(Re)conceptualising Connectedness as a Pedagogy of Engagement

David Zyngier
Faculty of Education
Monash University

Abstract:

In the context of educational reforms in Australia over the past 30 years, the concept of “connectedness” has emerged as a critical pedagogical strategy and goal, particularly for disadvantaged or at-risk students. Connectedness implies a relationship between the home, school, and community, as well as between the curriculum and students’ real life situations. The relationship between connectedness and social justice is discussed and the principles of a socially just and connected education are explicated, along with challenges that it presents to teachers, administrators, curriculum development, the community, and larger society. Three contesting discourses of pedagogical connectedness are identified, that reflect contending understandings of social justice and education. Specific implications of a socially just education for disadvantaged students are reviewed and directions toward the development of a new “generative pedagogy” are outlined.

Keywords: Australia; Educational Reform; Social Justice; Educational Policy; Curriculum; Disadvantaged; Social Cohesion; Students; Relevance; New pedagogies; School renewal and pedagogic improvement

This paper will be presented as part of Symposium 60 ZYN06864 Engaged pedagogy is a risky business! Contesting voices of engagement from the margins.

Correspondence:
David Zyngier
Faculty of Education, Monash University,
P.O. Box 527, Frankston, Victoria, 3199 AUSTRALIA.
Phone: (03) 9904 4230 Fax: (03) 9904 4027
Email: David.Zyngier@Education.Monash.edu.au
1. Introduction

The greatest weakness of our school was the fence around it. We can’t have a culture that’s apart from the community we’re in. We thought we’d lose kids by connecting to the community and letting them go into programs outside the school. Instead we’ve gained kids. (Bradshaw et al., 2001, 58)

This paper analyses the various understandings of connected pedagogies in schooling. Failure to acknowledge the significance of the students’ socio-cultural experiences ‘question[s] the degree to which classroom practices address issues or problems which have salience outside of the school’ (Lingard, 2001, 8). This paper is informed by Gale’s (2000) characterisation of social justice as redistributive, retributive and recognition and the variously described purposes of education. Three contesting discourses of pedagogical connectedness are identified, that reflect these understandings: a conservative vocational, instrumentalist deficit view; a liberal academic, individualist and constructivist view; and a social democratic, counter hegemonic, and critically transformative view. In making these distinctions, attention is drawn to the persistent and predictable structural inequalities that continue to advantage and disadvantage social groups.

The concept of a connected and engaging education is developed in this paper through reference to the work of critical pedagogy. I argue that calls for a more practical real life curriculum for at risk students may be a masquerade that serves to further disempower marginalised youth and can create as many problems of disengagement and disconnectedness and student alienation as it seeks to solve. This paper asserts that such a pedagogical approach ‘doubly’ disadvantages the already disadvantaged students, whether this is intentional or not, by serving them up more of the ‘basics’ and ‘busy work’ instead of actively engaging their intelligence.

The challenges to teachers and schools of a socially critical and connected pedagogy are advanced, while I explain the connection between social justice and connectedness in the classroom. A connected education, it will be shown, can be intellectually challenging, relevant, catering for difference and socially supportive. Connectedness is portrayed as a bridge between community need and private action. The paper highlights the research ‘from the field’ that learning needs to be interactive and relevant for it to be effective.

Rejecting a deficit or redistributive concept of educational reform as a panacea for at risk students, an alternative is suggested, of a socially just, connected education where students no longer see themselves as victims, objectified and exploited as innocent and docile victims of the system (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Carlson & Apple, 1998).

The role of schools in western democracies in the development of social justice is discussed to demonstrate the crucial role that pedagogy plays in the production and reproduction of educational advantage and privilege. I conclude by reconceptualising a connected pedagogy – which I term Generative Pedagogy1 - as one possibility to the achievement of the objectives of social justice and equity through school connectedness and student engagement.

---

1 Developed from a discussion with Trevor Gale about Giddens’ concept of generative politics.
2. Why connectedness?

Schools in low-income neighborhoods often represent themselves as the means for students to “escape” their socio-economic situation, or even sometimes as a way to “save” those students from their parents. While this position ‘nurthes both racism and classism, it is also patently ineffective pedagogy (Fine, 1995, 86, emphasis added). Fine challenges such a conception of school and proposes that if schools are to facilitate individual enhancement, they also must be involved in community and social change that ‘incites parental participation, empowerment, and critique’ (Fine, 1995, 86). Fine rejects as “educationally bankrupt” community collaboration in which parents are trained as homework assistants, or to be “better parents”, in favour of one where school-parent-community collaboration strengthens their children’s’ commitment to schooling.

