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MASCULINITY, FEMININITY, CLASS, RURALITY AND SCHOOLING:
(FIRST STAGES OF A QUALITATIVE LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH PROJECT)

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The authors are engaged in a qualitative, longitudinal study ('The 12 to 18 Educational Research Project') of a group of students from the end of primary school until the end of secondary school. This paper explains some methodological and substantive interests which frame this project and discusses some tentative impressions concerning gender, class and rurality from interviews conducted with grade 6 children at three primary schools during the first stage of this project. In terms of gendered subjectivity, the background to the study is the psychological theories of Gilligan and others regarding male and female development, and the rather different theories of discursive construction of Davies, Walkerdine, Taylor, Gilbert and others which have raised ways of seeing individual subjectivity, but have not traced how these look as individual development over the course of secondary schooling. The stage of the study reported here primarily notes some findings about grade 6 boys which were rather unexpected in terms of the literature. In terms of class and schooling, the study is constructed to focus on two types of comparisons not readily available in that earlier influential study, *Making the Difference*: namely the different experiences of children from rather similar class locations who attend different types of school; and the different experiences of those attending school outside the metropolitan setting. This early stage of the study reports some tentative initial impressions of those experiences.

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(FIRST STAGES OF A QUALITATIVE LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH PROJECT)É

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(Interviewer):

How would you describe yourself?

(T):

I like playing cricket. And.. haven't got a .. I can get
very angry sometimes...

(Int):

What makes you angry?

(T):

Just... grade 3 and 4s, they give you so much cheek
going around, but when you grab 'em or trip them over or
something you get in so much trouble. Not them. They get
away with it.

(Int):

What else about yourself?

(T):

When I'm older I want to play where David Boon plays..

(Int, to T's friends):

What else would you add to describe T?

(A):

Well, he likes lots of sport. He's in the sport things we
have at this school, athletics, he's in those. And he's a
good friend.

(B):

Like when I cracked my head open and had to have stitches, he sat at the sick bay until me Mum come to get me and when I'm up the sick bay he sits there and [obscure] He's thoughtful.

(Int):

And how would you describe yourself, B?

(B):

Well, I like most of the sports at this school. I want to play cricket when I'm older . I'd like to be like Dean Jones, 'cos I reckon he's real good.. and.. um.. I like cars and motorbikes. 'cos, if you've got a motorbike you can ride it around the paddock. I like most of the teachers at this school.

(Int):

Would you add anything to that?

(T):

Well he's friendly too. Like if you get in a fight or something and you're crying, he's cheerful. He cheers you up a lot.

(Int):

And A, how would you describe yourself?

(A):

I like music, I play a few instruments [...] I've got a fair few friends. I like most of the teachers at this school, most of them [laughs]. I do fairly well in class. I help other people do things that they're not sure of.

(Int):

What do you think you might be doing when you're 25?

(G):

Working hard... dating... getting married.

(S):

Make sure if you get married you've got to get married to someone who likes what you do. Yeah. If the person you get married to doesn't like what you do they might have an argument.

(G):

And see if they accept the job that you do. You might be away most of the time.

(R):

And you need to get a proper job to bring in money and food and that...

(S):

And afford the kiddies (laughs).

These extracts are taken from interviews with grade 6 boys carried out in 1993 as the first stage of a longitudinal research project which aims to follow some groups of girls and boys from the beginning and through each year of their secondary schooling (The 12 to 18 Educational Research Project. This project was supported in 1993 by a small grant from the Graduate School of Education, La Trobe University. In 1994 and 1995 it is being supported by an ARC Small Grant.). This paper is an initial report on this work in progress, which explains some of the background issues framing our study; its initial methodological approach and problems with this; and some of the substantive impressions we formed from the first stages of the study.

