenched forms of contradiction (also Beach, 1999a,b, 2001, 2003a,b, 2004; Dovemark, 2004; Dovemark & Beach, 2004). These students know they are in a competitive situation and that they will be graded and valued within a system that selects and distributes bums to seats higher up in the education system. And indeed their success actually seems very much to depend on them knowing this and then taking the most pragmatic response possible. This response can vary but in the data in the investigation has had two distinct forms. Firstly, avoiding helping others so you can better help yourself (Dovemark & Beach, 2004; Dovemark, 2004). Secondly, secretly identifying your own weaknesses so you can hide them and train for improvement.

> These are oddly inauthentic tendencies in learning in relation to new policies for self-determination and creativity. They can be seen in some of their most outrageous forms when the most successful students speak. Marcus is perhaps the best (or at least the most alarming) illustration. He was a very successful student at Dovemark's site who expressed the following with respect to group projects and student steered work in school:
>
> I don't (work) with others if I can avoid it... I'm a lot better than most of the others and it's not that much fun to work with people like Jonny (his supposed to be best friend) because... he's always asking for help... It's better to work with someone else... so you don't have to explain things all the time.

This is a voice of incredible selfishness in learning and (although of course we also found some notable exceptions) we found its kind regularly amongst successful students as an example of the full negative consequences of the privatisation of learning (also Beach 1997, 1999a,c, 2001, 2003a; Naeslund, 2001), which together with other deep-seated 'conflicts' between policy and practice in the modern school suggests that this school seems to be a very strange place in which to try to cultivate (or even take seriously) the education policies we have been concerned with.

These policies are concerned with socio-cultural and constructivist learning as it is described in current school curricula. But schooling has a competitive imperative and continues to differentiate students through the ways 'truths' are first created and then used to forge the grades that are employed to legitimate selections for and into further education and work. This kind of practice opposes the development of creativity, self-

determination and independence. However, student responses also suggest that student consciousness has become conditioned by/to these alienating practices in ways that have made the structures of ownership, surveillance and control of the over-determined system of consumption they are subjected to seem different to this.

The above finding helps give us four working hypotheses regarding the possibilities for creative and self-determined learning. These are firstly, that because of the way its reward processes work, formal success in relation to the systemics of the education process requires conformity and the rejection (or re-appropriation) of self-determination, which is either opposed or fetishised. This is because, secondly, educational success in an alienated education system does not involve creative studies except in a distinctly compromised way when education is a form of capital with an exchange value that far outstrips other experienced forms of value for most of those involved in it (Brosio, 1994; Allman, 1999). This means that thirdly, success in education can only be about self-development in the sense of the self as an object of investment in a learning process that takes the form of accumulated labour and fourthly then that capitalist culture has set a primary framework for acceptable behaviour and choice in school in ways that limit freedom and innovation so that learning becomes an activity concerned with the private acquisition of education goods and their valorisation as education capital. Alienated learning characterises this condition well. However, as well as this, also reproduced in the relations between teachers and their students is a corollary to the wider social relation of production characteristic for the working conditions of capitalism itself; i.e. the specific capital/labour production relation (see also Beach, 1999c,d).

DISCUSSION

Several propositions can be developed from the article we think. One of these is that new education ideas in formal policies only have a very slight impact on the learning of successful students in materialist (and consumerist) education cultures. Another is that this shouldn't really be surprising to us. In competitive (capitalist) school forms what students think they 'want', need and are materially rewarded by, are things like knowledge about *how to get a good grade*, what *amount of effort needs to be put... into this or that course* and what represents a balanced *optimisation of the qualification-work load variable* so as to do well in school. Furthermore, the actual

social relations of education and production make the successful students responses logical ones and allow them to be continually reproduced from student to student, from school class to school class, from institution to institution and from year to year, despite new formal policies that would claim to want to suspend them.

Schooling processes still, as they have done also in the past, primarily consist of the actions and relations of symbolic exchange within an ideologically saturated commodity context that has a 'truth bound' (neo-conservative) epistemology that normalises academic credentialing and corresponds to a micro-political economy of signs that is crossed over to by means of a symbolic *consummation* that allows hyper consumption (of commodity 'truths as facts') to replace needs (of really useful knowledge) in education, in a transitional zone where structure ends and individual potlatch begins (Genesko, 1994: 10; Beach, 1999c, 2000). This is characteristic for education as a commodity form but seems to be rarely recognised and responded to in these terms by those exposed to it (Brosio, 1994; Allman, 1999; Dovemark, 2004), perhaps primarily because of the normalising tendencies brought about by the dominant significations and relations of the basic capitalist condition (i.e. the conversion of all value forms to economic forms that can be counted and accumulated, the unequal accumulation of economic value forms by a few individuals at the expense of the rest and the production and interpellation of a normalising ideology for these practices; also Cole, 2003).

These are the most seismic points of our article. They concern the negation of forces in dynamic equilibrium between alienated and non-alienated production, labour, nature, and, thus, identity and practices in education. They relate to Gramsci's distinction between common sense and good sense, within which consciousness is both permeated by ideology and 'exists' at (and can be raised to) different levels from naïve to critical consciousness. The inter-relations of the power of ideology and the ideology of power is always able to transform (collective/common) consciousness in the interests of dominant classes unless (and until) they are correctly identified, named and opposed (Spivak, 1993, p. 113). This is what happens in schools to students and teachers.

