The empty child: the reproduction of culture through schooling

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The Empty Child: The reproduction of culture through schooling.
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Abstract
This research provides a needed glimpse at the ‘underside’ (Giroux, 1981) of Australian pedagogy. By charting the lives of six teachers and six students from a range of Victorian schools, the research examines our assumptions about how identities are produced and reproduced through schooling. It provides a detailed analysis through a combination of photo elicitation and narrative inquiry methods. The study examines the resistance to sameness and why some students and teachers submit and accept the sameness, while others push back.

Building initially from the work of Michael Apple and his positioning of ideology, curriculum and power relations, this study explores what are the values and assumptions that shape pedagogical practice and in what ways do these practices inculcate Victorian students into ideologically ridden ‘common sense’ practices that are not articulated but understood through the consumption of cultural capital?

This research seeks access to the powerful undercurrents that shape the identities of our teachers and our students as ‘foot soldiers in the long front of modernity’ (Willis, 2003, p. 390). The research is concerned with schooling and the process that happens to an individual within a school. It examines power and education and asks how do both students and teachers internalize and express the pedagogies of contemporary schooling and in what ways do the everyday aspects of teaching and learning reinforce the notion of schools as mechanisms of cultural capital distribution?

Key Words
Pedagogy, culture, ideology, reproduction
Introduction and framing of the article as a PhD offshoot

A critical appraisal of how cultural hegemony (Gramsci, Hoare, & Nowell-Smith, 1971) affects and shapes what we do in education is difficult because the normal strands upon which we would seek to analyse a given occurrence itself must be questioned and appraised as teaching, learning and culture are ‘historically and socially constructed practices’ (Giroux & McLaren, 1989, p. xii). This research, which forms a component of a larger PhD study, seeks to uncover the commonsensical notions of human interaction within a school and thus examine the construction of ideological practices through schooling, since schools, ‘at least in part, act as agents in the economic and cultural reproduction of an unequal society’ (Apple, 1980, pp. 63-64). The analysis stems initially from the pivotal work of Michael Apple, but forms part of the larger continuum of critical theory and draws from other workers in this field such as Joe Kincheloe (Kincheloe, 2008) and Ted Aoki (Aoki, Pinar, & Irwin, 2005) while attempting to make sense of the lived experience of classroom teachers and students.

This paper is concerned with the ways in which Australian schooling prepares children for the future. This research seeks to begin the process of examining hidden pedagogy or what Aoki calls the ‘site between representational and non representational discourses’ (Aoki, 2003, p. 5) in which the implicit values of social engineering become implicit within Australian classrooms. This paper examines three vignettes of the Australian schooling system which ‘often places young people who must rely upon schooling under the care of the least experienced in the most unstable conditions’ (Hayes, 2009, p. 101) whilst problematically ‘the educational research imagination needs to be exercised’ (Lingard, 2006, p. 288) in order for research to be able to access the ‘evolutionary (and revolutionary) that states of disequilibrium present to us’ (Gough, 2010, p. 32).

Introduction

The purpose of education has been heavily contested and is a vexed question. Some believe that for the ‘effectual defecation of the stream of life in a great city, there is but one rectifying agent- one infallible filter- the school’ ("Educational Institutions of New York," 1853, p. 2); others, such as the conservative ideologue Ravitch, suggest that education’s purpose is to prevent the ‘diminution and degradation of the common culture’ (Ravitch, 1981, p. 340). Juxtaposed to this is the notion that ‘education is a space for transforming lives’ (Hay & Moss, 2005, p. viii). The importance of the ‘enlightening function of the school’ (Carnoy, 1977, p. 1) frames schools as a place of discovery and wonderment. Conversely, employers see schools as ‘preparing youth for economic functions’ (Carnoy, 1977, p. 1). This clear juxtaposition emphasizes the tension residing in schooling whilst hinting at the expectations of the ‘hidden pedagogy’ that lies beneath.
This paper contends that, through prolonged and sustained exposure to a schools ideology, the environment of the learner and the educator begins to influence the ways in which they see the world. Transference occurs beyond the superficial level of remembering crude facts, such as who took ‘the swim that needed no towel’ and extends to the tacit understanding of what is acceptable behaviour in a classroom.