The notion of equality of opportunity rings hollow without analyses of outcomes. For many teachers, the oft-heard student claim “when are we ever going to use this stuff?”, that the “classroom is boring” (Peterson, 2000, 11), and that one of the things students want most when it comes to engaging education is to leave the classroom (see Zyngier, 2005 for discussion of what student engagement might look like) is all too familiar. What students crave is the opportunity to take education beyond the four walls as it appears in its usual format (Papadopoulos, 2002).

The education reform programs of the last thirty years in Australia have in most instances given primacy to the achievement of social outcomes for disadvantaged at-risk students over the achievement of their intellectual results (Knight, 2002; Teese & Polesel, 2003; Thomson, 2002). Research completed in Australia (Lingard et al., 2001a) indicates that it is not sufficient for schools in socially disadvantaged areas, or any schools for that matter, merely to provide social support. Schooling must be socially supportive and intellectually demanding; it must engage with student difference(s) and be relevant to the students.

Low achievement by certain student groups may be the result of a ‘mismatch’ between students’ prior background knowledge and the structured knowledge of the curriculum (Lingard, 2001). Newmann (1996) acknowledges that a range of thinking and learning styles needs to be incorporated into classroom pedagogy to enable students not only to engage, but also to achieve improved outcomes. This improvement is especially needed for marginalised students from disadvantaged and low socio economic backgrounds, who do not benefit as much as their middle class peers from often implicit and intuitive pedagogies (Delpit, 1988).

As a focus of education, student and school connectedness to the community is not new and has been defended as a valuable pedagogic strategy at least since the early twentieth century by progressive educators such as Dewey (1998). The concept of teaching and learning based on community and intellectual “projects” is central to his discussion. More recently The Centre for Applied Educational Research at the University of Melbourne developed a checklist for Middle Years education (Hill, Jane, Mackay et al., 2002). Five of their priorities clearly relate to the issue of school-community connectedness. Hill et al. (2002) suggest that schools should emphasise both active student-centred learning and the development of autonomous learners, together with higher order thinking and in-depth learning while developing and implementing links between the home and the school. This will lead to schools becoming more community conscious through the use of off-campus learning and learning resources in the wider community (Mitchell, 2002). Middle Years research
indicates that connected pedagogical approaches are making a difference to students’ attitudes and outcomes, and ‘that there is a pattern of teachers being more positive about their capacity to make a difference to students’ learning and of being more open to initiating changes in school structures, school relationships and teaching practices’. In short, having secured a number of the pre-conditions for improvement, Hill et al. (2002) conclude that the key challenge for schools and teachers is to ‘adopt highly effective pedagogical practices that connect the questions that students have about themselves and their world with the essential knowledge and skills remained’ (Hill et al. 2002, 2). This can be achieved through planning for authentic purposes that created more meaningful and engaging contexts for learning, promoting student independence and ownership through:

connecting … learning to authentic contexts and designing learning tasks with purposes, which are related, as far as possible, to ‘real life’ contexts and to the development of essential knowledge and skills. For learning to be effective, it needs to engage with student ‘subjectivities’ and to connect with the world outside school, particularly with the wide range of information, technology and popular culture literacies students participate in the world outside school. (Culican, Emmitt, & Oakley, 2001, 88)

This connectedness is currently emphasised in the Principles of Learning and Teaching in Victoria where ‘learning connects strongly with communities and practice beyond the classroom’\textsuperscript{2}. Such pedagogical practices enable ‘authentic purposes or “world connected” learning which combines learning-rich tasks with opportunities for targeted teaching of specific literacy knowledge, skills and capabilities in response to student needs and interests’ (Culican et al., 2001, 6).

The current educational emphasis on a credentialled society defines quality student outcomes in terms of academic results from limited, standardised testing of basic skills, a generalized ranking out of 100 that says very little about what has been learnt and how well it has been learned (Brennan, 2001). The Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS) (Lingard et al., 2001a) was concerned with how student learning, both academic and social, could be enhanced through quality classroom teaching and assessment practices and curricula relevant to students’ futures. By contrast, the QSRLS defines quality student outcomes in terms of a sustained and disciplined inquiry focused on powerful, important ideas and concepts which are connected to students’ experiences and the world in which they live (Queensland Department of Education and the Arts, 2004).

The QSRLS in particular highlighted the importance of community-school connectedness. Quality learning experience is acknowledged in the research (Darling-Hammond, 1996; 2000; Hattie, 2003; Kleinhenz & Ingvarson, 2004; Rowe, 2003; Rowe, 2004a) as what the best teachers have always provided for their students: intellectually challenging material that is relevant and connected to children’s lives, cognisant that children learn in different ways and have different needs, all done in a supportive environment (Lingard, Ladwig, Mills et al., 2001b, 103-105).

