Marketing education in the postmodern age

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This paper demonstrates that Australian public education is taking up a series of market identities and raises a number of selected matters that caused us concern as we both surveyed the field and the available critical literature and considered the social justice issues which are raised by markets in education. These matters are, first, the inadequacy of current conceptual frameworks for categorizing various developments and, second, the relative blindness of commentators to the connections between the growth of markets in education and certain wider cultural as opposed to economic shifts. It seems to us that some more recent forms of education markets raise social justice issues that the literature has either not engaged or has engaged in a rather restricted manner. We will identify some of these in the process of exploring the possibilities which theories about postmodernity provide both for explaining the rapid momentum and acceptance of the market lexicon in education in Australia and elsewhere and for predicting possible future trends. Much of what we say arises from research-in-progress. It is therefore tentative, exploratory, speculative and open ended. Our purpose in raising these matters at this stage is to generate discussion which will assist us all to answer at least some of the pressing questions posed by the marketization of education.

Introduction

Since the mid-1980s, Australia has experienced rapid and extensive changes in education at both the Commonwealth and state levels. Such changes have impinged to varying degrees on almost every sector and aspect of education. Education is now constituted and represented according to a language which is entirely different from that associated with previous governments, Labor or Liberal. Observers of educational politics tend to agree that at the Commonwealth and state levels, economic restructuring is the master discourse which informs all policy decisions and corporate management is the master discourse which informs all administrative processes. Most observers also recognize that underlying policy are two central strategies which are deployed in order to ensure that education will cost the state less and serve the economy more. One strategy involves intensified government intervention in education. The other strategy, perhaps paradoxically, involves the privatization and commercialization of public education. These two strategies come together in the sense that the state produces the frameworks within which privatization and commercialization will happen, it promotes certain values to guide these processes and undertakes the ideological work necessary to ensure they are publicly accepted. Social justice is included on this agenda in a subordinate but important way (see further Fitzclarence and Kenway, in press).

A pivotal concept in many of the proposed changes is the market. This concept is central to a number of discourses which constitute the current policy agenda. This may not seem remarkable to observers of educational politics from countries where a 'mixed economy' of schooling is the norm. However, Australians are used to high degrees of centralization and regulation in their education systems. This is the case even in those institutions which define themselves as independent and, to put it more crudely than they
would, market driven. Under these circumstances then, the movement towards a market model represents a policy shift of some magnitude; a shift worth documenting and exploring with care for, in the view of many, it represents the end of an era in which the state sought to ensure equal and universal provision and the beginning of a period of considerable dislocation and uncertainty placing many long-held and worthy educational values at risk.

The market, or more particularly markets in their considerable variety, is/are the topic of this paper, which arises from our current research project titled ‘Educational Markets in the Information Age’. Our concern here is threefold: to demonstrate that Australian public education is taking up a market identity or a series of market identities, to identify a selected number of issues which arise in connection with this almost paradigmatic shift, and to explore ways of understanding the imperatives which have brought it about. Generally, the paper explores the possibilities which a particular theoretical framework provides for explaining the rapid momentum and acceptance of the market lexicon in education in Australia and elsewhere.

Marketing education

A key concept in education in Australia in the late 20th century is the market. As we will demonstrate, education is now to be thought of in market terms and markets of various sorts are to guide priorities and funding. What will become evident from the short list of examples to follow is not simply the centrality of the concept market but its extremely flexible and imprecise usage. The term is in fact applied to a range of processes and practices which, it would seem, are very different in character.

In a very broad sense, education is expected to service the national and international market economy. It is to do so by preparing students for particular sectors of the labour market which will in turn service the export market. Students are to enter the work-force with marketable skills and value is accorded to knowledge, skill and various forms of production according to whether they satisfy market demand and enhance the market economy. Knowledge is to be regarded as an investment which ‘pays off’ for individuals in a job, for industry in a better trained labour force and for the nation in economic growth. Further, business and industry are increasingly encouraged to ‘invest’ in education and training both financially and in order to shape educational programmes, emphases and directions. As a result, they have developed and participated in any number of ‘think tanks’ and ‘business round tables’, all designed to influence education policy in a particular direction. They have also sponsored a number of Chairs in universities, and hybrid educational forms are developing as universities and companies make joint arrangements. Further, ‘School/industry links’ are encouraged and the technical and further education (TAFE) sector has, for some time, been undergoing a radical restructure in order that it may serve and better profit from the training needs of industry by developing marketable competencies in students that are oriented towards the labour markets which will supposedly enhance economic growth. Education is increasingly subsumed under the concept ‘training’. Although not particularly forthcoming with money, the profile of business and industry has never been so high. Of course, such an economistic conceptualization of education if far from new. With varying degrees of intensity, it has guided the motives of many educational policy makers since the introduction of state-provided secondary education in Australia. However, never before has this view been so wide-ranging in its focus and promoted with such intensity.
Education for economic recovery and expansion is the only game permitted in policy circles and this has contributed significantly to some more recent and new forms of marketization.

