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# Schools, hegemony and children's agency: a sociological study with children on their schooling experiences

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Schools, hegemony and children's agency:  
A sociological study with children on their  
schooling experiences

by

Patricia Ann Rose

(B.Ed. Primary, Honours – Class I)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

from

University of Wollongong

Faculty of Education

2011

## **Certification**

I, Patricia Rose, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Department of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Signed:

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Patricia Rose

Date:

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## **Abstract**

This study explored how structures and relationships in schools constrain and/or enable a small group of children to exercise agency. There appears a disjuncture between traditional education systems and modern students' knowledge and experiences in society. Part of this widening schism is explained sociologically by the differences in perceptions of childhood between the dominant framework, informed by developmental psychology, and the new sociology of childhood. This study explored both perspectives with critical social theory providing the theoretical and analytical framework for designing the research and analysing the data.

Using a model of Participatory Action Research this study engaged with nine, ten - fourteen year old children from the Illawarra Region in a project that investigated children's place and power within their schools. As co-researchers, the young people in collaboration with the researcher devised and distributed two surveys for adults and children to compare adults' perceptions with children's experiences of schools. In teams the co-researchers analysed the data and presented their interpretation of the data in short skits they wrote, filmed and edited for a DVD. Additionally, the co-researchers provided rich qualitative data on their lives through interviews, taking photographs and journal writing. As a critical ethnographer, I documented and commented on the process of conducting authentic research and sharing power with children.

This study was designed on Gramsci's notion of hegemony (1971, 1977) as a way to explain children's mostly active consent to the processes in schools that ultimately subjugate them. Findings indicated that the strength of hegemony was in the normalcy of adults' accepted authority to make decisions and define rules, allocation of space and children's learning in schools. Conversely, results also suggested that hegemony was not absolute as the co-researchers questioned the status quo in schools and in doing so redeveloped their idea of 'normal'. Data reflected that children wanted ideal schools to focus on learning rather than indoctrination with spaces for children's voices and identities to be respected where children and adults share power democratically.

## **Preface**

I would like to begin with a story I adapted from, “The Golden Eagle”.

Once upon a time a man found an eagle egg. Not knowing it was an eagle egg he placed the egg under a chicken. The eagle hatched and was immersed in chicken culture and taught chicken ways. She learned quickly what the adult chickens valued and so she modelled herself on the ‘ideal’ chicken. She never questioned, listened all the time, never spoke unless told she could and always did what she was asked even if it was boring or dull. She clucked and scratched and eventually after much work was quite a ‘successful’ chicken. She never thought of other possibilities to her world - the adult chickens made the rules and that was the way it had always been and would always be. Only a few chickens tried to change the chicken ways and they were publicly humiliated and out-casted by the adult chickens and the chicks who feared retribution. So the thought of challenging her conditioning never really occurred to her. She knew her place in the scheme of things. She was a great and mighty obedient chicken!!!

One day she saw an amazing bird flying high in the sky. When she enquired about this bird she was told that the amazing bird was an eagle who was king of the birds. It belonged to the sky and chickens like her belonged to the earth. Flying high in the sky... was that possible??? Why hadn’t anyone told her about that before? She began to wonder if she could fly high up in the sky too?

“No”, she thought I am a chicken. And so sadly, she lived and died a chicken for that is who she believed she was.

I compare this analogy to children’s hierarchical position in schools in relation to adults. Many adults within their schools and family have conditioned children from a young age to do what they are told - to be seen and not heard. In my own family I was a child who struggled to be heard as one of six children. I spoke in my family and at school but felt no adults really listened to me or respected my opinion. I was considered too young for my opinion to have any real bearing on matters of consequence. When I became an adult I was

inspired to become a teacher and researcher who shared a voice with children. I would like to briefly describe how this PhD study is the culmination of this voyage.

Children play ‘schools’ all the time with each child wanting to be the teacher – they strive to have power over others. Children play at having this power because in reality at school most children have little or no power to change their schooling circumstances. They are expected to conform without question. As a teacher I changed my own practices in the classroom to give children more of a voice but I was limited by how much autonomy I could nourish in the children due to the culture, expectations and structures of the traditional schools in which I worked. Even as an adult and a teacher I felt powerless to change schools and help children be treated as respectable people whose opinions mattered. I was frustrated within the system and yet lacked the knowledge and skills to challenge it. It was tutoring and lecturing part-time at university that opened my eyes to the literature, theories and research that have now been translated into this thesis.

The picture below encompasses my 20 years primary teaching experience and the ‘new and innovative’ curriculum, pedagogies and teaching strategies that have come and gone (expressed in modern flight materials) – without making any major dent in the structures that maintain the lower status of children within most schools (the horse and cart).

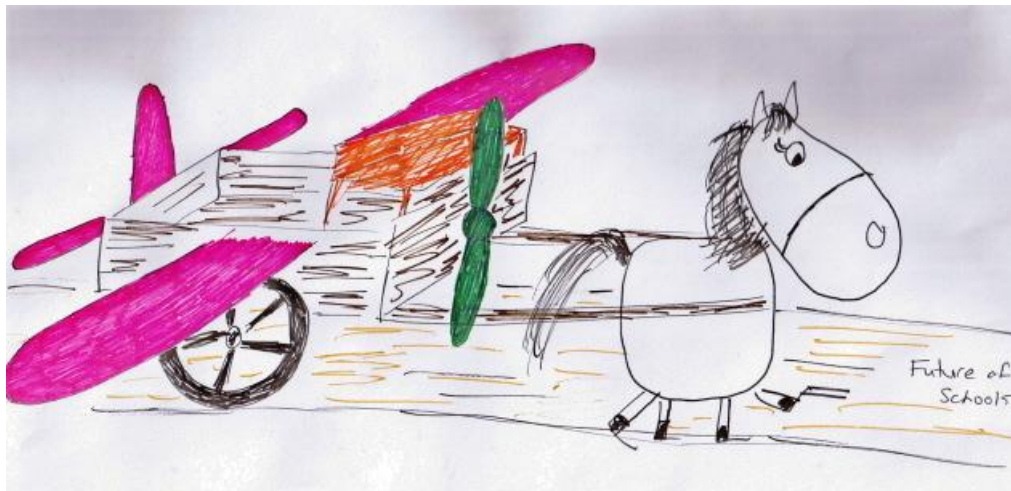


Figure 1: Educational Change (Rose, 2006)

As a teacher I became increasingly more alert to the observation that whilst most children were powerless to change the classroom and school conditions, like the chicken in the story a lot of children had accepted school the way it was and the way it should be. These children in schools seemed oblivious to the structural practices and relationships that ultimately restricted their schooling experience and potential. I was reminded of this in Daniel Quinn's novel, *Ishmael* (1992) where he explains that for change to occur people have to know what it is that is keeping them captive;

If you can't discover what's keeping you in, the will to get out soon becomes confused and ineffectual. (p. 25)

This was the starting point for this research study that was designed to explore children's experiences in schools from their perspectives. It is my deepest desire as an educator to rewrite the ending of "The Golden Eagle" and how it relates to children in schools. Not by adding what I think should happen or what I think is possible but by asking the children themselves what they think may be possible – so that schools could be places where all children know their own power and greatness and are supported to contribute to educational change. In this way they too could soar like the king of the birds.

# Chapter 1: An Introduction to the Study

## 1.1. Introduction

In 1935, John Maynard Keynes wrote:

The real difficulty lies, not in the new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones, which ramify, for those brought up as most of us have been, into every corner of our minds. (Keynes, 2009 [1936], p. 4)

This study explores the potential for adults and children to challenge some old constructions of childhood and provides new possibilities and hope for future schools. In late modernity many traditional schools are becoming inadequate in delivering the tasks they are expected to perform – educating children for the future. The traditional hierarchical model of school organisation where learning is transmitted from the adult teacher to the student child reinforces differences in power and authority between adults and children. This contributes to the dominant sociological dichotomy between adults and children and, among other things, impacts considerably on children’s exercise of agency within schools.

In contrast the expansive Internet is a vast interactive network that removes the differentials of power and resources often found in face-to-face interactions and provides unprecedented opportunities for new forms of action, interaction and education (Slevin, 2000). Beare (2001, p. 148) says that through the Internet, students can find most of the ‘information’ they need which means the teacher’s role changes “from that of expert to that of mentor, advisor, fellow learner and wise friend”. This study is not investigating technology per se however, the Internet and technology have contributed to a changing world and have become the catalysts amplifying the need for schools to change authoritarian structural practices and binary perceptions of adults and children. This in turn challenges schools to develop new relationships between adults and children, teachers and learners, based on reciprocity and respect. The study questions have evolved from exploring these possibilities of designing



schools or the ‘conception’ of schooling with children that would be relevant in these ‘new times’ (A.C.D.E., 2004; Latham et al., 2006).

The childhood period from 0-18 years of age includes a broad category of people who are considered children (United Nations, 1989). The reference to children throughout this study means the content is generalised to include children aged between 6-18 years who are attending school. References to young people or youth are indicative of children aged between 12-18 years. The co-researchers in this study were aged between 12-14 years. Any reference to schools without stipulation of primary or secondary school means that the content is applicable to both broad categories.

This chapter begins with relevant background information. Critical social theory and Gramsci’s notion of hegemony (1971, 1977), the dominant framework and the new sociology of childhood are introduced. Next the rationale for undertaking this study is outlined. A brief synopsis of the methodology is included that contextualises the purpose and significance of this study and its unique contribution to educational research and literature. The aims and research questions this study investigated are presented followed by a brief description of the structure of this thesis. Some relevant background information that informed this study is presented in the next section.

## **1.2. Background information**

This study brings together broad fields of literature and research from critical social theory and the sociology of childhood to explore the perpetuation of inequalities in adult and child status and power within society and some schools. These theories provided an interpretive lens for the analysis of data. The dominant framework as a perspective in sociological literature explains how childhood has been commonly constructed in society and schools while the new sociology of childhood offers new possibilities for future schools. I link children’s status in schools with Gramsci’s notion of hegemony to explain how common structural practices operate to normalise adults’ authority and subtly manipulate children’s

active consent in the process of their own subjugation. Critical social theory is introduced in the next section.

### **1.2.1. Critical social theory**

Critical social theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. The study was informed by three inter-related components of critical social theory: hegemony, power and agency. Gramsci's notion of hegemony (1971, 1977) was used to explain children's mostly consensual response to the processes in schools, and the way it ultimately subjugates them and impacts on their potential to take up power and agency in their school lives. Hegemony as defined by Gramsci (1971, 1977), is the invisible mechanism of control used by the bourgeois that normalises certain experiences, ideas and behaviours by creating a false consciousness. Schools like other social institutions, can transmit hegemony through rituals, routines and social practices that politically influence and regulate adults' authority over how space, time and social processes are organised within their everyday workings. One outcome of hegemony is that it can subtly manipulate children's false consciousness (Fay, 1987; Gramsci, 1971), or beliefs about themselves and can undermine their sense of self-worth and esteem (Lincoln, 1995). Fay (1987, p. 14) articulates the enduring effects of hegemony in the following way: "People trained in bondage cannot in a moment rid themselves of the effect of this training".

The next section links the way childhood has been constructed in society that has contributed to the dominant hegemony in schools. Sociology of childhood is the focus of the next section.

### **1.2.2. Sociology of childhood**

In this subsection I will introduce the role of developmentalism, socialisation theory and the dominant framework in marginalising children in society and how this has influenced the way children are positioned in schools. I conclude this section with the new sociology of childhood that is providing new ways of conceptualising childhood.

Corsaro (2005) cited that up until about eighteen years ago studies on children were largely absent from mainstream sociology. To understand this it is necessary to see how childhood as

a social structure has evolved. Ariès (1973) challenged popular sociological thought when he recently described in medieval times ‘childhood’ did not exist. He attested that during this era children were integrated into society and were given similar economic and physical responsibilities as adults. Industrialisation changed the landscape of childhood by requiring an educated workforce. The introduction of mass compulsory schooling to meet this need segregated adults and children in society. This also led to the evolution of developmentalism and socialisation theory.

#### 1.2.2.1. The dominant framework, developmentalism and socialisation theory

According to supporters of the new sociology of childhood Prout and James (1997) and Wyness (2006b), the dominant framework is the umbrella term that encompasses socialisation theory and developmentalism. The key link between these theories is that children are viewed as incomplete or developing adults in need of socialisation to become adults.

Developmentalism is represented by Piaget’s (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969) clearly defined pre-determined stages of cognition development that children progressed through in becoming an adult. The results of this study produced scientifically based norms that schools and parents relied on to measure and observe children’s ‘normal’ progress and development. In this thinking adults’ rationality and competence entitled them to have authority and responsibility over children. Children’s age based progression of school and continuous testing in schools that ensured children conformed to the standard ‘norms’ is synonymous of this thinking. His theory was based on the universality of children’s biological immaturity and lacked consideration of cultural variations in children’s lives (Wyness, 2006b).

Durkheim’s socialisation theory (1956, 1961) reinforced the idea that children needed adult control and influence to constrain them. Durkheim (1961) identified that children were especially amenable to socialisation as they easily developed habits through repetition and imitation and their suggestible nature made it easy for adults to manipulate ideas to ensure conformity. Teachers became the objective authorities to discipline and educate children under this regime.

The dominant framework reflects the influence of developmentalism and socialisation theory in four key features: children are distinguished in opposition to adults; children are viewed as lacking ontology, meaning they are viewed as ‘becomings’ rather than ‘beings’ (Qvortrup, 1994); there is an emphasis on the singular child rather than children as a collective; the State has an influential role of control on children’s pathway to ‘growing up’ (Prout & James, 1997). This means that within this psychologically based framework the individual child is considered rather than children as a collective, which serves to fragment children’s experience, ontology and collective power. The State legitimates adults’ authority to socialise children in schools and make decisions in children’s best interests as children lack adult competence and rationality.

Developmentalism, socialisation theories and the dominant framework still dominate perspectives on children and childhood (Prout & James, 1997; Wyness, 2006b). These theories focus on children’s biological immaturity and lack of adult experience thereby reinforcing adults’ competence and superiority. Their influence in schools is evident and is discussed next.

#### 1.2.2.2. Children in school

Schools are still modelled on a curious mix of the factory, the asylum and the prison. (Townsend, 2002, p. 24)

Recent research with children in primary and secondary schools provide some evidence of children’s subordinate position in relation to adults. Children’s treatment in schools reflects the dominant framework, where “the adults are the givers, and the children are receivers; the adults are rational, and the children are irrational” (Bardy, 1994, p. 308). Children have restricted agency in schools as they are legally forced to attend (Cullingford, 2007) and are socialised under the guidance and supervision of adults who generally define boundaries and structures (Bardy, 1994; Qvortrup, 1994). Children learn how to be a child in school where normalcy of experiences progressively builds from primary school and extends to high school. Some practices and relationships with adults in schools covertly transmit hegemony through

the continual reinforcement of unconscious messages that can perpetuate children's lower status.

The following research studies with children from both primary and secondary schools support these claims. A few studies revealed that some children in primary schools knew they were subordinate to adults (Christensen & James, 2001; Devine, 2000, 2003) and that adults controlled children's time, space (Christensen & James, 2001; Devine, 2000), behaviour (Cullingford, 2007; Devine, 2003; Farrell, Danby, Leiminer, & Powell, 2004) and social interactions (Devine, 2003; Farrell et al., 2004). In some studies children positively described their relationship with teachers (Devine, 2003) while others felt they did not have opportunities to tell their side of a story (Osman, 2005; Devine, 2003). One corollary of adults having power was that some children in primary school did not get many opportunities to demonstrate their agency and power by making decisions of consequence even in school or class matters (Cox & Robinson-Pant, 2003).

Research with students in secondary schools revealed similar findings to those of primary school with more emphasis on the way school and relationships with teachers made children feel. One participant from Cruddas' research (2001, p. 63) with female secondary students who had emotional and behavioural difficulties elucidated this, "it's the way they [the teachers] talk to us. We're not dirt you know". Other research identified that students wanted teachers to: recognise urban youth's realities (Marquez-Zenkov, Harmon, van Lier, & Marquez-Zenkov, 2007; Smyth & Hattam, 2004), utilise students' social networks (Marquez-Zenkov et al., 2007), to treat children fairly (Hatchman & Rolland, 2001) and be part of a larger network of adults who care for them and speak with them (Hatchman & Rolland, 2001; Marquez-Zenkov et al, 2007). Some students disengaged with school if they felt school personnel thwarted their aspirations (Quiroz, 2001) and treated them like little children (Smyth & Hattam, 2004).

The next section extends children's experiences in schools as largely an extension of their subjugated positioning in society. This lays the foundation for the emergence of the new sociology of childhood movement.

### 1.2.2.3. Children in society

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), namely Articles 12 and 13, directly supports children having a voice on issues that concerns them. Even though this declaration has been highly ratified, Qvortrup (1994) and Wyness (1999) believe that children are still marginalised in society and can be categorised as a minority group or social class due to children's subordinate position in relation to adults and exclusion from full participation in society. Qvortrup (1994, p. 4) argues that adults' power and interests regulate the relationship between adults and children where adults determine the level of power they share with some children (Sorin & Galloway, 2006). Alanen (1994) attested that children's participation and power in society does not begin until a distinct age or level of adulthood has been reached. Basically, a child's "principal way of gaining autonomy and status is growing up" (Näsman, 1994, p. 187).

The findings from the following research projects showed that from a young age children had been socialised by their parents and other dominant adults that adults are in charge (Mayall, 2001) and children on the whole had no power or leverage in negotiation with adults (Mason & Falloon, 2001). Some children felt their power and agency was confined to operating within adult-defined restrictions (O'Kane, 2000) however, some children used their agency to contest, negotiate and/or resist the structures that shaped their adult-child relations (Mayall, 2001). Adults' inclusion of children in research ranged from superficial propaganda (Tisdall & Davis, 2004), to sharing power within adult defined structures (Wyness, 2006a) to children managing their own organisations (Hart & Rajbhandary, 2003).

The many studies now undertaken in consultation with children that illuminates the world from their perspective is encouraging, however the fact that not much changes as a result of these studies is a more accurate indication of children's status in society. The next section introduces the new sociology of childhood.

#### 1.2.2.4. The new sociology of childhood

The new sociology of childhood (Cocks, 2006; Danby & Farrell, 2004; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Thomas, 2002; Wyness, 2000) is a way of conceptualising childhood that emerged in the climate when developmentalism and socialisation theory had dominated sociological thinking. The new sociology of childhood is a framework that offers a different view of children and childhood. This thinking supports the actualisation of children's right to self-determination by positioning children as people who have a voice and deserve to be heard in schools and in society. This understanding critiques the dominant framework that views children as becoming adults.

The new sociology of childhood explores how structure and agency are mutually supported in children's lives. Structure, is defined as the mode of societal and social organisation incorporating micro or macro institutions, policies and practices that regulate large-scale patterning of childhood and relationships in a society (Giddens, 1993). Agency is defined as action of choice that can lead to change (Prout & James, 1997). Children's agency 'impacts structures' in society, including the perception of childhood itself and structures in society can constrain or enable children's agency. This means that childhood, as a permanent social category in society like the other social variables of class, gender and race, is subject to historical and contemporary influences in society and impacts of societal forces (Qvortrup, 1994). Children's agency is changing the structure of childhood through the Internet and digital technology as children use the Internet to forge new cultural practices that can ignore some traditional adult/ child boundaries (Montgomery, 2007).

The framework of the new sociology of childhood constructs children as competent human beings in their present lives who use their power and agency to create and shape their world as well as being shaped by it. The tenets recognise that children replicate and appropriate aspects of their culture through their talk and interaction with others thereby actively participating in the co-construction of their own social situations and society (Danby & Farrell, 2004; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Pradham, 2007; Prout & James, 1997; Qvortrup, 2002; Thomas, 2002; Wyness, 2000, 2006b). Although there are limits, Prout and James (1997) acknowledge that children's agency occurs largely within adult defined structures.

Supporters of the student voice movement (Cook-Sather, 2006a; Erickson, 1987; Fielding, 2001, 2004, 2006; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Leren, 2006; Mitra, 2006; Osberg, Pope, & Galloway, 2006; Smyth, 2006a, 2006b) apply similar tenets of the new sociology of childhood to a schooling context. They advocate for children to be given opportunities to participate in school reform and research that are aimed at redefining relationships between adults and children (Cook-Sather, 2006a; Erickson, 1987; Fielding, 2001, 2004, 2006; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Leren, 2006; Mitra, 2006; Osberg, Pope, & Galloway, 2006; Smyth, 2006a, 2006b).

Results from six projects in 43 schools in the United Kingdom, coordinated by Rudduck and Fielding (T.L.R.P., 2003) found that providing children a space to talk about things that mattered to them and being taken seriously by adults increased children's self-esteem and respect. Children who perceived they were taken seriously felt more included in the school's purpose and that what they did could make a difference. It also created more collaborative relationships with teachers and the climate in the classroom became more trusting and open as teachers began to see children differently (Rudduck, 2006). These projects influenced this study's research design by modelling ways adults could share power with children in school environments.

The following studies within the school context exemplify children collaborating with adults as research partners to affect change by co-constructing knowledge: Fielding, 2001; Holdsworth, 2000; Mitra, 2006; Oldfather, 1995; Soo-Hoo, 1993 and outside of the school context, Bland and Atweh, 2007. Results from these studies indicated that as researchers the children had agency over the issue to be investigated and in the design of finding solutions.

In summary, this study emerged from my curiosity to understand children's experience of power in school within this modern world. Critical social theory provided some understanding of how hegemony can operate as a mechanism of control and became the theoretical framework. The tenets of the new sociology of childhood explained the influence of the dominant framework in some traditional schools whilst offering alternative perceptions of



children and their agency. This study also aligned with the student voice movement that shares similar precepts to the student voice movement by advocating for children and adults to share power in schools. The next section explains the reasons behind this study.

### **1.3. Rationale**

This study investigated how the current structural practices in schools shape children's relations with adults and children's capacity for agency. Lee (2001) and Prout (2005) believe that in this modern world boundaries between adults and children are becoming blurred. Yet some structural practices in schools cling to old constructions of childhood, informed by the dominant framework that can produce a schism between children's experiences in this modern world and experiences in school. These traditional schools, as Warner (2006) explains, are trying to maintain control over young people through the traditional curriculum, continuous testing and largely autocratic relationships between teachers and students.

These traditional structural practices and resulting relationships with adults are no longer relevant in this modern and changing world. The following excerpts from Beare's (2002) "I am the future's child" are a provocative portrayal of a possible reality that demonstrates as educators we are teaching children skills and knowledge to participate in an unknown future world.

Hullo. I am Angelica. I am 5 years old. I really don't have much of a past. In fact, I am the future.

... My world is already very different from the one you have grown up in.

... Human beings are starting to build living platforms in orbit around the earth and will create colonies in space.

... The really prosperous nations in my world have small populations and few physical resources. The 'commodities' they trade are non-material, like technical skills, brain-power, and know-how.

... I may change jobs or relocate seventeen or so times during my working life, and at least three of those changes will be major ones. My husband and I

will have to juggle jobs and careers, perhaps in different locations.

... I will do a lot of my learning in non-school locations with my lap-top computer. I am connected to the Internet, I have my own e-mail address, and some of my teachers will be located overseas... Computers are changing the way my schooling is arranged.

... Do you know what an international curriculum looks like, and how it can be taught?... My school says I need to be a global citizen... Are you confident that you can design a curriculum, which will equip me to live in my world?

My name is Angelica. I am 5 years old. And I am sitting in one of your classrooms today. (Beare, 2002, p. 11-17)

The Australian Council of Deans of Education (2004) recognised that the people who will contribute and participate effectively and successfully in this new era will be those who are flexible, problem-solvers and independent thinkers and who have multiple strategies for tackling a task. They require a range of portable skills to keep pace and adapt with the rapid level of change in the modern workforce. There are doubts that the current education system is well equipped to produce these 'successful knowledge workers' (A.C.D.E., 2004).

Harrison (2002) notices that with all of the discussions and talk of change in education very little is actually revolving around what is best for the child. A number of social commentators who have conducted research argue that schools have evolved over two centuries without listening to children (Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder, & Reay, 2004; Cook-Sather, 2002). Consequently, they argue current structures and practices in many schools that position children in opposition to adults are outdated and do not serve to stimulate or develop children's potential nor provide them with the necessary skills to thrive in an ever-changing society.

Many schools reflect the influence of developmentalism in their structures as children progress in age based stages with -stake testing (Angus, 2006) en route to becoming adults (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). These traditional schools also echo the dominant framework of

sociology (Prout & James, 1997; Wyness, 2006b) where children may not be considered competent or experienced enough by adults, have a voice or be decision-makers. Both these perspectives of children and childhood still prevail in traditional sociological thought and serve to legitimate adult power and authority in schools, which ultimately devalues children and their experiences today. Lorna, aged 14 years who entered the *School I'd like* competition in the U.K. (Burke & Grosvenor, 2003) verified that she was acutely aware of her lack of position and power within her school:

I left school at the age of thirteen, and enrolled at a local college... I left because I felt that the regime was oppressive and, like most oppressive regimes, coercive and difficult to change. I resented being told what to wear, what to think, what to believe, what to say and when to say it. In the average school, the children are the underclass, so low in status that they are not worth listening to. (Burke & Grosvenor, 2003, p. 98)

June Factor (2005, p. 2) supports this, when she commented that, “children understand the fundamental power hierarchies and consultative tokenism of many traditional schools and feel voiceless”. Delpit (1988) professed that people do not hear with their ears rather with their beliefs. So for school reform to truly include children some adults’ basic beliefs aligned with the dominant framework about who has authority in school needs to change.

The tenets of the new sociology of childhood that critique the dominant framework afford a new position of children in relation to adults, a position I have adopted as part of this study. Thus, influenced by the new sociology of childhood, this study emerged from my curiosity to explore children’s agency within schools by sharing a collaborative research journey with a small group of children. The next section introduces the aims this study sought to achieve.

#### **1.4. Statement of aims and research questions**

The aim of the study was to explore how children’s agency within schools was influenced by the hegemony that exists through structural practices and relationships they encounter with

adults. Additionally, this study aimed to provide some child-generated alternatives to some current schooling practices. To achieve these broad aims, I listened to students' voices and created a space for children to take up the role as co-researchers in the study. In this role they documented their own and other children's experiences of school and adult's perceptions of school. It was projected that finding out how adults perceive children's experiences of school today compared with what children actually experience in schools may leverage some adults to modify some current practices in schooling. The production of the DVD aimed to provide a platform for the co-researchers to showcase the results of this study. It was an aim of this study that the accompanying DVD would contribute to some social change in schools by building a bridge of understanding between adults and children's worlds. The DVD content and its construction will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

This study sought to investigate, understand and provide perspectives, as opposed to definitively answering, three research questions. The first two were substantive questions around children's experience of schooling:

- How do the structural practices in schools impact the agency of the children in this study?
- How do relationships in schools between children and adults affect the agency of the children within this study?

The final research question was a methodological question investigating the process of co-researching with children:

- How can children be effective co-researchers in an adult defined research project?

Through the process of co-researching with children I have sought to provide a context that will model a new way of positioning children in the process of participating in research on their school experiences. I have sought to provide feedback on how schools could share

power with children more authentically. This study was informed, therefore, by an ideal of children and adults being equal. Pradham (2007) describes this ideal in the following way:

It can be argued that in today's day and context, it would be a utopia to have adults and children as equals. Nonetheless, it is certainly an ideal worth venturing towards. The challenge is to undo different layers of prejudices and to learn and unlearn understandings of power and respect. Changing and reorienting the social structure in this way is an evolutionary process. (Pradham, 2007, p. 267)

The next section gives a brief overview of how this study achieved these aims and sought to address the research questions proposed.

### **1.5. A brief synopsis of the methodology**

This brief synopsis of the methodology of the research illustrates the way this study contributes to educational knowledge.

This study was an ethnographic account of a socially critical project. The socially critical project involved the researcher, co-researching with nine, twelve to fourteen year old children from the Illawarra Region. Unintentionally, all of the co-researchers were middle-class, high achievers who valued the futuristic opportunities of excelling at school. Together we investigated how adults and children perceived power was distributed in schools by designing two primarily identical open-ended surveys, one for adults and one for children. The co-researchers each chose five adults and five children to complete the survey. We collaboratively analysed the survey data and the co-researchers presented data that they felt was important in the form of a short skit that was then put onto a DVD. Each segment of the DVD was written, filmed and edited by the co-researchers and gave the co-researchers power over the way the results were presented (Quiroz, 2001). The DVD is submitted as part of this PhD as it exemplifies the co-researchers' voices and interpretation of what they considered valuable data.

Additionally, as part of the socially critical project the co-researchers provided valuable qualitative data on their lives including journal entries, taking photographs and being interviewed.

Separate and yet linked to the socially critical project I engaged in a critical ethnographic account of the process of engaging in this collaborative research with children. I then utilised the new sociology of childhood as a theoretical framework to analyse all aspects of the collected data. This collected data was comprised of the survey data and the additional data from the co-researchers including their interviews, journals and photographs. The next section explains the significant contribution of this study to educational research and knowledge.

## **1.6. Significance of this research**

This research study is significant in four ways:

- 1) children were co-researchers – researching both adults and children;
- 2) the research occurred outside of the school context;
- 3) adults considered the schooling experience today from a child's perspective; and
- 4) it had a transformative intent for the co-researchers.

The first distinction of this study was that children were not the subjects of research primarily; they were valued as co-researchers, researching both adults and children. This has important implications. In positioning children as co-researchers the traditional adult/child power dynamic within research was shifted as the co-researchers were given shared responsibility to devise, produce, distribute, analyse and represent the data, a privilege normally reserved for adult researchers. This distinguishes this research from other research on schooling where adults maintained authority of content and methodology (see Arnot & Reay, 2007; Bragg, 2007a; Christensen & James, 2001; Cruddas, 2001; Cullingford, 2007; Devine, 2002, 2003; Flutter, 2006; Hatchman & Rolland, 2001; Marquez-Zenkov et al., 2007; McIntyre, Pedder, & Rudduck, 2005; Osler, 2000; Osman, 2005; Quiroz, 2001).

As co-researchers it was important that power between the co-researchers and myself as an adult was balanced and negotiated. Children were afforded similar co-researching status in the following research projects: Bland & Atweh, 2007; Fielding, 2001; Holdsworth, 2000; Mitra, 2001; Oldfather, 1995; Osberg, Pope, & Galloway, 2006; Quiroz, 2001; Soo-Hoo, 1993. The distinction between my research and these studies is that in conducting this research the co-researchers were researching adults disassociated from their specific school environment.

The second unique aspect of this research study that verifies its contribution to knowledge was the location or site of the research activities. The co-researching with children was outside of the institutional setting of schools, even though the focus was on the school experience. The following research projects involved consulting children within the existing hierarchical power structures of school: Arnot & Reay, 2007; Bragg, 2007a, 2007b; Christensen & James, 2001; Cox & Robinson-Pant, 2003; Cruddas, 2001; Cullingford, 2007; Devine, 2002, 2003; Farrell et al., 2004; Fielding, 2001; Flutter, 2006; Hatchman & Rolland, 2001; Holdsworth, 2000; Marquez-Zenkov et al., 2007; McIntyre, Pedder, & Rudduck, 2005; Oldfather, 1995; Osberg, Pope, & Galloway, 2006; Osler, 2000; Osman, 2005; Potter & Briggs, 2003; Quiroz, 2001; Soo-Hoo, 1993. In contrast yet similar to my study, Smyth and Hattam's (2004) research with early school leavers took place outside of the school environment, however unlike this study the participants were not co-researchers.

Studies similar to mine include Bland and Atweh's (2007) research that involved high school students, as co-researchers going to the university to write up their research that was largely conducted in their schools. Mitra's (2006) research involved one group of secondary students co-researching within their schools and liaising with the community but the site of the research was still predominantly the school. In my exposé to identify a study the same as mine I found no comparable studies where children as co-researchers were researching adults and children outside of their school context.

This collaborative study was conducted at the university, which is a research-oriented environment where as the adult I was positioned as a fellow student and researcher with the

co-researchers. The decision not to conduct the research in the school was in order to alter the teacher/student power dichotomy often found in mainstream schooling contexts and build new relationships of reciprocity and trust.

The third contribution of this research, which is unique compared to similar studies, was that the adults were asked to complete a questionnaire based on how they felt children experienced school today, not, as is often the case, how they experienced school. The adults were considering the experiences of going to school from a child's standpoint and were challenged to imagine themselves as a child in schools now.

The final unique feature of this study was that congruent with other Participatory Action Research (PAR) projects, it had a transformative intent. As part of the research design the co-researchers developed critical knowledge, explored alternatives to schooling and shared the data in the collective action of producing the DVD. This thesis contributes to the developing literature on the role of children as competent contributors to discourses on schooling whilst also supplying child-generated alternatives to schools. The final section describes the format of this written report.

## **1.7. Structure of thesis**

The report on this study is structured using a traditional format including a review of literature, and methodology chapter, followed by an ethnography chapter, two data chapters and concluding with a summary and recommendations chapter.

