Chapter Two

Critical geography, critical education

A democratic ethos is already evident in much radical geography – one that is decolonising, keenly sensitive to structural injustice, and situated in a careful politics for a liveable life. An ethos is always negotiated and situated but is also guided by ethico-political principles that are shared. Let’s name them. Sophie Bond (1) p.17

New Labour’s efforts in this spirit entailed creating the educational context in which national subjects could be effectively trained to succeed in a globalized economy. For Blair, this meant education for the knowledge economy. He believed government should prepare its workers with the skills necessary to implement the new technologies of a changing world, one of rapid transformation and intense global competition. Katherine Mitchell (2) p.60

The neoliberal trend often pushes to the periphery those public goods that schools and colleges facilitate and epitomise. If we are hoping that state education, in the manner of John Dewey, acts as a laboratory in which students learn to collaborate and cooperate as emerging citizens in both the educational community and the wider community, then its consumerisation potentially negates that hope Neil Hopkins.(3) p. 1

This chapter locates critical geography and critical education (the key ingredients of critical school geography) within the rise of modernity and critical social theory. It argues that the Left needs to recapture the modern idea of progress with a universal project, sustainable development. This alternative to neoliberal capitalism should be open to difference or local interpretation as long as universal values are respected. A positive notion of freedom is central to such progress and requires everyone’s basic needs to be met; their critical social literacy to be developed; and new technologies to be deployed for the common good. Schooling has a key role to play in exploring how this might be done and
equipping students with relevant attributes and competences (Unesco guidance, p. 19 -25).

Having introduced a new Left modernity focussed on sustainability, the chapter then traces the background to critical geography and critical education and outlines their current characteristics. It next shifts its focus to schooling and the manner in which recent neoliberal reforms further limit students’ and teachers’ freedoms. Critical educators contest schooling’s enclosure (privatisation); commodification (a commodity to be chosen in market where schools compete for students); and the alienation experienced by many students and teachers. Critical geographers highlight new spatial divisions of schooling encouraged by the discourse and realities of parental choice. Both argue for the establishment of truly comprehensive and democratic community schools that produce socially useful young workers, consumers and citizens by deploying critical pedagogy.

The associated curriculum unit focuses on SDG 4 (quality education) and GCE topic 8 (ethically responsible behaviour). It allows students to examine the impact of parental choice on spatial divisions of schooling and the quality of education in their local area.

**Modernity**

Schools and geography are products of modernity (4), a distinct form of social life that has a history stretching back to the Age of Enlightenment in the late seventeenth. and early eighteenth centuries. It can be understood as a period of history associated with such events as the French and industrial revolutions; a set of institutions and processes such as colonisation, bureaucracy, and liberal democracy; and as a repertoire of conceptual innovations revolving around universal ideals of progress, freedom, equality, and democracy that had developed independently in numerous cultures around the world but which took on a particular resonance in Europe (5).

Modernity’s history in the West reveals four basic elements:

- **Economically**, modernity involved the expansion of a global capitalist economy with a related division of labour. Economic production was increasingly shaped by the profit motive; wage labour was increasingly the main form of employment; and industrial technology was increasingly
harnessed to transform natural resources into commodities. This involved colonialism and imperialism.

- **Politically**, modernity involved the consolidation of the centralised nation state together with the extension of bureaucratic forms of administration and liberal democratic forms of government. The state serves to protect property rights, maintain law and order, and transmit ideology supportive of capitalism via such processes as schooling.

- **Culturally**, modernity offered a world of progress (liberty, equality, fraternity) as science and rational thinking were applied to the running of society. It involved a break with a traditional and holistic worldview that emphasised the inter-connectedness of all living and non-living things, the importance of divine will and provenance, and the virtue of things remaining the same. This was replaced with a reductionist and modern worldview in which the world is seen in an objective, instrumentalist and reductionist way, and change in the form of social development was valued.

- **Socially**, modernity involved the re-sorting of social classes and increasingly complex patterns of social stratification. Socialism is the counter culture of modernity and it gained the mass support of working people because it promised the fulfilment of the modern project in ways that better realised liberty, equality and fraternity.

While the key ideas in chapter one focussed on the political economy of global capitalism, modernity encompasses these ideas but casts its net more widely. Capitalism is an expansionary universal within modernity (6) that weaves itself through multiple cultural fabrics, reworking them as it goes along producing locally specific forms of capitalism that cohabit the world (7). Postcapitalism (page 15) represents a project aimed at subverting this universal and taking modernity in new directions. It is guided by critical theory.

**Mainstream and critical social theory**

The rise of modernity saw the emergence of mainstream and critical social science. While all science should be critical (reflexive, questioning, testing answers carefully and thoroughly, logical, rigorous, and dealing with important issues) the critical tradition in the social sciences distinguishes between mainstream (problem solving) theory and critical theory (8). While the former ‘takes the world as it finds it’, the latter ‘stands apart from the prevailing order of the world and asks how that order came about’ (9), p. 129). So ‘critical
theory can be a guide to bringing about an alternative order, whereas problem solving theory is a guide to tactical actions which, intended or unintended, sustain the existing order’ (9), p. 130).