In an economic climate dominated by enthusiasm for growth and for budget cuts, the public sector generally and the public sector of education particularly are juxtaposed against the private/market sector and found wanting (see Kenway 1990). As a result, genuine market forms, rather than just orientations towards labour and commodity markets, are encouraged in state educational institutions and activities. And, further, education is increasingly to be steered by market forces within as well as beyond education. The production of market forms in public education in Australia includes the transfer of certain costs from the state to the ‘consumer’ via various ‘user pay’ and loan schemes. The public tertiary sector is gradually reintroducing fees in various disguises for undergraduates and a number of full-fee-based post-graduate courses have developed and these are strongly encouraged. Some state schools are also introducing a form of ‘voluntary’ fees. In the interests of export earnings and profits to subsidize their other activities, public universities and TAFE are expected to sell education off- as well as onshore. In the tertiary sector particularly, many individual institutions and faculties are currently either in search of a ‘niche’ in the offshore market (business education is popular in this regard) or trying to identify or open up new markets overseas but also in Australia. Many students have been encouraged onshore not just by full-fee-based courses in public institutions but also by English-language intensive courses for overseas students (ELICOS) and these courses have been mounted by entirely private bodies. Competitive self-interest is now what characterizes relationships between tertiary institutions and increasingly amongst academics, who are ‘encouraged’ to market their ‘intellectual property’ to sponsors from business and industry. Such ‘encouragement’ partly takes the form of proposals to deregulate the academic labour market. Already, market-based salary loadings are paid to academics in certain fields. State and Commonwealth governments are not discouraging, and subtly encouraging, the development of private or semi-private universities. Further, an apparent, some would say manufactured, crisis of confidence in state schooling has led to a significant shift in enrolments from the public to the private sector. The public sector educated 78.9% of school students in 1977 but by 1990 it educated 72.1% (Marginson 1991). As a result state governments have decided to market (promote) state schools to parents and the community.1 The devolution of certain management functions to schools is part of this trajectory allowing principals to ‘contract out’ certain school-related work, to buy in certain educational ‘resources’ and ‘services’, and to ‘target’ local ‘consumers’. Dezoning in various forms is seen to expose state schools to market forces which in turn is supposed to enhance their quality.

Certainly, the state continues to attempt to hold the reins in these marketization processes. In the tertiary sector it has used financial rewards and penalties to reshape the system, at the same time as orienting it towards labour, commodity and educational markets. The enclosure of the tertiary and schooling sectors within corporate management frameworks can also be understood as a mechanism designed to steer the direction for public sector involvement in educational markets. Further, for schools, the rapid moves towards national curriculum frameworks and profiles and the development of the Curriculum Corporation can be seen to represent new disciplinary technologies for educational markets (see further, Kenway 1992). The Curriculum Corporation is a national body, servicing national corporate objectives, in part, through the development and marketing of educational materials. None the less, despite these centrifugal forces, the market metaphor heads up a new policy and administration lexicon in education which
includes such terms as educational property, educational enterprise, entrepreneurial approaches to education, educational services, products, packages, sponsors, commodities and consumers, value-added education, user pays, choice and so on. These and other terms both reflect and are helping to bring into effect a relatively new and different era in public education in Australia, one in which state-provided, institutional education takes on many features of commercial markets.

A market imperative in state educational policy and administration is only part of the story, for what we are also seeing is a new player in the field of education which has the potential to recast education in ways as yet almost unimaginable. Various media, information and communications technologies, in particular broadcasting, publishing and modern computing and telecommunications, are converging to increasingly become integral to the operations of many education (and other) markets. Evident here is a strikingly new and unfamiliar nexus between education, markets and marketing discourses and information technology (Hinkson 1991). Because of their increasing use of various information and communications technologies, state educational institutions are providing an expanding market for commercial markets. For example, fierce competition developed in schools at all levels when the first commercially available microcomputers appeared. Schools were identified as key sites in the commercial contests between computer vendors (Bigum et al. 1987) and, as a result, many have been reconstructed to suit better the interests of those who sell the products of the new information technologies (Bigum 1991). Establishing an electronic ‘beachhead’ of compliant public and private consumers is clearly regarded as important if schools are to be implicated in the logic of the emergent global selling of the new information technologies and their products. And, on the other hand, educational institutions are using their relationships with information technologies in their own marketing enterprises. Some institutions are seeking to promote themselves on the basis of their use of such technologies in the curriculum and others are using such technologies to offer new forms of pedagogy which increase their market reach both nationally and internationally. A key example in this respect is distance education, a field which is, to some extent, at the cutting edge of the nexus of formal education, the new information technologies and educational and other markets. Equally, a number of institutions, technology high schools for instance, are redefining their practices in order to concentrate on preparing their students for employment in high-tech labour markets. In this framework, education is seen as providing a product or ‘output’ which is a necessary ‘input’ of human resources to maintain and develop new high-technology systems. More broadly, much current intellectual energy is being spent in exploring more and more sophisticated ways in which education, markets and information technology can come together efficiently and profitably. The Department of Employment, Education and Training’s (DEET) recently formed National Open Learning Policy Unit is a case in point here. So too are the new, fee-charging ‘open learning’ degree courses sold on public television. There is no doubt that the technologized market momentum will continue to build in the future. Already there is a range of indications about the directions which future combinations of education, markets and the new information technologies might take and, although we will elaborate a little on these later, it is pertinent to note here that they tend to be commercially initiated and therefore guided entirely by the logic of sectional profit.

The intensification of market forms in state education is not a uniquely Australian experience. Literature from the UK and the USA demonstrates clearly that it is happening in these two countries and, as Geoff Whitty (1991) suggests, it is happening in Japan and elsewhere too. It is doubtful that this literature documents the full extent to which a
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Market discourse is reshaping education in a range of countries as well as internationally; nevertheless, all the signs are that we are going through global educational adjustments of increasing force and magnitude.

