ReConceptualizing the Possible Narratives of Adolescence

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Abstract

This paper explores various epistemological paradigms available to understand, interpret, and semiotically depict young people. These paradigms all draw upon a metadiscourse of developmental age and stage (e.g. Hall 1914) and then work from particular epistemological views of the world to cast young people in different lights. Using strategic essentialism (Spivak 1996), this paper offers four descriptions of existing paradigms, including biomedical (Erikson 1980), psychological (e.g. Piaget

1973), critical (e.g. Giroux & MacLaren 1982), and postmodern (e.g. Kenway & Bullen 2001). While some of these paradigms have been more distinct in particular cultural, historical, and political contexts, they have overlapped, informing each other as they continue to inform our understandings of young people. Each paradigm carries unique consequences for the role of the learner, the teacher, and the curriculum. This paper explores contemporary manifestations of these paradigms. From this investigation, a potential new space for conceptualising young people is offered. This new space, underpinned by understandings of subjectivity (Grosz 1994), assumes sense of self to be both pivotal in generative learning and closely linked to the context and its dynamics. We aver that such a view of young people and educational settings is necessary at this time of focused attention to the middle years of schooling. In so doing, we explore the potential of classroom life and pre-service teacher education constructed within this new discourse of young people.

Introduction

Predominantly referred to as 'adolescents,' this group experiences two difficult sides of a discursive moniker. They are subject to a term that defines itself primarily through what it is not: neither child nor adult. No longer in need of the special program developed for early childhood but not yet ready for the 'serious' work of upper secondary schools, the adolescent is defined as being in between, effectively illegitimate in either valid end of a developmental binary. While differing historical and epistemological moments have framed these discourses in different ways, the adolescent has consistently been offered as an essentialised, flawed, and incomplete being within a metadiscourse of age. The obvious response from educators has inexorably been to categorize, remediate, or 'fix' young people to discipline and train them towards the idealized adult figure. At all times, they are implicitly and sometimes explicitly measured against the criteria of white, male, middle class adulthood in a way that suggests a truth element – one that supersedes contexts of history.

Such an essentialist view of the other, in this case, the adolescent, leads at best to discourses of tolerance and at worst to institutionalised practices of remediation, intervention and assimilation into the preferred state of being. Such is the case with the various systems surrounding young people. Discussions and debates around the nature of young people, premised on adolescence as a problematic and deficient stage, work from deficit perspectives: Adolescence is a difficulty to be dealt with and there is a need to escort this population through what is defined as a problematic stage. This discourse has material consequences that ripple across classrooms, schools and communities. From the tight control of time and space in the classroom, to a preoccupation with behaviour management, the resultant effect of this discourse is one of control, management and containment.

There is a striking need to rethink the established paradigmatic arguments around young people currently named 'adolescents', as well as the terms of the debate themselves. The metadiscourse of age that underpins commonly-held views of adolescence has been confronted and deconstructed by several scholars (e.g. Lesko 2001, Stewart 1998, Wyn 1998). We build on their challenges to this ideology, exploring its manifestations in various existing approaches to educating young people and then move to suggest a different subjective space for young people. Our argument works through and within discourses. We draw upon the postmodern concept of discourse, noting both its fluid and contextual nature and its ability to have material effects (Foucault 1979). Noting the close, dialectical relationship between language and power, we also conceptualise language as discursive space – one that realizes itself through words, actions, and practices. As such, we use the conceptual cojoining of discourse to explore how, through language and practices, possibilities for young peoples' selfhoods are created. In this paper, we work through four arguments to capitalize on this agentic potential.

To begin with, we situate this reconceptualisation within the metadiscourse of age that underpins much of the widely held truth that constructs and constricts young people. Next, we summarize educationally influential, historically distinct and yet overlapping dominant discursive spaces available for discussing adolescents. Then we set out a critique of the current terms of debate around available discursive spaces for young people. This is followed with a suggestion that a more generative view moves these discussions into unexplored territory. To conclude, we explore the potential of classroom life and pre-service teacher education constructed within this new discourse of adolescence.