Critical social theory originated with the early anarchists, Marx, and the Frankfurt School (10) (11), now incorporates some aspects of social constructivism (12), and is applied in such fields as radical ecology, feminism, and post-colonialism. Critical theory attempts to understand, analyse, criticize and alter social structures and phenomena (environmental, economic, political, cultural, technological, spatial and psychological) that have features of oppression, domination, exploitation, injustice, misery, and unsustainability. It does this with a view to changing or eliminating these structures and phenomena and expanding the scope of freedom, democracy, justice, happiness, and sustainability (13). The philosophy and sociology of knowledge associated with critical social theory is explored in chapter four.

While the new optimists (14) claim the world is better than ever and Alcock (15) argues for their views to be reflected in the geography classroom, we saw in chapter one that global development is contradictory and progress is not inevitable. Critical theory focuses on the dark side of European modernity associating it with among other things, colonial exploitation, genocide, imperialism, climate change, a global order premised on waged labour and capital accumulation; and progress that relies on borrowing financial and ecological capital from the future. Chapter one argued for an alternative to the current dominant neoliberal form of development and linked this to postcapitalism, left populism, or a new Left modernity.

**A Left modernity**

The unsustainable nature of the current world order suggests that we need an alternative expansionary and inclusive universal to combat and supersede neoliberal capitalism. It would contest the meanings of progress, development and the future; be associated with future orientated politics and education; and recognize that political strategies designed to defend localities, create autonomous spaces, identities and lifestyles, and tackle single issues are often desirable but insufficient (6).

Sustainable development has a strong claim to be considered such a universal provided it is guided by critical theory and such universal values as those incorporated into the Earth Charter (16) and is open to difference. Sustainable
development should integrate rather than eliminate difference; allow for living in common despite a plurality of ways of life; and be open to co-creation by global citizens from around the world. As such sustainable development is ‘a subversive and emancipatory vector of change’ (6), a placeholder that a variety of ideals, practices, collectives and technologies come to occupy. This text sees radical social movements and parties on the populist left that are committed to radical democracy and a global green new deal, playing a key role in establishing a new left modernity (the ‘next normal’) in much of the world, but acknowledges that other political and cultural traditions may be more appropriate to realising sustainability with social justice and democracy elsewhere. Central to critical theory and sustainable development is a positive conception of freedom.

**Freedom**

Under capitalism citizens have negative freedom. They are free to do what they wish within the law; have freedom to sell their labour power; and freedom to choose consumer goods and services. Rich and poor are considered equally free despite their different freedom (power) to act. Negative freedom is compatible with poverty, homelessness, unemployment, inequality, and wide variations in the quality of schools and educational outcomes.

Positive freedom is more substantial and recognises that rights are worthless if citizens lack the means and capacity to exercise them. Freedom and power (the capacity to produce desired outcomes or get what one wants) are related and the more power we have the freer we are. Sustainable development (17), as reflected in the sustainable development goals seeks to maximise positive freedom and the flourishing of all humanity by three means:

- The provision of basic needs, clean air and water, income, time, heath, education, etc. This may require the provision of universal basic income (18) and services (19).
- Social literacy or the empowerment of citizens so that they have the knowledge, skills and values (attributes, competences, capabilities) to pursue their common interests in sustainable development.
- Technological capacity or the harnessing of new technologies to free people from the drudgery of routine work, improve their health, and heal their relationship with the rest of nature.
The moral case for democratic socialism is that by fighting inequalities and injustices, and standing up for the powerless against the powerful, people can realise positive freedom and improve their lives. We will turn to the consequences of a left modernity and positive freedom for schooling once critical geography and education have been introduced.

**The development of critical geography**

Radical geography (20) originated with 19C anarchists such as Peter Kropotkin who critiqued the role of mainstream geography in facilitating and legitimating the rise of global capitalism. It resurfaced in the 1960s when new social movements, concerned with such issues as peace, the environment and women’s rights, prompted some academic geographers to develop a more relevant and engaged discipline (21) They were disenchanted with mainstream geography: its philosophy and methodology; its inability to solve pressing social problems; and the way in which it functioned as ideology to mask the true causes of those problems. By the 1970s they had shifted from liberalism to Marxism and geographical-historical materialism, recognising the key role of Marxist political economy in explaining the development of space, place and nature. Marx’s dialectical method (see chapter 4) represented a more objective and holistic approach to studying society that was able to counter ideology or ‘systems of ideas which give distorted and partial accounts of reality with the objective and often unintended effect of serving the partial interests of a particular social group or class’ (21) p. 9.

A Marxist critical social geography, concerned with social and spatial inequalities and issues of social justice and social reproduction, was challenged by the emergence of post-modernism and post-structuralism (chapter 4) and a cultural geography concerned with meaning, identity and representation. Post-structuralism rejects modernist claims to universal knowledge, reason and values, together with the claim by Marxist structuralists that every historical event and social feature (eg. schooling) can be explained as a component of some more general overarching system (structures) be it a mode of production or an ideology. Knowledge, rationality and morality are socially constructed, historically and geographically contingent and laden with power relations (they reflect and shape the social relations between people).

