Chapter 2
The Social Construction of Globalised Education Discourses: Inhabiting a World of Performativity, Competition and Responsibilisation

Brendan Hyde

Abstract Drawing on Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's notion of internalisation, this chapter argues that twenty-first Century learners are now born and socialised into a world through schooling in which globalised discourses of neoliberal performativity and responsibilisation are taken for granted as being the norm. However, this experience of the world is not necessarily fixed and pre-given. It is a construction. These discourses have been socially constructed in the process of globalised education reforms by governments and educational institutions in their quest for global competitiveness and comparative education data analysis. Educators themselves have forgotten the alternative educational discourses of happiness, learning for life, and so on, that were once more prevalent. Influenced by the purpose of social constructionism, this chapter argues for the need to take a critical stance towards this taken-for-granted knowledge to promote a more socially just and inclusive experience of education for learners and to foster a sense of agency and self-efficacy.

Keywords Comparative education data analysis · Discourses · Global competitiveness · Globalisation · Education reforms · Neoliberal performativity · Responsibilisation · Socialisation; social constructionism

The Social Construction of Globalised Education Discourses: Introduction

By way of introduction, I would like to present three short anecdotes that highlight the concerns being expressed in this chapter. The first comes from Reay and Wiliam (1999), the second from Keddie (2016), and the third from a conversation that I

B. Hyde (✉)
School of Education, Deakin University, Geelong, VIC, Australia
e-mail: brendan.hyde@deakin.edu.au

recently had with a group of pre-service teachers in the final year of their Bachelor of Education course:

> For Hannah what constitutes success is correct spelling and knowing your times tables. She is an accomplished writer, a gifted dancer and artist and good at problem solving yet none of those skills makes her a somebody in her own eyes. Instead she constructs herself as a failure, an academic non-person, by a metonymic shift in which she comes to see herself entirely in terms of the level to which her performance in the SATs is ascribed (Reay & Wiliam, 1999, pp. 325–346).

> For Danielle (Year 5), 'getting good grades' meant that she would not have to be a waitress like her cousins 'who didn't do very well as school'...Similarly, Annie (Year 5) spoke of a good education protecting her from having to take up menial jobs, as she stated: 'you wouldn't want to be a rubbish man picking up stuff from the streets' (Keddie, 2016, p. 112).

This group of students were growing more and more concerned by the minute. "But how exactly do you want us to set this out?" one of them asked. I replied that they could set out their work in whatever way they chose, provided that they addressed each of the criteria on the marking rubric. "But will I be marked down if I use bullet points?" asked another. "Does it matter if I put some of this information into a table?" asked yet another. "And, exactly how many references should I include – in fact, do I even need to include references?" chimed in another anxiously. As I began to reply that they should exercise their sense of agency and that their own voices should be reflected in their work, one of the students murmured, almost to herself, "I have to do well in this assessment task – I just cannot fail" (personal recalled anecdote).There is something that all three of these short anecdotes have in common. Each highlights a tension between the learner as an individual with her or his own attributes and talents, and the learner as one who is compelled to position her or himself to get good grades in those areas of the curriculum that are deemed to "matter", or which are seen to be of value, in order to succeed. This reflects the social reality that "aligns educational achievement with level of capacity to take advantage of the economic and material benefits of the social world" (Keddie, 2016, p. 113).

Through a close analysis, however, I would like to take this one-step further by suggesting that it is no longer that case that students are simply compelled to position themselves to compete within the external parameters of achievement that are deemed to be of value. Rather, I argue that they are now born and socialised into a world, through schooling, in which globalised discourses of neoliberal performativity and responsibilisation are taken for granted as being the norm. That is, twenty-first century learners' experience of school is, for them, fixed and pre-given. It is what they understand to be normal since they know of no other way of being in the world.

However, discourses concerning globalised education reform are neither fixed nor pre-given. They are constructions. These discourses have been socially constructed in the process of globalised education reforms by governments and educational institutions in their quest for global competitiveness and comparative education data analysis. High stakes achievement tests, such as TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), PISA (Program for International Student Assessment), and NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy

and numeracy) in Australia continue to encourage and to fuel these socially constructed discourses.

In this chapter, I draw on Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's treatise, in particularly on their notion of internalisation, to show how the neoliberal discourses of performativity and responsibilisation – both of which are features of globalized education reforms – have been socially constructed. Further, and in being influenced by social constructionism, I argue for the need to take a critical stance towards this taken-for-granted understanding of the world to promote a more socially just and inclusive experience of education for learners, and to foster within them a sense of agency and self-efficacy.