The incorporation of student background knowledge is acknowledged as a ‘necessary component of effective teaching and learning (Lingard, 2001, 10) as it is important that teachers recognise and build on what students from different groups bring to school in their ‘virtual school bag’ (Thomson, 2001) as cultural capital (Bourdieu,

\textsuperscript{2} POLT http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/pedagogy/plt/index.htm
1990) by valuing what children from marginalised groups bring to school and understanding how these different practices and knowledges can have a positive impact on school pedagogical practices.

The QSRLS research (Lingard et al., 2001a; 2001b) found that it was students most at-risk of failure, from socially, culturally and economically disadvantaged conditions who were the least likely to be exposed to intellectually challenging and relevant material.

3. What sort of connected education?

Not all school connectedness is the same. I differentiate between three different but sometimes overlapping/contesting conceptions or discourses of pedagogical connectedness. These discourses are framed by what is perceived to be their various understandings of social justice and the goals and purposes of education, together with the view that it is necessary to ‘invert the curriculum’ (Singh, 1998, 293) from the standpoint of the least advantaged or most marginalised in society (hooks, 1994).

Connectedness means both connecting new … knowledge and skills to prior knowledge and skills, and also connecting ‘school’ literacy and learning to ‘out-of school’ … and to … [the] wider community and global contexts. Teaching strategies that activate prior knowledge and encourage students to anticipate meaning by making and confirming predictions are connected (Culican et al., 2001, 76)

Apple (1996, 99-100) observed that ‘few people who have witnessed the levels of boredom and alienation among our students in schools will quarrel with the assertion that curricula should be more closely linked to real life.’ The critical difference between the various discourses is located in the construction of who actually decides which vision of ‘real life’ is to be taught.

3.1 Transmissive deficit connectedness

The transmissive, deficit view constructs ‘real life’ on the basis of preparation for (often non-existent) paid work (Gale, 2005; 2006) and on a retributive account of social justice defaulting to a “back to the basics”. Linking what is done in the classroom almost exclusively to its utility to the workforce and the economy can serve to produce results in student outcomes opposite to those intended (Australian Curriculum Studies Association, 1996; Knight, 2002). This may create as many problems of disengagement and disconnectedness and student alienation as it seeks to solve (Connell, 1993; Giroux, 1999; Kemmis & Lynch, 2002; Thomson, 2002). This pedagogical approach is:

… wedded to the idea that the education process we create and then impose on our children and young people must always be conducted - and therefore always encapsulated - within the decontextualized confines of a school building. (Clinchy, 1997b, 141)

In a transmissive view of connectedness, student feelings of fitting in, of belonging to the school community is often equated with connectedness (King, Vidourek, Davis et al., 2002) and is thought to result from high self-esteem which can be encouraged through school based self-development programs that promote peer, school and family connectedness (Zyngier & Gale, 2003b). These programs are meant to protect at-risk students from perceived negative social and health damaging behaviours and are often framed as ameliorating or correcting deficits within the students or their
families (Swadener, 1995). Such pedagogy focuses on covering life skills broadly defined, for example, a TAFE module on time management, offering study skills courses and connecting students with essential support such as welfare, housing or work (Bradshaw, Clemens, Donovan et al., 2001). Similarly, promoting the responsibility of parents (and the community) to get involved in the school is a common deficit theme with an emphasis on the importance of parent and family involvement in schools as a way to improve learning for at-risk students (Nathan, 1996). Typical of this is the deficit view that to effect change, parents must find time to participate in their children’s education (Mills & Gale, 2004; Ogle, 1997). But as Mills and Gale (2004) suggest, parents are not (always) to blame – arguing that the power and authority of school alone are insufficient to ensure the good discipline and motivation necessary for acceptable educational outcomes.

Finn (1989) focuses on “involvement in schooling,” which through both behavioural and emotional manipulation of students, increases students’ development of identification with school. According to this formulation, the likelihood that a student will successfully complete 12 years of schooling is maximized if he or she maintains ‘multiple, expanding forms of participation in school-relevant activities’ (Finn, 1989, 121). This is done ‘in its simplest form’ by introducing alternative teaching methods or activities into the classroom and through alternative vocational education programs. The suggestion here is that it is evident that student “resilience” is enhanced through a connected community provision of opportunities for young people to experience caring and support, high expectations and participation. This false construction of real life ignores or pushes to the margins systemic unemployment, low wages, youth exploitation, part-timism, non-unionisation, so that community connectedness is essentialised through the contact between a young person and a single influential adult outside the home, such as a teacher, an adult relative (other than a parent), a neighbour, or youth worker (Szirom, Waller, Johnson et al., 2001, 24). Seeking to both make school more relevant to the students and foster a greater sense of belonging, an emphasis on the teaching of life skills, vocational education and personal development, as well as some basic competencies, may be successful in improving students’ self-esteem and attitudes towards school (Finn, 1989). But this can result in their intellectual needs being ‘imperfectly’ met (Zygier & Gale, 2003b) or almost totally absent (Newmann et al., 2001). This overall lack of appreciation of young peoples’ lives:

ultimately produces a culture of dependence in these schools for those who remain in the school. At worst, there is a process of writing over the lives and experiences of students who fit the self-fulfilling prophecy of appearing to be ill-suited to the competitive academic curriculum. At the same time, there is also a fundamental failure to challenge the glossed over or covert manipulative power relations, that clearly exist in such schools. (Smyth & Hattam, 2000, 8)

The view of student connectedness and curriculum integration that prepares students for ‘real life’ is a partial fiction, as it institutionalises as official knowledge perspectives that benefit those who are already the most powerful groups in society (Apple, 1996, 100). A curriculum that connects to a romanitcised past, a world of work that is no longer viable in new times, is clearly inadequate, especially for students from disadvantaged socio-cultural backgrounds who are exposed to such decontextualised forms of pedagogy (Lingard, 2001, 14). Preparing for a credential future may carry with it a different meaning, or one not necessarily available to marginalised students (Knight, 2000). This model of teaching assumes the ‘planting
of knowledge’ and its ‘banking’ (Freire, 1993) in students that will eventually lead to the generation of knowledge in the learner (Wink, 2005). This ‘enforced uselessness’, is a ‘cruel punishment, [but] the essence of existing classrooms’ (Knight, 2000, 10). This pedagogy prepares students for future uselessness, while students are asked to ‘put their life on hold as a kind of promissory note’ (Knight, 2000, 10). Little or no account of student background is acknowledged in such curriculum and pedagogy, while the connection to competencies or concerns beyond the classroom is remotely ‘in the distant future’. The QSRLS suggests that what students do in this pedagogy has ‘no clear impact on others and or serves only to certify their level of competence or compliance with the norms and routines of formal schooling’ (Lingard, 2001, 11-12).

Apple (1996, 102) proposes a combination of a practical education with a critical and theoretical education as significant, in particular for marginalized youth whose lives seem to be controlled by decisions of dominant groups, legitimized by a neo-liberal social justice vision based on deficit theory that blames the victim (Zyngier & Gale, 2003).

This pedagogy is characterised by often forcing students to work alone on meaningless problems, imposing silence, ridiculing effort, and giving praise for inferior work, another form of symbolic violence inflicted disproportionately on marginalized students (Good & Brophy, 2000). As long as education is based on a deficit model of social justice the nature of the real problem is obscured and unrealised (Knight, 2002, 102). Social advantage, the structural reproduction of society is maintained and even enhanced by a curriculum and pedagogies that are increasingly irrelevant to at risk children (Shor, 1996).

### 3.2 Constructivist and individualist connectedness

A second discourse of connectedness relies on an individualist and social constructivist understanding of school and implies that the single purpose for school improvement is to increase equality of opportunity ‘to break out of the cycle of unemployment, underemployment, marginalization and reduced participation in our society’ (Feeney, Feeney, & et al., 2002a, 60), seeing this as a necessary condition for democracy. Gale (2000) has characterised this approach as redistributive social justice, which falls short of delivering social justice as it does nothing about the unjust social arrangements that are the cause of the problems it highlights. The social justice interests of groups, not just individuals, must be taken into account so that their views are seriously engaged in decision-making processes, where ‘self determination does not mean separate determination’ (Gale, 2000, 266), echoing what Carlson and Apple (1998, 9) call a code word for conditions that are better described as apartheid or separate development.

Smyth and Hattam suggest that schools that practise a constructivist connectedness have a ‘disposition of appearing to be “nice places” on the surface. However, the odds of succeeding with large numbers of students are strongly stacked against these schools’ (2000, 8). They conclude that this is symptomatic of an overall failure to understand the importance of curriculum relevance to the lives of students concluding that:

what passes as teaching often more accurately amounts to “misteaching” because of the multitude of lost opportunities for connecting in any real way with young peoples’ lives. Many of the students in these schools described themselves as having been “eased out” by a school, trying to present itself as
acting in their best interests, while denying that it still has allegiance to an elitist curriculum. (Smyth & Hattam, 2000, 8)

The crucial role that pedagogy plays in the production and reproduction of educational advantage and privilege cannot be ignored. Recent Australian research, (Kemmis & Lynch, 2002; Knight, 2002; Lingard et al., 2001a; Pearl & Knight, 1999; Thomson, 2002), concludes that there is a viable alternative to the deficit thinking research (OECD, 2002; UNICEF, 2002) and the government policies that act on the research advice. The conservative discourse (Gale, 2006) has witnessed a paradigmatic shift - from teachers making a difference - to teachers being the difference to student outcomes. The perception that education can transform ‘the personal and social fortunes of people who are disadvantaged’ (Feeney et al., 2002a, 7) is based on the assumption that schools can make a difference through compensating these children at risk for their alleged deficits. Teachers cannot be expected to do it on their own, but without a change in pedagogy, improved student outcomes may not be achieved for those students recognised as needing the most assistance (Hayes, Mills, Christie et al., 2006).