The research, though still in its early stages of analysis, suggests that it is not what is said that is learned (though that may well happen as well), it is what is not said but implied through meanings hidden but known to the recipient. This paper seeks to answer the question: how do the individual agents operating within the structures of a school environment consume memes (Dawkins, 2006, p. 198), which are ‘packets of information with set ideological interpretations’ (Meskill, 2007, p. 45) and propagate these memes through their actions?

Context

In this paper I argue that the transmission of cultural ideas, practices and symbols occurs throughout our lived experience but is profoundly affected by the unspoken hidden pedagogy of the teacher. The greater the time spent within an educational institution, the greater the effect on the individual within it, for schools are memeplexes (Coker, 2008) riddled with expectation, desires and traditional belief systems. The boundaries that are set by the school and reinforced though the culture of schooling continually shapes the practice of pedagogy for the teacher and the experience of pedagogy for the student. Over time, a relationship on an individual level is formed when the values and expectations of the school become the values of the individual, as Giroux points out ‘nowhere is this more obvious than in the transformation of the public school into a breeding ground for producing consumers’ (Giroux, 2010, p. vii). This exposure ultimately reshapes the identities of the individuals who ‘are too tired to hold up the armour’, work and learn within the school. That is not to suggest that the individual within the school is without agency; rather, they recognise that it is often both politically and socially expedient to ‘go along to get along’.
This research is interested in that interplay as it shows how the pedagogies of contemporary schooling are expressed through the values that students adopt, how students reach the point where they ‘feel that the rules at school were more important than the rules at home. The school and the teachers were right. As a child you began to feel the conflict’ (Rothstein-Fisch, 2003, p. 20) and the ways in which they learn to perceive the world. Teachers express the pedagogies of contemporary schooling by reinforcing and reproducing them through ‘hidden pedagogy’. Although every educator is different, ‘teachers tend to share a vision of their work, in which ‘classroom control’ and ‘classroom privacy’ figure prominently’ (Denscombe, 1982, p. 249). Teachers’ and students’ internalization of the pedagogies of contemporary schooling seems to operate through the memetic codes of hidden pedagogy; as this relationship takes hold the values of the participant become adaptive, ‘adaptation representing at most a weak form of self-defense’ (Freire, 2005, p. 4).

**Participant selection**

Twelve individuals were selected on the basis of varied demographics from across Victoria to take part in the study. Participants were self-selected and from country and urban Victoria. The gender divide was six male, six female. Six were teachers, whilst six were students, each at different ages and, in the case of the educators, experience levels. Three participants were from independent schools, two from catholic schools and seven from Victorian state schools. This sampling was intentional in order to draw from decidedly different educational paradigms and test the effect of place as it ‘informs our understanding of the subjectivity of social research’ (Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991, p. 6). One student and two teachers were selected to form part of this paper.

Students and teachers were in no way related and no participant had any form of power relationship over another. This was a deliberate choice as I am interested in the individual and their relationship with the memetic codes of their school. It was anticipated that this would allow for a broad range of understanding by selecting from both students and teachers at different points along the schooling continuum.
Table 1: Research Participants

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Methodology and Method

The research posed questions of the participant that were designed to examine how power is understood within education and question how individuals internalize and express the pedagogies of contemporary schooling. Participants were sourced through their respective school newsletters and invited to take part in the project. Each participant took a minimum of 30 photographs based on five broad categories, such as photographs that the participant believed made up their identity or photographs that represent the participant’s experiences of school. Participants met with myself, often in their homes, for a semi-structured interview. During the interview, participants were asked questions about their photographs to prompt them to convey the meaning that they saw in the images. The interviews were filmed.

From this vantage point, the researcher analysis of the photo elicitation coupled with narrative analysis of the semi-structured interviews was able to re-imagine how the everyday aspects of teaching and learning reinforce notions of schools as mechanisms of cultural capital distribution. These methods provided avenues to see how value sets are formed and common sense notions of truth created. The research then asks how these value sets and common sense notions are reproduced. Each category of photographs taken by the participants was designed to elicit information that would assist in providing data to help answer the broad questions of the research, of which this paper explores one.
It was anticipated that, through the category of photographs that represented the participant’s daily life, I would be granted access to the everyday and seemingly mundane events that dominate the participants’ lives, such as where they eat and sleep and what pressures exist within their worlds. More important than the literal translation of the image was the discussion that centred on these images during the semi-structured interviews with the participants. For example, what does the participant decide is the defining features of their daily existence? These images give access to the private lives where, as researchers, we can see the seemingly simple actualized. The images allow access to understanding the participants and give further access to their understanding of the values they have consumed through schooling.