The Social Construction of Reality

The central concept of Berger and Luckmann's (1966) treatise is that individuals and groups of people interacting in a social system create, over time, concepts or mental representations of each other's actions, and that these concepts eventually become habituated into reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to each other. When these roles are made available to other members of society to enter into and play out, the reciprocal interactions are understood to be institutionalised. In the process, meaning becomes embedded in society. Knowledge and people's conceptions (and beliefs) of what reality is become embedded in the institutional fabric of society. Reality is, therefore, said to be socially constructed.

Thus, human beings together create and the sustain all social phenomena through social practice. Berger and Luckmann detail three particular moments in the process of socialisation through which this occurs. The first is externalisation. This occurs when people act on the world in some manner, creating an artefact, or a practice. For instance, this could occur when an individual, or community, develops a concept, such as gender, and then seeks to externalise this idea in some way by, for example, telling a story, or writing a book about it, or creating an artwork that depicts this idea in some way. The artefact (the story, the book, the artwork) then enters the social realm. Other people begin to re-tell the story, or read the book, or look at the artwork, and in this way, the artefact begins to take on a life of its own. Externalisation largely takes place within institutions, since while "the social products of human externalisation have a character *sui generis*...it is important to stress that...Human being is impossible in a closed sphere of quiescent interiority" and the human being must, therefore, "ongoingly externalize itself in activity"(p. 70, italics in the original).

The second movement is known as objectivation, whereby the artefact – a product of human activity – is "available to both [its] producers and to other men [sic] as elements of a common world" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 49). It has become the object of consciousness for the society in which it was developed – a feature of the natural world itself rather than a construction of the interactions of human beings (Burr, 2003).

Berger and Luckmann ([1966](#)) argue that externalisation and objectivation are moments in a continuing dialectical process. There is a relationship between human beings (the producers of artefacts) and the social world. That is "man (not, of course, in isolation but in his collectivities) and his social world interact with each other. The product acts back upon the producer" (p. 78, parentheses in the original). The result of such interaction renders three essential characterisations of the social world, namely that "*Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality.* [And that] *Man is a social product*" (p. 79, italics in the original).

The third moment in the process is internalisation, by which "the objectivated social world is retrojected into consciousness in the course of socialisation" (Berger & Luckmann, [1966](#), pp. 78–79). Other people, including future generations, are born into and inhabit a world in which an idea already exists, and begin to internalise it as a part of their own consciousness, and understanding of the nature of the world.

Berger and Luckmann's ([1966](#)) account demonstrates how the world can be socially constructed by the social practices of people. At the same time, it demonstrates how people experience the world as if the nature of their world is pre-given and fixed (Burr, [2003](#)), rather than a construction.

There are two other key notions in Berger and Luckmann's ([1966](#)) treatise which have relevance for this discussion. These are habitualisation and institutionalisation (as alluded to above). Habitualisation consists of any human activity, repeated frequently, that forms a pattern which "can then be reproduced with an economy of effort and which...is apprehended by its performer *as* that pattern" (p. 71, italics in the original). Habitualised actions bring with them the "important psychological gain that choices are narrowed" (p. 71). While there might be an infinite number of ways in which one could complete a given project, or undertaking, habitualisation effectively narrows the choice to one particular way. Habitualisation thus provides direction for activity and renders it unnecessary to have to define again each specific step for specific situations.

Institutionalisation occurs "whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualised actions by types of actors" (Berger & Luckmann, [1966](#), p. 72). They are available to all members of the particular social group that constitutes the institution. Institutions are not created instantaneously, but are rather historically formed. That is to say, institutions have a history of which "they are the products" (p. 72). They are experienced as an objective reality since they have a history, which predates the individual's birth. The institutions "are *there*, external to [the person], persistent in their reality" (p. 78, italics in the original).

They control human activity by establishing predefined patterns of conduct, which steers the institution in one particular direction, as opposed to other possible directions. Institutions generally establish themselves in collectivities, and are comprised of large numbers of people. The development of "specific mechanisms of social controls...becomes necessary with the historicisation and objectivation of institutions" (pp. 79–80).