Our broad areas of interest in undertaking this study are three fold: understanding more about the shape of the development of gendered subjectivity; investigating further the changing patterns of young people's relation to schooling and the curriculum, particularly changes between junior and middle secondary school, and middle secondary school and the final years; and tracking young people's thinking about their future. Broadly, in the study, we intended to interview the young people involved two to three times each year, in openTMended, semi[@]structured interviews, and to video[@]tape as well as audio[@]tape these interviews. In the interviews we would ask a range of questions related to our three areas of interest: how students currently saw their schooling and how they spent their out of school time; how they saw themselves; whether they thought much about their future, and what sorts of things they thought about. At this stage, the study is being done in four schools, two metropolitan and two provincial, schools chosen to represent some contrasts as well as comparisons in terms of class. In each of the schools we focus on around 6 to 8 students, but each of these students is interviewed on each occasion with two of their friends, so each round of interviews involves around 50 to 60 students, and the total number of different students interviewed in the course of the study will be much greater than this. Not only will the

'friends' in the sample possibly change over time (and it is one of our interests to see the extent to which this does and does not happen), but we began the first stage of the study by interviewing all students in a particular class in each school. We also are hoping to do some comparative side studies of students of a similar age at other schools, to gain some further insights about the typicality or otherwise of our longitudinal group.

Methodological Starting Points

The macro problem we confront is what we are doing in committing ourselves to a seven-year empirical research project at a time (and in theoretical traditions which we respect) where assumptions, categories and concepts underpinning such an enterprise have been comprehensively problematised and made suspect. The ongoing micro problems we confront are also numerous. They include issues of method and technique; issues of how we interpret, justify and present any findings; and ethical issues both regarding what we do during the study with the students and their schools, and what we re™present from the study.

Feminist research in particular has challenged the assumption that researchers can somehow get at the 'real' person, the 'real' experience, or the 'real' pattern of development (eg Davies, 1989b; Riley, 1988; Butler, 1992; Scott, 1992 Theobald, 1993). Poststructuralist theories of methodology are only the latest in a series of contemporary arguments that point to the suspect nature of the truth that the researcher produces (cf Lather, 1991a, 1991b, but earlier, for example, Deakin University, 1982). Not only will the story produced by the researchers be incomplete (since telling all possible stories is an impossibility) and embedded with the researchers' own values and purposes, and indeed, in its empirical dimensions, constructed by them, but the act of producing this story is now suspect as a way of taking over the voices of others to produce an account which dominates those voices (cf Modleski, 1991; Lather, 1991a, 1991b; Gunew and Yeatman, 1993).

We are highly conscious of these debates, and see them as an ongoing issue for the project, but refuse to see such arguments as totally disabling. Neither the strategy of turning all research into a project of sophisticated theoretical introspection about the researcher nor the strategy of seeing 'democratic', 'participatory' action research as the only legitimate form of relationship with others in the project seems to us to warrant a privileged methodological position. The ongoing construction of education in schools (by teachers, students, policy-makers and feminist reformers), and the ongoing existence of inequalities in Australia, is not merely a chimera. Forms of research that embrace some concern with an empirical quest for new knowledge, for further understanding, we would argue, are both epistemologically and politically defensible. So too is an approach which takes seriously the learning, knowledge, interests and conditions of work of the researchers and the

different interests and conditions of the participants in the study, and does not insist that these always can reduce to a common participatory agenda. We are committed to the possibilities afforded by longitudinal study: to investigate

over time, to heed changes, to allow the participants' responses to modify our concerns, to prompt other questions.

