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CONTEXTUALIZING THE COMPETENCY-BASED SCHOOLING¹

Victor Václav Soucek

INTRODUCTION

To a classroom teacher the current debate about work-related competencies might appear far removed from his/her classroom and have no significance for teacher education. Yet the proposed policy changes are likely to affect the work and the professional status of teachers in a very direct way. As Whitty and Willmott (1991: 312) point out, one of the fundamental problems of competency-based teaching/training (CBT) approach consists in the difficulty to define just how narrow or broad the competencies might be. A too narrow definition based on observable work-related skills might indicate a radical departure from the traditional role teachers played in the old and more liberal educational system, and consequently the status of the *reflective professional* might be questioned if teachers becomes mere technical instructors and skills assessors. A too broad definition, on the other hand, can make it impossible to define criteria of competence in any meaningful way.

The second, and no less important ramification of the CBT approach is related to the capacity of a CBT system to produce *intellectually autonomous* and *reflective* citizens. The consequences of having skilled but not necessarily intelligent citizenry might not become apparent in a short term; however, the future social and moral developments of our civilization might be threatened should the CBT system prove inefficient in delivering such desired outcomes.

The scenario suggested above might seem unreal from the present vantage point. Yet the current thrust of our educational policy – the tendency to collapse the so-called “false” dichotomy between work skills and a capacity for an intelligent, autonomous reflection into a unified work-related training system – indicates that such scenario might be a distinct possibility. In the final analysis, however, it will be the teachers themselves who will implement these policies. It is for this reason that the support or otherwise they might lend to the new training system be informed by insights drawn from a broader perspective that would take account not only of what happens in their school or classroom, but

also of the changes taking place in the global and national political and economic systems.

In other words, the decision we have to make at the present juncture is to what extent should we allow the encroachment of the economic imperatives on our liberal-democratic aspirations. This article will aim to help teachers and teacher educators make such an informed decision.

Part 1 will look briefly at the restructuring of the global economic system. Part 2 will describe the new *skills formation* paradigm, and argue that the skills formation strategy has been chiefly informed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) generated policy proposals. Part 3 will closely interrogate the concept of competence as it is used in the Mayer (1992), Finn (1991), Carmichael (March and July, 1992), and Ashenden (1991) Reports to the Australian Educational Council. This section will identify difficulties inherent in the Competence Based Training (CBT). Part 4 will discuss the notion of educational competence as elaborated by Habermas (1972, 1979, 1984, 1989). Part 5 will critique the new skills paradigm from the position of the critical theory. The critique will focus especially on the domains of language, knowledge, intersubjectivity, and ego identity and ethics. Finally, the article will discuss the pedagogical implications of the *performative* (i.e., communicative) versus *formal* (i.e., CBT) teaching strategies.

PART 1: RESTRUCTURING GLOBAL ECONOMY

Over the last decade or so most Western economies have been undergoing a restructuring process prompted by the prolonged crisis of capital accumulation which has begun to emerge in the late 1960's and early 1970's (Wallerstein, 1980, 1985; Gordon, 1980; Lipietz, 1987; Catley, 1978; Crough et al, 1981; Crough and Wheelwright, 1982). This crisis has been qualitatively different from previous business-cycle type crises which could be more or less contained through allocative interventions by nation-state governments within the confines of

the Fordist accumulation regime. The present crisis thus needs to be understood as a conjunctural crisis – its resolution requires a fundamental re-working of the social structures of accumulation,² because their usefulness to the capital accumulation process had been exhausted by the mid-1970's.

Working from within the system-theoretic paradigm, the neoclassical economists located the malaise of the failing international economy in its inefficiency, low productivity, and lack of competitiveness. This assessment was not entirely incorrect; however, being exclusively focused on the economic system alone, it failed to take into consideration the possible social ramifications of economic rationalist policies. The above diagnosis had, subsequently, become the driving force behind global macro- and micro-economic reforms. The former being expressed in a general thrust towards a deregulated free-market economic environment and chiefly in the deregulation of capital flows and the financial industry in general,³ the latter in the downsizing of work-places, privatisation of the corporate capital, and the privatization and corporatization of state enterprises and provision of some public services. Underpinning the strategy was an explicit trust in technological and scientific advancement, which simultaneously provided a wishful even though somewhat utopian panacea for the perceived economic ills, and, at the same time, handed a sense of legitimacy to the growing disparity between the fewer wealthy and growing poor (Wheelwright, 1990).

The unprecedented global concentration of economic power and capital (Castells & Henderson, 1987: 1-2; Crough & Wheelwright, 1982: 11-31) which has undoubtedly played a major part in the current global restructuring would seem to suggest that nation-states might increasingly play a subordinate role in the way the global capital relations are being reorganized (Crough & Wheelwright, 1982: 28; Smyth, 1991: 12-13). However, the micro-economic restructuring, as well as the restructuring of the social provision of nation-state economic systems (i.e., education, health, welfare), take their shape through a political process unique to each national economy (Castells & Henderson, 1987: 1-2; Pusey, 1991: 209). It is, therefore, important to view these manifestations of global restructuring in the specific nation-states not as direct representations of the overall model of development but rather as unique crystallizations of the overall tendencies inspired by the need and struggle to re-work the accumulation strategies

and hegemonic projects.⁴ This global reorganisation clearly has to acknowledge the local political struggles.

Yet, as indicated above, there is now a considerable body of evidence which suggests that behind the individual nation-states' efforts to rework social structures of capital accumulation there appears to be an unmistakable uniformity of approach, an invisible hand, as it were, molding the way we understand and talk about economic priorities such as international competitiveness, or the virtues of weeding out the weak and curing the welfare dependency syndrome by withdrawing transfer payments.

It is for this reason that the educational changes in Australia and other OECD countries over the past decade need to be viewed as forming an integral part of the new global economic settlement described elsewhere as the post-Fordist settlement (Jessop, 1983, 1989; Rustin, 1989). Clearly, to conceptualize these changes as primarily educational reforms is no longer a sustainable proposition.

In the area of policy-formation, the new *structural selectivity procedures*⁵ put in place by the “reformist” movement in the 1980's brought about three major shifts: (1) the introduction of the principles of performance-oriented management by measurable objectives into the State departments, including education, encouraged the overall re-orientation of the educational system towards work-related skills development (Marshall, 1988: 29; Soucek, 1992: 135-137); (2) the structural selectivity of the State transferred the initiative for reworking educational standards and functions from educators and bureaucrats to corporate and business bodies, whose understanding of learning processes was quite naturally defined in terms of observable skills or performance; and (3) as a consequence of the above, the “reformist” policy-makers were able to articulate new educational goals in terms of specific and discreet skills-requirements.

Traditionally, public education undertaking was perceived as an attempt at approximating an ideal balance between work-related skills, personal social and moral development, and laying foundations for future cognitive, social, and moral individual growth whether in the workplace, through tertiary studies, or other life careers. It was precisely the availability of public education structures which, in principle at least, underpinned and informed the notions of equity

and social justice, especially with regard to the equalizing function public education was presumed to perform vis-a-vis the existing social inequality. This article will examine the impact of the changes noted above, and will argue that, in spite of its rhetoric, the competency-based schooling "reform" represents a radical departure from the traditional role our schools have been understood to fulfil.