The following literature review chapter, Chapter 2, captures key debates and perspectives in sociology to present historical and current understandings of childhood and children's place in society. The chapter begins with a historical perspective of childhood. Section 2.3. introduces the sociology of schooling and incorporates discussions on the dominant framework, children's power in schools and children's resistance to schools. The new sociology of childhood is the focus of the next section and includes critical discourses on childhood from feminist, Marxist, generational and modern perspectives. The tenets of the new sociology of



childhood are discussed with a focus on children as researchers followed by the student voice movement. The final section provides some discussions of ideal schools and new possibilities for future schools.

The methodology and research design are discussed in Chapter 3. Validations for choosing critical social theory as the theoretical and analytical framework are explained. Key critical theorists such as Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Friere, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren and Brian Fay are introduced and descriptions of how their work has influenced this study are made. The methodology of Participatory Action Research and critical ethnography are summarised and the research design details are evidenced.

Chapter 4 expounds the journey of the critical ethnographer and the role of co-researching with the children in this study. By giving an account of the methodology in practice this chapter provides a bridge between the theory of researching with the co-researchers and the following chapters that discuss the outcome of researching with the co-researchers.

Chapter 5 is the first results chapter that critically analyses the role that structural practices in schools have on children's agency. The data and findings are organised into two sections:

- Space and place;
- Learning and success.

Chapter 6 is the final results chapter and it critically examines the adult and child data on how relationships in schools affect how power is distributed. The data and findings have been categorised into three main sections:

- Child, teacher and relationships;
- Making decisions;
- New possibilities.

The conclusions and recommendations for future research are included in Chapter 7. The research questions are revisited and the main findings summarised. The DVD that the co-researchers collaboratively produced is submitted with this thesis.

# Chapter 2: Review of Literature

## 2.1. Introduction

The child, therefore, cannot be imagined except in relation to a conception of the adult, but essentially it becomes impossible to generate a well-defined sense of the adult, and indeed adult society, without first positing the child. (Jenks, 1996, p. 3)

In the preceding quotation sociologist Chris Jenks postulates that childhood is commonly understood in comparison to adulthood. This review of literature explores two ways of understanding this dichotomy between adults and children through the dominant framework and the new sociology of childhood. To do this, key sociological debates and historical perspectives are presented in the literature to unpack the socially constructed boundaries that have segregated adults and children in society. One limitation of the literature presented is that it can paint universal images of adults and children and the relationships between them. Although acknowledged, this limitation is due to necessity over the scope of the thesis, rather than a lack of understanding of the diverse experiences of children and adults and the many cultural nuisances that make childhood a unique and global experience.

The literature is organised to elucidate the evolutionary journey of childhood in relation to adulthood. Specifically, this chapter begins with some historic understandings of childhood. The sociology of schooling explores the dominant framework including developmentalism and socialisation theory, the role of schools in society and children's power in schools. The new sociology of childhood section discusses critical discourses of childhood including feminism, Marxism and generational perspectives, the tenets of the new sociology of childhood, children as researchers, and the student voice movement. This review of literature concludes with some examples of 'ideal' schools that are challenging traditional institutional structures and notions of childhood. The first section introduces historic understandings of childhood.

## **2.2. Historic understandings of childhood**

This section investigates how significant historic people and events have influenced the status of childhood in relation to adulthood. This literature will briefly outline some perspectives of how childhood has been socially constituted and historically constructed before the introduction of mass compulsory schooling.

French historian Ariès' (1973) contributions to people's understanding of childhood has subsequently led to other historians and sociologists also exploring historical constructions of children's experiences (see deMause, 1974; Heywood, 2001). Ariès (1973) recently identified that in medieval times childhood as a structural form did not exist as children from the age of five or seven were viewed as miniature adults and absorbed into the adult world. In medieval society there was no awareness of the "particular nature of childhood, which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult" (Ariès, 1973, p. 125). Children were included as valued contributors in all aspects of social activity such as games, crafts and arms. The term 'child' during this period did not denote limiting connotations as it does today.

Ariès (1973) estimates that childhood emerged or was invented in Europe between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries when children gradually appeared removed from adult life and a new notion of childhood emerged. Children became more emotionally valued and protected within the family. During this time historical figures like Puritan Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) believed children were innately evil, John Locke (1632-1704) viewed children as 'tabula rasa' or a blank slate and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) garnered adult interest in children by emphasising their innocence (Woodhead & Montgomery, 2003). In different ways these figures positioned children in need of discipline and training where adult lawyers, priests and moralists preserved power to morally educate children and/or protect children's virtue (Woodhead & Montgomery, 2003). From this stance children were seen as being incomplete and needing to be taught by more competent adults.

Industrialisation during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries drew more children to the labour force. According to Heywood (2001, p. 138) most children began full time employment at 12 years and far from being passive victims of exploitation children were

“generally eager to start work, as a way of contributing to their family budgets and joining the world of adults”. Children were considered productive members of a family contributing economically through employment outside the home and helping their parents within the home. The nineteenth century Factory Acts in England and America reduced the numbers of children within child labour. As a result children began to be seen to have little economic value in society and in the family children changed from being economic contributors to economic liabilities (Heywood, 2001).

The advent of mass compulsory schooling at the end of the nineteenth century provided a means to educate and occupy children. Hendrick (1997) explains that when a compulsory relationship between the state, the family and public institutions was legislated socialisation, education and the culture of dependency as natural components of childhood were reinforced. Ferguson (1990) outlines some ramifications as he states:

Liberated from the necessity of labour yet excluded from the adult social world, childhood became an increasingly puzzling phenomenon. Its sequestration was justified on the grounds of children’s ‘immaturity’ and ‘helplessness’, on their evident need to be looked after. (Ferguson, 1990, p. 11)

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the ‘child study movement’ explored the notion of biological universality through scientific observation and promoted the idea that childhood did not occur naturally and therefore needed the assistance of experts (Prout, 2005). Two disciplines emerged during this time – paediatric medicine and child psychology. Child psychology was the dominant academic discipline that influenced health, welfare and education policies. Practices were designed to define and monitor children’s normal development, functioning and behaviour (Prout, 2005) such as Piaget (1895-1980), Freud (1856-1939), Erikson (1902-1994) and later Kohlberg (1927-1987) (Woodhead & Montgomery, 2003). The emerging developmental theories of these men represented children progressing in fixed stages to adulthood. These theories strengthened the idea that adults were completely evolved compared to children’s incomplete development.

In conclusion, an important derivative of Ariès (1973) work was the argument that childhood was a social construction. Heywood (2001) points out a common criticism of Ariès work is that he searched for evidence of the twentieth century representation of childhood in medieval times, a view he found unsubstantiated. However controversial, Prout (2005) believes that Ariès' (1973) revelations contributed to understanding the evolution of the dichotomy that position adults and children as oppositional. The next section further pursues this dichotomy in the sociology of schooling.

### **2.3. Sociology of schooling**

The literature discussed in this section explores the role of schools in society and their influence on people's understanding of childhood in relation to adulthood. The dominant framework is introduced as it has shaped present school structures, followed by a brief synopsis of the historical and contemporary role of schools in society. The subsection, 'children, power and schooling' includes literature on research related to children's collective power and agency within the institution of schools, that will be expanded upon in the results chapters 5 and 6.

#### **2.3.1. The dominant framework**

This literature shows how the dominant framework shapes the socio-political context of childhood itself and the role and structure of schools in society. This subsection is organised to elucidate the way that developmentalism and socialisation theory have contributed to the evolution of this framework. Four key features of the dominant framework are elaborated on and some reasons for its persistence in sociology discussed.

Sociologists Prout and James (1997) describe a view of childhood that has dominated sociology as 'the dominant framework', a mixture of socialisation theory and developmentalism. The common element between these theories is that children are represented as a 'becoming' adult (Qvortrup, 1994) a "defective form of adult social only in their future potential but not in their present being" (Corsaro, 1997, p. 6). According to

Wyness (2006b, p. 136) the dominant framework sanctions the view that children need adult control if they are to grow into adulthood by focussing on biological age as the “key criterion for judgements about children’s abilities and notions of normality”. Developmental psychology is introduced first followed by socialisation theory to preframe the key aspects of the dominant framework.

#### 2.3.1.1. Developmental psychology

The developmental psychological approach to childhood connects children’s biological and psychological growth with social development. James, Jenks and Prout (1998, p. 17) assert that the/a developmental psychology approach “firmly colonised childhood in a pact with medicine, education and government agencies”.

Piaget was a key figure through his use of cognitive theory (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Wadsworth, 2004) that identified children *becoming* adults by progressing through pre-determined and fixed stages. Adopting the popular positivist approach of the time Piaget studied children in a laboratory setting to determine standards and norms pertaining to children’s development. The resultant scientific data meant that children could be measured against these ‘norms’ at each stage to signify normal development and progress. The ideas of the abnormal or deviant child evolved as parents and teachers sought to ensure children conformed to the standard norms. In this regard ‘growing up’ became standardised as measurement and observations became popular methods to regulate children (Wyness, 2006b).

Piaget’s cognitive theory (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; see also Brainerd, 1983; Prout & James, 1997; Wadsworth, 2004) is based on three evolutionary themes related to childhood; rationality, naturalness and universality. According to Piaget (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969) a child lacks and then sequentially develops logical competence, which is seen to be the mark of adult rationality. Childhood was considered universal and natural by Piaget’s singular use of ‘the child’ and the assumption that “irrespective of context, children are smaller, weaker and less physiologically developed than adults” (Wyness, 2006b, p. 117).

Critics such as Wyness (2006b) point out that the emphasis on biological certainty reinforces the dichotomy between children and adults as children's social, emotional and cognitive immaturity is often linked to their biological growth. Additionally, children's normal development was measured against Piaget's proto-individual based on a white western male and superseded any cultural variability. Burman (1994) explained that the ideal child constructed from the age-graded comparative scores did not exist. Finally, Wyness (2006b) argues that children's activities in themselves were used to measure normal development and yet were given little regard to their significance to children's lives and the problems that affect children as children.

Developmental psychology empirically establishes differences between adults and children where children lack competence in comparison with adults. Children's development and growth into rationality gives authority and persuasion to adults' competence and "justifies the supremacy of adulthood" (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998, p. 18). Socialisation theory was built on these past studies and considers the ways in which the environment impacted on children's development.

#### 2.3.1.2. Socialisation theory

The socialisation theory approach to childhood allowed theorists to describe how society maintained order and how people learnt and conformed to social norms. Wyness (2006b) described socialisation as an interactive process between people and the primary agencies of socialisation - the family, the school and the peer group, where schools and families play complimentary and mutually reinforcing roles in guiding the child to adult membership.

According to James, Jenks and Prout (1998) the binarism of the psychological model based on positivist approaches was absorbed into classical socialisation theories. From this stance these sociologists posit that socialisation theory was used to explain how asocial children became social adults because "children pose a potential threat or challenge to the social order and its reproduction" (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998, p. 9).



Durkheim's contribution to theories of socialisation (1956, 1961) influenced sociology between the 1940's to the 1970's. Durkheim (1956) argued that through education children's individuality vis-à-vis heredity could be altruistically bypassed for the collective benefit of society by learning social laws. Durkheim (1961, 1982) contended that children naturally formed habits by repetition and imitation that would correct and contain their instability and impart moral authority and discipline. The fixed practices and procedures in schools were used to reinforce children's status and develop these 'habitually' conforming behaviours. In quoting Durkheim, Gehlkie (1968) states:

All education consists in a continuous effort to impose on the child ways of seeing, feeling and acting to which it would not spontaneously come. (p. 53)

Durkheim (1961) did not see parents as being impartial enough to instil the necessary moral framework, thus adults in schools became the professional authority figure to channel and discipline children's irrationality. He attested that the State should "remind the teacher constantly of the ideas, the sentiments that must be impressed upon the child" (Durkheim, 1956, p. 75). Those who failed the socialisation process were categorised as school failures, deviants and neglected children (Prout & James, 1997).

According to Prout and James (1997) this functionalist model portrays the child as a laboratory rat, different to adults and directed by external stimuli, passive, conforming, unable to initiate interactions and lacking social skills. Children are viewed as a recipient under adult control lacking social competence and agency as adults do not recognise children's praxis and yet compare children's actions to adult's competence (Qvortrup, 2002). Temporality is either projected forward towards the goals of socialisation, adulthood or backwards by what went wrong with socialisation thereby neglecting the child's present time (Prout & James, 1997).

In conclusion, developmentalism and socialisation theory position adults and children in opposition to each other. Developmentalism assumes children lack the mental processes of rationality and socialisation theory proposes children lack cultural conventions. Qvortrup (2002) contends that both theories look forward to what children will become, an adult, and

therefore away from childhood today. The next section demonstrates how these theories combine to form the foundation of the dominant framework.

#### 2.2.2.2. Four key features of the dominant framework

Literature in this subsection describes four key features of the dominant framework. This section concludes with some discussion on the dominant framework's pervasiveness in viewing childhood in society and in schools as a key social institution (Prout & James, 1997; Wyness, 2006b).

According to Prout and James (1997) and Wyness (2006b) the dominant framework provides a narrow construction of children that discounts children's experiences and accounts of childhood. They identify four key features of the dominant framework:

1. Children are distinguished in opposition to adults;
2. Children are viewed as lacking ontology;
3. There is an emphasis on the singular child rather than children as a collective;
4. The State has an influential role of control on children's pathway to 'growing up'.

One feature of the dominant framework is that children are often constructed in a binary position to adults (see Table 1 below). Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (1998) support Wyness (2006b) in identifying chronological age as the foundation upon which most binaries are built. Prout and James (1997), Cannella (1997) and Wyness (2006b) describe some common binaries; children are seen as being uncultured, amoral, simple, uncivilised and wild whereas adults are civilised, moral, complex and cultured (see Table 1 below). These binaries endorse adults' natural authority over children and serve to trivialise and devalue children as people by drawing attention away from children's daily lives and the history they are creating today.

<u>The dominant framework</u>		
Child	→	Adult
Nature	→	Culture
Simple	→	Complex
Amoral	→	Moral
Asocial	→	Social
Person-in-waiting	→	Personhood
'Becoming'	→	'Being'

Table 1: Binary conceptions from the dominant framework (Prout & James, 1997, cited in Wyness, 2006b, p. 119)

A second feature of the dominant framework is that children are viewed as lacking ontology. As illustrated through the binaries, a dichotomy can be produced where adults are viewed as 'beings' and children as 'becomings' (Qvortrup, 1994; Wyness, 2006b). Durkheim (1982, p. 147, italics in original) states that in relation to education schools are presented with a child who is "not a complete work or a finished product – but with a *becoming*, an incipient being, a person in the process of formation". In this way children are conceptualised by what they will become, a *developing* person, rather than who they are and as such "the child is never ontologically established in their own rights" (Wyness, 2006b, p. 121). As a result of such positioning children are denied full social status or citizenship because of their imputed incompetence and inability to take social responsibility (Qvortrup, 1998). Lee (2001) believes that this being/becoming division underlies adult and child relations where adults as 'being' have the right and power to make decisions for children.

Another feature of the dominant framework is an emphasis on the singular child rather than children as a collective. In the dominant framework there is no individual child just 'the child', a composite or stereotypical child. This individualisation of children can have an adverse affect as it diverts attention away from children as a collective entity thereby reducing children's economic or political power (Qvortrup, 1998). It also undermines the view of children as able to produce their own cultural identity outside of adult culture.

A final aspect of the dominant framework is the influential role of the State or government in controlling children's pathway to 'growing up' (Prout & James, 1997). The State legitimises adult power over children where adults can act in children's best interest. Even in legislation children are considered dependents and minors and do not have their own identity as Qvortrup (1998, p. 8) avows, "children do not, neither as individuals nor as a collectivity, possess rights or powers to ensure distributive justice". Attendance at school is an example of one law children must adhere to without having legal rights to challenge it (Cullingford, 2007).

According to Lee (2001) the dominant framework provides a single view of children that suppresses contradictory notions. He comments that this may add to its persistence in sociology when adults such as teachers and social workers are called on to be *the* experts on children and childhood. The dominant framework then becomes the source of truth about the nature of childhood enabling adults to rationalise that their actions and decisions are based on solid foundations. Lee (2001) describes the possible effects of adults rejecting the dominant framework as he states:

... so to depart from the dominant framework, to recognise children as beings, or to refuse the being/becoming dichotomy distinction is to open oneself to external criticism. But it is also to deprive oneself of the convenient fictions of adulthood that could otherwise make one feel confident in one's judgements and motivations. (Lee, 2001, p. 123)

In conclusion, the dominant framework's persistence in sociology rests on its perceived reliability based on empirical evidence from developmentalism and socialisation theories. As Lee (2001) suggests some adults feel confident that through the binary dichotomy of the dominant framework adults are granted power and authority over children due to their adulthood. The next subsection links the dominant framework to the role and structure of schools in society.

### **2.3.2. The historical and contemporary role of schools in society**

This literature presents a brief synopsis of how schools evolved from providing specialised religious training in medieval times to its modern form. As key agents of socialisation many modern schools reflect the dominant framework in their structures and relationship with children.

As a social institution schools were a successful way to maintain positions of power and privilege for the aristocracy (Beare, 2002; Townsend, 2002). Ariès (1973) contends that in medieval time primary schools did not exist as elementary knowledge was taught at home or by apprenticeship. The medieval school provided specialised religious instructions for boys with little distinction and separation of the ages, “as soon as he started going to school, the child immediately entered the world of adults” (Ariès, 1973, p. 150).

It was in response to the Industrial Revolution during the 1870s and 1880s that mass compulsory attendance was introduced and led to the treatment of schooling as *the* primary source of children’s and adolescents’ life knowledge and learning (Gale & Densmore, 2000). As a result of enforced attendance children were separated from the adult population. Foucault (1980) attests the segregation of adults from children enabled children to become objects of social and administrative control. This allowed children to be further subdivided into fixed positions of age, gender and/or ability groups that facilitated the normalising systems of surveillance, timetables and examinations (Foucault, 1979). These rigid time and space restrictions regulated the quality and quantity of children’s social relations, access to and use of space and engagement of learning (Wyness, 2006b). Austin, Dwyer and Freebody (2003, p. 21) contend the primary purpose of education was acculturation and “installing and regulating a standard, administrable model of the clientele, of the child”. Adults maintained the hierarchy of control and authority in schools to morally and physically discipline the child who was expected to be obedient and subordinate (Shor, 1992; Wyness, 2006b).

Teachers efficiently transmitted a fixed, segmented curriculum to the largest number of students who learned in a linear manner and progressed through schools in a predetermined order (Beare, 2002). This knowledge-based learning meant children depended on adults to teach them information they would use in the future. Various tests and assessments promoted conformity to learning whilst measuring children's normal progress through age segregated learning stages towards a chronological endpoint (Walkerdine, 1998). Rudduck and Fielding (2006) describe that through testing competitive achievement entered schools and schools became pre-occupied with young people passing tests en-route to becoming adults. The futuristic outcomes of schooling are in the forms of access to jobs, careers and further education (Teese & Polesel, 2003). Preparation for Industrial era jobs suited this rigid learning as most workers needed little initiative.

Some ways of our world have become outmoded as the Internet has created boundary-free environments where knowledge, ideas, schooling, collaboration and commerce can occur without limitations (Warner, 2006). The Australian Council of Deans of Education (A.C.D.E.) in 2004 released a report titled, *New teaching, new learning: A vision for Australian education*. One finding from this report stated, "the idea that education is something you learn in institutions, which then prepares you for life, is no longer relevant" (p. 21). Recognising the fast paced changing world with new forms of employment appearing on a regular basis, the A.C.D.E. (2004) outlined that children and future workers need to be: flexible; autonomous; broadly knowledgeable; self-directed; good communicators; problem-solvers; independent thinkers who have multiple strategies for tackling a task. The A.C.D.E. (2004) further stated that future workers need to be able to draw on informational and human resources around them and work collaboratively within cultural and linguistic diversity. The present system needs to change as evidenced by a 1997 study by Warner, Christie and Choy (cited in Warner, 2006). This study found that nearly 70% of Australian workers-in-training and school graduates at university and TAFE were not self-directed learners.

According to the A.C.D.E. (2004) a dramatic rethinking of education systems is what is needed to produce independent and creative knowledge workers. Schools will radically need to change what it means to be an adult/child, teacher/student. Feinberg (2007) suggests that

new schools need to be horizontal where adults and children can operate on the same level within different cultural formations.

In conclusion, the effects of the dominant framework are apparent in the modern structure of schools where teachers socialise children to become adults and track individual children's development against a set of norms. Norms that were established before the Internet changed the global landscape of employment, commerce and children's access to information. Consequently, the need for adult apprenticeship is changing as the A.C.D.E. recognised. The next section discusses research related to children's experiences of the present schooling structures.

### **2.3.3. Children, power and school**

Schools today are undemocratic institutions. Qvortrup (2002) observes that collectively children within schools are generally treated equally in principle as they have to observe the same rules however, they are not treated equal to the adults in schools. Paradoxically, children are politically invisible in terms of their status in most schools even though they are the majority population (Oldman, 1994; Wyness, 2006b). Wyness (2006b) furthers this argument:

Thus, whilst schools are quintessentially children's places, there is little sense of children owning these places or having any control over how they are organised, run or structured. Despite their numerical supremacy, children in this sense conform most clearly to a social minority group. (Wyness, 2006b, p. 234)

The literature in this section highlights the dichotomy of teacher and student. It explores through research the impact of the application of the dominant framework principles on children's power and agency within schools. This section is organised into five sections: the dichotomy of teacher and student; the authority of the teacher; the teacher dictates learning; class, gender, ethnicity and children in school; and children's resistance to school. The first subsection addresses how children as the majority population in schools are positioned

contrarily against minority teachers.

#### 2.3.3.1. The dichotomy of teacher and student

This section discusses the influence of the dominant framework as the institutional identities of ‘adult teacher’ and ‘child student’ are dichotomised in schools. The explicit or covertly embedded shared beliefs and understandings that operate in schools can normalise adults’ competence and presumed superiority over children.

Devine’s (2003) mixed methodology research with Irish primary school children noted that in reference to teacher/pupil relations children were aware of their lowered rank in schools. Children commented on the lack of reciprocity with teachers having power over them as adults were entitled to move freely around the school and “boss children and control their time and space” (Devine, 2003, p. 35). Similarly, in Christensen and James’ (2001) ethnographic research in the UK children understood adults’ controlled children’s time and space directing “who to sit by, what to wear, who to talk to, when to talk, who to work with and what work to do” (Christensen & James, 2001, p. 79).

Conversely, being a child in school, “was equated with being curtailed, constrained and often not taken seriously because of their child status” (Devine, 2003, p. 115). Children’s awareness of their lowered status in the hierarchy of schools was reinforced by Osman’s (2005) Australian research where six primary school students amongst other data predominantly drew teachers as being big and themselves as being small. The children were feeling small as opposed to being physically smaller “because that is how we feel” (Osman, 2005, p. 184).

Devine (2002) found children’s uncomfortable chairs and barren playgrounds often contrasted with teachers’ access to well-equipped staffrooms and comfortable furniture. Foucault’s (1979) architectural composition of space indicates that children’s status is reflected in their limited access and use of space and resources within schools and as such adds to the dichotomy between adults and children.



This dichotomy between adults and children in schools can unite children with their peers. According to Devine (2003) peer culture in schools serves to arbitrate the pressure from constant adult scrutiny. Some children indicated that status amongst children “often stems from the degree to which they [children] are prepared to challenge adult norms and expectations” (Devine, 2003, p. 27).

In conclusion, these research studies confirm that many children were aware of the dichotomy between children and adults in school. These findings substantiate Wyness’ (1999, p. 356) proclamation that there is an unequal distribution of status and power between adults and children, “the school reflects, if not amplifies, the child’s lack of social status”. The next section discusses teachers’ authority to define expected norms.

#### 2.3.3.2. The teacher as authority

Research in this section links to the previous dichotomy of adult and child in schools by presenting ways that adults’ authority is structurally justified. Historically, adults in schools are privileged in power relations. Pradham (2007, p. 258) states that in schools, “children are expected to be compliant and meek, and to not question their teachers”.

The common finding between the following research studies is that teachers have accepted power and authority to impose restrictions on children in the form of rules and to discipline children in enforcing the rules (see Cullingford, 2007; Devine, 2003; Osler, 2000; Potter & Briggs, 2003). An Australian study by Farrell, Danby, Leiminer and Powell (2004) revealed that teachers used rules to restrict children’s social interactions, eating behaviours and bodily movements within schools.

Discipline is one way adults wield their power to maintain order that reinforces children’s “subordinate position within the social structure” (Wyness, 1999, p. 363). An Australian study by Potter and Briggs (2003) with 5-6 year old children found that children did not like being yelled at by teachers or the humiliation often associated with punishment, “these young children, even in the early days of school, felt dis-empowered, controlled by the

threats of punishment and the power of the teacher's voice" (Potter & Briggs, 2003, p. 48). Cullingford's research (2007) with primary school children concurred these findings and added that some children's compliance to rules and regulations was due to a fear of exposure in front of peers.

The power dynamics in schools meant that some children in Devine's (2003) research felt an inability to assert themselves when confronted by what they considered unfair teacher power such as – not being listened to, being unfairly punished, and being ignored by the teacher. In Osman's study (2005) children often felt that they were not given the opportunity to be heard or to tell their side of a story particularly in relation to punishment and children found it especially unfair that teachers used the lavatory when they needed it where students were required to control their bodies for adult timetables.

Osler's (2000) research on discipline with both primary and secondary students found that children wanted teachers to care more and to show greater respect by listening to students' points of view (see also Cotton & Griffiths, 2007; Devine, 2003). A project in the USA, *Through Student's Eyes*, involved high school students taking photos to represent school. Findings verified that youth wanted teachers to appreciate their realities as a starting point for building respectful relationships and content relevant to their lives (Marquez-Zenkov et al., 2007). Other research studies concurred that students wanted to be recognised as individuals with opinions and feelings and desired a quality relationship with their teachers (Fine, Torre, Burns, & Payne, 2007; Marquez-Zenkov et al., 2007; Quiroz, 2001; Smyth, 2007). This is substantiated by Devine's research (2003) where children wanted reciprocity of respect, to have a voice, to be consulted on rules, be treated fairly and they wanted teachers to have a greater understanding of what it was like to be a child.

In conclusion, teachers' accepted authority supports the binary mentality of the dominant framework by granting adults the power to restrict and regulate children's behaviour and movements. Adult authority is further accentuated by children's lack of voice in learning, which is discussed in the next section.

#### 2.3.3.3. The teacher dictates learning

Research in this subsection reinforces the dichotomy between adults and children in schools by presenting findings that validate teachers dictating children's learning. According to research by Devine (2003) and Christensen and James (2001) most children did not approve of school but accepted schooling as a part of life to help secure jobs in the future.

Learning in school is founded on competition and necessity (Cullingford, 2007) where its importance and relevance is deferred for the future (Holdsworth, 2005). The incremental age based progression of learning of the curriculum reflects developmentalism and gives the teacher the power to decide how information is administered and assessed to ensure a child's normal progress (Austin, Dwyer, & Freebody, 2003). This rigid curriculum largely ignores students' knowledge, experience and perceptions (Austin, Dwyer, & Freebody, 2003; Cook-Sather, 2006a; Fielding, 2001; Fullan, 1991; Holdsworth, 2005; Oldfather, 1995).

Thomas (2002) determines that in schools children become the responsibility of the adult teacher who regulates children, makes decisions on the children's behalf and subsequently creates a culture of dependence (Gatto, 2005). Teacher-controlled content of learning means a lot of children have little or no recourse to redress any dissatisfaction. Wyness (1999) translates children's lack of power in schools by saying:

Teachers do not appear to be any more directly accountable to the pupils in class. There are no means through which pupils are able to voice an opinion on the quality of teaching or the content of the curriculum. (p. 360)

As a final point, the futuristic learning and purpose of schools insinuates that children's lives are not valuable enough now, which exhibits the 'becoming' tenet of the dominant framework. Most children cooperate with adults in the enforcement and maintenance of norms through their shared social action in schools however, the degree to which individuals see themselves in control of their experiences in school is influenced by their class, gender and ethnicity, and this is considered next.

#### 2.3.3.4. Class, gender, ethnicity and children in school

In this section literature and research pertaining to the impact that variables such as class, gender and ethnicity have on children's subjectivity and power within schools is reviewed. These variables, distinct and yet often intersecting and cumulative, can further encumber children's position within the hierarchy of schools and their level of school success.

The schooling experience is stratified for some children when there are discontinuities between home and school experiences, values and ethos (James & James, 2008; see Connelly 2004; Willis, 1977). Graetz (1995, p. 28) states that "social background remains one of the major sources of educational inequality". Studies have elicited that highly educated parents: can be more involved with their child's education (see Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997); provide higher levels of psychological support within an environment that values the development of skills needed for success at school thereby cultivating a higher level of achievement in their children (see Williams et al, 1980; 1993); and have access to greater economic and social resources that can further increase the educational opportunities of their children (see Kaufman, 2005). Therefore, generally middle class children starting school have already learnt practices useful in the formal typically middle-class educative context of schools (see Comber & Hill, 2000; Hatcher, 2000). Comber and Hill (2000, p. 86) found that their middle-class children were quick to adapt to "the institutional ethos, culture and pedagogic routines and focus their attention on new academic learning... that makes 'playing' the game of school easier."

Conversely, some studies accentuate the limited educational opportunities for some working or low class children based on: impoverished neighbourhoods where low income families reside are often characterised by high crime and unemployment rates, and limited availability of resources such as playgrounds, parks, child care and health care facilities (see Baxter et al, 2009); low parental expectation and involvement in schooling (see Parker et al, 1999); and financial strain that limits parents' ability to "invest in a cognitively stimulating home environment, nutritious food, high-quality child care and safe living conditions" (Baxter et al, 2009, p. 24, see also Hart & Risley, 1995). Comber and Hill (2000) confirmed that children

from lower social class, where the institutionalised routines of school were disconnected from their home life, had less success in school (see also Connelly, 2004; Willis, 1977). Considine & Zappalà (2002) supported findings from previous research (see Ainley et al, 1995; Williams, 1989) that in terms of school success Australian children from low socioeconomic status families are more likely to: have lower literacy, numeracy and comprehension levels; leave school early; are less likely to attend university; exhibit higher levels of problematic school behaviour (e.g. truancy); are less likely to study specialized maths and science subjects; are more likely to have difficulties with their studies and display negative attitudes to school; have less successful school to labour market transitions. In Ireland Travers' (2010) concurred that there was disproportionate access to learning support and achievement in mathematics for children at disadvantaged schools.

A possible explanation for children from lower classes having less school success is provided by Wyness (1999) who observes that in deprived classrooms and schools the priority is for the teacher to maintain order and keep the children occupied and busy. Linked to this Ruge (1998) found that teachers often hold low expectations of working class students, which compound the low expectations students and their parents may also hold. In the USA, Darling-Hammond (2004) extends this discriminatory notion, observing that Black and Hispanic students are more likely than white students to be tracked into vocational, remedial, or general education classes, disciplined for showing lack of respect, and punished using harsh methods such as school suspension or expulsion. Black and Hispanic children are more likely to attend racially and economically segregated schools that suffer from overcrowded classrooms, outdated books and supplies, and fewer highly-qualified teachers (see Darling-Hammond 2004).

Interlocking with the class variable is gender differences in schools. Gender differences in schools can relate to behavioural expectation and/or educational performance between boys and girls. Devine (2003) found that girls felt they received less attention than the boys and that boys were reprimanded more than girls. Interviews with teachers confirmed that boys were thought of as more dominant and challenging, whilst girls were perceived to be a “more homogenous group who typically tended to please, work well and stay out of trouble”

(Devine, 2003, p. 18). Research by Pusser and McCandless (1974) found that social adjustment and success in school was related to verbal facility in both boys and girls. However, they claimed that teachers' tolerance of boys' aggressive and spontaneous behaviour in pre-school meant that boys had a harder time acclimatising to the rigid culture of school. Therapist, Gurian (1998) claims that regimented school learning that requires boys to sit still, listen and put up their hands is distorting and making defective normal, testosterone fuelled action for boys.

In Australia, "boys are being constructed as the 'new disadvantaged'" (Foster, Kimmel, & Skelton, 2001, p. 7). Buckingham (1999) determined that boys suffer an educational disadvantage relative to girls, especially in terms of performance in literacy and foreign language learning in Ireland (see Murphy, 2010). Some possible explanations for this gender gap included: biological differences; gender biases (e.g. reading being seen as 'not masculine'); teaching, curricula and assessment; and socioeconomic factors (Buckingham, 1999). Teese et al. (1995) noted that girls have been found to outperform boys within high or low socioeconomic groups, whereas the performance of boys deteriorates more rapidly than the performance of girls as they move down the socioeconomic scale.

