# The way we live now: An educational challenge

*David Massey*

*David Massey is a Lecturer in Identity and Ethics in the School of Humanities and Human Services at Queensland University of Technology. David was Editor of New Horizons in Education prior to 2002.*

As I reflect upon my time as editor of *New Horizons in Education*, my thoughts turn to the future mindful, however, of the rich legacy of the journal. I turn to the future as I contemplate the way we live now and consider the significance of this for educators and educational offerings. Is it necessary, I wonder, to imagine new horizons for education or, perhaps, do we need to retrieve lost horizons? If there are to be new horizons in education, should they equip students to adapt to the way we live now, and thus 'prosper', or challenge the way we live now, and thus suffer: suffer, for example, alienation, anomie, or ennui? To address these questions I first offer an account of the way we live now. Second, I indicate some harms induced by this way, harms which arguably affect many—far too many—in 'our' society. Finally, I consider how education might respond responsibly to our current challenging predicament.

Educators have always been interested in the future, keen to ensure that the education they provide will equip students well to engage with the future in ways that are both fulfilling and socially responsible. Schools (and other educational settings), for example, as sites of enculturation, seek either to socialize learners into the way things are and presumably will continue to be, in a deep sense, or to radicalize learners to become cultural re/creators. This obviously generates tensions and contestations between those who endorse education as cultural conformity and those who see education as cultural transformation; between those, that is, who like the way we live now and those who do not (to put it bluntly). Interestingly, this distinction, it seems to me, in some ways parallels the distinction between culture understood as a set of standards (Goodenough, 1971) and culture understood as a forum (Bruner, 1986). Jerome Bruner (1986: 123) argues, for instance, "a culture is as much a forum for negotiating and renegotiating meaning and for explicating action as it is a set of rules or specifications for action. Indeed, every culture maintains specialized institutions or occasions for intensifying this "forum-like" feature." He adds that:

> Education is (or should be) one of the principal forums for performing this [forum-like] function-though it is often timid in doing so. It is the forum aspect of a culture that gives its participants a role in constantly making and remaking the culture-an active role as participants rather than as performing spectators who play out their canonical roles according to rule when the appropriate cues occur.

This view is echoed in Issue 103 of *New Horizons in Education* by Michael Christie (2000: 13) who, in explaining—from his 'particular whitefella point of view'—Yirrkala Aboriginal understandings of education, indicated that, when education is understood as Garma it means:

> The open forum where people can talk and share their ideas, differences can be talked through, and everyone can work to reach agreement. It is a forum, in which people perform, and the collective Garma means the open forum where people can talk and share their ideas, performance is available to be read by anyone who has the necessary knowledge and desire.

Sadly, it is surely the case in Australia, today, that there are not only too many ‘performing spectators’ (Bruner, 1986: 123) and too few active participants but also too many non-performing spectators or even non-spectators—citizens who are aliens within, and alienated from, their communities: resident aliens. Why is this so? Perhaps it is due to the way we live now which, I acknowledge, privileges some, but which, if perpetuated and reproduced, is likely to fray the social fabric further and exacerbate the alienation and associated ordeals. I now turn, therefore, to the way we live now before considering how educators might engage with these realities.

## The way we live now

How, then, do we live now? This obviously is a complex story, with many themes, plots, settings and protagonists. I think of it as a Grand Narrative (Grand in the sense that it seeks to make sense of many happenings), but not a Progressive Grand Narrative—that is, a Grand Narrative of Progress—or a Grand Narrative of Emancipation which, as Said (1993: x111) noted, ‘mobilised people in the colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjection.’

On the contrary, I characterise it—and perhaps you will come to see why—as a Depressive Grand Narrative, a narrative which presses down on us with unrelenting force. In doing so, it circumscribes who we are able to be. What I want to suggest, ever so tentatively, is that our social fabric consists of many interwoven threads but that some, at the present time, are more prominent, and harmfully so. These hegemonic threads are so taut, and so (de)pressing, that they threaten those who go against the grain, thus resulting in a social fabric which is unfitting for many: and, surely, any garment with insufficient give (and too much take) is, in the long run, no good for anyone; it is, in other words, unseemly.

What, then, are these narrative threads or storylines?

**Fascism**. First, there is a Fascist thread. I use Fascism, not in the strict, narrow, political sense to refer to Mussolini’s Italy, but more broadly to refer to some key facets of such an ideology, such as the following.