Importantly, Berger and Luckmann ([1966](#)) draw attention to the fact that institutions are a humanly produced and constructed reality. They require legitimation, that is, the ways in which they are explained and justified to each and subsequent

generation of people who belong to them. Such legitimations "are learned by the new generation during the same process that socializes them into the institutional order" (p. 79).

In the following section of this chapter, I apply the three moments of socialisation as espoused by Berger and Luckmann (1966) to show how the neoliberal discourses of performativity and responsibilisation – both of which are features of globalised education reforms – have been socially constructed. I do this with particular reference to governance, and policy making.

Externalisation and Objectivation – Discourses That Have Been Socially Constructed

Influenced by the trends of globalisation more generally, Rinne (2020) astutely notes that education at the national level of western countries:

> ...involves not only language, concepts, classifications and preferences per se but entangle in their webs a shared sequence of new cultural and political myths, sagas and beliefs, produced in a new space of meanings that swear allegiance to community and to progress. . . .our collective understanding of education as a whole and its relationship to concepts like equality, social justice, or economy and culture is reshaped (Rinne, 2020, p. 27).

More specifically, the artefacts which are produced that contain and promote such cultural and political myths and beliefs are, in the first instances at least, a series of educational declarations and policies. These are produced, over significant periods of time (in this case since the early 1980s), with the purpose of externalising the idea that good and effective education ought to be reformed in such a way that it strives for global competitiveness, excellence and accountability. They advocate that students' success in the classroom be measured in terms of how well they perform and compete in tests and examinations. In turn, schools, and indeed education systems, are to be held to account in terms of their comparability with each other, both nationally and internationally.

Such artefacts have been in production since the early 1980s. They have served to shift the educational agenda away from, for example, learning how to live (Neil, 1917), engaging in inquiry for creative transformation (Freire, 1972), empowering individuals in a process for becoming (Biesta, 2009) and contributing significantly to personal and collective happiness (Noddings, 2003, p 1). Instead, these artefacts have steered educational reform towards the neoliberal values of performativity, productivity, economic competitiveness and measurement, as well as the comparison of education outcomes, both nationally and internationally.

A recent statement indicative of this shift may be found in Australia in the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Education Council, 2019). This declaration maintains that improving educational outcomes for all young Australians "is central to the nation's social and economic prosperity and will position young people to live fulfilling, productive and responsible lives" (p. 4). Statements on education

elsewhere also indicate a similar shift. For instance, the Ministry of Education, New Zealand *Te Tahuhu o te Matauranga* (2014) states that, "Education is vital to building a strong and successful society" and that "Our education system performs well overall and in global terms, and it must if young New Zealanders are to be equipped with the values, knowledge and skills to be successful in the 21st Century" (p. 4). Likewise, the Department for Education in England (2014) maintains, "The national curriculum provides pupils with an introduction to the essential knowledge that they need to be educated citizens. It introduces pupils to the best that has been thought and said; and helps engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement" (p. 6).

However, as artefacts produced by nation states and educational institutions, policies are not necessarily always reflective of a cohesive and systematic attempt to promote and guide best practice in any particular arena or aspect of social life. National policy-making is, as Ball (2007) maintains:

> inevitably a process of bricolage: a matter of borrowing and copying bits and pieces of ideas from elsewhere, drawing upon and amending locally tried and tested approaches, cannibalising theories, research, trends and fashions and not infrequently flailing around for anything at all that looks as though it might work. Most policies are ramshackle, compromise, hit and miss affairs, that are reworked, tinkered with, nuanced and inflected through complex processes of influence, text production, dissemination and, ultimately, re-creation in contexts of practice (p. 44).

Further, Dale et al. (2016) note that such policies are framed by institutional opportunity structures in education systems, meaning "the deeply ingrained conceptions about how education systems 'work', how they get things done, the set of rules, conventions, sedimented practices through which the system is administered" (pp. 63). They provide direction for how policies and structured are framed, similar to the way in which institutions control human activity by establishing predefined patterns of conduct (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Thus, these artefacts that have been produced in the form of policies are far from perfect or complete manifestations of ideas. They have been constructed by drawing on multiple sources and ideas and, to some extent, re-created in the context of practice. When others read and engage with these artefacts – politicians, policy-makers, school principals and teachers – they begin to take on a life of their own. As a product of human activity, these artefacts (policies) are available to both those who were responsible for their production and to others as elements of a common world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). These have, then, become the object of consciousness for the context in which they were developed. As Burr (2003) would argue, they have become a feature of the natural world itself rather than a construction of the interactions of human beings.

