Unsettling Deficit Views of Students and their Communities

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Abstract

In this paper we explore the possibilities for redesigning pedagogy in the middle years of schooling. We think that the middle schooling movement in Australia is unfinished because the pedagogical reforms promised have been patchy, not well researched and difficult to sustain. As well, middle schooling is a little exhausted because it has failed to respond to changing demographics and youth identities. As a response we argue for school change projects linked to mainstream curriculum change. From a range of conceptual resources we discuss the potential of using a "funds of knowledge" approach and a narrative approach to youth identity work.

Redesigning pedagogy in the middle years

> While schools cannot compensate for society, they can make a difference. Many features of the dominant policy regime in schooling impede such a possibility, particularly the silencing of teachers' voices, the fetish for performativity, the related competition between schools in a market context, and the re-articulation of individual deficit explanations in these new times. (Lingard, 1998, pp. 12-13)

In this paper we explore the possibilities for redesigning pedagogy in the middle years of schooling. In the past decade or so, aspirations to improve the quality of teaching/learning in the middle years of schooling have developed into an international movement, with Australian educators as major contributors. The middle schooling movement in Australia has drawn resources from a range of sites, including the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP) (Connell, 1994; Connell, White, & Johnston, 1991), the National Schools Network (NSN) (Ladwig, Currie, & Chadbourne, 1994; Peters, Dobbins, & Johnson, 1996), the Australian Curriculum Studies Association ACSA) (Barratt, 1998; National Advisory Committee for the Student Alienation During the Middle Years of Schooling Project, 1996), and (inter)national

concern about retention rates in the post-compulsory years (Fine, 1991; Smyth & Hattam, 2004). During that time, a middle schooling philosophy has emerged that can be characterised by certain features including: a separation of the middle years from the rest of the school; establishing teaching teams and/or sub-school groups to enhance teacher-student relationships; devising integrated and negotiated curriculum; and using "authentic assessment" of "rich" learning tasks. Along with Luke et al. (2003) we think that the middle schooling movement in Australia is both unfinished business and a little exhausted.

Middle schooling is unfinished because the pedagogical reforms promised have been patchy, the area is not well researched and reforms have been difficult to sustain. There has been a lot of effort put into structural changes in schools, and even some reculturing work, but the pedagogical changes that are required if middle schooling is to actually improve students learning, has been underwhelming. We want to argue that the questions about pedagogy in schools requires the most attention if the aspirations for middle schooling are to be realized. After all is said and done, it is the engagement between teachers, students and knowledge that produces learning. No amount of restructuring and/or reculturing that is not driven by a concern for this pedagogical relationship will make a sustainable difference to learning outcomes, and especially to those students who have traditionally not been served well by mainstream schooling.[1]

The middle schooling movement is also showing signs of exhaustion, mostly because it is more than a decade old and many significant changes have occurred during that time that now need to be considered. In this paper we want to argue for a second generation of middle schooling that is responsive to changing demographies and youth identities and this includes the following:

- Increasing levels of social and cultural complexity at a time in which governments has shifted concern from the "social" to "community" (Rose, 1996, 1999);

- A significant collapse of the full-time youth labour market and a normalising of precarious employment (Pusey, 1998, 2003; Pocock, 2003);

- A substantial number of families and youth living in difficult financial circumstances and a concentration of the new poor (Bauman, 1998) living on the urban periphery of most cities;

- The re-emergence and/or unleashing of deficit views of "disenfranchised" communities, refugees, Indigenous people (Luke, 1997); and,

- The influence of media culture on the identity formation of young people (Sefton-Green, 1998).