PART 2: THE GLOBAL RESTRUCTURING OF EDUCATION AND THE AUSTRALIAN INITIATIVE

Who sets the agenda of educational change?

As suggested in the introduction, from as early as the late 1960's the global economy began to experience considerable difficulties. The initial response of governments and the corporate sector alike was to blame the schooling systems of individual countries. The blame-the-schools campaign became evident in the plethora of Commission Reports in all major OECD countries. As a central policy-making agency, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) played an extremely influential part in the subsequent shaping of the member countries' individual educational policies. The trend towards explicit linking of education to the capital accumulation function was outlined in *Structural Adjustment and Economic Performance* (OECD, 1987), but the specific policy proposals were more clearly and explicitly outlined in the document, *Education and the Economy in a Changing Society* (OECD, 1989).

Education and Economy in a Changing Society summarily articulates the theme of the 1980's global educational changes and, at the same time, sets the agenda for the 1990's: it argues simply and persuasively that the explosion of knowledge in the 1970's and 1980's somewhat overloaded the educational curriculum and rendered it incoherent. The curriculum, therefore, needs to be revitalized; even the very notion of the *basics* needs to be redefined. This implies that certain choices need to be made. In two lines the document pays a lip service to the traditional curriculum's concerns with "individual development and education for an informed citizenship" (OECD, 1989:28), and then focuses firmly on the "need for more adequate introduction to jobs, careers, and the world of work in schools and familiarisation with and command of information technologies" (OECD, 1989:30). Most importantly, the document argues

that direct public funding for education should occur only when the labour-market indicators show clearly the need for such education (OECD, 1989:74). Having already acknowledged the necessity of future high unemployment (OECD, 1989:68), the document is clearly maintaining a contradictory position: on the one hand, it argues for a continuous education, on the other, it seems to be saying that only those individuals likely to be employed should be educated at the public expense. Given that the unemployment rates might remain high indefinitely, this suggests that only some citizens will have the right to be educated at public cost. The document argues that further education and training be explicitly viewed as part of investment strategies, with the objective to ensure that *human capital development costs* are treated in much the same way as physical capital investment costs (OECD, 1989:74).

Moreover, the document explicitly advocates the new skills-formation paradigm, arguing that the skills required should be conceptualised as competencies (the "currency of the market," so-to-speak [OECD, 1989:34]) in order to indicate what precisely successful completion of the programme has taught. The emphasis thus should be on what the learners "can do" (OECD, 1989: 35). It further argues that the skills formation approach "demonstrates genuine mastery of the subject matter, that are understood by all concerned, and that are comparable with one another" as nationally recognizable qualifications (OECD, 1989:34). Such skills should be work-related, generic, documented, and transferable (OECD, 1989:73). On the issue of the higher-order thinking skills, the document suggests that the "availability of technologies to perform routine tasks that before involved elaborate mental exercises may encourage [the promotion of] mechanical ability rather than enhanced understanding" (OECD, 1989:32). The crucial emphasis should be put on outcomes such as attitudes to innovation, team-work, and productivity (OECD, 1989:38).

In the current economic climate, the new vocational training systems clearly cannot seek further financial assistance, the document argues, claiming that the costs of further education and training thus need to be met by enterprises and individuals through loans rather than grants (OECD, 1989:73). Finally, the document asserts that the emphasis on vocational training is clearly justified, because the distinction between education and training is "blurring" (OECD, 1989:68), that it will increasingly be more difficult to discern which is which as the future labour

markets will require a continuous skills adjustment of the labour force.

In summary, the educational changes proposed by the OECD document encompass the following: skills are conceptualised as competences; competences must be work-related, documented and transferable skills, and nationally recognised; mechanical ability to use technology is preferred to complex knowledge or understanding; skills training is to be paid for by enterprises and individuals; and outcomes such as positive attitudes to innovation, team-work, and productivity must be given priority.

In so far as the new global economic order is concerned, the OECD's educational initiative signifies a major re-alignment of the schooling provision with the more general restructuring of the global economic enterprise and with the up-to-date requirements of the international capital.

Australian Vocational Certificate training system

The new vocational training paradigm is outlined in the Employment and Skills Formation Council's (ESFC) document, *Australian Vocational Certificate Training System* (March, 1992 [Carmichael Report]). The document is a bold statement, which recognises the inadequacy of the present and past training approaches in the face of a rapidly changing labour market conditions. It proposes a tight, yet flexible training system, with multiple points of entry and credit transfer (i.e., modular units acquired at different training points, such as Year 10, TAFE, Senior Colleges, or university, can, in principle, form a legitimate pathway). It is conceived as a national system, and recognises four distinct levels of the Australian Vocational Certificate (AVC). The targets outlined in the document are ambitious. By the Year 2001 it anticipates that 90% of 19 year olds will have finished Year 12, and 90% of 20 year olds will have achieved an AVC level 2.⁶

There are two central themes that underpin the new training paradigm: the learning process has been reworked as a process of skills acquisition, and the traditional division between education and training has been dissolved and replaced with a unifying principle of competency-based education/training.

Even though the new training paradigm appears to have emerged as a unique consequence of an

extended public debate, this article will argue that the AVC system is largely an adaptation of the globally initiated policy proposals. The next section will examine in some detail the concept of competency based skillings.

PART 3: THE NEW PARADIGM

The notion of work-related educational competence underpins the thinking of all major education policy documents commissioned by the Australian Education Council (AEC) which emerged in the wake of the 1989 OECD's education policy statement. There are, however, two key documents that deal specifically with the issue of work-related competency standards in Australian schools. These are the Report of the Australian Education Council Review Committee, *Young People's Participation in Post-compulsory Education and Training* (the Finn Report), published in July, 1991, and the Mayer Committee Report, *Employment-related Key Competencies: A Proposal for Consultation* (the Mayer Report), published in May, 1992. Whereas the Mayer Report looks specifically at the key competencies in the post-compulsory schooling, that is, from the Year 11 onwards, the Finn Report took a broader view and included in its considerations the primary and the secondary schooling years. Thus among other things it recommends that key competencies, which are explicitly employment related, be incorporated into the school curriculum from Year 4 onwards (Finn, 1991: 64), and through the key competencies present in school subject profiles from Year 1. Such approach would have further ramifications for the type of schooling children in Australian schools will be exposed to. This article will look at this issue in more detail in the second part of this section. At the present moment, let me focus more closely on key competencies themselves.

The Mayer Report (1992) was commissioned to further explore the concept of work-related key competences. Even though its emphasis from the outset is on employment related skills, The Mayer Report nevertheless defines *competence* in broad, all-inclusive terms. The key areas of competence do include critical and creative thinking, and issues related to personal moral and social development. This is, however, a well-established style employed by most governmental and corporate policy proposals throughout the 1970's and 1980's.⁷ Articulating educational goals, competencies and general standards in broad, all-inclusive terms serves to establish as broad a

consensus for the policy proposal as possible. Throughout the document, however, the original broad definition is refined and typically bereft of its original social and theoretical context. In the section that follows, I would like to trace and identify the moments of conceptual jumps, whereby, in the final instance, the competence is re-conceptualized as the ability to perform specific activities within an occupation or function to the standards expected in employment.

