From Community to Commodity College: Globalization, Neoliberalism and the New Ontario College Curricula

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Abstract

Adopting a post-structuralist and critical perspective, the author situates The Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002, often referred to as the New College Charter, and its developing Ministerial bodies regarding curricula at the colleges, in discourses of standardization, neoliberalism and globalization. Of concern is the shifting accountability for curricula development and reviews from the state to the local level amidst growing infatuation with market discourses. The author concludes with recommendations for further questioning about the interrelationships of governance and marketplace.

Keywords: discourse, curriculum, higher education, policy, college charter, neoliberalism, post-modern, post-structural

Fashioning truth in curriculum

I begin my conversation by saying that I am a student of post-structuralism; I celebrate the opportunities post-structuralism gives for multiple entry points to conversation.

In my understanding of post-structuralism, we fashion truth; *fashions in truth* – those discourses or paradigms which guide the way we see the world – in turn determine the very fabrics we have to make truth. Sometimes, that fabric is scant. Fabrication is also a component; meaning in language is a product of, and the illusion of, a structure which is stabilized by a centre, which limits play and which subjects all language users to its rules. The fabric itself is fabricated; "truth", as it turns out, is neither stable nor eternal, but is provisional and socially constructed.

As an educator, having a post-structuralist bent means that I must regularly remind myself of the structures at work which systematize and normalize my thinking and acting – some of which provide me *my sense* of stability – systems that privilege certain perspectives of stability and from which I happen to benefit because, for the most part, I am immersed and surrounded by positions of privilege. I have come to enjoy education and being an educator, in part, because I am interested in the possibilities I have to serve as a change agent in privilege – and by the possibilities I meet every day in my work to engage others in changing structures that prevent certain people from enjoying what I enjoy – not as some rhetoric of salvation or redemption, but as the pesky burr that suggests discomfort can have a purpose.

Since it is sometimes easiest to begin changing in the places which are most familiar to us, my obligation is to share my understanding of a place for post-structuralist, critical theory in my work domain, an Ontario College of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT) located in central Ontario, so I am a pesky burr here. This paper interfaces critical theorists and literary theory with education policy as I consider the ways in which systematic restriction intersects with individual change agency in the creation and implementation of curriculum policy for Ontario colleges. And just as post-structuralism moves us out of ways of thinking which are reassuring in their stability, this paper is intended to shift the reader's comfort zone in a consideration of standards and curriculum out of stability and assurance, into a space of question and uncertainty.

Contextualizing the CAATs and the New College Charter

Briefly, before we get uncomfortable in this way, it is worthwhile to reflect upon whence we come. Higher education in Canada is constitutionally the responsibility of the provinces. In Ontario, there are 19 provincially-assisted universities, including the Ontario College of Arts and Design and 24 provincially-assisted colleges of applied arts and technology (CAATs). Each institution operates independently and determines its own academic and admissions policies, programmes and staff appointments with the CAATs providing a wide range of career-oriented training programmes in Business, Social Services, Health Sciences, etc. for both secondary school graduates and mature students. Most two- to three-year programs culminate in a Diploma; most programs of one-year or less culminate in a Certificate. CAATs were a product of the late 1960's, when Bill Davis, then Ontario's Education Minister, set the mandate in motion that would give birth to the Ontario community college system. The community college was a place intended to provide higher education to those who would otherwise not receive it. It was the alternative to university, and the key identifiers were "access" and "skills training" and, ultimately, community. Catchment areas were established so that CAATs would have communities to serve and to seek out their programs and the government would maintain some control over curriculum and the purse strings.

Forty years later, did access still need to be the focal point? Were skill training and job acquisition still the intended outcomes? Certainly the external milieu had changed, but how would this alter the vision of the CAATs?