Unfortunately, the traditional secondary school curriculum has been difficult to shift and is now more than ever unrelated to the lived experiences of too many young people (Hattam & Howard, 2003). As a consequence, schooling is losing its influence on the process of youth identity formation (Duncan-Andrade, 2004) which we argue sets up the conditions for an urgent rethinking of middle schooling; schools cannot just wait out the storm (Luke et al., 2003). In this paper we argue that it is important to remember what we have learned from projects such as the Disadvantaged Schools Project and National Schools Network about curriculum and pedagogical reform for students living in poverty. Improving learning outcomes for young people living in poverty requires more that mere compensatory programs which mostly are based on a view that the problem is deficits of the students and their communities. Instead, whole school change projects linked to mainstream curriculum change are required. There is a range of conceptual resources that have the potential to assist schools in that broad direction including, funds of knowledge, youth identity work, local literacies (Street, 1994), place-based education (Gruenewald, 2003), future studies (Slaughter, 1995) and popular culture (Duncan-Andrade, 2004). In this paper we want to highlight the first two of these.

Getting past scripted teaching

In 1916 Dewey (1966/1916) pondered: "Why is it, in spite of the fact that teaching by pouring in, learning by passive absorption, are universally condemned, that they are still entrenched in practice?" (p. 38). Unfortunately there is an increasingly loud din being made by those advocating "learning by passive absorption" which we believe undermines decades of educational work that has placed the question: "what about the learner?", in the middle of the frame for educational debate about what's "good" curriculum and pedagogy.

The move away from the traditional didactic mode of teaching, at least in Australian schools, has been almost universal in the primary years, and widely supported by educators committed to the middle years of schooling. We are not sure we can confidently claim that didactic teaching has been widely abandoned in the middle years but its dominance is now widely disputed and alternatives are widely reported as essential parts of the middle school scene. What we are calling traditional didactic teaching has been variously referred to as "banking education" (Freire, 1972), or the "competitive academic curriculum" (CAC) (Connell, 1998) and recent advocates use terms such as "direct instruction" or "formal teaching". The sort of curriculum and pedagogies that we are referring to here, don't require the teacher to know much about the students/learners, rather this approach is mostly split-off from the everyday lives of the students and the communities in which they live (Pinar, 2004). Under this mode of (mis)education the curriculum content is argued as being inherently good, teachers teach subjects, and bad students are those who don't "respond to what has been

prescribed for them" (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. 50). Such a mode is defended by tropes such as: "Oh, I taught them that, but they didn't learn it" (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, pp. 49-50).

In their mandates about curriculum and pedagogy, most Australian Public Education Departments clearly argue that the learner is central. As examples of the ways that Education Departments are working with the question – what about the learner? – we'd like to refer to the *South Australian Curriculum Framework* (*South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework, SACSA*), and the *Productive Pedagogies* from Queensland Education. "The SACSA Framework does not represent a prescribed body of knowledge or authorise a particular way of going about teaching. Rather, it describes a set of parameters within which educators work to design their own teaching, and promotes contexts within which children and students construct their own learning" (Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS), 2005, Constructivism section). Central to the logic of the *SACSA* is a commitment to a constructivist view of knowledge and its implication for teaching and learning. To quote from the DECS website:

> The central thesis of constructivism is that the learner is active in the process of taking in information and building knowledge and understanding; in other words, of constructing their own learning. Learning then is the active process of engaging in experience and its internalisation in terms of thinking. All forms of experience can be called upon here. Constructivism also has clear implications for the social situation or context in which learning happens, in so far as learners are more likely to engage in constructing their own understanding in a supportive social environment. (DECS, 2005, Constructivism section)

Perhaps most importantly, this view of learning also understands that "[l]earners' conceptions are embedded in their culture and tied to their use of language" (DECS, 2005, Constructivism section).

In a similar vein, Queensland Education has developed the "Productive Pedagogies Project" as the first stage of a curriculum renewal process involving a Curriculum Framework planning process. The Productive Pedagogies have been developed out of the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (Lingard et al., 2001; Lingard, Mills, & Hayes, 2000) and involves four key themes which are: intellectual quality, supportive learning environment, recognition of difference, and connectedness. The last two of these themes represents a serious attempt to articulate an engagement with the specificity of learners. The theme of connectedness is especially generative and we believe provides one of the many takes on this theme. For the Productive Pedagogies Project, connectedness involves:

- Knowledge integration (Does the lesson integrate a range of subject areas?);

- Background knowledge (Are links with students' background knowledge made explicit?);

- Connectedness to the world (Is the lesson, activity or task connected to competencies or concerns beyond the classroom?); and,

- Problem-based curriculum (Is there a focus on identifying and solving intellectual and/or real-world problems?).