A macro question of another kind might be raised from the standpoint of existing longitudinal studies of students and schooling. Characteristically, in Australia at least, these have been large-scale, quantitatively-based studies (using both demographic and school results data, and purpose-designed surveys). (eg Poole, 1983; and the ACER 'Youth in Transition' longitudinal study, described in Blakers, 1990) One of the authors, Lyn Yates, is currently undertaking a DEET-funded project, 'The Student Pathways Project', which will be assessing current Australian data-bases about students and their transitions through school and beyond. The project is aimed to assess what these current collections can tell us and do not tell us about these issues. From this standpoint, the question would be, what is to be gained by a small-scale study of a relatively few students at a relatively few schools? The simple answer here is that we are interested in kinds of questions that statistical deductions do not answer: how is a pattern of thinking about schooling or about their future shaped within a particular individual biography? what does the process of changing subjectivity over the course of secondary schooling look like? what can a close look at the 'open' responses and at the visual record of students over time suggest about issues which are salient to Australian students at this historical moment?

In general terms then, we wanted to embark on a study with some consciousness and reflexivity about truth-constructing activities of the researchers, but we wanted to have some openness to the value of doing empirical research, of not reducing it simply to deductions from the existing state of theory. Our questions evolve out of dialogue with (a) existing literature on parallel topics, (b) our own previous research work on gender, curriculum, girls and schooling, and feminist theory, and (c) the responses from participants which prompt new themes, pose new questions or query assumptions and pre-occupations. Both the methods and the theoretical starting points, which will be discussed in the next section, have some eclecticism, but this is self-conscious strategy, not by default. Nevertheless the open-endedness has meant a continuing anxiety, uncertainty and tension about where the

research is going and whether the questions and interventions and constructions are appropriate ones.

Some of the specific 'methods' issues we have been concerned with over the past year (the first full year of the study, which began with grade 6 children in late 1993) are these:

what does the drop in twice a year forty minute interview produce compared with ethnography? (cf Maclure, 1993 on 'mundane autobiography')

how should we attempt to construct our relationship with the students? At present we have not attempted to build any sort of pseudo-buddy relationship, as many ethnographers have done. For the students we have been rather shadowy and 'neutral' figures: outsiders and much older, though we have played down status. The issues of whether to develop a closer relationship (cf Oakley,

1991); and what is (a) legitimate and (b) effective as a basis for asking more personal questions (about aspirations, dreams, etc) are ones we are continuing to discuss

the issue of whether we try to gather more information to look at our interviews in context (for example, from the teachers or school records). And whether we ask the students more about their families. These matters raise both ethical issues about what we are doing to the students, and issues about the standing of the knowledge that our methods are constructing.

the problem of interpretation and analysis. How do we physically organize the data for the purposes of reviewing it? How do we ground and take further emerging ideas? What reflexivity is there to our approach? Should we give students a chance to talk back to the project, and if so, where and how?

Methodology, Theory and Interpretation

Earlier in the paper, we explained briefly our three general areas of interest in embarking on this study and that our study arises out of dialogue with the existing literature and with our own previous work. We began the paper with two extracts from interviews with some boys in the first stage of the study because they made a particular impression on us, and are an initial illustration of some of the issues discussed in our explanation of methodology.

The reasons that the boys' responses here were striking to us, is that we found them more surprising than the girls' responses at this stage of the study. For one thing they seemed to challenge the stereotype of boys which has been derived from Carol Gilligan's work (discussed in the next section), which has been widely influential: the idea of boys as autonomous, concerned with action and achievement, not relational thinkers, not motivated by an ethic of care. We are particularly interested in changes in both boys' and girls' ways of answering these questions as they proceed to year 7 and then further through secondary school. In terms of our dialogue with the literature, and the way we are responding to the interviews, we are also aware that it is not that the girls by contrast made a more stereotyped response to our questions (in grade 6 they were particularly active and sporting, and most did not immediately talk about their future in terms of family), but that our own knowledge and reading here is expecting and attuned to such difference. In other words, in the feminist literature it is often masculinity that has been the shadowy 'other'. This is certainly not to suggest an endorsement of an emerging debate which sees the boys' issues as the same as and parallel to the girls' (cf Yates, 1993); it is only to make a specific point about research and theorizing on subjectivity. The work of Connell in Australia has been an exception (Connell, 1987, 1989; Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1987), but he acknowledges that the work on masculinity has been underdeveloped and is an offshoot of the theorizing about femininity. So the issue of what has been striking to us raises questions not only about what we noticed

because it seemed to be 'news' in relation to the existing literature, but also about how we can maintain some openness to areas which are for us already 'saturated' with theory via the literature. Clearly much more could be said about these issues, but this brief comment is intended to show ways in which we hope to engage in continued reflection and study both of the students and of our emerging interpretations.