As Berger and Luckmann (1966) have noted, externalization and objectivation are moments in a continuing dialectical process. There is a relationship between human beings (the producers of artefacts, in this case, educational declarations and policies) and the social world. They argue, "man (not, of course, in isolation but in his collectivities) and his social world interact with each other. The product acts back upon the producer" (p. 78, parentheses in the original), such that "*Man is a social*

product" (p. 79, italics in the original). Applying this notion to the present investigation suggests that those who have developed, implement, and complied with these educational statements and policies – politicians, educational planners, school principals, teachers and students alike – are, in effect, themselves social products of the neoliberal values, ideals and discourses for which these very artefacts advocate, in particular those of performativity and responsibilisation. It is to these that the focus of this chapter now briefly turns.

Neoliberal Performativity and Responsibilisation

Performativity refers to "a culture and mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)" (Ball, 2003, p. 216, parentheses in the original). In other words, the performances of individuals serve as measures of output, or productivity, and they represent the worth, value or quality of a person within a particular field of judgement.

In neoliberal educational reform, students' success in the classroom is measured in terms of how well they perform and compete. Students come to learn that the successful student is one who is good at doing what a test or examination requires, and who can successfully apply her or himself to whatever is required to succeed, for with the promise of success comes the opportunity to acquire a "good" score, and hence a "good" job and rewarding lifestyle (Hyde, 2021a). The better one performs, the greater the chances of being able to take advantage of the economic and material benefits of the social world. In this way, students are "incited" to "conduct themselves as competitive subjects" (Wilkins, 2012, p. 202).

In education influenced by the neoliberal agenda, there are a myriad of opportunities for students to perform and compete. Such opportunities abound not only in the academic arena, but also in the sporting field as well as in the popularity stakes. When students organise themselves in response to attainment targets, performance indicators, achievement standards and the like – which they are effectually forced to do – they are living "an existence of calculation" (Ball, 2003, p. 215).

However, the targets, goals, achievement standards and so forth that matter, or count, in this existence of calculation are neither decided upon by the school or classroom teacher in negotiation with students. They are externally prescribed according to utility and what is good for the economy, and manifest in the forms of classroom ability settings (streaming) and standardized tests, such as NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and numeracy) in Australia, the Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) in the UK, and the Progressive Achievement Tests (PATs) in New Zealand. They also comprise high stakes achievement tests, such as TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), PISA (Program for International Student Assessment). These constitute the fields of judgement that encompass and represent students' worth and value. In terms of the performativity of students, Thompson (2010, p. 416) astutely notes that, like teachers, students are:

> ...exposed to cultures that prioritise measurement and testing, reporting using mandatory standards and systems, state-sanctioned teaching methods, reformed organisational curriculum policies. In short, student are at the centre of those...practices and pedagogies [that] shape the subjectivities of students.

As a result, students in contemporary classrooms are compelled to position themselves to compete within the external parameters of achievement that are deemed to "matter", or which are of value. The research of Ball (2003), Thompson (2010), Wilkins (2012) and Keddie (2016) demonstrates that when students do this, their efforts may be viewed as highly strategic and active. They are continuous endeavours of calculation, in which students comply with the demands of performativity through learning to "playing the game" (Keddie, 2016.

When students position themselves to perform and to compete, it is perhaps not surprising that they ways in which they think about their achievement and success reflects a sense of neoliberal responsibilisation (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Shamir, 2008; Wilkins, 2012, Keddie, 2016). At the most fundamental level, responsibilisation operates so as to reconfigure the roles of individuals – managers, employees, consumers, students, and so forth – mobilising them to actively undertake and perform self-governing tasks (Shamir, 2008). Responsibilised individuals are those who have been "persuaded to willingly take over responsibility for areas of care that were previously the responsibility of government" (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 251). Thus, the newly responsibilised individuals come to fulfil their obligations to the nation, to the state, and to their employers by pursuing economic wellbeing for themselves and their families.

By way of example, Shamir (2008) notes that welfare programs in many countries now link welfare entitlements to the recipient's willingness to share the responsibility for enhancing their own earning capabilities. Catch-cries such as "no rights without responsibilities", along with the notion of "partnerships" (that is, "we are all in this together") are indicative of the culture in which the individual is persuaded to take on the responsibility for things that were previously obligations of government and social and economic systems more broadly.

