

Effects of Neoliberalism on Education

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Abstract. The discourses and practices of neoliberalism, including government policies for education and training, public debates regarding standards and changed funding regimes, have been at work on and in schools in capitalist societies since at least the 1980s. Yet we have been hard pressed to say what neoliberalism is, where it comes from and how it works on us and through us to establish the new moral order of schools and schooling, and to produce the new student/subject who is appropriate to (and appropriated by) the neoliberal economy. Beck (1997) refers to the current social order as the ‘new modernities’ and he characterizes the changes bringing about the present forms of society as having been both surreptitious and unplanned, that is, as being invisible and difficult to make sense of. In eschewing a theory in which anyone or any group may have been planning and benefiting from the changes, he falls back on the idea of natural and inevitable development, and optimistically describes the changes of the last two to three decades as the inevitable outcome of the victories of capitalism. The authors’ approach is not so optimistic, and they do not accept the idea of the natural inevitability of the changes. The approach that is taken in this issue is to examine neoliberalism at work through a close examination of the texts and talk through which neoliberal subjects and their schooling have been constituted over the last two decades. In this Introduction the authors provide their own take on the way the present social and political order has emerged as something that its subjects take to be inevitable.

Keywords: Education, neoliberalism

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