Adolescence and the metadiscourse of age

Underpinning any reference to adolescence reflects the belief that time tightly rules human development. The chronological age of a human being carries with it semiotic associations, including stage of life, career, maturity, familial relations, independence, skills, abilities and maturity. These semiotic markers are more distinct/ strikingly obvious/sharply profiled when one is seen to be working outside of the expected significations. When the signifier of age does not match the significations, we locate that person to be abnormal or in need of intervention, such as the case with pregnant teens (Lesko 2001). Adolescence, like other culturally constructed stages of development, adheres to these rules, but does so with a broader and more pervasive sweep of negative associations. This prevalence of negative construction and knowledge of the Westernized adolescent phase has a particular sociohistoric genealogy and is tied to larger conceptualisations of human development explored in what follows.

The work of Locke and Rousseau heavily influenced contemporary views of adolescents, through the works of Skinner (1969, 1974), Piaget (1954, 1973, 1978), Montessori (1912, 1913) and Pavlov (Pavlov & Gantt 1928), and perhaps most notably, Hall (1914). Hall emphasised the importance of adolescence as a biologically-based life stage, reinforcing the notion that adolescence was a time of 'storm and stress', 'growth spurts' and 'puberty' characterized as a chronic state of hormonal triggered emotional turbulence -a concept still strongly accepted by some today (e.g Susman 1991, Mensinger 2001). Influential examples of contemporary individual developmental psychology, which underpin much of educational theory, include Erikson (1980, 1982), Havighurst (1972), and Newman and Newman (1987). While the precise start and biophysical markers of adolescence move through various times and contexts, the age/stage conceptualisation of young people has remained staunchly embedded in Western thought since Locke and Rousseau and has been emboldened through the influence of Hall's work.

Central to the conceptualisation of 'adolescence' is its definition as a 'stage,' one through which all people must pass (in a given socio-cultural and historic period). As such, it encompasses developmental tasks that are required for a person to become a normal adult (Wyn and White 1997). In assuming a universal process of an internally constructed and held identity, adolescence is the period where the 'self' is found and established for life. An enduring stereotype of adolescence maintained by the psychology paradigm is one of turbulence, instability, and passion, where they are 'rebellious', 'drug users' and 'promiscuous' (Santrock 1993). While these stereotypes have recently been called into question, (e.g. Gecas & Seff 1990, Wyn & White 1997), the pull of the dominant discourse of 'natural' and 'normal' development, influenced by age has remained resistant to widespread transformation, rejection, and/or deconstruction.

Age and stage

'Developmental age' and 'biological age' are used as convenient ways to group people and explain their progression through a series of stages towards the ultimate stage of 'maturity'. Lesko (2001, p. 4) suggests that 'age is a shorthand . . . the main entry point to thinking within a developmental perspective'. Based upon theories of developmental psychology and biological determinism, many practices involving young people are predicated upon assumptions associated with age and developmental discourses. Distinctions are made between children, adolescents and adults, based upon western cultural traditions from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the 'biological' involving a set of basic determining factors; being separate from and dominant over the 'social' (Riley 1978). As such, certain phenomena are taken as universal and 'natural' based upon a static and unchanging

biology. One such phenomenon central to defining 'adolescents' is puberty. Griffin (1993, p. 10) notes:

> As with gender, sexuality, 'race' and nineteenth-century assumptions about class, 'common sense' ideas about age stages in general and youth in particular are founded on biological determinism. Since the onset of puberty is taken to be the key-defining feature of adolescence, the category is almost immune from effective challenge or deconstruction, since the biological domain is assumed to be inherently 'natural', inevitable and irrevocable. It was this 'natural' process that became embedded in the scientific and medical ways of knowing about young people that universalized 'adolescence' and 'adolescents'.

Underpinning age is an assumption of 'development' which implies change and improvement that is moving to an end point in a particular direction; towards maturity in a physical, social and cognitive sense. The goals for defining an age of adolescence were pragmatic. Philosophic discourses of youth did not clearly partition childhood from adulthood and yet there were clear differences between them, potentially implying some transition phase in the middle. Acknowledgement and description of these differences promised the development of carefully aligned practices for engagement with children and adults in society. Hall argued for age/stage appropriate pedagogy and his work paved the way for many educational innovations in schools. Conceptualising maturation in defined stages made the formulation of theories and models of development more easily manageable, and the sorting of people within a type of maturational taxonomy was viewed as scientific. The pervading sense was that maturation was a naturally linear experience, but that it broke into relatively neat stages, allowing closer examination of development at particular points along the trajectory. Pedagogy was and is often rationalised in terms of recognition and reflection of these and other popular age/stage models.

