

ASSUMING AN ALIAS: REVEALING STUDENT IDENTITIES IN SCHOOLING

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we examine the restructuring of students' habitus; specifically, the pedagogical messages of schooling that frame what it means to be identified as a student. Drawing on the voices of students from a secondary school located in a regional area of Australia, a township characterised by its high welfare dependency and indigenous population, we explore the tensions between how marginalised students see themselves, what some teachers want them to become, what other teachers expect them to become, and the regard held for the ways in which these students name themselves. In analysing student interview data, we suggest that some teachers are in the habit of attempting a transformation of students, projecting onto them identities without regard for the communities they embody. Others, however, are more concerned to transform schooling; to construct school-community relations that produce students 'as a fish in water', who do not feel the weight of foreign expectations as one might if removed from what is familiar, accommodating and secure. We conclude that for students to identify with schools in this way involves democratic conceptions of the relations between school and community; structures that produce a student habitus more in tune with their immediate social world.

ASSUMING AN ALIAS:

REVEALING STUDENT IDENTITIES IN SCHOOLING

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUAL FEATURES OF THE TOWN

This paper examines what it means to be identified as a student in a small secondary school (of 200 students) located in an Australian regional community that is characterised by high welfare dependency (particularly among those who live in the township) and a large indigenous population. The data are comprised of 23 semi-structured interviews with teachers, parents and students, although not all are directly quoted here.

The socio-economic status of many of those in the township creates issues of hunger - 'they come to school and they haven't eaten since the day before' (Teacher # 17) - of homelessness - 'We have many students who ... haven't lived with ... a parent since they were five or six' (Principal), 'they wander the streets at night' (Teacher # 17) - and of financial hardship - 'sometimes kids don't have books and stuff like that 'cause their parents can't afford it' (Teacher # 17) - which influence students' schooling. As one parent recounted to us:

... I was at a hotel and it was a Thursday night ... [There's a] single mother and she's down at the hotel and she's got her two kids there. Now I've wrapped up pretty well and those two kids were in T-shirts and they hadn't had a feed, they had a packet of chips ... It's come towards 10.30 and she's drinking up pretty big ... One of her kids is school age ... the other kid was a little toddler sort of thing. She's told them to go. Get out. Walk. Go home ... One of the other people in the bar happened to have his wife with him and took the kids with him, it was a sensible thing to do ... Now the next morning this person who they've gone home with has just driven 'em back to her place ... and I seen the little fellow walking up the road the next day without a port or anything ... About a half hour into the day ... I get a call from the [primary school] principal [to] come around and come with him while we go over and take this young fellow home because he's creating a problem in the classroom ... Now we found out

from that little fellow when he's walked into the house his mother's told him to get, just go. Go to school and he's got no port, he's got no lunch, he's had no breakfast ... So he's come to school with all these problems plus the night before God knows how much sleep he's got at the house where he's gone ... and he's still in the same clothes ... So as far as I'm concerned, [some of these kids have] a good reason for playing up, a good reason for not sitting down and listening. Their stomachs are rumbling and they're tired. (Parent # 21)

Although this story relates to a primary school aged child and his brother, it provides some insight into the conditions under which some of the children in the community grow up. For some students, 'just to get to the door of our school has meant going through a night of abuse, both sexual sometimes and physical and mental' (Principal). Then there are 'issues of dope, issues of alcoholism that enter in. So for many of my students just to get to the door is a major feat' (Principal).

Coupled with this, there is a very high incidence of student learning difficulties, learning disabilities and intellectual impairments in the school, with students ascertained at various levels ranging from level 2 (where the teacher needs to adapt their classroom material for the student) to level 6 (where the student requires a teacher aide in the room with them at all times). At one stage, the school had 'one of the highest incidences [of students with disabilities] in the state' (Principal):

The statistics tell us that [for a school our size] about 12 per cent should have a learning difficulty. We had at one stage 32 per cent, we're down to 27 per cent. Statistics tell us that we should have about 2 per cent of [learning] disabilities. At the moment we've got 8 per cent ... So we then have more of that impairment in our school ... but we still get the same teaching staff that other schools get. (Principal)

In addition:

... 60 percent of boys in Year 10 fail science ... More than 50 percent of kids in Year 10 maths receive a sound or below ... I'm concerned about literacy levels ... I have kids in my Year 8 class who are reading with a ... comprehension ability at an 8 year old level ... So they're 13 years of age and yet they're reading at what can be classed as an 8 year old level. (Teacher # 22)

Given these contextual features of the town and its school, we ask: how do marginalised students in this school see themselves? How do their teachers see them? What do they want them to become? What do they expect them to become? In particular, we address the tensions in these issues with reference to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. Specifically, we distinguish between what could be termed a 'reproductive' and 'transformative' habitus. We begin with a brief outline of these general issues of habitus before considering the specifics of the case school.

BOURDIEU AND THE NOTION OF HABITUS

Habitus, as Bourdieu uses the term (1979, p. vii), refers to 'a system of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices'.. The term, therefore, characterises the recurring patterns of class outlook - the beliefs, values, conduct, speech, dress and manners - which are inculcated by everyday experiences within the family, the peer group and the school. This set of dispositions incline individuals to act and react in certain ways, generating 'practices, perceptions and attitudes which are "regular" without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any "rule"' (Thompson, 1991, p. 13).