The ‘cultural turn’ in geography in the 1980s and 1990s saw both political economy (a form of structuralism) and post-structuralism claim authority over
the social at a time when neo-liberalism was on the rise and the political Left weakened, partly due to the rise of identity and single issue politics. The new cultural geography concerned itself with the representation and cultural analysis of such topics as gender, sexuality, youth, place, and nature, and drew on the critical theory of the Frankfurt School as well as that of post-structuralists such as Michel Foucault.

Valentine (22) suggests that the ‘cultural turn’ can be explained in terms of shifting understandings of society. These have moved from the large scale explored by political economy to the smaller scale of everyday social relations. Questions of identity and difference are now understood to underpin individual and group experiences of oppression as seen in the heterosexist, ablest and adultist nature of everyday spaces. Critical geography should accommodate both political economy’s explanations focussing on structural inequalities and the large scale distribution of power and resources AND post-structuralism’s explanations framed in terms of lifestyles, consumption, meaning, identity, and cultural representation (the ‘texts’ relating to place, space and nature that saturate people’s everyday experience).

Despite Valentine’s claim that the ‘cultural turn’ had not squeezed out the social but merely redefined it, others were more critical, suggesting the turn has led to the dematerialisation of human geography together with its political paralysis and fragmentation. Sayer (23) argues that in crucial respects the new cultural geography is uncritical since it ignores or marginalises economic matters and neo-liberal hegemony, but its treatment of culture is nevertheless highly compatible with a neo-liberal worldview. Both post-structuralism and neo-liberalism treat values as subjective: mere expressions of individual preferences, measurable in terms of exchange value, and simply discursive constructions. Critical geography should cling to the distinction between use values and exchange values (substance and appearance) and critique the aestheticisation of aspects of life that might otherwise be considered moral and political issues.

By 2000 ‘critical geography’ rather than ‘radical geography’ had become the privileged descriptor of Left geographical inquiry. Castree (24) attributes this to the professionalisation and academicisation of Left geography associated with the shift from modern to postmodern forms of higher education during the previous three decades. While the field was more vibrant and varied that ever before, incorporating a wider range of critical theories, including critical aspects of post-structuralism introduced by the ‘cultural turn’, it had become
disengaged from activism and engagement with the real world. In an analysis which finds echoes in school geography, Castree argues that qualitative change in the political economy of the university (school), resulting in such features as austerity; greater managerial control; performance indicators; more flexible and segmented academic divisions of labour; and uncertain tenure, led to a ‘taming’ of the academic Left at a time when the non-academic Left was in decline. He outlined a manifesto to contest these neoliberal changes in education, improve conditions for students, and promote critical pedagogy, that remains relevant to the work of teachers in universities and schools almost twenty years later.

**Contemporary critical geography**

The article on postcapitalism by Chatterton and Posey cited in chapter one (25) begins by reviewing work by critical academic geographers that builds understanding of the ‘shortcomings of humanity’s present condition’ and proposes ‘a range of progressive alternatives to articulate a more equal and sustainable world’ ((25), p. 1). Over 30 publications are cited and they provide insights into knowledge and methodologies on which school geography can draw. *Keywords in Radical Geography: Antipode at 50* (1) indicates the breadth of the field and Bond’s entry on its democratic ethos (see head of chapter) reminds us that the extension of democracy is a key concern.

Further insights will be proved in later chapters and curriculum units and readers seeking an inspiring overview of contemporary geography are advised to read Dorling and Lee’s introductory text (26). This tells a series of stories focussed on maps, sketching where we are and where we are going, and using three organising concepts (globalisation, sustainability, and equality) that are central to ESDGC. The [Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers](https://www.rgs.org/) (27) has a range of resources for schools written by academic geographers.

For the moment it is sufficient to note that contemporary critical geography has six characteristics (28):

1. **A commitment to theory and a rejection of empiricism.** Critical geography is not content to merely describe the world (empiricism). It consciously deploys critical theory from such sources as Marxism, feminism and post-structuralism, to explain the structures and processes...
at work in the world that shape, and are in turn shaped by, nature, space and place.

2. **A commitment to reveal the processes that produce oppression and injustice.** Critical geographers seek to unveil power, uncover inequality, expose resistance, and cultivate liberating politics and social change.

3. **An emphasis on representation as a means of domination and resistance.** A common focus of critical geography is the study of how representations of nature, space and place sustain power; or are used to challenge power.

4. **An optimistic faith in the power of critical scholarship.** Critical geographers believe that critical theories and ideas can be used to resist the dominant representations of reality, and that scholars and teachers can challenge people's partial or false understandings and so help free that from oppression. They have an implicit confidence in the power of critical theory and pedagogy to reach those alienated from the world, and in the capacities of people to defeat alienation by means of reflexive self-education.

5. **A commitment to progressive practices.** Critical geographers want to make a difference. They claim to contribute to and work with social movements and activists committed to social justice, democracy and sustainability. The relationship between critical geography and activism continues to be much debated.

