Even though the Credit Crunch has dispelled illusions in the ‘free’ market, neoliberal structures remain firmly in place. Since events have shown that, as Angela Merkel said, the banks have grown too big to be allowed to fail, banks and bankers—or, more precisely, speculative finance capital—retain their commanding position in the economy at the expense of productive capital and the public sector. So, despite talk about a new Keynesianism, private monopoly capital continues to dominate state capital in what has been called a new market-state as a semi-privatised state sector is increasingly permeated by a state-subsidised private sector. Privatisation of education and other public services thus continues apace and globalisation still rules.

This is shown in this issue in the European Union where Mina O’Dowd in Sweden traces the elision of a Utopian ‘learning society’ ideal into the more technologically driven ‘knowledge economy’ for ‘lifelong learners’ striving to avoid unemployment in the only slowly recovering mainland European economies. For the UK and Eire, where unemployment is still rising—particularly youth unemployment, O’Dowd dissipates illusions in a European alternative by the way that she shows the Bologna process being implemented across the region.

That all is not so bad is perhaps demonstrated by Gillian Hilton’s description of Collaboration Across EU Boundaries in teacher education which she says has become less didactic and more open to critical thinking, although at the same time she reports the importation of competences or ‘standards’ into what has become a teacher training process in Eastern Europe.

London and Warsaw are contrasted by Marta Ancewska and Peter Ryan where
mental health service users are described recovering through identical though differently provided educational initiatives, while Gertrude Shotte discusses the dialectic between social inclusion and exclusion for such marginalised groups of often vulnerable and discriminated against people. She evokes John Dewey’s notion of problem-solving within an activity-oriented curriculum as a means of educational inclusion, extending it to non-formal educational settings and to variously labelled oppressed groups.

Of course, processes of globalisation have heightened social polarisation across as well as within countries and continents and Sylvia van de Bunt-Kokhuis examines the case of China to show how policy and business in the current amalgam of state capitalism attempts to develop human capital through ‘talent development’ as interpreted by the Confucian tradition but hampered by the ubiquity of guanxi—personal connections or ‘contacts’—Bourdieuians might say ‘social capital’. Strangely perhaps, Howard Gardner’s ‘multiple intelligences’ are evoked to nurture management talent in these circumstances.

By contrast, Gordon Ade-Ojo reports young literacy learners in the UK socialised into ‘a discourse of failure’. His interviews with tutees and tutors in his ‘mind-study’ reveal ‘over-reliance on what might be called token evidence of participative processes’ to explain what in a schools context has been called ‘overschooling and undereducating’. He advocates instead a ‘literacy for specific purposes’. However, in the current absence of employment, this will prove even more difficult to provide.

A panacea often presented in this and other situations is e-learning. Zlatko Nedelko surveys business studies undergraduates in Slovenia to find them more than willing to use e-literature, though this may have been because it cost them less and he does not explore its effects upon their learning and reading. Reflection on practice is widely supposed to enhance student learning and Tijana Balic and Ksenija Romsterin explore this with pre-school teacher trainees in Croatia. The responses from the small sample surveyed ‘point to an instrumental view of reflection’ informed by the increasing marketisation of provision in Croatia.

This brings us back to the beginning of this collection of remarkably diverse occasional papers that co-editor James Ogunleye is to be commended for assembling. His own interviews with college leaders report their conceptions of creativity and its application in English Further Education. Despite their personal commitment to widely accepted notions of creativity, ‘there is’ he concludes ‘little evidence of institutional appetite for creativity in learning and teaching’ due to the context of persisting neo-liberalism that was noted above.