The system of dispositions (capacities, tendencies, propensities or inclinations) that constitute the habitus acquired by individuals 'unavoidably reflect the social conditions within which they were acquired' (Thompson, 1991, p. 13). That is:

... an individual from a working-class background, for instance, will have acquired dispositions which are different in certain respects from those acquired by individuals who were brought up in a middle-class milieu. (Thompson, 1991, p. 13)

Implying habit, or unthinking-ness in actions, the habitus operates below the level of calculation and consciousness, underlying and conditioning and orienting practices by providing individuals with a sense of how to act and respond in the course of their daily lives 'without consciously obeying rules explicitly posed as such' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 76). The habitus, therefore, disposes actors to do certain things, yet its capacity for invention and improvisation:

... 'orients' their actions and inclinations without strictly determining them. It gives them a 'feel for the game', a sense of what is appropriate in the circumstances and what is not, a 'practical sense' (*le sens pratique*) ... It is because the body has become a repository of ingrained dispositions that certain actions, certain ways of behaving and responding, seem altogether natural. (Thompson, 1991, p. 13)

Yet the feel for the game is 'an intentionality without intention which functions as the principle of strategies devoid of strategic design, without rational computation and without the conscious positing of ends' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 107-108). One of the privileges of the dominant, those who encounter a social world of which they are the product:

... who move in their world as fish in water, resides in the fact that they need not engage in rational computation in order to reach the goals that best suit their interests. All they have to do is to follow their dispositions which, being adjusted to their positions, 'naturally' generate practices adjusted to the situation. (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 108)

Habitus, most succinctly, then, is 'an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted' (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 95). Ultimately, practices are produced in and by the encounter between the habitus and dispositions, on the one hand, and the constraints, demands and opportunities of the social field or market on the other (Bourdieu, 1990b; 1991).

Cognisant of these dual imperatives of the habitus, we propose that the way students see themselves and the way their teachers see them, including their expectations for their futures, fall largely into two categories: those with a *reproductive habitus*, who recognise the constraint of social conditions and conditionings and tend to read the future that fits them; and those with a *transformative habitus*, who recognise the capacity for improvisation and tend to look for opportunities for action in the social field. While in this paper we consider these separately for analytical purposes, we understand them as dialectically related; both characterise the habitus at the same moment. We consider each habitus in turn to help us explore their features and their development.

THE REPRODUCTIVE HABITUS AND THE CONSTRAINT OF SOCIAL CONDITIONS AND CONDITIONINGS

In providing individuals with a sense of how to act and respond in the course of their daily lives, the habitus disposes actors to do certain things, orienting their actions and inclinations, without strictly determining them. This sense of what is appropriate and what is not means that certain ways of behaving seem altogether natural. In our view, the ways of behaving that seem natural to someone with a reproductive habitus include feeling the burden of their circumstances, reading the future that fits them and acting in ways that constrain possibilities.

Feeling the burden of their circumstances

While some students in our case school face issues of poverty and homelessness on a day-to-day basis, many more feel the burden of their circumstances in the way the town and its people are perceived by others. This in turn impacts upon the way some of the people of this community see themselves, influencing their self-esteem and their future ambitions. The location of the community, for example, seems to influence the township and the way its inhabitants view themselves. One teacher with whom we spoke drew a comparison between the school and her previous posting, both of which were 'a little centre outside a big centre' (Teacher # 17). 'The kids' in her current posting, she believed, 'feel that they're not as good as the people who come from the city ...and [feel] that they often missed out on opportunities and stuff like that' (Teacher # 17).

The way that members of the community are stereotyped by those in the nearby city gives us an insight into how a reproductive habitus develops. One parent told us of the constant uphill battle to improve the image of the town, as the people from the city 'all think that we're a bit strange up this way' (Parent # 19). She believes that the reputation goes back for years, and the perception is 'that the people from [here] are ... intellectually handicapped ... or interbred, wobblers, whatever you want to call it' (Parent # 19). The town is perceived as one 'where everyone [has] three eyes and people have got scars where the extra head used to be' (Teacher # 20). As one teacher pointed out to us, 'they have a very low self esteem these kids' (Teacher # 19). In fact, 'you'll find that a lot of kids when they go to [the city], they don't want them to know that they're from [here]. They're ... ashamed ... to be seen in a school T-shirt' (Parent # 19). Moreover, 'they are constantly being ... degraded by other towns' (Teacher # 19): 'they get picked on in sport, picked on if they go away for different excursions ... It's really, really nasty some of the things that come from particularly the private schools [in the city] as far as our school is concerned' (Parent # 19).

However, it is not just students from other schools in the region that contribute to perpetuating the negative stereotype of members of this community. The Principal told us of an incident involving a staff member from the local university bridging program. The school sent students to the university in 1999, whereat 'one of the lecturers actually stood up and asked to see the scar on the kid's shoulders because kids [from this town] had two heads' (Principal).

Low expectations of the students from this school are also expressed, albeit inadvertently, by the Principals of other schools in the region. After one of the leadership network meetings, where school leaders from around the region regularly gather together to share ideas, the Principal of the school 'had probably two or three principals and representatives of schools ring her to say how fantastic the kids were' (Teacher # 17). Although the Principal 'congratulated the whole school community on it and put it in their [community newsletter] ... we kind of thought, in a way it's saying they were surprised that the kids would be [like that]' (Teacher # 17).

The attitude towards members of this community appears to spill across into their adult lives, impacting on their opportunities for employment. As one parent commented,

If [the kids] say they come from [here] the employers don't really want to know [about them] ... But I did observe once there was a fellow got put on at the bank ... and he said that the only reason he got that job was because he went to [a prestigious private school in the city]. He said if he'd finished his schooling [here] he wouldn't have got the job. (Parent # 19)

In feeling the burden of their circumstances, some find it difficult to transcend the way they are stereotyped and develop a more reproductive habitus. This affects the way they view themselves and also influences their aspirations for their futures. As one teacher commented, 'I think these kids are just wonderful but ... some of them just lack that confidence that you see in other kids from different towns' (Teacher # 19).

The school also faces difficulties attracting quality staff, a problem which some believe is related to the way the community is perceived by outsiders. One teacher told us about her student teacher, who was undertaking her practicum in the school but was 'scared of coming here because she thought the kids would beat her up and that kids carried weapons here ... And other students at the [local] university have told her that' (Teacher # 17). The school principal has had similar experiences and commented that, 'Really bad incidents ... are targeted and brought up all the time ... even to the extent where we had university students ... [believing] that actually a teacher had been killed in our school last year' (Principal). These are some of the things that the school and the broader community battle against and that continue to foster a reproductive habitus in some. It is telling that when we asked one of the students interviewed as part of the research what she would change if she could change anything at all about the school, she said, 'Change it's reputation ... [It's] really hard to deal with when you go away and everyone says [your town is] really bad and stuff' (Student # 22). Still, she believes 'that'll never happen ... It's pretty much set in stone' (Student # 22).