The definition of competence

At the outset the Mayer Report (1992) has adopted a "broad definition of competence which recognises that skills are underpinned by knowledge and understanding, and that competence involves both the ability to perform in a given context and the capacity to transfer knowledge and skills to new tasks and situations" (Mayer, 1992: 4).

The Report emphasises that these capabilities should be mindful and thoughtful, and should incorporate a sense of the learner as one who builds concepts and develops understandings which inform *technical application*. The Report thus clearly claims that skills and knowledge are inseparable, but it seems to limit its definition of knowledge and *understanding* to a formal technical performance. It would appear that it is interested mainly in the type of *thinking* needed either for a psycho-motor performance or for a formal application (as opposed to a performative⁸ action) of abstract skills such as collecting and organising information, for example.

Some difficulties inherent in the competency based curriculum

The relationship between a demonstrated skill and understanding which underpins the skill is rather a tenuous one. As we have already seen, the OECD (1989) policy document favours a focus on skills as *routine tasks* and *mechanical ability* rather than enhanced understanding. Similarly the Finn Report favours the approach based on discrete competence/skill modules rather than knowledge and understanding per se (Finn, 1991: 57). The Carmichael Report also proposes that educational outcomes must be demonstrable, and suggests that the most suitable delivery of competency based learning is modular and self-paced. The certification of such competence is equated with a specific mix of knowledge, skills and applications (Carmichael, 1992: 24-5). These reports simply assume that understanding and

knowledge somehow issue from the skill-testing situation. Yet this conflation of skills-testing and knowledge and understanding (which supposedly underpin the tested skills) might not be quite justified. The danger is precisely in the assumption that a *limited number of specifically defined skills might demonstrate the presence of knowledge and understanding* that supposedly underpin those skills. There are many educationalists who question the validity of that assumption.⁹

The other difficulty that arises in the competency based approach relates to who actually determines what is to be learned. As Ashenden points out, "the outcomes defined are not the familiars of education talk - 'understanding', 'awareness', 'grasp' and so on, but the capacity to do something" (Ashenden, 1991: 18). But more importantly, he goes on, this capacity is derived directly from a particular job, workplace or industry. In other words, it is increasingly the employers, not educationalists, who determine what is to be learned in the classroom. The point being made here is that to the extent that employment-related skills might not often be underpinned by any more complex knowledge or understanding, the acquisition of such skills will be correspondingly bereft of any deeper knowledge or understanding, too.

There are, of course, some obvious advantages in having small modules of skills or units of knowledge. They might provide more flexibility to students, who can thus exercise more individual choice in mixing different components of curricula. But there are also clear disadvantages. The continuity of development of ideas might completely break down. Consequently, even after a prolonged period of study, students might fail to penetrate deeply into any area of skill or understanding. They might acquire a number of skills, but these might allow them merely to skip over the surface of what informs those skills. This is an obvious risk of any modular curriculum.

Perhaps the most appropriate criticism of modularised curriculum comes from teachers themselves. Their reaction to unitization of curriculum in Western Australia, for example, is well documented.¹⁰ Within the context of the present discussion, some of their major criticism was directed precisely at the lack of continuity of curricula. This was noted in all core subjects. The general perception of teachers was that students indeed "keep skipping over the surface of what normally underpins the general knowledge

skills." Furthermore, the 10 week modules of delivery made the traditional mentor or pastoral role of teachers impossible to fulfil, to the extent that many teachers did not in fact know their students' faces.

This latter point is important especially in the context of developing interpersonal or intersubjective competence of students. This article suggests that a modularised and competence-based curriculum might jeopardise the development of personal and interpersonal competence, because the competence-testing approach focuses on an isolated act of behaviour. The problematic of choosing one behavioural pattern (e.g., respect of other persons' right to become equal partners in communication) and rejecting the other (e.g., using one's own position of power to manipulate other persons in order to achieve a perlocutionary [i.e., unstated] goal) is never really addressed. There simply appears a flaw in the logic of competence based curriculum. This flaw consists in the assumption that: if "general knowledge, understanding and internalisation of social and moral principles (p)" tend to produce, in a given situation, an "intersubjectively competent reaction (q)" that, conversely, an isolated learned instant of "intersubjectively competent behaviour (q)" might lead to the development of "social and moral principles (p)" underpinning such behaviour.

This is clearly a mistaken assumption, because from the proposition:

if p then q

all we can infer is a conclusion:

if ~q then ~p

that is, "if there is no intersubjectively competent behaviour" then neither is there the "knowledge of general intersubjective/moral principles," but never:

if q then p.

Key areas of competence

In defining the key areas of competence, the Mayer report adopts the recommendations of the earlier Finn Report (1991). These are as follows:

- *Language and communication* - this area includes knowledge and skills related to: speaking, listening, reading, writing, accessing and using information.

- *Using Mathematics* - i.e., computing, measurement, understanding mathematical symbols.
- *Scientific and technological understanding* - i.e., understanding technological and scientific concepts and their impact on society, scientific, technological and computing skills.
- *Cultural understanding* - i.e., understanding and knowledge of Australia's historical, geographical, and political context, understanding of major global issues, understanding of the world of work, its importance and requirements.
- *Problem solving* - i.e., analysing, critical thinking, decision making, creative thinking, skills transfer to new context.
- *Personal and interpersonal* - i.e., personal management, planning, and career planning, negotiating and team skills, initiative and leadership, adaptability to change, self esteem, ethics.

At a first glance, the key competency areas reflect the traditional educational goals; namely, they appear to reconcile the aspect of personal growth with social, cultural, and economic needs of a broader community. Under a closer scrutiny, however, what becomes clear is that the *space for the learner to become him/herself is missing* - the learner is not expected to self-actualise, but to learn specific technical skills. In the Habermasian sense, the Report acknowledges only the technical knowledge. Both the emancipatory knowledge and the practical knowledge (Habermas, 1989) are ignored.

The overall emphasis in the key areas of competence is on technical managerial skills; for example, managing information, using technology, individual adaptability, and managing others. Even in the area of problem solving, which appears to emphasise critical and creative thinking, such competencies are related only to *technical* problem-solving. Nowhere in the document is there a suggestion that a desirable educational outcome or competence might include the ability to interrogate the value judgements that underpin the social purposes of technical problem solving, team-work, or developing and using technology.

The competencies described in the report are non-personal and strongly functional. The linguistic competence is not defined in terms of critical,

creative, or reflective thinking, even though such processes are ineluctably circumscribed by the ability to use language. Rather the language competence is defined as the ability to access and use information. The Mayer Report thus seems extremely reluctant to engage dealing with competencies that might promote autonomous, socially reflective and critical thinking.

The Key Competences clearly don't pay a sufficient attention to the future potential developments in the area of moral and social principles that underpin our present thinking, our current social order. In the view of the author of this article, this is an inexcusable flaw of the competence based approach. It is also an arrogant approach as it presumes that our Australian community has reached the pinnacle of social and moral understanding, and thus the application of the currently dominant standards of social and moral behaviour needs no further interrogation.

The latter part of this article will also discuss the issue of developmental stages at a phylogenetic¹² level. Specifically, it will consider Habermas' claim that the Formal Operational Stage (in the Kohlbergian scheme) might be surpassed by the *Argumentative* developmental (or *intellectually autonomous*) stage. The point being made here is that the competence based education/training (as articulated in the documents under discussion) might tend to freeze the social and moral standards at their present level.

