Education as surveillance and control

Denise Martin reviews the evidence for an emerging educational apartheid

Insecurities in the labour market and the reduction in state benefits, educational allowances and training opportunities are said to be impacting on a range of disadvantaged groups, especially young people, with the result of further marginalising the most vulnerable. Shifts in the labour market and the push towards flexible market society are changing educational settings, with the core role of education becoming one of human capital formation and job preparation. Educational systems have become commodified in ways that channel youth into the flexible labour market where they are subdivided into a privileged elite, a small technical working class and a larger, increasingly detached precarious group. Accompanying these divisionary arrangements is an increase of surveillance technologies to monitor, reinforce discipline and control access (Standing, 2011). This article considers the evidence for an emerging educational apartheid and the degree to which new surveillance (panopticon/ban-opticon) technologies are applied to maintain these inequalities.

Supporting this perspective, authors such as Kupchik and Monahan (2006) argue that **'**schools socialise youth into relationships of dependency, inequality and instability *vis-à-vis* the contemporary power dynamics of the post-industrial labour market and the neo-liberal state'. They argue that while schools of the early twentieth century prepared pupils for dependable factory labour, contemporary schools prepare youth for volatile labour markets and uncertain service sector employment. A decline in welfare, the privatisation of public services and the incorporation of business solutions and practices in many educational settings, not to mention increasing state control of citizens in public institutions, are now increasingly apparent in school policies, particularly in relation to discipline (ibid).

Inequality and selection

Melissa Benn, author of *School Wars* (2011) suggests that the *Education Act 2011*, introduced by the coalition government has accelerated inequality and selective processes in schooling. Long standing inequalities from the tripartite era, prior to the introduction of comprehensive education - which is slowly disappearing anyway - have resurfaced with renewed vigour, producing entirely negative consequences for education and social mobility. Recent funding cuts have left struggling state comprehensives even worse off. The new structure of education, which increasingly includes academies and free schools outside local authority control, will lead to further marginalisation as middle class parents who have lost faith in the comprehensive system choose to withdraw their children over fear of falling standards and diminishing opportunities. Benn questions the fairness of these new autonomous schools admissions policies; free schools in particular tend to be established in wealthier areas, meaning access to children from deprived communities is denied. Exclusionary admissions policies have also been identified. The Academies Commission (2013) reported evidence of covert selection tactics where academies would hold 'pre-admissions social events' for prospective parents. It also found that academies are shown to have higher exclusion rates than schools under local authority control. Academies, particularly those run by private businesses, do not want the reputation of their school tarnished by bad press or misbehaving pupils.

Contemporary schools prepare youth for volatile labour markets and uncertain service sector employment

Education is increasingly being seen as a vehicle to address society's wider social problems. Growing anxiety about young peoples' attitudes and behaviour have also become influential in educational policy making (Furedi, 2009). In the UK and elsewhere, schools have increasingly focused on pupils' anti-social and criminal behaviour (Hayden and Martin, 2011). Focusing attention here is said to distract from the enduring inequalities that continue to exist in education and will likely do nothing to improve the behaviour of pupils who are becoming progressively disengaged and likely to feel alienated from the school environment.

Surveillance

The use of surveillance technologies in schools has been increasing in recent years (Hope, 2009). CCTV cameras, screening facilities, access controls, electronic registers, biometric technologies including iris and fingerprint technologies are becoming commonplace in many secondary schools and even some primary schools in the UK. This is not just a UK phenomenon: we are witnessing a growth of surveillance technologies elsewhere, most notably the USA and Australia but also in many European countries. According to Monahan and Torres (2010) this demonstrates a mode of governance that controls access to opportunities and life chances and even helps to channel choices often using personal data to determine who gets what. They are in agreement with Standing that education is an important aspect of the broader political economy and therefore 'often serves as a battleground for ideological and material conflicts over resources, values and rights. Surveillance is not merely a weapon in those larger contests; it actively shapes the social field upon which those contest play out'.

Education is an important aspect of the broader political economy

While surveillance technologies and the use of other security mechanisms such as police officers and security guards are justified on grounds of safety and crime prevention, it can be argued that what we have instead is a process of surveillance creep where technologies are actually used in other ways than originally intended. Rather than keeping young people secure, cameras and other surveillance technologies are being used to monitor and control young people and their behaviour within schools and classrooms.

Clear distinctions have been found in the way that pupils at different types of schools and groups of pupils experience surveillance, according to existing social relations as well as cultural traditions (McCahill and Finn, 2010). Those from state comprehensives showed a greater awareness of surveillance and felt their experience at school was reflective of their experiences in the community, where they were often the target of local police officers or security personnel when they visited places like local shopping centres. Pupils at private schools, on the other hand, were neither concerned about nor particularly aware of being the focus of CCTV. Their contacts with police or security personnel, mediated by status and identity or simply by virtue of the way they dressed, were not regarded as adversarial.

Educating or isolating?

From the brief evidence provided here, there seems to be support for the arguments about the particular consequences of neo-liberalism for schooling. Education is becoming increasingly divisive, isolating particular groups of young people. Having joined the more marginalised sections of society, a person's experience becomes one of inferior positioning and treatment. Once this happens, authorities and higher status groups tend to become suspicious and feel the need to track the behaviour of precarious groups (Standing, 2011). However, there is maybe some glimmer of hope that resistance to this emerging educational apartheid is possible. For example, initiatives that aim to provide vocational skills to young people as well as improve their self-confidence and esteem should be enhanced, rather than furthering mechanisms that seek to control antisocial or criminal behaviour (Stephen, 2011). It is to be admitted, however, that achieving a fairer education for all is unlikely if present conditions persist. Those perceived to be potential members of the precariat will continue to be monitored, watched and, ultimately, excluded. ∎

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