From the preceding discussion it is evident that more traditional education markets, the archetypal cases here being the private school market (Kenway 1991) and the credential market for the labour market and the economy, are being caught up in and overtaken by a range of new market modes which in many cases mesh with information technologies in various ways which are becoming increasingly complicated and to some extent difficult to predict. Also, as noted earlier, despite its centrality, the concept ‘market’ has many meanings and applications. Further, there are a number of implied assumptions in its varied usage. One assumption is that educators, educational policy makers and administrators understand how markets in education (as opposed to other markets) operate and that they all share common understandings. Given the quite recent rise of the term in education and the relative dearth of sustained and serious research in the area neither is likely to be the case. Another common set of assumptions is that certain lines of thought from economics, business and liberal political philosophy can be unquestioningly transposed on to education and that they will have predictable consequences. There is no convincing evidence to demonstrate that this is so. A further assumption is that education, markets and information technology can and will come together in almost automatically mutually beneficial ways. Again, there is no convincing evidence to demonstrate this. However, despite the lack of conceptual clarity and supportive research evidence the marketization of Australian education without, with and through information technology proceeds apace. In the light of the rapid growth of market forms in education and the sparsity of relevant research evidence, a strong warrant exists for serious, sustained and far-sighted research into the various types of market in operation; the role that the new information technologies play in these markets; the different processes which generate, sustain and flow from them; and the educational, social, cultural and economic benefits and costs involved.

Meanwhile, how are we to understand what is going on? What conceptual frameworks are available to help us do so? How is the recent emergence of market forms in education to be explained and what are its implications? These are questions which a small number of policy analysts, of various persuasions, have been grappling with for some time. However, in our view, they have barely scratched the surface of this phenomenon. The reasons for this are many, not the least being that the pace of change constantly outstrips our capacity to describe it, let alone to explain it theoretically. The process will not stop still long enough for us to pin it down. It is not simply that old market forms are now accompanied by new, it is also that there is now a proliferation of types assembling the familiar and the unfamiliar in ways which would have been difficult to predict a decade ago. The pace of change in this area is ‘white hot’, as Giddens would say, and this suggests that a decade from now the likelihood is that we will be trying to come to grips with forms that we cannot even imagine at this stage. Clearly then, those who wish both to explore and to explain the emergence of markets in education and to identify current and likely future patterns are confronted with a research agenda of some magnitude. And what of those who remain to be convinced about the educational and social benefits of marketing education? If we are sceptical about the truth claims of market advocates and worried about the educational and social consequences of marketing education, then we are also faced with a matter of some political urgency. There is little doubt that what is at risk is the maintenance of a viable and vital public sector capable of sustaining universal provision of resources and services.
We will now raise a number of selected matters that caused us concern as we both surveyed the available critical literature and considered the social justice issues which are raised by markets in education. These matters are, first, the inadequacy of current conceptual frameworks for categorizing various developments and, second, the relative blindness of commentators to the connections between the growth of markets in education and certain wider cultural shifts. The third point relates to, and is contained in our discussion of the second. It seems to us that some more recent forms of education markets raise social justice issues that the literature has either not engaged or has engaged in a rather restricted manner. We will identify some of these. Much of what we are about to say arises from research work-in-progress; it is therefore tentative, exploratory, speculative and open ended. Our purpose in raising these matters at this stage is to generate discussion that will assist us all to answer at least some of the pressing questions posed by the marketization of education.

Interpreting the market

Conceptual frameworks

As education is overtaken by market modes, there is an increasing number of commentators documenting the ways in which this is happening. However, there has not been a corresponding amount of effort put into the development of a conceptual framework which helps to classify the range of ways that markets are manifest. An examination of the literature reveals that many commentators continue to use the concept ‘privatization’ to describe the emergence of educational markets and that they use the term in a global way without either attempting to disaggregate and classify the different types of privatization that are occurring or to ask themselves if what they are talking about can actually be defined as privatization. Rather than identify the tardy in this regard, we will discuss the work of those who have made at least some attempt to classify different market orientations, imperatives and forms. Before we do so, however, it is worth identifying the various dimensions of privatization that are mentioned in other policy literature and seeing what aspects of education may be located there. We draw here from a publication by the Labor Resource Centre (1987) which draws from the work of Heald (1983) who identifies four overlapping components of privatization.

1. Denationalization and load shedding which involves ‘the sale of public assets and the transfer of existing state functions to the private sector’ (p. 33). In education this involves the sale of land, buildings and plant which have been used for educational purposes. This is often the result of the ‘residualization’ (see Preston 1984) of a state school in a locality where state-funded private schools have flourished.

2. The privatization of production which includes: ‘the subsidization of private sector arrangements that undermine public sector provision’ (p. 33); contracting out and voucher distribution. In education this refers to financial support for private educational providers and this can include anything from subsidized ‘in-service’ for private school teachers, to research grants to staff at private universities, to educational institutions or systems engaging the services of private consultants or local cleaning or building contractors. In Australia its most obvious form is the considerable amount of funding which the state pays to the private schools; funding which, as any number of
observers has demonstrated, contributed to the dramatic expansion of private sector education and to the stigmatization of the state sector leading to a crisis of morale and confidence in state schools. The Labor Resource Centre calls this ‘privatization by stealth’ (p. 36).

3. *Liberalization/deregulation* involves the relaxation of ‘statutory monopolies, licensing arrangements or other regulatory mechanisms which prevent private sector firms entering markets exclusively provided by the public sector’ (p. 33). It was such deregulation which allowed for the establishment of a number of private English language intensive courses for overseas students in Australia which proved to be a disaster for many overseas parents and students and an international embarrassment for the government (see Bartos 1990).

4. *The privatization of finance*, in which the ‘service continues to be produced by the public sector but is not funded (fully) by taxation’ (p. 33). Any user-pays scheme fits into this category but primarily those goods and services which were previously provided free of charge.

Richard Pring is one commentator who continues to document the range of market forms in education under the concept ‘privatization’. However, he does argue that various forms of privatization can be categorized under two broad headings.