We think this version of connectedness is far from exhaustive and in fact we'd like to argue that this set of themes is a weak version of connectedness. There are other versions that are much stronger; and in this paper we'd like to point out a number of other examples. Firstly, is the Freirian approach adopted by Shor (1987, 1996). Shor's writing contains a rich description of his theory and practice and outlines in some detail a pedagogical approach that is committed to in one paper as "situated". For Shor:

> I learn from the students' speech and writing the issues that matter to them, and then use those themes to develop the problems for [further examination] together. The course is also situated in the language, statements, issues and knowledge students bring to class. Their cognitive and social situation is the starting point, not my prefabricated syllabus. (1988, p. 108)

In other places, Shor (1992) discusses this same idea in terms of designing courses using the "generative themes" from the everyday lives of their students. Drawing on Freire, generative themes are those words that name the most significant aspects of the students' "present, existential, concrete situation" (Freire, 1972, p. 68). Generative themes are those "words most weighted with existential meaning (and thus the greatest emotional content), and "reveal longings, disbeliefs, hopes, and an impetus to participate" (Freire, 1974, p. 49). The second example is the Citizen School in Porto Alegro (Gandin & Apple, 2002). The Citizen School also draws on Freire's ideas and especially the idea of education for democracy. Like Shor's approach, the curriculum begins with researching the "main themes" from the specific school community. "Then the most significant ones are constructed in the thematic complex that will guide the action of the classroom, in an interdisciplinary form, during a period of time" (Gandin & Apple, p. 267). For example, one thematic complex can be developed around the issues of a community's standard of living involving the study of "rural exodus; social organization; and property" (Gandin & Apple, p. 267). As Ganden and Apple argue, such an approach inverts previous notions of what counts

as official knowledge; i.e., that organised around dominant class and race visions of the world and instead proposes that "curricular knowledge is the culture(s) of the communities themselves" (Gandin & Apple, p. 267). Importantly students are not learning that knowledge that is already codified in books, but generating their own knowledge from the "historical experience of their families" (Gandin & Apple, p. 267) and focusing on "the real problems and interests" (Gandin & Apple, pp. 267-8) of their communities.

A Funds of Knowledge Approach

A more recent variation on this theme, and one that is not reliant on a Freirian lineage, but owes more to a Vygotskian view of culture, has been developed by Moll and others and involves what they call, researching community funds of knowledge as a first move in devising curriculum. Moll et al. (1992) use the term funds of knowledge to refer to those "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Moll et al., p. 133), pertaining to "social, economic, and productive activities of people" (Moll et al., p. 139) in local communities. Funds of knowledge include "social history of households, their origins and development . . . the labour history of families . . . how families develop social networks . . . including knowledge skills and labour, that enhance the households' ability to survive and thrive" (Moll et al., p. 133). In a recent book, they define funds of knowledge in terms of how families generate, obtain and distribute knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2002). This approach confronts the deficit views of some disenfranchised communities and pursues instead, what Tozer (2000) refers to as a "cultural subordination explanation". Such an explanation assumes that "people are competent and have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002, p. 625). The funds of knowledge approach represents "communities in terms of the resources, the wherewithal they do possess, and a way to harness these resources for classroom teaching" (Gonzalez & Moll, p. 625). This approach involves teachers in "collaboration with outside researchers using a combination of ethnographic observations, open-ended interviewing strategies and oral histories and case studies" (Gonzalez & Moll, p. 132) to examine the lifeworlds of local households. This knowledge is then considered as a resource for classroom instruction; and involves a stage in which the funds of knowledge is worked with to make it "pedagogically viable" (Moll, 2002, p. 278).