6. **An understanding of nature, space and place as critical tools.** Critical geographers pay special attention to how relations between people and the rest of nature, relations between people in space, and the relations between people in any one place, and the representations of these relations, can be the sources of oppression and inequality. Critical geographers identify how nature, space, and place can be used to both exercise power and to mask it.

These characteristics are somewhat abstract and readers wishing to know how they are reflected in the life of an individual geographer might read an obituary to Doreen Massey (29) who died in 2016.

**Critical education**

Like critical geography, critical education has a history dating back to the 19C. The Chartists established popular schools to serve the interests of the working
class and the threat posed by such schools, together with the need for a more literate, numerate and disciplined workforce, led to the establishment of state schools. Fielding and Moss (24) trace the history of radical education in England and elsewhere in Europe Folk schools were established in Denmark, modern (anarchist) schools in Catalonia, and progressive schools in Reggio Emilia in Italy (30). In Brazil it was the work of Paulo Freire that advanced our understanding of the differences between mainstream and critical education.

There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the 'practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (31)

Figure 2.1  Paulo Freire

Freire (1921 -1997) (Figure 2.1) was a Brazilian educator and philosopher who was a key figure in the Third World liberation movement and a leading advocate of critical pedagogy (chapter 5). He is best known for his influential text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (31) and gives his name to the Freire Project (32), a primary resource for teachers seeking to research critical pedagogy. His educational ideas are based on classical authors such as Plato and on Marxist and post-colonial thinkers. Education should allow the oppressed to regain their humanity largely through their own efforts. This will involve them in rethinking
their way of life and examining their own role in their oppression. We will examine the extent to which students and teachers in UK schools are alienated and oppressed and in need of critical education in chapter three.

Freire's distinction between the dominant banking model of education and that of education as consciousness raising (or conscientization) (Figure 2.2) summarises the differences between mainstream education and critical education. Critical theorists tend to refer to the former as ‘schooling’ since its primary function is socialization rather than the development of students’ critical powers together with their moral autonomy and social literacy.

Freire believed that education cannot be divorced from politics; that the acts of teaching and learning are political acts in themselves; and that teachers and students should be made aware of the 'politics' surrounding what is taught and how it is taught and assessed. People learn through praxis (chapter 5) that by learning they can remake themselves and their community. Hence he has inspired literacy schemes throughout South America (including literacy missions in Venezuela – curriculum unit one) and shaped the theory and practice of development education in both the global North and South (33).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Banking Model</th>
<th>Conscientization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupil is an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge imparted by the teacher.</td>
<td>Everyone in the classroom is both a teacher and a learner. Pupils produce knowledge guided by the teacher.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pupils are users of knowledge rather than producers of knowledge.</td>
<td>Education to explore problems of living in the world suggested by pupils.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge is an instrument of power and domination that stifles critical thinking.</td>
<td>Education to develop critical consciousness or knowledge of how the world works and how it might be changed in order to work more sustainably.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The world is presented as a fixed and abstract reality to which pupils are expected to conform.</td>
<td>Learning is active and experiential.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The teacher is active, the pupil is passive. The teacher has nothing to learn and is thus disempowered.</td>
<td>Critical literacy is a central aim of education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A mainstream pedagogy of oppression.</td>
<td>A critical pedagogy of liberation.</td>
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**Fig. 2.2 Two models of education** (based on (34) & (35)
Three forms of critical education

Edwards and Canaan (36) outline the history and characteristics of radical, critical and Marxist educations, noting the continuities and differences between these three overlapping perspectives (see Figure 2.3, pages 60 & 61). Like critical geography they are underpinned by diverse critical theories, flowered with the emergence of new social movements from the late 1960s, and were affected by the ‘cultural turn’ from the mid 1970s to the late 1990s. A focus on social class then shifted, under the influence of post-structuralism, to identity, gender, sexuality, race, and nation. In the more recent period there has been a return to class analysis now integrated with these other analytical concepts. While radical and critical educators view class, gender, sexuality, race and nation as equally significant in shaping exploitation and oppression, Marxist educators argue that the exploitative relations forged in and through labour (class) provide the basis for all other oppressive relations. All agree that critical pedagogy (in different but related forms – see chapter five) has a role in revealing and transforming such relations