Available discursive spaces of adolescence

In this section, we offer four discursive spaces that have constructed, legitimized and situated young people through conceptualizations based on adolescence. These spaces are not necessarily mutually exclusive, clearly chronological nor cumulative but represent some of the dominant discourses within Western society and especially in education. The four discourses are offered more as caricatures, rather than temporally and spatially specific examples of practice. As educators, parents and even young people themselves, consider and act out what it means to be an 'adolescent,' they would draw upon one, a few and perhaps over time, all of these discourses.

In offering the four discourses as caricatures, we draw upon the work of postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak and her conceptualization of strategic essentialism (1990)[1], the purposeful, temporary, and applied description and analysis of the qualities, characteristics, and nodes that make up an identity. Spivak points to the use of strategic essentialism, when carefully applied, as a way of dismantling unproductive structures and alleviating suffering. Postcolonial scholar Bahri (1996) uses the metaphor of a lawyer to demonstrate the tenets of strategic essentialism. A good defence lawyer makes strategic strikes by first considering the prosecutor and jurisprudence, and seeing the world and the specific case, through those lenses. Using this perspective, the defence attorney can then see more clearly the cracks, holes and gaps in the case – and that particular worldview. The lawyer then uses these slippage points, again strategically, to reconstruct and particularize the narrative – construct a truth.

In exploring how truths are produced, we explore four currently dominant discourses about young people, all of which stem from the metadiscourse of age and adolescence. Working from large epistemologies of cognitive psychology, neurophysical pathology, critical theories, and postmodern progressivism, we explore each discourse for its implications for the young person, the teacher and pedagogy. In doing so, we aim to reconstruct and posit what a more generative discursive space might offer for subjective participants in learning settings.

Cognitive psychology: Developmentalist perspectives

This discourse is tightly wound up in the preceding theoretical work exploring the construction of age and stage through the metadiscourse of time. Using work of Hall and Piaget, this view of the young people casts them as firmly located within a maturation process, but with the emphasis placed on the absence of the desired maturation. In fact, adolescents are defined first and foremost through their stage of development. This development tends to focus on the side of absences: a lack in higher order thinking, a lack in the ability to understand one's own positioning, an absence of moderation. Although a century stands between current research and Hall's (1904) definition of adolescence as a period marked by "storm and stress", this developmentalist discourse has proven to have both longevity and widespread tacit concurrence. The resultant effect of such a dominant discourse is primarily two-fold: one, the underlying assumptions of young people are taken to be biophysically predetermined fact, and two, such assumptions lead to practices of control, surveillance and restriction (Lesko 2001). In this way, the discourses surrounding young people in society relegate them to limited, precarious and marginalized positions. Through this view the adolescent is in a constant state of flux, at the will of her hormones, delimited by definition, and suspended by biology from reality. Popular uptakes of this view are replete through media-based, familial, and

educational conversation about the unruly hormones that characterize adolescents. In instances that pervade Westernized social strata, contexts and purposes, adolescents' practices and discourses are shrugged off with a reference to their hormones being out of control and consequently, so are they.

Because the adolescent is cast as an objectified entity, imminently knowable, the teacher's role follows logically to control the adolescent. As seen through middle school preservice and inservice teachers' perseveration on classroom management, behaviour management, and discipline tactics (e.g. Finders 1998/1999), the dialectical focus here is on controlling the hormonally affected adolescent. The teacher's role, above all else, is to maintain order and control in the classroom. A 'good' teacher, under this discourse, is one who establishes authoritarian guidelines in working with adolescents, gives them clear and consistent expectations, and exacts swift action when the adolescents need redirection. So substantive is this focus on control and surveillance that pedagogy and management of behaviour become synonymous. Teaching and learning focuses on the explicit rewards and punishment system. In fact, actual teaching and learning exchanges over curriculum take a back seat as the more traditionally hidden curriculum of controlling and surveilling behaviour takes precedence in this stage.

This concentration on control and surveillance also coalesces with a guarded weariness of adolescents' capabilities. Because they are viewed through developmental lenses that limit their ability to engage in higher order thinking skills, the curriculum is watered down to bide time until biology makes interaction worthwhile once again.

