

CHAPTER 1: EDUCATIONAL FUTURES

No wonder everyone is thick...inbreeding must damage brain development.

Message posted by UK primary teacher on Facebook (Press Association 2011)

A report that the Center for American Progress published yesterday shows that teachers expect students of color and low-income students to graduate college at lower rates than white students.

(Segal 2014)

The majority of white working-class children attend persistently inadequate, low-calibre schools. The UK's education system is beset by deep problems: a lack of progress and innovation, *pessimism about students' ability*, a fetish for never-ending surface-level change, and inadequate teacher training [to name a few].

(Stahl 2014, emphasis added)

On the feelings of others

How would it feel to be a six year old at the school where a teacher posted comments on Facebook about their students being 'thick' and how 'inbreeding' must 'damage brain development'? Or what would it be like if, day in and day out, based on your ethnicity and/or low-income, you were expected to have a lesser educational future than your classmates? If the first two of these quotes seem extreme, what then of daily encounters of educational pessimism about your ability? These three quotes show up ongoing problems with education for disadvantaged students. Indeed, these problems

tell a story which has ostensibly not changed for a long time. In order to develop a new perspective on experiences of educational disadvantage, we explore ways that feeling works to mark out, re-inscribe or facilitate change in the learning biographies and life stories of disadvantaged youth.

While it may be the case that some teachers say and do things that are problematic for young people and their feelings, simple *teacher blaming* is not the answer, and indeed serves to further obscure the complexity of processes that contribute to producing negative feelings in education. For instance, we need to acknowledge the sphere of pessimism that infiltrates contemporary western education, a pessimism tightly coiled with a larger culture of educational neoliberalism, one replete with maxims of *deliverology* (Ball, Maguire & Braun 2012) and enactments of policy (Maguire, Braun & Ball 2015). Or as Teague (2016) carefully describes, the obeisance and hyper-vigilance to an ever present threat of student, teacher and school appraisals, such as that which occurs in England with ongoing OFSTED [Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills] inspections.

What then, *would* it be like to be at a contemporary primary or secondary school and *feel* this thick culture of educational pessimism? This brings to mind the imperative behind Geertz's (1973) argument for *thick description* and interestingly, his mention of the importance of 'imagination' for being in touch with others:

It is not against a body of uninterpreted data, radically thinned descriptions, that we must measure the cogency of our explications, but against the power of the scientific imagination to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers.

(Geertz 1973, p.16)

Getting in touch with the lives of strangers is what we are called upon to do time and again in the multifarious practices occurring in education, and especially in the ethical task of making educational futures. Yet, all too often we are mistakenly fooled to believe we *know* this other [in the sense of Foucault's (2000) use of the French *connaissance* as opposed to *savoir*]. Teachers need to be encouraged to imagine the lifeworld and contexts of students who they experience as *other*. Developing a knowledge of, or coming to know, the experience of disadvantage is the first step in creating learning environments that are responsive to and accommodate the needs of, disadvantaged students.

Getting in touch with the lives of schoolings' strangers, then, demands we attend to the thick culture of educational pessimism that young people encounter. To do so is to engage not only beyond any simplistic assumption of *connaissance*/knowing and be alert to the lazy/thin ways young people are *known*. This is also to enter into an awake relationship to *savoir*/knowing. This demands us to be aware of how we believe we know them [and be mindful of adhering to diagnostic lines of *connaissance*]. This awareness demands of us to think through how young people feel and to appreciate their experiences with learning, schooling and education. To do so, as we argue in this book, is to ask that we engage with the feelings of others.

Heeding Arendt's (1981) exhortation to think and *go visiting* (Harwood 2010a), let us pause to think about the young people who might be connected with the above quotes. What would it feel like to experience pessimism at school and in relation to your personhood, education and learning? What would a young person do with all these feelings? How might these feelings have shaped our own learning biographies? What about how you might feel about your young child and their learning and education? Somewhat naively, misplaced assumptions are frequently made that *the poor* or people experiencing disadvantage or from low socio economic status [LSES] *don't value education*. Nothing could be further from reality. For instance, there is work that critiques assumptions of Indigenous parents' *lack of engagement* in their child's school education (Chenhall et al. 2011; Lea, Thompson & McRae-Williams 2011). Poor engagement is a constantly circulated term, yet as Lea, Thompson & McRae-Williams (2011 p.321) argue, 'The education sector does not systematically engage with the grinding issues that Indigenous families face in their everyday worlds...'. Moreover, certain discourses are activated that turn Indigenous parents experiencing disadvantages into particular kinds of problems, 'Vague policies reproduce a normalizing discourse which posits a narrow definition of good parenting and understates the material attributes underpinning the cultivating parent's high visibility involvement in their children's education' (Lea, Thompson & McRae-Williams 2011, p.334).

Research by Harwood and Murray (2016) into promoting educational futures in early childhood reveals how parents from low socio-economic status backgrounds [LSES]

who have not experienced further education, and many of whom left schooling early, strongly value the role of schools and education. At the same time, these parents describe having problematic feelings towards education and educational futures. This clearly is not the same as not valuing education. How, then, do we theorize and come to understand the ways in which experiences and feelings of disadvantage and precarious education impact educational futures?