In April 2002, out stepped what has become known as the "new College Charter", The Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002. Central to this charter was the belief that college education was more than skilled training and that a two-tier system in higher education with designated catchment areas for the colleges was no longer appropriate for the neo-liberal perception of the marketplace of the new millennium. As a rational response to perceived economic problems and the need for Canada to more fully engage in knowledge economies, the Ministry brought out the new charter, contextualizing it in the spirit that colleges could and

should be able to operate more autonomously in a free market system – to a large extent identifying what their products would be, how they would deliver services, and ultimately linking the choice of citizens for their education with the ability of individual institutions to respond in the market. The arrival of applied degrees and post-graduate certificate programs in the CAATs – never mind what was happening in the universities -- had already blurred the lines between the institute of theory (university) and the institute of vocation (college), but also between the institutes of privilege and access, and between concepts of academics and business. In the words of Stronach (1993), we would want a "transformation from mundane citizen to archetype, from dependent subject to active consumer/citizen, and from dull bureaucracy to innovative, entrepreneurial management.(120)." This new charter has thrown the gauntlet out to the individual CAATs and situated them firmly in discourses of globalization and liberalism, and the rhetoric of a free market system.

Governmentality, neoliberalism, globalization and curriculum

It is arguably increasingly difficult to understand education policies and practices without reference to globalization (Crossley, 2000). Liberalism (or its more recent incarnation, neoliberalism) as an economic theory advocating free competition and a self-regulating market, serves as an undercurrent or platform for globalization, especially as it relates to "freedom of commerce". Olssen and Peters (2005) argue that neoliberalism is a particular element of globalization as it constitutes the form through which domestic and global economic relations are structured. For Foucault (1991), liberalism represents an art of government or form of political reason, and, as a political rationality, it is not simply an ideology but a discourse containing theories and ideas that emerge – systems of expertise and technology which can be used for the purposes of political control. On the local level, the student within the CAAT shifts from citizen/subject to consumer. The purpose of curriculum is potentially not just vocation but the sexed-up promises of a marketplace product in the commodification of teaching and studying. Into this enter discourses of "quality", "performativity" and "choice" via the new bodies of the college charter and we move more perilously along a trajectory from "community" to "commodity" college.

Bodies of the New College Charter

As curriculum control and localized determination are now being transferred to the CAATs in the context of the new charter, the government – in consultation with several senior management executives across the CAATs – has determined the need for three essential bodies or entities.

A. The Ontario Colleges Quality Assurance Secretariat (OCQAS) – a subsidiary of the Association of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario (ACAATO) – has the mandate to "provide effective and efficient mechanisms that ensure specific program quality and consistency statndards are met by the CAATs"

B. The Credentials Validation Service (CVS), a body and series of policies which would be charged with standardizing diploma and certificate requirements for the colleges (for instance, determining which programs qualify for diplomas, for post-graduate certificates, for Ontario Certificates, etc.)

The CVS has been established consistent with the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities' Binding Policy Directive, *Framework for Programs of Instruction*. This service, along with the approval of programs of instruction by the local College Board of Governors, makes up a component of the Self-Regulatory Mechanism for the college system. Accordingly, the Ministry information releases indicate that the mandate of the CVS is to:

provide reasonable assurance that all postsecondary programs of instruction leading to one of the Ontario College Credentials (Certificate, Diploma, Advanced Diploma, or Graduate Certificate), regardless of funding source, conform to the Credentials Framework and are consistent with accepted college system nomenclature / program titling principles; and,

maintain the integrity of the credentials offered by the college system and protect the interests of students and employers who require a reasonable guarantee of consistency and quality in postsecondary programs of instruction offered by colleges of applied arts and technology in Ontario. (ACCATO web site)

C. The Program Quality Assurance Process Audit (PQAPA) would manage the review of CAATs to ensure that mechanisms were in place and being used at each CAAT to meet quality program development, renewal and review procedures, documents and, ultimately, results.

The Credential Validation Service (CVS) model was operational March 1, 2005, with a mandate to support CAATs in new program (curriculum) development and ensure standards across the system of colleges in the province. The CVS is charged with verifying that new programs can run and ultimately the CVS makes a recommendation to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) about whether that program ought to receive funding.

