the superior alternative? Recent school choice policies have their problems. Parents may choose a school, but schools may not chose to enrol their children. Do we know enough about how comprehensive schools operate in different urban, suburban and rural contexts? The perplexing question of how best to deliver post-elementary schooling to all of the people has been with us for a century – the chance of a stable answer emerging any time soon remains remote.

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Lost generation? New strategies for youth and education, by Patrick Ainley and Martin Allen, London, Continuum, 2010, 186 pp., £16.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-4411-3470-7

This review is prefaced by situating its context in a personal account. The story begins in January 2008 when my family relocated from Queensland, Australia to begin a new chapter in our lives in the north of England. Apart from the shock of leaving a southern hemisphere summer to be greeted by the climes of a Yorkshire winter, education systems in the UK were new entities to us all. This was the case for myself working in higher education and for our sons who entered local public infant and junior schools. This situation is significant to Ainley and Martin's work and had particular relevance to my reading of *Lost generations*.

The book, as the authors admit, focuses primarily on institutional education in the UK. For the uninitiated (like myself), the first half of the discussion is dedicated to providing an historical review of education policy and practice since 1945. Whilst I found this to be a useful introduction to the subject more could have been done by the authors to explain the terminology unique to British education (e.g., GCSE, O levels, etc). Having done so, the description would have greater accessibility to an international audience. This could be seen to be a minor point but in an examination of how neoliberal principles (e.g., market driven social activities) have impacted on educational practice connecting to the global spectator would seem appropriate and justified.

It is in the second half of *Lost generations*, particularly the final two chapters, that the narrative delivers what this reader was waiting to hear. No doubt, telling a story of how we have got to where we are is vitally important. And yet, so too is the capacity to offer some suggestion as to how, as members of societies across the world (and to a global community), we can prospectively move on. These movements are offered by Ainley and Allen as options – as they must be. They include radical redevelopments in curriculum and pedagogy to serve what they put forward to be the purposes of institutional learning: to learn from the past, to acquire new knowledge with the intent of informing and potentially altering future social action.

So how might this vision come in to being? According to the authors education should empower people to take control of what is happening in their world, particularly in respect to changing the dominant discourses that effect everyday lives. The UK, like many other western countries, has experienced post-World War II transition from conditions supporting welfare states to societies directed by market values in what is presently known as the knowledge-based economy. As Ainley and Allen clearly point out, education has become the servant to economic concern and this circumstance has wide ranging implication for how teaching and learning now takes place. For example, they argue that the UK educational system has become obsessed with servicing labour markets so much so that students are now overqualified yet underemployed. As per the reference in title of the book, they contend that such circumstance will create a lost

generation of under 25-year-olds who will struggle to find employment even with the necessary qualifications.

The authors' call for a revision of the relationship between education and the labour market is, I accept, a necessity but in doing so, amongst their targets, they take aim at 'academic post-modernism' (96). Whilst not falling back to the dichotic position of simplistically campaigning for a return to subject-based teaching, they do question what they term the social sciences employment of 'discourses of fragmented incomprehensibility' (96). Ainley and Allen proceed to do so by citing from (amongst other sources) a newspaper article written by sensationalist social commentator Frank Furedi. Whilst I would agree that academic language can tend to be inaccessible at times – this is something I believe all academics called to exhibit research impact must acknowledge – I could not accept the kind of sweeping statements about the nature or form of contemporary parenting practice or youth perspectives being suggested. There is a challenge laid down to academics and social commentators today that is twofold: first, it is to continue to open our work to a variety of audiences by using means which are as inclusive as possible; secondly, it is to recognise the polemic when it is presented and strive for engaging a richer debate about the future, in this case, of education. Criticisms of what is/was known as postmodernism cannot merely claim that critical (and often theoretical) attention is value-lite and/or impractical. This position ignores the constitutive nature of language and the potential for pragmatic analytic awareness of our use of discourse to change our ways of life.

Lost generations could be read in a number of ways but central to its purpose is a reminder that education is about change. For a family relatively new to UK education systems the future, if it holds its current trajectory, looks incredibly bleak. But Ainley and Allen implore those with an investment in education to reconsider and reconfigure what is in store. Theirs is an alternate narrative founded in an empowering view which sees education as a means to promoting collective responsibility via community action. This purposeful call to act is concerned with issues of social justice placing these within a realm of sustainability. That is, they see social justice as a continuously re/defined ends to which communities need to be explicitly committed. These are resonant ideals but whether my family can afford to remain in the UK fighting this ongoing battle is a serious and agonising question. It always is when the future of your children is on the line.

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The Routledge international handbook of English, language and literacy teaching, edited by Dominic Wyse, Richard Andrews and James Hoffman, London, Routledge, 2010, 556 pp., £125 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-415-46903-6

This is a book about the nature, remit, delineation, research and policy ideologies of the school subject we call 'English', one of the foundations of compulsory schooling since its introduction. As a subject, English is established, respected and often unquestioned. It is also nebulous, ill-defined and controversial. What are pupils meant to be learning in school English classes and why?

This is a collection of work, a truly awesome bank of articles, each dealing with a particular aspect of this amorphous subject *and* each rehearsing in micro the themes of the handbook: the definition, research, policies and practices of English as taught and learnt in schools. What is equally impressive is how the collection as a whole (and each individual chapter) does not simply