

## Editorial: Declassing Education

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## **1. Education, Pedagogy and Class**

### **1.1 Emergent consciousness in learning delivery systems**

*"Class is a communist concept" (Margaret Thatcher, 1992)*

*"...we're all middle class now" (Tony Blair, 1992)*

*"Rich, thick kids do better than poor, clever children" (Michael Gove, 2010)*

In July 2017, the journal's regular contributor David Hayes (also mysteriously known on social media as *Dajvid Haze*) posted a proposal on Facebook, setting off a chain of events leading to the issue of PRISM you are reading now (Fig.1). The online reaction to his idea was immediate and heartfelt. Our impression of that moment was that there was a hunger to talk about the lived experience of class in education and to relate this experience to our wider institutional, social and economic contexts. With this special issue, we hope to better

represent the issue of class in education as well as the experience of working-class students and academics.

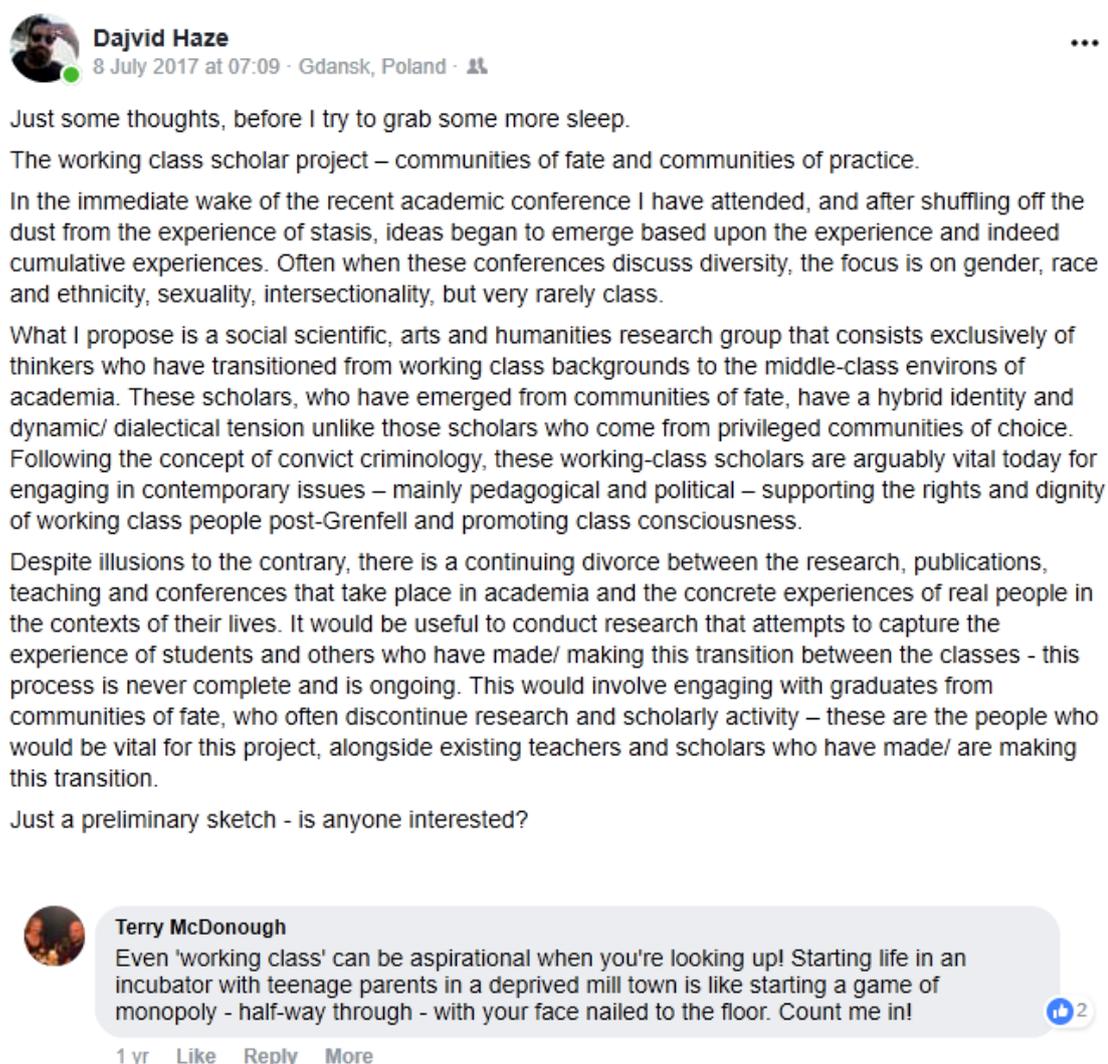


Figure 1: Facebook conversation on working class academics

In the United Kingdom in the 1990s and early 2000s there seemed to be a developing consensus view, a groupthink, employing phrases such as “the classless society” and “meritocracy” and, in reflection of Fukuyama’s ‘end of history’ (1989), giving the impression that society was progressing naturally and inevitably towards a liberal democratic, globalised meritocratic end state. The collapse of the world economic system in 2008 and the punitive measures used to bail out the financial markets in the years that followed (which in the UK