For students of differing ethnicity the alien classroom culture and the English idiom, or dialect of the elite used in classrooms can be foreign to most of them (Shor, 1992). In Australia some first-generation immigrant parents (e.g. Cubans, Vietnamese) viewed education as a key means of upward mobility for their children and supported the school culture (Considine & Zappalà, 2002). This has resulted in the second generation (especially European, Indian and Chinese origin) achieving substantial educational mobility (in terms of staying on at school) compared to those from British, German, Dutch and Australian origin (Birrell and Khoo, 1995). As a consequence, higher percentages of children from non-English speaking background achieve tertiary qualifications compared to those from English-speaking background (Birrell and Khoo, 1995).

On the contrary, in the USA Quiroz (2001) asserts that by high school some Latino children blame the school for their academic failure. Some students resented that white teachers treated

Hispanics differently, often ignoring them and thwarting the students' aspirations and engagement with school. Subsequently, Latino youth had immature career plans focussing on materialism and fame dominated by 'wanting to be somebody' rather than skills needed or intrinsic value of an occupation. Quiroz (2001) describes the alienating and stressful experiences of schooling for some children from this ethnic minority:

The high school experiences portrayed by these Latino students (failing tests, being placed in low-ability tracks, criticism by staff, and socially distant or indifferent teachers or counsellors), were generally so negative that it was difficult for them to tolerate the punishing aspects of schooling, particularly when the rewards of school were seldom acquired. (p. 344)

Children's class, gender and ethnicity can influence their perspectives, attitudes and options within the school system. Magill's (2005) study found that minority group members, individuals of lower class situation, and women were more likely to make external attributions of control. That is, these people viewed the direct result of their behaviour as attributed to something outside themselves like luck, chance, fate, or the influence of powerful others. Magill (2005) noted that individuals who experience inequality along multiple dimensions demonstrate greater externality than those who are in positions of relative advantage. This finding lends support to the results from Willis' (1977) study with working class 'lads' who felt that no matter how hard they tried they would not necessarily 'succeed' in school thereby, resigning themselves to their working-class status and working-class jobs.

Ostensibly, children receive the same education and yet not all children achieve the same educational opportunities or degrees of success. Children's unique location within the social variables of class, gender and race affects their status and power within schools in varying degrees and interactions. Some children circumvent their family circumstances and acclimatise to the dominant culture in schools whilst other children's social positioning has become an active process of constant negotiation whereby power and agency may or may not unite in conformity. The reasons some children may choose to resist conformity is discussed next.

### 2.3.3.5. Children’s resistance to schools

Literature in this section presents statistics and research that indicates some children can and do resist their social positioning within the schooling structure by disengaging or dropping out of school. Giroux (1996) made a distinction between delinquency and youth resistance with youth resistance being a conscious critique of one’s circumstances. This notion of resistance will be explored and is captured in the following remark:

There is a willfulness, even an anarchy, that the agency of childhood emits which resists containment and control through intelligibility. (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998, p. 9)

Prensky (2005) identifies three categories of children in schools; those who love school and work hard; those who do not enjoy school and work hard for future rewards; and those who resist schools. Basically “students give up, give in, or get out” (Quiroz, 2001, p. 344). Table 2 combines Prensky’s types of students with suggested ways children in these groups may use their agency and power in schools.

<b>Type of student</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Children’s agency and power</b>
Diligent student	Values and enjoys school	Happily conforms to school norms
Play the game of school	Feels disconnected from the content and sees the value in passing grades	Chooses to conform to school norms
Disengaged student	Can see no present or future relevance of school to their lives	Resists conforming to school norms through disruptive behaviour, truancy or dropping out

Table 2: Types of students’ agency in schools (adapted from Prensky, 2005)

Some students resist conformity in unconventional or conventional ways as Prensky (2005) identifies. This idea is linked to Erickson’s (1987) depiction of students constructing oppositional identities to symbolise their dissatisfaction:



The student becomes either actively resistant – seen as salient and incorrigible – or passively resistant – fading into the woodwork as an anonymous well-behaved, low-achieving student (p. 291).

Some students resist the socially constructed norms that value school attendance as beneficial for them by refusing to attend (Stroobant & Jones, 2006). Fullan (1991, p. 182) found from his research that “as students move through the grades from elementary to secondary, they become increasingly bored and alienated from school”. Recent statistics reveal that students are ‘dropping out’ of high school at alarming rates of about 30-40% in the USA and most western countries (Smyth, 2006a) and as high as 50% in urban areas (Marquez-Zenkov et al., 2007). In Australia, retention rates of students in years 11 and 12 have plunged from 90% in 1992-1993 to float in the high 50-60% (Smyth & Hattam, 2002, p. 375).

Stroobant and Jones’ (2006) research with adults who had refused to go to school as teenagers found that some of the participants had intentionally sought to outwit the schooling system. By not attending school truants are positioned as not accepting adult authority and are deemed less likely to conform to the school social apprenticeship model from the dominant framework (Wyness, 2006b).

Some students resist conformity in schools by disengaging. According to Cothran and Ennis (2000, p. 286) nearly two-thirds of the high school population in the USA are “disengaged” (Cothran & Ennis, 2000, p. 286). Disengagement for students is a political decision to resist or withdraw their assent to learning what teachers and administrators want them to learn and to the institutional identities of being a good student (Erickson, 1987). In the USA, Fordham & Ogbu (1986, p. 201) found that some African American students felt schooling was a “one – way acculturation” and as such viewed success at school as trying to ‘act white’ thereby their resistance was a way of choosing their own cultural identity veracity. Smyth (2006a) qualified this process of conforming in schools:

Succeeding at school, for many students, means having to suppress their own identities and act within a narrowly defined and institutionalised view of what it means to be a 'good' student. (p. 290)

The alienating learning environment means some students have to adapt, conform to succeed or at best cope (Thiessen, 2006). Even top-students can be seen to be suffering due to pressure of constantly achieving high marks where they even risk disengaging because of the lack of joy in learning (Angus, 2006). In Devine's research (2003), middle class children saw the long-term benefits of education and were most likely to comply and be subordinate with teachers, whereas working class children actively resisted teacher authority through misbehaviour and inattentiveness. These findings consolidate Willis' (1977) earlier study of the working class 'lads' in the UK who subverted the authority of the teacher through a variety of strategies. Smyth and Hattam's (2004) longitudinal research with early school leavers found that many students hated school uniforms as a sign of conformity, "because their appearance was so central to the performance of their identity" (Smyth & Hattam, 2004, p. 76).

According to theories of socialisation, a child's deviance or breaching of adult norms indicates inadequate socialisation and reflects badly on the adults whose responsibility they are (Wyness, 2006b). Therefore, it makes sense that adults "bemoan the unruliness of children and blame it on lack of discipline, a lack of moral uprightness" (Hart, 1997, p. 187). In response adults have instigated more rigorous controls and more punitive testing, resulting in schools becoming more bureaucratic and more adult centred (Wyness, 1999).

To sum up, being the minority population, with the majority of power it is in teacher's best interests to ensure children's compliance through discipline, testing and rigid learning. However, not all children conform to the structures and social positioning in schools and some use their agency to actively resist being constrained by disengaging or dropping out. In contrast, the next section of literature addresses the new sociology of childhood that provides a new lens for viewing children and childhood.

## **2.4. New sociology of childhood**

The new sociology of childhood is an evolving way of viewing children and childhood. The literature in this section explicates the growth of a new paradigm in the sociology of childhood. It begins with brief outlines of critical discourses of childhood that explore the evolution, influence and understanding of the new sociology of childhood including: feminist, generational, Marxist and modern perspectives. Next the tenets of the new sociology are outlined emphasising how structure and agency mutually produce each other with a focus on children as researchers. Finally, the student voice movement is presented as embodiments of the tenets from the new sociology of childhood.

### **2.4.1. Critical discourses of childhood**

The new sociology of childhood framework is built around structuralisation and social constructivist approaches and allows for a broader representation of children beyond the narrow developmental frameworks that had persisted in sociology. Structural sociology views childhood and children as having a permanent position within the social structure (Qvortrup, 1994). Social constructivism argues that childhood should be understood as a historical, cultural and cultural phenomenon as “social reality is not fixed, constant or unitary” (Prout & James, 1997, p. 15).

Qvortrup (2002) attests that as a structural form, childhood is not confined to a particular child or age distinction instead it is concerned with the status of children in relation to the more dominant groups in society and the life conditions of children as a collective entity. Critical discourses like feminism, generational and Marxist perspectives parallel childhood with the notions of gender, age and class in explaining power within social structures. These discourses, discussed next, opened the door in sociology for applying new ways of viewing childhood to emerge, like the new sociology of childhood.

#### **2.4.1.1. Feminist, generational and Marxist perspectives of childhood**

Applying feminist, generational and Marxist perspectives allows us to cogitate how children are structurally differentiated within societies, particularly in institutions where power is

experienced. Feminism and generational perspectives help us explain how power operates in children's lives by positioning childhood as a distinct minority social group whereas Marxism as a theoretical frame enables us to consider childhood as a social class.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (U.N.C.R.C.) has been ratified by over 191 countries and reinforces the status of childhood as a unique social and minority group within society (United Nations, 1989). These rights are grouped under four categories: provision rights, prevention rights, protection rights and participation rights. Articles 12 and 13 stipulate that children should be consulted on issues that affect them. Lee (2001) contends that article 12 adds to adults' potential ambivalence towards children's capability to speak for themselves by stipulating that the weight of children's words be moderated depending on their 'age and maturity'. Irrespective of children's perceived competence, adults are accorded the power to act with the child's best intentions when considering a child's welfare, care and protection (United Nations, 1989). Wyness (2006a) cautions that children exercising these rights can politically threaten the paternalistic and protective roles of adults (Wyness, 2006b). Feminism and generational perspectives provide some pertinent arguments for and against this stance.

Some feminists limit the possible correlations between women and children due to the absence of patriarchy (see Hood-Willams, 1990) or lack of children's ontology through minority-group action (see Oakley, 1994). Other feminists have drawn parallels between women and children as historically men acted for women's best interests much like adults have the responsibility to decide what is in children's best interests (see Franklin & Franklin, 1996; Hood-Willams, 1990; Morrow, 1996; Thorne, 1987). This thinking highlights women and children's perceived incompetence in comparison to men and adults alike. Lee (2001) notes that this incompetence implies children cannot control themselves due to their alleged deficiencies.

Similar arguments are found when considering generational perspectives of childhood. Alanan (2001) describes that generational distinctions construct relationships that define social positions relative to each other. The popular definition of childhood as internationally

agreed in the U.N.C.R.C. is the period from birth to the age of eighteen where age is the determining factor (United Nations, 1989). Adults have imposed age-related boundaries in regards to children's perceived ability to be sexually, criminally and legally responsible members of society. Mayall (2001), Qvortrup (1997b, 2002) and Wyness (2006b) claim that children's marginalisation in society based on age can take the form of denied access to: physical environments; representation in social reporting as statistically children are a hidden category as they are classified as dependents; remuneration where their activities are not deemed to have economic worth; and legislation where they have the status of minors. This translates in reality to adults defining and organising children's lives based on adults' perceived competence in society (see Austin, Dwyer, & Freebody, 2003; Jenks, 1996; Mason, 2005; Mayall, 2000; Punch, 2002; Qvortrup, 2002). Reducing children to an age category reinforces adults' competence and children's inferiority where the only means for children to gain autonomy and status is to grow up and become an adult (Näsman, 1994).

Marxist theories were not related to children specifically, however the idea of class and power has implications for how schools serve adults' interests. Oldman (1994) emphasises that childhood can be categorised as a social class. He argues that adults as the dominant class economically exploit the activities of children by controlling and organising children's activities that create "childwork" (Oldman, 1994, p. 45) or employment that involves non-family adults looking after children. He attests that schools as such are set up to make children manageable for teachers rather than providing opportunities for the self-capitalisation of each child. That is, schools limit children's agency and like other silenced and marginalised groups in society, need to be recognised and reinserted in to the public domain.

To summarise, childhood is a permanent social structure of society and as such is influenced by relations to other social variables such as gender, age and class. Each critical perspective offered different reasons for adults having benevolent power over children. However, feminism changed the dominant ideology as a result of women's experiences becoming more trustworthy than socially accepted standards (Lee, 2001). Similar to women, children are

“active beings with a consciousness awaiting mobilisation” (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998, p. 212).

For the new sociology of childhood to achieve similar triumphs as feminism and change the position of children within society, there needs to be evidence of children’s experience that counter it. Evidence of children’s ‘experience’ is captured through data about children that highlights children’s agency now (children operating as researchers is discussed in section 2.4.2.2.). Therefore, like feminism, the task would be for adults to see children’s experience and support their agency in order to recognise that children contribute to creating and shaping society. The next section adds another dimension to the critical discourses of childhood by asserting that as society changes so to have the boundaries between adulthood and childhood.

#### 2.4.1.2. Technology in society and its influence on modern sociology

This subsection presents modern sociological arguments that disrupt the dominant framework by discussing the technological changes in society that are destabilising the once rigid boundaries of the adult-child dichotomy.

The Internet is at the forefront of the recent rise in new technologies that is globalising the landscape of modern society and fuelling a generation divide. Lee (2001) and Prout (2005) believe that in this age of rapid change and uncertainty adulthood and childhood have become more complex, hybrid, networked, ambivalent and variable. Lee (2001) reasons that the once rigid boundaries between adults and children are now fluid as the endpoint of socialisation - adulthood has become destabilised. Consequently, the dominant framework that has made sense of childhood by deferring to the certainty and stability of adulthood through the binary assumption of children ‘becoming’ versus adult ‘being’ is being challenged.

Traditionally, children’s status as ‘becoming’ indicated irrationality, changeable and incomplete persons where adults’ ‘being’ on the flip side represented stable, complete, and independent humans (Lee, 2001). This matched adults’ generally predictable lives in society at that time with job and family stability. Prout (2005) articulates that in recent times adults’ lives have become unpredictable due to globalisation, changes in family structures with

blended families, high divorce rates and changing employment structures where adults 'reskill' for different occupations. These changes "have made the 'unfinished' character of adult lives as visible as those of children" (Prout, 2005, p. 66). Wyness (2006b) extends this thought by stipulating that a prevalent theme in contemporary western society is that childhood is in a crisis of representation due to the perceived weakening of families, schools and the welfare state to regulate and control children. The central aspect of the crisis is a perceived breakdown of generational boundaries.

For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century most of adults' fundamental aspects and experiences of growing up were still valid to children, whereas "this new digital world has rendered much of what adults experienced as children disconnected and inapplicable to the world of modern kids" (Jukes, McCain, & Crockett, 2010, p. 10). A study of 751 families by the Australian Communications and Media Authority found the average Australian family household in 2007 had the following: three mobile phones (one with advanced features like the Internet and two without); three televisions; two computers; two DVD players; two portable MP3/MP4 players; one VCR; one game console that connects to a television; and one hand-held game console. The biggest change since 1995 was that family households with Internet connections have increased from seven per cent in 1995 to ninety-one per cent in 2007. This study also included daily time-use diaries for 1003 children aged 8-17 years that revealed the Internet and digital media now has a very significant place in children's lives with children spending on average one hour and seventeen minutes online and a total of four hours and forty-nine minutes spent using electronic media/communications daily (A.C.M.A., 2007, p. 63). More recently, in the USA children's daily media consumption is seven hours and thirty-eight minutes with two hours and seven minutes (20%) of media consumption occurring on mobile devices, such as cell phones, iPods or handheld video game players (Rideout, Foehr & Roberts, 2010).

Young children are increasingly surrounded by language sculpted by digital media. A recent study (see Blanchard & Moore, 2010) found that this process of immersion has implications for the way these three to five year olds' neural circuitry learns to speak, listen, read, and write (Small & Vorgan, 2008). Small and Vorgan (2008) also found that youth have different experiences and acceptance for technology that concurred with Willis' et al (2006)

assertion that children raised with the computer think differently from the older generations by developing hypertext minds with parallel cognitive structures. Such neurological research vindicates that children and youth develop different parts of their brain as a result of continuous repetition offered in computer games and digital media (see Herther, 2009). Jukes, McCain and Crockett (2010) agree that children today are unlike children from previous generations:

Children today are fundamentally different in the way they think; the way they access, absorb, interpret, process, and use information; and in the way they view, interact, and communicate in the modern world-and that these differences are due in large part to their experiences with digital technologies. (Jukes, McCain, & Crockett, 2010, p. 20).

Young people use interactive mediums of communication and are superimposing their culture on the rest of society as “a force for social transformation” (Tapscott, 1998, p. 2). Modern children are “developing their own web sites, diaries, and blogs; launching their own online enterprises and forging a new set of cultural practices” (Montgomery, 2007, p. 2). Young people are seizing power using the Internet and cell phones to organise ‘smart mob’ activism campaigns against the powers that be (Montgomery, 2007). Online spaces, such as blogs, games, websites, and message boards, enable children who had been excluded from certain adult realms “access to discussions and debates that were previously off limits to them, challenging traditional hierarchies and social orders” (Weber & Dixon, 2007, p. 254).

For children the Internet and the new communication and information tools empowers them to create content and become part of virtual communities with particular identities or online persona (Haythornthwaite & Nielsen, 2007). One primary benefit of the Internet for children is that “the Internet makes it possible for children and teens to interact on an equal footing with adults in a virtual environment where one’s identity and age can be kept secret” (Montgomery, 2007, p. 212). A study of six hundred 9-18 year olds found that 50% of those who used the Internet had pretended to be somebody else while communicating by e-mail, instant messaging (IM) or chat (see Valkenburg, Schouten & Peter, 2005). The most important motive to engage in Internet-based identity experiments was self-exploration (i.e.



to explore how others react), followed by social compensation (i.e. to overcome shyness) and social facilitation (i.e. to facilitate relationship-formation) (Valkenburg, Schouten & Peter, 2005). This social nature of technology with virtual communities, makes children “conform to values, rules and norms that defy those traditionally heralded in schools” (C.E.R.I., 2008, p. 19).

Prensky (2001) accentuates the divide between children and adults by using phrases such as ‘digital natives’ and ‘digital immigrants’. Digital natives are people who grew up with digital technology from birth and whose experience of technology is native and natural. Digital immigrants are adults who were born before the Internet became main-stream and who retain part of their old world print dominated accent when interacting with new technologies. Bennett, Maton and Kervin (2008, p. 779) dispute the ‘digital native’ presumption that a whole generation of children are adept users of technology and conclude, “there is as much variation *within* the digital native generation as *between* the generations” (emphasis in original). Prensky (2001, p. 1) notes that more than simply children changing clothes or styles these technological experiences have caused “a really big *discontinuity*” between generations (emphasis in original). This discontinuity between generations becomes apparent as a recent poll in the USA showed that there is now the largest generation gap in values between young and older Americans, not seen since divisions over Vietnam, civil rights and women’s liberation (Pew Research Centre, 2009).

These shifts in socio-technical developments in communication and an increased awareness of the diversity of childhood have fragmented once stable notions of what childhood is and what it should be (Buckingham, 2000). Writers such as Postman (1982, 1994), Elkind (1981) and McDonnell (2000, 2005) proclaim that childhood is ‘disappearing’ as electronic media corrodes the boundary between adults and child. The blurring of boundaries is evident when computer games are considered to be children’s or young people’s medium however, results from Entertainment Software Association research that indicated the average age of game players is now 30 years (Buckingham, 2006). Not all electronic media are games as the Internet information ‘superhighways’ can also push children into the adult world at a younger age whilst bringing previously filtered world events into their lives (Tucci, Mitchell, & Goddard, 2006). As the “protective walled garden of childhood”

(McDonnell, 2005, p. 190) has crumbled children are reaching psychological maturity earlier than previous generations (Atweh, Christensen, & Dornan, 1998). Hence old ways of relating between adults and children may no longer be relevant.

There is a disjuncture between the more traditional view of childhood linked to the frequently institutionalised and controlled reality of childhood imposed by adults and children's autonomy, freedom and opportunities in the digital world. There is now a tension between children's dependency and independence in relation to adulthood. It could be argued that children's agency can no longer be confined to age-based scientific norms that were constructed before the Internet and other electronic media equalised the playing field between adults and children (see Small & Vorgan, 2008).

Therefore, Lee (2001) concludes that as the clear divisions between adulthood and childhood are eroded adulthood is no longer reliable to calibrate childhood. The implication of this is that within society new understandings of contemporary relations between adults and children need to develop. It was within this climate of change in the social order that the new sociology of childhood emerged. It provides new ideas of children 'becoming' that position children as social beings in parity with adults who are contributing to and being sculpted by this changing world. The next section expands the principles of the new sociology of childhood.

#### **2.4.2. Tenets of the new sociology of childhood**

This literature will summarise the tenets of the new sociology of childhood and demonstrate how structure and agency as key pillars of this approach mutually support a particular stance or outcome.

There are six key areas to consider when applying the new paradigm in the sociology of childhood as summarised by Prout and James (1997):

1. Childhood is understood as a social construction. As such it provides an interpretive frame for contextualising the early years of human life. Childhood, as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor

universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies.

2. Childhood is a variable of social analysis. It can never be divorced from other variables such as class, gender, or ethnicity. Comparative and cross-cultural analysis reveals a variety of childhoods rather than a single and universal phenomenon.
3. Children's social relationships are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspective and concerns of adults.
4. Children must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just passive subjects of social structures and processes.
5. Ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood. It allows children a more direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data than is usually possible through experimental or survey styles of research.
6. Childhood is a phenomenon in relation to which the double hermeneutic of the social sciences is acutely present. That is to say to proclaim a new paradigm of childhood of sociology is also to engage in and respond to the process of reconstructing childhood in society. (Prout & James, 1997, p. 8)

The new sociology of childhood approach supports a view that children are their own cultural group, are considered ontologically complete as unique human beings and are active social agents in the construction and determination of their own lives (Cocks, 2006; Danby & Farrell, 2004; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Pradham, 2007; Thomas, 2002; Wyness, 2000). The new sociology framework also approaches childhood by exploring how dichotomies like being and becoming, structure and agency relationally produce each other within the plurality of childhoods that coexist and overlap. The next section explores structure and agency as the two key pillars of the new sociology of childhood literature.

#### 2.4.2.1. Structure and agency

Informed by Giddens's theory of structuration (1984), the new sociology approach to understanding childhood views structure and agency as intertwined, mutually supporting each other in children's lives. Children's agency is recognised as occurring within and upon social structures and societal structures are viewed as influencing children's agency (Giddens, 1984; Prout & James, 1997). Structures consist of micro or macro institutions, practices or policies that regulate large-scale patterning of childhood, human action and relationships in a society (Giddens, 1993). Agency is the ability to initiate action of choice, reflected as creative production where people's activity can be a source of change (Prout & James, 1997) Recognising children's agency means seeing children as capable of independent interpretation and action (Lee, 2001). Wyness (2006b) furthers this understanding by saying:

Agency does not simply liberate children. It opens up possibilities for hearing children, consulting and working with children and creating new spaces for children's contributions. (p. 236)

The new sociology of childhood advocates that there are two interrelated arenas where the reciprocal nature of structure and agency are highlighted – within the structure of childhood itself and within established institutions. Both relate to the philosophy behind this study.

The new sociology of childhood positions childhood as a permanent macro-level structure of society whose membership is transient (Corsaro, 2000; Qvortrup, 1994, 2002; Wyness, 2006b). This means that childhood like other social variables such as gender, race, class and ethnicity are constructed in the processes of action or agency and subject to the same societal forces as adulthood (Qvortrup, 1994). So children's active participation in society influences the way people socially structure childhood and the way society constructs childhood and shapes children's agency (see historical constructions of childhood, section 2.2). From this perspective through their relationships within the social systems childhood "is both constructed and reconstructed both for children and by children" (Prout & James, 1997, p. 7).

Children taking up agency through the Internet and digital technology is changing the structure of childhood. Children embrace modern technologies for the opportunities they offer for action, creativity, self-determination as children learn, play, engage socially and explore their world. Being more digitally literate than their parents these technologically savvy children are superimposing their culture on the rest of society as Tapscott (1998, p. 2) states, “they are a force for social transformation”. For example, young people are seizing power using the Internet and cell phones to organise ‘smart mob’ activism campaigns against the powers that be (Montgomery, 2007). Modern children are “developing their own web sites, diaries, and blogs; launching their own online enterprises and forging a new set of cultural practices” (Montgomery, 2007, p. 2). Hoikkala (2004, cited in Buckingham, 2006) promotes the idea of reverse socialisation where young people may socialise their parents to cope with social change particularly around technology. As children’s freedom of agency afforded by digital technologies expands adults have developed new structures to tighten control of children (Wyness, 2006b). Surveillance technologies such as small GPS trackers and new mobile phone trackers that send a beep to an adult phone every time a child steps out of their prescribed boundaries (Hadgraft, 2008) are examples of this control. These examples point out that as structures change so too does children’s agency and as children’s agency changes so does structures.

The new sociology of childhood investigates the extent to which children are allowed to be competent within certain social and institutional structures. This approach describes childhood in a space and time and looks for links between the largely adult defined institutions or structures and children’s cultures within these structures that children create for themselves (Prout & James, 1997). Therefore children’s agency is constrained or enabled by the institution and yet acting as agents within it, impact upon the structure (Prout & James, 1997). Adding to this Qvortrup (1997a) attests that “people make their own history, but I am also convinced that Marx was right in adding that they don’t always do that under circumstances of their choosing” (Qvortrup, 1997a, p. 1). Children may not be able to choose the boundaries they have to abide by, yet they can choose the way they use their agency within each circumstance. Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (1998, p. 21) further comment that even though

children are subject to institutional knowledge and practices, children “deploy their own knowledge of institutional regimes to create spaces of autonomy and even resistance”.

Adults can use rules to constrain the activities of children however, it is children’s appropriation of these rules in light of their own agenda that represents ways that children can exercise a form of power over adults and construct their own peer culture (Corsaro, 2005; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). Corsaro’s (2005) ethnographic research with children in a preschool setting found children collaboratively produced ‘secondary adjustments’ to test rules, such as concealment strategies to evade the rule that prohibited toys from home being brought to preschool. In response teachers often engaged in their own type of secondary adjustment by only selectively enforcing the rule. In this light children were not passive recipients of adult culture as the children “negotiate, share and create culture with adults and each other” (Corsaro, 1997, p. 18). Hence, in effect these children as social agents are co-constructing childhood through their creative peer culture and their negotiations with adults.

The new sociology of childhood epistemologically contrasts the dominant framework by studying real children and their living experiences of being a child in the social world acting upon and constrained by the structural and interactional frameworks in modern life. From this vantage point children are “considered *as* children rather than as apprentice adults, are just as mature, rational, competent and social as adults” (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998, p.17). McDonald (2007) provides a compelling argument for adults considering children’s present activities. She states:

Children have the rights to human self-realisation as *children*, not as embryonic adults. Such futurity has the capacity to render us deaf and blind to issues experienced in the present *and* their impact in the present (much less the future). The present is, in effect, a hostage to the future – a future imagined by adults and imposed on the present of the daily lives of children. (McDonald, 2007, p. 6, italics in original)

Research with children and by children is needed to discover the ways in which society and social structures shape children’s experiences today (see section 2.4.1.). The next section explores children operating as researchers as one way to collect data on children’s experiences so that adults can understand children’s presence in the present.

#### 2.4.2.2. Children as researchers

This literature discusses the role that researching with or by children can play in adults’ understanding children’s worlds and links to the research methodology of this study (see sections 3.3.2. and 3.3.3.).

The positioning of children within research has changed almost concurrently with the development of different constructs of childhood. The model of participation developed by Mason and Urquhart (2001) is applicable to this study as it considers the dynamics of power that can occur between adults and children when children are involved in research (see Table 3). Jipson and Jipson (2003, p. 169) caution that irrespective of how children are positioned within the research design adult researchers may have an “inherent positional power and status [that] can readily overwhelm and subvert children’s understanding of their own experience and agency”.

	<b>Adultist</b>	<b>Children’s Rights</b>	<b>Children’s Movements</b>
Initiation of participation strategy	External statutory agency	External statutory agency	Children
Ideological framework	Positivist	Phenomenological/constructivist	Minority rights
Children viewed as	Developmentally incomplete ‘becomings’, incompetent	Actors, competent, ‘beings’ oppressed	Actors, competent, human beings
Locus of power	Adults - asymmetrical	Symmetrical	Children empowered
Needs identification	Normative from psychological literature	Individualised, from listening to children	Asserted both as a group and individually
Method of decision making	Adults structure procedures	Negotiation between stakeholders	Children dominate
Knowledge	Adult authority	Opportunity for children to shape and contribute	Children experts on own lives
Professionals	Superiority of expertise	Facilitate through alliances	Provide resources
Children’s voices	Filtered	Reflexivity means children’s voices being heard	Challenge and unsettle adults

Table 3: Models of children’s participation (adapted from Mason & Urquhart, 2001, p. 17)

Typical of research in the seventies and eighties, research was *on* children. The ‘adultist’ model (Table 3) represents this where boundaries and decisions are made by adults who use coercion and control to oppress the opinions of children (Malone, 2006; Mason & Urquhart, 2001). Developmentalism and Piaget’s scientific research (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Wadsworth, 2004) with children and the resulting norms are good examples of this model. In this model adult authority is imposed on the child through the choice of research activities and interpretation, analysis and representation of research data (Jipson & Jipson, 2003).

The focus of research in the late eighties and early nineties was *with* children (Malone, 2006) fuelled by the ‘children’s rights’ model of participation (see Table 3). In this model adults take a leadership role and children are regarded as competent and capable of contributing to decision-making in relation to their age. Power is negotiated resulting in a desire to balance the power between the researcher and the children (Mason & Urquhart, 2001). Children operating as researchers utilise their agency as social actors to access other children’s experiences “from inside the student cultures within their schools... that are not easily available to their teachers or outside researchers” (Bland & Atweh, 2007, p. 342). My study specifically employed the children’s rights model of participation in order to share power and negotiate aspects of the research design with the co-researchers.

One example of the children’s rights model is Fielding’s (2001) collaborative research project in the UK, known as *Students as Researchers*. Children as researchers became co-constructors of knowledge and understandings who discovered a range of solutions and acted on them (see Oldfather, 1995; Soo-Hoo, 1993). This student-lead research guided the emergence of new directorial arrangements that include students as equal partners in the development of curriculum renewal through dialogic democracy. Fielding (2001) noted as a result of the project:

Structural change seems to have followed from cultural changes in attitudes to students, changes brought about through the students’ capacity both to demonstrate the quality of their research and to identify and articulate



insights into curriculum practices and curriculum models in ways which were not forthcoming from teaching staff. (Fielding, 2001, p. 129)

Another example of the ‘children’s right’ model was Mitra’s (2006) research that compared the effectiveness of student-led school based inquiry from within a school and from outside the school. Findings concluded that the student groups who had the most alliances outside of the school were the most effective in pressuring school administration to change whereas the groups that operated within the school cooperated with teachers in improving student-teacher relationships (Mitra, 2006). A final example was the “*Stressed-out students*” project that was different to the other studies as it involved only one student consulting with the principal, one teacher, one parent and an outside coach (Osberg, Pope, & Galloway, 2006).

The ‘children’s movements’ model (see Table 3) of participation relates to research initiated *by* children where children are regarded as “powerful experts and negotiators and who through their own self-initiated projects are able to make decisions about all aspects of research” (Malone, 2006, p. 1). In this model the students as researchers direct the issues to be investigated, shape the pace, pattern and subject of research and develop skills in research (Fielding, 2004). One difficulty in including students as researchers, particularly the ‘children’s movement’ is that some university ethics departments require adult permission to include children and specific planning of the proposed research. The closest example of children’s movement research was Bland and Atweh’s (2007) *The Student Action Research for University Access* (SARUA) project in Brisbane. In a three-stage research process, marginalised secondary school students identified local barriers to positive educational outcomes and then devised school-based research projects, implemented and evaluated action.

In conclusion, the new sociology of childhood is congruent with a view of research with and by children that supports and values children’s present experiences and actions from children. The next section of literature further develops a case for how agency in schools has been given some credibility through the student voice movement.

### **2.4.3. Student Voice Movement**

Literature in this subsection applies the principles of the new sociology of childhood to schooling and is organised into two sections - children's decision-making in schools and children's decision-making in class. This literature investigates how schools are structured to constrain and/or expand children's agency, equated here with having a voice.

Some educationalists argue that schools have evolved over two centuries without taking into account the voices of students (Arnot et al., 2004; Cook-Sather, 2002). Supporters of the student voice movement (Cook-Sather, 2006a; Erickson, 1987; Fielding, 2001, 2004, 2006; Fullan, 2001; Leren, 2006; Mitra, 2006; Osberg, Pope, & Galloway, 2006; Smyth, 2006a, 2006b) assert that children have been discriminated against within schools. The student voice movement promotes the participation rights of every child to be included in decisions that affect them within schools (United Nations, 1989). They assert that children should be given opportunities to not only voice their opinions but be authentically included in decision-making within their classrooms, schools and the broader context of educational policies and practices in order to create change from within schools with adults (Cook-Sather, 2006b; Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2006).