Neoliberal responsibilisation, in the sphere of education, is the mechanism by which students are positioned as self-sustaining individuals whose choices "are rational expressions of free will, the consequences of which they will solely bear and are responsible" (Keddie, 2016, p. 117). Achievement and underperformance are seen as self-determined choices on the part of students, which are freely made. But, with the choice comes the responsibility for, and consequences of, the decision made by the student. In this way, students are praised for achievement and success, but are admonished for underachievement. Both of these outcomes are viewed as the result of the decision made by students for which they themselves are responsible, rather than shortcomings of an education system that may have failed to address issues such as adequate funding, appropriate education programs, and disadvantage (Hyde, 2021a).

While these two particular neoliberal discourses have been socially constructed, as discussed above, twenty-first century learners (as well as their teachers) have

themselves become social products of these neoliberal values as a result of the continuing dialectical process between externalization and objectivation.

Internalisation

Internalisation, the process by which "the objectivated social world is retrojected into consciousness in the course of socialisation" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, pp. 78–79) is the third movement in this social construction of reality. Other people, including future generations, are born into and inhabit a world in which an idea already exists, and begin to internalise it as a part of their own consciousness, and understanding of the nature of the world.

Not only are twenty-first century learners products of these neoliberal values and discourses that are espoused by education and policy statements, they are now born and socialised into a world, through schooling, in which globalised discourses of neoliberal performativity and responsibilisation not only exist, but are taken for granted as being the norm. That is, twenty-first century learners' experience of school is, for them, fixed and pre-given. Being good, compliant, strategic, and performing learners who are responsible for their own success (or lack thereof) is what they understand to be normal since they know of no other way of being in the world.

Taking a Critical Stance Towards Taken-for-Granted

Those who engage with the social construction of reality, or social constructionism, as it is commonly known, argue that a key purpose is to take a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge, that is, to be critical of the notion that observation of the world unproblematically yields its nature to the observer (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1985, 2001; Hyde, 2020; Parker, 1997). There is a need, such scholarship argues, to maintain a suspicion of assumptions in relation to how the world appears to be, and that the categories with which human beings apprehend the world do not necessarily refer to real divisions. One is asked to "suspend belief that commonly accepted categories or understandings receive their warrant through observation" (Gergen, 1985, p. 267).

In taking such a critical stance, perhaps the first thing to call into question is the purpose of education. The documents mentioned earlier in this chapter – the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (Education Council, 2019), Te Tahuhu o te Matauranga (2014) and The national curriculum in England Framework document (2014) – place an unmistakable emphasis on learners acquiring the knowledge and skills to be competitive in a globalised world. As such, they reflect the neoliberal values of performativity, productivity and economic competitiveness that have come

to characterise much of the discourse on globalisation. They are informed by common achievement tests, such as TIMMS, PISA, and in Australia, NAPLAN.

However, the purpose of education has not always been expressed in such overt neoliberal terms. Going back to the early twentieth century, A.S Neil (1917) saw his own notion of the purpose of education as being at odds with the policy of his day, perhaps best expressed in his claim that, "I want to teach my bairns how to live; the Popular Educatorswant to teach them how to make a living. There is a distinction between these two ideals" (p. 46). He believed that learners have the ability to direct their own learning and that it is their right to do so. In addition, Neil believed that a key purpose of education was to be happy and interested in life, and that imposed authority was unjustified. Instead, he trusted the natural inclinations of children and saw no need to externally and purposefully influence their behaviour (Neil, 1960).

For Paulo Freire (1972), education is concerned with the process of humanisation, which liberates learners from the powers that view them as empty vessels merely to be filled, or deposited, with knowledge. Such liberation is a praxis, that is "the action and reflection of men [sic] upon their world in order to transform it" (p. 52). An important notion of Freire's approach to education is the concept of "problem-posing" in which the taken-for-granted social roles and expectations of people are made problematic. In problem-posing, people "develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves" (p. 56, italics in the original). For Freire, problem-posing stimulates authentic reflection and action upon reality, that is, praxis, viewing people as "engaged in inquiry and creative transformation" (p. 56).

Importantly for Freire (1972), there is an inseparability between learning and being, that is, between learning and ontology (see also Hyde, 2021b). Learning is grounded in the learner's own being, in their interactions with the world, and in who they are *becoming*. Problem-posing affirms learners as "beings in the process of *becoming* – as unfinished, incompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality" (p. 56–57, italics in the original). The unfinished character of the learner and the transformational character of reality therefore requires that education must therefore be an ongoing activity.

