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Abstract
Within every classroom there exists the potential for inequality in various forms. It is essential to recognise the role of the educator in either the reproduction or transformation of these potential inequalities. As transformation of inequality should be the desired outcome, the teacher must understand the complexities of inequality and the external factors that inform and shape it, such as class, race and gender. Internal factors such as meritocracy, individual habitus, social marginalisation and social capital should also be considered if the teacher is to adopt pedagogy and practice that will transform inequality within educational contexts.

Keywords
capital, habitus, inequality, marginalisation, meritocracy, pedagogy, transformation

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Transforming inequality in the classroom: Not as easy as it sounds

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Within every classroom there exists the potential for inequality in various forms. It is essential to recognise the role of the educator in either the reproduction or transformation of these potential inequalities. As transformation of inequality should be the desired outcome, the teacher must understand the complexities of inequality and the external factors that inform and shape it, such as class, race and gender. Internal factors such as meritocracy, individual habitus, social marginalisation and social capital should also be considered if the teacher is to adopt pedagogy and practice that will transform inequality within educational contexts.

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Introduction

By the very nature of the teaching profession and its inherent practices, it must be considered inevitable that teachers will play a part in either the reproduction or transformation of inequality. Therefore, the desired goals of the teacher must be the development of understanding of inequalities that exist within the educational contexts of which they are a part and the adoption of practices and pedagogies that lead to the transformation of these inequalities.

To do this effectively teachers must appreciate the complexities of inequality. They must understand both the external and internal factors that reinforce the reproduction of inequality. Consideration must also be given to how social marginalisation experienced by individuals relates to these factors and how an understanding of these factors can inform pedagogy and practice to bring about the transformation of inequality.

Field and habitus

The role a teacher will play in the reproduction or transformation of inequality is in part determined by the educational contexts they function in. These can be intimate settings such as a classroom or a more distant context such as the education system as a whole. When considering inequality within these contexts, it is useful to adopt Bourdieu's concept of 'field', as they are social spaces where participants or 'players' utilise personal resources or capital in the 'game', or the struggle for position and power (Habibis & Walter, 2009). Bourdieu (Smith, 2004, cited in Habibis & Walter, 2009) is said to conceive of fields as being constructed by players who draw on their

habitus in order to access the social resources within them. Habitus refers to an individual's collective experience that can influence the way they act, think and understand their world while also informing and affecting their practices and participation in that world (Zevenbergen, 2005).

The classroom can be seen as a subfield of the wider school field, with students as players interacting in a confined and controlled social environment. It is within this intimate setting that the teacher will have the most influence on the reproduction or transformation of inequality. Consider the level of autonomy exerted by the teacher over classroom management procedures, pedagogical choices, seating arrangements or discipline regimes. All these contribute to the social climate of the field and, therefore, have an effect on how students, as players, utilise their habitus and to what extent they are involved in the construction of that field. The teacher acts like a referee within the field, often deciding what is right and wrong and tailoring the rules to meet their expectation of the 'game'. Often, these choices are based on preconceived ideas and information the teacher has gleaned from personal experience, group dynamics and observed behaviours of players within the field. This knowledge can and does inform practice that can reproduce or transform inequality.

The wider school field is thus informed and constructed by a larger number of players and referees along with external influences. The socio-cultural climate of this field shapes, and is shaped by, internal players but is also influenced by other key stakeholders outside the field, such as parents, the local community and policy makers. External community factors such as the socio-economic status, cultural diversity, employment, access to services and crime can all have significant impact upon the school field and thus impact upon the players therein. Add to this the requirements placed upon schools by state and federal education departments in the form of policy implementation – the NSW Department of Education and Training has over thirty policies relating just to access and equity (NSW DET, 2011).

These fields are where teachers are to play their major role in the transformation of inequality. Understanding of how these fields function, what influences them and how best they can operate within them will assist teachers to choose pedagogies and practice that lead to transformation of inequality. This understanding must therefore be augmented by considerations of the external and internal factors that reproduce inequality in order to diminish this reproduction.