...the purchasing at *private* expense of educational services within the *public* system, and... The purchasing at *public* expense of educational services in private institutions. (Pring 1987: 11)

In the first instance, Pring draws our attention to the problem of finding a defining line between what the state should and need not provide. However, his implication is that over recent years the line has shifted dramatically, and the cost of many provisions and services which might once have been considered basic or essential have been transferred to parents within the state sector and redefined as enrichment or ‘extras’. The increasing demands placed on schools to raise money and to solicit unpaid parental labour fit into this trajectory (see, for other examples, Walford 1989). (But does school sponsorship fit in here? Is business buying consumers, taught to be so by the school?) Pring’s latter case refers to instances where the state is ‘promoting the private at the expense of the public sector – it is a shifting of resources, an alteration of the overall structure of education’ (Pring 1987: 11). In Australia, as indicated above, state aid fits under this heading. In the UK the ‘assisted places scheme’ can be thus categorized, so can voucher proposals as well as the myriad of other major and minor ways in which the state supports private provision (see further, Pring 1987). As Chitty (1992) observes, processes whereby the state system is starved of resources thus encouraging parents into the private sector could be defined as a more subtle form of privatization.

Pring’s categories have the benefit of alerting us, in an elegantly simple way, to the ebb and flow of resources across the public/private divide and to the ways in which this happens which pose the greatest threat to the public sector and to equitable and universal forms of provision. However, despite the helpfulness of Pring’s categories, it seems to us that they are unable to account for the range of marketization processes under way in education at the moment. They are too general to be able to make some important fine distinctions. For instance, when we talk of the private expense of public education it is important to know whose expense and what aspect of education they are purchasing. If local schools are raising money from business sources through sponsorships then this is likely to have a rather different set of ramifications than if it is raising money directly from parents. Similarly, if nation-state borders are crossed in order to permit the private purchase of public education, then a different set of complexities arises. This leads to the
important questions: 'What is being purchased, by whom, on what scale, at what cost and with what implications for the education provided?' Further difficulties arise with Pring's framework and these include its emphasis on buying and selling (purchase), its reliance on the private/public dualism and its focus on transactions across the private/public divide. It is thus unable to account for the ways in which education is commodified which do not involve funds or purchase in the strict sense. (We use the term commodification here to mean the movement which turns complex social relationships and processes into objects and inserts them into the sphere of market exchange and values.) It thus cannot attend to the various developments which draw, in one way or another, on the concept of 'human capital'. Equally, it has difficulty in accommodating those structural, financial and ideological shifts within the state system, which encourage some aspects of a market mode. These include certain forms of devolution; a highly elaborated emphasis on choice, competitiveness and individualism; school effectiveness research and so forth but which, again, do not necessarily involve the transfer of costs. Such shifts position education in a consumer/product discourse. They encourage institutions to 'market' their speciality and exceptionality. They also encourage an emphasis on image rather than substance and indeed a confusion between the two. The concept of privatization is inadequate in other ways too. Because it is state-centric and because it is only concerned with formal institutionalized education, it does not allow into the frame non-institutional education forms which arise from commodity markets, and neither does it seem to permit discussion of the influence of material commodity markets on both state and private institutionalized education.

How have other policy analysts dealt with the limitations of the concept of privatization? Marginson (1991: 1) argues that the term and the binary oppositions upon which it rests (public/private and non-market/market relations) are no longer adequate to the task - if indeed they ever were. Drawing on feminist thinking he points to a number of instances in which the public/private dualism does not hold up. He suggests that the term commercialization more adequately accounts for many developments in education at the moment and describes it thus:

Commercialisation takes place when production assumes some or all of the forms of market (exchange-based) production: sale of goods or services, scarcity and competition, profit making etc. (p. 1)

He makes the significant point that both privatization (which he wants to define primarily as the transfer of production or assets or reputation across the binary) and commercialization are often related.

Commercial production in the public sector may form new markets in which private sector production later flourishes. Privatisation encourages competition and scarcity and weakens the influence of political factors in production. Under specific circumstances, commercialisation and privatisation may together lead to full market production. (p. 20)

So for Marginson the 'privatization of finance' would probably be classified more as commercialization than privatization, as would deregulation. Stephen Ball (1991) makes a somewhat similar distinction, except that he uses the term marketization saying simply that this involves 'the introduction of market forces into education' (p. 86). He focuses particularly on the local management of state schooling in the UK which was brought about by a number of Education Acts in the 1980s, and argues that 'the elements of this market are choice, competition, diversity' (p. 61) and particularly types of funding and organization (see further pp. 60–69). Implied in Ball's work is a further distinction between the macro-markets in education generated by the educational and economic priorities of the state and micro-markets. He is concerned to identify the micro-markets
which develop in and around schools as policy is rearticulated within local educational and other politics. From his data he makes the point that:

\[ \ldots \text{there is no one 'market in education' and no one set of market conditions. Schools operate in relation to multiple markets, usually local, which have very specific conditions, constraints and histories. Importantly too, schools are increasingly finding themselves implicated in other markets and their attendant regulatory legislation, e.g. leisure, financial and labour markets, each of which impinges upon the other and upon the 'educational markets that emerge out of local responses to' policy. (Ball, work in progress)} \]

We believe that yet further conceptual work is required. Clearly a number of education markets are developing within the state sector as Ball’s work shows and, as Marginson’s work illustrates, many different state/private hybrid markets have emerged over the last two decades or so. However, any adequate discussion of markets in education must also accommodate the increasing range of fully private non-institutional commodity and image forms and those markets which are no longer contained within nation states. Different markets involve different types of exchange – various ‘investments’ and ‘dividends’. They also involve a considerable range of forms and patterns of production, representation and consumption. Our empirical and conceptual work should help us to identify these.