Simply connecting the classroom with the world beyond the school does not ensure that disadvantaged students will be exposed to the requisite cultural capital necessary to transform their personal social fortunes. Connecting to students’ current real-world experiences - investigating with students what is happening in their world - will not necessarily assist students to make sense of the realities from an informed position without the required critical knowledge (Tudball & Forsyth, 2003). What is needed is:

for a pedagogy to extend lived experience to provide a context to inform technical knowledge for teachers’ work through an understanding of the biographical context of their learners; to develop communicative knowledge to facilitate language interactions that are mutually respectful and productive; and to cultivate critical knowledge to identify the cultural capital and power for learning of communities. (McLeod, 2002)

Various service learning and school-to-work strategies are designed to connect students to their communities through community service and through work force participation (Zyngier & Gale, 2003a). Both promote a pedagogy through which students apply academic and vocational skills and knowledge to address perceived “real life/work” situations, while ‘developing the attitudes, values, and behaviours that will lead them to become informed citizens and productive workers’ (Brown, 1998, 1). On the other hand, a pedagogy that only focuses on the student’s world may involve the study of popular music, sports’ stars, movies and fashion – while this has potential to offer much to students – without the acquisition of a variety of ‘powerful knowledge’ opportunities in the broader social context remain closed (Hayes et al., 2006, 38). A curriculum that only centres on popular culture can disadvantage the already disadvantaged, limiting their exposure to powerful cultural codes or other cultural forms. Limiting students to this type of connectedness is ‘not a substitute for intellectually demanding work’ (Hayes et al., 2006, 56), simply working with student interests can lead to stereotypical reinforcement and representation of problematic issues like gender, ethnicity and class. The subtext of constructivist and individualist connectedness (for example Feeney et al., 2002a) is the tendency to confine its recommended intervention to the economic spheres of life and ignore the cultural politics of social institutions (Gale, 2000, 260). The redistribution in a more equitable manner of the necessary goods and services for individual advancement must not be
discounted as irrelevant, but they are to be seen as ‘part of the project not the project itself’ (Gale, 2000, 267). Within schools, this means how students themselves are identified and by whom, as at-risk and the extent to which all those people and communities involved in schooling are also involved in determining their own development and schooling’s purposes (Gale, 2000, 268).

Many schools still have more to learn in terms of establishing the pre-conditions for students to become literate, to become connected to school, to engage with learning and to become independent and thoughtful learners (Culican et al., 2001; Hill et al., 2002). Indeed many schools view rapid social change of ‘new times’ as impediments to proper teaching and learning. Schools should never be mere training grounds for the industry or economic needs of a nation (Apple, 1990; Apple & Beane, 1999; Brennan, 2001; Giroux, 1983). Recent research from the OECD and UNICEF come to similar conclusions (OECD, 2002; UNICEF, 2002). If schools overly focus on the problems and needs of a practical everyday life the essential skills of critical reasoning are often ignored, further disempowering those students who already lack the requisite cultural capital required to succeed, where a practical ‘hands-on’ curriculum is not necessarily an engaging curriculum (Zyngier & Gale, 2003). Many of these programs result from powerful conservative lobbies blaming education for unemployment, loss of traditional knowledge and values and just about everything else that is wrong with society. But, Apple concludes ‘education is not just preparation for life, but life itself’ (Apple, 1996, xvi).

Redistributive social justice that has a fixation with people’s assets (or their lack of assets) and only minimally with social processes and procedures, tends to only reproduce inequality. Emphasis on education opportunity and empowerment as if it is a material good, tends to limit social justice to quantifiable and measurable outcomes. The artificial appeal to a so-called neutrality of objectivity at best regards all youth as the same, at worst it actually obscures the assimilation of group differences by the dominant class (Gale, 2000, 260).