External factors

The external factors mentioned above can be thought of on a macro level. These help provide a big picture approach to concepts that shed light on the inequality. The following discussion around class, gender and race and their interconnectedness will provide a platform for the teacher to better utilise key understandings toward a transformative approach.

Class

As Habibis and Walter (2009) assert, class can still be a determinant of the opportunities an individual may have in life, but traditional identities of class have,

over time, been fragmented. In general terms, it is those from the middle and upper end of the class scale that continue to have access to the social, political and cultural resources of a society, while those toward the lower end of the scale have reduced access (Habibis & Walter, 2009). While this concept of stratification is simplistic it does consider how variables of wealth and social standing are related and "implies the idea of a systematic and enduring pattern of inequality that is transmitted across generations, built into institutions and practiced in everyday activities" (Habibis & Walter, 2009, p.3). This concept of class as an everyday activity is supported by Reay (2006), who sees 'class' as daily processes and practices. She suggests class can be seen as "everywhere and nowhere, denied yet continually enacted, infusing the minutiae of everyday interactions" (Reay, 2006, p.290). In the context of educational politics within Australia, this notion has been supported at the highest levels of federal government. Senator Kim Carr, former Labor Party Secretary of Education, has stated: "Class plays an important role in how education is accessed, and Commonwealth education policy plays a vital role in determining whether or not class divisions are reproduced or ameliorated" (Carr, 2001, p.1).

The view expressed by Carr acknowledges class as an entrenched system within educational contexts, where policy is used in an attempt to address concerns of educational access affected by class divisions. This is in contrast to the view of Reay (2006) who argues that, in reference to the English education system, new considerations of class have had little impact upon educational policy, education training or classroom practice and that these domains are often presented as 'classless'. She further warns that any aversions to addressing social class as a central issue may result in a problem that grows proportionately to its neglect (Reay, 2006). Habibis and Walter are clear in their call for education to assume the role of a reducer of inequality, as opposed to being a reproducer (Habibis & Walter, 2009). In this case, it is essential that the teacher refrain from relying on preconceptions of class distinction as related to the geographic location, socio-economic or employment status of school communities and the students therein.

There is a need for pre-service teachers to gain insight into everyday class processes in order to understand the costs and benefits of fostering positive learner identities and how these costs and benefits may differ in relation to class (Reay, 2006).

Gender

The enduring nature of class distinction may still be evident today, however, it must be acknowledged that class itself does not stand alone as the only marker of inequality. Feminist-based research has revealed gender as a considerable font of inequality (Habibis & Walter, 2009). Recognition of the interconnectedness of class and gender are essential. This "involves an awareness of the complex struggles associated with intersections of class, location, gender and schooling" (Keddie, Mills & Mills, 2008, p.193). When considering the classroom field the teacher must look toward gender as the way in which individuals learn the behaviours and social context of their sex (Harwood, 2011a). That is to say, the teacher must look beyond simplified notions of sex, sexuality and gender. To truly desire to bring about equality within the classroom field means to challenge existing entrenched views of concepts such as

gender normativity. This refers to the gender roles that dominant society sees as normal for males and females (Harwood, 2011a). Hegemonic masculinity is another concept that has previously been "used in education studies to understand the dynamics of classroom life, including patterns of resistance and bullying among boys" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.833), referring to a dominant structure of masculinity that is high in status and applies strong influence through institutional and culturally based practices (Harrison, 2003). It must also be accepted that concepts of femininity and masculinity are far from set in stone but should be considered endorsed by the dominant culture, socially inscribed, built up over time and changeable and responsive to time and place (Harwood, 2011a).

By considering alternative understandings of gender, the teacher moves toward informed pedagogy and inclusive practice that bring about the transformation of inequality. Again, to view gender as a singular source of this inequality is to deny its interaction with other identities (Harwood, 2011a). Just as class and gender are linked so too are these linked to racialisation.