Earlier, we alluded to the fact that markets in education have increasingly included information and communications technologies in their processes of production, representation and consumption. Investing in various ways in such technology is now regarded as common sense in many education markets – and seen to pay dividends in a number of ways: extending market reach and market share, capturing preferable employment options, enhancing learning and so forth. There is no doubt that these technologies are being employed in traditional education markets in quite familiar sorts of ways; for instance in the micro-markets that Ball discusses and in the development of magnet schools such as technology high schools and the like. But, as indicated, the markets/education/technology triad is also generating markets which in many senses are unfamiliar. In our view, such markets are a sign both of the times we are going through and those yet to come. They are in many senses ‘post-modern markets’ (Hinkson 1992).

In order to explain what we mean by this term, we will briefly discuss postmodernism and, in the process, make the case that even though only some markets can be classified as postmodern, the rapid rise of the market form in education is best understood as a postmodern phenomenon.

Postmodernism

Some writers claim that in the late 20th century we live in social and cultural conditions which differ markedly from those of the early 20th and late 19th century (see further, Sharp 1985). Others go so far as to argue that these changes are so fundamental that the current condition must be named in order that it may be distinguished from earlier periods – hence the nomenclature ‘the postmodern age (or condition)’ (see Baudrillard 1981, Jameson 1984, Lyotard 1984). While recognizing the controversy that surrounds such claims we believe that the marketization of education generally and, more particularly, the newer technologically dependent and driven markets are best understood if we can identify some of the key features of the postmodern age. One such key feature is what has been described as the communications revolution which has arisen from what has been called the techno-scientific revolution (see Baudrillard 1981, Hinkson 1987).

Developments in science have brought about the communications revolution, scientific rationality has been its legitimating ideology and both have clearly had a
pervasive influence over many aspects of our life form. New technologies of information and communication have significant implications for culture, society and the economy, and thus for social interaction and human subjectivity. It is appropriate that we identify a number of these implications because they all have a bearing, in different ways, on the education markets alluded to earlier.

Of particular pertinence to this paper are the implications of the techno-scientific and communications revolution for the nation-state. New technologies interact with economic matters to help facilitate transnational enterprises, the operations of which challenge the capacity of nation-states to control their own economies, and cultural and natural environments. Indeed, new technologies of communication are demonstrating an increasing potential to bypass state boundaries. The state thus attempts to steer but is also to some extent steered by the cultural and economic logic of the new technologies of communication. Nowhere is this more evident than in relation to international money markets (see Knightley and Fay 1986).

Broadly, from this point of view, the power of the nation-state, and its capacity for better or worse to control its subjects and their form of life is significantly reduced. As states struggle to transform their national economies and as they direct their resources accordingly, what we see is a shedding of welfare responsibilities. In the case of education, then, what we see is a transfer of certain responsibilities and costs away from the state to civil society. Accompanying this shift is an organizational and psychological reorientation of the education community within the state, encouraging a market/consumer orientation which feeds into the state-sponsored privatization momentum, which then feeds back into it. What also becomes evident is that information and communications technologies and scientific discourses are deployed to promote and legitimate such adjustments. Policy making becomes increasingly caught up in the marketing and policing of images and the differences between the image and ‘the real’ becomes difficult to determine as the state variously uses and abuses media outlets and is used and abused by them. Indeed, images and meaning have been generated and circulated which not only attract and attach people to this market discourse but which also persuade them that it is working in the interests of all. It is in this way that national and international education markets are classified and framed, as Bernstein would say. Let us explain this point.

The techno-scientific revolution has facilitated a certain shift in the nature of economic production itself and has also generated a preference on the part of policy makers that this shift become the basis for a major structural change. The actual and preferred move is from industrial towards postindustrial; from ‘rust bucket’ towards ‘sunrise’ industries and from primary towards service industries. This is most commonly described as a shift from Fordism to post-Fordism. While allowing for the range of post-Fordisms, Baggaley (1991) offers a succinct account of what this shift is said to entail, saying:

Since the 1970s, it is claimed, Fordist forms of economic organization have entered a period of crisis, and the resolution of this crisis lies in the emergence of a new set of economic institutions which would ensure economic growth. This new arrangement, post-Fordism, would be characterized by short run batch-type production in small or decentralized firms, by the rolling back and partial privatization of the welfare state and by a decline in the membership of trade unions and of their industrial and political power. (p.151)

He notes that the key features of ideal-type post-Fordism, other than the above, are:

... fragmented niche markets, general flexible machinery, multi-skilled workers, 'human relations' management strategy, decentralized local or plant level bargaining, geographically new industrial districts, flexible specialist communities. (p.155)

Both accompanying and facilitating this shift in the nature of economic production has been the development of a new form of social labour. Indeed, at the very heart of this
transformation is the work of the 'intellectually trained', those:

... who apply established intellectual and scientific skills in work geared to the ends laid down by the owners or controllers of large scale industrial and administrative complexes. (Sharp and White 1968: 15)

The 'intellectual techniques' which such people deploy are abstract and portable. They have many applications and are thus, in many senses, universal (see Sharp 1985). Mental labour both replaces and displaces manual labour. It is clear that policy makers in many 'developed' nations believe that this segment of the work-force must be expanded to ensure international competitiveness. 'Really useful knowledge', that worth national and personal investment, has increasingly been defined as either technical and scientific, or that which services and expands the market economy. Hence students are steered towards maths, science, technology, commerce, business studies and Asian languages. Education institutions are to gear themselves accordingly and put the weight of their efforts and their funds in these directions.