Here we draw on Foucault (2000) and connect with his interest in *l'expérience* [as opposed to the existentialist or phenomenological *le vécu* or lived experience] (Gutting 2002; Thompson 2014). *L'expérience* involves:

(1) The complex set of correlations that encompass and make possible both the subjective dimension of lived experience and (2) the objective domain of the state of affairs that it encounters and the idea of wisdom or learning gained through exploration, experimentation, or a journey of discovery (the sense of being 'experienced').

(Thompson 2014, p.147)

This take on experience sanctions the space to engage with experience away from an existentialist or phenomenological imperative. Following Thompson (2014, pp.148-9) *l'expérience* permits us to do three important activities in this book. Firstly, it enables us to think methodologically through the *forms of experience* and produce thick descriptions inclusive of feelings. Secondly, we work with the idea of the *limit-experience* to consider how young people respond to and effect subjectivization and

desubjectivization. This second activity enables us to more exactly describe precarious relationships to education as well as the limit moments where this precariousness changed. Thirdly, the experience is engaged with the, ‘...embodied knowledges of subjugation or exclusion...’ (Thompson 2014, p.149). Here we expand and develop this well-known approach by Foucault and extend our analysis to engage with Spinoza and Deleuze in order to think on the feelings of others who experience disadvantage and precarious relationships with education.

Bringing feeling to the fore

There are many rich knowledge traditions that bring feeling to the fore and sitting with these is instructive for a number of reasons. An example from our own learning that deeply connects with our experience and thinking helps to frame this point.

Turning to Anthony McKnight’s (2015) discussion of feeling and learning from Yuin Country, strategies can be found for ‘thinking differently’ (Foucault 1990, p.8). Most of the writing, thinking and learning for this book happened on the Countries of the Wodi Wodi People, the Dharawal people and the Yuin people in the south-east coast of Australia. The fieldwork moved onto many different Countries in Australia [which, as we explain in Chapter Two, we are not naming in order to protect confidentiality], with our participants including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Country is deeply woven into our experience and stands as teacher reminding us to remember to listen for feelings.

Such a connection with Country also exists for non-Aboriginal people [such as the authors of this book]. Though, significantly, as McKnight explains, rarely is this acknowledged outside a Western dualistic [and arguably Cartesian], view:

Many non-Aboriginal people's identities are linked to the Country now known as Australia; however, the Western dualism connects them to enjoying the view of *Australia*, not seeing Country as placing them into identity. In Yuin ways of knowing, learning and behaving, you are placed by Country into the networks of reciprocal relationships.

(McKnight 2015, p.283)

To emphasize feelings, to conceive of the felt and embrace openness to 'thinking with feeling' or 'feeling with thinking' we can learn by, 'seeing Country as placing [ourselves] into identity' (McKnight 2015, p.283). In practice this means watching, pausing, listening and learning from Country. McKnight shares with us Mingadhuga Mingayung [My Mother Your Mother], the Yuin way of learning and listening to Minga [the Mother], where we encounter the centrality of feelings, without which stories from Country are inaccessible. As he explains, '[t]he silence while on Country, while listening and viewing the story, provides the depth in meaning, placing the responsibility on the viewers of the story to *feel* the story' (McKnight 2015, p.282 our emphasis).

Here, the heightened accent on feeling disrupts a dominant archetype of rationalizing thought. This is the very rationalizing thought that, we might venture to argue, erases

feelings from how we seek to understand and instead prioritize what is a disembodied technique of *knowing* chaotically applied in education. Pausing to listen is simply essential to understanding—to really understanding. Our office where we came together to work on this book is below Geera [called Mt Keira since colonization]. As Aunty Carol Speechly (Speechly 2014; Organ & Speechly 1997) explains, Geera is a teaching mountain. With our office windows often failing to automatically close [a *problem* that only through writing these words can be recognized as a gift] we felt the *outside*, we felt mother Geera, constantly. We felt rushes of wind, lots and lots of cool, thick, rain over hot January days and long nights marked by the sounds of crickets across the Australian summer. We saw the sunsets on Geera, we heard the songs of kookaburras as darkness wrapped the trees and Grandmother Moon shone on the wet walls, weaving her light. We stopped to rethink our work, to retrace our conversations, to remember anew.

Tuning in, pausing, listening in this relationship teaches us to learn a way of prioritizing feeling. Listening to Country privileges feeling as awareness. Pausing to sit and contemplate how living knowledge traditions, passed on for many thousands of years to the present and into the future hold respect for feelings, gives us strength to challenge the dominance of a system of thinking that accepts a higher education system that articulates through ideas of *knowledge* as being necessarily distinct from feeling and preserves as abject those *lost* to the system. Connecting with and pausing to listen to different knowledge systems have helped us to remember that we can learn to listen for feelings in the stories of the young people. Pausing to listen reminds us that feeling is the beginning of all processes of learning.