Race

According to Matthews (2007), racialisation is the distinctive union of past conditions, regimes of knowing and power that allow 'race' to surface and act as a classifier of differing hierarchies. This "links physical characteristics to cognitive, cultural and moral ones" (Wolfe, 2007, cited in Matthews 2007, p.6). Race and racialisation as a "palpable dimension of inequality" (Habibis & Walter, 2009, p.247) is not confined to asylum seekers, immigrants or refugee-people groups, but includes indigenous populations who remain "central to the contemporary practice of inequality" (Habibis & Walter, 2009, p.247). This racialisation is a

> discourse that activates race/racism by enabling images, symbols, terminology and classifications to be deployed in such a way as to make 'race'/skin colour, ethnicity and nationality distinct and able to be inferiorised, disparaged, fetishised and even commodified. (Goldberg, 1993, cited in Matthews, 2007, p.6)

This type of discourse can lead to stereotypical views of racialised peoples that seep into the very fabric of society, leaving a stain that is hard to remove. Many different approaches have attempted to wash away the stain of these discourses. References to Australia as being proudly multicultural or a cultural melting pot have done little to address the apparent disengagement of white Australia with issues of race and 'otherness' (Mackinlay & Barney, 2008), leaving a faded yet still visible stain. Mackinlay and Barney (2008) go on to discuss the stereotypical images of Aboriginal peoples found in a mainstream Australian television program such a *Play School*. The program claims to portray diversity across Australian family, social and cultural contexts, yet upon deeper research these 'white imaginings' of Aboriginal Australians contained "stereotypical notions of a primitive Aboriginal people engaged in strange and exotic rituals that sharply distinguish 'them' from 'us'" (Mackinlay & Barney, 2008, p.281).

For the teacher to diminish the reproduction of inequality within educational contexts they must first leave behind preconceived notions of race or ethnicity and recognise that these are not markers of difference and that "equating whiteness with normality" (Habibis & Walter, 2009, p.249) will only serve to reproduce inequality.

Internal factors

Internal factors, along with the external, contribute to forming a broader picture of an individual's response to discourses of inequality that may serve to reproduce inequality. Notions of meritocracy and deservedness, individual habitus and the role of social capital need to be examined if the teacher is to transform inequality.

Meritocracy and deservedness

Meritocracy relates to a society where position within that society is dependent upon, and achieved by, capacity and endeavour rather than depending upon age or social background (Habibis & Walter, 2009). That is to say, within a meritocratic system the opportunity to succeed is open to all according to talent and ability (Harwood, 2011b). Within educational settings the adoption of meritocratic principles may be problematic in that they are implicitly linked to notions of deservedness (Habibis & Walter, 2009). In their examination of the social science fiction work, *The Rise of Meritocracy* (Young, 1958), Goldthorpe and Jackson (2008) detail the author's warnings against meritocracy as a cure-all for social inequality and an inherent fear that new forms of social stratification might appear. That is, those members of a meritocracy who performed poorly will be regarded or even regard themselves as not deserving any better. This fiction is echoed by Habibis and Walter (2009), who claim meritocracy supports the normalisation of inequality. Teachers, therefore, should move away from the adoption of such discourses that may reproduce inequality.

Individual habitus

Another internal factor that may contribute to inequality reproduction is the habitus that individuals develop over time, in response to their social and cultural environments. Mills (2005) contends that individual habitus can be both reproductive and transformative. A reproductive habitus is born from a personal recognition and acceptance of social constraints and conditions that can influence present and future expectations (Mills, 2005). Therefore, as inequality is a sustained, lived experience that focuses on the deficits of the individual (Habibis & Walter, 2009), it may result in the individual normalising these discourses and, therefore, accepting the inevitability of their disadvantaged situation. The denial of equal access to resources also becomes the norm and, at worst, individuals blame themselves for this inequality (Habibis & Walter, 2009). This misrecognition of disadvantage and social constraints leads to the formation of a habitus that can result in a learned helplessness or "a feeling or disposition that seems to reproduce these constraints. Indeed, they [the individual] appear largely incapable of perceiving social reality, in all of its arbitrariness, as anything other than 'the way things are'" (Jenkins, 2002, cited in Mills, 2005, p.2).

