

Childhood, education and society at a time of deepening multiple crises

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Abstract: Knowledges of and new perspectives about children and childhood have expanded in recent years. Yet while there has been an emancipatory element in this expansion (e.g. children's rights, pupil voice), this has been overshadowed by the application of new knowledges and techniques (human technologies) to increase the governing of children, most obviously in education and schools, a reminder that (in Foucault's words) 'everything is dangerous'. This is connected to the rise of a highly instrumental and technical politico-economic regime of neoliberalism, in which the social and political has collapsed into the economic, children are constructed as 'human capital' and positivistic social science makes increasingly strident truth claims. I will argue the urgent need for constructing a critical, political and democratic approach to the relationship between childhood, education and society, to include the application of new knowledges and the role of scientists who produce them. I will further argue the urgency of building this framework as we move into an era of multiple crises, which will call for transformative changes if our species is to survive and our societies are to be renewed as places for individual and collective flourishing.

Keywords: childhood, education, society, multiple crises

We have such difficulty even imagining a different sort of society from the one whose dysfunctions and inequalities trouble us so... We appear to have lost the capacity to question the present, much less offer alternatives to it. Why is it so beyond us to conceive of a different set of arrangements to our common advantage? Our shortcomings – excuse the academic jargon – is discursive. We simply do not know how to talk about these things. (Judt, 2009, p. 86)

The historian Tony Judt, who died in 2010, was a vocal and incisive critic of contemporary neoliberal hegemony, not only for its direct effects on society (the dysfunctions and inequalities), but for its increasing control over individual and collective consciousness through its capacity to deaden the capacity to think and talk except in its terms. In this article I will argue

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that the neoliberal regime, or dominant discourse in Foucauldian terms, extends its hegemony deep into education, creating a particular relationship between children, education and society; but that different relationships can be imagined and enacted – and will increasingly contest the dominant neoliberal discourse, which will prove fallible in the face of deepening multiple crises that threaten the very survival of our societies and species. Like Judd, I shall draw mostly on developments in the USA, the UK and the rest of the English-speaking world, where neoliberalism has taken earliest and deepest root. But knowing that this discourse has spread to a greater or lesser extent far beyond, I hope that what I have to say has some resonance in Portugal.

Governing the child in the age of neoliberalism

A tension runs through the history of education, between education as a means of emancipation and self-realisation built on relationships of respect and dialogue; and education as a means of governing for the achievement of economic and political ends – whether the better assimilation of migrants, the taming of new urban proletariats or the instilling of basic skills to equip a workforce to meet the needs of employers, and built on relationships of hierarchy and transmission. The former has been associated, *inter alia*, with a tradition of progressive education, that came to hold sway, according to which country we are considering, during the 40 years between 1930 and 1970, though its roots go back much further to writers like Comenius and Rousseau. Darling and Norbeno (2003) suggest five recurring themes that characterise progressive approaches to education – criticism of traditional education, the nature of knowledge, human nature, democracy, and the development of the whole person. While the latter is associated with the early days of mass, and compulsory, schooling, with its strong emphasis on drilling into children a narrow, highly functional set of skills.

Recent years have seen an increasing emphasis being placed, nationally and internationally, on governing the child and young person in education through ‘human technologies’: “[t]echnologies of government...imbued with aspirations for the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired events” (Rose, 1999, p. 52). An assemblage of such ‘human technologies’ made the schoolroom a powerful machine as early as the 19th century.

This was an assemblage of pedagogic knowledges, moralizing aspirations, buildings of a certain design, classrooms organised to produce certain kinds of visibility, techniques such as the timetable for or-

ganizing bodies in space and in time, regimes of supervision, little mental exercises in the classroom, playgrounds to allow the observation and moralization of children in something more approaching their habitat and much more, assembled and infused with the aim of the government of capacities and habits. (Rose, 1999, p. 53)

In recent years, these technologies have become more invasive and effective, better able to 'govern the soul'. Take, for example, the field of early childhood education. At least in the Anglophone world, this is filled today by child development concepts, knowledge and vocabularies; developmental and learning goals; early years curricula; pedagogical and other programmes, such as developmentally appropriate practice; the authority of various expert groups; the competencies and deployment of staff; child observation techniques and normative assessment methods; regulatory and inspection regimes; particular (though often implicit) social constructions or images (e.g. of the child, the parent, the educator); and selected research (Moss, 2014). None of these technologies, in isolation, may be particularly effective; but connect them up into an assemblage and you have a powerful machine. The OECD now helpfully offers a 'Quality Policy Toolbox' containing technologies for policy makers seeking to realise the many benefits from an investment in ECEC – for "the magnitude of the benefits is conditional on 'quality'" (OECD, 2012, p. 9).