First, Fascism is totalizing: it attempts to regulate and control, standardize and homogenize, all aspects of life—the political, economic, and cultural. Umberto Eco (1995) informs us, for instance, that Hermann Goering (one of the most senior politicians in Nazi Germany and a close confidante of Adolf Hitler) was fond of uttering the phrase, ‘When I hear the word 'culture' I reach for my gun.’ This sentiment echoes a second feature of Fascism which is the endorsement of the use of violence and the suppression of opposition with ferocious aggression. Hitler (1971), for example, admired Mussolini because ‘he made no pacts with the enemies of Italy, but strove for their annihilation by all ways and means.’ The totalizing, violent facets of Fascism coalesce with a third facet, its imperiousness: it is overbearing, domineering, and dictatorial, and contemptuous of ‘inferiors’.

A further feature of Fascism is its disdain of individuality: paradoxically, it exploits individuals but despises individuality. Individuals only have instrumental, not intrinsic, value and are seen as subordinate to, and instruments of, the State. As George Mosse (1996: 156) indicates, for example, the new Fascist man in Mussolini’s Italy ‘was ready to fight and to sacrifice his life for the fatherland.’

Fascists are also xenophobic: they exhibit a deep antipathy to strangers and foreigners, those who are not the same as them. It is interesting to note, on this point, the recent comment by Kofi Annan (2001) that ‘In Europe today, it is xenophobia and the political manipulation of fear of foreigners that pose the greatest threat to democracy, or at least to the quality of democracy.’ Many Australians suspect that the

quality of democracy in Australia, too, is threatened by such antipathies. (See, for example, A Just Australia; The Refugee Council of Australia; Rural Australians for Refugees.)

Finally, there is Fascism's machismo: characterised by displays of ostentatious masculinity; the valuing of tough, vigorous men; aggressive pride in masculinity; disdain for women; and intolerance and condemnation of non-standard sexual habits, from chastity to homosexuality. Mosse (1996: 155) contends, for example, that 'the importance of manliness as a national symbol and as a living example played a vital role in all fascist regimes. Manliness was a principle that transcended daily life.' It is not impertinent to ask, I suggest, if machismo is an all too prominent feature of Australian life which, arguably, is on the rise.

These, then, are some of the qualities of Fascism, qualities which, it seems to me, are all too prevalent in the way we, in Australia, live now. Umberto Eco (1995: 15) cautions that 'Ur-Fascism [Eternal Fascism] is still around us, sometimes in plainclothes…Ur-Fascism can come back under the most innocent of disguises. Our duty is to uncover it and to point our finger at any of its new instances—every day, in every part of the world.' It is not only a Fascist thread that is around us, however, but also a bureaucratic thread.

**Bureaucracy**: The bureaucratic thread is used here to refer to institutions in the political, economic and educational spheres, for example, not merely the administration of government agencies. This thread, too, is composed of several strands such as the following.

Bureaucracies value organisation by "rational" principles, even though their practices often seem to be, or can be demonstrated to be, irrational. One example is the mathematical measurement of the performance of individual workers, such as the widespread use of teaching quality questionnaires (performance indicators) to measure, "rationally", teaching and teacher quality, Max Weber (cited in Coser, 1977: 230) noted long ago, for example, that 'the performance of each individual worker is mathematically measured, each man (sic) becomes a little cog in the machine and, aware of this, his one preoccupation is whether he can become a bigger cog.'

Bureaucracies, secondly, endorse and practice strict subordination: this is illustrated by a manager in Robert Jackall's (1988: 6) study who declared that "What is right in the corporation is what the guy above you wants from you.' A disturbing recent trend, highlighted by Dennis Tourish (2000: 37), is 'the separation of planning from doing—that is, the tendency to exclude those who do the work from decision making, while concentrating strategic planning in elite hands.' Tourish adds that:

> There is growing evidence to suggest that, under such conditions, the quality of decisions declines. Mintzberg (1994) estimates that 90 per cent of the strategic plans that result are never implemented. Nutt (1999) has calculated that 50 per cent of all decisions made by organizations fail. Two-thirds of firms surveyed in one study reported that their quality programs failed to exert a 'significant impact' on competitiveness (Shapiro, 1995)—a warning, perhaps, to those enthusiastic advocates of quality assurance in higher education.

No one (I assume) questions the importance of, and the necessity for, good—high quality—practices, whether they be business, medical or educational practices. What is questioned, however, and rightly so in my view, is the capacity of many bureaucratic quality assurance strategies to deliver on their assurances.