The high unemployment rate and dependency on government welfare payments in the community, many of whom are second, third or fourth generation unemployed, also contributes to students feeling the burden of their circumstances. As one parent pointed out to us:

[The town] is so small and there's not much job opportunities at all then here when they leave [school]. Already you know [some of them are] just going to sit at home ... on the dole ... And there's always, 'Why should we go to school? It's not going to get us anything.' (Parent # 22)

Teachers also noticed this attitude in students, where 'sometimes the kids just can't be bothered to do anything so that's why they don't do well. They haven't got the motivation to try' (Teacher # 19). Another teacher told us of two Year eleven boys who were in her class in the previous year:

[They] dropped out [of school] in March and [at the] beginning of this year I would see them walking around the streets ... drunk or have been sniffing glue at 11 o'clock in the morning, doing absolutely nothing with their lives but they're not in school either. I worry about kids like that ... I guess ... they couldn't see any end in sight. (Teacher # 22)

A reproductive habitus in some, then, induces an atmosphere of hopelessness. Indeed, some of the parents told us of their difficulty sending their children to school, as there's 'nothing to go for':

You can't force them to go to school. You can't force them to learn and we're stuck between a rock and a hard place. The kids come home, "I don't want to go to school." And you say, "You've got to." "I don't want to." You know, you can sit there and say "you've got to" till the cows come home. They get up in the morning but don't get dressed, you know, and you say it's a school day. I'm not going ... And it's not just this school, it's every school. You know, this one has its problems, believe me it has its problems with other children and that and mine as well but they just don't want to go any more. It's not the same. There's nothing to go for. They've lost everything. There is nothing left for the kids to go for. (Parent # 24)

She told us about how some students strategically plan, getting help from friends at times, to 'make sure they get suspended' (Parent # 24). 'They're very good at it ... [When] they tell you they'll be home before the end of the day you know they're going to ... There is nothing left for them' (Parent # 24), so they try to 'get even on the system because there's nothing there for them anymore'.

The child goes to school but there is nothing there that the child wants to do or learn or can get his hands or sink his teeth into ... so he doesn't want to do it. So he gets either (1) suspended, (2) finds a little bunch of buddies and they go and have a smoke or they do spray paint things and graffiti them or they break in and they burn and they destroy because there's nothing there for them and it's like, get even, you know and that's exactly what they're doing, all the kids that are doing it is getting even on the system because there's nothing there for them anymore. So they destroy it because they don't want it anymore. (Parent # 24)

Picking up on the lack of employment opportunities in the area and consequent high unemployment, this same parent later commented:

... you can have degrees in God knows what today but you can't get a job ... I know nurses out of work, doctors out of work ... teachers ... policemen. Where did their work get them? Still out of work and it's not getting any better, it's getting worse. So why push so much down their neck if it's not going to do them any good? You know, to me I think they ought to learn hands on because hands on may be the only thing that's going to give them any chance in life at all. (Parent # 24)

This lack of employment opportunities in their own community, coupled with the fact that so many generations of the townspeople have been dependent on government welfare, seems to play on the minds of many who feel the burden of their circumstances, and plays an important role in shaping a reproductive habitus in some:

... there are some kids up here who are second, third or even further, you know, fourth, fifth generation unemployed ... and they don't see a lot of activity around the place ... there's not a lot of inspiration. They can't look out the window virtually and see something going on like you can [in the city where] you drive a couple of k's down the road and you've got the industrial park and you've got the magnesium ... So there's lots of opportunities [in the city] but there's nothing here for them to sort of say, 'Well, you know, that's where I'd like to work'. (Teacher # 18)

Where others recognise possibilities for action, these people feel constrained by their circumstances; a feeling or disposition that seems to reproduce these constraints. Indeed, they appear largely incapable of perceiving social reality, in all of its arbitrariness, as anything other than 'the way things are'. Lapsing into apathy or despair, they take themselves and their social world somewhat for granted (Jenkins, 1992). As Wilson (1987) points out, in a community such as the one in our case study:

... with a paucity of regularly employed families and with the overwhelming majority of families having spells of long-term joblessness, people experience a social isolation that excludes them from the job network system that permeates other neighbourhoods and that is so important in learning about or being recommended for jobs that become available in various parts of the city. And as the prospects for employment diminish, other alternatives such as welfare and the underground economy are not only increasingly relied on, they come to be seen as a way of life. (p. 57)

Moreover, linked processes of self-limitation and self-censorship mean that often, 'too conscious of their destiny and too unconscious of the ways in which it is brought about' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, p. 71-72), the dominated become consenting victims to their futures. As one teacher suggested to us:

... the parental influence is very strong and you will find that even kids who are being bashed by parents ... would protect their parents as much as they possibly can because they don't have anywhere else to go. They're not old enough to sort of say, "Well look, this is really crappy, I need to move on". And so they'll put up with it ... People sort of say oh well, you know, they couldn't have been too worried about it. Yes they were but they didn't know what to do about it. It's the same with all these other circumstances, you know. (Teacher # 18)

Although this is a drastic example of the dominated becoming consenting victims, it is a good indicator of the way a reproductive habitus takes things for granted, as the way things are, rather than recognising that there are ways that the situation could be transformed.

Reading the future that fits them

While the Principal estimates that two to three per cent of their students intend to further their academic learning by going on to some form of tertiary education and the majority want a job, 'some just want to go on the dole anyway and don't want to work because they're third generation unemployed' (Principal). The latter group are students who, according to Bourdieu, are reading the future that fits them, confining possibilities to those possible for the social group to which they belong.

As one teacher explained, the kids who are full of confidence in the schooling environment still say, 'Oh yeah but we're only from [this town], you know, as if to say we're really not worth much of anything' (Teacher # 19). A reproductive habitus, then, tends to be structuring, 'defining limits upon what is conceivable as perception and practice' (Codd, 1990, p. 139). We were told that the 'kids don't have any self-esteem. The community doesn't have self-esteem; they don't believe in themselves as people. They don't think there is hope or they're able to achieve, and you can sense that within the kids' (Teacher # 16). Another teacher told us of a conversation that she had recently had with 'one of the brightest girls in the school'.