According to researchers, adults and teachers need to understand there is not one single student voice that represents all children's ages, situations, cultures and backgrounds (Burke, 2007; Cook-Sather, 2007; Ellsworth, 1992). McArdle and Mansfield (2007, p. 496) attest the term voice "expresses personality, experience, cultural identity, history" and is influenced by both individual and collective history and class (see section 2.2.). A person's voice as a form of agency cannot be separated from the context or structure in which it is created including the power relations within a particular school (Arnot & Reay, 2007).

Historically, adults in schools are privileged in power relations and this disparity in status between pupils and teachers means students may not even know they have a voice, are denied voices or their voices are ignored or suppressed (Lincoln, 1995; McLaren, 2003). If children find their voices younger children could be anxious about speaking up by not wanting to be 'rude' to an adult whilst older children may fear retribution (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). For

children, contends John (2003, p. 52) “being totally ignored is the ultimate in powerlessness: it means one does not count, that one’s existence is immaterial”. Supporters of the student voice movement aim to move beyond acknowledging children’s existence in schools to granting children power and responsibility in decision-making. This is discussed further in the next section.

#### 2.4.3.1. Children’s decision-making in schools

The literature in this section explores how and why children have been included and excluded in decision-making within some school structures.

Supporters of the student voice movement aim to build school organisation, culture and leadership that acknowledges and includes students’ realities and power authentically in decision-making (Levin, 2000; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000; Smyth, 2006a, 2006b). This inclusion of children in the student voice movement is about moving beyond isolated consultations (see Flutter, 2006) to children becoming an integral part of a school’s decision-making structure (Crick, 1998; Holdsworth, 2005; Osberg, Pope, & Galloway, 2006; Sinclair, 2004).

According to a number of student voice advocates, consulting students through student representative councils (SRC) or including students on governing bodies is becoming more commonplace (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Rudduck & Flutter, 2004) however, opportunities for children to be seriously included in whole school reform are rare (Bland & Atweh, 2007). Results from the *Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study* in England indicated that most school leaders agreed they were modelling democratic values and processes in their schools through school councils (Kerr et al, 2003). Over three-quarters of school leaders (80 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that the whole school was involved in discussions and decision making. Yet, there was a disparity in reality with more than half of all students (52 per cent) agreeing that students have *little* say in how their schools are organised and run and less than one third of students (27 per cent) felt they were consulted when school policies were being developed (Kerr et al, 2003). Similarly, only a small number of students (10 per cent)

participated in student councils with participation decreasing as children moved through the school. (Kerr et al, 2003).

A possible explanation for these discrepancies in attitude and children's actual participation in decision-making processes in schools is encapsulated in the concept of school efficacy (see Torney-Purta *et al.*, 2001; Kerr *et al.*, 2002; Kerr et al, 2003). School efficacy is the extent to which students believe they impact decision-making in their schools. In relation to this notion, Homana and Barber (2006, p. 20) point out that for students to fully develop democratic concepts and gain confidence in their abilities, participation in extracurricular activities needs to combine with the power to influence, such that "students must believe that their voice is valued in order to gain a sense of what democracy is about". One success story of including children in decision-making is from a high school student council in Norway (see Leren, 2006). Research by Osler (2000) and Cox and Robinson-Pant (2003) investigated primary school children's role in decision-making in school and class councils. Findings from these two studies illustrated that children did not take control, had self-imposed parameters that restricted what they felt they could change and talk about and children were frustrated at the ineffectiveness of the adult modelled councils in implementing decisions that were made. These children felt that their consultation was mere tokenism rather than authentic, as evidenced by the lack of implementation of decisions they had contributed to.

In the UK, statutory guidance under the 2002 Education Act, requires head-teachers, governors and educational authorities to give students a voice by asking them what they want (Bragg, 2007b; Cruddas, 2007). Poststructuralist feminist Orner (1992) had some cautions about women's voices becoming part of government policy:

What must the "oppressed" speak? For whose benefit do we/they speak?  
How is the speaking received, controlled, limited, disciplined, and stylised  
by the speakers, the listeners, the historical moment, the context? What is  
made of the "people's voice" after it is heard? (Orner, 1992, p. 76)

Mannion (2007, p. 407) presents similar concerns with children's voices, "what children say can be easily scripted by adults with their own agendas". Rudduck (2006) advises that by mandating student voice some adults may 'listen' out of obligation rather than through a commitment to equality and empowerment of children or sharing decision-making. Adults in schools can limit children's ability to have a voice as any spaces for 'giving' students' voices are managed by adults (Fielding, 2007a). Holdsworth (2005, p. 144) notes that a disturbing trend is "to take only some young people seriously those 'who present themselves well' or with whom we agree". The next subsection extends the way that children can be included to making decisions within their classes and discusses some difficulties and benefits of consulting children in classes for the teacher and student.

#### 2.4.3.2. Children's decision-making in class

The literature in this section discusses the benefits and concerns of teachers including children in decision-making within their classes.

Leren (2006, p. 367) points out that students know what does and does not work for them, "their expertise as users of the school system should therefore be made the most of". In England, Kerr et al (2002) proposes that the teaching norm of citizenship education is a didactic approach, with an emphasis on teacher talk, the use of textbooks and the memorising of facts, dates and definitions. In this regime only about one-quarter of the students say that they are often encouraged to voice their opinions during discussions in their classrooms.

Some of the mutual benefits of including children in class decision-making is outlined in research in the U.K., *Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning Project* that involved six projects in 43 schools (T.L.R.P., 2003) lead by Rudduck and Fielding. Findings from these projects indicated that consulting pupils about their learning resulted in both pupils and teachers having an enhanced commitment to learning when students felt they were respected and their concerns were taken seriously (Rudduck, 2006). Pupils in Osler's (2000) study reiterated this and she added that being involved in decision-making, gave pupils confidence, made them feel part of a school, improved relations between teachers and pupils and increased their drive to achieve. Children having a voice encouraged children to feel some

sense of ownership to co-determine their learning (Leren, 2006) that is considered a joint responsibility (Rudduck, 2006) as “knowledge-creation ventures” (Guajardo et al., 2006, p. 362).

Cook-Sather (2006a, p. 349) points out that when teachers listen in the classroom they begin to see the world through the eyes of the student where “learning to listen to students means learning not to speak *for* them...but rather to speak *with* them”. Pedder and McIntyre (2006) consulted with teachers and their classes at three secondary schools. The researchers concluded that student consultation was most likely to become embedded in a teacher’s practice when teachers seriously engaged with pupils’ ideas and there were “conditions of mutual respect and trust, a sense of solidarity and a growing confidence between teachers and pupils that they were both deriving benefits in the classroom” (Pedder & McIntyre, 2006, p. 156).

A challenge for some teachers in consulting with children is that it can confront traditional power hierarchies between teachers and children in the classroom (Hickey & Fitzclarence, 2000; Sarason, 1996). Teachers who do not have a particularly positive relationship with students may be sceptical about young people’s knowledge, objective or potential whilst other teachers may fear students’ judgments and unrealistic requests (Bragg, 2007a). Additionally, teachers may find it difficult to hear some painful and honest information when consulting with students and some teachers may be powerless to do anything about the child’s concerns (Reay, 2006). Bragg (2007a) and Devine (2002) stressed the importance of supporting and educating teachers on ways to share power with children in the classroom. Fielding (2006) describes this shift in perception in the following way:

More radical forms of student voice work are beginning to co-construct new understandings of what it is to be a student, what it is to be a teacher, in ways which blur boundaries and invite a different set of relationships and modes of working that model the dispositions and working practices of education in and for democracy. (Fielding, 2006, p. 311)

Authentically including children in school and class reform to create new relationships between students and teachers is a central aim of the student voice movement. The next section on the 'ideal school' research provides examples of schools that are adopting new ways of structuring that seek to enable rather than constrain children's agency.

## **2.5. Ideal schools informed by the new sociology of childhood**

Literature presented in this section includes research that depicts schools children wanted together with specific examples of some traditional schools that are embracing the ideology of the new sociology of childhood and changing their models of organisation and relationships with children.

### **2.5.1. Research of children's ideal school**

A competition in a newspaper may not constitute reliable academic research. Although a competition that provides access to samples of over 20,000 students' responses of what children want in schools is in itself a valuable data set that is hard to ignore. Children had the opportunity to design their ideal schools in the 'The School I'd like' competitions. Four competitions have run in conjunction with newspapers, two in the UK and two in Australia. Blishen's (1969) original project in the UK found that children wanted schools to have round buildings and domes particularly. They wanted bright classes that reflected their individuality and they wanted common rooms to relax. These findings support Papert's (1993) claim that the physical layout of schools and the resources within them have not changed since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He noted that if a teacher from this earlier time were to enter a school in the 21<sup>st</sup> century they would not only recognise it but they could teach in it. He compared this situation to advances in medicine where doctors' skills from the 19<sup>th</sup> century would be almost defunct in the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to modern technologies.

In relationships with teachers, children were tired of being treated as children and wanted to govern themselves and take risks (Blishen, 1969). Ruth, who was 15 years at the time advocated for democratic principles and equality between adults and children in her ideal school:

There would be no gaps between the pupils and the staff as there is in practically all schools. The pupils would organise the running of the school along with the staff so the school was more the sort of place the pupils wanted it to be. (Blishen, 1969, p. 161)

Burke and Grosvenor replicated the study in the UK and in 2001 *The Guardian* newspaper received replies from over 15000 children. One of the many themes identified from the results, supported Blishen's earlier findings that in their dream schools children wanted to be treated with respect where, "children and teachers would think of each other as equals..." (Burke & Grosvenor, 2003, p. 103). Lorna who was 14 years old at the time described her ideal school as, "the school would be run by the whole learning community... It would be a place where students of all ages came voluntarily, because they actually wanted to be there" (Burke & Grosvenor, 2003, p. 156). Fifteen year old Miriam described her ideal school:

We [children] will no longer be treated like herds of an identical animal waiting to be civilised before we are let loose on the world. It will be recognised that it is our world too...There will be no ridiculous hierarchy... They [children] will have been treated fairly and celebrated as individuals; not discriminated against just because they are powerless and a generation younger than the people in charge. (Burke & Grosvenor, 2003, p. 101)

This competition has also been conducted twice in Australia. In early February 2005, *The Sydney Morning Herald* invited school students in NSW to enter and in May, 2005 over 3000 entries were received by *The Age* newspaper in Melbourne. Some entries from *The Age* indicated that children wanted smaller schools, teacher time out areas, students teaching their teachers something once a week, teachers who know and like their work, clean toilets, safe, bully free environments and fun schools (Green, 2005).



These findings were similar to those from the Ask the Children project (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005). As part of the NSW DET Future's Project one hundred children and young people were asked how to make schools and TAFE better. Findings indicated that children wanted: a curriculum relevant to their lives; to be given a choice in what they learn; to be consulted on how to make their schools look more appealing; to be included in the process of making rules; and finally for the school to build links with local communities and organisations (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005). The next section showcases some schools that have listened and responded to what children want.

### **2.5.2. Sample ideal schools**

Warner (2006) was principal at Eltham College of Education in Melbourne, which was a K-12 co-educational, independent school of about 1150 students. In his role as principal he was instrumental in creating a culture of change. Teachers were supported to become more flexible and develop a client/partner relationship with their students where the focus was not on their teaching but on the children's learning. Children were arranged in active learning clusters where they engaged predominantly in self-directed learning and decided how, when and where they learnt. There were no bells in this school as teachers and students managed their time together (Warner, 2006).

In the Illawarra Region, where this research study took place, a Catholic high school, Corpus Christi, is similar in its approach to learning (Verity, 2008). The buildings are dominated by large open spaces that are flanked by smaller rooms ringed with glass for groups of 15 or less. The spaces connect easily as does the furniture that can be flexibly arranged to accommodate groups of 30 or individual students. The students form learning groups and break up into even smaller learning circles twice a day. Teachers are learning advisors and classes are referred to as independent connected learning experiences. The students have connected learning experiences for five weeks that are advised by at least two teachers from differing areas of expertise as well as their own independent learning (Verity, 2008).

Other schools in Australia are developing learning partnerships between children and adults. Ringwood Secondary College in Melbourne after close networking with businesses established its own Automotive and Manufacturing Technology Centre to address shortfalls in these sectors. Goondwindi State High School in Queensland has changed requirements for Year 12 completion where students complete four subjects additional to a training plan with employers and school-based traineeships (Warner, 2006).

Some mainstream schools are also creating new possibilities and more equal relationships with children by adopting democratic principles to differing degrees. In democratic classes, for example, learning is predominantly student-centred, self-directed or negotiated learning in a flexible learning environment with respectful, caring and equal relationships between adults and children (Hannan, 1985; Holdsworth, 2005; Mintz, 2003). At St. George-in-the-East a secondary school in the UK, democratic practices include mixed-age grouping of students, a co-constructed approach to the curriculum with no competition or marks, school council meetings that are attended by the whole school, weekly reviews, school study, residential camps and daily elective activities where the wider community of London is used as a learning resource (Fielding, 2007b). In democratic high schools in Australia, attendance in classes is by choice at: Currumbena, Kinma and Fitzroy Community Schools; Blacktown and Bidwill Youth Colleges; and the Boorobin Sudbury Centre of Learning in Queensland. The ACT Senior Colleges have designed non-compulsory courses where students choose their own educational goals and are treated as young decision-makers (Warner, 2006).

These few schools are creating new possibilities by critically engaging and changing what it means for students to be included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally. In these examples traditional adult-child power dynamics both within and outside of the classroom are challenged (Reay, 2006; Devine, 2002). Wells and Claxton (2002, p. 5) support challenging old ideals and relationships as roads to new situations, “without the contribution of new and even antithetical ideas and suggestions, there would also be no way of going beyond ways of acting and thinking repeated from the past”.

Beare (2002) foresees that future schools will be a system of relatively small semi-autonomous units or home-like pods of mixed ages that inter-connect with other pods, the wider community and to an administrative main centre. In this structure the standard school day together with segmented lessons disappear as the venue would be open and accessible to all members all day and evening. These patterns of operation are found in many 'schools without walls' and some 'community schools', like the Erindale and Lake Tuggeranong colleges in Canberra and the Lakes and Hub centres in Adelaide (Beare, 2002).

To conclude, these examples of ideal schools embrace the framework of the new sociology of childhood by developing relationships and learning within school structures that respect children as valuable people who are ontologically complete. Granting children responsibility, power and equal decision-making authority recognises children's agency to determine their own lives and contribute to the school community and society supports the tenets of the new sociology of childhood. Further evidence includes the authentic inclusion of and collaboration with children in their learning that honours children's reality, culture and knowledge today. Children's experiences of schooling in these isolated schools, contributes to the reconstruction of childhood in this modern world.

## **2.6. Summary**

This chapter drew together a broad scope of literature related to sociology of childhood and the sociology of schooling to discuss the historical, political, social and structural boundaries that have separated children and adults.

Childhood is a social phenomenon that has been shaped by historic events and people. Ariès (1973) declaration that there was a time when adults and children functioned in society as relative equals contrasts with how they are positioned in opposition to each other within the dominant framework. The dominant framework has evolved from developmentalism and socialisation theory and is a pervasive approach to understanding childhood that contributes to the common sociological dichotomy between children and adults. It reproduces a binary between adults and children. Adults are considered as complete, versus children viewed as

‘becoming’ or incomplete adults (Qvortrup, 1994). Socialisation theory rendered children passive recipients whilst focussing on adulthood as the final outcome thereby ignoring the potential for acknowledging children’s culture. Over the past century, developmentalism has dominated psychological discourses of childhood and emphasised children’s staged progression to adulthood that assumed a universality of experience and defined ‘adulthood’ as the barometer of competency. These theories have contributed to adults’ authoritarian position in relation to children and rendered children’s contribution in society invisible.

Through the literature on sociology of schooling, schools were presented as social institutions that shape the social structure and power of children (McLaren, 1995). The reality for students is that schools are polite places where everyone abides by the rules (Sarason, 1996) and pupils spend most of their time being told what to do (Cullingford, 2007). In response to adult authority and control in schools some children use their agency to conform, others choose to resist and disrupt the social order of schools whilst other children refuse to attend.

As stakeholders in schools children should be involved in decisions that touch their lives. Instead they have been marginalised and their voices ignored (Angus, 2006; Fielding, 2006; Smyth, 2006a, 2006b). Research confirms that students want new possibilities in schools to: have autonomy and the importance of being able to make decisions in school; have learning that is connected to their everyday lives; feel respected and valued by teachers and other students; be given more responsibility (Rudduck, 2007). As the most informed participants in the process of schooling students can play central roles in school transformation (Levin, 2000) based on reciprocity and dialogic intergenerational engagement (Fielding, 2007a).

Lee (2001) and Prout (2005) argued that the rigid boundaries between adults and children are becoming fluid through globalisation, the Internet and digital technology. This fluidity means that adulthood is no longer the epitome of stability and a guiding beacon for childhood. Consequently, old constructions of childhood and adulthood are now challenged. Schools as institutions of socialisation have relied on the authoritarian binary that has granted adults the authority to decide on rules, discipline children and to control the content of children’s learning. Therefore, as children experience more equal relationships with adults outside of

schools the foundation of these traditional hierarchical relationships in schools become destabilised. The challenge, as presented by the literature, is for mainstream schools to adjust some traditional structures that constrain children's agency and look for ways to accommodate new roles for modern children. The literature and research on the student voice movement is an example of how this is happening in isolated schools in Australia and overseas.

The new sociology of childhood is an approach re-theorising childhood that advocates for children to be considered as contributors to the social world that they reside with adults. From this perspective socially constructed boundaries dissolve as adulthood no longer becomes the reference point for calibrating children's lives. Schools that adopt this thinking could create opportunities for teachers and students to learn from each other as co-creators of knowledge. The inferring ideology of the student voice movement and its congruence with the new sociology of childhood supports the role of children to co-create with adults a shared culture and relationships in schools that incorporates students' voices. The implications of this mean that within society and schools new understandings of contemporary relations between adults and children would develop.

The next chapter explains the theoretical framework, research methodology and research design of this study.

# Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

## 3.1. Introduction

Epistemologically, within the broad paradigm of critical social theory the new sociology of childhood, provided the opportunity to understand historical and modern discourses of childhood in relation to adulthood, and to use these understandings to make meaning of the data. Gramsci's notion of hegemony also provided insights into how discourses and relationships between children and adults are being reproduced in current school systems.

This chapter discusses the methodological design of the study and how the data was analysed. The theoretical framework, methodology and research design used in this study linked schooling with three key components that underpin critical social theory: hegemony, power and agency. These aspects of critical theory framed the research methodology and were incorporated into the research design through the use of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and critical ethnography. By co-researching with children this study provided opportunities to demonstrate that through collective action children could take up agency in order to inspire social change in schools. Acknowledging and supporting children's agency embodies the philosophical foundations underpinning the new sociology of childhood and the student voice movement.

This chapter begins with a general description of critical social theory followed by a discussion of each of the three elements of hegemony, power and agency. Freire, Giroux and McLaren have specifically applied the fundamentals of critical theory to schools and education and as such these critical theorists, along with Gramsci and Fay, heavily inform the theoretical framework supporting this study. In the next section critical social theory is briefly introduced.

### **3.2. Critical social theory**

Critical theory is a reflective theory (Geuss, 1981) that evolved out of a quest to bridge the crevice between empirical research and philosophy. Critical social theory utilises all social-scientific disciplines in the development of a materialistic theory of society (Giddens & Turner, 1987). In developing this theory, critical theorists critique forms of oppression in modern society and use knowledge, historical and present, as a means of enlightening and emancipating agents from hidden coercion or hegemony for the purpose of practical political action (Fay, 1987; Geuss, 1981; Ingram, 1990). They aim to assist the oppressed to realise their own plight and become inspired to take some liberating action within their daily lives (Fay, 1987; Freire, 1998, 2005; Giroux, 1998, 2006; McLaren, 1991; McLaren & Giarelli, 1995; McLaren & Jaramillo, 2002).

According to Agger (1998) seven key elements capture the substance of critical social theory: it opposes positivism and its neglect of historicity; it argues that the possibilities for a better future lie in raising people's consciousness about their present oppression; it maintains that domination is structural; it posits that ideology and hegemony reproduce these structures of domination by manipulating people's false consciousness; it contests that people's everyday lives are the source of social change; it views a dialectical bridge between structure and agency; and it holds people responsible for their own liberation.

By collaboratively co-researching current structural practices and resulting relationships in schools with children, this study sought to incorporate these tenets as presented by Agger (1998). As such, this study investigated these aspects of the dominant hegemony and their influence on children's agency and power. The resulting critical knowledge inspired the co-researchers to take collective action in the production of a DVD with the intent of it being an educational tool to inform possibilities for social change. In the next sections hegemony, power and agency are examined and their relevance to this research study.

### **3.2.1. Hegemony and false consciousness**

Hegemony is the terrain upon which groups struggle for power. It is the web of reciprocally confirming structures, activities, beliefs, and ethics that interact to support the established order and the class, race and gender interests which dominate. (Lather, 1984, p. 55)

Expanding on Marx's idea of ideology as consciousness that was restricted to material influences, Gramsci observed hegemony in institutions of civil society (Gramsci, 1971; Hawkes, 2003). According to Mayo (2008), at the very core of Gramsci's concept of hegemony was his critique of educational establishments as superstructures of power that procured hegemony to control the political, economic and cultural aspects of society through "the means of mental production" (Marx & Engels, 1970, p. 47). Gramsci attested that hegemony operates through the construction and control of people's perception of reality or false consciousness by disseminating desired culture through the State's apparatus and institutions within the framework of capitalism (Buci-Glucksmann, 1982; Gramsci, 1971; Hawkes, 2003; Laclau & Moufe, 2001). Hegemony invisibly controls by exploiting those common experiences, values and beliefs that are accepted as common sense (Gramsci, 1971) or natural for most people who then ignore the economic and political effect of such enculturation on their freedom and power. This common sense disguises hegemony as normal and becomes a person's false consciousness. Fay (1987) describes people's self-understandings or consciousness as false when they fail to account for the life experiences of group members and when these self-understandings are contrasted with a superior alternative. He depicts false consciousness in the following way:

The world as we know it is not what we think it is, nor are we who we think we are... we organise our existence on the basis of these misconceptions... This is why our lives are false: false in the sense that they are organised around a mistaken image of our needs and capacities; and false that some of our important needs are not met. (Fay, 1987, p. 12)



Lukes (2005, p. 149) refers to false consciousness as “a cognitive power of considerable significance and scope; namely *the power to mislead*”. Manipulating people’s false consciousness is a powerful means to control people and influence their everyday experiences and interpretations (Fay, 1987). Gramsci (1971) proposed that false consciousness fools individuals into consenting to hegemonic domination (Buci-Glucksmann, 1982).

Giroux (1999) and McLaren (2003, p.187) argue that schools are central to the continuation of hegemony rather than the liberation from it. Lukes’ (1974, 2005) one, two and three-dimensional views of power explain how organisational practices in institutions, such as schools, manipulate the false consciousness of the oppressed to uphold hegemony. Three features critique the behavioural focus of institutions; the exclusion of the oppressed in decision-making power, the accepted social arrangements that disadvantage the oppressed and the disregard of the real interests of the oppressed. Lukes’ (1974, 2005) propositions are summarised in the following manner:

1. The oppressed as a collective have little decision-making power or ‘non-decision making’ power over the organisation of the social system and as such any potential issues identified by them are not considered part of regular management reviews. The oppressed lack ‘non-decision making’ power in that any demands for change in the existing social order are squashed before they gain access to the relevant decision-making arena or if access is gained are denied in the implementation stage (see also Bachrach & Baratz, 1970; Parsons, 1967). Consequently, the presumed lack of grievances or overt conflict by the oppressed can make conformity appear as consensus.
2. Institutional procedures legitimise social arrangements including the right that some groups [teachers] will benefit more than others [students] and are in positions to defend and promote their interests [teachers]. In these instances, the oppressed view the legitimacy of those in charge and the freedoms that this legitimacy offers in terms of behaviours.

3. The wants and preferences of the oppressed become a by-product of their participation within the system and may not reflect their real interests. This combined with the exclusion of the oppressed in decision-making practices means that within this system the oppressed have little scope to identify or develop their real interests. Further to this, in the absence of any viable alternative to its present structure, false consciousness can therefore mislead the oppressed into thinking this is the only way to satisfy their misinformed needs.

Connected to these ideas, hegemony and false consciousness exist through deep-rooted structures that control and reproduce underlying social relations (Joseph, 2008). In this way schools can transmit hegemony through structures comprised of rituals, routines and social practices that politically influence how space, time and social processes are organised within the everyday workings of schools. These structures or organisational practices within schools transmit hegemony either directly or indirectly through the hidden curriculum (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; McLaren, 2003; Wink, 2000) and presuppose expected behaviours between student and teacher (Willmont, 1999). In these unequal relationships students' voices may be subjugated due to the oppressive power of a teacher's authoritarian voice (McLaren, 2003).

Disciplining children in schools reinforces the unequal power relations between adults and children and enables adults to enforce hegemony through coercion or threat of punishment that includes the potential deprivation of something valuable (Lukes, 2005). The "penitentiary technique" (Foucault, 1972, p. 299) used in schools involved maintaining the status quo by controlling and punishing the divergence of a personality from the norm, more so than the deviant act itself. This approach served to prevent further acts of resistance whilst simultaneously rewarding compliance as the norm. Other organisational practices used to ensure the reproduction of hegemony in schools were based on techniques that combined surveillance with normalising judgment and amassing documents that reduced each child to a case who could be measured and compared (Pitsula, 2001). Normalising judgments and measuring children's progress links to the prevalent thinking of developmentalism.

Consequently, children indirectly validate, 'give' consent and yield to the common-sensical understandings that position them as inferiors by actively participating in these school practices (McHale, Zompetti, & Moffitt, 2007). This study was investigating how relationships between adults and children and children's ensuing false consciousness were reproduced in schools. Exploring children's false consciousness and their perceived power, or lack of power, in schools is discussed in the following section.

### **3.2.2. Power and critical education**

Lukes (2005) defines the exercise of power as the securing of compliance to domination, which is the intention of those propagating the ideas of hegemony. Gramsci wrote that false consciousness reduces people's capacity to be powerful and take independent action:

But this same group has, for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination, adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group; and it affirms this conception verbally and believes itself to be following it, because this is the conception which it follows in 'normal times' – that is when its conduct is not independent and autonomous, but submissive and subordinate. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 327)

In trying to understand why subordinates comply and do not resist conformity, Tilly (1991, p. 594) presented seven possible explanations, summarised as follows:

1. Subordinates are actually covertly rebelling continuously;
2. Subordinates actually receive something they deem sufficient in return for their subordination;
3. Subordinates become largely exploited within the system whilst pursuing their value/esteem and identity (similar to number 2);
4. Subordinates are unaware of alternative ideological frames and so are unaware of their true interests [false consciousness];
5. Coercion and apathy hold subordinates in place;
6. Most subordinates lack the financial resources to resist and rebel;
7. All of the above.

Tilly (1991) further explains that the most common explanations for people's conformity were 4, 5 or 6 separately or a combination of the three. Lukes (2005) vindicates that 4, or false consciousness prevents the subordinate from making informed decisions or having grievances as there is an absence of any alternative possible arrangements. Femia (1981, p. 39) concurs that compliance is a form of implicit psychological acceptance ranging from a complete internalisation of the dominant values to a partial assimilation based on "an uneasy feeling that the status quo, while shamefully iniquitous, is nevertheless the only viable form of society". Extending this understanding, Scott (1990, p. 193) describes the dynamic process of conformity as a choice by subordinates, not because they "have internalised the norms of the dominant, but because a structure of surveillance, reward, and punishment makes it prudent for them to comply." Tilly (1991) adds a different perspective by recognising that people do not consciously comply to follow rules instead they are negotiating obstacles to pursue their own personal agendas.

Irrespective of the reasons for compliance, the uncritical acceptance and illusory benefits and superficial ideals of hegemony, presented as common sense (Gramsci, 1971), ensure its desire and strength (Hawkes, 2003; McHale, Zompetti, & Moffitt, 2007). Schools bolster children's lower status to adults through largely unquestioned, constant experience and reinforcement. Subsequently, Kreisberg (1992, p. 179) contends that children have "internalised the attitudes and behaviours expected of powerless people". This false consciousness that is consistently fortified allows for interactions to occur that support the illusions of power and powerlessness that stall any social transformation (Fay, 1987; Ledwith, 2007).

Social transformation occurs by changing people's understandings of how the dominant structures that shape their society affect them by unmasking the ideological illusion or false consciousness. It is by questioning the hegemony that the social structure, which produced these false self-misunderstandings, can be altered in ways that will weaken the appropriateness of them (Fay, 1987). Alanen (1994, p. 40-41) attests that the stronger the false consciousness "the more difficult it is for alternative 'truths' about children and childhood to break into the contemporary institutional realities in which children live". Exposing the

hegemony that maintained children's false consciousness was a crucial focus of discussions in this study and formed the impetus for collective action.

According to Giroux (1999), the primary aim of critical education is for students to develop critical consciousness and critical literacy so they can analytically question the false consciousness. Exposing the deceptiveness of false consciousness weakens its potency and offers them a radically different self-understanding of who they are. He observes that critical pedagogy should, "provoke students to deliberate, resist, and cultivate a range of capacities that enable them to move beyond the world they already know without insisting on a fixed set of meanings" (Giroux, 2004, p. 39).

Gramsci (1971) educated working class adults through the Factory Council Movement in Turin and Freire (1998) educated illiterate working class peasants in Brazil. Both critical pedagogues started with the oppressed people's everyday life to awaken their critical awareness and analysis of their social and political world. They used dialogic problem posing as a liberating effect of education to challenge false consciousness as the means for cultural emancipation (Freire, 2005; Gramsci, 1971; Holst, 2006). Critical literacy allowed the oppressed to analyse their location within the privileging hierarchy of capitalist society and transmute these historic cycles of social reproduction with the endorsement of a language of hope (McLaren, 1999). These processes enabled people to critically evaluate their perceptions of powers, conditions, and society which opened possibilities for new thinking, feeling and acting (Shor, 1992).

In this study the co-researchers were encouraged to debate, dialogue and empower their voices through informal and formal discussions and brainstorming sessions. This study was a form of critical pedagogy by providing opportunities for the participants to develop transformative knowledge through co-researching that questioned the dominant hegemony in schools and their own false consciousness so that via some collective action, transformation could occur. Similarly, critical educators like Marcuse (1972), an early critical theorist, were committed to creating democracy through counter-hegemonic sites of political struggle for

disenfranchised groups. The next section discusses ways that children resist the dominant hegemony.

### **3.2.3. Counter-hegemonic discourses and agency**

Hegemony is powered by consent and can therefore be negotiated and contested by counter-hegemonic discourses that can lead to collective opposition and ultimately emancipatory action (Fay, 1987). In this light McLaren (2003, p. 214) sees schools as a “cultural terrain characterised by varying degrees of accommodation, contestation, and resistance”. He further suggests that for some students their counter-hegemonic behaviours are a form of “moral and political indignation” (p. 216) against the dominant hegemony and the disjuncture between classroom cultures and their “street-corner” cultures (p. 214).

Joseph (2008) asserts that the actions of agents preserve or transform a given set of relations and are largely mediated by the hegemony and organisational practices that maintain it. Some students use their agency and create overt behaviours, often regarded as rebellious that resist the dominant hegemony. These children withhold their compliance and by doing so undermine the power of those who oppress them. In this way these children “are in a fundamental sense not powerless because they share in the creation of power” (Fay, 1987, p. 122). Corsaro (2000, p. 93) identified some preschool children aged between three to five years made persistent attempts to gain control of their lives and had developed “behaviours or activities that contradict, challenge or violate the official norms or rules of an organisation or institution” such as playing with toys that were not allowed. Shor (1992) portrayed common resistance or counter-hegemonic behaviours displayed by children in schools:

They [children] resist in various ways – sabotage, silence, submission, playing dumb, getting by, dropping in and out of courses, not doing homework, coming late, being absent, getting friends or family members to write their papers. (Shor, 1992, p. 217)

Extending this idea of overt resistance to covert resistance, Scott (1990) explained that slaves avoided open confrontation due to the punishment and humiliation that were eked out to those

who explicitly resisted. Instead acts of covert resistance were more common with the serfs who disguised their resistance by strategically appearing conciliatory. The ‘success’ of these examples of resistance were contestable as Joseph (2008, p. 119) argues that, “agents act consciously within practices, the effect of which is the unconscious or unintended reproduction of deeper social structures”. This conjecture is synonymous with notions of structural determinism from Marx (1975 [1843-1844]) and Durkheim (1933) who proposed that structures determines people’s agency. This thinking explains how, covert or overt resistances are integrated and easily neutralised by the potency of the hegemony and may even reinforce or strengthen this hold or conditioning (McLaren, 2003). More attuned to valuing counter-hegemonic behaviours, Weber’s (1978 [1910-1914]) contraposition advocated that people’s agency constructed structures.