Coupled with practices of strict subordination, elitist strategising and deferential disposition/ing is an inclination to over-identification with the institution one works in resulting, at times, in excessive and chronic identification with the institution or organisation. One is susceptible, therefore, to being taken over by one's institution and thus less likely to question the legitimacy of its bureaucratic procedures, including those which are irrational; those procedures, for instance, which aim and claim to be effective but which are, in fact, quite ineffective. A feature of this process is the surrendering of one's narrative—note that Arthur Frank (1995) examined 'narrative surrender' in a medical context where patients surrender their stories to medical discourse—one's storied identity, to the Depressive Grand Narrative: the institutional story trumps all other stories; the story of the institution that is told is told in "its" discourse and on "its" terms: all other stories are suppressed.

While it is necessary, indubitably, for accountable and effective procedures to be developed and followed, what arguably are unnecessary and wasteful are procedural practices—forms, forms, forms; signatures, signatures, signatures—that are cumbersome and excessive. The danger—and the reality—with such privileging of procedures is that the means of the bureaucracy become the ends of bureaucrats.

Concomitant with the rational calculability of decision-making are depersonalized practices which entail 'the exclusion of love, hatred, and every purely personal, especially irrational and incalculable, feeling from the execution of official tasks' (Weber in Coser, 1977: 230). Bureaucracies, in other words, are designed, deliberately, not to address individual particularities and are disinclined to do so. To work in such settings is to risk losing sight of what one lives for and what it is that constitutes a good life. It is interesting to note, in this respect, the following comment by the Australian Government's Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) that 'Official statistics indicate that Australian organisations are not providing enough flexibility to enable employees to balance competing work and family demands"' (EOWA, 2006).

Are we entrapped in, disenchanted with and constricted by Weber's Iron Cage or are we, as Karl Marx optimistically posited, living in a Garden of Eden—which, obviously, is not the garden Marx envisioned? If it is the latter—and it arguably is for some, at least - then surely it is a garden which requires much weeding and mulching, or one that needs to be replaced by a new, more enchanting, garden.

**Narcissism**: A third thread of the metanarrative we arguably live by is Narcissism. Here I am referring to narcissistic cultures and to individuals who display narcissistic qualities, which are not unrelated. It is important to note, also, that Narcissism, characterised by the following qualities, is being used in its everyday rather than clinical sense.

Those individuals or cultures who display narcissistic qualities are preoccupied with themselves, with their own image, which they fixate on and adore, as Narcissus did in the ancient Greek myth. Because they are so vainly preoccupied, they only notice, and are only interested in, surfaces. In other words, they are superficial and lack depth. Thus they are or become pretentious: image and face are everything; looking good is what counts, not necessarily being good. As Stephen Frosh (1991: 65) indicates, 'The image of modernity is "the image", expressed in the language of television.'

Grandiosity is another facet of Narcissism: narcissists are pompous; create an impression of grandeur or greatness; exaggerate their capacities; and are unapologetically self-promoting. This 'ain't I grand' disposition inevitably produces hubris: excessive pride and self-confidence. This hubris, when allied with disdain of others, as it usually is, results in manipulation: others are 'valued' only to the extent that they can be useful; there is unlikely to be genuine interest in, or empathy for, others. However, as you may be

aware, narcissists, although appearing to love themselves, paradoxically are contemptuous of themselves –and of those who admire them. 'Behind manifest grandiosity, depression is constantly lurking' (Frosh, 1991: 75).

**Triple R materialism:** I refer here to economic, not philosophical, materialism, understood as the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. The triple R stands for rampant, ruthless, and reckless economic practices. It is characterized by corporate colonisation, conspicuous consumption, 'money fever' (Trollope, 1951), gross greed and disrespectful work practices.

Corporate values, discourse and practice are now ubiquitous, and seem to be infiltrating and 'contaminating' many sectors. It is as if our social fabric is all being dyed (died?) a corporate blue. Sunderland (2000), for instance, indicates how corporate discourse, in recent times, is colonizing higher education institutions. She shows, for example, how university students are conceived and positioned as clients in a commodified, free—though paradoxically unfree—higher education market. Interestingly, Koehne (2005: 117) reveals that for some international students at three Victorian universities, there was resistance to 'being positioned as a customer in the marketplace of education. There is a desire to become an international student, but to be considered a customer is often seen as offensive, and is rejected.' Similarly, Victoria Palmer (2006) has examined the infiltration of corporate values into the community services sector, illustrating how (some) cooperatives and co-operators struggle to resist economic imperatives and corporate values of competition, for instance. She explains that 'many community organisations are transforming their previously non-profit structures to become for-profit companies competing in a community services marketplace' (p. 3). The main concern with this development is not with business per se; rather, it is that business and corporate values and practices are exercising such a dominating influence across all sectors, even in sectors such as education and community services where such values contradict—some argue are diametrically opposed to—the central purposes of such practices.