Too often even the most radical of school reform erodes to ‘resemble more traditional forms and processes’ because they ‘fail to challenge or penetrate’ the pedagogical practice of schools (Hayes et al., 2006, 33), which is too often taken-for-granted so that schools return to their “back-to-the-basics” default mode of transmission and deficit. This is ‘particularly deleterious and mysterious for students whose social, cultural and economic backgrounds are not strongly matched to the norms and practices of schooling’ (Hayes et al., 2006, 34). Understanding where the student is ‘at’, recognising and building on what students from different cultural and socio-economic groups bring to school in their “virtual school bag” is important. Research with indigenous and first nation families suggest a ‘growing agenda for the school, one that urges compatibility and shared understanding about the meanings of school, community, and culture’ (Dalton, 1998, 25). In this situation, Dalton concludes that students’ understanding builds as much on what they bring to learning in the classroom as it does from what they will learn.

Pedagogies that only obliquely connect with student understandings are not pedagogies of social transformation but rather those of individual adaptation (Zyngier & Gale, 2003), such that ‘experiential affective and emotional learning can shape dispositions and loyalties’ equally towards domination and disadvantage inhibiting and not enhancing student empowerment (Apple, 1996, 102-103). Practical and even progressive teaching and curricula are not always socially critical as ‘experiential,
effective and emotional learning can in a highly stratified society just as easily shape dispositions and loyalties’ (Hargreaves 1989) that favour dominant classes. Such pedagogies can just as equally inhibit, as enhance critical students’ analysis and empowerment. Hayes et al. (2006) assert that the provision of high intellectual quality pedagogy will seldom be sufficient to improve student outcomes. But combined with pedagogies that connect the classroom with the students’ world beyond school may motivate students to become engaged as they need to see that schooling has some meaning for them (Hayes et al., 2006).

The pressure it seems now is on public schools to respond to the market regardless of the social justice cost. The result of this is that innovative and critical pedagogy that might better serve the needs of students and their communities is replaced with a (pre)existing and more traditional curriculum (Apple, 1996, xvi).

### 3.3. Critical, transformative and empowering connectedness

A critically transformative and empowering connected education, based on values of recognitive social justice (Gale, 2000; Gale & Densmore, 2000, 2002), must enable students to have more control of their lives; learn about individual and collective rights and be connected to a more participatory social vision than that of providing the human capital needs of industry and business. There are at least two complimentary but divergent conceptions of equality within social justice. The first is the equalisation of the life conditions of the learners, the distributive justice of equality of opportunity proposed in reports like Bridging the Gap (Feeney et al., 2002b), and the underlying assumption of liberal deficit models of education reform and social justice. The second conception of equality is that of fairness, the extent to which a society acts to ensure that everyone in it has ‘equal encouragement’ to achieve success in society (Knight, 2002, 103). This second conception is not necessarily a capital or resource issue but one that is closely tied to the practice of pedagogy, to what happens behind the classroom door (Zyngier, 2003c), in the school and the education system.

A pedagogy based on recognitive social justice must be inclusive, engaging and enabling (Gale, 2000). It must not only recognise and respect difference, but celebrate it as ‘a source of strength and vitality in the community’ (Kemmis & Lynch, 2002, 3), engaging students in valued and worthwhile activities, linking learning not just to the community but also empowering students to use their own authentic knowledge, values and culture to take control over their own lives (Shor, 1996; Thomson, 2002).

Shor (1992, 16) argues for a transformative citizenship and connectedness that Giroux describes as:

> educating students to fight for a quality of life in which all human beings benefit … [ and to] be critical citizens who can think, challenge, take risks and believe that their actions will make a difference in the larger society. (1988, 214)

What distinguishes this connected or socially critical pedagogy from other humanistic or child-centred progressive pedagogy is that ‘only reforms that recognise these conditions and actively engage them are likely to make a lasting difference in the lives of the children, educators and communities served by schools’ (Apple & Beane, 1999, 12-13). Rather than deny student culture, or relegate it to the realm of “outside of school”, a transformative connectedness is constructed around the lives and experiences that students bring with them to the school (Smyth & Hattam, 2000, 8). Such pedagogy tries to not only lessen social inequalities, but also change the conditions, which create them in the first place. It explicitly rejects any deficit model
and actively engages with a cognitive justice framework. The democratic processes within the classroom reflect that recognition, and reject inequitable structures and processes. Research into school community partnerships (Murray, Mitchell, Gale, Edwards, & Zygier, 2004) concluded that where there were strong views about the legitimate place of young people in community life, working with young people was seen as intrinsic to working with their community; that meant that ‘learning does not stop at the school gate’ (Bradshaw et al., 2001, 58.).

Caring about kids is no longer enough; teachers and schools must also care about racism, injustice, power, poverty, pollution and environmental degradation (Apple & Beane, 1999, 13-15). Teachers must actively seek to not just understand but incorporate students’ home and community knowledges in the classroom through the development of a ‘permeable curriculum’ (Dyson, 1993). Students must be empowered to inquire, act and reflect on the issues that are of real concern to them and to positively transform situations where they see disadvantage or unfairness in their own and others’ lives.