were called “austerity”) are associated with rising inequality and savage cuts to the welfare state and public services. The post-crash period has also seen a resurgence of populist and extreme right-wing politics. At this moment the debate around social class and education seems more pertinent and necessary than ever. Our initial and informal discussion of the theme revealed an abiding anxiety over class identity, a micro-fracturing and division that distracts from gross societal inequalities and decreasing social mobility. Is this class self-consciousness rather than class-consciousness?

This journal is hosted at an institution in one of the most deprived areas of the United Kingdom. Staff here are regularly trained in equality and diversity for characteristics such as race, gender and sexuality, but bias based on social class is not covered. As Diane Reay suggests, social class is insufficiently addressed in teacher training and education, leading to the issue’s marginalisation.

...until we address social class as a central issue within education then social class will remain the troublesome un-dead of the English education system. I am not conjuring up here some gentle shadowy ghost haunting our classrooms but a potential monster that grows in proportion to its neglect (Reay, 2006)

Diane Reay was the first researcher to be mentioned in the comments on the Facebook post above and we are absolutely delighted to publish her article in this issue.

The question that then arises is whether the low status of class issues in education and society is a result of unconscious bias or, as Henry Giroux suggests in this issue, because there is an active, conscious depoliticisation through reinforcement of ignorance and illiteracy.

More profoundly, illiteracy is also about refusing to act from a position of thoughtfulness, informed judgment, and critical agency. Illiteracy has become a political weapon and form of political repression that works to render critical agency inoperable and restages power as a mode of domination ... Illiteracy provides the foundation for individuals to be governed rather than a foundation that enables them to govern.

We note the increased prioritisation of skills over education and growing emphasis on the employability of school leavers and graduates. Does this suggest that class consciousness, creativity and critical thinking may be seen as superfluous at best and, at worst, a threat to the established social and economic order?

Our call for papers used the phrase 'emergent consciousness in learning delivery systems' both as a reference to (re)emergent class consciousness in education and in relation to the recasting of pedagogy, teaching and learning in the more robotic, instrumental and behavioural vocabulary of learning delivery, programme management, assessment and quality assurance, with implications of a future of artificial intelligence and algorithmic education. PRISM's remit is to welcome and support submissions from established and emergent authors and practitioners and the reaction from our contributors to the call has been truly impressive in its breadth and quality.

## **1.2 Conclusion**

Has the 'resigned compliance' and 'submissive complicity', referred to in our opening paper, got the better of us and extinguished our hopes and beliefs in a higher education system that levels the opportunities for all its students rather than divide them?

This special issue contains six articles, three think pieces and one book review - over 50,000 words on a topic we have been blithely told no longer exists, or if it does, can just be surmounted through more aspiration and participation? The commitment and critical insights in this issue will hopefully inspire every reader to engage with this research and scholarship.

## 2. In this issue

This special issue is opened by *A Life Lived in Class: The Legacy of Resistance and the Enduring Power of Reproduction* from **Diane Reay**. It has her own life and career as a case study, one originating in a working-class coalmining area, before twenty years as a primary school teacher in London and then as an academic and Professor of Education at Cambridge University. The case study advances the influential work of Pierre Bourdieu on the relationship between a habitus and a field through its concept of a recalcitrant habitus. The article supports its position through many examples of personal experiences that illustrate both self-defeating and transformative consequences of resistance. It posits the effects of a field cannot be overcome 'by pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps'.

Thanks to the depth of its analysis, this 'life lived in class' provides enhanced insight and alarming examples of the impact of class and its relationship with other influences. It questions the ability of higher education to surmount these problems when:

*...the academy is a field defined by male as well as upper class power: a space where racism of intelligence is compounded by the misogyny of intelligence.*

**Henry Giroux**, in *Higher Education and the Politics of the Radical Imagination*, then provides a piercing account of the contemporary threats and pressures facing higher education. It serves immediate notice to their urgency from increasing authoritarianism,

deregulation and privatisation. It identifies a political project behind pedagogies of repression and education that merely 'provides the foundation for individuals to be governed rather than a foundation that enables them to govern.'