Thorstein Veblen (1973), in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, originally published in 1899, introduced the term 'Conspicuous consumption' which, more recently was described as the situation where 'consumers purchase a conspicuous good in order to signal high income and thereby achieve greater social status' (Corneo and Jeanne, 1997: 1). If consumption was conspicuous in 1899, it surely is ever more so now, as is advertising of 'goods' and services. Indeed, as Daniel Krähmer (2005: 2) posits, advertising 'is a necessary requirement for establishing a product's image: without advertising, goods would be indistinguishable and could not acquire the distinct meaning that allows conspicuous consumption.' Thus a conspicuous consumption setup, Krähmer (2005: 2) explains, is 'where image concerned consumers make choices so as to influence others' (the public's) views about themselves.' Significantly, it could be argued that educational services in the school and higher education sectors are affected increasingly by such advertising and consumption. To what extent, for example, is the drift from government to non-government schools (Caldwell (2005) indicates that, in Victoria, more than 40 per cent of senior secondary students are now bypassing a government school to attend a non-government school) attributable to slick advertising and conspicuous consumption? If, as Krähmer (2005: 2) indicates, 'Advertising creates goodwill if it creates captive consumers who consider purchasing from the seller only from whom they received an ad.', then how many parents have been captured by creative advertising? Is it correct, moreover, to depict that which has been created by such advertising as goodwill?

Material prosperity, particularly if it is shared by all, undeniably is better than material poverty (It is important to note, however, Martha Nussbaum's (2001: 410) comment that 'The world of the poor, as

Steinbeck [in *The Grapes of Wrath*] depicts it, is rich in love, friendship, and spirituality…The poor people are never too stricken to take thought for the equal or greater needs of others.) Some may even endorse Gordon Gecko's assertion that 'greed is good. Greed is right. Greed works.' (*Wall Street*, 1987). However, surely no one would endorse gross greed. Surely not; and yet, arguably, such greed exists. Perhaps it is related to what Anthony Trollope (1951) called 'the money fever' in *The Way We Live Now*, set in the late 19th century. Are we, too, obsessed with money, and (far too) deferential towards the wealthy? Furthermore, do we fail to acknowledge the presence within our communities of the increasing numbers who are relatively poor? When the disparities are widening, not only materially but also educationally, are we entitled to think of ourselves as a good society? We may not be a bad society, but are we good enough?

While there are people who are engaged in fulfilling work there are others who work in jobs which devalue them and which under-challenge their capacities as workers. Karl Marx (cited in Barbalet, 1999) quite some time ago—interestingly, in the current context where there is increasing discussion about work-life balance as noted earlier—claimed that 'labour under capitalist conditions 'does not affirm [the workers] but denies [them] …[they] only feel [themselves] outside [their] work, and in [their] work feel outside [themselves].' This is not to deny the work sites where workers are affirmed and treated with respect; rather, it is to emphasize the unacceptability of work sites where workers are not affirmed. One example of this is the casual work force where work is provided on an uncertain and discontinuous basis. For example, The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) (2002) revealed that:

> An examination of indicators of relative levels of employment and income security show that casual employment is more precarious than traditional employment. More than 62 per cent of casual employees have variable monthly earnings. This compares with 12 per cent of those in traditional employment.

They added that 'Precarious employment combined with a fluctuating income combine to severely restrict the ability of casual employees to take out housing and personal loans, often causing further financial and personal hardship.'

The intertwining qualities associated with Triple R materialism, Narcissism, Bureaucratization and Fascism are latent and often manifest, I contend, in current managerial practices and beliefs. I turn now, therefore, to a consideration of Managerialism in order to show the extent to which such practices have become common place.

**Managerialism**: One central claim of management (and managers) is the assumption of a right to manage, which is seen as natural and uncontestable. This claim is beguiling because, on the one hand, it seems to be legitimate and logical, just as teachers are entitled and expected to teach. On the other hand, however, the problem with the contention is that there is a tendency to overreach; that is, for management to manage more than they are entitled or competent to manage. For example, are managers of hospitals entitled to manage surgery? Are managers of educational institutions entitled to manage classroom learning? It is accepted, I believe, that it is not acceptable for the judiciary to manage the legislature or for the legislature to manage the judiciary. The separation of powers is regarded as important in those contexts, as it should be in educational contexts.