Emotional landscapes of educational foreclosure

The comments cited at the start of this Chapter might be dismissed as carefully chosen *one-offs*, or criticized as a singular misguided eugenic comment about ‘inbreeding’. The five years of empirical work on which this book is based illustrates the fact that this is not the case. Furthermore, such swift dismissal disavows the emotional impact of such thoughts and the psychic realities that accompany such thoughts. Thoughts produce feelings and feelings about bodies impact on bodies’ capabilities. We use the word *feelings* as a term that refers to emotions and orientations, how we *feel* about things often expresses our emotions. It also signifies our proximity or distance to a thing and our orientation towards or away from it. Human feelings, the raw material of all our experience, are part of the human imagination. The imagination is made up in part from feelings as embodied responses: images, memories and what in vernacular terms we might consider our unconscious orientations to things, places, and people. It would be an error, then, to assume the quotes at the start of the Chapter are one-offs. The first quote was found via a newspaper database search [Factiva] that shows many more instances in which a deficit view is taken and disadvantage, LSES, social class or *race* becomes equated with lack of capacity. Media reports are just the tip of the proverbial iceberg when it comes to the issues of how the educational futures of some children and young people are, to draw on Butler’s (1990) term, foreclosed. Through necessity, feelings are the starting point for all thought, and feelings are also, initially, very passive as they are a response to experience, ‘the ideas that we generally have of ourselves, and of external bodies, are only inadequate ideas or passive affections that indicate an encounter

between some external body and our own' (Duffy 2011, p.57). Feelings are an inescapable part of life, and as such, they matter. More than this, feelings comprise an underutilized resource in educational theory. Too often ignored, feelings should be conceived as core to all educational projects.

Dismissal of feeling also ignores the work that needs to be done to re-cast negative feelings. Such dismissal disguises the power of neuro-discourses proliferating through education as authoritative knowledges in schools that cultivate pathologizing opinions about feelings (Harwood & Allan 2014; Youdell 2011). The word feeling also signifies aspects of the work of two thinkers who developed ideas that have been of use for us in understanding young people's relationships to higher education. In our use of the word feeling, we gesture towards both Foucault's work on experience, introduced above and Spinoza's work on affect and imagination as a primary or initial kind of knowledge. Feelings are not only the first product of all experiences, they are often used by teachers in schools as ways of teaching young people ideas about themselves as learners.

What then of the emotional landscape of educational foreclosure, of having an educational future reduced, or removed? Returning to the questions we posed previously, what might it be like to be six and in a classroom with teaching staff that describe you as *thick*? How does this experience manifest in feelings? What impact do these feelings have on your future? What happens when the student listens to the teacher or wants to ask a question? Two quotes from Spinoza's the *Ethics* (2001, PART III, p.139)ⁱ offer a way to map the political impact and psychic reality of this

negative thinking: ‘Proposition 54. The mind endeavors to imagine those things only which posit its power of acting’ and ‘Proposition 55. When the mind imagines its own weakness it necessarily sorrows’.

Spinoza’s statements, taken from consecutive sections of his book, give us pause to think through how the mind and emotions are intricately entwined. Further, these quotes remind us that being shown one’s weakness causes weakness. That sorrow manifests, that feelings move and flow through the body, is suggestive of the enormity of the moment one’s mind imagines it cannot do something in the classroom. More than this, the fact that, ‘The mind endeavors to imagine those things only which posit its power of acting’ (Spinoza 2001 *Ethics* PART III, p.139) very simply explains why some young people never imagine going to university and don’t conceive themselves as good learners. If institutionalized educational cultures are spaces that posit they have no power, then as an act of self-protection, they do not imagine themselves in such spaces. Rather, they imagine spaces in which they have a power to act - their home, their skate park, the youth centre; wherever the power to act is accorded to their body. Spinoza’s statements also illustrate the impacts of others on this sadness, ‘...sorrow is strengthened in proportion as the mind imagines that it is blamed by others...’ (Spinoza 2001 *Ethics* PROP 55, Corollary, p.139).

Most of us would agree that feeling anxious or unconfident can be cumulative at times, but no major empirical study of educational disadvantage has investigated the impacts on educational futures of the feeling that one is a failure at school. Feeling one is a failure at school impacts on prospects for making educational futures. To feel

a failure can have an enormous consequence and as we show in this book, can have debilitating outcomes for educational futures. The shutting down, or foreclosure of educational futures for children and young people is of central concern for us. In this book we illustrate some ways such shutting down is brought about by teachers, educational policy and cultures of schooling. Here we pick up on Marginson's (2011, p.22) argument for a politics of inclusion in higher education, 'A politics of inclusion works when higher education is an instrument for advancing individual and social freedoms—and is known and deeply felt as such by the subjects of equity strategy'.

This politics of inclusion does not only concern itself with advancing individual and social freedoms, it overtly states that how such a strategy is felt is crucial. By naming widening participation as an inherently political project and connecting this to the act of making educational futures, we call for a practice of educational recognition that is inclusive in its capacities to envisage the challenges faced by young people with precarious relationships to education (Harwood et al. 2013). Thinking through how the construction and activation of practices of educational recognition can occur and theorizing ways to open out the possibilities of educational futures is thus a key agenda for our writing this book.

Feeling educational futures

It is difficult to deny the importance of education to living well in contemporary society. Beyond the more obvious links to employment, there is strong evidence of the benefits of education to health—benefits that, premised on the social determinants of health, conclusively show how education leads to improved health and wellbeing

(Marmot 2004). At the same time, as has been argued by numerous researchers in the sociology of education, for example in work by Dolby and Dimitriadis (2004) and Willis (1977), schooling, the means via which education is primarily distributed can restrict, if not diminish, opportunities for education. This book seeks to continue the contribution of the sociology of education to this important space, a space we contend needs to be revisited and made subject to different and new angles of scrutiny in order to effect change (Harwood 2006).