She's really, really bright and could be [an 'A'] student so easily, like has the intelligence, is very mature, critical thinker, all that sort of thing but hands in her work late continuously or will just do it the day before ... So I said, 'What are you going to do next year?' because she could get into university and I said, 'Are you going to go to uni?' to which she just laughed and said, 'Why would I put myself in a position where I could go and sit in a room where I would be the dumbest person there?' And I was just floored because she is not a person who suffers from any of the socioeconomic stigma ... both of her parents work, have very very good jobs. She

doesn't deal with any of that. She is indigenous but ... she could just do so much and yet she's not going to. (Teacher # 17)

For those with a reproductive habitus, then, the 'subjective expectation of objective probabilities' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72) are realised. They know how to 'read' the future that fits them, which is made for them and for which they are said to be made (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Through processes of self-limitation and self-censorship, they confine possibilities to those possible for the social group to which they belong.

One teacher, for example, suggested to us that many of the students are not:

... there for the fact of where they could go with their education ... They don't have goals, they don't have dreams ... not that you have to when you're thirteen years of age but just even to have role models and go, "I can be anything that I want to be", there's not that hope in them. There's not that place of going, "I can do this if I wanted to".. (Teacher # 16)

For this particular teacher, the limits that such a reproductive habitus imposed on such students in terms of what was conceived as possible and impossible for their future provided a major source of frustration. As she commented:

... it comes back to self-esteem, some of them don't even think they've got ability, so you're just going around in a circle and they don't know where to break the circle and actually go, 'I'm going to be something that I want to be'. (Teacher # 16)

Individuals are therefore disposed to recognise and act in particular ways, but Bourdieu explicitly rejects the implication that habitus determines our actions or futures in a mechanistic way, such as Jenkins (1992) suggests. Habitus goes beyond a simple formulation of biological determinism (Grenfell & James, 1998a). Dispositions are neither 'mechanistic causes nor voluntarist impulses. They enable us to recognise the possibilities for action and at the same time prevent us from recognising other possibilities' (Codd, 1990, p. 139). That is:

... dispositions durably inculcated by objective conditions ... engender aspirations and practices objectively compatible with those objective requirements, the most improbable practices are excluded, either totally without examination, as *unthinkable*, or at the cost of the *double negation* which inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway refused and to love the inevitable. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 77, emphasis in original)

It appears that peer pressure not to do well also plays a part in the self-limitation and self-censorship that students impose upon themselves. One parent's observation was that the students are:

... happy just to pass. Just to get through ... Maybe [they] think if you want to do well at school ... you get ribbed anyway ... You think you're better than what you are ... It's more embarrassing to do well at school than do badly at school. (Parent # 22)

Similarly, one parent told us a story about her son who 'wanted to be an architect and now he's changed his [mind] ... because he doesn't think he's smart enough to be an architect' (Parent # 22). When we discussed this further, we found that, 'he did before ... But, you know, listening to others [saying], "You're not smart enough to be it"' (Parent # 22) has

changed his ambitions in spite of his parents' protests that 'nothing's stopping you. You're the only one that'll stop yourself' (Parent # 22).

This pressure to read the future that fits them, not to 'think you're better than what you are' is a good example of the constraints of external reality or the 'subjective expectation of objective probabilities' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72) being realised by the reproductive habitus. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) suggest, social agents are reasonable; they are not fools:

They know how to 'read' the future that fits them, which is made for them and for which they are made (by opposition to everything that the expression 'this is not for the likes of us' designates), through practical anticipations that grasp, at the very surface of the present, what unquestionably imposes itself as that which 'has' to be done or said (and which will retrospectively appear as the 'only' thing to do or say). (p. 129-130)

When we asked one student what the worst thing about the school was, he said, 'some of the kids ... just don't really care. Got nothing to really look forward to' (Student # 20). He went on to say, 'in town here I don't know how many people are on the dole but it ... half rubs off onto their children ... If [their parents are] on the dole the kid just says, "Oh, doesn't matter. Don't have to do well at school"' (Student # 20). Here is another example of the reproductive habitus, where the marginalised in the community read the future that fits them rather than recognising possibilities for action and improvising to make change in their lives. Noel Pearson (in Grasswill, 2002) has made similar comments in recent times about the attitudes of many of his indigenous community, who he claims have been kept in dependency by often well-meaning welfare schemes. Charles Murray (1990), one of the most prominent critics of the welfare state, is another 'forceful advocate of the view that welfare systems create impoverished and demoralized underclasses' (Giddens, 1994, p. 165). Indeed, Giddens (1994) argues that welfare measures may create 'exclusionary ghettos' where 'what seem to be economic benefits serve actually to fix an individual in a social position or status from which it is difficult to escape' (Giddens, 1994, p. 185).

In reading the future which is made for them and for which they are made, students are quick to realise when their parents and others in the community perceive education as having little or no value, and through self-limitation and self-censorship, begin to confine their futures to those possible for the social group to which they belong. As one teacher recounted to us:

In some cases ... nobody in the family sees any value in education so [the students] don't see any value in education ... One kid I spoke to ... he just didn't have an interest in anything and I said, "So why are you here? Because realistically, apart from the social aspects, you're achieving nothing ... When you leave here you're gonna have a piece of paper that says you failed everything ... That can't make you feel good" ... He said, "I'll just stay until the end of year 12".. He was never a behaviour problem and just did nothing virtually ... I said to him on another occasion, "So what are you gonna do when you leave school?" He said, "I'll stay home, go on the dole". "Gees, that's not really much of an ambition", I said. "What about when you want to go on holidays?" He said, "Oh no, we don't do that". I said, "What are you gonna do?" He said, "Oh sit at home and watch TV" ... I found out he was in that situation where granddad and dad had both worked in the mine and granddad had been put off and then dad got put off and then since granddad had gone onto the pension and they all lived in this one big house, grandma and granddad and mum and dad and about four or five kids and they all lived there and they were all on the dole and collecting various types of social security and nobody had bothered to do anything else. (Teacher # 18)

In the schooling environment, then:

Some of them just don't even try. They don't even bother trying; they don't see the reason why they should try. They go home to parents who don't work ... I'm not putting the parents down ... but because of the type of town it is and because of the high unemployment rate, they're not seeing anything worthwhile in education; they're not seeing what education can do for them. (Teacher # 16)

The concept of reproductive habitus, then, picks up on a theme in the work of Oscar Lewis (1968). He believed that the economically marginalized develop adaptive responses transmitted from generation to generation. Even by the age of six or seven such children 'have usually absorbed the basic values and attitudes of their subculture and are not psychologically geared to take full advantage of changing conditions or increased opportunities which may occur in their lifetime' (p. 188).