Management, moreover, is often privileged. In many settings I suggest (you may like to examine your own sites of engagement to confirm or refute this assertion) managers are the privileged and most

powerful group: for example, they control agendas; they insist they consult but, in fact, merely inform; and they dominate selection committees. Tourish (2000: 32) offers the following sobering comment:

> recent important experimental studies have found that when managers perceive themselves as having greater control and involvement over the decision making process they immediately exaggerate the quality of the decisions reached (Pfeffer and Cialdini, 1998) - the by-product of various well known self-enhancement biases (Myers, 1996). Managerialism encourages precisely the exercise of ever-greater control over the work of others. Since managers then over-rate the gains from this, it is natural that they seek to tighten the screw yet further. The result is a spiral of escalating control. This diminishes participation, reduces quality and generates frustration on the part of academic staff. Nevertheless, the psychological dynamic encourages persistence in what are failing courses of action.

There is a need for management—of finances, for example—but there is surely no justification for unwarranted management which exaggerates its importance and exceeds its legitimate warrant. As well as the detrimental effects which Tourish noted, there is the danger that management will assume total control over the purse strings and, in doing so, attach too much significance to economic considerations to the neglect of ethical ones such as decency (see, for instance, The Decent Society by Avishai Margarlit, 1996 in which he describes a decent society as 'one whose institutions do not humiliate people under their authority' and compassion (see, for instance, Compassion and Public Life by Martha Nussbaum, 2001). Morgan (1988: 480), for example, indicates that, in a hospital context:

> Financial controls can make hospitals more efficient. But they can also make them less humane. Accounting systems grasp and shape important aspects of the reality of running a hospital, especially the economic and financial aspects, but in the process, they also change the nature and quality of other aspects.

Such economic rationality, widely embraced by management, is (or can be), however, ethically irrational.

Other features of Managerialism, which are not exclusive to management, however, include Careerism, where one understands one's work as a career rather than a vocation or calling; Pseudo-empowerment, the use of a rhetoric of empowerment which disguises the reality of control and where consultation is treated as direction; Simplification, the reduction of complex processes, such as curriculum development or evaluation of teaching, for instance, to simplistic procedures (which are often imposed and tightly monitored); Guru adoration: the adoration of management gurus such as Peter Drucker and Tom Peters which is analogous, arguably, to the idolization of leaders in Fascism. John Micklethwait and Adrian Woolridge (1996), for example, write that:

> wherever one looks, management theorists are laying down the law, reshaping institutions, refashioning the language, and, above all, reorganizing people's lives.
>
> …Many of those laid off in the 1990s were "reengineered" out of their jobs. The name was used in a book, Reengineering the Corporation, published in 1993 by two management theorists, James Champy and Michael Hammer, to refer to the method of reorganizing businesses around "processes," such as selling, rather than administrative fiefs, such as marketing departments.
>
> … The reengineering craze is merely the latest, most potent example of the bewildering power of management gurus throughout this century.

As I noted in Issue 103 (Massey, 2000: 1), commenting on the article by Dennis Tourish, which addressed the malaise affecting Australian universities:

> Many experience a dishonouring and debasement of values and practices which they regard as intrinsically important and necessary for a cohesive and socially responsible society. Dennis questions the effectiveness of the managerialist practices which arguably are colonising the sector and argues that these practices contradict the research evidence on best management practice.

These practices, I continued, 'are affecting not only the Australian higher education sector but also, arguably, the education sector and other sectors as well, such as the public broadcaster, the ABC.' For an insightful examination of the deleterious effects of managerialist practices on the British public broadcaster, the BBC, where a culture of "accountancy as morality" prevailed, see Georgina Born (2004). For an earlier critique of the BBC, described by the speaker/writer as 'a cry as much from the bile duct as the heart', see Dennis Potter's (1994) James MacTaggart Memorial Lecture which he titled, arguably aptly, "Occupying Powers", in which he writes that:

> It was during the making of Midnight Movie that I came to see just how deeply and how seriously the demoralization, the bitterness and, yes, even the hatred had bitten into the working lives of so many hitherto reasonably contented and undoubtedly talented BBC staff. My worst experience was seeing a middle-aged man on the far edge of the set start to cry after a phone call from some manager at the Centre, a grief that I am only marginally glad to say was nothing to do with my script. (pp. 37-38)