The meaning of the photographs was able to move beyond pure researcher interpretation and instead became a looking glass at the hegemonic constructions of the participants’ lived experiences. Questions such as ‘why did you take that photo’ were designed to explore the non-literal aspects of the participants’ photos and engage with their emotional experiences. The photographs and the narratives of the participants provided me with a chance to understand the motivations, understandings and explorations of the researched.

The following three vignettes extract and analyse the images and semi-structured interview responses of three of the participants – two teachers and one student. Through these vignettes, we can begin to understand how hidden pedagogy can shape individual experience. The vignettes also enable access to the sites of contestation where the individual is in conflict with the mainstream collective consciousness and examines their capacity for resistance.
Vignette 1: Abigail

Abigail\(^1\) is a middle-aged teacher from country Victoria, former principal and parent of two foster children with special needs. Whilst swatting flies across her kitchen table and wrangling an overexcited three year old with her spare arm, she disclosed to me her belief that, whilst on one hand [her] school purportedly believes that relationships are important, the school system and the degree to which parents are given a voice forced Abigail to hide her sexuality. Whilst Abigail is ‘very comfortable’ with who she is, she is routinely positioned as other within mainstream society.

This desire for acceptance is played out in a photograph of Abigail’s adopted daughter with her friends on the way into school (Figure 1). Within this one image the values of the parent clearly articulated. Abigail is acutely aware of what it means to fit in; she wants her daughter to be in an environment in which she feels comfortable and can be herself. Though her daughter is only six years old, Figure 1 illustrates the transference of her mother’s values onto her daughter. It is this same value of acceptance and togetherness that Abigail takes into her workplace, because she knows that ‘teachers [and schools] do more than convey neutral information to students’ (Apple, 1983, p. 113).

Abigail felt accepted until one day when directly questioned about her sexuality by a senior student. Comfortable in the democratic nature of her school, the maturity of her students and the belief that was passed onto her students by the school that ‘who you are, whoever you are, is okay’, Abigail answered the student’s question honestly. Parents of the students contacted the school ‘disgusted that [Abigail] told the class what was none of their business and that it belonged in her private life’. Abigail acutely felt this overt discrimination. The school did everything they could to pacify the parents, whilst suggesting to Abigail that it was she who was in the wrong, rather than the sexist, homophobic views of the school community. Despite her efforts to create an environment in which the students and staff fostered the ideal of acceptance, it became a thing of rampant gossip amongst the parent community. Abigail became ‘the gay teacher’, whereas once she was ‘the great teacher’.

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\(^1\) This article refers to the participants by pseudonyms, which were chosen by the participants. Abigail is Participant 3 in Table 1.
Abigail’s story is the personification of the difficulties an individual confronts when their face is pushed up against a collective ideology. In this case, that teachers are asexual and if they are to be gendered at all it should be heterosexual (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006). Abigail’s lifelong battle against mainstream homophobia and its position of different as ‘other’ (Smith, 1998) developed in her an understanding of the importance of friendship and the necessity of being part of something. Abigail’s personal values informed her pedagogical practice. She confidently disclosed her sexuality to students she knew and trusted. Abigail attempted to inculcate them into what she believed to be the shared ideology of their school. Stemming from her own values, she attempted to inculcate the students into her own understanding:

‘I'm very clear with kids. They say, that's gay and I say, no it doesn't have a sexuality, let alone one that demotes it or promotes it as inferior to the rest, to which they're like, oh I don't really mean that. I said what you're saying is that gay is less than okay, less than normal and inferior to the rest, so that's what you're assimilating it to. So we've had those kinds of conversations.’ (Abigail, 2011)

The students in her care, however, existed within a paradigm in which the common sense, ideologically ridden practice was to mark her as ‘other’. When the collective turned and moved against Abigail, she had nothing left with which to resist. The message to consume the mainstream collective ideals became clear to her; she had stepped too far out of what is possible in this environment. Without any cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) left to spend, she was forced to submit or be sublimated since resistance, for Abigail, is futile. She later left that school. This was the only way in which Abigail could exercise her ability to resist the collective ideology of the school and protect what she felt was an integral value.
Vignette 2: Andrew