The CVS is arms-length from the MTCU, and while CAAT Boards of Governors have the last stamp of approval at each college in terms of whether or not a program will run, the CVS ultimately tells the MTCU whether or not to hold or yield the purse contents.

The PQAPA is, rather simplistically, an attempt to conduct standards assessment from something of a distance. Because both the PQAPA and the OCQAS are relatively new, they do not yet really have established personnel or mandates beyond what had been laid out originally under the new charter. These entities are at a very early stage of formation, having only approved an Orientation Model in principle in September 2005. Still, to understand the role of the PQAPA (and, to a lesser degree, the CVS), we need to recognize that the transformation of the college system follows on similar reforms globally – primarily with the belief in the marketplace. We must keep in mind that these bodies in Ontario are just in their very early stages of development. There are a number of cautions for us as we move forward.

One might argue that the autonomy permits each CAAT to develop its own niches and celebrate those aspects of education which it best delivers; opposition might suggest that the decentralization of curricular decisions which would come with the new charter essentially devolves the responsibility (and blame) from the government to the institutions, while the maintaining of target setting and performative techniques to steer from a distance, distances the reformer from outcomes of reform. Distancing the government and its responsibility to citizenship from the CAATs may cause other issues for society which I certainly would not attempt to consider here. The point I will make is that governance is not necessarily as localized as some might argue when we recognize that governance and discourse are closely aligned, that

concepts of "choice" and "standards" may well be propagandistic assumptions more than democratic truths.

Standards and performativity in curriculum reviews

Policies and mandates currently in place for curricular development and review at most colleges have little to do with ensuring a critical perspective on curricula and the political assumptions underlying content; instead, they deal largely with the processes departments must follow in considering and reconsidering curriculum with what I contend is a neo-conservative consideration of power operating largely within a rhetoric of "standards" and what Lyotard called "performativity" – describing the essentials of how academia has been adapting to the demands it has encountered to act in more "accountable", commercial ways (Pratt, 1995: 35-40). Barnett (2000) utilizes the concept of performativity to argue that marketization has become a new universal theme, commodifying teaching and learning and various ways higher education must meet performative criteria with an emphasis on measurable outputs. Examples of performative policy/policing include the curricular bodies that must sign-off documents, timelines for the generation of documents, and delineation of such course delivery elements such as credit value, delivery mode and course numbers. Student success rates are tracked as are retention/attrition ratios. Students are polled to determine their satisfaction levels with particular courses and programs in instructor evaluations. Instructors receive this information when courses have been completed but such information is not available for curriculum reviews. Perhaps less concerned with administration but none-the-less somewhat removed from what most educators deem to be curriculum, we have guidebooks which instruct curriculum developers and reviewers to use only action verbs approved in rhetoric from Bloom's taxonomy; similarly, outcomes, we are told, must be measurable, specific, and clearly delineated for each program and for each course. Curriculum is reviewed not just by developers but by bodies of other academics not typically associated with the programs under review, so what becomes a focal point during these reviews is the measurability of performance and such purposes can cause considerable frustration for the reviewers (Arvast, 2005). Reviewers need to operate within this standardizing rhetoric of an outcomes-based orientation.

In addition, some standardization of content coverage occurs within Ontario because of Ontario curriculum standards. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) has, for each program of study within community colleges, a broad set of learning outcomes which must be incorporated into a program, and measurements against these standards exist with repercussions for college funding impacted by Key Performance Indicators – or K.P.I.s. So, for instance, a graphic design program or an electrical engineering program would need to delineate expectations for graduates in terms of technical proficiencies; funding would, in part, be dependent on graduate success "benchmarked" against these expectations. In the past, the MTCU would review a college's application to run a program to ensure that the stated proficiencies, timelines for delivery and nomenclature were in keeping with these standards. Further standardization of content within each college would deny autonomy which is presumably necessary for higher education; curriculum processes which steer clear of delineating common learning outcomes and assessments (such as those assigned to the elementary and secondary curriculum streams in the public education sector in Ontario) provide a modicum of autonomy for teachers and college systems.