In this view, connectedness is a bridge between community need and private action, conceptualizing pedagogy as social praxis that is committed to the problematisation of the students’ social world, and its transformation as a means of emancipation and empowerment (Shor, 1996). Participation in community action empowers students to act within their community and to connect with other people working towards similar outcomes (Zygier & Brunner, 2002, 3). It is important that students have a chance to discuss and reflect on the activities on which they are about to embark and how these might contribute to longer-term change and improvement within their community.

Apple suggests that teachers have an obligation to help young people seek out a range of ideas and to voice their own. Apple and Beane conclude that ‘this altered and more complete understanding of the problem then is rich in teaching possibilities that connects to the real world’ (1999). Teachers however often shirk this responsibility teaching, what Apple calls, high status knowledge, as if it was ‘the truth, immutable and infallible’ (Apple & Beane, 1999, 15) while silencing the voices of those outside the mainstream.

A critical and transformative pedagogy (Apple & Beane, 1999; Gale & Densmore, 2003; Giroux, 1999; hooks, 1994; McLaren, 1995; Pearl, 1997; Sefa Dei, 2003; Shor, 1992; 1996) argues that education is more than mere instrumentalism, either serving the interests of the economy and/or the social mobility of some at the expense of others. A critically connected transformative education serves the interests of both the individual and their families and the communities in which they live.

Pearl and Knight (1999) reinforces the central role that student connectedness and engagement have with improved and successful outcomes for marginalised and at risk students. The research into the pedagogical efficacy of innovative social justice programs suggests that cognitive social justice requires the representation of the interests of groups, not just individuals so that their views are seriously engaged in the decision making process (Davidson, 2002a; 2002b; Vetere, 2002; Zygier, 2001). This reinforces Brennan’s (2001) view of the centrality of student connectedness in school reform and innovation that rejects a ‘hands-on’ form of connectedness:

What is clear is that ... school change can only be accomplished with significant student participation ... and an engagement with ...the community on the basis of changing purposes of secondary schools. (Brennan, 2001, 22-23)
Society will need to accommodate an engaged, empowered and generation of learners demanding social justice and equity for not just the few, but for all, a recognition of social justice concerned not just with the redistribution of goods and services. The social justice demanded by such students/adults may demand a rethinking of social arrangements that are currently accepted as just, giving status to action that is currently thought to be counterproductive, and centering concerns thought to be pivotal (Gale, 2000). Together with their teachers, students would have greater control over not just the content but also the delivery of their curriculum, and the pedagogy involved in its teaching as empowered and transformative agents.

4. Conclusion - Towards a new Generative Pedagogy

A critical and transformative connectedness recognises that a teaching practice that includes both class and culturally appropriate teaching and assessment are the key factors for success for all students, not just those who come to school with the social and cultural capital acknowledged by the school system as appropriate (Bourdieu & Passeran, 1990). Such pedagogy can make a real difference in the formation of autonomous and responsible persons and the formation of a productive, rational, and socially just society (Kemmis & Lynch, 2002, 1). Knight argues that the test of a democratic education is not just the difference it makes to the lives of the individual students, but also to the community to which the student belongs (Knight, 2002, 103). The QSRLS (Lingard et al., 2001) emphasises that quality student outcomes, in terms of a sustained and disciplined inquiry focused on powerful important ideas and concepts, is possible through pedagogies which are connected to students’ experiences and the world in which they live, where:

... all educational activities will, as much as possible, be connected to and in no small measure based on the real, non-school lives of its children and young people and upon the real world outside of the school. (Clinch, 1997a, 184)

What I tentatively term Generative Pedagogy must also include the crucial element of action for social justice and social change. This is particularly important if teachers and schools are to effectively and authentically engage marginalised and at risk students (Shor, 1996).

This concept of Generative Pedagogy, after Giddens’ notion of a generative politics (Giddens, 1994, 93), to include social reflexivity and agency, is the key connecting link between education and questions of what Giddens says is required to combat poverty, absolute or relative, redress the degradation of the environment; contest arbitrary power; and reduce the role of violence and force in social life (Giddens, 1994).

Giddens explains that generative politics exist in the space that links the state to reflexive mobilisation in society at-large. Generative politics is based on individuals and groups taking action to create and increase social justice, making things happen rather than having things done or happening to them.