This attests to the strength of the parental influence in shaping a reproductive habitus in their children, a point with which another teacher agreed, and who suggested that she would:

... like to see more parents involved [in schooling]. I think that would make kids do better at school. If their parents are actively interested in what they're doing they have more pride in their work and if they have more pride in their work then they're motivated to do better. (Teacher # 22)

Children coming from families that are second, third or fourth generation unemployed may find it difficult to experience on a firsthand basis the value that education purports to bring. When their parents, who are unable to find employment, are unable to see the value in education, it makes it difficult for their children to also see value in schooling. While this has the effect of preventing students from recognising possibilities to change their futures, and instead reading the future which is made for them and for which they are made, at least one teacher is hopeful that 'maybe over time there'll be a generational change and you might be able to bring about a change in the students' (Teacher # 20). However, such teachers are in the habit of attempting their own transformation of students, projecting onto them identities without regard for the communities they themselves embody.

One teacher commented:

[I'd like] students [to] see school as ... somewhere where they can really get something out of it for their future and that's partly the responsibility of the parents, partly the responsibility of the students but also a very big part of the responsibility of the school to make sure that what we're offering and the way we're offering it is the right thing for this bunch of kids. (Teacher # 20)

His hope was that students would see the offerings of the school as valuable for their future. However, we found that many of those who could be characterised as having a reproductive habitus felt, on the contrary, that 'what they teach isn't relevant for my life'. When we asked students about this, one answered, 'Probably not ... I suppose because [some students] think they'll never use any of it in their careers or whatever' (Student # 22).

Another teacher also told us of students for whom what the school offers is not relevant: 'it's often boys but not always, that seem like square pegs in round holes, don't fit in, they're just marking time' (Teacher # 20). He wishes that there were some way that he could encourage these students to 'see the school as a real stepping stone to somewhere else instead of somewhere to be until you're old enough or till you've done your time here' (Teacher # 20).

While one parent believed that the school saw her children and others like them as 'trouble makers' and 'potential jail breakers' (Parent # 24), she believes that their behaviour is a reflection of the relevance of what the school teaches for her children and their lives.

... that child has no more use for what is behind that door, there's nothing there. "You can't teach me. I don't want to go. I'm not doing anything. It's not doing me anything" ... And if they just sit down and talk to the kids, listen to the kids, they'll find out what these kids want in school ... And until they're not bored any more they're just going to walk out of school younger and younger and younger. Even my eight year old doesn't want to go to school half the time ... He's at the primary school. (Parent # 24)

Some of the 'alternative programs' on offer within the school are good examples of the way that the school has tried to respond appropriately for such 'at-risk' students. One teacher told us of an alternative program that was started at the beginning of the term for some indigenous boys in Year eight. They are taken out of certain classes and given an alternative program where they spend time with one teacher doing hands-on activities. Some of these kids:

... for whatever reason just can't cope with ... having to sit down and read a book in class. Having to sit down and analyse a poem in class ... [So] we take those kids out and give them to the alternative program teacher who at the moment is planting plants, and while they're planting the plants, he tells them about chlorophyll and sunlight and things like that ... [The alternative program teacher] refuses to do anything but hands-on stuff, so they go to him and they don't take pen and paper; they turn up and they basically work with him doing something around the school. (Teacher # 15)

Then the students have other periods with the Aboriginal liaison officer who helps them with work prepared by the classroom teacher. The English teacher told us about the kinds of tasks she sets for the students, who she believes need basic skills 'to be able to live in society':

... I just try and give them games to build up their language skills. I still try and give them work to do that's related to our class so that when they're in our class on a Monday and Friday, they're not feeling isolated, they're not feeling like, "Well, why am I here for?" So they still have work related to the unit and the theme but I try and do things like ... [play] the language game up on the computer, get them to use the internet. I make them spend time reading out aloud to [the teacher aide]. I make them do spelling words ... They still need to know how to spell. They still need to know how to read. They still need to know how to communicate basic things to be able to live in society. (Teacher # 16)

However, our concern is whether the students, who may well enjoy these alternative programs, are meeting the outcomes that students in the regular program would be meeting. When we asked one of the teachers about this, he said:

... they are getting some basic skills. Some of them may not match up directly with the science syllabus outcomes for that year level but their situation is such that some of them missed so much school in primary school because they've been suspended for hitting other kids or whatever, that they've missed out on all this stuff ... So if we are teaching them science outcomes for the Year 8s, they really have a fair gap to make up ... Like, basic reading ... you couldn't get some of those kids to sit down and read a science text book because they wouldn't understand most of the words. (Teacher # 15)

The school's hope, though, was that by continuing with the alternative program:

... by the end of Year 8 they should hopefully have enough skills to go back in and do the subjects with the rest of the kids without feeling like they're stupid, because they don't understand or they can't do something. (Teacher # 15)

However, he acknowledged that:

... for this particular group of kids, if we didn't do this for them, they would spend probably half their time at the school either suspended or ... doing detentions ... And it would be worse for them. I'd rather see them out of the class and doing something where they are learning something that's useful for them, than in class, not learning and disrupting other students. (Teacher # 15)

The fact that one of the justifications for the alternative program is so that these students are 'not disrupting other students' also leads us to question whether the purpose of taking these students out of their regular classes is a strategy of behaviour management rather than a learning strategy (Gale & Densmore, 2000). When reading the future that fits them, these students may be receiving the message that they do not need to learn the same things as their classmates who aspire to be solicitors and teachers.