Not only are children and young people exposed to more and more powerful technologies. They are exposed to them for longer. The time spent in compulsory and post-compulsory education have increased, accompanied by an extension of formal services for children below compulsory school age, some under a broad heading of 'childcare', others 'education'.

Despite occasional resort to the rhetoric of participation and 'pupil voice', education today is driven by an urge to govern the child. It shows a strong instrumental rationality, with schools increasingly assuming the identity of 'exam factories' (Coffield & Williamson, 2011), dedicated to the achievement of a prescribed set of predetermined outcomes and subject to constant national and international monitoring of performance. Education has become, first and foremost, a technical practice, expressed in the supremely technical question 'what works?' with contested political issues such as the purposes and meaning of education side-lined in favour of an unrelenting focus on effective means.

Driving this approach is a pervasive neoliberal regime, that has spread inexorably from its guerrilla roots in the first quarter century after the end of the Second World War when social democracy and Keynesian economics were triumphant; to emerge via the Anglophone world and powerful international organisations as the new orthodoxy from the mid-1970s onwards (see, for example, the account given by Mirowski, 2013). This pow-

erful discourse reduces all relationships to the economic, the calculable and the contractual – including the relationship between childhood, education and society.

So the only education to be valued is that which produces measurable outcomes, outcomes that are only of value if already predefined and predicted, and does so in the most efficient way – an education, in short, that gives a high return on investment. The state continues to fund schools, teachers and children, but on condition they accept a new contractual relationship of meeting performance targets. Education has become a matter of realising ‘human capital’ and producing what Lynn Fendler (2001) calls ‘flexible souls’, ensuring a constant supply of compliant, malleable and autonomous workers, accustomed to meeting externally defined targets, equipped to respond to the continuously changing needs of the market place, yet unable to question or contest its logic and ends. Neoliberal reforms thread the value of competition through every aspect of education, whether between parents (each striving to get access to the ‘best’ school); pupils (compared and sorted through constant assessments); teachers (also constantly compared and increasingly subject to systems of sanction and reward, such as payment by results); schools (reduced to competing with each other as businesses seeking the custom of parent-consumers); or nation states (striving to out-perform each other on PISA and other international assessments).

With the spread of deterritorialised neoliberalism, with its global production and markets and its constant and unimpeded flows of capital, the nation state has become hollowed out, unable to exert significant influence over economic and many other strategic matters, leaving it in thrall to international capital, reduced to constant efforts to attract fleeting investment. An ‘educated’ workforce – of ‘flexible’ souls – is one of the inducements it can offer, one of the ways it can hope to survive in the ‘global race’; and this means deploying its powers where they are still effective, i.e. on children and young people in the state or public education system. The logic is clearly expressed in this recent statement by an English Education Minister: “The 21st century will belong to those countries that win the global race for jobs and economic advantage. In order for every adult to fulfil their potential, they need to be properly equipped with essential skills from the very beginning of their lives” (Truss, 2013). The accompanying government policy paper insists that “[m]ore great childcare is vital to ensuring we [i.e.England] can compete in the global race” (Department for Education (England), 2013, p. 6).

Underlying this discourse is a fatalistic view. The future will be like the present, even more so. In this respect we suffer the failure of imagination that Judt wrote of, an oppressive effect of what Roberto Unger (2005) terms ‘the dictatorship of no alternative’. All we can hope to do, it seems, is cling on to the juggernaut as it races towards an inexorable future, doing

our best to 'future proof' children (Facer, 2011), equipping them to compete in the global economy of tomorrow, hopefully enabling some to be winners in a dystopian future of increasing inequality and many losers.