In our view, the literatures of educational exclusion/inclusion do not embrace the cultural politics of schooling enough; specifically, this work does not include the feelings and educational views of the marginalized youth they seek to *include*. Disadvantaged young people's feelings are consistently disavowed across the vast range of literature on educational inclusion and exclusion, despite the fact that emotion is central to experiences of learning. Emotion is vital to how young people learn and indeed, to the experience of growing up. Despite a growing literature on inclusion in higher education, what has not been tackled enough is the influence of the affective domain on young people and how this impacts their conceptualization of educational futures. Recent work is considering and valuing the roles of feelings, emotion and affect in education (Danvers 2016; Hickey-Moody 2013; Kenway & Youdell 2011; Niccolini 2016; Watkins 2011). This theoretical shift is described by Kenway and Youdell (2011, pp.131-6) as a response to the utility of affect as a concept, 'The recent turn to Deleuze and Guattari's (2008) notion of affectivities has seen a new set of engagements with the emotionality of education'. Affectivities are understood as the intense sensation of bodies that are pre-personal and pre-discursive.

This understanding of affectivities has been taken up to demonstrate the ways that affective intensities flow through educational sites and encounters in ways that exceed any notion of a unitary subject, even an emotional unitary subject. Anna Hickey-Moody's work has been significant in provoking fresh thought and inquiry along these lines as illustrated in Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007) and particularly in Hickey-Moody and Crowley (2010; 2011, p.133).

Our theoretical work here contributes to these broader disciplinary shifts to consider feelings and affect as critical in education and includes feelings in our mapping of material and affective assemblages of learning. We write with the belief that young people already belong to many different learning cultures, or what we call *ecologies of learning*, but this belonging has, to date, been largely ignored in the literature on widening participation. Belonging is a feeling and feelings orient our relationships with people, places and institutions. For example, in terms of the widening participation agenda, if a young person belongs to a learning culture in which universities are imagined in negative ways, the impact of this belonging and the associated feelings of fear will sensibly orient the young person away from the life path of attending university. In such instances, universities might be depicted as inhospitable, perhaps unimaginable, *un-horizonable* places and experiences. For instance, unlike our feelings toward the sun or the moon, which we experience seeing, which we feel in myriad ways and which we learn to expect, educational futures are never there. They never have been and are never expected to be, on the young person's horizon. From this angle, the omission of consideration of feeling in efforts

to build educational futures is enormously problematic and symptomatic of a broader need to understand, be with and to include, those marginalized from schools.

The central argument of this book, then, is that we must have an awareness of the role of emotions and feelings in learning, schooling and the wider project of education in order to *widen the participation* for young people with precarious relationships to education. In order to effect this change we need to begin by firstly understanding and respecting the learning cultures, or ecologies of learning, in which young people are already embedded. Secondly, we need to grasp the far-reaching implications of both precarious relationships to education and disadvantage. As discussed previously (Harwood et al. 2013) in work on disadvantage and precarious education, Butler makes a distinction between precariousness and precarization:

(1) precariousness, a function of our social vulnerability and exposure that is always given some political form, and precarity as differentially distributed, and so one important dimension of the unequal distribution of conditions required for continued life; but also (2) precarization as an ongoing process, so that we do not reduce the power of precariousness to single acts or single events. Precarization allows us to think about the slow death that happens to targeted or neglected populations over time and space. And it is surely a form of power without a subject, which is to say that there is no one centre that propels its direction and destruction.

(Butler cited in Puar 2012, n.p.)ⁱⁱ

Precariousness, then, accentuates the impermanent nature of one's relationship to education, it is *not a given* and is vulnerable to cultural politics. Precarization, on the other hand, forces us to contemplate the sheer awfulness of this vulnerability and the ominous hovering 'slow death' (Berlant 2011; Hickey-Moody 2015) that occupies the lives of those in the neglected strata of education. To be provocative, this 'slow death' could be referred to as depicting intergenerational educational disadvantage. This is the slow death that occurs to those who occupy the neglected strata of education that encompasses both schooling *and* widening participation in higher education.

The study at the centre of this book, *Imagining University Education*, set out to understand how university is imagined by young people with precarious relationships to education and who live in disadvantaged communities. While the young people who participated in this study could all be described as low socioeconomic status (LSES), the focus was far more attuned to the specificities of educational vulnerability. As we describe next and discuss in detail in Chapter Two, this study involved fieldwork in a range of disadvantaged communities in five Australian states.

We also draw on the 2015 fieldwork from Harwood's 2014-18 study, *Getting an Early Start to Aspirations: Understanding how to promote educational futures in early childhood* [ARC Future Fellowships, FT130101332]. This project seeks to address the widening participation agenda by investigating how to promote educational futures in LSES early childhood [for example, early childhood centers, playgroups and in the community]. The first phase of the GAESTA study drew attention to the precarization formalizing of relationships to education and the

foreclosure of educational futures that occurs for children who have yet to commence school. This interview research, with parents who themselves have precarious relationships to education, shows some of the paradoxes of educational vulnerability: the view of education as being important while at the same time eschewing its formalizing and sombre influence on the playful and happy lives of young children. Below are excerpts from three interviews with parents held in different regional locations in New South Wales, Australia:

I: What do you think about Education?

C: It's the start of your future I suppose.

(Small Regional City, central NSW, GAESTA)

S: It's good.

L: It's important.