Biomedicine: Pathologizing perspectives

A second available discourse of adolescents views them through the lenses of biomedical diagnoses and builds upon the adolescent developmentalist discourse. At the time the concept of 'adolescence' was being formed, puberty was linked to 'normal' sexuality, muscular Christianity, dominant constructions of femininity and masculinity (with hetero-masculinity being superior), the need to control masturbation, and the construction of homosexuality with sexual deviance, evil and pathological sickness (Weeks 1981, Faderman 1981). The pathologization of those who were not 'normal', that is, those not adult, male, white, heterosexual and European, meant their 'different' forms of behavior could be deemed 'deviant', 'disaffected', 'deprived', 'rebellious' – words often used to construct young people on claims of identity development, hormonal and physiological changes at puberty (e.g. Erikson 1980, 1982). These discourses, which underpinned much of educational theory centered on biological and medical paradigms, were carried into institutional

life such as schools. Through Western medicine, upheld as a superior aspect of science, the body has been objectified and serviced through a bio-medical model focusing on a natural scientific framework, physical causes and treatment of health and illness, and a notion of progress or unilinear growth as developmental change. Contemporary and historical issues reflecting the continued dominance of biology and the pathologization of young people include panics over 'teenage pregnancy', 'adolescent homosexuality', conduct disorders, learning disabilities, and issues associated with body image. The state of 'normal' is dubiously constructed through quantitative studies harkening back to a focus on white, male physicality, but then moves quickly to regulation and control of the 'abnormal.'

The discourse of pathologization works to position the young person as immature learners deficient in a hierarchized mind over body. Their conditions, behaviours, and practices are viewed through the lens of 'normal' development, whose strongest antecedent is the white, middle class male. While some young people might fit such a definition of normal biomedical and cognitive development at certain points in certain contexts, the discursive pull of this model of development then casts young people as needing intervention, remediation, and diagnosis through a variety of labels and diagnoses, all of which are predicated upon an assumed normal maturation process. The teacher's role, then, in response to this flurry of pathologies, is to act as mature, objective scientist and trainer, or rational knower.

This discourse permeates teacher education programs, as increasingly, secondary preservice teachers expend significant amounts of time and energy perseverating on the various [dis]abilities, diagnoses, and ailments that will present themselves in middle and high school classrooms. This discourse also manifests itself in other related professions, such as behavioural psychology, school-based psychology, and counselling. As the diagnoses of adolescents through various classifications has increased, so too has the number and placement of such professionals in educational contexts. These professionals are then acting as mediators of pedagogy through this discourse, helping the adolescent to mediate her disability. In the case of a student with ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) the remediation is part medication and part counselling. In the case of an adolescent who has been diagnosed as having ODD (Oppositionally Defiant Disorder), psychotherapy often follows. Engendering discourses of disorders, disabilities, intervention, medication, and therapy, contemporary educational spaces are witnessing unprecedented growth in this way of framing adolescents.

Oppressed/Resistant Bodies: Critical perspectives of Adolescents

A third available perspective/discursive space surrounding adolescents is one that politicises them and society at large. Critical theories seek to draw particular attention to the role of power in the human experiences and this viewpoint assumes an imbalance in power in all situations and contexts. Making explicit the 'ideological' function of schooling draws in particular on Marxist and neo-Marxist (e.g. Bowles & Gintis 1972, Apple 1979) theories of power, control and reproduction of inequities in society and has drawn particular attention to schooling as a site of reproduction of inequities. Neo-Marxist perspectives that came into prominence in educational research literature during the 1970s and 80s represented schooling as one institution and social field through which social and economic relations were reproduced in both overtly and covertly coercive ways to perpetuate the race, class, and gender inequities that permeate society (Gramsci 1971). A parallel and/or intersecting development of feminist and anti-racist theories in education challenged theories of reproduction and resistance based solely on gender or class, and examined the relationship between schooling and the constitution of unequal gender and race relations. Although the critical perspective began with a class-based Marxist and neoMarxist tradition, questions about the particular raced, classed, and gendered subjectivities both broadened and transformed basic questions about power, dominance, and social justice.