However, informed by Foucauldian perspectives on neoliberalism as a form of state reason or governmentality, as Olssen and Peters (2005) argue, under neoliberalism markets are perceived as a new technology by which control can be effected and "performance" presumably enhanced in higher education.

Let's contextualize such recognition of discourse in curriculum planning. Regardless of our positions and political leanings, most of us would agree that the process of schooling is a form of "social and cultural reproduction" that is linked openly to structures in society; we would probably also agree that the core links are especially to economic structures as schooling develops its workforce. As Corson (1995) argues, formal education legitimates knowledge, class and social strata. "Schools allocate people and legitimate knowledge, or legitimate people and allocate knowledge. By extension, language is the vehicle for power distribution through education." (p. 9) The language that frames our curriculum bodies is of critical significance to the ways in which curricula can be spoken. These discourses serve as context for texts.

Some would argue that those links to economic or market discourse are the very fabrics we use in the creation (fabrication) of curriculum. Over the past number of years in which I have worked within colleges, I have witnessed a change in curriculum reviews such that the implementation of standardized review processes has turned the attention of educators from academic aims to economic aims, from multi-faceted aims of education to utilitarian, labour-market responsive or vocationally explicit aims. It is what Grubb and Lazerson (2005) have termed a rising voice of the "gospel of vocationalism", with its promise that formal schooling preparing individuals explicitly for employment can resolve all public and private dilemmas – chiefly national and local economic prosperity in a "century of human capital".

The PQAPA Orientation Model takes great pains to explicitly consider language. For instance, the introduction appears as follows:

> In the early stages of the development of an approach to self-regulation, a distinction was made between the terms Quality Assessment (the mechanism or procedures used to determine the extent to which quality exists) and Quality Assurance (the mechanism or procedures used to assure or measure the level or existence of quality). A decision was made to focus on the latter, Quality Assurance, and the implementation of a mechanism that assures and measures the existence of quality in the college system. This is an important distinction that is consistent with the expanded roles of college Boards of Governors and the literature that stresses broad participation in, and ownership of, quality assurance processes. (p. 3, PQAPA Orientation Model, 2005).

A further footnote indicates:

> The name "Program Quality Assurance Process Audit" (PQAPA) was chosen to deal with several concerns: (a) the word "program" limits the scope of reviews to postsecondary credit programs (not overall college operations); (b) the words "quality assurance process" describe the process (or processes) adopted by a college Board and its administration to act on their responsibility for ensuring overall effectiveness, currency, and relevance of the postsecondary credentials offered, and does not extend to or include "program evaluation"; (c) the word "audit" describes the role of the province-wide review process (in that it reviews processes, validates the college's Program Quality Assurance record, and verifies that the process has the impact of improving programs). A shorter title for this process is desirable. (p. 4, PQAPA Orientation Model, 2005)

Throughout this document, however, there is little questioning of the validity of such terms as "international best practices", "minimum standards", "consistency" and "objective judgments", which are repeatedly used.

As previously introduced, the language of the PQAPA is not new. In the current CAAT context, we define curriculum in learning outcomes which must be measured against and meet program standards assigned to CAAT curriculum for various programs, but ultimately our industry advises us whether the graduates are "market ready". For instance, we have the aforementioned Key Performance Indicators (K.P.I.)attached to CAAT funding which very clearly align economic productivity and market value of our graduates. In essence, a K.P.I. is a performance measurement which is used to generate statistical data that presumably can be used to measure the "success" of an institution when compared to its "competition" and relative to its past performance. On a broader scale, the information generated by K.P.I.s is used to track the performance of an entire *system* (e.g., the Ontario postsecondary education system). Though the standards and performativity discourses are well established in the CAAT repertoire of policy, the new promises of "choice", the "gospel of vocationalism", and the "free market system" as solutions for public education should be warily considered.