T: No I think it's incredibly important for - especially for the early years so up until, I don't know, a certain age that it's incredibly important so that there's some form of education.

(Coastal Regional City, NSW, GAESTA)

I: What are your thoughts about education? Just generally?

N: It's important.

M: I think it's something that a lot of people take for granted as well, I feel. I've just started my journey again in educating myself.

(Small Regional City, northern NSW, GAESTA)

These were typical of the responses to the interview question about education, and together with the follow-up discussion, revealed the extent to which the parents viewed education as important. Yet engaging in *education* with young children is a tricky activity insofar as it often requires a focus that does not *stay true* to what the parents stated should be the preferred experiences of early childhood. For these parents, too much education is *wrong* because young children should be happy and playful and *education is the antithesis of this happiness*. We explore this paradox in Chapter Seven, ‘Orientations, pathways and futures’.

The GAESTA study has also alerted us to the density of precarious relationships to education and how these produce different effects despite the best efforts of parents, who themselves have precarious relationships to education. An example of this issue is evident in the following excerpt from an interview with Tia [one of the parents in the group interview cited above]. Here she talks about her young daughter’s negative feelings about school:

So we’re trying to find alternative things within the mainstream system...and it’s really tough...Yeah cos my daughter’s seven and where - she’s already going, “I don’t like school”. To get her through just to - you know, and *I value education as really high*. It’s - it’s exactly what I needed to help me get out of where I was and things like this and, you know, start a whole new concept of what’s important in my life. And – and so it’s really important that she does school but she’s not

fitting and not - even the teachers are trying to support this so it's not a lack of trying of - for the teachers or the school or myself or anything like that...

(Tia, Coastal Regional City, GAESTA, parent's emphasis)

In this interview excerpt a young mother in her mid-twenties with two children aged seven and two, describes her primary school daughter's feelings toward school - she doesn't like school. At the same time she is careful to stress to us that she '...value[s] education really high.' One of the reasons she makes this point to us is to counter the assumption that as a parent she *doesn't care* about her child's education, an assumption that can be encountered too frequently (McMahon, Hickey-Moody & Harwood 2016). She clearly does value education and is undoubtedly troubled by the possibility that an assumption be made that because her daughter doesn't like school, there is a problem with her parental valuing of education. This response suggests the extent to which negative judgements about the parent-child-school-relationship pivot back to the parent, eliciting fears disadvantaged parents are people who don't 'value education'. Yet in this situation, as the dialogue suggests, there is a complicated landscape of feelings surrounding formal educational spaces and systems that is swiftly elided in the hurry to know, to *point the finger* and render conclusions about the child and the parent.

Taking up the challenge of this problem, the theoretical perspective we develop here places the affective domain and feeling front and centre. Our critique shows not only how schooling produces damning statements such as those quoted at the start of the Chapter but can prompt an abiding fear about the adequacy of a parent's value of

education. Our critique also offers ways of thinking differently about disadvantaged youth and educational futures and takes explicit issue with the absence of discussions of feeling in the widening participation literature. Putting feeling on the table, as it were, foregrounds the relations of power that feed into and support, the complexity of practices that impact engagement in schooling. One of the issues for us in writing this book is to carefully consider how the imagining of going to university is often foreclosed for disadvantaged young people with precarious relationships to education. In order to understand this, we explore images of university generated through their processes of schooling. We began thinking through this task in the examination of the relationship of precarious education to how university is imagined (Harwood et al. 2013; McMahon, Hickey-Moody & Harwood 2016). Building on this work, in this book we focus more closely on feelings (Hickey-Moody 2013).

Feelings seem core to answering the question about precarious relationships to education, educational futures and the ambitions of the widening participation agendas. School is often a place that makes young people feel *lesser than* their peers or teachers. Feeling like: you don't fit in; you don't understand; you might not succeed; or as quoted above, that you will be assumed to be a bad parent, are all feelings experienced in relation to school, especially for those on the margins. Most students have some of these feelings some of the time. But those who are perhaps the most seriously disadvantaged and marginalized experience many of these feelings all at once, all of the time. We might ask, *who wants this?* In such situations basic self-protection perhaps leads students to stay away from class and certainly to avoid thoughts of continuing in such a difficult environment after a period of *compulsory*

schooling is over. While the concept of ideology shows us some of the problems with *common sense* (Althusser 1971), namely, that common sense ends up being a way of ruling classes maintaining their power, a perspective focused on feelings can be read as offering a more sympathetic reading of the emotional realities of people's lives (Hickey-Moody 2012). Our assumption is that the young people in our study are active agents with different kinds of social power. Here, it is *common sense* not to want to go to school or university, as both places make marginalized youth acutely aware of their *otherness* and they require substantial emotional labour on the part of the young person if they are to maintain a presence.

Turning to the cultural politics of schooling and tuning into feeling provides one way to understand processes via which educational futures are foreclosed. Importantly, this can also impact on how we might change practices that do harm. Feeling, we contend, has a significant place in the practices of educators (Niccolini 2016).