A Grand/iose Depressive Narrative? When all these storied threads are stitched together we see the formation, I contend, of a Grand/iose Depressive Narrative. It is depressive because of its tendency to press down upon us, to put us down, to lower and disparage us, to alienate, to reduce our vitality and, in a psychiatric sense, to make us miserable and dejected. It is not only individuals who are depressed, however, but also, arguably, our social practices and institutions. In the education sector, for example, it surely is not impertinent to ask if this grand/iose narrative is depressing - lowering, bringing down, flattening, deadening - the quality of educational provision and engagement? John Synott (2005), for example, argues that there is a crisis in education as a cultural system analogous to other crises facing humanity such as the environment crisis. He attributes this crisis to the failure of education systems worldwide to educate in ways that "support the welfare of humanity as a whole, as a living species that has survived through hundreds of thousands of years of evolution" (p. 32). One (of the four) education systems he critiques is what he terms the corporate global education model. 'This rapidly expanding system of education,' he writes:

> promotes the notion of educational provision as a business, and skills and knowledge as commodities that have value in the information society and which should be bought and sold in a free trade market. This approach to education treats education as a consumer product, whose significance lies in its marketability.
>
> … Leading this approach, universities compete like corporations to sell their educational products to ambitious customers who want to access the benefits that educational qualifications can bring in the global marketplace. (p. 35)

His concern with these educational systems, which are surely far too prevalent in Australian universities but not restricted to them, is that they 'have minimal interest in the sets of values important to the survival of human identity and a universal culture of peace' (p. 35).

If many of us are embedded within, and affected by, a Grand/iose Depressive Narrative is it any wonder, then, that too many experience life as boring and pointless, do not feel that they have a place, and lack direction in leading their lives? To lead a life, Charles Taylor (1997: 179) suggests, is 'to be and become a certain kind of human being.' It entails the sense that, firstly, one's life is moving and, secondly, that one

is guiding that movement, to some extent, at least. Arguably, therefore, the more regulated and controlling a society, the greater the likelihood that one senses that their life is being led (They lead horses, don't they?) rather than senses that one is leading one's life. It is important to note that leading a life, in Taylor's sense, does not endorse what he terms 'the dark side of individualism…a centring on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society' (Taylor, 1991: 4).

To what extent does living the way we live now, as I have portrayed it, put lives at risk—at risk, for instance, of anomie? Anomie, interestingly, is a notion used by Emile Durkheim (1984) in The Division of Labour in Society, originally published in 1893, and in a subsequent book, Suicide (Durkheim, 1966) first published in 1897. He used the term to describe a condition characterized by normlessness (the lack or erosion of standards and values), alienation, and lack of direction or purpose in leading a life. Durkheim believed that anomie was most likely when societies were undergoing changes in economic conditions, for better or worse. It was just as likely, therefore, in times of economic prosperity as it was in times of economic decline. He noted, also, that anomie was more likely when there is a discrepancy between the values which are commonly espoused and what individuals in a society could reasonably expect to achieve.

We live in the best of times; there are no grounds for complaint or dissent; Life has never been better; Let the good times roll. Claims such as these, I suggest, which I assume you are familiar with, are often made by Knowers—those who insist they know—positively, unequivocally, and with certainty—who we are and what we need: those who claim to know, for example, what it is to be an Australian, or what schools are for, or what academics need to make them more efficient and productive, or what people who are disaffected or alienated need to do to get their lives 'back on track'. Such certainties, however, or so it seems to me, are not only unwarranted but also dangerous. One of the dangers is that they cover up, or fail to recognize sufficiently, the depressions in our society and the negative impacts of, for example, policies and practices based on instrumental reason: "the kind of rationality we draw on when we calculate the most economical application of means to a given end. Maximum efficiency, the best cost output ratio, is its measure of success…the ways the demands of economic growth are used to justify very unequal distributions of wealth and income' (Taylor, 1991: 5). Thus, as Taylor indicates:

> A manager in spite of her own orientation may be forced by the conditions of the market to adopt a maximizing strategy she feels is destructive. A bureaucrat, in spite of his personal insight, may be forced by the rules under which he operates to make a decision he knows to be against humanity and good sense (p. 7).

Significantly for educators, what constitutes a fitting, socially responsible, educational response, if one accepts that the Grand/iose Depressive Narrative characterises, reasonably well, the way we live now? Should education equip students to thrive according to the way we live now and, in doing so, reproduce and exacerbate what I have suggested are thin and demeaning values and practices or, alternatively, should education equip students to resist the current ethos and, in doing so, "condemn" them to "failure" because they lack fascist, bureaucratic and narcissistic qualities? Should education, in other words, equip students to make a better world or equip them to make more – and more and more – of the same? Obviously, a critical issue is what constitutes a better world.