Educators in CAATs often spend a considerable amount of time "marketing" programs – trying to sell the educational product, and these measures in turn bear on the very curriculum we are selling. The new college mandate in many ways is extending the market discourse more formally and the policies which evolve with it will also bear out the same neo-liberal perspective of education as product.

 The New Charter: Considerations for the Curriculum Reviewer and the Quality Assessor

By now I have underscored that the new college mandate is still in its very infancy. In the formation of bodies and entities for the monitoring of standards and quality across the system, we are preparing ourselves for the policies which will evolve with these new entities. In order to step forward in our understanding of the implications for policy reform, we need first to seek a working definition of policy. Stephen Ball (1994) refers to the distinction of policy as text versus

policy as discourse and such distinctions will help us to set the stage for effective body and policy evolution.

Most policy analysts and developers alike would agree that policy is not just text – written and served up in hypodermic needles to the masses with some rational, homogeneous experience. It is a complex interaction, iteration and reiteration of intention, understanding, interpretation and enaction. Borrowing from concepts of literary theory, we can see policies as "representations which are encoded in complex ways (via struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and meaning in relation to their history, experiences, skills, resources and context)." (Ball, 1994, p. 16) Policy is not a concrete and immutable entity; policy as text is regularly contested and changing.

Policy is text in this theoretical framework, but it is more also. I will argue that in its intention, policy is about power. In its iteration and reiteration, it is about power. And in its enaction, it is about power.

When we view policy as text, we understand that the individual actors have roles in the definition of meaning and intentionality of policy. A "policy as text" perspective suggests that the text itself is the point where power struggles occur. Individuals make meaning, deal with contradictions and attempt representations of policy. In the case of new policy for college curriculum, those individuals would include faculty, staff, a director for a Centre for Teaching or Research, the registrar, curriculum coaches, the Academic Vice President, etc. A discursive perspective of policy takes us beyond the individual players to a systemic conception of power. "Discourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention." (Foucault, 1977, p. 49)

Discourses are about what can be said, and thought, about who can speak, when, where and with what authority. Discourses embody the meaning and use of words. Therefore, collections of words into rhetoric (and ensembles of policies into collections of related policies), exercise power through a *production* of "truth" and "knowledge". When policy is repeatedly referred to as though there is complete agreement on meaning, we run risks of oversimplification and a very

denial of the underlying power. Focusing on policy as discourse brings the power questions right to the fore. Understanding that dialogues favour central perspectives in regard to gender, race and economy (for instance) is only part of the picture though. We need to appreciate that discourse operates beyond just terminology and beyond words; it is the produced understanding itself.

Specifically, language which gets used around curriculum, especially in "outcomes-based" education, prevalent in college curriculum discussions, includes such terms as "excellence", "high quality", "productive citizens" and, perhaps especially, "standards" in addition to the aforementioned infatuation with the verbs associated with Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive levels. In turn, discourse involves a rhetoric which gives the impression of universality or homogeneity and hides the possibility of differences (Portelli, 2001, p. 67). "Objectivity" is a necessary assumption and also has falsely assumed homogeneity in this rhetoric. As Ball reminds us, "Concepts such as the learning society, the 'knowledge based economy', etc., are potent policy condensates within this consensus. They serve to symbolize the increasing colonization of education policy by economic policy" (Ball, 1998, p. 4).

Consider how I started this paper. Did you wonder what I meant by "knowledge economies", "free market systems", "knowledge products", "citizens" and "choice in the marketplace"? Did you even question the use of such terminology? If you are like me, we tend to take this language for granted and use it daily in our administrative discussions in higher education. *This* is the very power of discourse; it becomes common, normalized and reasonable, and it frames how we understand and interpret our work in education and our places in society. In Ontario, we might consider the development of the Post-secondary *Quality* Assessment Board (2000) as created by the Post-Secondary Education *Choice* and *Excellence* Act of 2000 (my italics). The Ontario Colleges *Quality Assurance* Secretariat, The Credential *Validating* Service, and the Program *Quality Assurance* Process Audit all share the assumptions (at least in their titles) of measurability, ensurability and accountability. They definitely share assumptions about "truth" which can't sit well with a critical post-structuralist.