Through adult education and the Factory Council Movements, Gramsci (1971, 1977) was trying to create a revolution by organising counter-hegemonic activities that eventually failed. Fuelling the counter-hegemonic activities were ‘organic intellectuals’ from the subaltern group who acted as revolutionaries and led people “as constructor, organiser, ‘permanent persuador’ and not just a simple orator” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 10). These organic intellectuals led oppositional groups through coalition where diversely oppressed groups were brought together “to identify in a common oppositional identity which respected their differences” (Crossley, 2005, p. 116). In schools there are so many diverse identities and developmental aspects of childhood that developing a collective oppositional identity may be a challenge. This struggle is evidenced by the assertion that many forms of student resistance are individualistic and not part of a collective struggle (Laclau & Moufe, 2001).

For critical social theorists developing children’s critical awareness and knowledge of the power relations, inequalities and oppression in schooling is only part of the solution. Shor (1992, p. 6) declared, “knowledge is power only for those who can use it to change their conditions”. According to Fay (1987) transformation will occur when this knowledge is translated into empowerment which occurs when a disorganised and unfocused group builds an identity and decides to act towards fulfilling a newly discovered purpose and then ultimately into practical action. Carr and Kemmis (1990, p. 159) encourage students to take

responsibility for their actions and encourage participants to work together in the organisation of their own enlightenment to change their own practices and then “live with the consequences of the transformations they make”. Gramsci (1977) expresses this forethought;

What matters is that a new way of conceiving the world and man is born and that this conception is no longer reserved to the great intellectuals, to professional philosophers, but tends rather to become a popular, mass phenomenon, with a concretely world-wide character, capable of modifying (even if the result includes hybrid combinations) popular thought and mummified popular culture. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 417)

The main difficulty in revolutionising society is that the members within an institution have to realise their needs are not being met. This process of transformation through hegemonic action takes place under conditions of structural crisis when the unconscious process of social reproduction is questioned (Fay, 1987, Joseph, 2008). Consequently, agents become more aware of the false consciousness presented in their present circumstances and become open to new possibilities. Some agents will resist change and engage in actions that conserve the structures, which results in struggles over the transformation or conservation of structures (Joseph, 2008).

To summarise, this study investigated how the dominant hegemony positions adults and children in schools by exploring the impact of structural practices and relationships on children’s agency and power. In this chapter I have presented three key components of critical social theory relevant to this study; hegemony, power and agency. Firstly, as institutions schools use hegemony to subtly manipulate children’s false consciousness that normalises their school reality, subjectivity and lowered status. By which, children naively consent to their own structural domination in schools. Secondly, power was explored through critical education, which is one method used to expose false consciousness and by doing so weaken its strength. Critical education is one avenue for children to reclaim their power. Finally, children’s counter-hegemonic behaviours aimed at resisting the dominant hegemony



using action as a means towards emancipation was presented. The next section explicates the links between critical social theory and the methodology adopted in this study.

### **3.3. Critical methodology**

Many traditional research methods do not provide frameworks for praxis (Egbo, 2005) and the methodology in this study relied on action. Participatory Action Research (PAR) and critical ethnography were methods that provided opportunities for children to question the dominant hegemony in schools through collective action designed to stimulate counter-hegemonic discourses and activities. Consistent with critical social theory this research aimed at some level of social change where the possibility of change was directed by the co-researchers themselves. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) outline a rationale for critical research that embodies these links between critique, and possibilities that may lead to transformation:

To begin to question the relationship between the actual and the possible in education or social life is already to have embarked on a *critical* project. It is to treat education and society as *problematic* – to question what it is in light of what could be. (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 30)

The research methodologies embodied a process of social transformation with the objective of raising the co-researcher's critical awareness and knowledge of false consciousness as a preliminary step to inform collective action. The dialogic and dialectical aspects of critical research methodology are central to “transform ignorance and misapprehensions (accepting historically mediated structures as immutable) into more informed consciousness” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110).

Smith (1993) argues that there are two distinct forms of critical research, those that are emancipatory and focused on direct social action and those that are emancipatory through their critique of social phenomena. Critical methodologies limited to critique do not support action within the research design but have the intent of informing action such as critical ethnography, whereas research with an emancipatory intent supports action *within* the

research design, such as PAR. The next section outlines my role as critical ethnographer within this research.

### **3.3.1. The critical ethnographer**

Critical ethnography is a form of ethnography with a critical intent (Smith, 1993). It uses the phenomenological approaches of interpretative research within the theoretical framework of critical social theory (Noblit, 2004). Critical ethnography is one qualitative research methodology that strives for deep understandings in natural settings by recognising the ethnographer's political standing as having an influence on research (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005).

Critical ethnographers create knowledge with an empowering intent so that the cultural and historical representations or knowledge developed from the research can contribute to social change in association with the study participants. In this way researchers participate in research projects where “knowledge can be reproduced, remapped, and de-centred in order to rewrite the borders and coordinates of an oppositional cultural politics” (Koro-Ljungberg & Greckhamer, 2005, p. 294).

According to LeCompte (1995), critical ethnographers need to position participants as engaging in the process of co-constructors of knowledge rather than positioning them as in need of empowerment. McLaren (1995, p. 291) points out that research should involve working with participants and not over them as stated, “critical ethnography must be organic to and not administered upon the plight of the struggling people”.

As the critical ethnographer I commented on researching with children as a way to protest for reform on popular practices of conducting research on children that posits them as inferior subjects. In this study the students operated as co-researchers indicating a level of empowerment including shared power and agency.

The critical ethnographer speaks for their subjects as “words have meaning; authors have power” (Tierney, 2002, p. 429). The ethnographer's position is often viewed as an

intermediary between the world of the researchers and the “world of the other” (Koro-Ljungberg & Greckhamer, 2005, p. 294). In critical ethnography the researcher is open about their bias from the beginning and the researchers are aware of the dominant hegemony and the relationship between their beliefs, assumptions and values at every stage of the research from deciding what project to research, and inviting participants to writing up the research. Hammersley (2006) warns that when the ethnographer serves a political regime or seeks to improve conditions for the oppressed then there is a danger of systematic bias. In this study my beliefs have clearly been expressed as a way of incorporating these biases.

The researcher’s epistemological beliefs shape the interaction with participants or field relations and the interpretation of the data. Critical ethnographers regard the relationship they have with the research participants by considering historical relations and dominance or hegemony. These relations include the power dynamics and the discourses that are constructed by the perceptions of the participants (Carspecken, 1996; LeCompte, 1995) and affect all participants’ thinking and acting including the researchers (Carspecken, 1996; Ledwith, 2007; McLaren, 1995). These discourses that produce differences in power and status – or asymmetry – between the researcher and the researched need to be addressed (Erickson, 1996; LeCompte, 1995). Being aware of one’s biases and being honest about one’s views does not nullify the issues of power (LeCompte, 1995). Punch (2002) describes how children’s experiences of hegemony and the consequential power relations may influence their openness in research conducted by adults:

Children are not used to expressing their views freely or being taken seriously by adults because of their position in adult-dominated society. The challenge is how best to enable children to express their views to an adult researcher. (Punch, 2002, p. 325)

In summary, as the critical ethnographer in this study I was aware of the dominant hegemony and my biases towards these beliefs, attitudes and practices. I was also alerted to the notion that power is determined by the relationship I had with the participants as well as my own personal power as the teller of the story. In the next section I explain the empowering benefits

of including children as researchers that can serve to disrupt the dominant hegemony through investigation and the co-construction of critical knowledge.

### **3.3.2. Children as researchers**

There are many degrees of involvement in the research process for children from data gatherers for another person's research to full participation as principal researchers. This section links the children's movement model (see Table 3, p. 62) as a method to disrupt hegemonic ideals. Children as researchers positions children as actively included in authentic decision making in all aspects of the research process. They can negotiate their role, having equal opportunities to make their contribution more likely to be significant and sustainable.

Positioning and respecting children as experts in purposeful research that authentically validates their experience means that students can contribute to significant change. A description of students as researchers by Steinberg and Kincheloe (1998) captured this potential when they wrote:

...[Children as researchers] possess a vision of 'what could be' and a set of skills to uncover 'what actually is'. Such students are empowered to delineate the social, political and pedagogical contradictions of schooling, in the process ascertaining the ways these contradictions have shaped their own and other students' consciousness. (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998, p. 2)

In the process of researching, students become co-constructors of knowledge that challenges previously unquestioned common sense. Children can begin to analyse the mainstream hegemonic representations that not only creates new knowledge but also examines the reason for knowledge, as eloquently described by Horton and Freire (1990, p. 157) as "knowing better means precisely going beyond the common sense in order to begin to discover the reason for the facts".

The action research techniques also teach skills that serve a broader purpose of developing critical literacy and understanding the social construction of the world around children that

can then inform their action (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998). Children as researchers can then “gain the ability to awaken themselves from a hegemonic dream with its unexamined landscape of social knowledge and consciousness construction” (Kincheloe, 2007, p. 757).

Children becoming student researchers also has the potential to empower them to challenge injustices and investigate the causes of inequity to then design fairer systems of schools and practices. In counter-hegemonic classrooms the teachers are developing students as researchers in school-based research (Fielding & Bragg, 2003) and in the USA critical philosophies that underpin student research (Fielding, 2004; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998) have led to radical student activism for social justice (Fine et al., 2004; Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006). As activism is the intention of critical research children’s involvement in action research projects results in “student production of alternate bodies of knowledge” (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998, p. 4) as well as presenting a range of solutions designed by the stakeholders themselves (Bland & Atweh, 2007). Adults sharing power with children move children from being research consultants to active research agents and social actors.

An example of this activism was *The Escuelas Nuevas Project* in Colombia. This project, that started 19 years ago in Caldas wherein children were given the space and time to research community issues. The ensuing action was the design of a relevant school system where the schools were organised with the children participating in democratic processes at every age level and where each child planned and implemented a community based projects that required research (Hart & Schwab, 1997).

Children in the role of student researchers need to critically examine whose interests the knowledge that is produced serves. This skill of critically analysing the source of knowledge is paramount in a technologically Internet connected, information-saturated world. Students as researchers are similar to feminist researchers in that the knowledge constructed reflects a standpoint and may not speak for all women or children (Thomson & Gunter, 2007). As researchers the students are not necessarily representatives of all pupils and need to refer to the data as an expression of standpoints and then explain and defend their developing knowledge with adults (Thomson & Gunter, 2007).

To enhance students as researchers new kinds of relationships with adults may need to be developed to support children's identity and power authentically. Adults can resist and control the level of children's participation by holding back knowledge or power (Alderson, 2000; West, 2007). Consulting, hearing or listening to children in research usually follows adults' agendas. Children participating as researchers can mean children's involvement will make a difference to them and is part of a purposeful process (Sinclair, 2004; West, 2007). The co-researchers' participation in this study is further clarified in the following section.

### **3.3.3. Participatory action research**

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a research paradigm for research that provides opportunities for collaborative research in a democratic way that enables previously subordinated voices to be heard. PAR is a reflexive, participatory process of research that is practical and collaborative with an emancipatory, critical intent that aims to transform and link both theory and practice (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). This section further explains the children's rights model of children's participation in research (see Table 3, p. 62).

PAR transforms inquiry into reflective praxis directed at solving problems with the stakeholders (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Three distinguishing attributes of PAR that have made it commonly associated with social transformation in the Third World are: joint ownership of the research, analysis of social issues within the community by members of the community, and an emphasis towards community action (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Freire (1997) used PAR as a tool of empowerment, which he described as the process where:

... people rupture their existing attitudes of silence, accommodation and passivity, and gain confidence and abilities to alter unjust conditions and structures. This is an authentic power for liberation that ultimately destroys a passive awaiting of fate. (Freire, 1997, p. xi)

PAR has also been widely used by teachers to reflect on their own practice however, its scope and application is broadening into more possibilities of systemic and school reform. By using PAR techniques stakeholders explore how to study and generate change (Hawkins, 2007). In this way research is not imposed *on* participants instead collaboratively designed *with* the participants. Smith (1997) explains that when a group forms with a common purpose to investigate their predicament, make decisions and take actions their reality is transformed resulting in the production of “knowledge based on experience: the wisdom of the people” (p. 6).

Authentic PAR research projects foster a sense of ownership and share a commitment to involving people as co-researchers, which requires power sharing and consideration of issues of control and authority. For adults to genuinely co-research with children they need to develop relationships with children based on “respect for the intellectual and political capacities of the dispossessed” (Lather, 1986, p. 262) that trusts children to have the ability to find solutions to their problems (Atweh, Christensen, & Dornan, 1998; West, 2007).

For children as co-researchers one benefit is “epistemological empowerment” (Oldfather, 1995, p. 132) which derives from the process of constructing meaning and incorporates a sense of intellectual agency. Oldfather’s research with children, helped children feel empowered, that they had made a difference, and their contributions were worth something. The primary importance was that the co-researchers felt “their voices were invited, responded to, acted upon, and honored” (Oldfather, 1995, p. 135). For most children they have not experienced an honoured voice in their school experiences. Brian (Oldfather, 1995) describes the difference between being a subject in research and a co-researcher:

If you’re a ‘SUBJECT’, it sounds like you’re working with a bunch of guinea pigs or something, but when you say ‘co-researcher’, it makes it sound like people who are helping to make whatever you’re doing better. Now it matters what I say because I know that other people are going to hear this, and understand how we feel. (Oldfather, 1995, p. 131)

Lincoln (1995) attests that adults often underrate children's ability "to be shrewd observers, to possess insight and wisdom about what they see and hear, and to possess internal resources" (p. 89). Adults co-researching with children need to be self-critical of their own power (Goldstein, 2000; Ledwith, 2007) and need to maintain a power balance with children (Goldstein, 2000; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). In Chapter 4, I discuss my personal issue of sharing power with the co-researchers in a project where I had made decisions and presented the outline of the research without their input. There were discrepancies in power and privilege (Goldstein, 2000; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) due to our different roles (Erickson, 1996; Ospina et al., 2004). Mason and Urquhart (2001) also struggled in aspects of their own research with children and described it in the following way:

The major obstacle we have so far faced as we begin to implement the project is how do we achieve anything near a framework which balances the power of children and researchers when we the adult researchers, are seeking to involve children in a project for which we, of necessity... have already had to develop the parameters? (Mason & Urquhart, 2001, p. 19)

Their concerns are acknowledged as ongoing for all academics working within university based research projects that demand pre-determined research models. The knowledge gained from participating in PAR is aimed at developing critical enlightenment. PAR projects involve opening a communicative space that builds solidarity. In these spaces opinions, understandings and decisions can be problematised and debated openly in order for the participants to "better understand their own situation, raise consciousness, and support future action aimed at political change" (Patton, 2002, p. 549). It is this part of PAR that exposes the participants to the dominant hegemony and resulting domination, oppression and lack of power within institutions so that they can recognise the effect on their lives (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008). This excerpt of an interview from Oldfather's research (1995) demonstrated how as a result of participating in research John (a research participant) developed critical knowledge;



See the thing is, I would have the same opinions, I just wouldn't have the knowledgeable answer that I do now.... It is better to know what is wrong than just know that you don't like something. But if you have no idea what is wrong, you just know that something is wrong. Then you are not going to be able to do anything about it. (Oldfather, 1995, p. 135- 136)

Working collaboratively with co-researchers to co-construct critical knowledge of the dominant hegemony in schools was of supreme importance in this study. In PAR once 'false consciousness' or self-misunderstandings have been explicated then enlightened participants can plan suitable collective action that advances the present social circumstance as part of the research process. People use this communicative space to discover, investigate and ultimately attain consensus and reciprocated understanding about the action to take in a situation (Bland & Atweh, 2007; Flyvbjerg, 1998; Grundy, 1998; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). The collective possibilities for change are enhanced when individual issues lead to local projects which link with other projects to form networks and alliances that lead to movements (Ledwith, 2007).

The agency and action through PAR methods allows children to express themselves and make decisions affecting their lives whilst also encouraging them to more fully participate in society (Punch, 2002) and imagine alternative social worlds through performances (Denzin, 2003). This research focussed on co-researchers taking one unified collective action due to time constraints rather than applying the "spiral of self-reflective cycles" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 563) associated with PAR research. The DVD was one form of collective action that enabled the co-researchers to show others what they had learnt. Measuring the effects of the action, what people thought of the DVD was beyond the time constraints of this study.

In summary, critical developments in epistemology have resulted in methodologies that oppose positivism and embrace the notions of personal agency and frameworks for praxis that also reflect the political contexts within which educational policies and practices are entrenched. Critical researchers use PAR as one method that empowers the participants through the conduct of research and action to discover for themselves who they are, how they got to be that way and where they might go in the future (Weil & Kincheloe, 2003, cited in

Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008). It is an approach that is congruent with a philosophical position supported throughout this study that seeks to acknowledge children as social actors, knowledge makers and people entitled to opportunities to participate in shaping their society. Critical ethnography is a research method that supports and embraces critical social theory by supporting the culture of researching with children with the intention of promoting change in the way children are positioned in research with adults. In the next section I explain how the critical methodology influenced the research design, which supported critical social theory.

### 3.4. The research design

This research was designed to exemplify the tenets of critical social theory. This research was a critical ethnographic study of a participatory research project where children acting as co-researchers was central to both studies. My relationship with the co-researchers was paramount to both projects. In the socially critical project the co-researchers and myself collaboratively designed and analysed two surveys investigating children's school experiences. The focus of my relationship with the co-researchers was on building rapport and sharing responsibility and power with them. The critical ethnographic project centred on my observation of the relationships occurring in the socially critical project between the co-researchers and myself. Therefore, throughout the study two concurrently interlinked yet independent research designs operated – the critical ethnographic study and the socially critical project with the co-researchers central to both projects (refer to Figure 2).

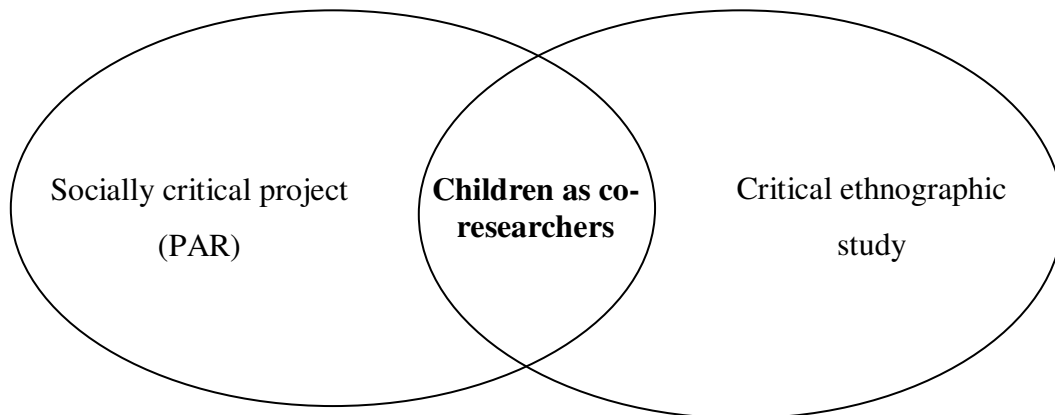


Figure 2: Substantive thesis

In the next sections I discuss the particular features of the socially critical project and the critical ethnographic study. I explicate that participation in this study as co-researchers provided opportunities for these co-researchers to critically question the schooling experience, which aligns with critical theory. I comment on the conduct of collaborative research with children and how this created more authentic participatory structures that honoured and respected their opinions. I begin by detailing aspects of the critical ethnography.

### **3.5. Critical ethnography**

The critical ethnographic component of the study was a microanalysis of the process of children engaging as researchers by the adult researcher. It allowed me, as the researcher, to distance myself from the critical project in order to participate in a theoretical analysis of the story of the research study. It also allowed me to have a voice outside of the collective voice of the children and provided an interpretative account of the human experience by looking at how the ‘child as subject’ was being shaped by the social world, therefore contributing further to the key field of childhood sociology.

In conducting critical ethnography I aimed to maintain a level of objectivity whilst being aware of my own biases as potential sources of influence (Erickson, 1996; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I reflected on the practices and exchanges occurring between the students themselves in their roles as co-researchers and the co-researchers’ interactions with me as a facilitator and co-researcher. Examinations of these exchanges encouraged me to consider what was happening for the co-researchers and try to see experiences through their viewpoint.

The co-researchers were not subjects to be studied as if through a microscope I aimed to enter their world and respect their version of reality by engaging in dialogue that valued their voice, knowledge and expertise. I was a researcher like them, albeit the key researcher who had a large stake in the outcome of the research. My observations of the research process occurred within the research in which I was also a part. Whatever my intention I remained an adult researcher commenting on the role of children acting as researchers with me. My

interpretations reflect my perspective, that of an adult, as discussed by Jipson and Jipson (2003):

The deeper problem, however, seems to be whether capturing a moment in time is capturing the child's reality or whether it is the researcher's representation of the child's reality, given the researcher's own life experiences and theoretical perspectives. (p. 169)

One of the key components of ethnographic research is the quality of the relationship the researcher has with the participants. I was aware of the universal constructs of the adult/child binary (Krieg, 2003) and the disparities in status and power (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). The challenge for me was building relationships with the co-researchers. The strategies I employed to develop rapport, gain their respect and alter any traditional teacher perceptions of me are outlined in Chapter 4.

In an attempt to reduce power differentials and subvert traditional adult-teacher/child-student subjectivities I sought to find a location for the conduct of this research outside of school. My rationale for conducting the research outside of the school setting was so the co-researchers would have freedom of voice with no fear of retribution. I decided on the local university setting as it wasn't a school and was a familiar setting for six of the co-researchers whose parents worked there. I delineate the data collection techniques used in the critical ethnography in the next section.

### **3.5.1. Data collection and analysis critical ethnography**

To support the consistency with data I commented and critiqued my own conduct in the research process through a reflective journal. I asked the co-researchers some direct questions regarding the conduct of research thereby using their words in my reflections where possible. I interviewed each of the co-researchers individually twice in relation to their involvement in the research process: once, as part of the initial interview, and the second for the purpose of discovering their responses to the process of engaging in research. The audio-taped interviews

were conversational to encourage the co-researchers to participate. The interview transcripts were member checked by the co-researchers giving them the opportunity to “see how their speech objectified and represented them” (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005, p. 223).

The co-researchers had two informal group discussions as a means of providing feedback to me on the research progression. As an adult I was constantly aware of the need to become part of the decision-making process collaboratively with these co-researchers and not make decisions for them (Danby & Farrell, 2004). I did this by constantly seeking their opinions and encouraging their own dialogue that was not filtered through me.

Critical ethnography is more concerned with the usefulness of the information obtained or “ethnographic competence” (Petersen, 2005, p. 313). Ethnographic competence refers to evaluations made by the participants themselves or by those who must make apply the data in their work. The quality of ethnography was measured by the compatibility with the participants’ own understanding and experiences (Carr & Kemmis, 1990; Petersen, 2005). The co-researchers were asked to comment on their interview transcripts for accuracy and add changes if their opinions had changed since the initial interview.

Validity of an instrument is concerned with the trustworthiness of the data to substantiate itself as quality research (Mertens, 1998). Strategies to support communicative validity in this study included cross-examining multiple sources of data and evidence, such as the interviews, discussions and field notes; participant member checks where all transcripts of audio taped or videoed interviews were member-checked by the co-researchers; and outsider audits where one academic supervisor assumed this role to demonstrate research soundness. I ensured a complete and well-documented audit trail of the accumulation of data to validate its inclusion in this study (refer to Appendix 1 for a table that timelines research events). The critical ethnographic account of the research written up as a research narrative acts as an audit trail (Creswell, 2005). To improve the trustworthiness of the data my researcher bias is explained further in section 3.7.

In analysing the data patterns or themes were identified from the interviews and used to aid classification of data. Interview data were referenced and put in context against evidence found in the observations and field notes and connections or links were examined. Chapter 4 is the critical ethnographic narrative. The research details related to the socially critical project are outlined in the next section.

### **3.6. Socially critical project**

There were two parts to the socially critical project. One part involved the co-researchers providing me with qualitative data on their lives and experiences of school through interviews, journals, taking photographs and photo-elicitation interviews. The other part of the socially critical project involved PAR collaborative research with the co-researchers involving the design and analysis of two surveys and the production of a DVD that included the co-researchers' interpretation of the survey data in the form of short skits. The co-researchers exclusively decided what aspects of the research in which they would participate.

The socially critical project was designed to empower children to become educated as researchers and reformers by giving children the skills and opportunities to critically research schools and how they influence their lives. As mentioned an aim of this project was for the co-researchers to develop critical knowledge and become critical and analytical about their experiences of school.

The socially critical project primarily involved working with the co-researchers to design and analyse two questionnaires, one for adults and one for children (contained within Appendix 2). The two surveys mirrored each other with only five questions different between the adult and child surveys and a few changes in subjective language. The adults were asked to complete the survey from the perspective of what being a child was like today. As the facilitator I gave technical expertise on the conduct of survey research and supported a collaborative enterprise (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) of designing and analysing the survey questions. Construction and analysis of the two surveys allowed the co-researchers and myself opportunities to develop counter-hegemonic discourses. These discourses helped the co-

researchers to understand their world critically by exploring issues of hegemony, school culture, structure and expected behaviours, power and agency directly through the research. Power was shared through the analysis of the data and the DVD as the agreed upon form of transformative action (Greenwood & Levin, 2008; Hawkins, 2007; Kemmis, 2006; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Torres, 1995).

The co-researchers initially agreed to five full days of group work over a six-month period to complete the research project. By the end of this study I had met with them for ten full days of collaboration and planning over a year period with additional meetings in their teams (see Appendix 1 for a timetable of research events) These full days comprised of discussions, brainstorming sessions, designing and analysis of the questionnaire and the filming of the skits for the DVD. In the next section the co-researchers who were paramount to this research design are introduced.

### **3.6.1. The co-researchers**

In the research project I sought to position children as the experts at going to school, and capable of leading other children to question and ultimately change oppressive school structures. I initially advertised for co-researchers between the ages of 12-14 years. I specifically targeted this age bracket because children would have relevant experience of both primary school and high school to draw on and articulate. Bailey and Meltzoff (2001) believed that adolescence is the period when children's understanding of the ageist or discriminatory treatment of them unites with the voice to speak out about it. Advertisements were placed at various recreational facilities for children and youth around the Wollongong area, such as Wollongong Youth Centre and Police Citizens Youth Clubs. No children responded. I then invited two children who were within the age category and five children I had taught at primary school who invited friends of theirs to participate. More detail on the recruitment of co-researchers is included in Chapter 4.

Originally there were 12 co-researchers aged between 12-14 years. The co-researchers chose their own pseudonyms that are used throughout this thesis. Brice and Tarco were siblings and so were Leroy, Charleston and Juliet. The three siblings withdrew, one after the first day and

the other two after the third full day. No explicit reasons were given for their withdrawal. These three co-researchers who withdrew and their parents gave permission for their interview data and survey data to be included in this study. Table 4 provides a brief overview of the co-researchers' personal details including their gender, age (at the start of the study in July 07), year at school (at the start of the study in July 07), type of school they attended, and if I had previously taught them at primary school.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age #	Grade #	Type of school	Previously taught
Cildru	Female	13	8	Private girls' high school	Yes
Julliet *	Female	14	9	Private girls' high school	Yes
Penelope	Female	14	9	Private girls' high school	Yes
Alice	Female	13	7	Public co-ed high school	No
Charleston *	Male	14	9	Private boys' high school	Yes
Hamish	Male	13	7	Private co-ed high school	Yes
Brice	Male	14	8	Performance based selective public co-ed high school	No
Arc	Male	13	8	Academically selective public co-ed high school	No
Agent Sprat	Male	12	7	Public co-ed high school	No
Tarco	Male	12	6	Public co-ed primary school	No
Leroy *	Male	12	7	Private co-ed high school	Yes
Semaj	Male	12	7	Private co-ed high school	No

# indicates the co-researchers' age and grade at July 2007

\* indicates the co-researcher withdrew from the study

Table 4: Summary of co-researchers

Demographically, the co-researchers lived within the boundaries of the Illawarra region, extending from Otford in the north to Haywards Bay and Marshall Mount in the south. The twelve co-researchers brought schooling experiences from nine different public and private schools within the Illawarra region. The co-researchers are introduced in more detail in Chapter 4. The next section chronicles how the co-researchers provided data on their lives and worked collaboratively with me to collect and analyse the survey data.



### **3.6.2. Data collection and analysis socially critical project**

This socially critical project used a research design based on qualitative data collection techniques. Qualitative data provided by the co-researchers included; the transcribed audio taped interviews, journal entries, photographs, videotaped interviews and survey results. The interviews, journals and photographs from the co-researchers provided a deeper understanding of “the meanings and purposes attached by human actors to their activities” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 106). The diversity of methods and mediums of expression used to collect the qualitative data fostered the co-researchers’ autonomy, met their competencies and interests, and encouraged them to communicate in ways that were meaningful to them whilst not patronising them (Punch, 2002). In analysing this data, recurring themes and patterns were identified and then cross-checked and triangulated between multiple data sources, particularly the survey data. The analysis of the data is documented more in Chapter 5, which is the first results chapter.

The methodology of collecting the data is recounted in detail in Chapter 4 and so to avoid repeating the same information I will give a brief synopsis here. Appendix 1 also contains a timeline of main research activities. At an introductory ‘Pizza Party’ night the twelve co-researchers made an informed decision to participate and chose which research aspects to participate. All of the co-researchers kept a reflective journal and took photos with two disposable cameras. All of the co-researchers were next informally interviewed individually in regards to their life and school experiences. During a collaborative planning day I used the photo-elicitation technique (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Fielding, 2007a) that allowed the co-researchers to describe the images and their reasons for taking each photograph. Some of the co-researchers interviewed each other for the photos from the second camera using the photo elicitation technique. Alice was the only co-researcher who additionally chose to interview an adult and child. Some data were not included in this written report due to its perceived irrelevance.

### 3.6.2.1. A qualitative survey

A survey is considered a quantitative research tool. This study used a survey compiled collaboratively by the co-researchers and myself. The survey data has been analysed qualitatively due to the small sample, non-parametric analysis of the survey data for the DVD and the lack of calibration of the survey as a quantitative research tool. The survey also contained mostly open-ended questions in order to access more personal data and detail and so for analysis purposes is considered an open-ended questionnaire. The survey data was the main source of adults' data combined with one short interview conducted and audio-taped by Alice. The children's data from the survey supported the qualitative data that the co-researchers provided and represented a slightly broader range of children's experiences. The purpose of the survey was therefore more to add depth to the co-researchers' data rather than data in its own right. It also provided a context for discussion and analysis by the co-researchers to extend their own data contribution.

Collecting the data for the socially critical project required ten full days of collaboration and planning as well as some additional small group meetings. The co-researchers were partners in the instrument design, data collection, data production and interpretation stages of the research process. The initial intention was for the twelve co-researchers to design one survey that would be given to children to find out how relevant school was to their lives. However, after much discussion on the possible outcome of the research, which was to influence schools to become more child-friendly, the group decided that two surveys would be developed – one for adults and one for children. The rationale for taking this stance was that adults can make decisions regarding children's lives and schooling. The co-researchers and myself wanted to understand adults' perceptions of children's lives and experiences of school to see how in touch adults actually were with children's reality. The co-researchers and myself collaboratively decided through discussions that the most effective method of getting the message from this research to other children and adults would be by DVD. This DVD would showcase some of the data from this research in the form of short skits that the co-researchers would write, film and edit.

Targeting adults as an audience for the survey meant there were two surveys where adults were asked to respond based on what they believed it was like to be a child today. The co-researchers and myself agreed on the questions through voting, discussions and brainstorming sessions. The adults' survey was basically a mirror of the child survey with six different questions and several changes in subjective language. The survey questions consisted of thirty-five questions in the adult survey and thirty-six questions on the child survey organised into three sections. The collaboratively designed surveys were divided into three sections, 'Demographics', 'Life in General' and 'School Life' (contained in Appendix 2).

The 'Demographics' section ascertained the respondents' age, gender, occupation for adults, grade level for children and how many siblings or children at home. The 'Life in General' section had three closed questions and ten open-ended questions. The questions in this section focussed on finding out the opportunities children got to make decisions, what children valued in their lives, children's relationships and power. The final section, 'School Life' comprised of eighteen open-ended questions and two closed questions for the children and fourteen open-ended questions and one closed question for the adults. Questions concentrated on building awareness of children's experiences of schools by asking: the purpose and expectations of schools; what children loved and didn't like about school; children's relationships with their teachers; how children were included in decision-making and what children would like to have a say about and what new possibilities of schooling by representing their ideal school. Some questions differed between the adult and child survey. Adults were furthermore asked whose responsibility it was to look after the school. The children were additionally asked; what their learning style was and if the teacher catered for their learning style, how teachers would describe children in school and finally how adults outside of school would describe children.