There are a number of issues we'd like to raise briefly here in regard to pursuing a funds of knowledge approach. As Gonzalez herself says, the early versions of this approach suffer from a certain "naiveté regarding the burdens under which teachers work" (Gonzalez et al., 2002, p. 2). As such the approach tends to suffer from the same lack of connection to the everyday life in classrooms that is often levelled as

overly theoretical versions of critical pedagogy. That teachers could find the time to be involved in extensive ethnographic research into the funds of knowledge of their students' communities is probably quite fanciful. And it is unlikely that they will have the opportunity of working with an expert ethnographer/anthropologist as is the case in some of the documented case studies published by Moll and colleagues. Secondly, the funds of knowledge approach can under-estimate the fact that many children create their own funds of knowledge in ways that are quite independently from their families (Moll, 2002, p. 279). Researching community funds of knowledge then demands examining more that the family as a site and could involve examining other sites inhabited by young people such as youth centres, (Dimitriadis & Weis, 2001) and their engagement with popular culture.

Re-narrating Deficit Identities

The literature on middle schooling testifies to the importance of *identity* in the middle years. The ages ten to fifteen years have been described as the "first identity crisis" (Earl, 1999) when young people shift their frame of reference from family, to peers and to the world. The negotiation of identity is seen a key element of adolescence (Chadbourne, 2001) and support for this is essential within middle schooling (Barratt, 1998; Cumming, 1996) and to prevent early school leaving (Smyth & Hattam, 2004). This support should take the form of middle school teachers who are skilled in fostering identity development (Smyth, McInerney & Hattam, 2003) and are sensitive to transitions in adolescence over these years (Roney, 2001). Yet, despite this emphasis on identity, on the whole, the concept of *identity* is assumed to be self-evident and there is limited exploration of connections between identity, and pedagogy within middle schooling policy and practice. For example, the *South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework* (Department of Children's Services (DECS), 2006) identifies identity as one of five "Essential Learnings". The explanation provided assumes the definition of identity to be self evident, instead focussing on how students can develop a sense of "group dynamics" and "self worth". Neither are pedagogical resources provided to assist teachers to "construct curriculum which is appropriate to the learners they teach and is consistent with the constructivist teaching and learning theories upon which the SACSA Framework is based" (DECS). Throughout the documents, identity formation is assumed to be an unproblematic, decontextualised and objective result of learning. This is demonstrated in the SACSA English curriculum document's statement that "students develop a sense of identity, and of being connected with others, as they engage with literature, media and everyday texts" (DECS).

Narrative Identity

But there are conceptual resources available that allow us to think past such decontextualised views of identity, and that have the potential to inform middle school pedagogy. In this paper we want to argue that narrative offers a useful conceptual framework:

> In striving to make sense of life, persons face the task of arranging their experiences of events in sequences across time in such a way as to arrive at a coherent account of themselves and their world around them. Specific experiences of events of the past and present, and those that are predicted to occur in the future, must be connected in a lineal sequence to develop this account. (White & Epston, 1990, p.10)

This account can be seen as a story, a self-narrative or an identity. Thus a narrative conceptualisation of identity goes beyond stories that are told about people, rather identity is a phenomenon in flux that finds its expression through one's "own narrativization" (Gee, 2001) which is collective and performative in nature (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). This line of thinking draws on the work of Bateson (1972) who argues any mapping of reality must include a temporal dimension, as well as that of Bruner (1986) who presents life experience as richer than dominant discourses or the dominant story. As a consequence, new identities can be created with each new telling as it encapsulates and expands on the previous telling (White & Epston, 1990). These new identities can identify "unique outcomes" that plot trajectories outside the available "repertoire of identities" to resist deficit views and the adoption of deficit identities. Such ideas have found currency within elements of the counselling profession which have used a narrative conceptualisation of identity as a foundation to "narrative therapy".