Nevertheless, the present discussion notwithstanding, the Mayer Report Committee came to realise in the course of their research that the identified key areas of competence did not exist in isolation but were closely interrelated. The working party, therefore, proceeded to develop Key Competency Strands which would integrate the key areas of competence.

Key competency strands

These focus on the capacity to apply knowledge and skills in an integrated way in work situations. They are as follows:

- Collecting, analysing and organising ideas and information.
- Expressing ideas and information.
- Planning and organising activities.
- Working with others and in teams.
- Using mathematical ideas and techniques.
- Solving problems.
- Using technology.

What is a critical omission here is the area of moral development (the areas of key competence did mention Ethics). The linguistic and cognitive competences are still present. However, even the crucial area of intersubjective competence had been reduced to a capacity of "working in a team, setting common goals, and monitoring achievement." Furthermore, nowhere in the defined competency strands is there a provision for original, creative or critical thinking. In other words, the key competency strands define formal operational problem-solving skills. Translated into pedagogical situation, the above *competency strands reduce the classroom experience to a cognitive/linguistic interaction. The dimensions of creative/expressive, affective, and moral learning experiences are completely ignored.*

One additional point needs to be emphasised in this respect. This article is not arguing against formal cognitive competences, such as being able to access, organize, synthesize and communicate information or factual data, for example. What is being suggested here, however, is that such formal operations need to be taught within a *socially meaningful context*, with an emphasis on the continuity rather than discontinuity of ideas and concepts. A modularised curriculum, characterised by decontextualisation and segmentation of specific skills, simply has no capacity to produce anything else but contextually limited formal cognitive skills.

If we transpose such acquired skills into the concrete life of public policy-making, one consequence of such a technical reductionist approach might be a failure to ask socially relevant questions. To use an example from the current restructure of the State Education Ministries, I would suggest, the following and crucial question has *not* been addressed: How is a restructuring of the educational provision (informed by the Structural Efficiency Principle) going to affect the teachers' work and the learning of the students? Accordingly, I would like to argue that *defining the problem-solving task in purely technical terms deprives any social action of its necessary contextual/social depth.*

This article, therefore, disagrees with the limits imposed on the concept of "contextual learning" advocated by the Carmichael Council, which defines contextual learning as learning that is relevant to the work goals of students (July, 1992: 10-11).¹³

Performance levels

Performance levels describe levels in the development of competence within each of the key competency strand. The report proposes three performance levels.

There are two comments I would like to make in this respect. Firstly, the proposed levels of competence are in themselves quite trivial. For example, as a top performance in the key competence strand, *Working with others in a team*, the report lists an example of "being able to work effectively in a team on a multistory building site". As a bottom, Level 1 performance, it cites the ability to "being able to serve behind a counter in a fast-food outlet."

The point that needs to be made is that the proposed performance levels might be interpreted as aiming at reducing educational achievements to a very specific basic level of education. True, at this stage it is not quite clear how much of the overall school assessment will be comprised of work-related competences. However, to the extent the student outcomes in this area are likely to become indicators of teachers' performance, it might be possible to see the future education of our children as being overwhelmingly consumed by such "educational" trivia.

The second point I would like to make is related to my earlier discussion of the OECD (1989) policy proposal. If the reader might recollect, the document argued that increasingly more people will be destined for a life-long career of unemployment, and that public education should be funded only to the extent that its outcomes might be useful to the labour market. At the same time, as Fisher and Mandell (1988: 52) point out, the growth in high-tech and other highly-skilled jobs in the USA will be approximately 5% of the total job growth. Most noticeable growth is predicted in such job categories as cashiers, kitchen helpers, guards and fast-food outlet operators. That is, performance Level 1 jobs. If we are to take the OECD proposal seriously, the implication is that the bulk of school-leavers might be streamed into performance Level 1 outcomes. And this is perhaps the most strikingly distinguishing feature of the new global economic order: its deliberate and manipulative streaming into discrete life-chances for the students, life-chances which might be increasingly and selectively overdetermined by the wealth of individual students.

Can education be reduced to vocational training? Can the society become a function to the economic system?

Over the past decade, the educational policy discourse in Australia has been characterised by a diminishing importance of traditional educationalists and a corresponding rise in prominence of system theorists and business or other corporate bodies. My aim here is not, however, to examine the causes of why this should be so. Let it suffice that structural reasons (duly underpinned by the present economic strategy) have emerged which tend to promote a specific structurally selective bias in favour of the domestic and increasingly international capital. Educational policy reports discussed in this article bear witness to this claim. What I would like to address in this section, however, are its potential consequences for our educational system in the first instant, and for the whole society in the last.

In the previous section we have seen that the proposed vocational education/training system shows an open bias in favour of specific work-related skills. The traditional educational values inscribed in such concepts as intellectual autonomy, realising personal and workplace-independent potential, or critical and creative thinking have been somewhat neglected in all current policy proposals commissioned by the Central Governmental Agencies. It is, of course, important to acknowledge a due respect and need for vocational skills. These should be cultivated and perfected, for no complex society can possibly function without a capacity to physically produce and create wealth. In this sense this article endorses the initiative taken by the Carmichael Council (July, 1992). Its orientation (i.e., its strong emphasis on training and the primacy given to the economic system with respect to the educational curriculum) is, however, of some concern.

What is of a particular concern is the claim that the "distinction between education and training is blurring" (Carmichael Council, 1992). The OECD document goes even further and argues that public funding of schooling should be determined by labour market conditions, that is, by the needs of the economic system (OECD, 1989: 74). Similar sentiments are echoed in all key policy documents. Thus Carmichael (July, 1992: 10) argues that "both individual and industry needs are leading towards an increasing convergence of general and vocational education." The Finn Report recommends that "in the schools sector [the need for experiential

learning] will require a stronger commitment to integrated and appropriately structured work experience" (Finn, 1991: 53), and further argues that work-related competences must spread across the curriculum (Finn, 1991: 74). Finally, the Report claims that the difference between general education and vocational training should diminish and that learning in schools should be more "hands-on" (Finn, 1991: 75).

Both Carmichael Reports (March, 1992: 17, and July, 1992) advocate a Competency Based Training System which would integrate all post-compulsory schooling such as TAFE, upper secondary and higher education, and other training bodies. Given that competencies are essentially segmented, work-related skills, based mostly on fragmented technical knowledge or understanding, such approach to education might clearly take away the social capacity for reflective, critical and individually empowering thinking.

It is with some urgency, therefore, that we need to ask: Just what might the appropriate mix of general education and vocational training be in order that the economic well-being of citizens might be sustained, and yet conditions would prevail to encourage further institutionally and individually autonomous interrogation of the existing social relations and moral principals underpinning the social arrangements? Or, conversely: Just to what extent can we allow the encroachment of the new training paradigm onto the territory of our educational systems without, at the same time, jeopardising the social and cultural developmental project of humankind?

In the next section I will address and re-conceptualise the notion of educational competence. In this I will be guided by the theory of communicative competence developed by Habermas (1970, 1979, 1984, 1989).