This text uses critical education to refer to all three perspectives. They had a significant impact on schooling in the late 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s under the label progressivism (37). This was characterised by integrated curricula, student centred learning; mixed ability teaching, greater awareness of the politics of the curriculum, and increased autonomy and professionalism for teachers. Critical education has had a greater influence on environmental education, development education, and ESDGC than on geography (see chapter four), and its overall influence faded as neoliberalism reshaped schooling from the late 1980s. Edwards and Canaan argue that they now need to work together to analyse neoliberal educational reforms, ‘mobilize workers, forge alliances and articulate a vision in and outside formal and informal educational spaces to help build another education and world’ (36) p. 71.
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<th>Radical</th>
<th>Critical</th>
<th>Marxist</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Foundations</strong></td>
<td>Progressive socialist and libertarian/anarchist political critiques of society and education associated with popular agitation and subversive dissent.</td>
<td>Eclectic and contradictory range of philosophical and theoretical traditions. Marxist, neo-Marxist, pragmatism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, feminism. Critical theory of Frankfurt School.</td>
<td>Marxism that assumes workers and citizens can transform capitalist social relations and that dialectics explains the process by which such transformation can be realised.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Key concepts</strong></td>
<td>Autonomy, popular sovereignty, personal freedom.</td>
<td>Critical rationality, critical consciousness, discursive ethics and democracy.</td>
<td>Class struggle, praxis, ideology critique, revolutionary consciousness.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Defining features</strong></td>
<td>Rejection of hierarchy and an affirmation of self management invoked through both educational process and product. Anti-authoritarianism. Anti-rationalism. Romanticism. Participatory democracy rather than state governance.</td>
<td>Critiques ways in which education is connected to relations of exploitation and domination in society. Critical rationality as a means of defining what restraints on personal freedom are justifiable in a democratic society, and a tool to eliminate false consciousness.</td>
<td>Capitalist education systems are sites of class struggle. Teachers and learners in dialectical relationship with one another and the state. People’s minds and understanding are constituted within inherited forms of life and consciousness that include state institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basis of education</strong></td>
<td>The realization of personal development and freedom. Child-centred progressivism.</td>
<td>The development of higher states of rationality and democracy.</td>
<td>Praxis or the continual refining of knowledge by testing it in action.</td>
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<td><strong>Strategy</strong></td>
<td>Grassroots initiatives, direct action, autonomous collectives and informal communities. Free schools, de-schooling, informal learning. Critical pedagogy.</td>
<td>Aims to disrupt oppression and discrimination by developing critical consciousness (political awareness that citizens develop through working with others to transform the world) via media analysis, discussion and project based learning. Critical pedagogy.</td>
<td>Teachers and learners educate each other by exploring the contradictions of everyday life and how they might be resolved. Ideas from critical theory, including Marxist political economy, prompt the critique of ideology. Critical pedagogy.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Critique</strong></td>
<td>Risks utopianism and detachment from mainstream politics.</td>
<td>Cultural turn from 1970s resulted in relativism and inability to arbitrate between knowledge claims</td>
<td>Risks degenerating into the transmission of what the teacher believes to be (is led to believe to be) revolutionary consciousness.</td>
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**Figure 2.3** Radical, critical and Marxist educations compared (based on Edwards & Canaan (36))
Towards democratic socialist education

The supporters of Reclaiming Education (38), a coalition of trade unions and pressure groups, would endorse such aims. It seeks to influence Labour’s education policy and among its recommendations are the ending of the academies and free school programme; the restoration of powers to local authorities to provide, allocate and manage school places; the ending of selection at 11; a broad and balanced 14-19 curriculum to include academic, creative and technical courses; and stakeholders, including parents and employers, having a role in decision-making on the curriculum. The Socialist Educational Association (39) is a member of the coalition and its proposals on the curriculum (40) are enabling of ESDGC.

Included in the coalition and association are democratic socialist educators (3) who believe that education is a public good (not a private commodity); is primarily about developing active and critical citizens (alongside socially useful workers and creative and well adjusted individuals); and is a collaborative rather than transactional process. Schools should be places where students are introduced to democratic culture and practices and acquire the competences to become active and critical citizens. Morgan (41) reviews ‘what’s left for education?’ noting that the comprehensive revolution is uneven and unfinished (see Education for the Good Society (42)) and that there is an urgent need to modernise the common school and to engage with the cultures students bring to the classroom. He contrasts the progressive views of modernisers who have written reports for Compass and the IPPR with the more conservative views held by post-liberal communitarians associated with Blue Labour (page 19).

Gilbert (43) makes the case for the democratic governance of schooling and allowing students to experience democratic self governance in citizen schools (44). Together with Fisher (45) he advocates the reform of public institutions such as schools in line with the values of radical democracy and co-production (by local authorities and local communities) and the abolition of the machinery of neoliberal regulation, for example league tables and standardised testing. Elsewhere, Adnan and Lawson (46) in a report influenced by the accelerationists (page 17) and the concept of network society (chapter seven), propose education for life. Its prime purpose would be to ‘learn how we live together, each of us finding our unique and fulfilling way to participate and
contribute’ It should help each of us to search for our own understanding of ‘the big picture’ of history and ecology (and geography) that our lives are lived inside (p. 31). Such thinking is echoed in the final report of the Compass education group (47) who noting the current narrowing of education in terms of content, ambition and imagination, advocate ‘big education’ that ‘rests of values of equality, democracy and sustainability and has a sense of citizenship at its heart that looks to build a coherent and consistent educational framework for the fast emerging networked society we live in’ p. 25. (see Figure 2.4), It is to the reforms that have led to the narrowing of education that we now turn.