Secondly, in terms of the methods of our study, the textual extracts here are a less rich illustration of the things we are reporting than our original experience of this, and than the video record:

[We deliberately designed the scale of the study to be one that we would do ourselves, rather than via research assistants. In almost all cases, we will both be present for

the interviews, with one asking the questions, the other operating the camera. The issues mentioned under methodology, as to how to handle and organize the material are related to our understanding that physical presence, video recording, audio recording, transcripts, coding or use of computer data™handling all involve particular shapings of the evidence.]

the way the boys looked at each other, occasions of tenderness, occasions of lack of guile in their responses to us, and so on. So these extracts were chosen to begin the paper also to help explain why we chose particular approaches to this longitudinal study.

In the next section, we discuss some of the existing literature which is the background to our study, and some of the starting questions this generated. In general terms we consider that most of the existing literature on these areas has been somewhat different in form from the study we are undertaking here, but in any case we consider that this has been a period of considerable cultural as well as schooling change, and that studies done in the past or in other countries would not necessarily be replicated today.

Theoretical and Substantive Starting Points

i. Gendered Subjectivity

In the past two decades we have seen the growth of a massive and theoretically diverse literature on gender and subjectivity. It includes many descriptive surveys of attitudes and aspirations, psychological testing of self™esteem and sex@role orientations, ethnographic and other sociological studies of gendered behaviour in adolescence, pschoanalytic and poststructuralist interpretations of popular culture, fantasy and desire, and many more. The starting point for this study drew in particular on two bodies of work which inhabit rather different paradigms of understanding and investigating the world.

The first is the work on psychology, epistemology and moral development associated in particular with Carol Gilligan and her co@workers (Gilligan, 1977, 1982; Gilligan, Lyons and Hanmer, 1990; Gilligan, Rogers and Tolman,1991, etc) and seen more broadly in work on female and male 'ways of knowing' (Belenky et al,1986; and the object relations approach derived from Chodorow, of Jan Harding and others, cf. Harding

and Sutoris, 1987; and discussed in Yates,1993) and also, in a different way, emerging in some of the contemporary strands of

the 'men's movement' , such as in the approach of the Jungian psychologist, Robert Bly ('Iron John'). Strictly, the 'Jungian' interpretation is about developing both male and female sides, and Bly's argument is ostensibly about correcting an imbalance in contemporary men towards the female (due to the dominance of feminism over them). In practice, the emphasis in these projects on the need for men to redevelop traditional male-hunter rituals is a re-interpretation of Jungian psychology to very sex-differentiated agendas. The different writings emerging from this area have in common an identification of a sharply differentiated male and female psychology and epistemology, one which has a 'different voice', which is motivated by different needs and agendas. This literature is particularly concerned with individuals or human subjects as formed by processes of psychological development (in infancy and early childhood, in adolescence etc). It does not see individuals as mere receptors of social, cultural or educational messages, and would see a key issue of how young people react to secondary schooling (including gender reform projects in secondary schooling) as understanding how the rationalities and pressures which that institution embodies interact with the needs, agendas, and developmental phase taking place within the individuals.

The theory and concepts associated with Gilligan's work have been both widely criticized and widely influential. In her initial revision of Kohlberg's theory she suggested that women's thinking was formed around an ethic of care and relational epistemology; while men's was formed around an ethic of justice and deductive and abstracted epistemology. Gilligan herself was careful, especially in the initial influential article (1977) and book (1982), to say that the 'different voice' was not necessarily one which differentiated 'all women' from 'all men'. But her own subsequent work, and the way she has generally been taken up by others (both those who seek to build on her work, and those who criticize it) has tended to take it up in those terms.