PART 4: EDUCATIONAL COMPETENCE RE-CONCEPTUALISED

Habermas and the theory of communicative competence

The theory of communicative competence goes far beyond the domain of linguistic and cognitive competence. It also embraces the areas of social (or intersubjective) and moral development, all of which are underpinned by the speaker's egological (or ego-identity) development.¹⁴

Let me, firstly, draw an attention to what Habermas (1979: 5-6) considers a fallacious and unjustified separation of language from speech (*langue vs. parole*). One consequence of this arbitrary separation is that, at one level, the study of language concerns itself exclusively with the study of phonetics, syntax, and semantics, totally ignoring the social implications which linguistic structures impose on the pragmatic use of the language as it is spoken. Conversely, at the pragmatic level of the analysis (i.e., psycholinguistics or sociolinguistics), the language structures are ignored, and the analysis is conducted in purely empirical terms.

The theory of communicative competence aims to redress the analytical deficiency that flows from such separation (i.e., structuralist vs. pragmatic) by bringing the two together and by showing how the linguistic structures might radically shape the *utterances* (spoken language) not only in the sense of language competence, but also in the sense of cognitive (e.g., What do I know? and, Is what I know valid?), *intersubjective* (e.g., Is the social interaction conducted on a fair and equitable basis?), and *egological* (e.g., Do I allow my self-interest to dominate my social conduct?) competences. In other words, a competent communicator is not only an accomplished user of the language, but he/she is also well-informed, and socially and morally, and psychologically mature person.

A speech act, therefore, is not only a symbolic representation of a linguistic meaning, but expresses at the same time the (often intangible) norms, rules, and belief systems that underpin the conditions of any social interaction. Thus a school bully might brow-beat his weaker opposition into submission because of a "shared" perception of the bully's power; similarly an employee might feel somewhat tentative vis-a-vis his/her employer; or a school teacher might feel uneasy when dealing with the school authorities. The distinction being made here is that between a discourse based on commonly agreed and articulated norms, assumptions, and rules, and where the goal of a social action is known to all participants (i.e., illocutionary social action), on the one hand, and a discourse guided by unofficial power-relationships which tend to privilege one participant at the expense of the other(s), and where the real goal of a social action is known only to the privileged participant (i.e., perlocutionary social action).

As such, a speech act can then be analyzed in terms of *illocutionary force* and *propositional content*

(Habermas, 1972: 138). Thus, for example, utterances: "I order you to return within one hour!" or "I would appreciate if you returned within one hour!" express with varying degrees of illocutionary force the same propositional content. Every speech act thus consists of two sentences: a dominating sentence (e.g., "I order you!"), which establishes the illocutionary force of the utterance, and a sentence of propositional content (e.g., a person is asked to return within one hour) (McCarthy, 1984: 275).

Every utterance then situates both the speaker and the listener in a world of physical and social reality. Its illocutionary aspect reveals the social relationship between the speaker and the listener; its propositional content might reveal the external or inner reality. Understood in this way, every utterance can be said to raise validity claims in at least one of the above areas. Respectively, these validity claims refer to comprehensibility, truth, appropriateness, and truthfulness.

Educational competence thus involves not only a mastery of language and cognitive operations, but also a capacity to acknowledge other persons' right to a "complete symmetry in the distribution of assertion and disputation, revelation and hiding, prescription and following among the partners in communication" (Habermas, 1972: 143). In other words, it also involves a social or intersubjective competence. All of the above are finally underpinned by an egological competence, which implies that the learner is capable to enter into argumentation with others not for the sake of proving his/her point or seeking some other personal benefit, but to search for a *true* understanding (or its approximation) of any given social or moral dilemma. This latter competence might even involve challenging one's own validity claims. The ultimate aim of pedagogy informed by the above notion of competence is to help the learner attain this post-formal-operational stage of social/moral development, which is characterised by *intellectual autonomy*. This means that the learner is able to perform or fulfil his/her social and moral responsibilities *independently* of external sanctions or penalties.

The Competency Based Education/Training approach limits its frame of reference to work-related skills. Consequently, and perhaps quite unwittingly, it thus finds itself defining knowledge in technical terms, such as doing things, or managing oneself and others. The theory of communicative action, on the other hand, recognises other than work-related or

technical skills or competencies. It therefore had to go outside the technical knowledge to seek the generic foundations for such competencies, and thus came to recognise also *emancipatory* and *practical* knowledge. The former relates to the humanist notion of becoming oneself, but also involves the broader area of social emancipation. It quite naturally questions the social and moral values that underpin the social structures, which, the empirical evidence might indicate, tend to block the individual emancipatory struggles. The practical knowledge can refer to the analysis of discourse procedures implicated in the maintenance or re-working of such social structures, but at the same time it embraces basically all communicative activity.

Combined, the broadly defined domain of knowledge and competencies understood as an ongoing process of becoming oneself (and thus a more mature and socially and morally more responsible person) converge to what Habermas calls an *ideal speech situation*. The concept of ideal speech situation is, however, only a theoretical construct, and nowhere it is suggested that it might become an empirical possibility. Neither it is suggested that there might be some predetermined evolutionary pattern waiting to be discovered by humankind. It is, nevertheless, an orientation point for social action—it describes the conditions of private and institutional discourse, and it names structural obstacles to emancipatory struggles.

In the final analysis, the value claims, which are central to the process of emancipation, can be challenged or redeemed only through discourse. It is, however, possible to argue that there might be many types of qualitatively different discourses; for example, authoritative, authoritarian, or liberal. Some discourses might be structured by norms that favour one participant in the discourse, whilst handicapping the other, for example. It is, therefore necessary that in an emancipatory discourse all belief systems, norms, and values be allowed to be challenged, with a proviso that all participants be given symmetrical rights to dispute and assert, and claim and redeem, with the aim of achieving consensus. The theory of communicative action envisages that our education system should aim to develop a capacity in the learner to take an active and competent part in such discourse. At the ontological level such developmental stage is categorised as the *argumentative* developmental stage. The Figure 1 shows its relationship to the Kohlbergian scheme of social and moral development.

Cognitive presupposition	Stages of consciousness	Idea of the good and just life	Sanctions/motivation	Communicative inter-subjectivity subjectivity	Social action orientation
I Preoperational thought	Understand and follow behavioural expectations	Generalized pleasure/pain	Award/punishment	Incomplete intersubjectivity guided by concrete actions and consequences	Pleasure/pain principle
II Concrete operational thought	Understand and follow reflexive behavioural expectations (norms) - law and order orientation	Culturally socialised needs - concrete morality of a customary system of norms	Award/punishment - shame (withdrawal of love and social recognition)	Incomplete intersubjectivity guided by roles and system of norms	Culturally interpreted needs
III Formal operational thought	Social-contractual legalism - ethical principled orientation	Civil liberty and public welfare - moral freedom	Guilt (reaction of conscience)	Incomplete intersubjectivity governed by norms, rules, power-relations relations, and social precedents	Towards achieving a concrete purpose
IV Capacity to enter into an argument	All ethical norms rendered redeemable through discursive procedures	Moral and political freedom	Not appropriate because of natural predisposition to the ideal speech situation.	Complete inter-subjectivity	Towards understanding - i.e. ideal speech situation

Figure 1: Stages of the development of communicative competence (i.e., cognitive and intersubjective competencies, including social and moral development)

With this in mind, I re-examine in Part 5, the key competency areas as outlined in the Mayer, Finn, Carmichael and Ashenden Reports, and using analytical categories developed in this section to name and describe these competences and their related validity claims.