How different our very structures might be if we organize our worlds differently – think differently about the nature of truth and knowledge such that we recognize how significantly our organizing systems (such as our day-to-day language) determine knowledge. When we forget to ask questions about hierarchies and taxonomies, about concepts such as the quantifying of education, about the very paradigms which determine how we move through our environments, we run risks. More to our point here, when we dismiss questions of consensus, forget to ask about dominant discourses that run through policy, and assume universality of definition, how then can we possibly think clearly and critically about "standards" in and across CAATs? How can we engage in these conversations when we don't think about the conversations which *aren't* being engaged?

Standardization and Globalization

Many years ago, there was a Harvey's commercial which figured women coming out onto a fashion runway wearing potato sacks. Each time they came out wearing the same potato sacks, the Russian announcer gave a different commentary of their outfit: "lounge vear", "evening vear", "svim vear"; the Harvey's ad mocked the absence of distinction for fashion in the Soviet Union. The wall had not yet fallen and the Cold War still played out in the psyches of Western consumers. A little funnier than the Emperor's naked body, the concept was the same. Call it what you will and processes of normalization will probably have others agreeing to these dominant perceptions. One of the reasons the commercial was funny to a Western audience is that we have a "free marketplace" with ample "choice" which would let us actually buy different outfits for swimming and dining out, and hopefully they would look better than potato sacks. But what if you wanted to wear a potato sack?

Marketing agencies count on us to be won over by such terms as "new and improved", "high quality", "A1 grade" or even Starkist Charlie's tuna that "tastes good", never mind to whom; we, as consumers, are directed to relish choice. Education is subjected to the discipline of the market as well – what is fashionable, what is tasteful and what gets bought. So if the marketplace decides what happens in education, what happens to the people who do not have choice in consumption? What happens when you want something other than a Macdonald's burger or its

equivalent in higher education? The citizen as consumer ultimately leads to a loss of choice and a loss of the citizenship that education originally purported to be about. Implementing standards has the same potential to undermine individual as well as societal need. In the words of Ford (2003), "The most insidious dangers of systems of practice are those that hide significant effects in innocuous activity and unacknowledged decision making" (p. 6). Criticizing the notion of common standards does not imply a lack of concern about quality or about standards in themselves. We need to be concerned with quality and what quality involves. But we must also ask some key questions:

> Whose quality and whose standards?
> How are the standards to be articulated and addressed?
> Who is included and who is discluded from defining the standards?
> Why is there a resistance to looking at these kinds of questions?
> Who benefits from not raising and discussing these questions?

And, more than questions of agency, let's ask how texts become infused with standards rhetoric and assumptions to the demise of other ways of seeing education. We need to recognize the inherent powers in discourses of standardization. Mediocrity is not birthed in the absence of commonly agreed upon standards, but, I would argue, it has a better environment in which to flourish when we do not continually ask questions about the inherent power dynamics.

The Global and Globalized Model: How the CAAT is caught

The commodification and standardization of education is similarly not solely restricted to education in Ontario. As ISO (International Organization for Standardization) becomes a common attachment to industry, so the discourse of standards has similarly impacted much of what we do in education in Ontario and abroad. A sample of the standards discourse follows.

ISO (International Organization for Standardization) is the world's largest developer of standards. Although ISO's principal activity is the development of technical standards, ISO standards also have important economic and social repercussions. ISO standards make a

positive difference, not just to engineers and manufacturers for whom they solve basic problems in production and distribution, but to society as a whole.

The International Standards which ISO develops are very useful. They are useful to industrial and business organizations of all types, to governments and other regulatory bodies, to trade officials, to conformity assessment professionals, to suppliers and customers of products and services in both public and private sectors, and, ultimately, to people in general in their roles as consumers and end users.