Of course, to highlight the hegemony of a particular regime and discourse, to emphasise the power and irresponsibility of global capital, to point to a prevailing education of economic relations and technical practice is not to say that there is no resistance and no examples of people and places working differently. There is resistance and there are examples, but mostly they are marginalised and often insecure, struggling to survive in adverse conditions. While the dominant discourse has access to huge resources to enable it to create education and schools in its own image; the last thing it wants is to share any of this near monopoly with alternatives, believing as it does that there are no alternatives to its totalising and fundamentalist credo.

Only a crisis produces real change

So is change possible? Can we hope, at least, for the end of dictatorship, and a more democratic politics of education, where diversity of views and practices is acknowledged and valued? Can we reclaim the capacity to question the present and offer alternatives to it? Despite everything, I think we can.

As a general point, nothing stays the same, the world is in a constant state of flux. Today's dominant discourse always, in time, becomes yesterday's story. And what often brings about change is crisis, a point well understood by the godfather of neoliberalism, Milton Friedman, when he wrote back in the 1960s, at a time when Keynesian social democracy was still ascendant:

Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable. (Friedman, 1982, p. ix)

The crisis that Friedman and his neoliberal companions were ready to exploit came about in the 1970s, with a series of economic shocks that undermined the post-war regime, leaving the way open for a new regime and a decisive change in the relationships between capital and labour and between private and public, in favour of capital and private.

But that crisis is but nothing compared to what confronts us today, in particular the crisis of the environment. This changes everything, to borrow the title of the new book by Naomi Klein, who goes on to observe that this looming and unprecedented crisis “represents an historic opportunity...[since in responding to it] we once again have the chance to advance new policies that dramatically improve lives, close the gap between rich and poor, create huge numbers of good jobs, and reinvigorate democracy from the ground up” (Klein, 2014, p. 10). But even climate change, serious as it is, is not the extent of the gathering crisis, or rather crises. For as Edgar Morin notes, the human species has entered a Damoclean stage of deadly global threats, where “this complex intersolidarity of problems, antagonisms, crises, uncontrolled processes, and the general crisis of the planet that constitutes the number one vital problem” (Morin, 1999, p. 74). These “threats to our collective well-being” (Coffield & Williamson, 2011, p. 27) include: an economic system that is unsustainable and inimical to human flourishing (Jackson, 2009); growing inequality and other injustices in a ‘winner-takes-all’ system (Hacker and Pierson, 2010); and the catastrophic cumulative effects of biodiversity loss, resource depletion, environmental degradation and global warming. Faced by these threats, the Doomsday Clock of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists stands now at 3 minutes to midnight, with “[u]nchecked climate change, global nuclear weapons modernizations, and outsized nuclear weapons arsenals [posing] extraordinary and undeniable threats to the continued existence of humanity” (<http://thebulletin.org/clock/2015>).

Towards an education of democracy, care and creativity

What this says to me, and many others, is that we cannot go on as we are. A model of the future as the same as today, only more so is, quite simply, impossible. To say that education is *the* key to a different and better future is naïve; there are many keys, which will have to turn in unison if we are both to survive and flourish. But education must have a part to play, and it must engage by facing up to the terrible situation we face – not pretending everything will be fine as long as we can compete in the global race. Only then can it contribute to a collective response that searches for a future that is both worthwhile and sustainable, a future in which, as a species, we can both live well and within limits.

This means re-setting the relationship between childhood, education and society, turning away from a relationship based on economics, calculation and contract to a relationship based on democracy, care and creativity. Returning to one important strand in the progressive educational tradition, democracy would be embraced as a fundamental value and practice. For

[o]ur society faces challenges where we need to act collaboratively more than ever. We need to deepen democracy through more deliberative and participative democratic mechanisms which spread democracy into the 'everyday' of our lives. (Shah & Goss, 2007, p. 26)

I adopt a 'thick' understanding of democracy: democracy as a multi-dimensional concept. Skidmore and Bound's 'Everyday Democracy Index' (2008) proposes six dimensions, ranging from 'electoral and procedural democracy' through 'activism and civic participation' and 'aspiration and deliberation' to democracy in the family, the workplace and public services. They argue that modern democracies must "be rooted in a culture in which democratic values and practices shape not just the formal sphere of politics, but the informal spheres of everyday life: families, communities, workplaces, and schools and other public services" (Skidmore & Bound, 2008, p. 9). So while formal and procedural democracy - democratic governance - is vitally important, democracy has a more pervasive presence: as a way of thinking, being and acting, of relating and living together, as a quality of personal life and relationships.