PART 5: COMPETENCE-BASED SKILLING vis-a-vis COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

In Parts 3 and 4 a critique of the competency based approach to education was advanced on the following grounds: (i) its focus was on technical skills only and thus other important learning domains were being neglected, (ii) its underpinning assumption that a successful isolated-skill testing necessarily indicates an existence of a deeper knowledge and understanding was found invalid, and (iii) the combination of the above makes it somewhat unlikely that such educational systems might produce "thinkers" able to reflect critically on the existing social and moral practices.

In this section I will project the preferred outcomes as articulated in the policy documents under discussion on the Habermasian scheme of communicative competence, and re-articulate their technical language in terms of the emancipatory/practical language. Figure 2 attempts to interpret the new-training-paradigm competencies in terms of the Habermas' theory of communicative action.

Language and knowledge

Economic rationalism has not only introduced into our schools and social life new ways of doing things and new organizational hierarchies, but it also brought different concepts and different language. I would like to argue that the language of economic rationalism has become actively implicated in reshaping the way our society is conceptually viewing itself, and that it serves to re-legitimate the power of property rights over citizen rights.¹⁵

What is the basis of my claim? It is an accepted fact that language contains elements of a conception of the world (Gramsci, 1987: 348; Giroux, 1988: 191). To become ourselves, to develop a sense of identity, we use language. As the language is thus actively involved in constructing our meanings, it effectively directs or shapes the way we conceptualise the world. As

Jackson Lears argues, the language thus becomes a political player in the negotiation of power relations in a society by marking

"the boundaries of permissible discourse [and] discouraging the clarification of social alternatives, making it [thus] difficult for the dispossessed to locate the source of their unease, let alone remedy it"
(Jackson Lears, 1985; quoted in Giroux, 1988: 191).

Grace (1989: 211,220) calls this strategy of colonising the language domain of discourse an *ideological manoeuvre*, arguing that in the public sphere *corporate speak* was first introduced through the central governmental agencies under the guise of being "sensitive to a wide range of concerns, but [was] in fact pursuing a single and narrow concern." Johnston (1983: 22) argues that the Karmel Report (1973) used a similar strategy in that it aimed to "create as wide a consensus as possible for future educational policies."

To some extent the spate of policy documents that followed the Karmel Report did enjoy that consensus. What distinguishes the present commissioned reports is that their consensus is rather more artificial. It is a consensus enjoined by default, because the structural selectivity of the State set up the rules of educational policy discourse (and public policy in general) in a way that tends to privilege specific sectional and corporate interests while marginalizing other (and especially critical-pedagogy) voices. As Triado (1984:47) observes:

The organization of the functional groups in corporatist bodies (which are designed to reduce the conflict potential between participating parties and to restrict the range of societal inputs into public policy formation), inevitably entails the marginalization of "vital areas" of social life reflecting important, at times compelling, needs of the lifeworld.

But perhaps the most damaging aspect of the new paradigm of skills formation is its understanding and treatment of knowledge. In fact, the push in the Australian educational policy towards labour market relevant education first emerged in the Williams Report (1979). Freeland describes the realignment of education as outlined in the report in following terms: "The ideological call of the early 1970's for equality, diversity, and devolution was displaced by the much more 'dry' concerns of quality, efficiency, and answerability" (Freeland, 1986: 230).

Language: There is an increasing dissonance between the hegemonic paleosymbols and public language (e.g., "devolution of power to schools" stands for "increased control by the central agency" [e.g., Angus, 1990: 5]). Corporate speak (e.g., "upgrading the stock of human capital," [OECD, 1989]) increasingly defines the way we are encouraged to think about education.

Validity claim: comprehensibility. Progressively, only concepts akin to economic rationalism are deemed valid and politically legitimate. The linguistic concepts thus become implicated in the promotion of the new "regime of truth."

Knowledge: is increasingly instrumentalised, fragmented, and modularised. Knowing and understanding is reduced to an acquisition of an appropriate mix of skills. The emphasis is on cognitive functions. Intellectual autonomy tends to cease to be a desirable educational result (outcome).

Validity claim: truth. True knowledge is work related, documented, and transferable. It must be objectively testable. It is defined as a marketable skill. Original thinking is considered valuable only in so far as it might enhance, in a pre-specified way, the system's performance. Non-hegemonic critical thinking is deemed dysfunctional.

Discourse/intersubjectivity: The agenda of policy discourse is progressively set and controlled by hegemonic forces, but a special care is taken to give an appearance of consensus. The post-Fordist "regime of truth" tends to increasingly empower those agents whose thinking skills, and orientation to success emanate from the "nodal point" of economic rationalism.

Validity claim: appropriateness. The right to participate in policy discourse is determined by property, corporate standing, and ideological attitude. This selectivity of participants (stake holders) which politically structures policy discourse in order to ensure *consensus*, legitimates the hegemonic agenda, and delegitimises or marginalises non-hegemonic positions.

Ego identity and moral development: Ego is systematically fragmented and commodified. Legitimate characteristics include: self-interest and self-reliance, and the capacity to adjust personal aspirations to the system's requirements. Moral development is arrested at the social-contractual legalism level. The notion of common good either ceases to have any legitimate meaning, or the meaning is radically re-worked in such a way that it legitimates "private good" *vis-a-vis* "private deprivation".

Validity claim: truthfulness. Desirable attitudinal outcomes include: positive work attitude, respect for authority, optimistic conformism, dispositional adjustment, and a mixture of a collectivist identity, which is able to accept uncritically the system-defined priorities, and of orientation to success. Moral orientation is defined in terms of social-contractual legalism. Ethically principled motivation is disclaimed (not in the language, but in terms of the practical rules which motivate social action) and replaced with motivation defined in terms of the system's needs. The desirable characteristics of a communicatively competent, post-Fordist, global citizen include: instrumentalised language skills, effective cognitive functioning, political docility, and capacity for attitudinal adjustment.

Figure 2: Standards of communicative competence as defined in the new training paradigm.

In the 1990's the Finn, Carmichael, and Mayer Reports tend to conceptualise knowledge as discrete modules of skills, and education as an acquisition of an appropriate mix of skills. Having thus successfully colonised the language domain of educational discourse, the "reformist" language also succeeded in completing the task of commodification of knowledge begun earlier by the Williams Report. "Human capital development costs are [thus] treated in much the same way as physical and capital investment costs" and the funding of education is linked directly to the mechanism of commodity exchange. In other words, the students (deprived of their personal histories and individual aspirations) are thought of primarily in terms of capital investments.

Furthermore, knowledge and understanding have been severed from the learner. Knowledge becomes something that the learner acquires at the free market and deposits it as his/her credit with a skills bank. It was the OECD (1989: 34) document that introduced the equation: knowledge = currency of the market. *The Progress and Prospects in Improved Skills Recognition Report* (1991) (Ashenden Report), commissioned by NBEET, develops this notion even further and argues for the "development of new credit exchange or currency [i.e., skills] systems to provide national comparability and portability of skills." It proposes that the system be administered by "authorised issuers". This would require new "exchange systems" with recognised "credit transfer" and "skills/credit banks." The knowledge thus becomes a "new unit of currency, smaller and more flexible than certificates awarded at the end of formal courses" (Ashenden, 1991: xi). The position of economic rationalism could hardly be put more bluntly.