ISO standards contribute to making the development, manufacturing and supply of products and services more efficient, safer, and cleaner. They make trade between countries easier and fairer. They provide governments with a technical base for health, safety and environmental legislation. They aid in transferring technology to developing countries. ISO standards also serve to safeguard consumers, and users in general, of products and services – as well as to make their lives simpler.

http://www.iso.org/iso/en/aboutiso/introduction/index.html#one

Global discourses, and in this case discourses of standards, naturally enter into educational policy and practice. The core-periphery structure of our global economy and national labour markets is closely paralleled in emerging educational policies and perspectives. These are the very perspectives which argue that education is essentially about ensuring that our economy is maintained by the workers we educators train to operate within it. And certainly this argument about "skills training" is firmly ensconced in the collective consciousness of the CAAT; the new College Charter with its emphasis on free-market and public choice finds its place solidly here.

There is a concomitance if not correspondence… between the logic of globalization – as a world free-trading system – and the new terrain of thinking about social policy. Jones (1998) again notes that "Notions of the public good shift in order to accommodate reduced expectations about accountability, regulation and taxation, which in turn lead to not only reduced but transformed expectations about what public services and infrastructure consist of' (p. 146). This

concomitance is obvious in what Brown and Lauder (1996) called neo-Fordism: 'the route to national salvation in the context of global knowledge wars is through the survival of the fittest, based on an extension of parental choice in a market of competing schools, colleges and universities (pp. 6-7). That is, "education systems have been made objects of micro-economic reform with educational activities being turned into saleable or corporatised market products as part of a national efficiency drive" (Ball, 1998, p. 8).

Discourses of standardization enter parallel to the discourses of globalization. "Education is not simply modeled on the methods and values of capital; it is itself drawn into the commodity form" (Ball, 1998, p. 10). Our times, at least in developed nations, are marked by rapid change, niche rather than mass production, service rather than manufacturing orientations, and leaner, flatter, meaner organizations. From Lingard's reference to the UK, we can see ourselves in Ontario:

> While the structural formation of educational systems has been remade as flatter, leaner and meaner, there is an emergent consensus that within the globalized economy the production of an educated workforce 'judged according to international standards' is more important than ever, part of the state-provided infrastructure necessary to the competitive advantage of nations. At the very moment that nations were losing some control over economic policies and were cutting expenditures, educational policy took on even greater significance. This renewed significance of education as an element of an effective (national) economic policy was reflected in the structures of its production and delivery, but not in expenditure terms (Lingard, 2000, p. 84).

Check the mirror; with cuts deep to the Ontario Ministry budget over the last decade, efforts to monitor CAAT curriculum and delivery have *necessitated* downloading to the CAATs – and most recently the "standards" considerations have been downloaded to the new CVS and other bodies. So with both global discourses of economy/autonomy/choice and discourses of standardization, we arrive at a similar policy experience. And the tensions which exist globally can ultimately come to converge across localities and at the (relatively micro-) level of each individual CAAT. The dance between the individual (local/CAAT) narrative and global discourses of standardization is fluid.

Global and Local Performativity Inter-dis-course

The comic character Dilbert who often suffers at the hands of his clueless boss is somewhat fortunate in that he has an obvious adversary. Whenever he enters into performance evaluations with his employer, we have a very clear sense that his employer's concept of assessment if faulty. Power is clearly oppressive and performativity is mocked. Often we aren't quite so aware of the oppressiveness of performativity in the relationship of the CAAT to the state. Performativity is a principle of governance which establishes strictly functional relations between a state and its inside and outside environments. It is ultimately a steering mechanism – a form of indirect steering or steering at a distance which replaces intervention and prescription with target setting, accountability and comparison. In Ball's words, "performativity provides sign systems which 'represent' education in a self-referential and reified form for consumption" (Ball, 1998, p. 6). Those very bodies external to the MTCU in Ontario for the purposes of monitoring, evaluating, and reflecting on standards across the CAAT system are bodies which are intended to steer CAATs from a distance. The MTCU would admit to the same. But if we remember that power is multiplicitous, interactive and complex, and that policy texts *enter* power relations rather than change them, then we are also reminded of the complexity of relationships between policy as text and policy as discourse – between policy intentions, interpretations and en/re-actions.