The move from structural reproduction to a focus on agency and resistance, alongside the political goals of critical, feminist and anti-racist theories, offered a point of entry for pedagogy with an emancipatory and social justice purpose. Freire's tradition of 'conscientization' (1970) and Giroux and McLaren's theorization of resistance of oppression (e.g. Giroux 1983, Giroux & McLaren 1982) were key works in suggesting teachers can have an intellectual and political role in creating a curriculum that critiques dominant cultures and supports student empowerment; and that learning can be linked to social and political transformation. While early versions of critical pedagogy had as their central theme teaching and learning practices that challenged forms of class based oppression, later versions acknowledged oppression and injustice based on racism, sexism, ableism, and homophobia[2]. It is of note too, that particular forms of feminist and anti-racist pedagogy were developed in contradistinction to critical pedagogy (Ellsworth 1989). With its emphasis on power, domination, and social justice, the ideation of the adolescent as oppressed and resistant also has material consequences on the role of the teacher, curriculum, and pedagogy.

From a critical perspective, the student is viewed as an easily duped purveyor and consumer of dominant societal messages and institutions. Similar to the other available narratives around adolescents, a particular essential and therefore caricatured essence of the young person is found within critical theories. However, this rendering differs strongly from the version of young people as wanton, misguided, and in need of pastoral care. Instead, this view of the student is more strongly characterized by a partial deference to the stereotype of rebel without a cause. This theoretical perspective seeks to provide them with a cause, namely an unjust society, assuming that this will both drive and direct their rebellion and angst. In many ways, young people are seen to be just as incomplete as developmentally-driven perspectives of becoming, but the critical perspective puts the nexus of completion on deconstruction of implicit power structures.

Within this dialectic of power, the teacher is the natural unveiler of implicit power structures. Her/his role is to interrupt the celebrity/consumer dialectic and bring mass media texts within the format of critical inquiry; to lead the student in the deconstruction of seemingly innocent but beguilingly insidious vehicles of power imbalances, oppression, and advantage. In this way, the teacher is a revolutionary – one who romanticizes mass media and popular culture, by potentially conflating adolescents and their mass-mediated subjectivities and continuing to castigate young people for their inability to independently identify and then reject the dominant discourses of mass media texts. The teacher then vacillates between the traditional public intellectual (Gramsci 1971) and the organic intellectual who seeks to supplant, in her students, critical inquiry skills in the place of the will to consume.

The pedagogy becomes one that is comprised of particular questions. Who is represented? Who is silenced? Who benefits and who is marginalized? What knowledge, for whom, and why? More explicitly, the content of the curriculum often plays itself out in the realm of popular culture. These texts, to include print-based books and magazines, film, TV, and increasingly, the Internet, are a smooth fit with the romanticised view of the adolescent as incomplete and naïve rebel, in that these texts are conflated with the umbrella term, 'popular culture'. From an adultist perspective, popular culture, in all of its associated vapidity and indulgence, is associated with adolescents. As the teacher assumes the role of guiding students through critical inquiries of cultural models and mass mediated forms of knowledge, the teacher/student dialectic permeates through the intellectual rigor of the critique. While the call exists to open spaces for students' critical interrogation of cultural authority, the norm has been for the teacher to model a critical pedagogy that, in school contexts, more closely resembles an assembly of particular queries, skills, viewpoints and practices, rather than a dynamic cultural practice. Put simply, the popular culture and mass media texts, favoured by critical educators, are 'schoolified.'

Unruly youth – postmodern perspectives

The final discursive space/perspective to be discussed, in which young people have been constructed as unruly youth, relates to a shift to postmodernity and progressivism. The notion of a 'postmodern world' is slippery, troubling and engaging with modernism and cannot be constrained to the linear category of time, but is more a reflection of modernity's 'endless infatuation with innovation' (Bordo 1992, p. 160). Jenks (1996, p. 18-19) characterizes the shift from the purpose of modernity as being progress and the notion of utopias and grand narratives to a condition of 'avoidance, or minimization, of dystopias', a process of 'de-traditionalization'. This view is supported by Lyotard (1984) who speaks of the death of the metanarrative as representing a decline in collective aspiration and progress and hence a shift from modernity. For him, modernity always contains post-modern moments. In a post-modern world, the grand narratives are no longer credible.

Through such a challenge, postmodernists seek 'to develop conceptions of social criticism which do not rely on traditional philosophical underpinnings' (Fraser & Nicholson 1990, p. 21), and so reject positivist foundations of the meaning of knowledge and truth, and totalising narratives that govern power relations. This explanation is supported by Jencks (as cited in Bordo 1992, p. 160) who suggests that 'anything resisting or deconstructing common assumptions of culture' is postmodernist. As such, postmodernism serves as a broad category, characterized by a general critique of contemporary society and acknowledged as a fundamental turning point in social thought. In its true sense, the literature surrounding much of education, and middle years of schooling in particular, does not provide a discourse, which could be defined as postmodern, but it offers a modernist discourse where postmodern moments occur.