For Rex Andrews (1999: 16), 'If ONE person is saved from starvation to live a decent life; if ONE person is spared from torture and unjust imprisonment; if ONE unemployed person is given the chance of a worthwhile job—the world is a BETTER place.' For Colin Power (2005), the National President of WEF

(Australia), seeking to educate for a better world requires having a vision of the good society we aspire to. 'In defining the purpose of education,' he writes, 'we must first generate a shared vision of the kind of society we wish to create.' He, as well as Synott (2005), provide several examples of such visions including UNESCO'S (1995) Universal Ethics Project, The World Education Fellowship's Global Preferred Futures Project (Campbell et al., 2006), and The United Nations Millennium 2000 Report: We the People. My contention is that, while such visions are important and those reports are valuable, there also needs to be critical understanding of the kind of society we are for, without that, there is unlikely to be sufficient impetus for change. In other words, the impulse to reproduce who we are now will be stronger than the imperative for transformation. If who we are is not sufficiently good, as I intimated above, then the prospects for the future are bleak. I acknowledge, however, that some, perhaps many, will disagree with my characterisation.

I believe, in conclusion, that we do, indeed, need new horizons—new imaginaries (Gaonkar and Lee, 2002)—including new horizons in education, but we need, also, a deep and thick understanding and appreciation of our existing horizons, for the feasibility of realizing new horizons necessitates awareness of, and resistance to, the narrow and depressing horizons of the present: it requires, in other words, countering the deadening Grand/iose Depressive Narrative with more enriching narratives, just as some feminists, for example, have resisted master narratives of sexist oppression with counterstories (Hilde Lindemann Nelson, 2001: 6), which Lindemann Nelson describes as stories which resist oppressive identities and attempt to replace them with ones that command respect. She adds that:

> Through their capacity for narrative repair of identities damaged by oppression, counterstories can provide a significant form of resistance to the evil of diminished moral agency…If the dominant group, moved by the counterstory, sees subordinates as developed moral agents, it may be less inclined to deprive them of the opportunity to enjoy valuable roles, relationship, and goods. (p. 7)

I do not pretend that the challenges we face, as a society and as educators, are simple and easy. They are not, and thus easy assurances are unwarranted. They are complex and demanding, far more complex than I have been able to explicate in this brief paper. That is why WEF (Australia), and *New Horizons in Education*, are (and have been) so valuable: they provide a public space for 'negotiating and renegotiating meaning and for explicating action…ways of exploring possible worlds out of the context of immediate need' (Bruner1986: 123). Such public spaces, given our current 'depressing' context and need, are as important as ever, if not more so if one accepts Synott's (2005) claim, noted earlier, that there is a crisis in education and Robert Manne's (2006) recent claim that Australian universities are facing 'one of their not uncommon moments of crisis.' Thus education (and educators)—although, according to Bruner (1986), it too often has been timid in performing its "forum-like" feature—must be resolute in ensuring that it 'gives its participants a role in constantly making and remaking the culture—an active role as participants rather than as performing spectators who play out their canonical roles according to rule when the appropriate cues occur' (Bruner, 1986: 123). I trust WEF will continue to be an active participant in such activities and will be willing not only to counter oppressive and depressive narratives but also to continue to imagine new horizons in and for education. Is there any project that is more important and more practical?

## References

Australian Council of Trade Unions (2002) Improving rights for casuals. Retrieved 5 July, 2006: http://www.actu.asn.au/papers/casualskit/index.html

Andrews, Rex (1999) A Better World In Cross-Cultural Perspective. *New Horizons in Education*, No. 99, November, 4-17.

Annan, Kofi (2001) Democracy: An international issue. *UN Chronicle*, June-August.

Barbalet, J. M. (1999) Boredom and social meaning. *British Journal of Sociology,* 50 (4), 631 – 646.

Bruner, Jerome (1986) *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Born, Georgina (2004) *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC*. London: Secker and Warburg.

Caldwell, B. (2005) The deplorable neglect of our state schools. ON LINE opinion, 14 October. Retrieved 5 July, 2006: http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=87

Campbell, Jack, Baikaloff, Nick and Power, Colin (2006) *Towards a Global Community: Educating for Tomorrow's World*. Dordrecht, NL: Springer.