One example of the use of narrative therapy with youth in the middle years can be found in the work of Nylund and Corsiglia (1997) and Law (1997). Often a focus on behaviour management in schools frames students with problems in schooling as problem students, with one prominent example of this process being found in Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Nylund and Corsiglia (1997) saw ADHD as a discourse located within individual deficit and thus argued that ADHD lends itself to a discursive or narrative therapy approach, not only because it is more accessible to those with lower linguistic ability, but also because it wrests back the ownership of the label for the individual. They propose that a young person should be encouraged to use their expertise to develop their own metaphors to reclaim their gifts and talents which have been narratively hijacked by the ADHD discourse. Similarly, Law (1997) describes his use of narrative therapy with young people diagnosed ADHD. The basis of his approach was the belief that ADHD was a construction located in the social and cultural practices of pathologising behaviour, mother blaming, and the infantisation of children. In response he used the narrative

therapy model to deconstruct the dominant view of ADHD, thus allowing more scope for the discovery of strengths and success.

However, this application of the narrative therapy approach, while holding great promise, overlooked the impact of the broader cultural forces behind labels, and how this emphasis on the agency misses the many structural implications for ADHD. As Connell (2004) and Goodson (1995) warn, there is nothing necessarily revolutionary about deconstructing identities or telling stories; it is only when deconstruction is integrated with inequality, human consequences and contexts that emancipatory analysis and action can occur. This limitation is considered by research into ADHD from within the field of critical narrative inquiry (Prosser, 2006). This approach argues that if only medical or functional questions are asked about ADHD, the result will only be medical answers – and more drug treatment. Prosser explores educational, social and political questions about ADHD in order to understand and address the barriers to otherwise successful interventions. What makes this approach unique is its collaborative production of narratives with students who have been diagnosed ADHD using a "critical narratives" model (which brings together the principals of critical ethnography and narrative therapy).

Moving beyond ADHD as an example of a prominent deficit identity, in recent years there has been a growth in research that uses narrative identity as a conceptual basis for exploring and unsettling other deficit identities (e.g., Reynolds & Taylor, 2005; Archakis & Tzanne, 2005; Goodley & Clough, 2004; Gopalakrishnan & Ulanoff, 2003; Rappaport, 2000). However, what has been absent from most of these approaches is a consideration of how narrative identity can be used pedagogically to unsettle deficit views. As a consequence, it is important to explore how the concept of narrative identity can be extended as a resource for educative relationships that resist deficit student identities within schools and specifically middle schooling. Or to ask this another way: what pedagogical resources can a narrative conception of identity provide middle school teachers to develop and sustain anti-deficit identities?

Narrative identity as a pedagogical resource

One example of an attempt to use critical discourse analysis and narrative theories as a pedagogical resource to challenge deficit views of students can be found in the work of Comber and Kamler (Kamler, 1999, Comber & Kamler, 2005). More specifically, the pedagogical use of narrative therapy to consider "students at risk" can be found in the work of Fitzclarence and Hickey (1999). They argue that the term "at risk" is a technology of control that has emerged through an economic rationalist obsession with individual responsibility and silences those to whom the term is applied. However, drawing on the discovery of Willis (1979) that the labelled are far from passive victims, they argue for a disruption of "risk" through multilayered narratives built using

narrative therapy approaches. Thus, their consideration of pedagogy is best understood as the learning that results from living and they see the process of narration and re-narration of identity as pedagogical.

Although Fitzclarence and Hickey (1999) do not explicitly discuss particular pedagogical processes, their work points toward a number of possible resources that can be adapted from within narrative therapy approaches. For instance, positive individual and family stories can be identified, recorded, performed and reinforced within the middle school context to unsettle deficit identities. Another variation on this approach would be to link identities available through popular culture to student "unique outcomes" and new positive identities. Popular culture should not be seen solely as an oppressive force (Buckingham, 1998), rather it can be a site for resources to rewrite texts about youth (such as identity) in a more socially just manner (Giroux, 1994). The repertoire of identities available from within popular culture can also be a resource for understanding, redefining and resisting deficit identities. The writing and sharing of counter narratives drawn from youth experiences and against deficit images in popular culture can be an important resource in resisting deficit views. Fortunately, there is some evidence that young people already use popular culture to imagine identities beyond those provided for them (Dimitriadias & Weis, 2001).