These are of course points that have been made before in education; not the least by Vygotsky (1926/1992) who recognised that questions of free (liberated/liberating and

empowering) education will only be fully resolvable first after the problems of the social order have been resolved. In Vygotsky's words, until this point every attempt at constructing emancipatory ideals for education in a society with contradictions will be a utopian dream; which is a point commonly forgotten in the context of education policy today (Beach, 2000). These contradictions will, as they have been suggested to have done in the presently researched context, create cracks in the most well thought-out and most inspired education system (also Brosio, 1994).

Vygotsky quoted William James' work in relation to the points above. Using James he suggested that grades are the most salient micro-contradiction of the free educational context. This is also our point too. A grade (and other centrally objectifying aspects of performativity culture in education) is a form of assessment that is alien to the intended course of school work as described in current curricula but it still comes to dominate the concerns of teachers and learners (Beach, 1999b, 2003a,b). As we have suggested, particularly for successful students grades combine all the negative aspects of praise and censure to the point that these students begin to learn either for the sake of obtaining good grades or avoiding bad ones. This brings us back to the condition of alienation in learning and our earlier reference to Engels' comments of why people work, but this time turned back onto the question of why 'good' school students learn. Do they learn out of a love of learning or a natural impulse to learn? Or do they do it for external reward where there is no real joy or reward in learning simply for learning's sake. The answer seems pretty clear to us.

CONCLUSIONS

The 'new values' that are expressed within current education policy in Sweden's national school curricula (Lpo 94/98; Lpf 94) can be interpreted straightforwardly to imply flexibility, genuine ownership, new partnership and enhanced possibilities for self-determined learning and the fabrication of knowledge for students as the new 'foundational' educational values for a new knowledge society. These values are continually returned to in new policies (both national, European and supra-national; Dovemark, 2004) and of course we do not dispute their possible worth. But standing against their realisation according to the present investigation are the protective adaptations and restraining features of education super-structure, and epistemological practices that are resonant with the ethics and practices of capitalistic forms of

accumulation both in school and outside of school. The new recommendations and their outcomes are quite simply caught between two tendencies in the formation of education power. One of them suggests the articulation of genuine use-value in education the other materially supports its fetishisation in practice as a cultural commodity (also Willis, 1999; Cole, 2003; Beach, 2003a,b, 2004).

Marx also expresses something like this in Capital vol. 1 concerning the commodity fetish in relation to which the contention of the present article is that the plight of an education policy will always finally depend on the state of the education system (including its most basic epistemological values and the ways these are externalised in artefacts, technologies and social practices), the characteristics of surrounding culture and the predispositions of the individuals in it (Willis, 1977), as these things in combination help form what Bourdieu (1996) has termed the repertory of actual and virtual possibilities that are offered at any given moment by the space of available cultural positions and the relations of symbolic force between agents and within institutions (Beach, 1999c, d, 2000). It suggests, as Gustafsson (2003) has also put it, that although agents may try to use all the powers at their disposal to activate what seems to be *in accord with their best intentions and interests* (also Bourdieu, 1996, p. 201 - 202), these agents are not free agents who are restrained only by their intellectual and linguistic possibilities. They are *restrained* agents who are positioned by and in relation to powers beyond their immediate, conscious control and understanding and who inherit rather than create much of what is immediately available as a cultural resource in any given social-cultural context. This should not be forgotten when we consider which interests are recognised in new education policies and how these are then lived out and made effective in practice.

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Notes

1. The variation within the 8th grade group and between this group (as a whole) and the upper-secondary science group is not surprising. The natural sciences programme is the most prestigious upper-secondary school programme (SOU 2000: 39) and, as shown by Reuterberg & Svensson's (1998) and Svensson's (2002) investigation of 7995 randomly selected students who made their choice of upper-secondary programme in 1998, has a strong social economic class recruitment bias favouring ethnic Swedish, middle and upper middle class categories. Furthermore, these students have begun a career in what can be termed a *long theoretical* educational trajectory (after Baudelot & Establet, 1971), with all that this entails in terms of socialisation effects through material and time investment (Beach, 1999a,b, 2001).

2. This is what we term as education as a commodity, in line with Willis' notion about fetishised cultural commodities (1999) and Freire's concept of 'banking forms of education' (see also Allman, 1999; Brosio, 1994). Education is a form of accumulated labour here (e.g. Bourdieu 1984, 1997; Beach, 1999a-c) and learning new things is predominantly seen as important by learners in terms of their exchange value as a form of capital.

3. This doesn't mean of course that socialising in the formal and informal school cannot mutate into a fetishised value form. Indeed most research on status deprivation theory, sub-cultural formation theory and informal status hierarchies suggest that it can, as is also intimated by some of Marie Bliding's findings (Bliding, 2004) and in what we noted in relation to things like the illicit trading of booze and file-share materials. What it does mean is that the social dynamics of socialising in school and its social relations of production are distinct from those of the more accommodated responses of formally successful students.

4. As Cole (2003) suggests it is in practice that the policy fails, as rather than ideal types being predominant and rewarded in practice, many students typically don't seem to care about studying because they quite simply have other things that they value more highly than it and the majority of the remainder are more apt to do what they are told and learn what authorities indicate they need to do in order to get the grades

required for a particular post-secondary or higher education. This is clearly a predominantly alienated relationship to education.

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