**Small Education** | **Big Education**
---|---
Narrow | Expansive
Competitive | Collaborative
Bureaucratic | Democratic
Restricted | Lifelong
Targets | Freedom
Centralised | Localised
Elitist | Equal
Selective | Comprehensive
Imposed | Organic
Individualistic | Generous
Closed | Open
Mechanical | Professional
Directed | Creative
Fragmented | Coherent
Remote | Accountable

Figure 2.4 The key features of small and big education (47)

Neoliberal and neoconservative reform further marginalises critical education

From the introduction of the national curriculum in 1988 to the present, educational reform in England and elsewhere in the world (48) has sought to recast education not as a right or entitlement that develops critical citizenship, but as a commodity, produced, valued and exchanged in a kind of market place, that instils social conformity. Marxist commentators (49) on global reform see it
as a product of neoliberalism and neoconservatism (a desire for hierarchy and control together with traditional morality) (50), producing the impacts listed in Figure 2.5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neoliberalism</th>
<th>Neoconservatism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Privatisation/ Pre-Privatisation of public services such as schooling and universities</td>
<td>1. Control of Curricula of schools, of teacher education and universities, with the removal of `dangerous’ content</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Cuts in public spending/ salaries/ pensions/ benefits</td>
<td>2. Control of Pedagogy teaching methods, pedagogic relations between teacher and students</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Marketisation, Competition between schools and between universities</td>
<td>3. Control of Students, through debt, and through actual or fear of unemployment</td>
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<td>4. Vocational education for human capital (except for the ruling class, who, in their elite private schools, are encouraged into a wider and less `basics’ driven education)</td>
<td>4. Control of Teachers and Professors, through surveillance, a culture of having to meet targets, punishment of dissidents and union activists, dismissals and closures of schools, closures of university departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Management of the workforce: ‘New Public Managerialism’ in schools and colleges, with hugely increasing differentials in pay and power between managers and workforce</td>
<td>5. Brute force and ‘the Security State’ within schools and the wider society- the use of tear gas, sound grenades, stun grenades, beatings, prosecutions, draconian sentencing, and in some countries, imprisonment, killings (e.g. murders of trade union activists in Colombia).</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Encouragement of competition between workers, through performance related pay and the ‘busting’ of trade union agreed of national pay scales</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Casualization/ ‘Precariatisation’ of public and private sector workers, with a decline in tenured and in full-time `secure’ jobs for teachers and university faculty</td>
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<td>8. Attacks on trade unions, on workers’ rights, on centralised pay-bargaining</td>
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<td>9. ‘Management speak’ e.g. students as `customers’, ‘delivering’ the curriculum, discourse of the market replacing that of social responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Denigration / Ideological attacks of public sector workforce</td>
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**Figure 2.5 How Marxists view the impacts of neoliberalism and neoconservatism on schooling** (49)

Successive English administrations have viewed the primary purpose of schooling as economic, to raise standards, develop human capital, and thereby restore the UK’s competitiveness in the global economy. School reform has been justified in terms of raising the aspirations of working class pupils, tackling low achievement, promoting social mobility (51) (rather than social justice), creating a diversity of schools in what was formerly a landscape of
uniformity, and providing parents with choice. It locates responsibility for class inequality with schools and teachers rather than with the structures of capitalism, and sustains a deficit model of working class culture and values (52) (53). Yes there are low expectations, but an emphasis on standards, which many cannot achieve, may only worsen the problem of students’ alienation (see chapter three) and give rise to ‘meritocratic hubris’ (54) that feeds populism.

Reform encompasses curriculum reform that marginalises critical ideas and pedagogy (the national curriculum) (37); parental choice that sharpens social divisions in schooling; new ways of involving the private sector in the financing and governance of schools, and new forms of managerialism that further erode teacher professionalism. This agenda diverts attention from poverty and social injustice to opportunity and social mobility, and has been resisted in the more socially democratic nations of the UK as noted when considering their provision of ESDGC in chapter one.

Schooling as a commodity needs to be measured and compared, so that consumers (parents, employers) know what they are getting, politicians can claim to be raising standards, and providers (schools, teachers) are accountable for what they are providing. Hence an age of ‘performativity’ and ‘deliverology’ dawned with teachers told what to teach and how to teach; schools, teachers and pupils continually tested, inspected and ranked against externally imposed standards and targets; and market values of individualism, cost efficiency, competition and choice, coming to dominate the life of schools (55). At the same time new types of schools and school governance were introduced. Academies (56) receive funding directly from central government, exist outside the control of local authorities, are designated as ‘all-ability, state-funded schools established and managed by sponsors from a wide range of backgrounds’. Promoted as a means of giving schools more autonomy (spending, teaching, organisation) they are controlled by private organisations called charitable trusts. Multi-academy trusts (MATS) have greater access to government than local authorities; are likely to have a government minister or appointee as a trustee; and the decisions they make are not as transparent as those made by local authorities. While schools have gained new freedoms, parents and carers have lost the freedom to know about the people running their schools, to question them, and have a voice in decisions that affect their lives (57).
Free schools are a type of academy that can be established without the involvement of parents or the local authority, and while required to deliver a ‘broad and balanced’ curriculum, academies need not follow the national curriculum as local authority schools are required to do. In 2017 31% of English secondary state schools were local authority schools, 7% were free schools, and 62% were academies with 36% belonging to a multi-academy trust (58).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mainstream</th>
<th>Critical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>A means of control that reproduces economic, social and cultural inequalities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning and teaching</strong></td>
<td>Just in case learning. Learning and teaching for some anticipated future. Curriculum and pedagogy assume that pupils will need a particular skill or knowledge set when they are examined or move to the next level of education or the workplace. Knowledge is seen as an accumulation of information that lies in wait for an appropriate moment of application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School</strong></td>
<td>An examinations factory or assembly line for transmitting chunks of abstract information. Largely separated from the community and segregated by subjects, activities, and age. Consequently many pupils find school alienating.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2.6 Two critical educators’ views of mainstream and critical education, learning and schools** (Based on Unwin & Yandell, (34))