The co-researchers had the option of inviting one adult participant and one child participant to an interview after the completion of the survey. The interview questions extended the scope of the survey and were compiled collaboratively using the same process as the survey questions. Alice completed these semi-formal interviews with an adult and a child. She used her own discretion to select both the participants. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

The co-researchers, all unintentionally high achievers from middle-class background each selected ten participants, five adults and five children to complete a relevant survey. In alignment with the research intent of giving the co-researchers real power over decision-making, the co-researchers used their own selection processes to choose these participants. The co-researchers selected adults and children participants from within their social spheres and this implies these participants would be from a similar social class however, the identification of a person's class was not in the survey design. Therefore, no uniform selection criterion was utilised. Some co-researchers selected teachers as part of their adult sample and as this was a very small sample, the data was not analysed separately. Teachers were not specifically targeted as a group of adults in the research design because it was discussed that the selection of teachers should be a personal choice dependent on how comfortable each co-researcher was with the inverted power dynamics within their school setting. The co-researchers' choice of adult participants depended largely on their degree of familiarity and comfort within each relationship. Most co-researchers approached their family first and then friends at school and in the neighbourhood.

The co-researchers were given one month to distribute and collect the ten surveys. The self-completion survey was confidential as the only identifiable aspect recorded was the co-researcher's code who distributed and collected them. Table 5 includes the verification codes of the surveys collected by the co-researchers that identified the survey as adult (AS) or child (CS), the participant's gender and age or age bracket for adults. The final two digits refer to the survey number.

<b>Co-researcher</b>	<b>Adult survey codes</b>	<b>Child survey codes</b>
Cildru	ASF36-01 ASM26-03 ASF36-02	CSF12-01 CSF13-03 CSF09-05 CSF16-02 CSF14-04
Julliet	ASF36-04 ASF46-05	CSF13-06 CSM14-07
Penelope	ASF46-06 ASF46-08 ASM36-10 ASF36-07 ASF36-09	CSF14-08 CSF17-10 CSF13-09 CSF14-11
Alice	ASF36-11 ASM46-13 ASF26-15 ASF36-12 ASM46-14 Interview; AIF-01	CSF15-12 CSM16-14 CSF12-16 CSM15-13 CSF11-15 Interview; CIM-01
Hamish	ASF36-16 ASM36-18 ASF46-17 ASM36-19	CSF13-17 CSF17-19 CSM12-21 CSF08-18 CSM13-20

Brice	ASF46-20 ASF36-21	CSF14-22 CSM16-24 CSF14-23
Arc	ASF26-22 ASF46-24 ASF36-23	CSM13-25 CSM14-27 CSM13-29 CSM14-26 CSM14-28
Agent Sprat	ASF36-25 ASF36-27 ASM18-29 ASF26-26 ASF46-28	CSF12-30 CSM12-32 CSM12-31 CSF15-33
Tarco	ASF26-30 ASF36-31	CSM12-34 CSF10-36 CSF10-35 CSM13-37
Leroy	ASM46-32 ASF36-33	CSM10-38
Semaj	ASF36-34 ASF36-35	CSF11-39 CSF12-41 CSM15-40

Table 5: Survey verification codes for the socially critical project

In analysing the survey data qualitatively, the questions on the survey were further categorised into four areas: daily life; relationships with adults; decision-making at home and at school; and school life. The nine co-researchers selected one of the four areas that they were interested in. Each area had two co-researchers and one area, relationships with adults had three co-researchers. These teams of co-researchers were responsible for collating the data from the questions that related to their section (see Chapter 4 for more details). I facilitated and worked collaboratively with each group during this phase of the research process. Each group put the collated data into Excel database sheets and then created tables and graphs. They analysed the data using non-parametric procedures and wrote summaries and trends for each of the questions comparing adults' and children's data. Once all of the data was analysed each group then independently decided on what aspects of the data they felt was important to include in an episode or skit. The children in their teams then wrote, directed, filmed, and edited their skit. All of the episodes were compiled to form one DVD.

### 3.6.2.2. The DVD

The DVD follows the basic structure of the collated survey data. The 'daily life' group filmed two parts entitled, "Little Sister" and "Spocks and Specks". Cildru wrote and produced "Little Sister" as she felt children were constantly watched in their daily lives just like the show 'Big Brother' that has hidden cameras. The data Cildru included was; what children wanted to achieve in twelve months and in the next ten years, what adult did children want to be when they grow up, how did children spend their week and an adult only question, whose job is it to take care of the school.

Alice wrote and directed the second skit related to daily lives called “Spocks and Specks” that was modelled on the popular ABC show ‘Spicks and Specks’. The data that Alice included was; some demographic information including the number of participants and their ages, what children wished they could spend their time doing and what do children feel most confident doing.

Semaj, Tarco and Brice represented ‘relationships with adults’ by a skit called, “Professor Smart”. This episode was a board room meeting where adults only, and an orangutang for light relief, discussed results of a recent survey. The data they included was; who are important adults in children’s lives, do children get along with their teachers and what adult would they like to be when children get older.

Hamish and Agent Sprat delved into the area of ‘decision making at home and at school’ with a skit called, “Thank Goodness You’re Here” copying the format of the trendy show, ‘Thank God You’re Here’. This group did not give data throughout the skit, however wrote some data on the blackboard at the end. This skit was set in a classroom where they got me as a student to answer some questions as to what decisions children get to make at school, at home and if you were principal for the day what would you do.

The final group had a large amount of data dealing with ‘school life’. Penelope and Arc decided to make a skit titled, “Erasers War on Education” modelled on the well-liked show, “Chaser’s War on Everything’. The data included; if no-one was watching at school what would children do, what annoys children most about school, the thing that children love about school, and some children’s only questions - what subjects do children value the most and do teachers accommodate the children’s learning style.

I wrote the introduction and conclusion for the DVD and Agent Sprat helped me present these sections on the DVD.

Taking collective action was a central feature of the research design. The production of the DVD allowed the co-researchers to present the data in ways that suited and celebrated their creative expression whilst widening the scope of people who may benefit from the results, as advocated by Curtin and Nayler (2002):

If children and young people can speak through the medium of video they can contribute their views to an audience beyond their classroom. They are able to utilise skills in research and offer the ‘other’ – the researcher or whoever else is sitting on the periphery and struggling to gain access to classroom research – the potential to hear their views. (Curtin & Nayler, 2002, p. 6)

In sharing power and working with the co-researchers, the production of the DVD was a motivating and uniting tool that helped me understand how important it was to give the co-researchers a real project with real power to express themselves. The primary intent of this study was to inspire some level of personal change by raising awareness of the results from the survey by the production of a DVD. The DVD that is submitted as part of this PhD is the co-researchers’ representation of what impacted them and what was important to them from their particular section of the survey data. Some of the data presented in the DVD regarding children’s lives outside of school is not repeated in this written account. This written account is more concerned with children’s agency within schools and includes the qualitative data provided by the co-researchers. The DVD represents the co-researchers’ voices. The DVD was their project. In the next section I identify my biases as influences on this study.

### **3.7. Researcher bias**

Making my biases explicit is important ethically and creates transparency of the research process and data analysis. I am critical of the current schooling system. From my twenty years teaching experience I am aware of the lack of status and voice children have in traditional schools. I have initiated this study as a way to investigate current practices and power relations in schools from children’s perspectives. I am an adult and therefore I see things from my adult perspective.

I am a single mother and have a daughter who motivates me to contribute to school change as I dearly want my daughter's personality, creativity and imagination to be nurtured in school. I am a white, middle class, educated woman who is privileged and the majority in Australian schooling. I have no first hand experience of being discriminated against – except for when I was a child. I have utilised my own childhood experiences of school and also my many dialogues with children during my teaching in schools to help me have empathy for the standpoint of children and to validate their experiences.

### **3.8. Ethical considerations and limitations**

For this study to receive ethical clearance from the University of Wollongong, certain roles and ethical issues were pre-established, including some aspects of the research design and the organisation of data. As the principle researcher I took responsibility for the accumulation, confidentiality and storage of data. To ensure the security of confidential information all data was stored in a locked facility at the university or at my house.

The outline of the research design was presented to the co-researchers and their families before each consented to participate. Various aspects of the research design were approved prior to commencement, such as the co-researchers using cameras, having journals, creating a DVD, handing out surveys and interviewing other children and adults. The co-researchers' roles were therefore defined collaboratively within this basic research design with each co-researcher choosing their level of participation. Justly, the co-researchers each had equal power and voice in the democratic process of developing the format and questions for the surveys and interviews (see also section 4.3). I constantly mediated the power dynamics in my relationship with the co-researchers to ensure reciprocity and my journal reflects this at times, arduous cycle (see section 4.4).

The primary challenge in attaining ethics approval from the university was describing the children as participants and not as co-researchers. Consequently, I had to take responsibility for all of the research that was conducted and had to ensure an arena of safety around each of



the co-researchers in the distribution and collection of surveys and in the conduct of the interviews.

The agency of children and their ability to participate in research is becoming widely recognised however, there are still structures that limit the opportunities for children to authentically participate (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2007; Krieg, 2003). Bearing the influence of conservative frameworks children are presumed to lack capacity and are considered 'legally incompetent' under certain ages to make informed decisions (Johnson, 2004). Ethics committees and researchers must decide what is in the best interests of the child based on their perceptions of a child's decision-making capacity and maturity to participate. When parents give permission for their child to participate in research there is no legal requirement for children to consent (Johnson, 2004).

In this research both parents and children gave their consent. I felt it necessary for the children as co-researchers to sign a consent form independent from their parents as a way to respect their decision to participate.

The issues of privacy, confidentiality and autonomy were relevant to this research. Co-researchers had their privacy protected through choosing a pseudonym. Informed consent from both the child and the parent or guardian was given for the footage used in the DVD and for the use of other data for educational purposes. In terms of autonomy, all children, parents and adult participants were free to withdraw themselves and their data at any time. Three secondary co-researchers withdrew, one after a day and the other two after two full days, although they gave permission for their data to still be included in this study.

One of the main ethical difficulties was the commitment of time needed by each co-researcher. Each co-researcher originally agreed to five full days over a six month period. This was an under estimation and after ten full days and many additional meetings the study extended to over a year. Each co-researcher was informed that at any stage they could withdraw their data and person from the study, however the bonds made and the opportunity

of making a DVD produced, written and directed by them kept motivation high and the nine co-researchers stayed for the full year.

Trustworthiness of the study was enhanced as the data obtained was at a point of saturation. The second form of trustworthiness was demonstrated by making explicit coherence in the methodology and design of the research. Detailed accounts of the research decisions contained within my reflective journal and the justification for those decisions enhanced the entire project's trustworthiness and credibility (Creswell, 2005). Some of these decisions are shared in Chapter 4. My supervisors also acted as critical friends to ensure the data collection methods were authentic, detailed, descriptive and well documented.

A limitation to this study was that voices of teachers and school administrators were not included. This was not within the scope or capacity of the project design.

Other limitations to the study include the sample size and demographics. Contrary to current and typical divorce statistics, all of the nine co-researchers lived with their biological parents who were still married. All of the co-researchers were successful at school where education was valued in their families and for their futures. Nearly all of the co-researchers' parents had university degrees and some had post graduate qualifications. The next section provides a summary of this chapter.

### **3.9. Summary**

As a critical social theorist I have focused on co-researching with children as a form of critical education with the intent of inspiring social change through collective action. By conducting the research study the consensual hegemony in schools, that dominates and manipulates children's false consciousness, was exposed and new possibilities of 'ideal schools' were explored. Ledwith (2007) describes that one of the purposes of critical research that can be applied to this study is to create critical public space, "with the potential for critical reflection and collective action, and for deepening of consciousness" (Ledwith, 2007, p. 605).

The critical methodologies employed in this research design, such as PAR and critical ethnography fit within the paradigm of critical social theory. PAR methods allowed the co-researchers to become critically enlightened and aware of the false consciousness and its affect on their power. Using critical ethnography in the research design meant that I could have an insider/outsider perspective on the way the children engaged with the process of conducting research without enabling this to contaminate the socially critical project.

In the next chapter I share my journey as an adult researcher sharing power with the co-researchers in an ethnographic account of the conduct of this research.

# Chapter 4: A reflection on the research process

## 4.1. Introduction

This reflective critical ethnography is testimony to the journey of an adult researcher sharing the process of conducting collaborative research with children. This chapter acts as a bridge between the previous theoretical chapters and the following results chapters. As such it adds the personal and reflective element of the research process in practice whilst also serving to verify the research methodology and its link to the outcomes of the research. Therefore this chapter aims to help the reader understand the reasons why certain methodological choices were made and how they played out in the research whilst also providing insights of the relationship I had with the co-researchers and the relationships to a lesser degree the co-researchers had with each other.

Indicative of critical ethnography, this account demonstrates the nuances of the literature presented not necessarily by direct referencing but in the use of personal data that incorporates the content. For that reason this reflection is a compilation of extracts from three sources. First, my personal journal, secondly, from formal discussions I had with the co-researchers regarding the research process during the research and lastly from the individual interview I conducted with each co-researcher at the conclusion of the research project. I have italicised comments from the co-researchers so these can be identified from my own narrative.

I have organised this chapter into sections that introduce the research participants and provides insider details of the research process. The first section includes some personal information on the co-researchers and myself. The next section introduces the research project and my role as facilitator of the project. The following part discusses the strategies I used to build rapport with the co-researchers and their parents. After that, the process of researching with the co-researchers is recounted followed by the co-researchers' reflection on the journey. My final words include my reflective response to the research question: how can children be effective co-researchers in an adult defined research project?

## **4.2. Understanding the research participants**

I begin the research journey with brief introductions of the co-researchers and myself, and the relationships we had in order to create this research project.

### **4.2.1. My school yard memories**

I don't remember much from my twelve years at school and yet I know some experiences have shaped who I am. I have always had a very strong sense of social justice. From my primary school I remember my kindergarten teacher pulling our ears as punishment and I falsely owned up to an uneaten sandwich so the class could go out and play. I remember thinking she was a mean teacher and that punishing all of us was unfair. I remember in Year 2 my teacher gave the cane to me and some other children because we had the audacity to run along a seat in the playground. I remember she missed me with the cane and I cried anyway so she wouldn't give me another whack. She was another mean teacher. In Year 4 I had a nice teacher who seemed to like kids. I remember the Year 5 teacher being cranky and throwing a duster at me because I couldn't remember an equivalent fraction for a half.

In high school I was studious and got good grades and I was awarded dux of my school in geography. If anything I was bored by school. What I remember most about high school were the times with my friends where class was just an inconvenient necessity that impinged on my socialising. I attended a strict, Catholic all girls high school. I remember in Year 8 being sent to the principal's office with three of my friends because we had passed a note around saying how boring the economics class was, how much of a dinosaur our teacher was and how we were going to go to the footy with some boys on the weekend. We had to write an apology and were not allowed to leave until we did. I remember not being sure if we got in trouble because we said the teacher was a dinosaur or that we mentioned meeting boys?

Perhaps that is why I became a teacher – to inspire because I was not inspired, to treat children with respect because I did not feel I was treated with respect. Even as a teacher I addressed perceived unfairness within the school with principals, sometimes things changed, mostly they didn't and yet knowing I had spoken was important.

As a teacher I believed I was fair and approachable. One crucial aspect of my teaching was that I loved and respected the children I taught and they knew it. I tried to make learning fun – the controlled and stifling curriculum fun - guided and directed by me. My motivation for delving into new projects was always to benefit the children. After attending workshops on gifted education I found their individualised learning approach refreshing and engaging. I started to ask myself why I did certain things, why there were certain rules and ways of operating within my class and the school. I began to change the way I did things to give students more of a say and introduced more individualised homework and learning programmes. I became the coordinator of Tournament of Minds (T.O.M.). T.O.M. is a student directed team problem solving competition. I had to get out of the way as a teacher and watch as the children worked together without adult interference. I was in awe of what they could achieve – far different to how I would have approached things. This experience was to be the catalyst that spurred my desire to create more authentic schools where children have real power and voices.

### **Meeting the co-researchers**

The co-researchers were my partners on this research journey. Their individuality, unique experiences and lives shaped this research journey. As previously mentioned each of the co-researchers chose their own pseudonym for the research, some more creatively than others. In the next section you can meet the co-researchers. I have grouped them according to the friendships and relationships they brought to this research.

#### **4.2.2.1. Charleston, Julliet and Leroy**

Charleston and Julliet were twins and Leroy was their younger sibling. Charleston was an eccentric, humorous, loquacious boy. He liked to: relax by watching the TV or Internet or playing strategy games on the computer; read; play the guitar; playing tennis; hang out with friends from school and study together; and act/performing. In the research discussions he was very intelligent, articulate and quite cynical of schools. He left after the first day without

reason. I think it was because the first day was teacher-directed and he had come to get away from school.

Julliet was an extroverted, friendly, optimistic girl who enjoyed: being with her friends, either shopping, watching DVDs or going to the movies; listening to her *iPod*; reading books and poems; and downloading songs or communicating on *MySpace* on the computer. She was a relaxed, social butterfly and in the research she enjoyed chatting with the other co-researchers.

Leroy was a quiet, creative, musical boy who respected and liked to please adults. In describing himself he noted, “I’m different from most people... I just stay happy” (Interview, 10/4/07). He liked: sleeping; playing shooting games on the computer either by himself or with friends; hanging out with friends watching movies; reading; Irish dancing; and singing. In the research he participated and enjoyed doing what was expected. Both Leroy and Julliet withdrew after three full days. No reason was given however, their family had just returned from a trip to Perth the day before they withdrew.

#### 4.2.2.2. Brice and Tarco

Brice was Tarco’s older brother and they didn’t know anyone else in the research team. Brice was a shy, creative boy who took pleasure in quietly meeting the other co-researchers. He liked to; play basketball; take drama classes at school; teach himself the keyboard; play strategy computer games like *Age of Empire*; cycle; read - particularly the *Harry Potter* series; drama and performing. Interestingly, Brice loved acting and was confident in the skits in the DVD.

Tarco was an energetic, enthusiastic, talkative boy who wanted “to become a zoologist... or an animaltronics person that makes things” (Interview, 10/4/07). Tarco liked to; do Taekidokai martial arts; swim; run; play games on the computer like *Zootica 2*; watch TV – *The Simpsons*; play outside in his fort; walk the ferret; play on equipment; archery; cycle with his family. Tarco was the youngest co-researcher and he enjoyed socialising and playing with the other co-researchers.

#### 4.2.2.3. Penelope, Arc and Semaj

Penelope, Arc and Semaj were family friends and treated each other like siblings. Penelope was a very creative, organised, ambitious girl who enjoyed completing tasks to a high standard. She loved *Harry Potter* and wanted to work at NASA. She enjoyed: spending family time with her parents, siblings and nanna; playing the clarinet, guitar and piano; reading; hanging out with friends either at the movies or shopping; hiring DVDs; playing cards; camping with family friends; playing netball; swimming; using the computer for investigations, Internet, games with the twins and downloading music. In the research she was focussed, worked independently and yet also had fun.

Semaj was a very talkative, creative, humorous boy. He liked to: draw cartoons; create short movies with Pinnacle studios; draw with friends; build things with his Lego set; collect War Hammer figurines and construct terrain; play War Hammer games; play rugby union; watch TV, *Nerds of Seashow*; make music on the computer; create craft things; swim; ride his scooter; and ride the billycart and skateboard he made. Semaj was very chatty and enjoyed playing with and leading the other co-researchers at times.

Arc was a relaxed, bright, friendly boy who at times made his own fun in the research. He enjoyed: composing music on the computer; playing online flash games on the computer; playing the Playstation; playing sports like basketball and soccer; reading; and watching TV, *Family Guy* and *The Chasers War on Everything*.

#### 4.2.2.4. Hamish, Alice and Agent Sprat

Hamish, Alice and Agent Sprat played in a band together. Hamish was a happy, technologically savvy, talkative boy. He liked to: play *Playstation* racing games on the computer either by himself or making a night of it with his friends and having pizza or Chinese food; listen to music on the computer – with over 3000 songs of different genres on his *iPod*; share music with his friends; play the trombone and bass; play cards; eat lollies and marshmallows; watch DVDs; and exercise with his personal trainer. In the research he enjoyed socialising and playing with the other co-researchers.



Alice was a very creative, bubbly, adaptable girl who enjoyed participating and helping wherever needed. She had lived in four states. Alice liked to: play her saxophone; play in one of the five bands she belonged to; play with friends either at concerts, at the beach or play games and have fun; surf; read; and do art at school. In the research Alice enjoyed playing with the other co-researchers and doing work independently when needed.

Agent Sprat was a keen, relaxed, musical boy who liked to; play his game-cube and Nintendo *Wii*; play table tennis; play his trumpet; play in the band; climb trees; play his soccer table; and play dominoes. In the research he assisted whenever needed and when the group was together he valued chatting and playing with the other co-researchers.

#### 4.2.2.5. Cildru

Cildru knew Juliet, Penelope, Charleston, Hamish and Leroy from primary school. She was a quirky, intelligent, creative girl who was a prolific reader. Cildru liked: imagining things; driving with her parents; performing/acting at eisteddfods; playing the piano; drama; netball; creating things, web pages or advertisements on the computer; hanging out with friends either talking, listening and sharing music or email messaging each other. In the research she worked independently and had fun. The next section describes how this research project evolved.

### **4.3. The research project**

From the outset of designing this research project I struggled with my adult status and considered it almost a bias (Erickson, 1996; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Interestingly, the fact that I was also a teacher did not cause me as much tension as being an adult, probably because my perception of being a teacher is broad and not defined by age. My seven year old daughter is one of my greatest teachers in life and so I am comfortable creating spaces where I learn from children. This attitude together with my formal teaching experience in schools heightened my awareness of the unconscious power dynamics and expectations between teachers and pupils in schools. The experiences of teaching in schools also highlighted how

positively children respond when treated with the same respect afforded adults. Thus, a priority for me in designing this research process and analysing the data was that it be mutually satisfying, engaging and respectful to me and the co-researchers foremost as well as the other adults and children.

Originally I had wanted to have open, flexible research where the children defined the methods. To satisfy university ethics and to get approval from the education faculty I had to delineate some specifics without consulting any children.

I wonder how things would be if children were free to investigate/explore what they wanted to? I feel frustrated at times due to me having an agenda and trying to give the children freedom and autonomy. I am restricting the unfolding of the project due to the very limitation that it is my project!  
(Personal reflection, 12/4/07)

Being the facilitator of the study meant that I was responsible for some jobs namely; organising the venue and times to meet, contacting and arranging the team and their parents, organising food and getting any resources prepared. As a researcher and a facilitator I was constantly reflecting on the distribution of power between the co-researchers and myself as evidenced from my personal reflections (see Jipson & Jipson, 2003; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). I was still an adult so I aimed to be an interested adult co-researcher who sincerely valued and respected their perspectives.

One aim of ethnography is to get membership status within a social arrangement (see Corsaro, 2000; Christensen & James, 2001). When researchers function within schools some children may value participation for its disruptive effect on their schoolwork. This research project did not take place within an existing environment like a school, which gave me the freedom to create the research environment and project. The greatest disadvantage of creating my own space for this research was time. I was impacting on the co-researchers' precious leisure time and this added great stress to my management of the research. I became acutely aware of how important it was to effectively use our time.

My rationale for choosing the university as the site for conducting the research was strategic. The university was a research-oriented neutral site with no possible ramifications for the co-researchers. I was a student, like them at university conducting research thereby I felt it helped blur the teacher/student dichotomy of power.

#### **4.4. Creating the research partnerships and building rapport**

After failed attempts of recruiting children at local youth centres (mentioned earlier in section 3.6.1.) I invited the children I had taught in Year 3 between four and six years earlier; Juliet, Charleston, Leroy, Penelope, Cildru and Hamish. They had all been involved with the Tournament of Minds so I knew they liked challenges and I already had great relationships with the children and their families. Penelope asked Arc and Semaj, my sister asked a work colleague of hers, Brice and Tarco and I asked a colleague of mine from university Alice, who then asked Agent Sprat. I spoke to each child and their parents about the research and I invited them to a pizza party night where I would explain more. This research had to fit within their family lives so I was actively building rapport and negotiating with the parents as well.

Parents and the co-researchers attended the pizza night. My intentions for having the pizza party were clear. I wanted the co-researchers to make an informed decision on whether to participate or not, get support from parents and build the foundation of our relationship - reciprocity; fun, authenticity, respect and trust. I tried to shake the school 'teacher' image. I intentionally dressed casually, used more informal language to casually engage with them, asked their opinions all the time, gave them choices as to what part of the research to participate in and made sure we had play-time and ate pizza.

I was the facilitator of the night, which set the scene for the whole project. In the first ice-breaker activity I asked the co-researchers to interview each other to find 'missing persons' by asking three questions; Where do you live? What is your favourite food? What is your favourite TV show? In pairs they interviewed each other and we came together and compiled the data. We discussed the relevance of the questions asked, the information gained and the

purpose of the interview. Cildru commented that we needed physical characteristics. So I instructed them without looking to describe the partner they had worked with. Some gave detailed descriptions so we added physical characteristics to our data to help us find a missing person. Next we examined any trends in the data. At first they noticed the obvious discrepancies like most popular suburb and favourite food. Some started to find less obvious patterns like grouping data into hot food and ethnic origin. In the second activity the co-researchers paired up with someone different and I gave them a transparency sheet. They had to trace each other's face and write positive qualities about each other.

We then ate pizza and I explained that they could choose what parts of the research to be involved in and they could also help design the research. The variety of research methods they could choose from were aligned with the co-researchers' interests and aptitudes (see Punch, 2002) such as; taking photos, designing the survey, distributing and collecting the surveys, analysing the data, designing the interview questions, conducting the interviews and keeping a reflective journal. I mentioned that we could produce a DVD to present the findings and invited the co-researchers to provide any other options. The co-researchers unanimously and excitedly wanted to make a DVD and so they could also choose if they wanted to write a script for a DVD and film and edit their skit for the DVD.

I provided all of the co-researchers with a journal and they were encouraged to record any feelings, activities or responses to what was happening in their lives. Each co-researcher was given their first disposable camera to take images of what was important in their lives. I talked about university ethics and the restrictions with taking photos of other people that meant the co-researchers could be the only human subject in the photo. Penelope wanted to take pictures of parents and friends and Semaj was also frustrated by this constraint. Charleston wanted to use a digital camera. Semaj and Penelope asked about referencing songs in their journal indicating they saw it as a school project rather than a personal diary. The children I had taught called me Mrs Marr (I've since changed my name to Rose) which indicated to me I was still a teacher in their eyes rather than a student like them.

Generally went very well – we talked and laughed and had some fun. The children I taught feel uncomfortable calling me Pat but hopefully will.  
(Personal reflection, 4/7/07)

The parents and children signed separate forms agreeing to participate in five full days of their school holidays. The co-researchers and their parents chose times for an initial interview before our first day together. All of the interviews took place at the children's homes, which gave me a broader picture of their lives. The interviews were more like informally guided conversations. I listened and shared a lot about me as I felt it was really important for all of the co-researchers to know me as a person to help build trust and reciprocity. This was the foundation for the process of conducting research, discussed next.

#### **4.5. The research journey begins**

This research was praxis-oriented with the intention of raising the co-researchers' critical consciousness. To achieve this, the children had an active role and an attempt was made to give them real power to influence the research process. The co-researchers' participation in this study was a process through the co-construction of dialogue, analysis, information sharing, reflection and action (see O'Kane, 2000). I was concerned during the study that the co-researchers had agreed to only five full days of their precious holidays. As the facilitator it was difficult negotiating suitable times with eight families and therefore we did go over time. The co-researchers were mostly oblivious to practical facets of organising the study and came along ready to have fun. Appendix 1 contains a timeline of the main research activities.

This was my first time conducting collaborative research with children so I was a learning facilitator. I was continually evaluating the group dynamics and children's engagement with activities and changing those that seemed ineffective and boring. I tried to combine research tasks and play with various degrees of success. I made sure each day we had a long break and I had organised for some sport equipment to be available to enable the group to be physical and develop different types of collaboration, beyond the 'in study' mode.

I started our first full day together with an individual activity that was school-like. I did stop the activity after a short time and in hindsight this could have been changed to a group activity that would have fostered more interaction.

It [the activity] was a visual one and it was a very teacher/school one with magazines and cut-outs and it really went down flat. (Personal reflection, 11/4/07)

I gave them a model survey to complete as I wasn't sure of their familiarity with such a research tool. We discussed the type of questions and what information they would give. We collated some data and noticed some trends. This set us up for discussions on what we wanted to achieve in the research. At this stage it was agreed that we would design a survey to find out how children experience school.

We began a brainstorming session on the different aspects of school life. It was at this point that I gave control over to them to organise this discussion. The most intriguing part of the research process was that they didn't take charge. In wondering why they didn't leap at the chance to have power I thought of an analogy I had heard in relation to gifted education. The story compared the subjugation of children to a leopard that has been caged and used to getting its food brought to it – many children's mind numbing experiences of an alien curriculum. Once the cage is taken away the leopard will at first be unsure of how to hunt for food and may take some coaxing, however its natural instincts have not disappeared - they have been dormant. For children their natural tendencies to play and explore, create and question are there they are just asleep because they, like the leopard, have not experienced anything other than the zoo, or school. By giving them control I had opened the cage and I had expected them to know what to do not realising that I should have allowed for adjustment periods. Their reluctance to take charge may have also indicated that the children did not feel comfortable enough in our relationship to take charge and possibly upset me as they were not sure of my attitudes.

Perhaps some of their reticence was due to the fact that they didn't know what angle I was coming from so some did not want to go 'against' me or bag school just in case I was in favour of it and having had me as a teacher disagreeing with me may have been quite intimidating for some. (Personal reflection, 11/4/07)

It was during the brainstorming and discussion on the practices and culture of school where I listened without judgment to their voices that “they started to free up” (Personal reflection, 11/7/07). The co-researchers’ then enthusiastically explained their school realities that involved discussion of some complex and abstract issues that I scribed; age segregation, popular groups, uniforms, learning and how schools are more about teaching rather than learning and teachers’ power. It was after they had shared freely that the discussion turned towards including adults as the survey audience. The co-researchers proposed that if we compared what adults thought to what was actually happening for children then it may indicate how in touch adults were with the reality of school for children today. So the decision was collaboratively made to include adults as the survey audience which meant we would compose two surveys – one for adults and one for children. The co-researchers broke up into self-selected groups with some putting our initial data into Excel and some brainstorming one school area further and designing questions for the surveys. The first day felt quite adult-directed, however also set the precedent that I trusted them to do real jobs and that their voices had equal weight to mine.

The activities on our second full day together gave children more control. The agenda was simple – by the end of that day we needed the survey and interview questions. The co-researchers had the option of interviewing one adult and one child after they completed the survey. The interview questions would extend the understandings gained from the survey. Semaj reflected on how he was devising questions for the interview:

*Well, we're actually figuring out what questions will be in the interview, we've kind of helped us prepare and because we get to do the interview we*

*think about the answer that we would have given. (Semaj, discussion, 13/7/07)*

I had printed off their photos so I was busy conducting photo-elicitation interviews with the co-researchers in pairs. One co-researcher was filming the interview and the other co-researcher was being interviewed. I started one self-selected group up with some fun creativity exercises to inspire some suggestions for their ideal school. Two open questions were asked to stimulate thought; what would be impossible for schools to do? And how can we make schools worse? Penelope came up and she said, “well it's like Big Brother and imagine getting voted out of school [laughed]” (Personal reflection; 13/7/07). To explain the comment further, in the show Big Brother contestants are under constant surveillance from hidden cameras and the viewers get to vote people off the show. Her analogy implied that to make schools worse there would be hidden cameras. She thought it would be funny if children could actually get voted out of school.

There were moments throughout the day where I felt like a teacher monitoring behaviour rather than a researcher.

There was a little bit of paper plane throwing and stuff and it was like, 'oh, you know come on guys am I the teacher or can we work together' and a bit of Big Brother they almost needed from me (Personal reflection; 13/7/07)

Our relationships were becoming more open and sincere meaning that I could make comments and negotiate boundaries with them as a participant rather than an adult authority figure. By the end of the second day bonds were beginning to form between us as we were all in this project together. One of the things I did was take stock of how the co-researchers were going with the research process. During our first discussion it became apparent that Semaj had different notions of what he had thought his role in this research would be,

*I thought that you would be giving us a survey. (Semaj, discussion, 13/7/07)*



The fact that he was given a far more important role than simply completing a survey may explain why he said the research was fun:

Semaj was very outspoken saying how much he loved the research - it was fun, it was real, they really liked the challenge, all of them were saying that they all really liked it, they were all really positive. (Personal reflection, 13/7/07)

If I sound surprised by their reactions I was. I have learnt that these co-researchers and I had different definitions of fun. According to my reflections I felt like an adult teaching them the research techniques where, from their perspective the fact that I had asked them to engage with something real where they had a valued role seemed to be enjoyable for them. Semaj articulated how he felt power was being shared in the research:

*... because it gives us a sense of, we have the power to keep it going. When you do something with someone else that they did a lot of the work, when you, [laughter and interruption from group] when you do something with someone else and they have the power as they have control over it, when it's finished you don't really feel a sense of achievement that you've contributed a lot and did a lot and here since we have the power and control what happens it's much more fulfilling at the end. (Semaj, discussion, 13/7/07)*

These discussions were an integral part of developing the co-researchers' sense of ownership as this was their way to influence and control the research design. They gave me feedback about the disposable cameras. Tarco commented,

*That was fun. (Tarco, discussion, 12/10/07)*

Hamish said he would have preferred a digital camera;

*... to find a way where we actually or give us a memory stick - I personally would like that. (Hamish, discussion, 12/10/07)*

Penelope noted,

*It would be nice to have a digital camera, we wouldn't go out smashing it or anything. (Penelope, discussion, 12/10/07)*

Penelope's comment may indicate that she felt I didn't trust them enough to give them a digital camera, which I explained was not the case it was because I didn't have access to digital cameras that was the inhibiting factor. In hindsight allowing them to use their own digital cameras and giving me a copy of the photos on a computer disc would have overcome this slight hindrance.