Nothing happens without making some kind of feeling - feelings are the thermometers of all actions, they are the emotional geographies of cultural changes (Hickey-Moody 2013). Yet this crucial bedrock of schooling and education is too often ignored in discussions of widening participation. At worst, feeling is mocked, feminized, devalued, or dehumanized by a too often restricted range of psy-discourses deployed in schooling that suggest schooling is more clinical or scientific than feelings. Indeed, thinking on schooling is so dominated by the psy-sciences (Harwood & Allan 2014) that it is not too grand a claim to make that the schooling profession and practices of teacher education, remains largely ignorant of the rich philosophical literature available to think through and respond to feeling. The sheer dominance of psy-

knowledges [such as those stemming from psychology and psychiatry] and the psy-ed bodies [the psychologized, psychopathologized young body and young *behavior*] in education and pedagogy is, at best, overwhelming. A significant consequence of this colonization of mainstream ecologies of learning to which young people belong means we lose from view the beauty and benefits of a depth of knowledge that envisages learning and education. One of these perspectives we engage with in this book, the work of Spinoza, provides ways for understanding human life and learning as part of what he calls an *ethology*. We develop this idea to talk about ecologies of learning. The following quote explains Spinoza's thought as an *ethology*:

...from the viewpoint of an ethology of man, one needs first to distinguish between two sorts of affections: *actions*, which are explained by the nature of the affected individual, and which spring from the individual's essence; and *passions*, which are explained by something else, and which originate outside the individual. Hence the capacity for being affected is manifested as a *power of acting* insofar as it is assumed to be filled by active affections, but as a *power of being acted upon* insofar as it is filled with passions.

(Deleuze 1988, p.27, original emphasis)

The relationships between people [actions] and their environment [passions] which is brought into focus through this ethological approach, allows us to think through the practical complexities of learning. Learning is always relational - it happens in place and in relation with other people and ideas and objects.

As we have outlined, our use of the word ‘feeling’ shows our investment in the embodied nature of the cultural politics of schooling and the idea of *educational futures*. We develop the term educational futures as a core concept and foundational politics concerned with justice (Young 2011). *Educational futures* refers to the idea that an individual’s future must be inclusive of education in all its myriad forms. This is to include not just the *formal* and officially sanctioned sites of education, but also to take in the compass of education sites that exist in numerous ways. While these might be described as *informal*, this is a dangerous binary with which to engage. For instance, it is inadequate and an act of myth-making (Barthes 1957) to describe the educational sites of Cultural learning for Yuin people on the south coast of Australia as an *informal* practice. To do this is to be ignorant of the complex, detailed processes and places involved and the long history over many thousands of years on which they are based (Harrison 2009). Uncle Max Harrison gives us a taste of this learning in the excerpt below:

My five Uncles and my Grandfather were my teachers but they were more than teachers; they were masters of law and healing. They taught me continuously for 17 years. I was taught alone. They would take me out bush at certain times. Sometimes it would be ten days at a time. Ten days of silence in the bush was one lesson.

(Harrison 2009, p.71)

Reflecting on this sharing of experience from Uncle Max, we see that we need to learn to differentiate. Rather than developing a formal-informal dichotomy, it is more

precise to speak of government sanctioned institutional sites that operate to legitimize knowledge in twenty-first century societies and non-government forms of learning.

Early institutionalized education experiences might be assumed to open up opportunities and for some, opportunities for further education. There is however, as we have emphasized, a neglected and silenced strata of young people for whom the schooling process does the reverse, it narrows opportunities and is the antithesis of connecting to educational futures. Schooling quite simply teaches these students not to be involved in education and more ominously, forecloses their aspirations for educational futures. The issue of poor university attendance and retention by LSES students continues to be faced by numerous countries worldwide (Koshy 2014; Lehmann 2009; Edwards & McMillan 2015). Poignantly though, these issues of attendance and retention hardly ever specifically refer to those with already precarious relationships to *school* education, these are the abject in the widening participation agenda. Socio-economic status has been shown to be one of the strongest predictors of educational outcomes, with those from high SES backgrounds three times more likely to attend university than their LSES peers (Bradley et al. 2008; Currie 2009). UK research predicts children living in disadvantaged circumstances having increased likelihood of school suspension and exclusion (HM Treasury & DEFES 2007), an outcome that results in much lower educational outcomes. Even reports of improvements are relatively modest (Universities Australia 2016) and tend to neglect close attention to those young people with precarious relationships to education.

Echoing this concern, considerable funding has been and still is, directed to the problem of *widening participation* in university and these efforts have seen an emerging research literature. We contribute to and extend this work, building on education and cultural studies' longstanding investment in illustrating working class perspectives and articulating the classed nature of curriculum discourses. For instance, Paul Willis' (1977) classic English ethnography *Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs* is still popularly cited as a famous moment of scholarly engagement with the experiences of white English LSES boys at school. Research modelled on his work such as Nadine Dolby and Greg Dimitriadis' (2004) more recent ethnographic collection on post industrial exclusion from education offers an empathetic, if not particularly critical, scholarly template for thinking about how classed experiences of schooling lead to exclusion from higher education. Although formative and enduringly useful, Willis' (1977) work has been robustly criticized by feminists (Griffiths 1995; Luke 1992; McFarland & Cole 1998; McRobbie 1980) and scholars of *race* (Gilroy 1987) for reproducing a white, working class male heterosexual position.