Drawing on theories of postmodernism, young people are discursively constructed as a homogeneous group with 'problems' and who are 'at-risk', thus becoming 'deviant' largely as a result of being labelled as such. The notion of 'unruly youth' is a product of in-group identity and the labelling process, which emerges out of the marginal positioning of youth culture within the hegemonic norm of adult and parent discourses. The postmodern paradox of youth culture is that resistance to hegemonic culture (a rejection of adult society) is expressed through means made available through consumerism and the mass media (Epstein 1998), which are dominant discourses offered generally by adults to young people. Giroux (1998, p. 24) argues that when youth speak, their voice emerges on the margins of society, 'increasingly point[ing] to the dangerous erosion of civil society that has resulted in the undermining of the safety nets and nurturing systems that historically have provided some sustenance and hope for youth'. This has led to a point where young people 'are being distanced from the values, language and practices necessary to shape a

democratic social order and those public terrains that traditionally have been used to promote and embody civil discourse and critical reflection' (Grioux 1998, p. 25), a challenge to the notion of the progressive traits of the modernist personality. The idea of a future devoid of moral and political obligations such as social responsibility, democracy and citizenship is one of increasing despair where society exudes both a deep-rooted hostility and chilling indifference towards young people.

The unruly youth, who inhabit the modern/postmodern territory, are frequently considered in educational settings to be 'at-risk', due to a rejection of the progressivism that features in the dominant hegemony of adult discourse. They are generally considered to be at-risk of not achieving a certain benchmark, for example, completion of schooling; or not achieving to their individual potential. What is important here is that while the progressivist, pastoral tone of this postmodern concern exists, it has, in individualistic and modernistic fashion, positioned the danger and risk within the young person.

Within the modernist world, 'teachers' are also normalized as a collective in the discursively produced domain of educational institutions, including schools. There are tacit rules for performing as teachers reflecting prevailing social standards of middle class respectability. The teacher in the middle years of schooling, for example, is a socially produced version of teacher as therapist, who recognises the unruliness of youth as they challenge the dominant discourse of progressive society. The teacher's role is to identify students who are at-risk, and to provide appropriate 'therapy' and support, whilst maintaining the role of a normalised, traditional teacher, acting as friend and therapist. In the quintessential Oprah-esque turn, they see themselves as helping their students live 'their best lives'.

The discourse of unruly youth is used to legitimise a focus on the middle years and the need for specialised middle schooling sites, structures, and/or practices. For example, the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (1996); Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan (1996); and Hill and Rowe (1996) utilise student alienation, disengagement, disruptive behaviour, boredom and disenchantment as arguments of legitimation for middle schooling reform. This raises questions about the role of middle schooling as being a form of 'risk management that is seen to be in the best interests of the society at large' (McLean 2001, p.15), rather than as genuine concern for improving the life chances of young people. It also signifies values of modernity and progressivism that underpin the discourse of 'unruly youth', and explains the moral panic produced as a by-product.

Contested discursive terrains for (young) people

Poststructuralist theories of representation provide a means of understanding the historical trajectories of discourses – such as the four models presented above – and their social implications for human subjects. Poststructural concepts of discourse and selfhood argue that meaning in language and other forms of semiotics construct identities and position subjects in certain ways through social relations, such as young people as 'other.' In this paper, discourse means the production of meaning – in oral, written or multimodal text – and view it as inherently and inexorably social practice. Discourses are constitutive of both knowledge and power, and implicated in processes of domination, subjection, contestation and subversion.

Discourses and the senses of self, enable and constrain, reflect and refract the specificities of historical, social, and cultural contexts. Within their own disciplinary terrains, the aforementioned theories of young people provide competing terms, concepts, codes, knowledges and practices that naturalise and normalise cross-generational relations between adults and those considered less 'mature.' In each of the respective models, principles of biology, pathology, deviance and economy create the adolescent subject and make her 'knowable' and therefore controllable.

As Western society sits astride a number of profound, complex and often contradictory processes such as globalization, ICT and diversity (Suarez-Orozco 2001), we require a reframing/retheorization of young people's construction, engagement and positioning within schooling specifically, and society more generally. As university educators, we view for example the middle schooling movement as a response – albeit an inadequate one – to the demands of a modernist schooling system working within New Times.