In her study of adolescent girls, *Making Connections*, Gilligan suggests that these agendas have particular impact in the developmental phase which coincides with girls' move into and through secondary schooling. Here, more sharply than in primary schooling, they are asked to be concerned with 'public' knowledge, a knowledge seen as outside them, and to be oriented to career and the public world beyond school. Yet they are also, Gilligan argues, deeply concerned about relationship and how to maintain connection:

For girls to remain responsive to themselves, they must resist the conventions of feminine goodness; to remain responsive to others, they must resist the values placed on self-sufficiency and independence in North American

culture. Thus for girls to develop a clear sense of self in relationship with others means © at least within the mainstream of North American culture © to take on the problem of resistance and also to take up the question of what relationship means to themselves, to others, and to the world. (Gilligan, Lyons and Hammer, 1990, p10)

The conception of gendered psychology associated with work of this kind has been directly and indirectly influential in a

wide range of other work (for example, the best-selling work by Deborah Tannen (1991) on ways of talking), and especially in education (see McLeod, 1990; Yates, 1993). Teachers' observations and other research projects frequently report examples of girls' behaviour in secondary school that seems to reinforce the picture Gilligan paints. Girls are especially concerned about the social elements of their schooling, their relations with their peers (both female and male), and are often seemingly ambivalent about school success. Boys often seem to have little patience for subjects dealing with people or feelings and are clearer and more consistent about their orientation to career and success. Many curriculum projects spawned by concerns about girls and 'girl-friendly schooling' similarly assume that the lynchpin of such reform in all subjects is to reorient the curriculum and pedagogy towards a humanized, discussion-based concern with relationship. (cf Yates, 1985; McLeod, 1990)

But the academic critique of Gilligan-style research and theory has been wide-ranging. By feminist theorists, it has been dismissed both for its methodological inadequacy and for its politically unacceptable association with an essentialist orientation to women and men. The methodological problems include the development of a general model on the basis of a very small and a very narrow (class and race-homogeneous) sample; as well as the quasi-positivist interview technique (in which there is no reflexivity about the researcher or the interview situation) and coding of responses (supposedly according to a pre-set scale, rather than interpreted contextually, though within the 'moral development' field which favours the former technique, it is equally criticized for its failure to conform appropriately to the norms for positivist scaling).

The damning charge of essentialism is largely mounted on two fronts (given that Gilligan, to our knowledge, nowhere argues and indeed explicitly denies that she sees the 'different voice' as being biologically innate). First, until recently,

there was little attention to race (and no attention to class) differences, and the understanding of 'women's voice', whatever the marginal qualifications in the texts, did tend to produce the voice of a dominant privileged group as the voice of all. Secondly it is argued that the focus on a women's voice, a different women's agenda, in a theory such as this, is too readily used to justify 'women's sphere' and lack of change in women's position in society (as was done in the Sears case in the USA, discussed by Scott, 1990).

In a recent article on the subject of 'Methodological essentialism, false difference, and other dangerous traps', Jane Martin (1994) has pointed out that the savage critique of Gilligan's work by many feminist theorists is far harsher than that addressed to theorists such as Foucault, whose gender™blindnesses are acknowledged but excused. So in Gilligan's and associated work we have a body of theory about gender and adolescent development that seems to have developed concepts that now influence many people and projects in education, but which has been criticized as research and as an appropriate orienting paradigm for those concerned about inequalities of women and girls.