Consider Andrew\textsuperscript{2}, a forty-year-old private school teacher and middle years specialist who has had the ability to build his ideological beliefs into reality both through a purpose built middle years centre and curriculum shifts. While Andrew might be perceived by adherents to a liberal ideology as holding conservative views, in the setting of a conservative private school, he perceives himself as a radical and identifies as working against a system ‘that no longer teaches young adults in the ways in which they need to be taught’. Andrew sees schools as ‘selling a product’ and education as something that has a symbiotic relationship with industry. At Andrew’s school, it is ‘openly said that traditional values are pushed’; for Andrew, that has curriculum implications. Despite any particular conservatism that he may hold (perhaps evidenced by his chosen pseudonym being ‘Andrew’), Andrew is an advocate for innovation. He notes the difficulties in changing pedagogy in a place that, by its very nature, is about tradition. Andrew is acutely aware of the ideological positioning of his school as a conservative place of traditional values.

His pedagogical practice is actualised through the school building and curriculum, which were designed by him to work in counter cultural ways to the rest of the school. Andrew is able to achieve this as a Leading teacher, who is afforded considerably more cultural capital within this environment. However, Andrew sees it [the school] as ‘out of touch’. Andrew’s ideology of education has led him to design a green school building within this environment that stands apart from the more traditional confines of the rest of his school. In fact the school has quite literally set it apart, the middle years centre residing a kilometre down the road from the main campus. Andrew’s pedagogical practice does not resist sameness; if anything he embraces it and accepts the environment he is in. He says ‘[he] can live with the product [he] is selling’.

\textsuperscript{2} Andrew is participant 10 in table 1.
In his words:

“When I first came to this school, it meant that year 7, 8 and 9 were photocopies of each other. Things like ties, jackets, being called sir, miss, those kinds of issues that people think are important. The school values those as being important. It doesn't teach subjects, or it tries not to teach subjects, that aren't related to going into university. So we don't run VCAL or we don't want VET, or anything like that, because it's not related to what we perceive as being our core business’ (Andrew, 2011).

Through Andrew we can see that some Australian schools are places for the ‘perpetuation of the present social order’ (Kelly, 1925, p. 121) in which we train the minds of students to submit to those in authority based on a set of pre-determined (and time honoured) values. Kelly suggests that it is best to inculcate students with this kind of submission to authority early as this lays the foundations which in ‘adult life are all to the advantage of the ruling class’ (Kelly, 1925, p. 121).

In Figure 2, we see the view that Andrew has from his desk in the school building he designed. Andrew spoke about its openness and his ability to ‘keep an eye’ on the students and what they were doing. In this image the critical theorist can see Andrew’s conservatisms actualised. His values and assumptions about pedagogical practice lead Andrew to believe that a separation between student and teacher is both necessary and integral; since ‘representational spaces such as classrooms and staffrooms reify subject positions such as teacher, student, and visitor’ (Rossi, Tinning, Flanagan, & Macdonald, 2011, p. 34). Andrew even mentioned the staff member who ‘guards the door’. Through this we can distil the common sense values such as ‘students should not be in the office’ or ‘teachers need a place to call their own’. The students understand these common sense ideologies. As they intrinsically know that there are some places that they can never go, since both teachers and students are ‘required to read, understand, negotiate, reconstruct, reproduce, resist or reconstitute what is acceptable and what is not within this space’ (Rossi, et al., 2011, p. 34). The students in effect, do not have the cultural capital to enter the staffroom. Through an acceptance of tradition, the ideology of privilege for some is secured.
Vignette 3: Rose

After many hours driving around the 2011 Victorian floods I met Rose, a 14-year-old female. She lives in country Victoria and is a ‘school refuser’ (Stroobant & Jones, 2006). She defines herself as a ‘bad girl’.

When she views her schooling, she sees no place for herself. Crucially Rose does not consider that she has any voice in the way her school works or in the way her school operates. Rose’s internalization of the practices of schooling lead her to distrust teachers because one of them called her ‘a fucking bitch’ and ‘they [the teachers] are pretty much all like that underneath’. When she complained about it, the complaint ‘went nowhere’. In essence, students have no real voice at the school ‘we don’t, actually- like we say our opinions, we say what we want, we fight with them, but we don’t really get much of a say’. When the school designed a new building and classroom space, the students and teachers had no say in its design. Says Rose:

   Everyone was complaining about the new school, how they hate how it’s open but then the teacher was like that’s not our fault because the architects built it. We didn’t even have any input into it either. (Rose, 2011)

As Rose rather concisely put it ‘So no one really got a say with that.’