One of the parents we spoke to also happened to be a teacher aide at the local primary school and facilitator of the alternative program there. He shed light on what he perceived his role to be; both teaching the students 'at their level' while giving the 'teacher and the students in the classroom ... a fair sort of go':

The idea I thought was to make it as easy as possible ... [for] the teacher and I thought that kids that don't want to be involved in a certain lesson if I took 'em away from the lesson, and I suppose I took five or six kids it makes it a lot easier for the teacher and then I could teach ... at their level which would give that teacher and the students in that classroom ... a fair sort of a go. (Parent # 21)

According to this parent, who knew some of the kids quite well:

They were in classroom and obviously not going to do anything work wise except distract and make it harder for the other kids to learn ... When I first started primary school there was a lot of kids on exclusions and suspensions. Now instead of having them out so they're just going to go on the street, we've started a program where ... I'd take them to my house with their ... work for the week that the teacher would set them because they're not allowed in school ... We had other programs going ... We used to go to [the city] to do some rock climbing ... [and go to] the water slide. (Parent # 21)

When we asked this parent whether he thought the alternative program was a real educational solution for the students involved, he answered:

They were helpful for the teachers because they didn't have the problem kids in there. They were helpful for the kids because they didn't want to be in the school room anyway and they were helpful for the town because the kids weren't up the main street or wherever. (Parent # 21)

While such programs and their facilitators may have the best of intentions, our belief is that the messages being communicated to these students, who see themselves as not capable of doing the same work as their peers, are messages of low expectation for these students

and their futures. These messages and the way that the staff involved in the alternative program are reading the futures that fit these students could, in turn, propagate a reproductive habitus in students.

It is therefore not only students' low self-esteem, the lack of employment opportunities in the area or the perceived irrelevance of the curriculum that influence and perpetuate a reproductive habitus in some. Teachers, too, can play a role in shaping a reproductive habitus in their students through communicating low expectations to them.

One parent told us of her concern that her son's maths teacher saw no need for a parent-teacher interview in spite of his poor results in a number of areas:

I think our expectations are different to the school 'cause we just got [our son's] reports on Friday so we're going to have to come up next week and have interviews and discuss 'cause he's done well overall but ... I think it was in his Maths he got an overall he got a B plus or something but in a couple of areas he got D's ... but because he got a B plus average, yes, they just said he's fine ... (Parent # 22)

Another parent told us of her friend, who was shocked to learn that her son had failed English.

... last year was his Year 10, and at the end of the year he failed in English and the parents had no idea ... It was an extreme shock. All through that year the boy even thought he was doing okay ... [and the parents] had no contact with the teacher, he'd never asked for parent interviews, he never let them know in any way whatsoever that he was struggling. (Parent # 19)

Although these teachers may well have had the best of intentions, they were acting in ways that did not serve students' best interests by reading the future that appeared to fit them and constraining their future possibilities.

Several staff also recognised the importance of considering the relevance of what they are teaching for the students in this town. As one teacher pondered:

[Are] the assessment pieces that we're doing relevant to them or is it just a waste of time? And then I go, well what's the use of school? What is school used for then? I mean, we've got to be able to educate them; they need to be able to read, they need to know how to spell, they need to know how to fill in forms. I mean, they need to know how to communicate, they need social skills and they need basic mathematics to survive. (Teacher # 16)

Another teacher, who had been mulling over similar questions, commented that things may well need to be done differently in this school. She suggested that the school completely redesign the junior curriculum 'in consultation with the primary school and the community':

... we've now got eight key learning areas ... I would move them to one side and in consultation with the primary school and the community I would create domains of learning ... And say what's important for us as a community? What do we want our kids to know and be able to do? ... So for example, if they believe that active citizenship is really, really important because of unemployment, because of a lot of the problems that [this town] has, then ... we would offer active citizenship as a subject. (Teacher # 22)

From this teacher's perspective, this would:

... be the best thing for the community because they could be creating their own curriculum for their kids ... I think that would empower them. I think that they would be more interested in coming to school and being a part of that process ... Kids would create their own curriculum. What is important for you to know? ... And they don't always know but together with parents and kids and teachers and ... significant others in [this] community, I'm sure that we could probably come up with fairly good model. (Teacher # 22)

Here are the beginnings of a transformative habitus, to which we return below. It is one that sees possibilities in what might otherwise appear constraining; that invites agency and is generative of alternatives not immediately apparent.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE HABITUS AND THE GENERATING OF POSSIBILITIES

According to Giddens (1994):

... involuntary unemployment, like unwanted divorce, is often traumatic because of the damage it does to an individual's sense of security and self-respect as much as because of the economic deprivation it causes ... Just as what unemployment actually is depends substantially on subjective attitudes, so too do reactions to it; these flow from narratives of self-identity, as well as acting to disrupt or alter them. (p. 186-187)

What one may experience as incapacitating, then, another may see as generative of opportunities for self-enhancement or self-renewal (Jordan, James, Kay & Redley, 1992; cited in Giddens, 1994). The latter is true of the transformative habitus.

In our research, for example, we found 'kids who are just like determined to not let coming from [this town] be any hindrance to what they plan to do' (Teacher # 17). Unlike those with *areproductive habitus*, who 'read' the future that fits them, which is made for them and for which they are made (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and confine possibilities to those possible for the social group to which they belong, the beliefs, values and conduct of those with a *transformative habitus* are creative and inventive. They recognise possibilities for action in the social field and attempt to act in ways that transform their situations. We consider each of these transformative attributes in turn.

Recognising possibilities for action in the social world

Rather than defining limits upon themselves and working within the perceived constraints of social conditions and conditionings, the ways of behaving and responding that seem natural to those with a transformative habitus recognise the infinite capacity for improvisation. Their *sens du jeu* or 'feel for the game' allows their habitus to generate strategies, which are adapted to an endless number of possible situations (Mahar, 1990).