Aside from Willis' acquiescence to the sexual objectification of girls by the boys in his study and his choice not to hear girl's stories or challenge patriarchal cultures of schooling, the cultural climate in which Willis worked has been changed radically by processes of globalization. Multicultural, multilingual and multi-faith backgrounds now characterize English, Australian and indeed many North American classrooms. We tell the stories of exactly such multi-cultural and diverse classrooms and some Australian Indigenous spaces. The multifarious perspectives and experiences they

hold and produce seem a long way from the world Willis documented when beginning this line of inquiry. We draw on a rich data-set with 263 young people and examine why they don't go to university. We build suggestions for ways of making university more appealing to LSES youth.

As we suggest above, the book draws together a theoretical framework designed to respond to the politics of experience. Thinking through our empirical work with young people, we explain the different ways the university is constructed as impossible. This empirical work is from the perspective of disadvantaged young people who have had, drawing on Butler's (2004) term, a 'precarious education' (Harwood et al. 2014). In considering the many sides of 'precarious education' we show what happens when specific material, geographical and emotional co-ordinates align to prevent disadvantaged youth from engaging with higher education. In order to illustrate and explain our data, we assemble a new set of theoretical resources, which are known for thinking about the politics of experience. Contributing to the emerging body of work on feelings, emotion and affect in education, we draw on Spinoza and Deleuze to examine the production, political utility and significance of what might be considered *failed futures* within educational discourses.

Largely excluded from educational futures, young people with tenuous relationships to schooling and consequently, education, remain an enduring problem for addressing social inclusion, yet paradoxically, are unlikely to be meaningfully consulted about university. Amidst the arguably internationalized cry to raise aspirations and widen participation in universities, there is the poignant absence of those for whom

schooling and educational futures are no longer viable. This stratum of young people who have precarious relationships with education and live in disadvantaged communities remains unacknowledged. *Difficult to reach* and unknowable to the university, this is the generation unconnected to widening participation. A generation for whom educational futures, especially educational futures in sites of institutionalized learning, pass by.

In grasping this substantive issue of educational failure, our appreciation of the influence of the affective, of place and how imagination is embodied shows up how ecologies of learning are composed of so many things outside the university, yet at the same time, share intricate connections with how educational futures are imagined and realized. There is no point in advancing critiques that do not feature the perspectives and input of young people with precarious relationships to education and who live in disadvantaged communities. Yet as we note above, young people who are not in schooling are rarely considered in discourses about widening participation - or in programs to connect them to higher education. Paradoxically, such programs concentrate on young people in school and so, by design, completely miss the many young people who have *opted out* of the schooling pathway to education. The empirical study which is the focus of this book, sets out to understand exactly what young people with precarious relationships to education knew about further education and how they had come to know these things.

Empirical research on young lives in difficult places

While we discuss our research design and process in detail in Chapter Two, in order to introduce the remit of the study and outline the structure of the book, here we offer a brief introduction to the empirical work on which we draw. As described above, the book is based on substantive empirical research with disadvantaged young people in precarious relationships to institutionalized education sites. The research team consulted and interviewed 263 young people aged 11-25 years in urban, suburban and regional disadvantaged communities, across five Australian states: Queensland [QLD]; New South Wales [NSW]; Victoria, [VIC]; Tasmania, [TAS] and South Australia [SA]. These young people had experienced disengagement from compulsory schooling [primary and secondary school] and were either not attending school or had sporadic attendance. The participants were recruited through the youth sector and related agencies, with the youth professionals often joining the interviews. The young people were asked about their education and their educational futures. The interviews also sought to learn how they imagined universities and university participation. Universities were largely construed as overwhelming spaces and characterized as being extremely anxiety provoking. The interviews also sought descriptions of the young people's experiences of living in disadvantaged communities, descriptions that would enable a nuanced and youth generated account of the emotional and material realities of disadvantage.

This is the first project to achieve such a geographically extensive data set with this cohort of young people. These are young people who are usually very difficult to access in educational research and they are not often willing to participate in research. Consequently, the stories these young people have shared with us can be thought

about as being important informants for contributing to contemporary international understandings of social inclusion and education. As we unpack in detail in Chapter Two, the depth and breadth of this study across a range of very different disadvantaged socio-cultural environments provides diverse examples of educational exclusion, consequently our data can be employed to think through experiences of educational exclusion in Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States as well as Australia. The range of sites brings to the fore the critical importance of understanding place, industry, family and young people's enmeshment in place. Their feelings of belonging are clearly very significant in relation to how young people connect to, or are alienated from, education. As we discuss in the Chapters that follow, the findings from this Australian study will have resonance with the complexity that relationships between place and socio-economic status have on educational inequality in countries outside Australia.

This book seeks to redress the gap in literature dealing with feelings and emotions in widening participation by bringing the stories of young people into focus, and considering this through an innovative assemblage of philosophical, political and social theory to offer new ways to think about the significance of experiencing alienation from school. We contend that young people who *fail* in educational terms often do so for predominantly practical reasons; reasons that relate to relationships between class, gender, ethnicity, geography and precarious relationships with education. There are dimensions of this experience of *failure* and cultural disengagement that can be read as youth resistance to governmental imperatives,

modes of resistance that are conscious and unconscious expressions of some young people's experiences of alienation.

Theoretical work that illustrates the politics of experience of disadvantaged young people with precarious relationships to education and who are effectively excluded from university is important. Such work matters because if we do not understand the perspectives and experiences of those being excluded and have insight into their lives, we will not be able to develop appropriate means through which to engage them in university. In order to understand emotions as something functional we have developed a theoretical framework for feeling, affect and matter, which we explore in detail in Chapter Three.