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3 Rose is participant 4 in table 1.
Rose is an iconic representation of a typical year 9 student. Unfortunately, it seems that her school is treating her as just another brick in the wall, rather than seeing her for the individual she is. Rose is pushing back and actively defying the school system and the rules on which being part of the system are predicated. The result is that she spends the majority of her time outside of school not receiving an education. The end result for Rose is that she is actively pushed out of a place which may be able to take her beyond the working class world in which she is entrenched. Rose becomes separated by her resistance when we consider that ‘by taking all children as equal, while implicitly favouring those who have already acquired the linguistic and social competencies to handle middle-class culture, schools take as natural what is essentially a social gift, i.e. cultural capital’ (Dale, Esland, & MacDonald, 1976, p. 4). Rose has already sown the seeds of reproduction of her present social condition, through her resistance to the curriculum.

Rose actively resists sameness, yet during her semi structured interview lamented that she ‘should be more like her sisters’ who go along with everyone. She is aware of the huge pull to conform but pushes back in her current context. The values and assumptions that shape Rose’s schooling is that school is a place she ‘needs to be at’. However, when she attends school, she finds a place that is not for her. Unfortunately, she is unable to find connections between her world and the world of the school. Research suggests that when students experience ‘a sense of belongingness, they are more likely to function optimally because their needs are satisfied’ (Johnson, 2009, p. 102).

When Rose is cut out of her schooling by choosing to not conform, she spends time with her animals, as was demonstrated in her semi-structured interview.

Interviewer: What is it about animals that you like so much?  
Rose: I just love it. They’re so cuddly and people are just so cruel.  
Interviewer: You like animals more than people?  
Rose: Nearly, yeah. Most people! (Rose, 2011)

Rose instead makes strong and developed connections with her animals as seen in Figure 3. Rose’s dog ‘Wolfenstein’ provides her with unconditional love and the attention she doesn’t get when she attends school. Rose understands that she has no cultural capital in her school. The capital that she does have is her choice to resist. Since this works in counter cultural ways, Rose often finds herself at home separated from her friends and peer group. Rose effectively disables herself, since the ‘knowledge skills and dispositions – cultural capital’ (Oropeza, Varghese, & Kanno, 2010, p. 219) of those who attend becomes what is normal. Rose is effectively purchasing educational inequality.
Analysis

Weaving between these sites of contestation, we begin to see some cracks appearing in the form and functions of schools as cultural capital mediators. Examining the dissemination of cultural capital through schooling is a powerful way of analysing the everyday practices which support and disrupt identity formation through schooling.

Education achieves this in the same way that industry does by separating the individual from the collective so we arrive at what Apple refers to as the ‘atrophication of collective commitment’ (Apple, 2004, p. 9). Thus we are left with an overreliance on the individual within our social, educational and working lives. It is important to realise that this is both intentional and desirable from a free market perspective. The individualisation breaks our ability to see the whole school apparatus as a process rather than simply focussing on a component. So we focus on our role, rather than the larger signification of what that role means. The prospective parent considers the ‘My Schools’ website ranking, rather than whether or not the school, for ideological reasons, allowed students with special needs to sit the test. This process is then enacted through cultural capital, government policy and the school apparatus. If a school’s enrolments are based in part on how a school is ranked, then the leadership of a school cannot afford to do anything less than pay serious attention to what it means to achieve good results on the test. In a choice between integrity and the lights being turned off, as a classroom teacher, I know very few administrators who will stand for the individual.

The individual is further divided from the herd through the application of the school’s own filter, the curriculum. The curriculum is important for educators and parents because it gives a sense that what is happening is appropriate of worth and important information needed for a student’s future; this is manifested in Andrew’s rewriting of the curriculum. The curriculum masks a further reality of the hidden pedagogy, which is comprised of the literal translation of the memes of schooling. These memes are as diverse as the schools they serve, but ultimately work towards building the one broad societal understanding of acceptance, ability and opportunities for some.