But this is clearly not the end of the matter for, as Bagguley (1991) points out, post-Fordism also brings with it reorientations in the practices of management and industrial relations involving processes of de-centring. Let us explore this point a little through the work of Steven Ball. Ball (1991) makes the case that recent crises in capitalist accumulation and as a result in nation-states have brought about a new correspondence between education and the economy. As he says 'education is made more subordinate to and less autonomous from the commodity form...[which] penetrates the form, content and delivery...of schooling' (p. 81). Privatization, marketization, differentiation, vocationalism and the proletarianization of the teaching service in the UK are, as he demonstrates in some detail, reflections of this. And, with regard to vocationalism, he makes the point that the industrial lobby and economically oriented education policy makers are keen that schools not only produce 'enterprising' individuals for the 'enterprise' culture they are trying to effect, but also produce the types of individuals who have the attitudes and competencies appropriate to an emergent and anticipated post-Fordist economy. Hence this 'lobby' has developed a critique of 'narrow, abstract, academic and elitist' (p. 102) forms of curriculum and assessment and formed an ideological alliance with progressivist theories of learning and motivation (a process orientation, co-operation, problem solving, open-ended investigation and the like). Vocationally oriented education ('vocational progressivism') is to develop in students 'flexible competencies and a predisposition to change' (p. 102). The long and short of Ball's argument is that educational institutions are not only to produce the post-Fordist, multiskilled, innovative worker but to behave in post-Fordist ways themselves; moving away from mass production and mass markets to niche markets and 'flexible specialization'. His case is, first, that a post-Fordist mind-set is currently having implications in schools for management styles, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment and, second, that this mind-set is largely the result of the ways in which fractions of capital and factions within the state have responded to the crises mentioned earlier and engaged in profoundly successful discursive and interdiscursive work in order to reshape political and public opinion along post-Fordist lines.

As Ball and many others show, a considerable array of economic and political forces have converged to encourage the marketization of education in the UK and elsewhere. Popular educational and economic sentiments and concerns have been reworked and attached to the discursive ensembles of the neo-liberal and libertarian strands of the New Right whose ideas have been adjusted and rearticulated by policy makers in accordance with broader state imperatives. However, this does not fully explain why such ideas seem to have made their way so readily into popular consciousness and gained such acceptance.
We therefore believe it is necessary to move beyond explanations which focus on post-Fordism and beyond those which focus on the discursive politics of dominant fragments and fractions of labour, capital and governments. Neither engages sufficiently with some other significant cultural shifts which, in our view, help to explain why markets in education have found such a receptive audience. These shifts are more usually associated with postmodernism. Whitty (1991) takes up this point and suggests that it is possible to read the devolutionary and deregulatory imperatives associated with marketing education as part of a broader and deeper cultural shift – as a ‘wider retreat from modern, bureaucratized state education systems’ now seen to be ‘inappropriate to societies of the late twentieth century’, and as representing ‘new ways of resolving the core problems facing the state’ (p. 41) as a result of changes in capital accumulation. He further observes that the diversification of provision, and its associated notion of choice and so on, need not be seen as solely a reflection of a new Trinity between sections of the New Right, governments and industry but that such themes resonate strongly both with the cultural pluralism associated with the decline of totalizing meta-narratives of whatever sort and with the rise of cultural projects premised on notions of difference and fragmentation. Such projects, he says, are practised through pragmatic, shifting and short-lived alliances in relation to particular local struggles; ‘unprincipled alliances’ based in ‘changes in the mode of social solidarity’ (p. 8). None the less, Whitty is sceptical that such changes, to the extent that they exist, actually challenge structural inequalities in any significant way. To imagine this is otherwise, he suggests, is perhaps to mistake ‘phenomenal forms for structural relations’ and is also to replace the meta-narratives associated with social planning and social intervention (e.g. Keynesian economics and social democracy) with another meta-narrative – the market.

In our view, the dominance of markets, or more particularly intensified commodity forms, is one defining feature of postmodernity. The techno-scientific and communications revolutions have helped to facilitate the cultural dominance of the commodity. They have done so by revolutionizing processes of production and so reducing the need for manual work but also by invading people’s lives with a flood of both commodities and seductive images which generate desire. As a result, people now are increasingly coming to define themselves less as workers and more as consumers. Non-market relationships are redefined according to the logic of the market. And, as Ranson (1990) argues, markets require a shift in focus from the collective and the community to the individual, from public service to private service, and from other people to the self. They redefine the meaning of such terms as rights, citizenship and democracy. Civil and welfare rights and civic responsibility give way to market rights in consumer democracy. Clearly, in promoting the marketization of education, policy makers seek to promote and tap into a cult of educational selfishness in the national interest. Educational democracy is redefined as consumer democracy in the educational supermarket. Buying an education becomes a substitute for getting an education. Consumers seek the competitive edge at the expense of others and look for value-added education. Increasingly, information technology is seen to be the best value to add. That aside, by altering the relationship between space and time, new technologies have changed our patterns of communication and integration. The face-to-face has been replaced by more abstract and global ways of relating (see further, Hinkson 1991). This leads us back to our earlier point about postmodern markets in education.
Postmodern markets in education

John Hinkson (1991) argues that the communications revolution 'elaborates and facilitates markets' through a process of social extension; constructing 'settings for relations that go beyond the face to face' (p. 117). He goes so far as to argue that the market is 'crucially influenced by the communications revolution' which has indeed created a new phenomenon: the 'postmodern market'. There are four distinguishing features of postmodern markets, Hinkson argues, and these are:

1. swift and wide-ranging transactions facilitated by information technology (the international money market is the paradigm case here);
2. the assimilation of previously non-market spheres of life as a result of technological intervention;
3. the centrality of the image through the mass media;
4. a dramatic increase in the flow of commodities with implications for cultural production and self-production.

This postmodern market is made possible, he notes, by the application of the intellectual techniques discussed earlier, techniques produced by currently favoured and promoted segments of formal education systems.