While education policy claims to offer parents choice, the reality is that wealthy parents can afford to move into the catchments of the best performing schools and they determine their admission policies in ways that favour already advantaged students, excluding those from poorer families and those with special educational needs who are seen as likely to struggle in the classroom or require additional expenditure. (59). The original goal politicians claimed for academies (to raise the standards in underachieving areas) has becomes self-
defeating as many underachievers are denied entry to the best performing academies and the definition of achievement (examination results in academic subjects) reflects the very processes of social stratification that has led to underachievement in the first place. Studies show that academies do not reduce segregation; do not increase social equity in education; and do not out-perform local authority schools (60) (61). Critical educators claim that neoliberal reform has sharpened the distinctions between mainstream and critical education (Figure 2.6) and wasted the potential of many students (62).

**Geography teachers enacting the curriculum under the pressures of reform**

Mitchell (63) has analysed how four geography departments enact the curriculum in the face of the pervasive forces of capitalism. He recognises a tension between the teacher’s potential agency to make a curriculum and the controlling socio-economic climate of accountability, performance pressure, and technological change resulting from the reforms outlined above. Pressure to meet students’ needs as future workers and satisfied consumers; to comply with the demands of Ofsted (64), school managers, and parents; and to use new globalised technology to develop and share content and pedagogy; can all obscure the balanced process of curriculum making proposed by Lambert and Morgan (65) and subsequently incorporated into GA guidance. Mitchell found that the ‘curriculum thinking’ questions (around key concepts, geographical thinking, appropriate learning activities, and progression) could be pushed into the background or hidden but were not completely lost. He concludes that curriculum making in late capitalism is contingent on teachers effectively navigating the pressures that threaten to distract from and obscure curriculum making. This is a theme that this text seeks to illustrate and to which we will return to in subsequent chapters.

**Spatial divisions of schooling**

In any local authority area there will be a hierarchy of schools, spread across space and reflecting the area’s social geography (the spatial division of schooling). Until relatively recently local authorities were able to plan school catchments and admissions to render school intakes as mixed or comprehensive as the social geography allowed but educational reform means their powers have been reduced and a pseudo market in education has been created along with a discourse of parental choice. The result has been to sharpen the spatial
inequalities in schooling as rich parents buy houses close to 'good' schools, and schools chose pupils from 'better' homes.

In an interview with the Guardian, Diane Reay (66) (67) summarised the situation whereby working class pupils lose out:

*There are predominantly middle class comprehensives and predominantly working class and ethnically mixed comprehensives - and despite all the rhetoric around pupil premiums, pupils in the more working class comprehensives get less money per head. They get less qualified teachers. They get higher levels of teacher turnover and more supply teachers. Even if they are in the same schools as middle class children, they are in lower sets and yet again they get less experienced teachers.*

A study (68) using geodemographics (the analysis of data by postcodes) has shown that the overwhelming factor determining how well children do at school is not what type of school they attend but the social class of their parents. League tables measure not the best, but the most middle-class schools; and even value-added tables fail to take account of the most crucial factor in educational outcomes, a pupil's address. For schools, selecting pupils whose homes are in high-status neighbourhoods is one of the most effective ways of retaining a high position in the league table.

More recently Dorling (69) has addressed the problems of greater inequality produced by richer parents buying or renting homes in areas with better performing schools. He notes that this has been a factor in fuelling the speculative bubble in house prices in the South East of England and that what often started as a small difference between schools has grown into a 'chasm dividing some towns and cities up starkly'. Competition between schools has been accentuated by the establishment of academy and free schools, and the Left needs to recognise how housing, growing economic inequality and education, are linked, not just through who can live in each catchment area, but in the high turnover of young teachers in the south of England.

Dorling seeks solutions in new ways of democratically managing schools so that they can work co-operatively with one another, and local universities, sharing teachers and expertise and attracting middle-class parents away from the independent sector. He suggests that the 800 Co-operative Trust schools (70)
already established in the UK provide a model for such a future and that the financial crisis affecting schools may prompt schools to co-operate, share resources and pupils, and so promote social cohesion rather than division.