Cildru and Penelope had differing opinions on the value of the journals that I gave them. They stated:

*The journal was fairly pointless. (Cildru, discussion, 12/10/07)*

*I actually like doing the journal, I sort of have done one for English before. (Penelope, discussion, 12/10/07).*

The co-researchers began to feel ownership where they had choices of what, when and how they would participate in the research. Interestingly, everyone participated in everything except Alice who was the only co-researcher to conduct two interviews that supplemented the survey.

I needed to liaise with co-researchers by email to finalise the survey drafts. I changed some questions and added a few more after consulting with my supervisors. The difference between the adult and child surveys were six different questions and different subjective language such as, on the child survey the question would ask 'you' as a child whereas the adult survey would ask 'what school would be like for a child going to school' recognising that it wasn't their direct experience. The survey was never intended to be a formal quantitative research tool as there was no calibration or aim to obtain generalisations. The prominence of open-ended questions meant it gave us the opportunity to access and analyse people's opinions to raise the

co-researchers' awareness and consciousness. After compiling and printing the surveys each co-researcher was given five adult and five child surveys to distribute and collect. I gave them about a month to do this and naively I had arranged for us to meet for three days to analyse the data, write, film and edit the skits for the DVD. I say 'naively' because what I had proposed was a mammoth task and I had very much underestimated the time needed.

I had been in regular contact with the co-researchers by phone or email, organising the surveys and dropping off the second disposable camera for them to take photos of how they learn and teach in their lives. It had been three months since the whole team had come together (see the timeline of research events in Appendix 1). I had organised for our final whole group collaboration days to be three consecutive days. To keep motivation high I tried to have something to give to them that they had done each block we met. I had printed their photos from the second camera. I had invited a teacher colleague, Donna to attend our first day. Donna has outstanding information technology skills and had conducted research with children.

In preparation for the day I had compiled the data I had together except for two questions. The morning of our session Juliet and Leroy withdrew and agreed that I could collect their completed surveys and so my compiled data needed to be updated. Two questions on the survey that had been influenced by Christensen and James (2001) research were challenging and needed to be collated. On the surveys the participants had to draw a pie graph of the way they used their time in a week and another pie graph for the way they wished they could spend their time in a week. This fourth day together was spent converting each piece of pie graph into a percentage. This was very onerous as Tarco in our discussion described pie graphs as boring and Penelope averred,

*It was very stressful, especially with the graphs. (Penelope, discussion, 12/10/07).*

Hamish changed his mind about the pie graphs when he reflected on the process as these excerpts show;

*[pie graphs were] boring, time consuming and I'll never get those hours of my life back. (Hamish, discussion, 12/10/07)*

*I didn't actually mind turning everything into percentages and graphing it all at the end, writing all the stuff down, I didn't mind it. (Hamish, interview, 18/3/08)*

I could tell the co-researchers were frustrated and so was I. Having new data come in that morning did not help and I felt terribly unprepared and guilty that I had almost wasted their day doing boring yet necessary stuff.

It was a really, really flat day I was flat they were flat it was a boring hard working day and... I wouldn't be surprised if they didn't want to come back... that's what I find the most frustrating is being able to relax and being able to, wanting to guide them and hurry them on because we're on a tight, a tight time schedule so it is hard as to how much power I can give them... and that's again that hard line to as a leader how much you have to pull rank to get them focussed. (Personal reflection, 11/10/07)

I made sure that I had included all of the data for the following day and Agent Sprat assisted me. Donna and I started the morning off by talking about the DVD. We wanted to motivate them to show them that this hard work was going to lead to some fun. Donna also showed them how to use Excel. I had grouped the survey questions into categories; children's lives outside of school; decision-making in children's life at home and at school; children's relationships with adults; and school life; The co-researchers selected one of the four areas that they were interested in and formed teams. Cildru and Alice chose 'children's lives outside of school'; Semaj, Tarco and Brice chose 'relationships with adults'; Hamish and Agent Sprat chose 'decision making at home and at school'; and Penelope and Arc chose 'school life' that had the most survey questions to collate and analyse. These teams of co-researchers were responsible for collating and analysing the data from questions pertinent to their area and

presenting the data in the DVD. Each group then started to put the data into Excel to make tables and graphs and I helped them to analyse the data non-parametrically.

Alice and Hamish provided feedback on the survey in our progressive research discussion and in the interview. They stipulated;

*... to change some of the questions we put in because I had lots of people saying I can't answer these questions. (Alice, discussion, 12/7/07)*

*That it [the survey] went to long, don't put pie graphs in. (Hamish, discussion, 12/7/07)*

*Less questions on the survey and I would've asked them in a different way so they wouldn't come up with so many random answers so it could be easily processed because that was a pain in the butt. (Hamish, interview, 18/3/08)*

Some co-researchers also stated how difficult it could be analysing data as Alice commented,

*It's quite hard to read between the lines. (Alice, discussion, 12/10/07)*

Hamish and Agent Sprat were analysing the responses to a survey question on what do you want to be when you grow up. One child had said, “ninja master”. Both the co-researchers said that the child wasn’t answering the question seriously, which the data did not indicate. Hamish then noted,

*It's also difficult not to put your opinion in. (Hamish, discussion, 12/10/07).*

This verifies the challenge of children as researchers giving their standpoint rather than interpreting the data only (see Thomson & Gunter, 2007).

The co-researchers had worked really hard again and I organised for us to have a swim at the university pool in the afternoon as a reward. I was feeling stressed with only one more collaborative planning day left that the co-researchers had originally agreed to and the filming of the DVD nowhere in sight.

I feel stressed. I feel stressed that we're not getting it done in time, they are working as hard as they possibly can. They can't do it any quicker, it's just such a huge project - there's 64 questions... and they have done a fantastic job but it's just time, it's so huge... we went for a swim this afternoon and it's really, really hard to work out, they've given up their time so this is their holidays so even though I'm pushing them I feel a little bit guilty thinking I don't want to be an ogre or teacher because you're giving up your time freely for me and I really, really value that. (Personal reflection, 12/10/07)

Our fifth full day began with Donna introducing storyboards for the DVD. The groups worked hard again putting the collated data into Excel and making graphs and tables. Hamish and Agent Sprat had finished analysing and began to work on their storyboard and script. By the end of the day we were still nowhere near finished. This added to my stress as I now had to explain to the co-researchers and their families that their original obligation of five full days was complete and yet the project was not finished. I made it clear that the co-researchers did not have to participate any more and yet all of the nine remaining co-researchers chose to continue – perhaps because we were finally coming to the fun part – the making of the DVD. I negotiated with the families for two more full days together.

In between our next full collaborative day I met each group separately at one of the co-researcher's house to finish analysing the data and putting the data into Excel. Again I had to negotiate with parents and flexibly fit within their family time. I brought dinner with me for the family to ease the burden and I dropped off my computer for those that needed it. This meant on our sixth full day together each group worked on their storyboard for their skit. The choice of what data to include was at their discretion. Some groups had also worked on *GarageBand* to compose some original music for their skit, which they loved.

It is still hard to keep them on track... I had to leave a few times and they did the paper plane throwing, I mean that's just kids... it's been that balance between being a bit of a matriarch, you know teacher to trying to get them focussed to do what they have to do. (Personal reflection, 13/12/07)

We needed to use the time we had together more productively and so reluctantly each group had three weeks to email me their script and storyboard before we met again,

I really, really hated giving them home-play but I had to because they just weren't using the time as well. (Personal reflection, 13/12/07)

I was impressed as each group emailed me their script and storyboards so we started to film on our seventh day together. Donna came again and led Alice's group through the filming of her skit. What I did discover is that some co-researchers had nothing to do while one group was filming so I decided that we didn't need everyone altogether for the next filming day. Alice and Semaj's group had finished filming and Penelope's group had started filming. I was feeling more encouraged and the co-researchers were motivated as they were having fun, they were in charge.

Do you know what? It will actually be very, very good and the kids have done 90% of it especially the video they've done like 98% they've done heaps... Look it was absolutely fabulous they did so much, they did have fun - I just felt like a bit bad at the end because I was being a bit of an ogre but that's ok, it's all looking good and I can feel the finished product but now I have the drama because we'll need to do at least one more day filming and then at least one more day editing... it's just me getting frustrated because I wanted to do more, but anyway I've got to chill out. (Personal reflection, 4/1/08)

I organised another filming day for a Sunday where Cildru and Hamish's groups could film. Unfortunately Cildru couldn't make it and so we just filmed Hamish's skit.

It was a Sunday so again I still struggle with this whole position and role of keeping them really focussed and also allowing them some freedom and fun, it's their own time they're giving up but we had to do some filming. (Personal reflection, 3/2/08)

On our last full day together Cildru and Penelope's group finished filming. Two of the co-researchers were amusing themselves and disrupted the filming:

I did the whole teacher thing and said 'get out' because they ran in while we were filming and they were going to be throwing water at each other and then they also went and threw a ball over the rail so they had to go down and get it - and because the uni was all locked I had to keep going down to let them in and I was a little bit disappointed in them and then there's this kind of that whole you know they're having fun so - it's getting that balance. (Personal reflection, 3/2/08)

With all the filming done all that was left was the editing. I arranged to meet each group separately and gave them my computer so they could edit. Donna had showed them how to edit and some already had a firm grasp of editing like Semaj. They were teaching me to edit. I wrote and filmed the introduction and concluding sections for the DVD and Agent Sprat agreed to help film and perform these parts with me. I did my own editing.

Four months after our final day together all of the co-researchers and their families came to another pizza party night to view their skit and the nearly finished DVD. It had been a very long journey and at that stage the project had been going for over a year. I asked at the viewing night if any co-researchers were interested in showing the DVD at their school and at some meetings with educational administrators. To be honest I think most of them were 'over it' as the project had dragged on. Agent Sprat and Alice seemed keen and once this thesis is submitted I will arrange with these co-researchers to show the DVD. This research always had a transformative intent and so arranging these meetings was important in keeping my promise



that we would show it and potentially contribute to broader educational change. Alice shared her enthusiasm in this way:

*I reckon they'll [the meetings], they'll be great, I reckon it will be like a real slap in the face to the Department of Education, they'll be like 'whoa they've gone out and done this research, maybe we should actually do something about it and not just sit back and watch. (Alice interview, 11/3/08)*

Since that group showing in 2008 two co-researchers have further edited their skits. I paid Donna to spruce the introduction and conclusion sections up and compile all the short skits into one DVD. Alice agreed to design the jacket for the DVD. I gave each of the co-researchers a copy of the DVD in November 2009 to get their final approval of the DVD before submission.

#### **4.6. The co-researchers' reflection on the journey**

An important element of engaging in a reflexive critical project is to engage in reflection retrospectively of the process and to evaluate how things went. In order for this to happen I interviewed each co-researcher individually at their home to review the research process. The co-researchers reiterated that friendship and bonding were important elements of the process for them. Hamish enjoyed making friends the most, Agent Sprat and Alice commented;

*It was really fun and there were some people who did their bit and really helped out the group. (Agent Sprat, interview, 4/3/08)*

*It's just been really fun I mean having the other kids there we learnt from each other doing what we're doing because everyone knows, everyone is good in different areas so everyone has like contributed. (Alice, interview, 11/3/08)*

Semaj, Cildru, Penelope, Alice and Hamish all described participating in the research as fun and when asked how they would improve it could not offer any suggestions. Tarco and Agent Sprat described the filming and acting as fun. Brice, Arc and Cildru liked different things about the research, as each mentioned:

*Computers were pretty fun and Garage Band – music. (Brice, discussion, 12/10/07)*

*What I enjoyed the most was when I was working with the research I was learning excel and using skills I've got. (Arc, discussion, 12/10/07)*

*The lollies were fun, but it was fun doing research during the holidays because half the time during the holidays I'm bored out of my skull. (Cildru, interview, 10/3/08)*

The authenticity of the project was another factor that contributed to the co-researchers feeling valued and owning the project. Penelope and Semaj felt that they had contributed and made decisions. Hamish said he helped design questions and provided technical support. Arc, Brice, Alice and Tarco elucidated the importance of their roles in the research further:

*We did get all an equal part, we did get very involved in this. (Arc, interview, 13/3/08)*

*We're the ones that went out and did all the... doing the surveys. (Brice, interview, 5/3/08)*

*We're sort of doing all of it and putting it together. (Alice, discussion, 13/4/07)*

*I think it's [his role] been very important because I've been doing the filming, I helped with some computer work, I helped with Garage band and I've also*

*helped with the pie graphs even though they were terrible. I also helped with the survey and a couple of other things... I mean we actually had a say not much left if we don't. (Tarco, interview, 5/3/08)*

Part of their feeling of ownership can be credited to the relationship I developed with them individually and as a group. Hamish recognised,

*You're very manoeuvrable and our opinions counted for a lot because the survey was on us. (Hamish, interview, 18/3/08)*

Cildru gave me feedback on the way I conducted the research:

*... we all got a chance to say what we thought, even when, we, even when we continually dragged down pie graphs, we were still allowed to say it but we all got an opinion on everything and a couple of times even when you were being reasonable you told us you would be quiet because you didn't want to influence it too much, you didn't want to be big bossy Pat, which you weren't. (Cildru interview, 10/3/08)*

The co-researchers' opinion of adults including children in research provided some insights. The co-researchers nominated some advantages for adults including children in research such as; children think differently to adults, are more active and like to have fun and make things interesting. Penelope and Agent Sprat described it this way:

*The advantages are you get a younger perspective and a more sort of creative perspective, no offence but adults do have more rigid, structured ideas. (Penelope, interview, 13/3/08)*

*Adults are maybe more serious and trying to get the information across to the kids won't really work because it doesn't really have the kids' sort of point of view or wording. (Agent Sprat, interview, 4/3/08)*

One disadvantage is that children can have short attention spans. Arc expanded these ideas:

*I'll start with disadvantages, perhaps we could be immature, not work on task but I think I did a wonderful job of staying on task. The benefits, we have are more creative mind than older people, because older people have been restricted at school so they're already like their creative minds have just gone because they've been to school. (Arc, interview, 13/3/08)*

Agent Sprat, Semaj and Tarco politely advised adults doing research with children to;

*Sort of try and make a deadline, try and make it a bit further away then what you actually hope to get. (Agent Sprat, interview, 4/3/08)*

*Make it quick and don't draw it out to be too long. (Semaj, interview, 19/3/08)*

*[Adults] should always have a good break because kids don't like it if you have to just work... you should always make sure there are people the same age because sometimes you can feel left out, um, sometimes try and get an even number of boys and girls and try not to make everything boring otherwise they'll get sick of it. (Tarco, interview, 5/3/08)*

#### **4.7. My final words**

As the facilitator of this research two inter-related facets of the research process were difficult to manage – time and behaviour.

The time management was caused in many ways because of its uniqueness. As this project did not occur in an existing aspect of their lives like schools, I had to negotiate and create the time to meet, which affected the co-researchers' leisure and family time. This meant flexibly negotiating with eight different families.

They're [the co-researchers'] casual where I have the drama of getting them all together and using that time productively, so I stress much more than they do, they don't care. (Personal reflection, 13/12/07)

One positive aspect was that as the research did not occur in an established or familiar community, like school, there were no definite boundaries or expectations of behaviour. This was liberating as it meant that the co-researchers and I could relate without traditional adult/child binaries. Even the co-researchers I had taught quickly relaxed once they realised I was in the research with them, facilitating from the inside.

The co-researchers came to have fun where for me as the facilitator I came to work with them to get a job done. This difference in perspectives meant I was consciously aware of how productive we were in using our time together which links to the other source of stress or frustration, which was behaviour management. The struggle I continually faced was joining in their fun and being the adult facilitator who tried to motivate them and keep them focussed. I struggled with maintaining the balance between facilitator and researcher. In my reflections I refer to feeling like a teacher, ogre and matriarch at times when dealing with the co-researchers. Perhaps unintentionally I have created the impression that I didn't relax and enjoy myself. We did all laugh and play and had fun. If I were to do anything different I would allow for more time meaning less stress and I would include the co-researchers more in organising regular meeting times.

#### **4.7.1. Children as effective co-researchers**

How can children be effective co-researchers in an adult defined research project? To provide perspectives on this research question I shall interpret the research process in light of the children's right's model of participation (see Table 3, p. 62) that this study adopted by reflecting on: an adult's view of children; children's voices as a source of knowledge; and children negotiating power and decisions.

#### 4.7.1.1. An adult's view of the children

In alignment with the new sociology of childhood and the children's right's model of participation I knew that the co-researchers were competent people who had unique perspectives to offer this research if I stepped out of the way as an adult. The T.O.M. competition served me well as I had first-hand experience of some of these children's capacity to engage in creative intellectual work when given autonomy and freedom. As a result it was easy for me to share power with them as I trusted them and gave them space to complete activities their way. I didn't want carbon copies of me. Therefore to have effective co-researchers within an adult defined project the adult should view children as capable of being effective co-researchers without necessarily restricting their competence. The adage, 'no-one rises to low expectations' comes to mind. If adults view children from this perspective then they are more likely to share power with children and children are acutely intuitive in differentiating between tokenistic and authentic participation.

#### 4.7.1.2. Children's voices as a source of knowledge

The children's right model sees children's participation in research as an opportunity for children to shape and contribute to creating knowledge where children facilitate their voices being heard. This links with critical theory and the transformative intent of this research which was for the co-researchers to develop critical knowledge and raise their consciousness. I have learnt that for children to truly have a voice adults need to create a safe space free from judgments and limitations of what can and can't be spoken. To do this there must be time given to building rapport between the children and adults. I consciously built rapport with the co-researchers by dressing and talking more informally; having a pizza party; choosing fun ice-breaker activities; interviewing them individually and sharing my opinions also so they could get to know me as a person; ensuring we had a big informal breaks with fun equipment; choosing research techniques that were relevant to them – taking photographs, journal writing/drawing; sincerely asking and listening to their opinions; and giving them real influence and power over the research design.

At the first brainstorming session the co-researchers were still a little reticent and not used to the freedom of being able to say what they wanted to an adult about school, especially an adult who had taught some of them. As I listened and asked questions without judgments they began to realise that I valued their opinions and experiences and this created the environment in the research where they were just as important as me –it equalised our perspectives in the research. Their knowledge and voices were just as poignant and valuable as mine. Cildru mentioned in her reflection that the co-researchers could ‘bag out pie graphs’ without fear of offending me which for me evidenced that I had created an environment conducive to collaborative research. So to have effective co-researchers in an adult-defined project the co-researchers need to feel that their experiences, knowledge and voices are valued just as much as the adult researchers.

#### 4.7.1.3. Children negotiating power and decisions

In the children’s right model of participation (see Table 3, p. 62) the locus of power is symmetrical and decisions are negotiated between the stakeholders. As the instigator and facilitator of this research it felt like ‘my project’ as I had delineated some research methods to satisfy the university ethics committee before approaching the co-researchers. The effectiveness of this project was that I left space for the co-researchers to have real power and influence the research design. This space created a sense of ownership for the co-researchers. As the facilitator I managed the process, however the co-researchers were included in negotiating and deciding on the research design, from their personal level of participation, to composing the questions for the surveys, to deciding what data to include in the skit. They were part of something real and important where their role was valued and they had:

*... the power to keep it going. (Semaj, discussion, 13/7/07)*

The fact that some of the other co-researchers also felt they had contributed to the research validates the authenticity of the project. This together with the relationship I developed with them based on trust and reciprocity produced effective co-researchers within an adult defined project.

In conclusion, what I have learnt from facilitating this research is that the co-researchers considered being given real jobs to do, being respected and being listened to by an adult as 'fun'. I have also learnt that the co-researchers' insights, desire to make a difference and power and agency combined to achieve an amazing feat of conducting this research and creating a DVD in the little time we actually had together. My final words are that I am incredibly proud of the DVD and I consider the DVD a vital and culminating part of this research process - as it was the co-researchers' voices.



# Chapter 5: Structural practices in schools and children's agency

## 5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter outlined how the research was conducted and this chapter presents the findings. This study investigated how a small group of children were limited or enabled by the structural practices and resultant relationships with adults in their schools. This first results chapter shows data and key findings pertinent to structural practices and Chapter 6 presents data specific to children's relationships with adults. I have addressed structural practices in schools first under the premise that these structures affect children's relationships with adults in their schools. Structural practices refers to the structures or organisation in schools, both conscious and unconscious, such as rules, rituals, expectations and allocation of space that adults have established to ensure an orderly and controlled system (see Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Joseph, 2008; McLaren, 2003; Willmont, 1999; Wink, 2000).

In this chapter the findings are organised as a series of themes derived from the analysis of the data. There was some data related to children's lives outside of school that was included in the DVD and is not repeated. The data presented in this written report integrates the survey data with the qualitative data provided by the co-researchers most relevant to the key research questions around children's agency within schools (see section 3.6.2.2.). The thematic presentation of data in this first results chapter is organised in order to provide perspectives on the research question: how do the structural practices in schools impact the agency of the children in this study?

I have arranged the data in this chapter in two interrelated categories firstly, 'Space and Place' and secondly, 'Learning and Success'. 'Space and Place' provides data concerning physical spaces and the place for children in schools. Children's place in schools explores data relating to children behaving properly and resisting conformity. The next broad category, 'Learning and Success' presents data in six areas; children's learning; homework; testing; wishful

learning; being successful; and technological children. In each section adult data is presented first to introduce their perception of children's reality followed by children's data of their actual experiences in schools. The co-researchers' data is italicised. The codes attached to the survey data (see Table 5, p. 106) are organised to denote the following information: AS indicates adult survey, CS indicates child survey, gender M – male or F - female, age or lowest age bracket for adults and the survey number. An example: ASM36 – 11, translates to data collected from an adult survey, male, between 36-45 years and the survey was number 11 given by Alice. This section continues with a brief overview of data from the adults and children in this study.

### **5.1.1. An Overview of Adults' Data**

The primary source of adults' data was the survey and Alice conducted an interview with a female adult. The co-researchers used their own discretion to choose five adults, most choosing their parents and adult family friends, neighbours or relatives. The co-researchers distributed the survey to each adult and collected the completed survey. The adults were asked to answer the survey from their perspective of what it is like being a child today. Thirty-five adults completed the surveys, eight were male and twenty-seven were female. Adults ranged in age from 26 years old to over 46 years and most adults were aged between 36-45 years (see section 3.6.2.1.). Data was not presented in terms of gender or age, as after analysis there were no discernable patterns. Due to the predominantly open-ended questions, the small sample and the lack of calibration of the survey as a research tool, the survey data was analysed qualitatively.

The survey was long and some adults did not answer each question. Generally, adults responded with longer answers compared with the children. The adults' data sheds some insights into their unique standpoint based on their beliefs and experiences of children today. The presentation of survey data in the DVD highlighted differences between adults and children. The analysis of data in this written report does not adopt this same standpoint instead adults' data is presented as contributing to building understandings of modern childhood and children's experiences in schools. One adult (ASM46-13) in particular wrote in response to questions that experiences varied from child to child.

I analysed the survey qualitatively, which meant that each adult was identified with his/her specific data however, there were some overarching patterns that are expanded upon in the two results chapters. This overview of adults' data pertaining to school provides a brief glimpse of the spectrum of opinions whilst introducing some content and perspectives that prevailed during the analysis. For example, various adults thought the purpose of schools from students' perspectives was to learn new things, socialise, to prepare for life or to gain job qualifications. A lot of adults indicated that what children loved about school was seeing their friends, whilst others suggested children loved learning new things, recess, lunch and home time. Generally, most adults felt that what annoyed children most about school was homework, strict rules, hard work or rigid learning structures. Adults also commented that children were expected to behave properly at school, socialise with children, do their best, participate in activities, complete tasks and manage their time. Many adults agreed that there were no spaces 'just for kids' in school although some adults nominated areas such as the classroom, the library, ovals and the playground. Most adults believed that children got along with their teachers. A lot of adults thought children would want their teachers to know about children's lifestyle and their personal identity. Numerous adults responded that if children knew they couldn't fail they would attempt everything, take risks, yet others in contrast thought they would do no work or study. The next section provides an overview of children's data.

### **5.1.2. An overview of children's data**

Children's data was compiled from; the survey, Alice's interview with a male youth, brainstorming and discussion sessions with the co-researchers and the co-researchers' interviews and journals. These sources of data were integrated to provide a more individualistic and detailed perspective of what being a child today was like for these participants. In the previous chapter I introduced the co-researchers and gave a snapshot of their lives. Data included in this chapter paints a broader picture of how the co-researchers viewed schools and their roles within it.

Eleven co-researchers completed the survey themselves and distributed the surveys to five children of their choosing. Forty-one children completed the surveys, seventeen were male and twenty-four were female. The age of children ranged from 8 years old to 17 years old and most children were aged between 12-14 years (see section 3.6.2.1.). The qualitative analysis of the survey data revealed similarly to that of the adults, that there were no distinguishing patterns resulting from differentiating between age or gender. Each child was identified with his/her specific data.

This overview of data pertaining to schools provides a glimpse of the range of children's responses and perspectives and introduces some key concepts that informed the analysis. All of the co-researchers valued school and were successful at school. A range of children thought the purpose of schools from students' perspectives was to learn new things, socialise, to prepare for life or get an education. A lot of children specified they loved seeing their friends at school whilst others itemised specific subjects they enjoyed, learning new things or recess, lunch and home time. Generally, most children felt that homework and assignments were the most annoying aspect of school and other children suggested students spoiling the class, tests, bullying, troubling teachers or rigid learning structures. Children were expected to behave properly at school, succeed and attain high standards and do their best. Most children agreed that there were no spaces 'just for kids' in their high school although some children named the library, classrooms, desks and lockers, ovals and the playground as places where children had some identification. Most children indicated they got along with their teachers. A lot of children wanted their teachers to know their personal identity and the effects of their teaching and learning. A few children highlighted they wanted their teachers to know how they felt about the homework workload and classroom management. Numerous children responded that if they knew they couldn't fail they would take risks others suggested they would keep studying or alternatively some stated they would do no work. The next section is the first thematic category of spaces for children.

## **5.2. Space and place**

In the analysis of the data two interrelated themes related to structural practices in schools and the way they can impact children's agency became apparent - physical spaces for children in

schools and children's place in schools. The data from these broad categories are further broken down into three smaller sub-sections; spaces for kids, behaving properly and resisting conformity. I have started with the spaces for children in schools.

### 5.2.1. Spaces for kids

The data presented here includes a mind map from a brainstorming session with Juliet, Tarco and Arc, an interview with Cildru and responses to the following survey and interview questions;

- Describe any inside or outside spaces in schools just for kids.
- Interview question; Are there any decisions you'd like to make in school?

The analysis of participants' interpretations of what 'just for kids' meant lead to the three key identifiable themes with both data from adults and children. The themes were; no spaces for kids, limited spaces for kids and the whole school is for kids.

In a brainstorming session Juliet, Tarco and Arc drew a mind map of aspects of school titled, 'Good, Bad' (see Figure 3 below). The bad aspect of school was "closed spaces" linked to teachers and boring. The good aspect of school was "open spaces" connected to free periods, recess, lunch, Art and sports.

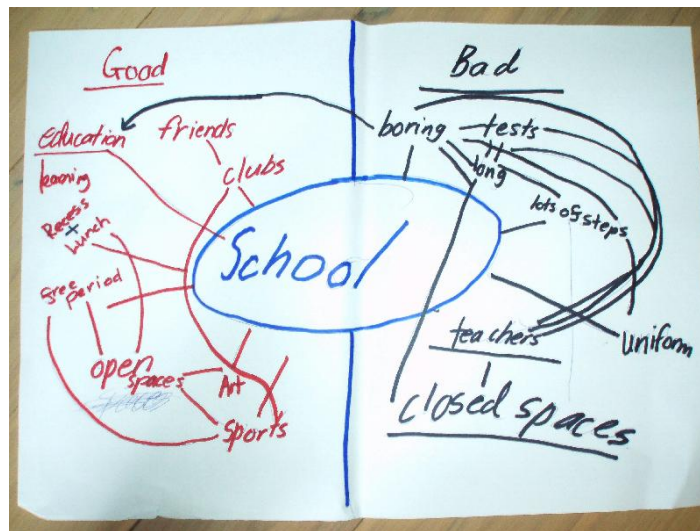


Figure 3: Mind map indicating spaces in school for kids (Juliet, Tarco and Arc, 4/7/07)

This links closely with results from the survey indicated that some adults and children wrote there were no inside or outside spaces just for kids without adult supervision. These adults stated; “we’re in high school so there’s no real “kids” spaces” (ASM26-03), “I don’t think there are any spaces at school that are just for kids” (emphasis in original; ASF36-11), “none really” (ASF46-06; ASF46-28), “can’t think of any” (ASF26-30), “no idea” (ASF36-23) and “none really – all have teachers present to some degree, common room for older high school students” (ASF36-33).

Some children responded in much the same fashion as they succinctly said; “none” (CSF12-30; CSF17-19; CSF1201; CSF1404), “none that I know of” (CSF11-39), “there are no inside/outside spaces just for kids” (CSM14-28) or clarified “nowhere without a teacher” (CSM12-32).

A few adults and children indicated differences in access to space between teachers and children in high school. One adult mentioned “playground, sporting field. Note: teachers are allowed everywhere. Children have no ‘place’ just for them” (ASF36-09). Two children also observed this disparity “plenty of spaces for kids but teachers can go there too” (CSF14-11) and “teachers are allowed everywhere, no specific places for children” (CSF17-10).

The second discernable pattern from the data was that some adults and children suggested specific inside spaces in their schools that were just for children. One adult asserted the “colourful classrooms, computer filled classrooms, TV in every classroom, fun resources” (ASF36-31) whilst another adult stipulated, “cubby houses, dance floor, costume room, games room, art space” (ASF46-08) These adults mentioned that children’s spaces inside were; “reading space, computer room” (ASF36-33), “hallways” (ASF36-27), “library, games room” (ASF36-35), “library, common rooms for older children” (ASF46-05) and “beanbags, computers, music, less formal learning space” (ASF36-34).

Children did not give such detailed descriptions as adults. These children recorded; “in the classroom” (CSF11-15), “lockers, desks” (CSF14-08) and “toilet” (CSF08-18) as inside spaces just for kids. Several children mentioned the library (CSM12-31; CSF14-23; CSF13-03) and one child clarified; “a lot of students go to the library, but there are a lot of teachers too” (CSM13-29). Cildru commented that she often went to the library if she had no-one to sit with:

*... where I sit, I don't like oh that's that group, that's that group, that's that group or you can have this spot here or that spot there or that spot there take your pick because... if it's raining I can't sit there I have to go straight up to the library and not eat - which annoys a lot. (Cildru interview, 6/7/07)*

Adults and children nominated more outside spaces just for kids. Some adults and children nominated the playground (ASM46-14; ASF46-05; ASF36-27; ASF36-01; ASF46-06; CSF14-22; CSM13-20; CSF12-30), sporting fields (ASF46-05) and basketball court (ASF26-30) as places just for kids. These adults elaborated further; “sheltered area with seats and tables, vegetable gardens, zoo, fishponds, sandpits, playground equipment” (ASF46-08), “play areas, covered areas, great seating, swimming pool” (ASF36-31), “cubby, playground” (ASF36-35) and “picnic tables, seats under trees” (ASF36-25).

Some children identified a variety of outside spaces just for kids; “there are a lot” (CSF17-19), “footy field” (CSM12-34; CSM12-31), “on the quadrangle” (CSF11-15), “canteen” (CSF12-41), “the reserve outside the school” (CSF13-03) and “pool, footy field” (CSM10-38). Several children commented further; “a massive oval so people can do what they like without disrupting other classes/people” (CSM16-14), “ovals outside the classroom where kids can play” (CSF14-11), “basketball and netball courts, park –we kids at my school go to those places to eat lunch/recess and chill/talk” (CSF14-23) and “shade cloth, seats and tables, handball courts, grass” (CSF15-12). One child stipulated “the oval and courts are normally “ruled” by the kids; only the teacher-on-duty is on the oval” (CSM13-29). Another child identified an outside space just for kids as “inside our bags” (CSF08-18).

A final theme that a minority of adult respondents idealised was that almost the whole school was just for kids. One adult stated “classrooms – 90% is children’s space and 99% children’s space, play areas etc.” (ASF26-22). Another adult qualified her response “the whole school (except staffroom) is just for kids! I suppose it is really only the playground where they can do what they like (within reason!) though” (ASF36-07).