One element then of our own project is interested in asking questions (in Australia today, and to students who are mixed in terms of class, ethnicity and urban/provincial location) that might enable some comparison with and reflection on the body of work associated with Gilligan, and also the strands of work which dismiss this out of hand. Methodologically however we are not replicating Gilligan's procedures. We think the brief extracts from the beginning of the paper give some taste of why we think it is of interest to look more closely at what young people are saying about relationship, about what they do, and about their achievements, and to look at patterns of difference that might be seen in relation to class or region or other matters. We are also particularly interested in seeing what happens in terms of the same individuals longitudinally. In our initial interviews we were struck particularly by the answers given by boys in grade 6, where comments about relationships and about their own feelings in the present and in the past and future, were much more prominent than we had expected (for example, they told some vivid stories of their remembered and emotional experiences of beginning prep. Again, we are not assuming that these memories simply reflect what was the case then; we are interested in how these 'memories' function in their present subjectivity. In terms of method and construction of truths, it might also be noted here

that the responses we got were to a relatively 'unmarked' question, 'Can you remember what it was like when you began in prep?' and we did not probe beyond whatever initial response was offered here.

Our first impression of these same students at their new school in the middle of year 7 suggests a considerable toning down of this openness, partly perhaps because a key theme for the boys in year 7 has been a concern about bullying by older boys, and a concern about their own safety and what procedures do or do not contribute to that. So it may be, in relation to Gilligan's comments about the entry to secondary school as representing a new stage of strain for girls, that some strains of a different kind are also being strongly felt by boys.

The other body of literature on gendered subjectivity which has been a particular background to this study has been the work concerned with masculinity and femininity as discursive constructions of non-unitary subjects (including Walkerdine, 1990; Davies, 1989a, 1989b, 1993; Gilbert and Taylor, 1991; Kenway et al, 1993; Kenway and Willis, 1993). This research and theory draws attention to such issues as desire and fantasy and how it intersects the rational project of schooling and gender reform in schooling (Walkerdine, 1984, 1990; Kenway et al, 1993; Kenway and Willis, 1993); the historically produced commonsenses of our culture, our language and our pedagogy and how these differently position girls and boys (Walkerdine, 1987; Davies, 1989b, 1993; Johnson, 1993; Faye, 1991); the discursive construction of girls' and boys' bodies (Davies, 1989b; Corrigan, 1991; Lesko, 1988); the interaction of subjects with texts and popular culture (Gilbert and Taylor, 1991; Rhedding and Jones, 1994; Walkerdine, 1984, 1990; Frith, 1985 school story article...).

This varied literature has also been subject to some critique within feminist theory broadly. Methodologically, as writers

who draw on Foucault know, to undertake an empirical research project which in a sense attempts to tell the truth of girls or boys, or gender, or schooling, is to engage in a form of domination. In practical terms, the problem is that researchers set up a framework which seeks to acknowledge desire as well as intellect, to be reflexive about the research process, etc, but end up often with stories which sound very like the old sociological story of endless dominant social ideologies being written in every student (cf Yates, 1992; McLeod, 1993) or which set up grand typologies in which the complexity of non-unitary subjects is writ very

small.

Moreover, much of the literature here captures a snapshot of an individual/culture transaction at a single point in time and in the individual's biography. An interesting exception is a recent PhD thesis by Jeanette

Rhedding@Jones, which followed longitudinally the development of girls' subjectivity through their activities of writing in primary school. See Rhedding@Jones, 1994, also Rhedding™Jones, forthcoming. One of our reasons for choosing a longitudinal and qualitative study was to see whether we would get some sense of individual biographies as other than a simple building up of social messages, or endlessly repeated jousting between desire and the rationalities of schooling. Here we want to look at two things. First, like many developmental psychologists whose general assumptions we do not share, we want to consider whether there are particular effects of certain 'stages' of development: are the things that motivate girls and boys in years 9 and 10 different from those that come before and after, and not necessarily part of a linear progression of their gendered and intellectual development? Secondly, we are interested in the recursiveness of development within individual biographies: how do particular individuals think about their past experiences, and how do they conceptualize their futures? And how does a particular individual, or group of friends do this differently over time? Questions like these are not addressed by the most popular types of existing longitudinal educational research in Australia, which are survey@based and designed primarily to provide greater information about 'who gets what', and they are only touched on in the interesting ethnographic and poststructuralist interview@based studies which tap into students at a particular point rather than over an extended time.