This facilitates the reproduction of inequality with the volition of the individual, who knows no better.

Alternatively, Mills (2005) asserts individual habitus can be transformative in that the individual has improvisational capabilities allowing them to recognise transformative opportunities to action within their field. Within classroom contexts, it is an educator's pedagogy, practice and expectations that can afford opportunities for development of a transformative habitus, thus leading to a transformation of inequality.

Social capital

The notion of social capital is used by Bourdieu and is concerned with the social networks, support structures and resources that individuals can access (Habibis & Walter, 2009). It can also be thought of as a "closed system of social networks inherent in the structure of relations between persons and among persons within a collectivity" (Zhou & Bankston, 1994, cited in Giorgas, 2000, p.3). The teacher must consider the sources of social capital accessed and used by their students. Coleman (cited in Giorgas, 2000) asserts that social capital mainly exists in two domains, within the community and within the family. With reference to community sources of social capital, these exist within social structures, social relationships and established social institutions (Giorgas, 2000). It is the dominant class that uses the capital gained from collective relationships to maintain positions of power within the wider community (Dika & Singh, 2002, cited in Smyth, 2004). Family-based sources of capital are derived from the relationships between members, while the successful utilisation of such capital is dependent upon the strength of those relationships (Coleman, 1988, cited in Giorgas, 2000). Teachers, too, can be a source of social capital for students, dependent on the strengths of educational relationships and classroom social structures that will afford students access to capital of quality. Thus inequality can be diminished.

It is the combination of external and internal factors that interplay with individuals' lived experiences of social marginalisation that informs the need for transformative pedagogies within educational contexts. Theories surrounding the reproduction or transformation of inequality remain only theories until they are viewed through the lens of lived experience and enacted within real-world social and educational contexts. Only then can a teacher effectively apply informed and meaningful measures to transform inequality.

Social marginalisation

Social marginalisation is a multifaceted and complex issue. Poverty, social omission, inequalities related to gender, race and ethnicity, location and disability can act together to lock underprivileged groups into severe educational disadvantage (UNESCO, 2009). It is important to note that marginalisation is linked to, but not the same as, inequality and can be socially or culturally based (UNESCO, 2009). Teachers must understand the dynamics of this type of marginalisation in order to find ways in which to locally reduce it.

Transformation of inequality within the field

It has been established that teachers are important agents of transformation within educational settings. Apart from understanding of the relevant issues, there are research-based methodologies that can improve the effectiveness of the transformational teacher. This effectiveness "is related to certain organisational characteristics, such as good pedagogical leadership by principals and head teachers or the existence of teachers' collaborative cultures" (van Zanten, 2005, p.162), which is also based on the belief that 'all students can learn'. Mills (2008) suggests that, while it is possible for students' habitus to be transformed, it is transformation of educational opportunities available to students that will benefit disadvantaged and marginalised students. She goes on to explain Bourdieu's assertion that schools play a central role in the reproduction of social and cultural inequalities, as "schools are key institutions for transmitting cultural capital" (Schwalbe *et al.*, 2000, p.431). Mills (2008) believes the teacher can become an agent of transformational change by broadening the types of cultural capital available to students through real-world curriculum and pedagogy. Mills also draws a connection between the marginalised 'players' and the 'field' upon which they operate, calling on the teacher to transform the field by inclusion of the marginalised in the game (Mills, 2008).

Conclusion

If teachers desire to be agents of transformation of inequality, a foundation of knowledge must be established around the complexities of inequality within educational contexts. This foundation supports understanding of the external and internal factors that reproduce inequality and the role that social marginalisation can play in its reproduction. This knowledge and understanding will inform and guide pedagogy, thus leading the teacher toward transformational practice within their field of action.

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