There are clearly currently many market forms in education and as Ball's (1990) evidence with regard to the micro-markets in schools in the UK demonstrates, many do not take on any features of the postmodern form as described by Hinkson, even if they have, as we argued earlier, emerged, to some extent, as the remote result of the changed cultural conditions of postmodernity. None the less, as we also argued earlier, new forms are emerging which have all or some of the features of postmodern markets and it is highly probable that more such markets will develop in education. It is even possible that the education/technology/markets triad has the potential to change the shape of education as we know it. How might this happen?

Rotman (1987) describes the path that money has taken from gold to paper to magnetic marks on a disk. Modern computing and communication networks facilitated this most recent historical shift to, in his view, postmodern money or xenocurrency. The education/markets/technology triad may well be bringing into effect a similar chain of events; it is possible that in the not too distant future magnetic marks on a disk may come to constitute the core of education and that we will then be in the era of xeno-education. Already there are signs of emergent forms which do not merely extend the somewhat better known interactions of the new information technologies, markets and education which we mentioned earlier. Indeed, there are some early indications that the state's monopoly over education is being discreetly challenged by such technologies which are bringing into effect new modes of de-institutionalized education guided entirely by market logic. It may well be that the educational centre of gravity is in the process of shifting; that education policy has not only been de-centred by the processes of devolution and the marketization of public services but by informal, technologically and commercially mediated learning. This form of 'education' certainly has the potential to challenge the pedagogical primacy in students' lives of institutionalized, formal and face-to-face learning. As the home increasingly becomes the focus for the delivery of information and education, there is no doubt that students' informal learning will be increasingly dispersed across the fleeting, shifting but life-dominating webs of information which are spun by communications technologies. In an electronic ecology, computer-based games in the home far outnumber their more serious counterparts in use in formal educational settings.
When numeric superiority is coupled with the eventual emergence of a virtual reality system (Rheingold 1991) in the home for various purposes, the threat to traditional schools, teachers and teaching will be serious. Meanwhile, the embryonic mass electronic media categories of infotainment and edutainment point to some of the possible new forms that education may take. Science and technology parks point to another.

However, at the moment full-fee, off-shore, distance education is a paradigm case of a postmodern market. The phone, fax, E-mail, and the satellite have brought space and time into new realignments. Relationships in this educational mode are abstract and fleeting, mediated by the market and the technology (see further, Fitzclarence and Kemmis 1988). And, if current trends are any indication, this is what the pundits would call a ‘growth area’. While Hinkson’s work is useful in identifying the central features here, a more complete understanding of the context in which these particular markets are developing is provided by the thinking of postmodern geography. To understand the context is to get some sense of the likely future directions of this genre of market in education. But it is also to recognize that exporting education puts significantly new issues on the educational and political agenda. These will become evident as we proceed.

It is postmodern geographers who explore what happens when new communication and information technologies, markets, post-Fordism and neo- and postcolonialism (see Ferguson et al.1990) come together. Offshore education markets also bring such processes together. So it is pertinent to ask what postmodern geography has to say that might illuminate current and future offshore markets in education. In tentatively answering this question we will draw particularly on the work of Kevin Robins (1989, 1991).

A central theme in discussions of postmodern geography is that new technologies in association with the international restructuring of capitalist economies break down the forms of organization which have arisen as a result of geography and, as Robins (1991) points out, introduce new and competing ‘centrifugal and centripetal forces’ (p. 24). In Robins’ view, global capital and new technologies have brought about the emergence of a new ‘global-local nexus’; more specifically in the drive to capture world-scale advantage, in a world of continuous innovation, giant transnational corporations have become ‘flexible’, polycentric and deteritorialized; Robins shows that on the one hand globalization involves flexible forms of corporate association giving ‘maximum integration on a world scale’ and the possibility of responsiveness at a local level. This is made possible through new computer communications systems which create a new and abstract electronic space across pre-existing physical and social geographies – the ‘network firm’ creates a new ‘electronic geography’.

One tendency here is towards global cultural convergence, the production of both universal cultural products and global market consumers. The impulse is towards a borderless ‘placeless geography of image and simulation’ (1991: 29) where time and space horizons are compressed and where communication is instant and depthless. This is created by new global cultural corporations such as NBC and Sony. However, as Robins shows, the globalization of culture is not necessarily about repressing local difference and particularity; it is about assembling, displaying, celebrating, commodifying and exploiting it. ‘The local and “exotic” are torn out of place and time to be repackaged for the world bazaar’ (p. 31) – delocalized. The other side of the global/local nexus is post-Fordist ‘flexible specialization’, and the ‘revitalization and revalidation’ (p. 34) of a strong sense of place in economic, cultural and self production – a renaissance of place-bound traditions and ways of life. However, this localization imperative is, according to Robins, in many cases a form of relocalization – ‘place-making’ and marketing in ‘placeless times’; it is ‘about new and intricate relations between global space and local space’ (p. 35). While
positive in some senses, he argues that this should not be romanticized or attributed with too much agency for, in this context, the local can mean what the global wants it to mean and it can be seen as useful today and useless tomorrow. The defining features of this global/locus nexus then are:

... new relations between space and place, flexibility and mobility, centre and periphery, 'real' and 'virtual' space 'inside and outside', frontier and territory. (Robins 1991: 41).