ii Students' relationship to school and out of school

In our interviews at each year level we are asking students both how they spend their time in recesses and out of school; and also, in various ways, we will be asking them about the things they are doing in school (the curriculum) and what they think about that. Many other researchers have surveyed or interviewed students about these things. Given the relatively small numbers in this study, the investigation within it of how students spend their time or what they think about different aspects of school is primarily of interest within the investigation of processes of development over time, rather than as any definitive account of Australian youth ('research shows...'). We are interested in what the same

individuals say and do differently as they go through school;

and we are also interested in any apparent patterns of difference in this in terms of gender, or class, or physical size etc. (Connell (1987, 1989) is one writer who has emphasized the significance of size in the construction of masculinity.)

In this part of the study, we are interested in following on from earlier Australian research (such as Making the Difference) on how schooling, students, families and culture are interactively producing or reproducing inequalities of certain types. Making the Difference a decade ago was much criticized for attending to extremes (schools of the rich and schools of the poor) and thereby possibly exaggerating the extent to which schooling operates as a mechanism of social reproduction. In our study we have selected the four schools to enable some comparison of students from roughly similar backgrounds who might go to a different type of school (either private compared with state; or, an 'academic' state school as compared with a 'technical' one); as well as some comparison of students from very different class backgrounds and from non-Melbourne as compared with metropolitan settings.

This paper, as we have stressed, is written at a very early stage of a study designed primarily to gain longitudinal insights. With that caveat, some of the findings we have found interesting from the first year of the study are these.

In terms of gender, our impression has been that in grade 6 the pattern of activity of girls and boys was not as highly differentiated as we expected; and there was a very high participation in sport and orientation to sporting interests and aspirations, especially in the provincial city.

In terms of school-differences (that is, the types of inequality investigated by Rutter et al, 1979 as compared with the school differences associated with broader social inequalities), there was a strong school effect on the pattern of activity in recesses and lunch-times. Primary schools differed considerably on whether mixed-sex recreation was the norm or was only occasional. At grade 6 level there was a noticeable difference in the responses of the children attending the school located in a small town as compared with those from a roughly similar class background attending school in a larger city. They were dressed differently, were noticeably less

knowledgable about careers and related educational requirements, were more limited in their job-related aspirations; were doing more adult activities in their out-of-school time (riding trailbikes, training greyhounds, assisting fathers in their work, being substitute mothers); and they were less at ease in the video-taped interview situation.

In terms of 'stages of schooling', we do notice some general changes in what students are saying in the middle of year 7 compared with what they were saying at the end of grade 6, but the change and dislocation is not the problem of dealing with different subjects, classrooms and teachers; with learning the ropes and finding their way round, etc, that transition programs often dwell on.

Difficulties in these areas seemed very short-lived.

The issue that has come across strongly in all four secondary schools at year 7 (schools varied widely in wealth and location) is that students are overwhelmingly bored by the work they are doing. They are bored by curriculum and pedagogy that is informed by pupil-centred, progressive, work-at-your-own-pace on yet another project/assignment/topic-of-your-choice values. In subjects such as mathematics and English, year 7 (from the students' perspective) replicates what they did in grade 6, and does it in a less challenging and less interesting way. Where they are enthusiastic, it is usually for new subjects which incorporate a combination of knowledge which the students see as new, concrete achievements, and intrinsic, non-relativist criteria for achievements: subjects such as metalwork, woodwork, textiles, ceramics, home economics, music and, in some cases, computing.

(Incidentally, in contrast to some recent media reports of how these subjects are genderized in other states, we found in Victoria, where there has been a non-sex-differentiated teaching of these subjects for some years, that the girls and boys were similarly enthusiastic about these subjects (with the possible exception of music at one school), and they said nothing that indicated that they saw the subjects at this level as belonging to one sex rather than the other.)