This is democracy as "a personal way of individual life...[signifying] the possession and continual use of certain attitudes, forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all the relations of life" (Dewey, 1939, p. 229). This is democracy as a form of subjectivity expressed as a quality of human interaction (Biesta, 2007). This is democracy as a relational ethic that can and should pervade all aspects of everyday life, a way of "thinking of oneself in relation to others and the world" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 156), a relationship of solidarity, mutual affection and care for one another, of democratic fellowship. A relationship, too, that recognises and welcomes plurality of values and perspectives, respecting the alterity of others, not grasping it to make the Other into the Same.

A democracy, in sum, of what Gray (2009) calls *modus vivendi*, inscribed with a high degree of value pluralism, though premised on "a shared adhesion to ethico-political principles of democracy" (Mouffe, 1999, p. 755) – and in contrast to a democracy of rational consensus, which presumes one right answer to any question. Democracy, so understood, is certainly agonistic, recognising a "dimension of antagonism inherent in human relations" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 101). But it enables people to reach negotiated compromises, through "public deliberation and contestation about the common good" (Biesta, 2010, p. 54) and "the translation of private troubles into collective issues" (Biesta, 2010, p. 100).

Democratic education is not primarily about teaching courses on citizenship. Rather, it is about experiencing and living democracy in schools (for all ages) that are democratic, for "we become citizens when we are treated and valued as citizens" (Coffield & Williamson, 2011, p. 60). Individ-

uals, as Dewey believed, “learn to understand themselves as democratic individuals by becoming members of a community in which the problems of communal life are resolved through collective deliberation and a shared concern for the common good” (Carr & Hartnett, 1996, p. 63). (For a further and fuller discussion of democratic education, and some of its constituent features, see Fielding and Moss, 2011).

None of this, it should be emphasized, is new or untried, as we can readily recognize by shaking off the ‘historical amnesia’ cast over us by neoliberalism, to re-call important traditions and past experiences. So by advocating the centrality of democracy to education, I am standing on the shoulders of giants, who proclaimed and practiced the centrality of democracy to public education: educators such as Alex Bloom, headteacher of St.George’s-in-the-East secondary school in post-war London; Loris Malaguzzi and his colleagues in the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia; John Dewey, Janusz Korczak and Paolo Freire; and many more besides.

The care part of this new relationship assumes an ethics of care, a relational ethic (which recognises that education is, first and foremost, a relational practice) proposed by feminist scholars such as Joan Tronto. This ethic involves particular acts of caring *and* a general habit of mind, that should inform all aspects of life, and which includes attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness. It defines caring as:

a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our “world” so we can live in it as well as possible – a clear connection to the idea of ‘living well’ that we discussed earlier. That world includes our bodies, ourselves and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web. (Fisher & Tronto, 1990, p. 40)

The concept, it should be noted, is broad enough to include our relationship with the environment as well as with people.

The third part of this new relationship, creativity, assumes the importance of creating new knowledge, new insights, new experience, rather than privileging the reproduction of what already exists, which drives an education of calculation. (The issue, of course, is not either/or, but finding a productive relationship between creating the new and reproducing what is of value). Creativity is essential if we are to find new ways of living and relating that may just be able to save us from the Damoclean Phase of deadly global threats that we have brought upon ourselves as a species. Creativity is at the heart of what Osberg and Biesta term an ‘emergentist’ epistemology and define as the creation of new properties.

[C]ontemporary understandings of emergence have retained the idea that emergence introduces properties that are novel and some-

times even inconceivable or unimaginable...Strong emergence therefore presents a direct challenge to determinism (the idea that given one set of circumstances there is only one logical outcome)...[If] we think of knowledge (or knowing) not as *determined* by our engagement with the present, but as *emerging* from our engagement with the present...each knowledge event – which is to say each taking place of knowledge (knowing) – is necessarily *also radically new*. (Osberg & Biesta, 2007, pp. 33, 34, 40: original emphasis)

Put another way, “in an emergent universe we cannot rely on the rules of the past to dictate what we should do in the future”.