Through the work of Harry Braverman (Braverman, 1974) we can develop an understanding of the ways in which industrial pressure has served to systematically deskill workers into a specialisation with certain traits encouraged and others not. Servitude and compliance are encouraged whilst resistance and an ability to do more than your role is not. A bartender need not know how to brew a beer, he need only know how to do his part. He becomes a specialist whilst management has the overall conceptual understanding of how the component parts of the specialists come together.
Abigail disclosed during her interview that schools can both mediate and mitigate that pressure. Abigail suggests ‘I just need to move [the students] on to the next maths question or the next English or Science topic, rather than really enjoying or establishing any real substance to anything’. According to Abigail, the education system prefers the separation of self from the contradictory world of the classroom. Through what Andrew describes as ‘industries’ symbiotic relationship with schooling’ (Andrew 2011), Australians have seen a move towards centralization and deskilling. This centralization happens both on an economic and cultural level. On a cultural level it becomes apparent when someone obscures their desires for the pleasures of the collective.

On an economic level, the compartmentalization of school funding in Victorian into ‘zones of improvement’ sees the grant of monies for equipment that schools do not have the infrastructure for – such as the ‘Digital Education Revolution’ (Buchanan, 2011, p. 67) which saw schools furnished with thousands of computers, but ‘the implementation of the policy requires the involvement of various corporations for the provision of the necessary facilities’ (Buchanan, 2011, p. 70) such as software or the electrical points into which to plug the prescribed computers. The centralization on a federal level in schooling has left schools scrambling to fit government criterion in order to not be left behind. Culturally schools are highly adept at centralizing power and removing individual agency, as demonstrated in the vignette of Rose. As Abigail warned, in her opinion, over a long enough arc, education and the practice of pedagogy becomes ‘ongoing sameness’; that is, education is becoming more about monotony and stratification. Victorian education is heading towards everyone being and doing the same. In light of the national curriculum, Abigail asserts ‘you can try and resist but resistance only makes it harder’. The end result being no resistance.

The centralization of all decision making is key to hegemonic control of the individual as the end result is that all thinking, critique and analysis occurs away from the point of production. Hidden pedagogy prepares the individual well for this, preparing students and teachers for hierarchical norms. At the most preparatory level, we understand that the ‘concept of hegemony implies that fundamental patterns in society are held together by tacit ideological assumptions, rules… which are not conscious, as well as economic control and power’ (Apple, 1990, p. 86). In fact it may help to understand hegemony as the ‘rules of the game’, a series of implicit assumptions, which we do not question for that is ‘how things are’. We seem to spend an inordinate amount of time in education lamenting ‘how things were’; to that end the adherence to ‘how things are’ is simply an attempt to not move too quickly. The power of hegemony as it speaks to our assumptions of common-sense practices is that it means that we don’t question the basic premise of the game; we accept that some rules just are.
An example of this belief in tacit assumptions is the value of trust. When we ‘drive down the street, we trust that the car driving in the opposite direction will stay in its lane’ (Apple, 1990, p. 86). This basic tacit assumption doesn’t even enter our waking consciousness, just as we don’t question that we will stop at the lights or that we will be searched before boarding an aeroplane. These basic rules just are. Dreeben argues that it is an obligatory understanding for the students in a classroom as they develop normative coping skills because the assumptive practices of the pedagogue are never questioned. In time the student comes to accept ‘the occupational and political institutions should contribute to the stability of industrial society’ (Dreeben, 1968, p. 145).

The atrophication of the collective allows ‘an overemphasis on the individual in our educational, emotional, and social lives [which] is ideally suited to both maintain a rather manipulative ethic of consumption and further the withering of political and economic sensitivity’ (Apple, 1990, p. 10). The individualisation of education makes it almost impossible to see power and the impotency of teachers to teach for resistance in the situation of which they are a part. Andrew wrestles with the conservatism of his school and his own values base, illustrated during the course of the interview when, whilst in defence of his value choices, he took off his tie. This seemingly innocuous action, captured by the camera and analysed ‘from a Deleuzian interpretation of the body can suggest shifts and transference of subjective states.’ (Moss & Bain-King, 2008, p. 64). Andrew saw the school as a place that ‘sold a product’; he confesses that ‘because I’m high enough up in the structure now to know that if we want people to come through our door then we sell a certain product to those people’. Whilst he is aware of this, he confesses that he is ‘not cynical about it. I can live with the product that I’m selling’.