So in year 7, schoolwork is seen as something to be got through; the time outside the classroom is what matters. Given this, it is also interesting that there seemed to

be (with the exception of one wealthy private school) a significant reduction in student's school-based physical recreation compared with primary school. Equipment was less easily available, older boys dominated the playing fields and excluded and bullied younger boys, and many girls, when asked 'What has been the best thing about school this year?' talked about the canteen. (Though the most memorable response to this question was the girl who paused for a very long time, obviously trying to think of something, and then said '... uh... going home'.)

On class differences, there has been some evidence, in line with earlier Australian researchers (Branson and Miller, 1979; Connell et al, 1982) and the work of Bourdieu, that successful education careers are founded not on the students' liking the work or finding it interesting but on whether or not they bring to it a cultural capital that is knowledgeable about what matters. For example, in the provincial city, we found both at grade 6 and in year 7 it was the students in the lower status schools that most 'liked' what they were doing, and who were most enthusiastic about their teachers. The students at the higher status schools were critical of the curriculum and teaching, but were unequivocal that they were at a 'good' school and had higher aspirations. Similar knowledges can be seen in individual biographies. One student, an immigrant who has been here about three years, is fanatically interested in science, and he spends his recesses going off by himself trying to

memorize the exact distances between each planet because he wants to do really well at science.

In this part of the study we are asking students about their different subjects, and will be hoping to see if there are some generalized patterns in students' reactions to different aspects of schooling; and also to look at the way in which particular biographies are consistent or dramatically reshaped as they go through particular schools. We are interested in how students' perceptions of their school and their progress do and do not interact with their aspirations. This year we have been asking them both about the subjects they are doing, and also 'What do you think this school thinks is important?'

iii Thinking about the future.

Since the issue of girls was raised in the 70s, a consistent emphasis in policies and funding has been on the need to reorient and extend girls' aspirations about their futures.

However, while there has been considerable change in girls' retention and subject choice at school, there has been much more limited change in the gender-based pattern of jobs in Australia. For boys, there is a rather different issue. The pattern of work in Australia has been undergoing considerable change in the last 20 years, with a continuing shift to the service sector and information-based technologies, and with a reduction in many manual and trade occupations and growing male unemployment. So how students think about their futures, when they think about this, and what knowledge they have at particular points is all of considerable interest.

At the grade 6/year 7 stage of the project, it is apparent that few students are thinking seriously about jobs and careers, though daydreaming about their future is another matter. The dreams of the future are often extrapolations of their current interests (play cricket/netball for Australia), or images of glamour (be a model and travel the world).

The most striking finding was the limited range of ambitions professed by the children at the most rural of the primary schools. One girl's ambition when she left school was to be a babysitter. Another's was to live with her married sister, rather than to have to continue to stay at home and look after her young brother, which she thought was what was likely to be her future. We are not taking responses to these questions at face value, but we will be interested in following what changes and what stays the same in the way students in our study talk about these issues.

In this project we will be asking students about these things as we go on, but methodologically we are aware of a problem into which we hope to gain some further insight. The problem is that the interview situation and the act of asking particular questions are particularly leading in this area (as Simons (1982) has said, what we want to know is not how they answer our question, but whether they pose that question to themselves and in what way). Students are likely to be influenced by what they think you would like them to say, or by what their friend said. Not that this is necessarily unenlightening in relation to discursive constructions of

gender and class. In answer to our questions 'What do you think you will be doing when you are 25?' and 'what would you like to be doing then?', one girl from a wealthy background talked at length about how she would like to be a part-time barrister and a part-time model, and travel the world, and

have a lot of money etc etc. And then she looked at us, processed what she had been saying from the perspective of her audience, and added, 'and I'd also really like to be like Mother Theresa and go to India and help the poor'

Notes:

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