Further, a number of additional resources can be drawn from poetic and narrative approaches to pedagogy. Nowhere is the power of language and the images of popular culture more powerful than in narrative and poetry, and these can be used as a vehicle to a new way of seeing the world (Leggo, 2005). An example of such an approach is to use "heuristics", understood here as the use of a range of episodes to explore experience in dialogue with others (Conlan, 2000) to challenge logics of deficit. These stories can be written by students for teachers or other adults to foster deeper understanding and reflection and can draw on experiences from youth culture (such as success at music or sport), elements of popular culture (such as identifying with movie or virtual characters) or student lifeworlds. It has been our experience that students find heuristics powerful tools to scaffold new identities (Prosser, 2006). However, this is not an easy task, as other groups in society tend to undermine positive identities through reinforcing the powerful deficit identity stereotypes that are available. By sharing heuristics with those who would project deficit identities it can challenge their assumptions, promote understanding and develop more sympathetic responses. Given time and practice, teachers and students may consider extending heuristic writing to the collaborative production of short stories and novels. These texts could portray student lifeworlds in a way that more broadly unsettles deficit views around identity and learning.

The performative aspects of narrative have already been alluded to within this paper. However, it is important to reinforce the power of performing empowered narratives to reinforce and sustain new identities.

> Poetry emphasises the performative and creative activity of language, the ways we not only reveal identity and understanding, but the ways we also engage constantly in constituting and reconstituting our sense of self and identity. (Leggo, 2005, p. 445)

We would contend that this observation is not just reserved for poetry but encapsulates the essence of narrative identity also. Building on this recognition of narrative providing a new way of seeing self and identity, collective narrative sharing can build communities of support. While not all of a group will share the experiences of its component members, all the group has experience of emotion, and the connection with common feeling (or empathy) can encourage unity and action (Barone, 1995). Even if individually told, narratives are products of collective story telling (Sfard & Prusak, 2005), just as identity is a social product. When such an orientation is used thoughtfully to draw on references to the group's experiences, it can be transformative (particularly if information technologies used by young people are the ones used to construct and transmit texts). This approach can open up student lifeworlds at their most awful and awe filled, enabling connections that move beyond depoliticisation and toward high tech communities of support and empowerment. In many ways such an approach echoes the Habermasian ideal of discourse communities using honest speech acts to build new and empowering truths.

Another critical tradition that emphasizes the power of language and community is found in the work of Freire. This tradition sees pedagogy as collaborative, empowering relationships that move forward through dialogue to create knowledge that is transformative and situated in people's lives. However, Freire (1993) also called on pedagogues to use a sense of fun and creativity to stimulate doubt, criticism, risk taking and to project or advocate for more just futures. There is within the genre of narrative and the conception of narrative identity, plenty of scope for educators to embrace the liberatory project put forward by Freire. Further, narrative identity provides a conceptual framing to explore the individual, local and global. As Freire (1997) suggests, the more rooted one is in their location, the more they can rigorously extend themselves to be a critical citizen of the world. By necessity, narrative grounds us in the individual and particular, but also allows us to expand out to the local, popular and virtual to interrogate the world around through the word.