Christie, Michael (2000) Galtha: the application of Aboriginal philosophy to school learning. *New Horizons in Education,* No. 103, November, 3-19.

Corneo, Giacomo and Jeanne, Olivier (1997) Conspicuous consumption, snobbism and conformism. *Journal of Public Economics,* 66 (1), 55-71.

Coser, Lewis A. (1977) *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context,* second edition. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Durkheim, E. (1966) *Suicide: a Study in Sociology*. Translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson; edited, with an introduction by George Simpson. New York: Free Press.

Durkheim, E. (1984) *The Division of Labor in Society.* With an introduction by Lewis A. Coser; translated by W.D. Halls. New York: Free Press.

Eco, U. (1995) Eternal Fascism: fourteen ways of looking at a Blackshirt. *New York Review of Books,* 22 June, 12-15.

EOWA (2006) Facts on Work/Life Balance in Australia. Retrieved 5 July, 2006: http://eeo.gov.au/About_Equal_Opportunity/Key_Agenda_Items/Work_Life_Balance/Facts_on_Work_Life_Balance_in_Australia.asp

Frank, Arthur (1995) *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Frosh, Stephen (1991) Identity *Crisis. Modernity, Psychoanalysis and the Self*. London: Macmillan.

Gaonkar, Dilip and Lee, Benjamin (2002) Toward new imaginaries: an introduction, *Public Culture,* 14 (1), 1-20.

Goodenough, W. (1971) *Culture, Language, and Society.* An Addison-Wesley Module in Anthropology. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

Hitler, Adolf (1971) *Mein Kampf.* Translated by Ralph Manheim. Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin.

Jackall, Robert (1988) *Moral Mazes: The World of Corporate Managers.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Koehne, Norma (2005) (Re)construction: ways international students talk about their identity. *Australian Journal of Education*, 49 (1), 104-119.

Krähmer, Daniel (2005) A*dvertising and Conspicuous Consumption. Discussion Paper No. 72*, Berlin: Governance and the Efficiency of Economic Systems.

Lindemann Nelson, Hilde (2001) *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Manne, Robert (2006) Perspective. 29 August, *ABC Radio National.*

Margalit, Avishai (1996) *The Decent Society*. translated by Naomi Goldblum. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Massey, David (2000) Editorial. *New Horizons in Education*, No. 103, November, 1-2 .

Micklethwait, John and Wooldridge, Adrian (1996) *The Witch Doctors: Making Sense of the Management Gurus*. New York: Times Books - Random House.

Morgan, G. (1988) Accounting as reality construction: towards a new epistemology for accounting practice. *Accounting, Organizations and Society,* 13 (5), 477-485.

Mosse, George (1996) 8. *The New Fascist Man. In The Image of Man. The Creation of Modern Masculinity*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nussbaum, Martha (2001) *Compassion and Public Life. In Upheavals of Thought: the Intelligence of Emotions*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Palmer, Vikki (2006) *Narratives Beyond Civility: Moral Protest and Cooperation in Ethical Communities*. A Dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, School of Humanities and Human Services, Queensland University of Technology. Under examination.

Potter, Dennis (1994) *Seeing the Blossom.* London and Boston: Faber and Faber.

Power, Colin (2005) Quo Vadis? Education for what purpose? *Social Alternatives,* 24 (4), 13-18.

Said, Edward (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage.

Sunderland, Naomi (2000) How we propagate the everyday: discourse, social practice and the ‘modern’ university. *New Horizons in Education,* No. 103, November, 43-51.

Synott, John (2005) The crisis in education as a cultural system. *Social Alternatives,* 24 (4), 32-38.

Taylor, Charles (1991) *The Ethics of Authenticity.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Taylor, Charles (1997) Leading a Life. In Ruth Chang (Ed.) *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Tourish, Dennis (2000) Management and managerialism: mis/managing Australian universities? *New Horizons in Education,* No. 103, November, 20-42.

Trollope, Anthony (1951) *The Way We Live Now.* London: Oxford University Press. (First published 1875)

Veblen, Thorstein (1973) *The Theory of the Leisure Class.* With an introduction by John Kenneth Galbraith. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. (First published 1899)

UNESCO (1995) *Our Creative Diversity.* Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.

United Nations (2000) Millennium Report: We the People. Available online at: http://www.un.org/millennium

Wall Street (1987) Movie directed by Oliver Stone. 20th Century Fox.

## Contact

David Massey
d.massey@qut.edu.au