A transformative habitus can be nurtured by teachers by holding high expectations of students, wanting these students to see opportunities to change their lives rather than read the future that seems to be made for them. The Principal of the school, for example, told us that it was her ambition that the students in the town 'go on and make a life for themselves', which drew her to the job at the school initially. Reflecting on these matters, she commented:

I probably never intended to be at [this town] because my impression of it from being an ex-[city] person was that it was very low socio-economic, very hillbilly style, [even] backward if I can use that ... [But] because of my own background where I came

from a similar community I was interested in giving something back to people like me so that they could have similar opportunities ... In hindsight I probably had a saving element to it, thinking I could save some of the kids, if you can use that terminology, which sounds very condescending but it wasn't meant that way. I came into the school and could see a lot of things that were happening ... particularly from staff and the way kids were treated and the needs that the kids seemed to have that weren't being met and I thought, "Oh, I can help you." (Principal)

Another teacher, who was new to the school, told us about how she makes an effort either to:

... send a letter home or even ring the parents, contact them in some form to introduce myself or to have a chat about ... the great things that [their] children are doing ... I try to always make them feel that I'm open to them to come and see me because they want the best for their child and I definitely want the best for their child ... Because I don't want to work against them, I'd rather work with them, just to see their kids grow up and have a better life. (Teacher # 16)

This same teacher mentioned to us a recent experience where she became quite angry with one of her Year 11 students:

I have higher expectations of Year 11s ... I just have the expectation that, "You're in Year 11, you should have an amount of intrinsic motivation to be here. You're doing a Board [of Senior Secondary School Studies] subject therefore if you don't hand in work, your mark doesn't get counted, you aren't rated". (Teacher # 16)

Her way of dealing with this frustration was to:

... just stop and I say, "I'm doing this because I think you're worth it" ... It's saying to them, I think they're a worthy human being and ... I want to spend my time on them because I want them to grow up and be something. (Teacher # 16)

In Bourdieu's terms, then, this teacher's frustration is with the reproductive habitus she observes in many of her students and she finds herself battling against it in her effort to engender more transformative dispositions and the hope for a different type of life. While she may recognise possibilities for action in the social field, some of her students may not. Those with this kind of transformative habitus, then, seem informed by de Certeau's (1984) analysis of the 'uses' that some find for imposed conditions, uses that are sensitive to *possibilities*.

Many staff also realise that if they are 'trying to keep kids at school after the age of 15 they need to cater for kids that probably don't want to be [there]' (Parent # 20). That is, it is not about 'just keeping [the students] here, but making it meaningful for them' (Parent # 20). To this end, the school had established:

... different training schemes, traineeships ... for the seniors ... where they're doing like one or two days work experience a week towards the end of senior. So I suppose that's got to be a plus for those kids that don't intend to go on to uni, that's got to be a good thing. (Parent # 20)

Another parent agreed that the scheme is, 'just brilliant, you know, it just really helps the kids to either step into that job full-time after they leave school or to get that experience to go somewhere else' (Parent # 23). One of the teachers commented that the scheme makes a big difference to some of the 'problem students'.

... I think it makes a big difference to them, it really does. They might be problem students at school if they're here five days a week because they're doing subjects that they find boring and rigid. But they come back now a couple of days and they think well they seem to have grown up a little bit and also broadened their world view a bit more so the opportunities that they can see are sort of a bit more tangible for them now. (Teacher # 20)

Such schemes, while recognising the diversity of students and their futures, provide further examples of the way that some staff members are endeavouring to nurture a transformative habitus in students, encouraging them to make 'use' of their circumstances, to see the possibilities.

Acting in ways to transform situations

While our dispositions 'enable us to recognise the possibilities for action and at the same time prevent us from recognising other possibilities' (Codd, 1990, p. 139), those with a transformative habitus also recognise opportunities for improvisation or 'tactics' (de Certeau, 1984) and act in ways to transform situations. As Connell (1993) argues, 'even dominant groups do not seek simple "reproduction" through education. They know the world is changing, and they want the schools to help their children get ahead of the game' (p. 29).

According to one teacher, the lack of employment opportunities in the town has created two distinct attitudes among the students. The first is:

I'm going to go on the dole anyway. There's no jobs here, what am I going to do? The other theme would be, I've just got to get out of here ... Their whole aim is to get out of [this town] ... So some work really, really hard to go to uni and TAFE for employment ... because they don't want to be like the person down the road with four kids and not being able to pay bills. (Teacher # 22)

The attitude of some students wanting to do well at school in order to give them greater opportunities than their parents, is indicative of a transformative habitus, where 'social life [is] no longer lived as fate' (Giddens, 1994, p. 185). de Certeau's (1984) distinction between producers, those who dominate spaces, and consumers, those who occupy them, is useful here in explaining the disposition we have in mind. In brief, the transformative habitus 'acts on' rather than simply being 'acted on'.

One girl we spoke to illustrated this well. She had done all her schooling in the town from pre-school up and her ambition was to be a mechanic, but this had not always been the case:

I'm in senior classes now and I really want to be a mechanic and I really want to get there. Whereas the last couple of years I didn't really care if I ended up in the street or anything ... I'm more committed to schooling this year and I'll be even more committed next year because I'll be in Year 12 ... But beforehand I didn't really have any idea of what I wanted to be so I just didn't really care where I ended up, whether it was like a checkout chick or whatever. (Student # 25)

Another student told us about how he, too, had changed.

... all the kids that are coming through are really bad and like they're just getting away with heaps. Like my brother, he's real bad when he's around all his friends ... They all just get into trouble together ... to impress each other ... and they take suspension as a holiday ... I used to be one of them. (Student # 23)

When we asked him what had made him change, he replied, 'Just thinking about how am I going to be when I'm older with no job on the dole. That's what I don't want to do' (Student # 23). By acting in ways that will transform their situations, then, we could talk of the actions of these students as an attempt to *make things happen*, rather than have things happen to them. This is what Giddens (1994) refers to as a generative politics.