Clearly, such narrative pedagogies align with the funds of knowledge approach described earlier in this paper. However, because the funds of knowledge of many students do not contain the cultural capital needed for school success, there are

challenges that need to be considered by teachers who would use narrative pedagogies to empower students. Firstly, although narrative therapy has an avowed political and socially just orientation, it is important that this is not lost when its principles are recontextualised as narrative pedagogy. For instance, if the positive experiences that are identified to rewrite identity are only those that reinforce dominant notions of school success, then there is a risk that the result will be little more than manipulation, deeper subjugation and reaffirmation of deficit. Teachers using this resource must maintain a sense of criticality. Alternatively, there is a risk that the critical pedagogue will see "students as deficient and lacking in critical capacities, to be enlightened by the teacher/educator" (Albrecht-Crane, 2005, p. 496). The challenge then is to support the identification of genuine "unique outcomes" from the students' lives that disrupt subjugating identities, but not to impose them. Secondly, there is the challenge of young people acknowledging more liberating identities but for a range of affective and other reasons choosing to maintain deficit identities. For instance, in the case of Prosser's (2006) research into ADHD, students found it difficult to adopt critical ideas because it meant unpacking a deficit identity that was seen to be explanatory, individualised, empowering and beyond critique. Again, the challenge for the teacher is how to evoke and encourage unique outcomes that are both genuine and emancipatory. Thirdly, there is the opposition that the positive identities produced by teacher and student will face in the classroom, school and the community. Consideration must be given to how the spark of a more empowering new identity will be sustained in often difficult surroundings. For all these reasons it is important that narrative pedagogies are rewritten and performed, not individually, but in supportive and collaborative critical communities. It is in this context that narrative resources can work best to unsettle and sustain resistance to deficit identities.

In essence, if we conceptualise identity from the perspective of narrative, we see individuals adopting certain events from their experience to remember as part of their identity. If all that is reinforced in our lives are deficits, it is likely that we will have deficit identities, but if we can begin to identify our unique successes, we can begin to develop a more positive outlook on self. This is an important understanding for those working with young people shifting into the adult world. If we can use a concept of identity that moves beyond that of a "potentially changing core identity" (Gee, 2001) to multiple narratives constantly being re-written and re-performed, then a range of pedagogical options emerge that can make that renarration an empowering one. What narrative offers teachers is a resource to conceptualise identity, to help young people define their own positive identities and to work back against deficit views by drawing on popular culture, student experience and resources in their communities.

Conclusion

In this paper, we argue along with Pinar (2004) that curriculum and pedagogy need to be conceived as a "complicated conversation" occurring in real time, in classrooms, that involves "connecting academic knowledge to our students' (and our own) subjectivities, to society, and to the historical moment" (Pinar, 2004, p. xiv). It seems absurd that after decades of educational advance (going back to the work of Dewey), we are still debating the importance of taking into consideration the lives and identities of our students in curriculum design. Yet, backlash pedagogies (Gutiérrez et al., 2002), logics of deficit and reform by resentment are moving powerfully in the Australian public arena to maintain the status quo. In the face of these influences, we see an urgent need to articulate again a view of curriculum and pedagogy that asks: *what about the learner?* Further, if teachers are to resist pedagogies that are driven by deficit views of students and their communities, then they need conceptual and practical resource support. To this end, we have outlined in this paper pedagogical resources that are being drawn on by educators to work against the logic of deficit views of the marginal(ised) and towards more socially just middle schooling in Australia.

Acknowledgements

Note

[1] We'd especially like to mention students living in poverty. We need to say a few things about the nature of poverty in Australia, a topic that is seldom discussed in any meaningful way in Australia's media. "Poverty" is difficult to define (The Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2004) and its definition is highly contested. A recent Senate report measured poverty in terms of a "poverty line" based on half the average income or half the median income (the point where half the group earn more and half earn less) (The Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2004). Individuals (or families) with an income "below" these lines were defined as being in poverty. Using such a measure, the Senate inquiry concluded that: "[There is] consensus that the numbers of Australians living in poverty generally ranges from

2 to 3.5 million" (The Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee, 2004, p. xv). And using this measure of poverty it is estimated that between 479,000 and 743,000 dependent Australian children (all children aged less than 15 and all 15 to 24 year olds engaged in full time study and living at home) live in poverty (Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2004). These figures indicate, close to one in ten Australian children live in poverty (using the lower estimate). This number has been steadily rising during the past decade. As well, Australia has the fourth highest percentage of people living below the income poverty line compared to other selected OECD countries (United Nations Development Project, 2004).

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