Assuming this complexity inspired epistemological position, Biesta and Osberg propose (following Ulmer, 1985) a ‘pedagogy of invention’, in which “knowledge does not bring us closer to what is *already* present but, rather, moves us into a *new* reality which is incalculable from what came before...knowledge is not conservative but *radically inventionalistic*” (Biesta & Osberg, 2007, p. 46). They also propose an innovatory image of the school, which discards the common image of “places where the rules of the past are taught in order to take care of the future...replicating the past and holding the world still” (Biesta & Osberg, 2007, p. 47). Instead of teaching children about a pre-given world, Osberg and Biesta argue schools must be places

where meanings can be *responsibly* negotiated and hence where the new is *allowed* to appear...We believe that if we rethink the purposes of schooling using insights from complexity and deconstruction, which suggest an emergentist relationship between the world and our knowledge of it, then we must think of schools as not as [sic] places where the meanings of a *present* world (which is also a world that has always already passed) are replicated and hence preserved. Instead schools can be thought of as places where new worlds are *allowed* to emerge, or to say this differently where the world is renewed. (Biesta & Osberg, 2007, p. 49: original emphasis)

The relationship between childhood, education and society that I am proposing as one of the keys to a better and survivable future, a relationship of democracy, care and creativity, understands education very differently to today’s dominant relationship of economics, calculation and contract. Instead of a concept of education-in-its-narrowest-sense, an understanding of education as the transmission and reproduction of a narrow range of disconnected competencies and skills validated by the constant assessment of predetermined outcomes, the new relationship adopts, or goes back to, a concept of education-in-its-broadest-sense. This is education as a holistic

process in which learning, care, health, general well-being and development are viewed as totally inseparable; and in which learning is about the construction of meaning, always in relationship with others, with value placed on the emergence of new knowledge, understandings and perspectives, in short on creativity; an education that nurtures our imagination and expands the realm of the possible.

A different meaning for education is closely connected to a different purpose. Instead of education being primarily about shaping a labour force and citizenry fit for a neoliberal future of endless competition and consumption, historian of education Richard Aldrich argues for ‘an education for survival’, with two main aims: to make preparations for survival following any catastrophes; and to foster “‘living well’ to prevent or reduce the incidence of major catastrophes that threaten human and other species and the Earth itself” (2010, p. 11). Picking up on this theme, Osberg and Biesta suggest that “one function of schooling is to teach the young how to take care of the world...because we care about and wish to take responsibility for the future, the world that will emerge” (2007, p. 47). To which I would add the function of fostering critical thinking, described by Nikolas Rose as

Introducing a critical attitude towards those things that are given to our present experience as if they were timeless, natural, unquestionable: to stand against the maxims of one’s time, against the spirit of one’s age, against the current of received wisdom. It is a matter of introducing a kind of awkwardness into the fabric of one’s experience, of interrupting the narratives that encode that experience and making them stutter. (p. 20)

In this way education, hopefully, might better equip us to contest the dictatorship of no alternative, appreciating that there always are alternatives and honing a capacity to evaluate and decide between them through, *inter alia*, democratic processes of deliberation, dialogue and argumentation.

The importance of our images

One of the most successful and sustained examples of an education based on democracy, care and creativity is the network of more than 50 municipal schools for young children (birth to 6 years) created by the Italian city of Reggio Emilia since the early 1960s, most run by the commune but some by cooperatives under agreement with the city. This local project in democratic education is now extensively documented (see, for example,

Edwards et al., 2012; Hoyuelos, 2013; Rinaldi, 2006; Vecchi, 2010), and has a large, global following. Central to this endeavour has been an acknowledgement of the importance of the image of the child – an explicit recognition of how we, as a society, understand or construct the child and of how policy, practice and provision flow from answers to the political question: ‘what is your image of the child?’ For Loris Malaguzzi, first director of Reggio’s schools and one of the great educators of the last century,

[o]ne of the strong points [of Reggio Emilia] has always been that of starting from a very open, explicit declaration of our image of the child, where image is understood as a strong and optimistic interpretation of the child. A child born with many resources and extraordinary potentials that have never ceased to amaze us. (Malaguzzi, 1993 cited in Reggio Children, 2012, p. 103)

This is the image of the ‘rich’ child, a child of unknown possibilities (for, in the words of Spinoza, “we never know in advance what a body can do”), a child born with a hundred languages and the desire to make meaning of the world, a child as citizen and the bearer of rights