What are the implications of all this for education? If we think of education in the broadest possible sense as what we learn informally as we live, then the implications of this are immense. In global terms such education is already in the hands of transnational corporations and their myriad subsidiaries, and the question is how does what they do and the way they do it shape and reshape our individual and collective identities as we plug in, at various points, to their cultural and economic communications networks? This is the meta question for social theory and certainly not one we can engage adequately here. However, it does suggest that the commodity and the image will increasingly become the structuring forces of our lives, creating the conditions in which we learn how to be, who to be and what to value. As Schwartz, cited in Brand (1988) argues, mass finance (commodity) and entertainment (image) will shape computers and communication. And, in a very broad sense, this does lend further support to the point we made earlier about the commodification of our culture and its capacity to dispose us favourably towards markets. As work, place and community shape our identity less and less, then the commodity and the image slip into the lacuna.

Clearly the global/local nexus also raises questions about the role that the nation-state plays in identity formation. Notions of citizenship, rights, justice and so forth have long been connected to governments and thus to the state/nation. What meaning do these terms have in a global economy and culture? As Ted Wheelwright (1992) says:

...the globalization of capital does not necessarily change its character, except in one respect; it becomes less susceptible to the checks and balances of the nation state and national trade unions and movements. Its freedom to expand and contract, to exploit and relocate is greatly enhanced and its tendency to foster inequality is accentuated, for there is no world government, no world taxing authority, no global minimum wage or welfare state. World capitalism is therefore more unstable and creates more inequality within and between nations because there is no countervailing politically responsible power to offset it. (p.74)

And, as any number of commentators have indicated, the image turns us inwards and outwards; on the one hand privatizing us and on the other directing us towards a distant and often seductive 'out there', which is often not there; or at least not there in the ways represented. For example, the simulacrum (see Baudrillard 1981) of the 'pleasures' of life in a market economy no doubt played a role in the recent fall of governments in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Now, many people in many instances are finding to their cost that the image was all there was. Doubtless, this is one example of a myriad which would demonstrate the power and emptiness of the image. None the less, the image has led people to distrust the evidence of their senses. These days it seems that the image does not have to prove itself - the senses do. And sometimes this evidence has to be considerable before it is accepted as sense. Let us take an example. In the recent UK election, the 'look around' factor was deliberately brought into play. People were told to turn away from their screens and see around them the damaging effects of the recession and the Tory government. To make the point more clearly the market and the image reinforce and hide each other. Robins (1989) makes this point well when he talks of image markets. In certain senses for consumers, the market is a simulacrum; it layers promise upon promise, but it has no centre of accountability.

Getting back to distance education and the new global/local nexus, there are many
questions about the future worth asking. What is the place of distance education in this new geography? And, will it eventually model itself along the lines outlined above and map itself onto current network firms and electronic geographies? If so, will this mean that competing transnational education corporations with world-wide subsidiaries will develop and operate outside the nation-state? Will these new education corporations maximize their accumulation by creating and intensifying demand and achieving world-scale advantage by the continual denial of gratification? Will we have life-long education on a global scale which exists for no reason other than profit for the ‘teacher’? Robins (1991: 28) argues that the command centre or ‘strategic nodes’ of world-wide electronic grids and their associated economies are such global cities as New York, Tokyo and London. Will these become the centres for the development of the postmodern, post-Fordist curriculum? And what will constitute the global curriculum? Will we have world-wide intellectual convergence and/or flexible specialization; will it be post- or neo-colonial? What is the place here for local knowledges? Indeed, what sort of curriculum is created for ‘a world of flows, images and screens’: a world of electronic space with its depthlessness and instantaneity (Robins 1991: 29)? If image and education become one, how do we learn to tell one from the other? Is that the end of ‘reality’? And finally, is there any place in this future place-less educational economy of the sign for matters of ethics and justice?

Markets are not premised on the assumption of fairness or equality. While their proponents make the claim that there is general benefit from competitive self-interest, they also argue that those who play according to the rules and are best at the game deserve the greatest rewards. Ultimately, markets operate according to the logic of profit, only in certain sets of interests and let the ‘weak’ go to the wall. They work to produce a selfish, individualistic culture in which the main moral imperative is gratification, not the collective good. Of course critical policy analysts have been making this point for some time, although obviously not to much avail. None the less, the point stands and is supported. However, we are concerned that postmodern markets in education will both generate and obscure forms of injustice that are significantly different from those noted above. We suspect that certain of these injustices will be even more difficult to address precisely because the global markets which generate them stand outside the state and therefore outside our normal channels of redress. In many senses this is a devil we do not know. Or do we know it in another form? Do the operations of international money markets give us a hint? In the postmodern financial jungle ‘the market is a predator. It looks around for a vulnerable currency and strikes it, unmercifully, like a cobra’ (Knightley and Fay, *The Age, Sunday Extra*, 18 January 1986, p. 3).

**Conclusion?**

Education is not a field of practice that stands outside its context. It helps to shape and is shaped by that context and so contains traces of the old, the new and the in-between. The same can be said about markets in education. They too are a sign of their times and, as we have argued, some, either fully or partially, are a sign of ‘new times’, postmodern times, yet-to-be-known times. None the less, it does seem as if we are ‘inside the belly of this monster’, as Donna Haraway (1991) would say. Our current concern is to understand much more fully what we are inside and up against. However, we also hope to be able to move beyond the radical pessimism evident above to talk of other things, such as, for example, educational possibilities and oppositional politics within and against postmodern
markets in education. Those who are interested in exploring ideas with us can do so by E-mail. What does that say?

Notes

1. Interestingly, the rise of the market in state education has led to a concomitant intensification in the private school sector. A number of private schools now employ public relations officers in various guises and fund-raising specialists and collectively conduct quite large-scale marketing enterprises such as Information Fairs. A recent Fair was held in the World Trade Centre in Melbourne and was promoted through a 12-page supplement in a major newspaper (see The Age Classified Advertising Feature, Wednesday 19 February 1992, pp. 1-12).

2. cj@deakin OZ AU or jlf@deakin OZ AU.

References