Our hope in sharing this work is to prompt greater understanding, discussion and consideration of those youth who are not easy to access, those who are not in school and to incorporate their experiences into the politics of widening participation practices and literature. We also want to engender recognition of how these young people's rights to opportunities for educational futures are so often easily ignored in policy and in educational practices. We want to make space for new educational futures.

Book overview

Across the Chapters of the book we examine our fieldwork with young people with precarious relationships to education and by consequence for many of them, to educational futures. In Chapter Two: 'Method assemblages and methodology', we

provide a detailed discussion of method and methodology, introducing the fieldwork and the places and people who inspired the ideas developed in the book. We contextualize this data internationally and offer some comparisons with other countries, so those working in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada or outside Australia can consider utility of the findings of this study.

In Chapter Three, ‘The embodied imagination and capacities to act’, we model our innovative theoretical framework, designed to better understand the ways experience shapes the learning biographies of young people excluded from institutionalized education. We take considerable space establishing our theoretical framework, in which we draw on Spinoza, other Spinozist thinkers, as well as our own work (Hickey-Moody 2013; Hickey-Moody & Harwood 2016) and contemporary educational theory, to think through the importance of the embodied imagination and the power of context in determining young people’s capacities to act. We link the importance of capability in the exclusion literature to the idea of capacity to act, and suggest we need to revalue the role that enabling pedagogies can have in young lives. The book engages with theoretical work that develops discussions of feeling away from the dominant discourses of psychology or psychiatry. In so doing, we are seeking to disrupt the dominant discourses that rely on problematic practices that, to put it bluntly, cast young people as deficit. This includes for example, psychopathologizing practices (Harwood & Allan 2014) or classed (Skeggs 2014) or radicalizing practices that so deeply interrupt the educational futures of so many young people (Ahmed 2004).

In Chapter Four, ‘Beyond the widening participation agenda - towards ecologies of learning’, we engage with the scholarly context in which the young people in our study are typically conceived by offering a critical discussion of the widening participation agenda and the related literature. Whilst arguably generative in terms of opening some opportunities for access to university, there are a number of criticisms of the way in which widening participation and notions such as aspiration have been operationalized. We open up a critical consideration of the widening participation literature to think through how these discourses impact on young people and their education. We introduce the importance of feeling and place into these debates through the concept of *ecologies of learning*.

The next Chapters work more closely with the empirical material from the 263 young people to theorize feeling different, processes of foreclosing education futures, and how this produces, in Spinozist terms, an emotional, geographical *physics* that contributes to disconnection from education. Chapter Five: ‘Precarious education and assemblages of disadvantage’ proposes a way to bring feeling explicitly into considerations of plural disadvantage. We took the view that, to research precarious education and relationships to university *as these are experienced by young people living in disadvantaged circumstances*, it was clearly crucial to understand how *they* experienced disadvantage. This impetus to have a nuanced understanding of plural disadvantages connected us with the capability approach of Amartya Sen (1980, 1992, 1999) and we also build on Jonathon Wolff and Avner de-Shalit’s (2007) work on disadvantage. The Chapter sets out to push our thinking on disadvantage and

crucially, to open our ears and minds to their talk of the feelings and emotions that infuse the experience of disadvantage.

Chapter Six, 'Feeling different', closely examines the experiences of feeling, disadvantage and precarious education, building an in-depth picture of the fabric of disadvantage. We work with the idea of feeling as water, an analogy that enables the relationality of feeling to be foregrounded - as opposed to feeling being signified on a list. By thinking of feeling as water, we are reminded of how it moves through and with us and is thus, always in connection, in relation to us.

In Chapter Seven, 'Orientations, pathways, futures', we think through the idea of the future as it is a part of the present for young people with precarious relationships to education and we examine the importance of ecologies of learning as a way of understanding existing orientations determined by the present. We ask what educational futures might look like for these young people and how these futures might be achieved. In answering this, we examine young people's orientations towards learning, the reasons why they feel attracted towards, or pushed away from, institutions of higher education and the ways they value their experiences of learning outside institutionalized learning environments. We develop recommendations for building sustainable pathways to educational futures for these young people.

Extending this exploration of affective attachments to learning pathways, in Chapter Eight, 'Reorganizing images', we examine the ways young people's imaginings of their learning futures, indeed of their futures, are organized around images of

university. For the most part, these patterns of organization oriented young people away from education. In the second half of this Chapter, we examine remarkable instances in which young people have redesigned their relationship to education and have been brave enough to *swerve* from the path of educational failure upon which they were positioned. Chapter Nine, ‘Recommendations for widening participation’ introduces *diagrammatic pedagogies* as a way to think through the possibilities of outreach with young people for whom schooling is not straight forward and consequently omitted from the gestures of widening participation.

ⁱ We have made a conscious choice to work with more than one translation of the *Ethics* as different translators draw out divergent qualities of the text, depending on their interpretation. As such, our choice of translation is guided by the alignment between the translation of the text and the theoretical work we want to do.

ⁱⁱ From the round-table discussion *Prearity Talk*, with Lauren Berlant, Bojana Cvejić, Isabell Lorey, Jasbir Puar, and Ana Vujanović, Judith Butler (2012) proposed two ways to think about precarity: precariousness and precaritization.