

The Two Heads of Janus? Professional and Semi-Professional Education and Dilemmas of Engagement in the Context of the New Capitalism

Yvonne McNamara
Liverpool John Moores University
United Kingdom

This paper discusses the impact of globalisation and the 'New Capitalism' (Sennett, 2006) on Higher Education. It raises questions concerning the Janus-like nature of Higher Education Institutions (particularly the 'New' Universities in the UK), which are facing simultaneously, though perhaps not in equal measure, towards liberal and a neo-liberal educational models.

It uses the example of semi-professional education, historically a contested site within the academy, to explore the nature and impact of these tensions, previously manifest as a dualism between 'education' and 'training', 'academic and 'non-academic' work or 'tradition' and 'progress'. In 'new times' (Hall and Jacques, 1990; Nayak, 2006) these tensions are particularly acute in the realm of professional and emerging semi-professional education, with its emphasis on 'work-relatedness' and work-based learning.

The paper draws on recent qualitative research with a group of students enrolled on a new 'semi-professional' degree in Working with Children and Young People. It explores their motivation for engagement with the programme and the perceived benefits/outcomes. It also explores the feelings and perceptions of a small team of ten staff, as they grapple with competing perceptions of their role and purpose and what it means to be 'professional' in the context of HE.

The paper raises important questions regarding the role of HEI in praxis – ensuring best outcomes for both the individual and society – whilst implicitly questioning the nature of the society we hope to create.