Teachers in the school had their own views on what required transformation and how it could be achieved. For example, several believed in the importance of catering for students with different types of futures, and supporting them in their various endeavours. For one teacher, this meant that:

... not all kids are meant ... to be spending four years of their life in uni because that's not where their skills are and they're wasting their time if they do that. Because they can get out there and try and get apprenticeships and stuff like that and try different avenues of where their abilities are. (Teacher # 16)

This kind of 'transformation' looks very similar to the reproduction noted above. While we support the notion that all students should be able to experience success in their schooling and education more generally, such comments do not necessarily take account of the broader social and political influences that prepare some students for some futures and not others. Some of these issues are evident in the comments of the following teacher:

I think some of our assessment regime are still fairly antiquated and I'd like to work fairly heavily with staff on making the assessment different so that kids could experience success but at the same time making sure that we still have a lot of academic rigor in what we do, 'cause they still have to go and compete in the world and I mean, that's what [recent research in the school] said, you know, we make kids feel good but we're not really good at teaching them anything. And they've got to go out and compete in the real world for jobs and that sort of thing so we have to make sure that we're doing that at the same time. (Teacher # 22)

In a similar vein, one parent we interviewed said, 'I would love for the kids to participate in more things ... I don't want this school and this town to be their whole world' (Parent # 20). She went on to say:

I think any experiences [my kids] have gives them a broader view of things generally and that's got to make it easier when it comes to relating to different people ... Just trying to get them to meet different people and go to different things and it makes them more thoughtful ... This sounds like I'm slamming [this town] but I'm not, some people that have been here forever and their families have been here forever they really don't have that broad view and they're very narrow minded and intolerant and we're trying to bring our kids up so that they're not [like that]. (Parent # 20)

In support of this view, a teacher told us about one family who had 'been in [the town] for a hundred years or so' (Teacher # 18). He believes that:

... maybe the trauma of even thinking about leaving the place would be difficult because for a lot of people, it's a very settled sort of a lifestyle, you know ... everything they perceive as needing is there ... I think even the very thought of pulling up stumps and going somewhere else turns them into shivering wrecks ... And what we try to do with those kids is ... we make sure they go on as many excursions and expose them as much to the outside world so they get to see that, hey, I wouldn't mind doing what other people do. (Teacher # 18)

These are better examples of schools working towards countering a reproductive habitus with a transformative one, by exposing students to possibilities and opportunities; 'countering' in the sense of counter-hegemony. The need for such 'countering', of opening up possibilities and opportunities, is evident in the experience of one teacher who told us of an experience she had the previous year when she took students on an excursion to the nearby city to visit the cinema:

The [new] cinemas in [the city] have been open since ... '99 and I took kids halfway through [2000] to see "Looking for Alibrandi", some of them hadn't even been there ... I couldn't understand... we got off the bus ... and I walked in ... And these boys followed me in and I said, "Boys", and they went, "Oh, just we haven't been here, it's huge", and they just hadn't been there at all ... Yeah, and I was dumbfounded. I went, "Okay, come in have a look" and I let them go and have a walk around ... A lot of them have never been to [the capital of the state] ... Some of them haven't even been to [the beach]. (Teacher # 17)

The teacher wishes that:

... it was easier for us to be able to get kids into [the city] 'cause they miss out on a lot of things because we just can't get them down there ... You know it'd be good to be able to take them to [the capital of the state] and stuff like that too ... That's what I would like to see changed, is more opportunities for them. Yeah, I think that would make a difference. (Teacher # 17)

For some of these students, who have never been to a cinema or a beach and know nothing but the town in which they live, perhaps efforts by the school and its teachers will be the only way that they might come to recognise that there are other opportunities for action, instead of confining their futures to those possible for the social group to which they belong.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have proposed that the way students see themselves and the way their teachers see them, including their expectations for their futures, fall largely into two categories: those with a reproductive habitus, who recognise the constraint of social conditions and conditionings and tend to read the future that fits them; and those with a transformative habitus, who recognise the capacity for improvisation and tend to generate opportunities for action in the social field. In revealing student identities in schooling, then, we are revealing both the reproduction and the restructuring of students' habitus.

Habitus is, therefore, both 'generative (of perceptions and practice) and structuring (that is, defining limits upon what is conceivable as perception and practice)' (Codd, 1990, p. 139). As such, this creative yet strictly limited capacity for regulated improvisation reveals both the dynamic structure of social reality and the constraint of social conditions and conditionings where many of us believe there to be choice and free will (Bourdieu, 1990a). The notion enables Bourdieu to analyse the behaviour of agents as 'objectively coordinated and regular without being the product of rules, on the one hand, or conscious rationality, on the other' (Postone, LiPuma & Calhoun, 1993, p. 4). In this sense, habitus transcends 'determinism and freedom, conditioning and creativity, consciousness and the unconscious, or the individual and society' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 54-55). According to Bourdieu, we cannot make history just as we please. Hence, it would be ignorant of the 'material conditions as the dominant influence on the quality of life open to individuals' (Giddens, 1994, p. 181) to try to convince the marginalized that they:

... don't have to stay victims. The present is the point of power. We can always choose, in the present, to change our negative beliefs ... My body, my health, my relationships, my work, my financial situation - everything in my life - mirror my own inner dialogue ... Our experiences all arise from our inner dialogue. Therefore, if we change our thoughts, we will have different feelings and different experiences. (Corbett, 1993, p. 150; cited in Giddens, 1994, p. 181)

This is a weak substitute for real and material emancipation. This is not to say, however, that people cannot 'change their psychological outlook in the face of material deprivations they are powerless to control' (Giddens, 1994, p. 187). Indeed, if we were to 'develop means whereby damaged identities can be healed and a strong sense of self-respect developed' (Giddens, 1994, p. 187), individuals may be able to negotiate changes in their life circumstances. Specifically, Giddens (1994) suggests directing schemes of positive welfare to fostering what Csikszentmihalyi (1992) describes as the *autotelic self*; one with an inner confidence which comes from self-respect. It refers to:

... a person able to translate potential threats into rewarding challenges, someone who is able to turn entropy into a consistent flow of experience. The autotelic self does not seek to neutralize risk or to suppose that 'someone else will take care of the problem'; risk is confronted as the active challenge which generates self-actualization. (Giddens, 1994, p. 192)

Moreover, fostering the autotelic self - what we have called here, a transformative habitus - would also broaden the notion of welfare from simple economic provision for the deprived (Giddens, 1994). (See also Noel Pearson (in Grasswill, 2002) on welfare dependency and indigenous Australians.)

However, we must ask ourselves whether it is right for some teachers to attempt a transformation of students, projecting onto them identities without regard for the communities they embody or which they want to embody. Such strategies might simply be assigning students an 'alias', where 'transformation' is confined to the intentions of teachers, however well intentioned, actions in this sense understood as reproductive. Instead, teachers should be more concerned to transform *schooling*; to construct school-community relations that produce students 'as a fish in water', who do not feel the weight of foreign expectations as one might if removed from what is familiar, accommodating and secure.

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