**Critical theory and spatial divisions of schooling**

Two critical theories of education shed further light on spatial divisions of schooling using the analytical concepts of the state, social class, discourse, and governmentality. Harris summarizes the Marxist view of education is this way:

*To begin with, education is an instrument of the state, and serves the ruling class interests and power elites of the state. Its job is to maintain and stabilise the social order, and it does this in interaction with other social institutions and ideologies; and there is no way that education could possibly extract itself, become autonomous, and then dictate the social order.* (71), p.183

**Marxism** (72) maintains that state education developed to sustain capitalist systems of accumulation by reproducing workers and citizens with appropriate dispositions. Schooling introduces the discipline of the workplace and respect for ones’ ‘elders and betters’; is provided in different forms in different places for different social classes; and transmits cultural capital along with ideology that legitimates inequality, defuses conflict, and fosters appropriate social norms and expectations. The structuralist tone of early work (73) was rejected as too deterministic and later work (74) acknowledged the agency of working class youth and its ability to form its own culture in opposition to schooling despite the consequences. Later still the focus shifted to schooling’s role in creating a particular type of citizen, one schooled in the norms of proper codes of behaviour required of liberal democracy (75).

Neoliberalism (page 10) with its changed forms of accumulation and governance, requires changed dispositions, new forms of cultural capital, and new forms of global citizenship. Hence the focus of contemporary Marxist theories is on the restructuring of schooling to meet its needs (76) (49) and the nature of socialist alternatives (37) (3). We will revisit this theme in chapter five in the context of the economy, education and the future of work. For the moment it is sufficient to note that Marxist theories would predict sharper spatial divisions of schooling as neoliberalism seeks to tilt the balance of power further towards the upper and middle classes, and that these divisions are
legitimated using ideology associated with the myths of elitism, meritocracy, choice and social mobility.

Dorling (77) (78) explodes the myth that there are inherent genetic differences between people that justify an elite having advantages of wealth and power. He argues that that all students in rich countries are capable of learning without limits and that IQ tests, and those that claim to measure attainment, are primarily designed to fit students to a bell curve of distribution and label them successes or failures. Such testing does great harm to the ‘failures’ who must assume ‘that there is something wrong with them because of who they are, that they are poor because they have inadequate ability to be anything else.’ (77) p.35

James echoes Dorling by insisting that modern education has been sold under a false prospectus containing three untruths:

*The first is that it will bring meritocracy, which it has not; and the pretence of it, requiring absurdly long hours devoted to passing mind-sapping, pathology-inducing exams, is hugely harmful to our children’s (and especially our daughters’) well-being. The second is that by enabling people to rise up the system, it will confer well-being, which it does not. The third is that exam results are crucial to our individual and national economic prosperity, and that is simply not true.* (79) p. 301-2

**Michel Foucault** (1926 – 1984) was a poststructuralist (80) who claimed that domains of knowledge such as medicine, criminology, and education create new spaces and rationalities that render people governable as they freely submit to technologies developed by professionals. Foucault saw people governed through **discourse** (81) (systems of thought composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak). Governance results primarily not from the laws, rules and regulations established by governments, but by the beliefs, values, and rationalities transmitted in everyday spaces such as the home, GP surgery, supermarket, and school.

Governments are not absent from this process. Governmentality refers to the way in which a government thinks about itself and its role, how it goes about shaping and guiding the choices and lifestyles of citizens. In the neoliberal era workers and citizens are required to be entrepreneurial beings, self promoting
enterprises that are responsible for their own welfare and development. Government offers them ‘normalizing technologies’ (agreed goals and procedures that are made to appear obvious) such as recycling, losing weight, contributing to Sport Relief, donating to a food bank, choosing the ‘best’ school for one’s child, and paying university fees. Neoliberalism functions as discourse, in the ways we talk to friends and neighbours and the ways in which government and the media talk to us, encourage us to accept these technologies and behave in certain ways. By developing a nudge unit (now the behavioural insights team (82) the UK government found perhaps the most dangerous way to govern: by presenting everything as a free choice and giving the impression that it is not governing at all. Foucault’s ideas suggest that the discourse of choice is a key factor shaping contemporary spatial divisions of schooling.

The curriculum unit

In curriculum unit 2 pupils explore the spatial divisions of schooling in their local area in the context of SDG 4 (quality education) and GCE topic 8 (ethically responsible behaviour). They locate local secondary schools and with an appropriate degree of help from the teacher, research the average house prices in the postcodes surrounding each school, and the social composition of heads of households in those postcodes. They also research the performance of the schools before going on to examine the influence of house prices, and the social grades of surrounding heads of households, on school performance.

Data is provided for secondary schools in Bedford Borough, a town with a significant number of private schools and sharp social and spatial inequalities partly linked to immigration. Teachers are encouraged to use this as a model to develop a unit based on their own town or city and their own students’ experiences of schooling and school allocations.

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Danny Dorling, Education, Inequality and the One Percent, 2014 One hour

Doreen Massey on the Kilburn Manifesto 50 minutes

Diane Raey speaking on inequality in education, 2015 15 minutes

Fiona Millar – School Choice is a Big Fat Myth in Skipton Yorkshire (11+ and grammar schools), early 2000s 6 minutes