Is there a place for diverse approaches and understandings of quality? If we again come back to our core question (whose standards?), how do the broader (or macro) ideals of consistency and quality get determined locally/within the individual CAATs? More difficult perhaps, how do non-dominant discourses enter into the arena? Policies *as texts* which our new CAAT curricular bodies will develop will indeed be like other policies. They will tell us what to do by creating a range of options available for us to decide what is to be narrowed or changed and how particular goals or outcomes are to be set. Individual actors will then have some opportunity for that definition of interpretation and action with local struggle. There is a place for the Registrar, for the faculty, for administration, and for students to define curriculum. Policies as discourse will prove to be more challenging for us to negotiate, and, from the critical perspective, more challenging to subvert.

Subversion as question: a new CAAT walk

I have consistently raised questions in this paper. I have also consistently subverted the concept of teaching and learning in CAATs by mocking our very need to market it, to walk it out in front of consumers and yet pretend that we are somehow above mere haberdashery. If there is optimism as we evolve the new bodies of the CVS, PQAPA and OCQAS, it is to be found in the questions we ask and the play we seek.

I am pleased that in the documents generated by the PQAPA and Proposed Implementation Plan (2005), the starting point for defining these bodies, our representatives began with (and didn't seek to answer) numerous questions. The documents asked largely for definitions and distinctions in language, including terms such as "assessment", "quality", "process", "audit" and "governance". These documents place priority on "appeal", "public release" and "characteristics" of consultation. I think this approach was a sign that the bodies began from a "good" place and the approach gives me hope in my role at a CAAT as it sets up the very admission that policy is process. Questioning as starting point seeks to stake out assumptions and suggest that fixable/stable definitions of quality are neither desirable nor doable. Open spaces for different voices and conversations exist between policies at different levels and the different levels where policies are formed; agency is in the local text. I would contend that the spaces exist at the macro-question marks as well, where structure can come under contest and be available to subversion. There is opportunity for policy as text and policy as discourse to be reconstructed provided it is done with questions rather than statements.

The post-structural, post-modernist approach of the non-linear and anti-categorical is essential to a healthy perspective on conversations about standards. Beginning from a place of questions is unlike scientific discourse which begins with a hypothesis and attempts then to prove or disprove it. A post-structuralist perspective says there aren't single truths or laws for us to uncover, but meandering and shifting multiple truths for discovery and recovery.

In Winter 2006 the Proposed Implementation Plan for CVS and PQAPA enters into its first "developmental cycle" of program quality audits. Within this next year we will see whether the

PQAPA becomes a mechanism more for prescription or description, for support or governance, a vehicle which might help colleges move forward amidst tides of global/globalization discourses. Without a doubt, the CVS and PQAPA are, by their very natures, technologies of governance. The PQAPA discussion paper of March 2005 states quite clearly that this body has been established

> in context of current debates about public policy. First, since 2000, the provincial Auditor General has called for an extension of public agency accountability to include "Value for Money Audits" – a need frequently underlined by the provincial government. (p. 3)

And we must recognize these entities and the discourses within which they are positioned as technologies of governance. To move forward cautiously means we question solutions, we question the concepts of standards and notions that colleges have autonomy in an establishment of same, we question performativity and the simplification of performance into rubrics, the application of scientific method to teaching and learning and human behaviour, we question the very discourses which shape our policies and practices and we engage each other intellectually and philosophically about what higher education ought to be. Outcomes based education and standardized curriculum/evaluation can be useful to get us into conversations about what education can and might do, provided we are moving from a place that had no conversations about standards to begin with. But if we want to be reflexive practitioners in our curriculum development, we will have to return regularly to a place of discomfort and a place where there are no easy answers or scaleable rubrics or one-fits-all potato sack gowns. We have to go to places where we regularly ask whose market, whose choice, whose commodity and whose community? Hopefully our external bodies are here to help more with the questions than with the answers.

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