Considering the obvious similarities between the neo-classical bias of the OECD education policy statements and policy documents produced or commissioned by DEET and NBEET, it becomes evident whose interests, within the context of the current educational debate in Australia, might be served or listened to. It would appear they are the interests of those who stand to gain most from the conversion to an input/output logic of the neo-classical economic thinking; that is, the very same people on whose behalf the OECD has been conducting the hegemonic *war of manoeuvre*. In this sense, the OECD has become the intellectual General Staff of the hegemonic global capital (Gramsci, 1987: 148),¹⁶ and had thus subsumed the role previously fulfilled by the nation state,

which, in turn, had been relegated to the level of regional manager.

My argument, in this respect, is that the radical shift in the Australian educational policy has been made possible precisely because of the role played by such agencies as the OECD. Through a concerted global discourse strategy, the *rhetoric* of neoclassical economics was allowed, almost unchallenged, to take over the language of public discourse. The direct consequence of this was that the vital questions about economy and society asked at the system level were radically circumscribed by the incapacity of the economic rationalist language to conceptualise the ramifications of its own policies in other than purely technical and fiscal terms.

Discourse and ego identity

Drawing on my earlier discussion, I would like to argue that the post-Fordist public policy discourse far from being marked by a high degree of consensus represents rather a radical departure from consensual politics – the "perceived" consensus is gained only at the expense of marginalizing the critical or non-hegemonic voices.

I have argued that a valid consensus, that is an agreement which has a consensus status, can be derived only after the relevant belief systems, values, and norms have been made problematic. This is a necessary starting point if a true and valid consensus is to be obtained. The process of thematizing and redeeming the claims raised by respective sectional interests needs to involve a willingness and ability to admit to own mistakes and misunderstandings and to learn from them. Indeed, it might be argued that the acid test of an appropriate discourse attitude is a public demonstration of not only responding to challenges to one's own validity claims by oppositional forces with the intention of defending one's own position, but precisely to be able and willing to challenge one's own claims.

The current debate about educational policies is very much guided by a specific type of preferred intersubjective competence. As Figure 2 suggests, it is a competence based on an ability to ask the "correct" questions; namely, technical, problem-solving questions, but not questions challenging the existing belief systems, values or norms underpinning the existing (or emerging) social order. Communicative competence thus delimited then informs the production rules of

public education policy formation and directly affects three distinct levels of educational provision: (i) at a public discourse level it affects what is said about education and who has the legitimate right to make claims about it; (ii) at a teacher-training level it determines the course content and the method of intellectual inquiry; and (iii) at a classroom level it predicates the subject-matter taught and the type of interaction between students, their teachers, and administrators. The "preferred" type of communicative competence thus might directly permeate all levels of educational provision from policy formation to the classroom delivery.

Performative versus formal competence.

In Part 4 I suggested that at the ontological level we might be able to identify (in addition to the Kohlbergian scheme) the fourth, *Argumentative* stage of development. The communicative capacity entailed in achieving such stage might be, perhaps, best described as a *socially grounded capacity to reason about universal principles*.

Young (1990: 117) further argues that the children's capacity to enter into a moral argument is ontogenetically given, and that "there is no formal logical difference between a rational adult and a three year old child in this respect". What is important is that children's argumentative capacity develops in a specific sequence. In a classroom situation the sequential level of a child's cognitive/moral capacity to argue rationally is manifest in his/her capacity to solve societal moral problems. The key issue here in so far as pedagogy is concerned is the relationship between the level at which the child can currently solve such problems and the curricular *problem level* with which the child is asked to interact. In other words, the problem-solving task must be pitched at exactly the level slightly above the child's present ability to solve these problems and below the limit beyond which the child's present capacity cannot extend.

Clearly, there are direct implications for classroom pedagogy. As Young (1990: 118) points out, only the student him/herself can ultimately "fine-tune" the actual level at which he/she might successfully perform and thus extend his/her moral capacity. The teacher's task is to provide approximate limits of the problem level. Such pedagogical practice requires a great deal of co-operative learning, whereby the student must participate in the control of teacher/learner interaction. The important point Young makes is

that the learner must perceive him/herself to be at least in partial control of the learning experience if he/she is to become an independent, autonomous, and critical learner.

Success in solving a moral problem in an autonomous fashion has an *empowering* and *character-forming* effect on the student. It empowers him/her in the sense of becoming *less dependent on the authority's provision of moral guidance*, and, in fact, also *provides epistemological grounding for a challenge to authoritative norms*; and it has a character-forming effect in the sense that the *implicit moral dimension of the resolved problem is internalised and the student's character is thus extended or even altered*.

The situation in which the student participates in setting the problem level of his/her moral-problem learning experience, whereby he/she first explores his/her own cognitive and moral capacity to help set the moral problem in a social context and then finally succeeds in resolving the dilemma, needs to be clearly distinguished from a situation in which a problem-solving task is given to the student without the student's participation and involvement in, firstly, establishing the appropriate problem level, and, secondly, in setting or socially *contextualizing* the moral problem. The latter approach appears to be flawed with respect to: (i) the failure to provide an opportunity for an emotional investment in the learning task, (ii) the student perceives the task as belonging to someone else – the moral dimension implicit in the resolution of the problem is, therefore, unlikely to be internalized by the student, and (iii) the student might perceive it not as a *real* challenge to his/her own capacity to autonomously and creatively resolve the dilemma, but rather as a task requiring him/her to guess what the teacher thinks is the "right" answer. The important point that needs to be made in this respect is that an effective learning of this type cannot be executed in a coercive, non-participatory and pre-determined fashion (Young, 1990: 118).

Miller's insights into the ontogenetically marked problem-solving capacity of children, and especially its relation to fostering children's rational autonomy, have direct implications for school curriculum and classroom pedagogy. In Young's words:

If it is possible to devise a curriculum which does not simply ignore the problem levels at which children are capable of operating, but moves approximately with them in their development,

allowing for respect for and preservation of children's rational autonomy, can we justify not doing so, or settling for a curriculum based on heteronomy?
(Young, 1990: 118)

Most importantly, the distinction Young is making is that between a *formal moral capacity* to comprehend and argue, which is derived from formal skills such as being

able to identify the main ideas, ...paraphrase them, ...record them [and] sort out opinion from fact and to ensure that they do not allow their own personal opinions or assumptions to prevent them from comprehending information being presented
(QERC, 1985: 70)¹⁷,

and which thus remains in a very real sense an abstract and non-participative exercise of cognitive faculties, from a *performative moral capacity*, which is born out of a personal intellectual struggle of *discovery*, a struggle that involves not only the formal, cognitive dimension of teaching/learning interaction, but, most importantly, also the normative and expressive dimensions.