More recently, Nel Noddings (2003), like A.S. Neil (1917) maintains that a key aim of education is happiness. Noddings disqualifies the explicit push towards schools being places that should focus on academic achievement or as incubators for the production of successful graduates who contribute meaningfully to a society; one in which success is measured in terms of literacy, numeracy and scientific abilities. Instead, she argues that happiness and education are intimately related. Noddings comes from a premise that happiness should be an aim of education, and a good education should contribute significantly to personal and collective happiness. For Noddings, a "feature of happy classrooms is a continually negotiated balance between expressed and inferred needs" (p. 242).

Arguing that we have lost sight of the values and purpose of education, Gert Biesta (2009) argues that there is a need to reconnect with the question of purpose in

education, especially in light of a recent tendency to focus discussions about education almost exclusively on the measurement and comparison of educational outcomes. For Biesta, what constitutes good education is a composite question that moves beyond what he describes as the "learnification" of education, and involves qualification, socialisation and the process of individuation. While these three functions of education are interconnected, discussions about the purpose of education need to distinguish between the ways in which education can contribute to qualification, socialisation and individuation. Ultimately for Biesta, and in reflecting the ideas of Freire, education is concerned with empowering individuals in a process for becoming. Any education "worthy of its name should always contribute to processes [of individuation] that allow those being educated to become more autonomous and independent in their thinking and acting" (p. 41).

The thinking of writers such as Neil (1917), Freire (1972), Noddings (2003), and Biesta (2009) above, together with a number of others, including Dewey (1916), Apple (1979), McLaren (1980), Giroux (1981), Britzman (1986), Macedo (1994) and Shor (1996) (to name but a few) represents alternative educational discourses that stand in stark contrast to the neoliberal imperatives that dominate the present milieu. Such scholarship has taken a critical stance towards the taken-for-granted knowledge and structures of the neoliberal education agenda.

Such alternative discourses are neither new nor novel. They have been advocated for quite some time now, and many have been put into practice in various contexts with great success. However, contemporary educators seem to have forgotten these alternative educational discourses that were once more prevalent. It seems that they, too, have fallen victim to "the cocktail of a narrow vision, widespread standardisation and abstraction, an exclusively fiscal view, a depleted curriculum, deprofessionalised teachers and market driven accountability systems" (Gorur, 2016, p. 612). That is, their professional identities have become social products of the neoliberal values and imperatives, which devalues tacit and professional knowledge (Gorur, 2013) as a result of the continuing dialectical process between externalization and objectivation. Professionally speaking, they cannot remember a world otherwise.

However, the neoliberal school reform agenda is not going away any time soon. Globally speaking, cultural, economic and technological exponential growth have raised the value of education as a desirable commodity, and this has increased the importance of ensuing that students have access to high standards and quality education (Zajda, 2015, 2020). The challenge lies in being able to take a critical stance towards the way in which education in the contemporary milieu *appears* to be, and to incorporate – especially at the localised and individual school level, that is, at the "micropolitical level of engagement" (I'Anson & Allen, 2006, 276) – mechanisms for the activation of alternative discourses such as those indicated above. Such discourses could also include the notion of a rights-respecting curriculum and the promotion of student voice (Hyde, 2021a, c).

Conclusion

Discourses concerning globalized, neoliberal education reform are neither fixed nor pre-given. They are constructions. As has been shown in this chapter, these discourses have been socially constructed in the process of globalised education reforms by governments and educational institutions in their quest for global competitiveness and comparative education data analysis. Yet, and as I have argued in drawing on the treatise of Berger and Luckmann (1966), twenty-first century learners are now born and socialized into a world, through schooling, in which these discourses of neoliberal performativity and responsibilization are taken for granted by them as being the norm. It behoves policy makers, academics, curriculum advisers, school principals and classroom teachers to take a critical stance towards such taken-for-granted globalised and neoliberal discourses in education. Taking such a critical stance opens up for them the space to recover and rediscover some of the alternative discourses that shift the educational agenda towards learning how to live, engaging in inquiry for creative transformation, empowering individuals in a process for becoming, and contributing significantly to personal and collective happiness. When such alternative discourses are considered, educational practitioners are positioned to provide a more socially just and inclusive experience of education for learners, and to foster within them a sense of agency and self-efficacy.

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