Images, then, lie at the heart of the relationship between childhood, education and society. Under the current neoliberal dispensation, with its economic perspective, the child is a passive object to be filled with requisite skills, competencies and attitudes, and an economic asset (‘human capital’) to be invested in, managed and exploited – very different to Malaguzzi’s image of the ‘rich child’. And the importance of images extends beyond children, to parents and to teachers for example. The parent today is cast as the consumer, exercising individual choice to find the ‘best buy’ for their child’s education, engaged in a struggle with other parents, where the wrong choice may well consign their child to future failure in the global race. While teachers are both technicians, seeking to improve their performance in meeting prescribed targets for their pupils, or, for those at the top, business leaders, selling their product – the school – to parents and managing their workforce to achieve a high performance organisation. Both can and must be recast for an education of democracy, care and creativity.

But I want to end with the image of the school, since the school is the visible face of the relationship between childhood, education and society. It should, of course, be acknowledged that it is not the only place where education occurs: the family, the community and the wider environment are all important. I recognise, too, some questioning of a continuing role for the school, given the growing potential for distanced and networked learning, suggesting “the school itself should simply be dissolved into the learning landscape and replaced by personalized learning environments” (Facer, 2011, p.27). While I share, concerns about the potential destructive power of

the school through its ability to govern, discipline and normalise child and teacher alike.

For me, however, the school retains a vital role, agreeing with Keri Facer when she argues for continuing investment in the school

as a physical space and a local organization,...[because] it may be one of the most important institutions we have to help us build a democratic conversation about the future. A physical, local school where community members are encouraged to encounter each other and learn from each other is one of the last public spaces in which we can begin to *build the intergenerational solidarity, respect for diversity and democratic capability* needed to ensure fairness in the context of sociotechnical change. Moreover, the public educational institution may be the only resource we have to counter the inequalities and injustice of the informal learning landscape outside school...It is therefore the time both to *defend the idea of a school as a public resource and to radically re-imagine how it might evolve* if it is to equip communities to respond to and shape the socio-technical changes of the next few years. (Facer, 2011, pp. 28-29; emphasis added)

These words evoke a strong and rich image of the school, very different to the 'exam factory' with its narrow instrumental focus on achieving pre-determined outcomes through applying powerful human technologies. The school emerging from Facer's image is a public space where citizens, of all ages, encounter each other, and where a multitude of projects may take place – schools as potentialities, as community laboratories or workshops, as 'living centres of open democratic culture' in the words of Loris Malaguzzi, who insisted passionately on schools being open to and looking out towards families, neighbourhoods and the whole society. Schools, too, that instead of 'future proofing', to adapt children to an inevitable future, are places for democratic 'future building', "a platform within the community for creating a conversation about the future. It brings together students, parents, grandparents, community organisations and staff...to examine what alternative future for their students and their neighbourhoods they might seek to create" (Facer, 2011, p. 105). And so just one of the public institutions that, though enacting everyday democracy, might resist the dictatorship of no alternative and open up hopeful alternatives.

I have sketched out a possible future relationship between childhood, education and society, one (but not the only) alternative to what I see as the prevailing relationship, at least in the Anglophone world. While acknowledging the force of Tony Judt's comment (with which I start this article) that "we have such difficulty even *imagining* a different sort of society from the one whose dysfunctions and inequalities trouble us so" and that "we simply

do not know how to talk about these things”, these limitations are not irreversible. If we struggle and resist, we can imagine, we can talk, we can hope. And indeed we need to do so, since, as I have argued, the prevailing relationship between childhood, education and society will not survive, not least because it represents a neoliberal *status quo* that is ill-equipped to survive increasing crises of unparalleled severity.

Is the alternative feasible, an alternative based on a democracy, care and creativity? I am convinced it is - but not if we leave matters to luck, hoping everything will turn out alright if left to itself. The present neoliberal phase of education has been sustained by massive, prolonged attention to the conditions that enable a system based on competition, individual choice and constant comparison: huge amounts of money, time and human resources have been poured into creating these conditions. We (at least, all those who want a different education) need to focus on the hard work of thinking about and specifying the conditions that might support and sustain a system based on democracy, care and creativity, emulating the example of Milton Friedman and his fellow travellers. He was clear about his purpose, and so should be those who contest the world he helped bring into being: “to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable”.

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