Our aim here, therefore, is to show that parents, educators, youth workers and policy makers need 'namings' and meanings for conceptualising young people that are more apposite to the times and more generative for the benefit of young people and those who work with them. To approach this naming, we suggest that key departures must be made from the currently available discourses in the areas of selfhood and context. We propose such an understanding could be based upon a more generative reckoning with an ambiguous, context-referenced sense of self.

Ambiguous bodies in dynamic spaces

Central to the four essentialised paradigms offered in this article, but curiously absent from explicit educational agendas, is the focus on the young person's body. Through the unquestioned deference to the biologically underpinned stage of adolescence,

each of these paradigms begins from a stance towards young people that is temporally fixed, unitarily constructed and grounded in assumptions about the necessary subjugation of the body to the mind. While Cartesian splits between the mind and body permeate and limit many aspects to semiotic social understandings of the world (Grosz 1994), this discourse is reified in an even stronger stance when understood through lenses that position young people as subject to the whims of their hormonally-tinged bodies. While the four paradigms described here each position the young person slightly differently, their inherent and shared flaw is the sustenance of a unitary fixation on the age and temporally constructed stage of adolescence. Whether understood as hormonal, unfinished, oppressed or unruly, young people are still understood through a singular lens, a view of identity that staunchly traces its roots back to a fixation upon static concepts of identity and self. The maintenance of this undergirding conceptual structure then delimits the ability for any of these paradigms to make significant departures from commonplace understandings of young people. To shake these paradigms, a generative space must purposefully begin with the young person's body, but in such a way as to target the reconstruction of embodied subjectivities within complex, shifting social contexts. It is this notion of embodied subjectivities (Grosz 1994) as ambiguous and referring to multiple subjectivities in terms of the primacy of corporeality that provides us with a more generative space in which to consider young people.

Subjectivity: The ambiguous self

In asking what is most crucial to identity, one can offer, from liberal humanist standpoints, that it is the experience of the individual, the experience of the individual as seen in the context of social and cultural structures, the lived experience of the subject. Post-structural feminists such as Grosz (1994) and Butler (1999) have defined subjectivity in marked contrast to the traditional psychological view of identity Theorists such as these, viewing the self through a powerful Foucaultian lens, present subjectivity as an alternative to internally negotiated, fixed and positivist constructions of identity. While it is a theoretically dense concept and appropriately elusive of a definitive set of characteristics, using subjectivity here allows us to make two key departures from the territory known through identity.

The first key difference is in explicitly noting our experiences as social, cultural and historical subjects, and this knowing occurs through our bodies. Grosz (1994) notes that through both violently demonstrable and subtle inscriptions our bodies and abilities come to be morphologised and categorised into what are seen as socially significant groups. For example, the potential constraining and control of young peoples' movement in chronological and temporal spaces of schools can act as one inscription of age and development (Kirk 1998, Vadeboncoeur 2005). Arguably more

subtle, the shared understandings around particular clothes and commercial brands can also work as signs to denote adolescents of certain backgrounds and proclivities (Moje & van Helden 2005). By working through the concept of subjectivity instead of identity, we are first moved to strongly contextualize the lived experience of the subject through an embodied understanding of experience. As has been noted, adolescence has been strongly constructed out of biological discourses about developmentalism. By reclaiming and reckoning with the body as a necessarily complex conduit for lived experience, the concept of subjectivity allows us to talk generatively about young people as subjects.

Second, the concept of embodied subjectivity is productively tinged with movement and travel, of fluidity and shift, across contexts (Belsey 1997, Nelson 2001). The political potential of viewing the subject as process rather than as fixed serves to include and acknowledge the multiple, competing, and contradictory positions that are both concurrently and disparately invoked within the subject and across subjects. Starting from this theoretical stance at once delegitimates and devalues knowing any person, and moreover, any group as commonly characterised. Working within a frame of fluidity and contestation, ergo an appropriately evasive knowability, subjectivity contains a conceptual saliency previously unknown in academic, research, and educational conversations about young people. Throughout this article, the terms 'young people' and 'youth' have been privileged over 'adolescence' when we have been arguing outside of the dominant discourses. This is, at once, a symbolic gesture to break with the developmentalist discourses surrounding adolescence and a linguistic move to more closely bring subjectivities into the foreground. In this way, the young person is ambiguous, eluding pre-conceived and pre-existing conceptions of identity, as understood through chronological age.