Structural responses, no matter how much they seem to champion social justice and equity, are too often couched in the language and practice of deficit. These responses see the solution to education reform to be resource based, more money, more teachers, more computers and more schools. The deficit model adopted by many proponents of social justice is but another form of the oppression and violence (Bourdieu & Passeran, 1990; Thomson, 2002), where treating the learner as a victim inhibits the full development of the potential of the learner.
These deficit and constructivist responses (Zyngier, 2002; 2003b) in both Australia and overseas, provide solutions to the future welfare of at-risk populations mainly through the provision of additional resources and reworked programs to promote equal treatment and equality of opportunity. Such action relies on the assumption that this will then lead to improved and equal results for all. This defines alleged student shortcomings in social and cultural capital as the real issue to be resolved, ignoring the negative effects of school structures, curriculum irrelevance and pedagogical practices that may lead to the disengagement of students.

Educators and school administrators that work from the premise that ‘education has the ability to transform the personal and social futures of the disadvantaged’ will continue a pedagogy that operates in the deficit mode of thinking. Individuals from among the at risk and marginalised will no doubt benefit. When there are no serious work choices for the disadvantaged youth and a decline in alternative pathways for at risk students, then students in the privileged group of society will continue to succeed in a schooling system that serves to extend their social advantage at the expense of the marginalised (Knight, 2002, 101; Teese & Polesel, 2003; Thomson, 2002).

Current research in Australia and elsewhere - as described in this paper - attests to a rise in student disengagement from school and its curriculum and pedagogy, with a concomitant and decreased student interest in social values and civic responsibility (Lingard et al., 2001a; 2001b). At the same time, the response has too often been a retreat to the deficit model of responding to social justice and disadvantage relying on the provision of increased resources as a panacea (Zyngier, 2003b). The structural inequalities that continue to advantage and disadvantage social groups are persistent and predictable. The inequality is not the result of individual attributes, neither of the student, nor of cultural or other deprivation, but the very nature of the socio-political system (Zyngier, 2003a). Gale and Densmore (2003, 3), emphasise that without the engagement of teachers with schooling, and with the broader social, political and economic conditions of society, then the ability and opportunity of teachers, students, parents and other community members to work together to make things happen, rather than have things happen to them, will be seriously limited.

A Generative Pedagogy is critically empowering because it explicitly implies an active social justice element entrenched in the curriculum and the pedagogy of the classroom. Students are the first to discern whether the focus on ‘real life’ is a strategy for oppression or empowerment. Apple writes that:

if [pedagogy] does not connect in a powerful way to their daily experiences, many students simply will return to the cynical bargain to doing enough just to get through. (Apple, 1996, 104)

The introduction of a critically connected and transformative engaged pedagogy into the classroom, requires a combination of a socially just curricula and pedagogy, with an emphasis on student habitus, acknowledging the role of dominant knowledge as the cultural capital of the dominant class (Apple & Beane, 1999; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Haberman, 1991; hooks, 1994; 2003; Schlechty, 2002; Shor, 1987; 1996). Without this, the institutional response to students’ disengagement/disconnection from schooling remains confined to structural and programmatic solutions. Not just in relation to curriculum content that is presented by the teacher in the classroom, but also in the national and systemic reactions to the social justice issues of equity and disadvantage (Shor, 1996). This is ‘at the heart of the risky business of the classroom’ (McNaughton, 2002, 20). Lingard (2001)
Newmann (1996) assert there are powerful grounds to hypothesise that increased relevance, concrete contextualisation of curriculum and connectedness will improve student outcomes for all, but especially for students from disadvantaged groups.
References


Australian Curriculum Studies Association. (1996). *From Alienation to Engagement: Opportunities for Reform in Middle Years of Schooling*. ACT: ACSA.


Stegley Foundation. (2001). What the r.u.MAD Program hopes to achieve. In D. Zyngier & C. Brunner (Eds.), *The r.u.MAD Program*.


---

1 The outcomes of this transmissive approach are found in the discourse between the Australian Federal Minister of Education and the states’ Education Ministers (July 2006) regarding an agreed early starting age of children which only further highlights the conservative human capital view that what is important is the ‘long-term economic benefit arising from the extension of the working lives of affected children and expected earlier workforce re-entry of affected parents’ (The Federal Minister of Education, Julie Bishop in Maiden, 2006). According to instrumentalist research (that the Federal Minister quotes), the ‘national reform around the minimum age of school commencement could represent a significant contribution to the processes of wider structural economic reform’ (Ferrari, 2006)
The renewed calls by conservative politicians in Victoria in 2005, for example, for the re-introduction of technical schools confuses a practical curriculum with connectedness.

These conclusions in relation to expectations and resources are echoed in research with Indigenous Australian children (McRae, Ainsworth, Cumming et al., 2000; Sarra & Australian College of Educators., 2003).

For example the ruMAD pedagogy being trialled by the Education Foundation in Victoria (Bell & Shrimpton, 2004)
This document was created with Win2PDF available at http://www.daneprairie.com.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.