The article encourages all educators to protect the cultures that make democracy possible and rebut the current attacks on the truth, honesty, and the ethical imagination. It argues this requires a new way for thinking about education, one that halts the creation of a predatory class of 'unethical zombies... producing dead zones of the imagination that even Orwell could not have envisioned'. It also includes clear guidance for practitioners seeking to do more in their higher education teaching than merely train students for the workforce:

Critical pedagogy is about more than a struggle over assigned meanings, official knowledge, and established modes of authority: it is also about encouraging students to take risks, act on their sense of social responsibility, and engage the world as an object of both critical analysis and hopeful transformation.

The third article is *Beyond the Curriculum and the Classroom: A case study of a curriculum enhancement programme in an English secondary school* where **Rachel Jackson** puts forward her research from teaching classics on an after-school curriculum enhancement programme. Half of the participants had been identified as 'disadvantaged' on the 'CLASSics CLASS' programme that provided learning opportunities usually reserved for elite educational institutions. The paper includes five portraits of the participants that provide fascinating insights into how these young people perceive their futures.

This is followed by '*Risky Business?*' *On Perceptions of Risk and Vulnerability in Further Education* from **Christina Donovan**. The intriguing title illuminates the paradoxical and conflicting response the term 'risk' produces; conflicts evident from her research within a

further education college into the conflicting accounts of the term 'risk'. The research investigates how the term is defined by different members of staff and captures what they consider the characteristics of an 'at risk' student to be. Before assessing how negative perceptions influence attitudes towards such students who in the consequences of the neoliberal environment where they represent a 'risk' to the financial health of the organisation.

The next article is from **Abdul Aziz Hafiz** who in, *Class Precarity and Solidarity in Education: Social Value Co-creation and Non-ownership Social Infrastructures* considers the Great British Class Survey 2013 and its class at the bottom of this ranking system, the 'precariat'. It extends earlier work by acknowledging the sociospatial complexities of class and argues for understanding difference in relation to global dependence and the reproductive mechanisms of precarity. The potential to provide security through higher education is then considered.

**Alex Dunedin** then provides *Class, Opportunity and the Lesser Minds Problem: A Ragged University Response* which considers his work in the free education project the Ragged University. This initiative uses the UK's traditions of free education to provide learning opportunities at community events in social spaces. The piece opens with discussion of the Lesser Minds problem and processes of dehumanisation and dementalisation. The social justice aspirations of pedagogy are contemplated as are the relationships we encounter when education is reduced to "free" market principles.

The first of the three think pieces in this special issue, comes from **Richard Wyatt** with *Raymond Williams the working class academic*. This contemplates the key ideas from one of the founding fathers of cultural studies and argues for his contemporary relevance. The piece

considers Williams' pioneering insights from the 1960s that included additional ways for understanding lived experiences and his term 'structure of feeling' which can uncover alternative collective opinion; an important method as such thoughts may not always reflect dominant ideologies.

**David Allan** provides the second think piece, *Class, Education, and Mindset*. Allan considers the influence of attitudes in education, employment, and social status. It reflects on the role of education for maintaining rather than alleviating class divisions, through its ability to reproduce capital rather than its production. The piece offers a clear challenge for educators, one where we aim to educate beyond the curriculum to create more life chances and informed choices for our students.

This is followed by a third think piece, *Containment and Division: Evaluating Class-Based Metaphors in Higher Education* by **Terry McDonough**. The use of Conceptual Metaphor Theory is put forward to understand the divisive effects in educational discourse from terms such as 'HE-in-FE' (higher education in further education). A thoughtful breakdown of this metaphor is provided in the piece which stands as a clear provocation and challenge to this artificial and damaging distinction in the different classes of HE now available in the UK.

This special issue then concludes with **Peter Shukie's** book review of Virginia Eubanks (2017) *Automating Inequality: how high-tech tools profile, police and punish the poor*. This book has evolved from Eubanks' research and case studies into experiences of the use of technology in everyday life and its embeddedness into the infrastructure of welfare in the United States. The review elucidates some of the troubling findings in Eubanks' book and the pervasive and destructive over-reliance on technology as a means of disassociating and alienating the poor.

We hope that you enjoy reading this issue and that you find it inspirational for your own work and/or thinking. PRISM welcomes your responses, critiques and counterpoints for future issues.

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