Paralleling Giroux's call for representational politics of raced youth, we realize there is a need for a place where a politics and pedagogy of the embodied subject is addressed. However, the social and cultural spaces where young people can express themselves is largely within control and surveillance of adults where engagement with and transformation of the conditions in which they live is also controlled by adults. The democratic possibilities for young people to produce knowledge, in this case through and of their embodied subjectivity, allows for resistance to particular representations rather than simply reinforcing stereotypes and all their constraints. Adults, as cultural workers, be they teachers, academics, school administrators, parents, educational policy makers, governmental policy makers and purse-string holders, need to create pedagogical practices that provide the conditions through which young people actually learn about and understand their personal stake in struggling for a future in which social justice and political integrity become the defining principles of their lives. Although dichotomous binaries maintain a

stronghold throughout western epistemologies, the divide and hierarchy between the mind and body has been challenged; these challenges provide a generative space in this proposal of young people.

To influence a reconceptualisation of young people as occupied through embodied and fluid subjectivities, we must reconsider the body as both the condition through which we experience life and the shifting selves that constantly reorganize, reassemble, and reassert proclivities, desires, and needs throughout various contexts. Drawing on the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962), this notion of being embodied denies a forefronting of either the cognitive or the corporeal. Instead, the world is experienced and understood only through the interconnected, complex, and inextricable fields of the mind and body. People move through the world in corporeal existences, but our understandings are so intertwined throughout our bodies that regarding the body as a static object denies the fluidity of embodied, immediate and sensory responses to different configurations of time and space. As young people move throughout contexts, they do through their physical, material and symbolic bodies. At times, this corporeal experience sustains echoes of ways of being, doing and acting from other contexts, and at times, these subjectivities are reorganized into wholly different legitimations, priorities, and hierarchies. In that sense, the body is an ambiguous condition, one that denies unitary construction, as it responds to, engages with, and transforms its surrounding contexts.

As currently configured in Western contexts, middle schools, junior high schools, and high schools are particularly marked by highly controlled configurations of time, space, and young bodies. Understanding people, contexts and learning as generatively complex, casts these types of regulations and governmentality as particularly ineffective and antithetical. In this sense, complex views of learning offer a synergistic coupling with the destabilising of deterministic meanings associated with 'adolescence.' Through a forthright recognition of destabilization, necessarily complex views of learners and learning would pose these questions recursively, assuming variant understandings over time, space and contexts. In this way, this combination of deconstruction and reconstruction offers a potential productive space in which we can actively restructure our epistemological and ontological stances and effects.

While the educational gains of a shift to an ambiguous sense of self and the dynamic of context are clear, the possibilities also necessarily extend to the larger paradigmatic orientations to (young) people that permeate levels and institutions in society. While schools are practised in naming and, therefore, limiting possible subjectivities, this discourse is drawn from the larger metadiscourse of age. Using ambiguity and subjectivity as conceptual constructs releases the adult from predicting, prenaming and therefore overcontrolling the possible instatiations of the young person. These

conceptual constructs also challenge the relational notions of adult and young person, teacher and student, schooling and pedagogical spaces. When understood as not necessarily unitary and static, wholly new dimensions are opened to explore and entertain subjectivities currently all but impossible in the liminal spaces of education, schooling and the societal control of the young person.

Notes

[1] Though widely cited, this concept is often misinterpreted in two ways. Most commonly, it is understood superficially to amount to only essentialising, a destructive and oversimplified rendering of the world. Adding to that misreading is a similar concentration on strategy, or critique as it is taken up in this context, which is misunderstood to simply point out the errors in any argument. Spivak advocates for neither of these, seeing essentialism alone as the conduit for oppression and critique alone as simply another version of positivism.

[2] Our intention is not to conflate critical pedagogy into one unified concept. There are varied traditions of critical pedagogy, not all of which overlap with equally varied traditions of feminist and anti-racist pedagogy. In this paper our concern is to highlight seminal work in the fields. Similarly, over the course of three decades it is possible to see ways in particular authors have shifted their theoretical positions to take account of critiques and new social and philosophical theories. For instance, Giroux's (1992) later work on border pedagogy engages with post-modern theory alongside critical theory.

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