My argument is that the latter fosters the child's capacity to enter into a rational moral or social argument with an orientation towards reaching understanding and with a capacity to acknowledge one's own errors and mistakes and to learn from them. In other words, participative pedagogy, quite in the tradition of Dewey (1956: 15), aims to create such conditions that children's own activities move them inevitably in the direction of fulfilling their own capacities, or, in Habermasian sense, in the direction of *idealized* communicative competence. The former, on the other hand, would appear to foster a clinically detached orientation to success, an attitude likely to inspire a type of "social" action which might fail to take into account social consequences of its own "rational" approach to resolving social problems. Economic rationalism is a type of attitudinal disposition which well exemplifies my point. Pusey (1991b) describes it as being "rational within its own terms"; and claims that it is "self-referential and socially destructive." In other words, its thinking is derived from a formal cognitive capacity deprived of any meaningful social *contextualization*.

The important point is that the post-Fordist pedagogy (which, I would argue, is largely informed by the assumptions of economic

rationalism) tends not only to conceptualize the social world in an extremely narrow manner, but also understands the world thus constructed in a thoroughly instrumental and non-interactive fashion. Its knowledge of the world is objectively given, and, therefore, the method through which such knowledge is obtained can in no way affect it. In fact, the post-Fordist pedagogy recognizes only the technical knowledge, and fails completely to take account of practical (e.g., understanding) or emancipatory (reflective) types of knowledge (Habermas, 1979, 1972).

The flaw of post-Fordist pedagogy is precisely in that it fails to discriminate between various types of knowledge, and consequently treats learning experiences concerned with development of moral attitudes in the same way it treats an instruction in the steam engine mechanics, for example. It fails to take account of: (i) different dimensions of learning (i.e., normative or expressive), (ii) what Peters (1965) termed "procedural principles", which, in the case of moral argumentation, stipulates that a capacity for autonomous moral reasoning might be acquired only when the principles of autonomous and participative learning are used, and (iii) Miller's insights into the ontogenetically bound sequential developments in the learner's capacity to socially and morally mature.

The concept of *performative moral capacity* as discussed above, I believe, corresponds to Habermas' concept of *intersubjective* and *egological communicative competence*. Clearly, such capacity or competence cannot be conceptualised as objective data, in the positivist sense. Instead, it needs to be understood as a personality disposition oriented towards understanding of a given social problematic. Such an intersubjective disposition, therefore, must be closely intertwined with egological communicative competence (or psychological maturity). In a practical life, thus defined communicative competence constitutes an essential prerequisite for a socially responsible public discourse in that it manifestly represents an ego which is willing and prepared to acknowledge in a socially responsible way its own weaknesses, errors, and (where appropriate) conflicts between the *common good* and its *own* interest.

It is thus easy to see how critically important it is for our educational system to address the issues of appropriate curriculum and appropriate procedural pedagogy; for a socially deficient curriculum and pedagogy might, perhaps even in a decisive manner, confine the moral

development of future generations to a specific social and moral developmental level. The implications of Miller's insights into how pedagogical principles might affect our children's moral development, therefore, reach far beyond the classroom door.

CONCLUSION

This article recognises the need for our educational system to develop mechanisms through which it might become more responsive to the labour markets' requirements. In this respect, but with some notable reservations, it endorses the Carmichael Reports' (March and July, 1992) initiative to develop a comprehensive educational and training system in Australia. However, this article identifies several areas within the "preferred" competency-based training approach, which is to underpin the new educational/training system, that are of a particular concern. Among these as the most critical limitations identified were the assumption that a tested skill does represent a deeper knowledge, that educational goals can be collapsed into labour-market relevant skills, and that the CBT approach fails to acknowledge (contrary to its ostensible rhetoric) other than technical domains of learning. This article further suggests that one likely outcome of the new training paradigm, should it be implemented as it is proposed in the documents discussed, might be the loss of our capacity to reflect critically on our social and institutional practices. Lastly, the article suggests that the CBT approach might result in a further fragmentation of our societal moral fibre, with possible disastrous ramifications for the social cohesion of our community.

Given that the critical points raised do not provide particularly new insights into the problematic of the CBT, yet are being consistently ignored by the policy-makers, it is, perhaps, time for a more substantive critique precisely of the power-base underpinning the selectivity procedures which tend to steer the policy formation process in a seemingly predetermined direction. It is for this reason, that in their struggle to understand the current changes in the Australian educational provision, the teachers and teacher educators need to locate these changes within the political economic terrain of educational policy formation. This article was aiming to encourage such a move.

ENDNOTES

1. This article is based on a paper presented at the National Conference of the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia, Perth, 24-28 September, 1992.
2. That is, the structures designed to support the current economic strategy. In the area of education such re-working of structures supporting accumulation involves the restructuring of state education departments, and higher and post-secondary education along the requirements of the structural productivity principle, for example. As part of the overall economic strategy, the restructuring of education has three major goals: (i) provide cost-effective education and training, (ii) supply labourmarket-specific outcomes, and (iii) minimize and marginalize the critique of the new economic regime. For further reading on structures supporting accumulation see Gordon (1980), and Soucek (1992, especially Chapters 2 and 3).
3. For example, short-term interest rates are at present the only remaining monetary policy instrument the Australian government has at its disposal (Phillips, 1992: 17).
4. These concepts are well elaborated in Jessop (1983). See also Soucek (1991, 1992).
5. This phrase refers to the structural correspondence between the requirements of a capital accumulation strategy and the State Central Agencies' organizational structures and decision-making principles designed to support the capital accumulation process. It is also referred to as *structural isomorphism* (see Hargreaves and Reynolds [1989], Chapter 1).
6. AVC level 2 equates with, for example, full-time study to Year 12 + a vocational year at TAFE + six months structured training and work experience.
7. For examples of this see Soucek, 1992, Chapter 6.
8. See the section, *Performative vs. formal competence*, in this article.
9. See, for example, R. Linke's commentary in *Education now* (ABC tapes), broadcast 5 Dec., 1991.

10. For further discussion of this topic see Soucek (Winter/1992); Robertson and Soucek (March, 1991); and The Ministerial Taskforce Report (Nov., 1990).
11. Modus Ponens and Modus Tollens, respectively, are basic rules of logical inference.
12. I am referring to the Freudian notion of using the ontogenetic development (i.e., development of an individual being) as a basis for interpreting the development of the species. For more on this subject see, for example, H. Marcuse (1973), especially pp. 55-67.
13. The Carmichael Council suggests that learning should be based on an application of theoretical knowledge in real life situations. However, from the above discussion it would appear that the Key Competencies curriculum does not have the capacity to deal with theoretical knowledge at a more complex level.
14. The term "egological development" refers to the development of "ego identity". In other words, it refers to the developmental stage of "role competence" and "moral consciousness".
15. Identified and discussed by Piven and Cloward (1982).
16. OECD's major decisions are taken by the Economic Policy Committee, consisting of economic officials and heads of central banks. The purpose of the organization: to "achieve the highest sustainable economic growth, ...maintain financial stability and to contribute to the development of the world economy...[is] to be achieved by liberalizing international trade and capital movements." (Encyclopedia Britanica, 1981; Encyclopedia Americana, 1984.)
17. The point made here is that it is precisely the capacity to make one's own values and assumptions problematic which distinguishes the communicative competence from the type of competence proposed by the new skills-formation paradigm.

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