The individualization of education coupled with the uniquely Australian ‘she’ll be right’ mentality leads to dire consequences for young Australians. Australians are particularly susceptible to cultural hegemony and market forces because, as a nation, we inherently trust authority. Australian historian John Hirst notes:

Australians think of themselves as anti-authority, it is not true. Australians are suspicious of persons in authority, but towards impersonal authority they are very obedient (Hirst, 2006, p. 306).

We like to pretend that we are a nation of antagonist larrikins but the truth is we are not. This love of authority coupled with what could be generously described as apathy towards any events beyond our own backyard leads, to both paraphrase and recontextualise Orwell, to the inevitable boot of pedagogy stamping on an Australian face forever (Orwell, 1949).
The push towards an individualised curriculum and to examine each of our students as individual treasures is not without its merit. However, a cursory look at the ‘Inquiry Based method’, makes clear the power structures right from the outset. Whilst it is certainly more engaging and much more student focused than rote methods of learning, Inquiry calls for the specific teaching of skills and methods so students ‘learn how to inquire themselves’ (Apple, 1990, p. 7). The inquiry method aims to deliver control to the students but in fact often starts from premises that are dictated by the teacher for a range of assessment and management purposes that are not necessarily ‘evil’ at the base of it, though the effect is the same.

Whilst we are prepared to let students inquire into scientific thought, we are reticent to disrupt the appropriateness of the thought in the first place. As Apple suggests ‘instead we “inquire” into consensus ideology that bears little resemblance to the complex nexus and contradictions surrounding the control and organization of social life’ (Apple, 1990, p. 7). This suggests that even the curriculum only further disables the individual’s ability to confront or subvert power relations against powerful ideology. Apple also suggests that the saturation begins early for our students; ‘the ideological saturation will undoubtedly be more effective if it done earlier in one’s life’ (Apple & King, 2004, p. 41). This is reinforced through primary school and actualized through all of secondary school life.

This is not to suggest that this notion of saturation and its effects are always successful nor are they necessarily a mortal lock for homogenised students. Students yield a great deal of agency within this process to resist, as seen in Rose. However, it is evident that the:

‘principles and rules that are taught will give meaning to students’ situations (schools are in fact organised to maintain these definitions) and at the same time will also serve economic interests. Both elements of an effective ideology will be present (Apple & King, 2004, p. 41).
In Australia, schools play a crucial role in the distribution of both technical knowledge and the dissemination of cultural capital through memes and ideologically riddled practices. Pedagogy creates a preparatory ground for life beyond school in which cultural capital is disseminated even in the enabling decisions we make. However, there is ‘diffused within a social space a cultural capital, comparable to economic capital, transmitted by inheritance and invested in order to be cultivated’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970) (cited in Kennett, 1973, p. 238), thus serving to reinforce class sameness and reproduce existing modes of production. Through this perceived reality of schooling, we are able to see the natural progression of adults who are aware of social norms, who can then carry these practices into the workforce and onto their own children, thus perpetuating an ouroboros style template for schools to continue to feed the machinations of the collective.

Conclusion

Through an exploration of three vignettes, I have articulated the ways in which the everyday assumed practices of both students and teachers are in part ideologically driven, such as Rose’s and Andrew’s power relationships in a classroom and Abigail’s sexuality. The application of the participants’ pedagogical practices led them to pursue their ideological common sense practices that conflicted with the schools’ common sense practices. Through the participants’ positioning as a result of their disabling pedagogies, they have consumed the cultural capital afforded to them by their ideological framework. Andrew both submitted and retained a semblance of his ideology, perhaps due to his greater cultural capital, alongside the consumption of the pedagogies of contemporary schooling, whereas Abigail and Rose resisted. Whilst Abigail and Rose were able to resist, it was evident that the collective forces at play such as the conservatisms of the school and the positioning of Rose as ‘trouble’ and Abigail as ‘gay’ acted to disable them of their cultural capital, rendering them effectively voiceless.

My preliminary findings are that, in light of the experiences of Victorian teachers and students, an acceptance of mainstream ideology, filtered through pedagogy, as a common sense approach leads to a disablement of the collective in schooling and, in effect, creates the empty child.
References