In summary, three types of responses flowed throughout this data; no spaces for kids, some spaces and a lot of spaces just for kids within their schools. The data demonstrated that some children and adults in this study were aware there were few spaces just for children as nearly all spaces in schools where children were allowed to go, teachers were present. Cildru went to the library when it rained. Some participants could see the inequity as teachers were allowed everywhere with some clearly defined adult exclusive spaces such as the staffroom where children needed to be invited to enter.

#### 5.2.1.1. Discussion of data related to ‘Spaces for children’

Foucault’s (1979) architectural composition of space explains how the allocation of space indicates the distribution of power in the school by limiting or encouraging personal freedom of movement. Several adults and children from this study verified that children were not granted their own space within some schools and that adults were present in those spaces considered children’s spaces such as the playground. Devine (2003) and Christensen and James (2001) noted from their research in primary schools that children were aware that adults were allowed everywhere and children weren’t. Consequently, these children’s freedoms in their schools were limited due to the constant adult presence and restricted access to space.

A minority of adults suggested that almost the whole school was for children. Their interpretation of ‘just for kids’ did not consider adults’ control of the spaces and their intended uses or that most children have little to no power to change these boundaries. One child (CSM13-29) discussed the playground where teacher surveillance was minimal to ‘rule’ that space. By doing so he was exercising his power to utilise an environment, within an adult



defined organisational structure. The following section will incorporate the structural practices that influence children's place in schools expressed by the expectation that children behave properly at school.

### **5.2.2. Behaving properly**

Children are taught through the institutional structures of rituals, discipline, interactions, punishment and rewards what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' in schools. The data that is presented in this section includes interviews with Semaj and Penelope, a mind map from a brainstorming session with Cildru, Brice and Alice, and responses to the following survey and interview questions:

- What is expected of children at school?
- The thing that annoys children most about school is...
- Do you get along with your teacher?
- And the interview question: How would you describe school to someone who has never seen or heard of them before?
- Tell me about your school

To emphasise the right/wrong conditioning in schools Julliet, Marco and Arc in their mind map (see Figure 3) used the binary good/bad to categorise aspects of school and Semaj described school as:

*Fun if you do the right thing and bad if you do the wrong thing. (Semaj, interview, 9/7/07)*

The most popular response on the survey for both adults and children was that children were expected to behave properly at school. This section has been organised around this primary theme and is broken down further into the sub-themes of children following rules, wearing a uniform and respecting teachers.

The first sub-theme of children 'behaving properly' was the expectation that children would follow the rules. Some adults stated that what was expected of children at school was; "conformity – diligence" (ASF46-28), "to be perfect in class and to do as told" (ASM18-29) and "to follow school rules, respect themselves and others and their learning, try their best" (ASF36-07).

One child stated the expectation at school was: "to behave and follow the rules. You have to do everything right or you get in trouble" (CSF12-16). She did not explain what 'right' meant to her however another child gave a little more detail of what was expected of her: "to arrive on time, in correct uniform, go to classes, complete work and tests, to follow instructions without question" (CSF16-02). Other children said; "be polite, follow the school rules and always try your best" (CSF14-04), "be on time, obey rules, follow instructions" (CSF9-05) and "conformity to rules, i.e. uniform, behaviour; work to the best of ability; getting involved" (CSF15-33).

Some other children and adults described behaving properly as children being expected to pay attention, complete work and work collaboratively with others. Several adults replied children were expected to; "follow rules, try their best, reach their potential, work cohesively with others" (ASF26-22), "pay attention, complete tasks, cooperate" (ASF36-02) and "take studies seriously, meet deadlines, manage time effectively (time management), interact with peers in a positive way (social skills) and follow rules" (ASF36-31).

Some children wrote they were expected, "to listen and learn and not be naughty" (CSF10-35), "to be quiet and studious, courteous, brilliant all-rounder with not much satire, irony or argument" (CSF13-03) and another "[to be a] good and responsible student" (CSF12-30).

Another theme that emerged from the children's data only was that to behave properly children should wear their uniform correctly. Some children wrote they were expected to; "make sure we wear our uniform correctly and to wear it with pride" (CSF13-09), "that I wear my uniform correctly" (CSF17-10) and another child noted she had to be "in correct uniform" (CSF14-23). Penelope justified wearing a uniform by stating:

... at school, like they're very strict about dress code and everything like that, but you know that's because it's very prim and proper, you've got to wear your blazer to and from school. (Penelope, interview, 9/7/07)

In a brainstorming session (see Figure 3) Juliet, Marco and Arc classified 'uniform' under the bad aspect of school. In the same brainstorming session another group of co-researchers, Cildru, Brice and Alice queried the practice of children having to wear a uniform by writing on their concept map by writing, "uniform for teachers?" (Cildru, Brice and Alice, Group discussion, 4/7/07, see Figure 4 below).

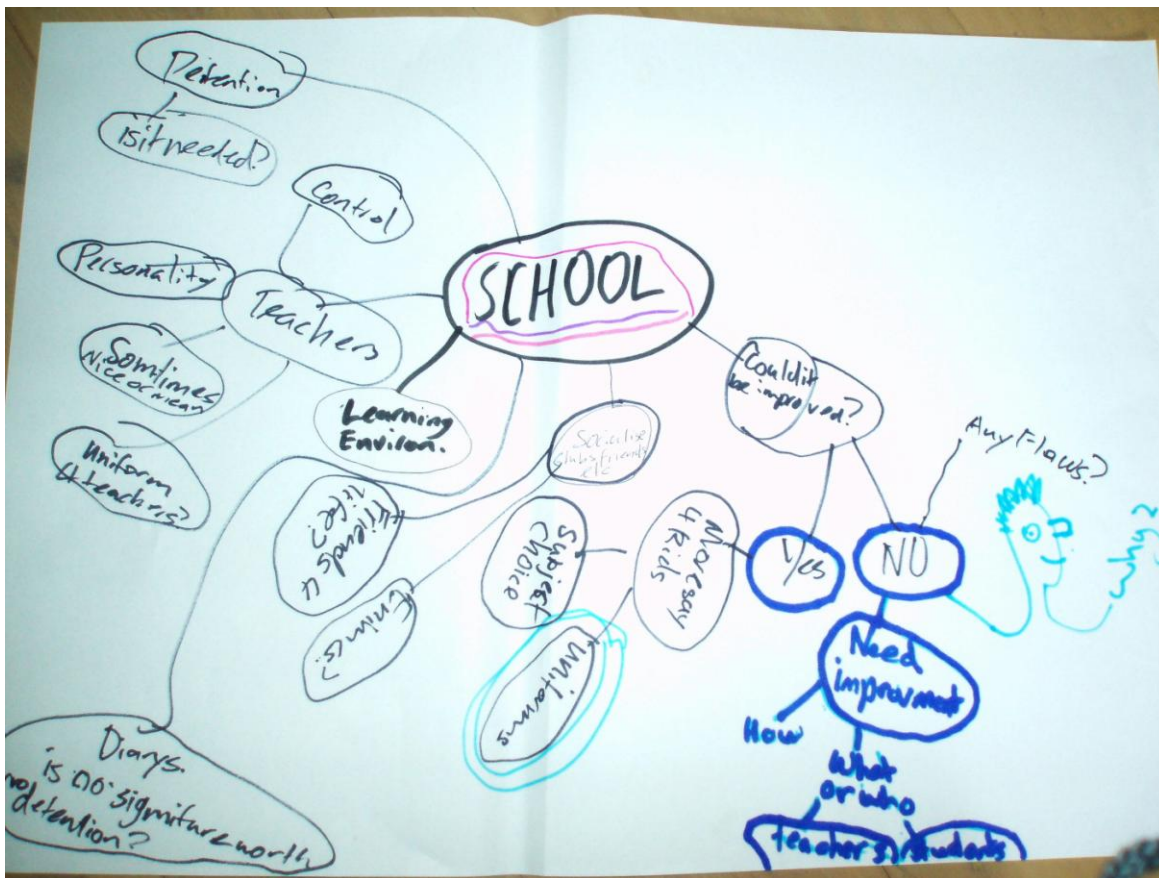


Figure 4: Uniform for teachers? (Cildru, Brice and Alice, 4/7/07)

Another theme from the data related to children behaving properly was that some children were expected to respect teachers. One adult wrote that respecting teachers was an expected

code of conduct at school, when she noted, “to behave well, respect their teachers and their school friends” (ASF36-09). Another adult in response to the question: ‘Do children get along with their teachers?’ stated:

Children should respect their teachers and to this end I think most children get along with their teachers. If a child doesn’t respect then they will find it difficult to learn. (ASM36-10)

A few children’s replies articulated this trend that in school they were expected; “to go to class, respect teachers” (CSF17-19), “to respect the teachers, yourself and each other” (CSF13-06) and “for us to respect all our teachers, not to behave badly” (CSF13-09).

In summary, three themes related to children behaving properly in schools as indicated by the data were that children were expected to follow rules, wear a uniform and/or respect teachers. Generally the data from the adults and children in this study concurred that within these expectations children were expected to conform.

#### 5.2.2.1. Discussion of data related to ‘Behaving properly’

Children and adults thought children were expected to conform and obey the rules within their schools without question. A few children and adults broadened the scope of expectations from simply complying with social rules to being a good learner with some children implying they were also expected to be positive with little argument whilst working studiously (see also Farrell et al, 2004). Children’s expected obedience to the rules may ensure behavioural conformity where adults’ authority can be continually reinforced as teachers have the power to eke out punishment (see Cullingford, 2007; Potter and Briggs, 2003). While this may be true only one child mentioned “do everything right or you get in trouble” (CSF12-16). Punishment as a consequence of not following the rules was not acknowledged as the motivation for conformity, rather simply conforming to what was ‘normally’ expected was more popularly represented and exemplified by Penelope justifying the strict adherence of wearing her uniform at her school.

A few children identified wearing a uniform as an expectation of school. What is legitimated in these schools is the difference in status and rights exemplified by children having to wear a uniform when adults do not. In these schools children's actions were expected to fit by complying with this structural dress code. Juliet, Marco and Arc judged children wearing uniforms as bad (see Figure 3) and similarly, Cildru, Brice and Alice queried if adults had to submit to the same rules they enforced on children by writing; uniform for teachers? (see Figure 4).

The data indicating children were expected to respect their teachers raises some contentious issues. In some of the responses there was no explanation of what 'respect your teacher' meant to the participants. What is important is that some children and adults felt children had to respect their teacher – there appeared no choice in the matter. Similar findings were reported by Devine (2003) and Osman (2005) where children felt inhibited to assert themselves or confront a teacher if they felt they had been treated unfairly. The adult (ASM36-10) that observed if a child does not respect their teacher then the child's learning may suffer perhaps was not considering possible reasons for a child's disrespect that in effect nullifies the teacher's skills and responsibility in the relationship. The point I would like to make here is that no person mentioned teachers had to respect children. As Wyness (1999) maintained, teachers are not accountable to children in what or how they teach and so children may assume that this respect is one way – children respecting teachers. There are ramifications for children's opportunity to exert agency within the school context if some adults and children in this study agree that children have to respect teachers irrespective of how the teachers treat the children. Adults presumed authority over children reflects the dominant framework and the understandings that children in comparison with adults lack ontology (Prout & James, 1997; Wyness, 2006b). Children's relationships with teachers will be further explained in chapter 6. The next section presents data related to how children resist conformity.

### **5.2.3. Resisting conformity**

Resistance can take many forms as Prensky (2005) and Erikson (1987) identified from passive to covert behaviours. The term 'resisting' is used here to depict responses or behaviours that

questioned the status quo and challenged common expectations. The data that is presented in this section includes interviews with Leroy, Charleston, Agent Sprat, Hamish and excerpts from Agent Sprat's journal as well as responses from the following survey and interview questions:

- What is expected of children at school?
- The thing that annoys children most about schools is...
- And the interview question: Is there a student culture at school?

The data is arranged according to the two dominant themes – silly rules and children's dislike of disruptive behaviour.

The data from the surveys revealed that a few adults and children thought some of the rules in schools were silly. These adults thought the most annoying aspect of schools for children was; "silly rules" (ASM36-19), "complying with rules they don't understand/feeling humiliated/feeling stupid" (ASF46-08) and "being disciplined for silly rules, e.g. wrong coloured hair tie" (ASF36-35). The following excerpts demonstrate that the rules annoyed two children most about school; "all the strict rules" (CSF13-17) and "that the rules are STUPID especially the ones like only wearing plain stud earrings or shoes have to have shoelaces" (CSF12-41).

The data from the interviews and surveys provided some interesting perspectives on children's dislike of those who disrupt classes and overtly resist conforming in schools. Both Leroy and Charleston mentioned a culture at their school where some children thought it was cool to misbehave, as Leroy depicted:

*Teachers would probably think that everybody wants to learn. There's always someone in the class who doesn't like school and doesn't want to be there...they [teachers] wouldn't really know that if you do something that's against school rules you automatically think that you're cool and stuff like*

*that, the teachers probably wouldn't be aware of that. (Leroy, interview, 10/7/07)*

Charleston noted that in his high school the children who did not value the future incentives of school achievement chose to misbehave:

*Most people are going to leave at Year 10 so really they're just making the most of the time that they've got. The culture would be more 'mess up when you can' scenario – 'we'll get an apprenticeship at the end of Year 10' style thinking a lot of the people at my school [have]. (Charleston, interview, 10/7/07)*

Agent Sprat and Hamish did not support this attitude that those who misbehaved were cool, instead they were irritated at children who deliberately disrupted lessons. As Agent Sprat and Hamish observed;

*... like there's some kids who do just little bad things that just really annoy other kids. (Agent Sprat, interview, 9/7/07)*

*There is one group of kids [who] will always muck up but most of us aren't like that. That's the culture 'mucking up'. Being an idiot so you can be popular. But most kids aren't like that. (Hamish, interview, 6/7/07)*

Other survey respondents affirmed that children who overtly resisted conforming and spoiled the class were maddening as they impacted the children who did want to learn. One adult commented that the most annoying aspect of school for children was “children who don't want to learn” (ASM36-10). Several children supported this by describing the most annoying aspect of school as: “kids that don't want to learn or participate” (CSM15-13), “people who disrupt learning” (CSM13-29), “people that disturb the class” (CSM14-07), “the people that spoil the class because we are a good class” (CSM10-38) and “how some students don't waste only their time but everyone else's as well” (CSF14-04). One child observed that the

disruptive child's behaviour squanders his/her own education, "those who waste their education" (CSF13-03). Agent Sprat elucidated this point further in an excerpt from his journal:

*Maths and English were two of my favourite subjects but now we don't get half of the work we're supposed to in English because the teacher is too busy telling the naughty ones [children] to be quiet. And worst of all we have had 6 English teachers and at least 2 of them have said that they don't want to have us again. (Agent Sprat, journal entry, 2007)*

In summary, some adults and children in this study resisted conformity by questioning the relevance of silly rules in schools. Charleston, Leroy, Hamish and Agent Sprat together with some children and adults from the survey added another perspective to children resisting conformity by declaring that children who do resist conforming by disrupting classes are annoying. These disruptive children actually disrupt the learning of those children who want to learn as Agent Sprat's learning in English was suffering.

#### 5.2.3.1. Discussion of data related to 'Resisting conformity'

There appears two clear contrasting views of children in this study involving issues of resistance: those children who comply either by choice or through ignorance and those who disrupt the system. Those who comply, like the co-researchers, have indicated things about schools that they do not like and would like changed, however may not be motivated to challenge the system as it will provide them with future jobs and 'success' in life (see section 5.4.5.).

Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (1998) indicated children's agency occurs within adult defined structures where children create spaces for resistance (see Corsaro, 2005; Devine, 2003; Smyth, 2006a; Smyth & Hattam, 2004; Willis, 1977). Some children resisted conforming by questioning the relevance of some rules in school. The data indicated that Charleston and Agent Sprat choose to conform and succeed in school represents largely middle-class ideals (see also Devine, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Williams et al, 1980; 1993).



Their annoyance was due to mixing with disruptive children who interrupt the learning of the children who do value school that epitomises working-class values (see Ainley et al, 1995; Connelly, 2004; Considine & Zappalà, 2002; Williams, 1989; Willis, 1977). There was an omission of data from disruptive children explaining their actions. According to Table 1 (p. 40) this situation describes the differences in the value of schooling between diligent students and disengaged students (Prensky, 2005). The next section concentrates on learning in schools as this was a substantial theme from the data.

## **5.4. Learning in schools**

I have included learning as a 'structural practice' within schools that impacts on children's role as a collaborator in school activities. I have focused on learning style, curriculum and testing used in schools. Chapter 6 presents data pertaining to the relationships children have with their teachers. Separating teachers from children's learning is like trying to separate a fish from water in the current system and yet the gap enables the interplay of chapters 5 and 6 and multiple perspectives to be considered. The data in this section is organised around themes that are addressed separately, however are also intimately interconnected: children's learning; homework; testing; wishful learning; being successful; and technology and children.

### **5.4.1. Children's learning**

The data presented in this section was compiled from interviews with Alice, Juliet, Charleston and responses to the following survey and interview questions:

- Children wished their teachers knew...
- The thing that annoys children most about schools is...
- The thing children love about school is...
- If children knew they couldn't fail they would...
- And the interview questions: What do you dislike about school?
- How would you like to teach and learn at school?
- How would you describe schools to someone who has never seen or heard of them before?

The data in this subsection explains how children and adults viewed children's learning in school and is broken down into the following themes; learning new things, rigid style of learning and children can be smarter than teachers.

In reply to the survey question, 'what do children love about school?' the most popular response was seeing friends and the second most popular response from both adults and children was learning new things. The majority of responses were quite short and included words and phrases like; developing (CSF15-33), learning (ASF36-16; ASM36-10; CSF15-33; CSM15-13; CSF14-04), learning new things (ASF26-15; CSF13-09; CSM16-24; CSF15-12; CSF11-39), interesting activities (ASF46-05; ASF36-34) and certain subjects (ASM36-18; CSM12-21; CSM12-32; CSF13-17). Two adults nominated that children loved, "developing their creativity" (ASF46-28) and "fun activities, the help of a 'good' teacher" (ASF26-22).

One child asserted, "how we can be creative" (CSF12-16) and another child said, "get to learn some things" (CSF14-23). Alice stipulated she enjoyed the music program at her school;

*I like the music program at my school. It's a really good music program.*

*There are three bands. (Alice, interview, 9/7/07)*

Some adults and children in response to the question, 'what annoys children most about school?' concurred that the rigid structure of learning was a common irritation for various children. Several adults nominated that what annoyed children most about school learning was the difficulty of some tasks, "having hard work to do" (ASF36-04) or "doing things they don't enjoy" (ASF36-25) and another adult thought "activities they don't like or can't do" (ASF26-15). One adult pronounced, "the difficulties of learning and the perceived unfairness" (ASM46-14) and a different adult said, "having to do what is timetabled, i.e. no choice, also homework" (ASF46-06). An adult said, "the rigid structure for learning and homework" (ASM46-32).

Children's short answers to what annoyed them about their learning included words like; repetitive (CSM13-25), certain subjects (CSM12-21), boring (CSM12-34), tests (CSF14-08; CSF14-23; CSM12-34) and homework (CSF14-22; CSF14-23; CSM14-28). Some children

specifically said, “boring teachers who take two hours to explain a single question” (CSM13-37), “it is a fun school but a lot of the subjects are very dull and lifeless” (CSM12-34) and, “that sometimes the lectures get boring” (CSM13-20). Charleston criticised the learning at his school:

*Originality isn't exactly encouraged in any school or creativity and imagination' (Charleston interview, 10/7/07).*

Referring back to the mind map (see Figure 4) Julliet, Marco and Arc commented that school was boring and long. Julliet and Alice said that learning in some subjects at their schools was boring as it involved:

*... just copying out of textbooks word for word and stuff. (Julliet, interview, 10/7/07)*

*Some of the ways that teachers teach things are really boring and they have that mono-toned voice, 'which is just like this' and it's very boring. (Alice, interview, 11/3/08)*

Another key idea emerging from the data related to learning in schools, was that several adults and children recognised that children could be smarter than their teachers. An adult stated that children wished their teacher knew, “how truly smart they are and that they have a lot to contribute” (ASF36-09). Two children wished their teacher knew “that sometimes kids can be smarter than adults” (CSF14-11) and “the answers to the questions I ask and how to write questions which read logically” (CSF16-02). A child said in response to the question if children knew they could not fail she would, “tell the teacher I was smarter than him” (CSF14-11) and another said “tell the teachers that there is no point doing the task that they set me” (CSF12-30).

In summary, the data indicates that most children and adults in this study agree that some children love school because they get to learn new things. Conversely, some adults and children in this study viewed the rigid structure of learning as the most annoying aspect of

school. Several adults thought children would not like the hard work of school whereas children disliked the boring, repetitive aspects of learning, homework and testing. Juliet and Alice commented that learning could be boring and Charleston noted that originality was not encouraged at his school. A few children and one adult wished teachers knew that children could be smarter than adults and two children would tell their teacher so if they knew they would not fail or get in trouble.

#### 5.4.1.1. Discussion of data related to ‘Children’s learning’

A few children wanted to have occasions where they could show and/or tell how smart they were. This data gives the impression that there are few opportunities for children to deviate from the prescriptive learning in schools where teachers define tasks that children conform to, even if the children know more than the teacher. Children can be limited by this expectation of conformity that the teacher knows more and so rightfully decides what and how the child will learn. This practice reflects the dominant framework philosophy (Prout & James, 1997; Wyness, 2006b) and privileges adults’ experience and knowledge and limits spaces in the learning for children to know more than adults or outperform their restrictive age norms (Austin, Dwyer, & Freebody, 2003).

Conforming to the learning in schools may be a source of agency for children, however what power do these children have to change the teaching? An interesting point to make here is that these children could identify features of teaching that they did not like on a survey, however what processes are in place for children to address such issues directly with their teachers, or more importantly change any? This is the intention of the student voice movement, children changing learning from the inside with teachers (Cook-Sather, 2006a; Erickson, 1987; Fielding, 2001, 2004, 2006; Fullan, 2001; Leren, 2006; Mitra, 2006; Osberg, Pope, & Galloway, 2006; Smyth, 2006a, 2006b).

The data presented in this section does include some children who state they are smarter than the teacher and yet the data is not saying that children are teachers. The teacher role has clearly been assigned to adults and the privileges and power this status affords (see Devine, 2003; Osler, 2000, Potter & Briggs, 2003; Wyness, 1999). Even in the literature pertaining to

student voice movement, discussion centres around collaboration between the student and teacher. It feels different to think of learning in schools as a possible collaboration between teacher and teacher, one of whom may be younger. The next section presents data that relates to learning and homework.

### **5.4.2. Homework**

In this section on homework I have drawn data from Penelope's journal, interviews with Leroy, Arc, Alice's interview with a female adult and the following interview and survey questions:

- Children wished their teachers knew...
- The thing that annoys children most about schools is...
- Children's least favourite place...
- And the interview questions: Describe your experience of going to school.
- Tell me about your school.
- What do you dislike about school?

The second most popular response to the question what is the most annoying aspect of school was homework and assignments. The data on homework is arranged to show the following themes; homework impacted the home, the overload of homework and the type of homework activity.

The first theme from the data was that homework impacted the home. These adults said they wished children's teachers knew, "how much time they spent playing sport, dancing and working" (ASF36-21) and "their demands on time out of school" (ASF36-02). The adult that Alice interviewed observed that homework "puts a huge amount of pressure on kids and parents" (AIF-01).

In answering the survey question 'children's least favourite place' one child asserted, "at home doing homework, it is stressful and annoying" (CSM14-28) and another child stated home "because when I'm there I usually have to do homework" (CSM12-31). One child averred that the most annoying aspect of school was "knowing that when I get home I'll have

to do homework” (CSM12-31). Another child confirmed that she wanted her teachers, “not to give us so many assignments because we already learn enough at school and we need time to play outside” (CSF12-30) and another child reasoned, “that I have lots of things on after school and the fact that homework wastes time” (CSM14-28).

Many children and a few adults commented that the overload of homework annoyed children most about school. One adult wished that teachers knew “to give less homework” (ASF36-33). Two adults thought the most annoying aspect of school was “homework” (ASF46-06) and “the rigid structure for learning and homework” (ASM46-32).

Some children mentioned that the “loads of homework” (CSM14-27) was maddening as one child stated, “too much homework, assignments and tests (ridiculous)!” (CSF14-23). Several children explained the build up of assignments as frustrating, “the assignments because they can get stacked up on each other” (CSF12-30) and “clustering of assignments/assessments and work” (CSM16-24). These children wanted their teachers to know, “what other teachers were handing out (homework wise) because it all builds up” (CSF14-23) and “that assignments come in all at the same time and how to communicate between teachers” (CSF12-41). One more child was annoyed about, “how much homework and pressure I get from other teachers” (CSF14-08). Leroy and Arc expressed that they disliked:

*Too much homework when it's not necessary. (Leroy, interview, 10/7/07)*

*The homework amount is too much for some subjects. (Arc, interview, 10/7/07)*

Penelope chronicled her homework frustrations in her journal as she described:

*... [the] steadily growing mountain of assignments. (Penelope, journal entry, 28/7/07)*

*AHHHHH!!!! I'm drowning in assignments! It's only week 3 and I'm already up to my neck in homework. (Penelope, journal entry, capitals in original, 2/8/07)*

*... if we ask to have an extension, the teachers just tell us we'll have to cope with our workload and manage our time. (Penelope, journal entry, 9/7/07)*

*I'm looking forward to the holidays.... It'll be nice to be able to relax and not think about school or homework or assignments. (Penelope, journal entry, 12/9/07)*

*I'M FREE!!! I handed in my Geography Project yesterday. (Penelope, journal entry, capitals in original, 15/9/07)*

The type of homework and assignments Penelope was given affected her attitude towards it as she described an engaging assignment she got last year:

*... that was fun because there were all of these different activities like make a recipe for a good story, like add a dash of courage and a sprinkle of, um evil and a touch of magic or something like that. [that's good] I like, I really like those sort of assignments, but I'm not, too big on the, you know, read this book and write and write an essay about it or something like that. (Penelope, interview, 9/7/07)*

In summary, for a lot of adults and children in this study homework and assignments were the most annoying aspect of school. There were several reasons evident from the data namely that homework impacted children's time at home and the overload of multiple assignments added stress. Leroy and Arc disliked the unnecessary volume of homework. Penelope particularly emphasised the overload of homework in her life and noted that the type of homework activity affected her motivation to complete the task.

#### 5.4.2.1. Discussion of data related to 'Homework'

In describing socialisation theories it is presumed that schools and families work together to ensure 'normal' development and homework is one way that demonstrates this partnership (Wyness, 2006b). In this way a teacher's power over children is extended to include the home through their allocation of homework. The interesting point to make is that whilst Penelope preferred certain types of homework activity she was still expected by her parents and teachers to complete even the boring activities, again reinforcing an adult's authority to define learning. The data indicated that for Penelope and a few children in this study it was the build up of homework by teachers that added pressure in school that was then brought home. This data indicated that for these children, home then became associated with pressure from school as the expectations of learning in schools impacts a child's 'free time' at home. This finding supported other research (Cullingford, 2007; Devine, 2003) that some children did not want to be at home because school in the form of homework was infecting the relaxing sacrosanct of their home. Children's choices at home can be limited by the expectation that they apply some of their 'free' home time to homework. Penelope also used the word 'free' to describe how she felt when she had handed in her final assignment and could relax. Testing is the next section that links to learning in schools.

#### 5.4.3. Testing

There were multiple references to testing throughout the data indicating that in some schools testing was an embedded structural practice connected to learning. This section connecting testing as a part of children's learning includes interview data from Charleston, Juliet, Penelope, Arc and Tarco as well as data from the following survey questions:

- Children wished their teachers knew...
- Children's least favourite place to be...
- The thing that annoys children most about school is...
- If children knew they couldn't fail they would...
- What is expected of children at school?
- And the interview questions: what fears, if any, do young people have?



- Are there any pressures about being a child?
- How do you feel at school?

The patterns that emerged from the data related to testing were; tests as pressure to succeed, tests as instruments for constantly tracking children's progress and tests as motivation to learn.

The most popular child response to the survey question, 'what is expected of children at school?' was getting good grades in school. One adult responded, "too much emphasis is placed on the HSC, school certificate and assessment tasks which cause undue stress" (ASF36-21).

These children were expected to attain; "very high standards, if they are not reached I am expected to "achieve great results" (CSM16-24), "at least be in the top 15 of our tests" (CSM12-34) and "achieve good grades" (CSF12-01). Two other children were expected to "perform to a high standard in all my tests and assignments" (CSF11-39) and a different child mentioned he was expected to reach "high standards I go to a selective/academic high school, so expectations in general schooling is a lot higher" (CSM13-29). Two children wrote short replies of tests (CSF14-08; CSM12-34) as the most annoying aspect of school with no explanation. A few children commented a little further by stating they were annoyed at, "researching and doing the tests, homework" (CSF11-15) and "doing essays that are worth a lot of marks" (CSF14-11). Arc concurred that at his academically selective high school he disliked tests because of the pressure to compete with other students;

*I dislike competing against smarter people than me and not always turning out the best. (Arc, interview, 10/7/07)*

The next written data indicated that part of the stress associated with tests came from the pressure to succeed from parents and fear of failing. Juliet illustrated this link as poor performance on tests at school could have repercussions at home. She stipulated:

*... [testing made her feel] probably stressful, especially before exams, especially because we have exam week in Term 2 and Term 4 which is about 8 exams in one week, it's horrible... A fear also is not doing well [at school] and disappointing your parents... I went to Yarranbool to see my cousins the other day and my cousin's sitting her HSC and she's panicking and 'oh what if I fail?' (Julliet, interview, 10/7/07)*

Penelope provided a slightly different perspective by commenting that failing was a stressful fear for her and some children she knew were punished by their parents if they did not perform to high standards at school. She described this as follows:

*[Penelope doesn't like]... exams, study, assignments... doing badly at school and stuff like that although some kids don't really care... I always want to do well in school I don't really want to fail anything, or anything like that... aside from school, we're pretty carefree I think, um but school is probably the most stressful thing about being a child... everyone's always been pressured to get good marks in tests and stuff like that, like a lot of my friends panic a lot before tests like, 'oh my God, if I don't get a good mark mum won't let me do clarinet anymore'. (Penelope, interview, 9/7/07)*

Tarco also confirmed these links between home and school when he stated:

*You have to do good at school usually otherwise you get a lecture [from his parents]. (Tarco, interview, 10/7/07)*

The second pattern that became evident from the data was that tests could be used as instruments that track children's progress. One child stated that school was her least favourite place to be because "everyone judges you" (CSF14-08). Charleston described that he felt self-conscious at school:

*... in the spotlight... Almost paranoid in a way because everything you do in the years that you're there tends to um, come back and get you because if you*

*get a low test score that's eventually going to show up on your report... the reputation of the students shows itself on their marking and how they're marked generally. (Charleston, interview, 10/7/07)*

The third area explored tests through the data as a motivation to learn. The second most popular response to the question 'if children knew they could not fail, they would...' for both children and adults was that children would do no work or study. These adults commented that children would do no study; "not bother studying at all" (ASF26-26), "not make any effort" (ASF46-05), "not always try their best" (ASF36-02), "try less hard" (ASF46-28), "do no homework, no study" (ASF36-09), "not study hard enough"(ASM26-03), "wouldn't try at all" (ASF26-30), "do no work" (ASF46-24), "not try" (ASF36-04), "lose interest after a while" (ASF36-07) and "not put in any effort, not study" (ASM36-18).

Some children made similar remarks; "not study at all" (CSF13-17), "never study" (CSF14-08), "not do homework, projects or attend classes I hated" (CSF12-01), "study less and spend more time doing other things" (CSF15-33) and another child averred that she would, "not study, no point as I know I would pass anyways" (CSF14-23).

A few children and one adult indicated that children would keep trying (CSF12-41) and continue studying (CSF16-02) if they could not fail. One adult noted that children would, "probably work just as hard without the stress" (ASF36-21). These comments from children reflected this sentiment; "try harder to get a higher mark" (CSM16-14), "do my best" (CSM13-37), "still do my personal best" (CSF12-16) or "cruise along but still put in a bit of effort" (CSM14-27) and another example, "still try my hardest" (CSM10-38).

In contrasting data, several adults and children responded that if children knew they could not fail they would take risks and try everything. Some adults thought that children would; "be more confident" (ASF36-27), "not be scared to try" (ASF36-01), "try anything at least once" (ASF36-35), "attempt everything"(ASF26-15), "try everything" (ASM18-29), "tackle or try most things" (ASM36-10), "try anything" (ASF36-33), "take more risks with their learning" (ASF36-12) and "be prepared to give more things a go!" (ASF26-22).

One child said if she could not fail she would “be more confident in my work and not stress as much” (CSF13-09) and another avowed that she would, “go in everything I possibly could” (CSF11-15).

A final more positive pattern emerging from the data was that some children and adults believed that if children knew they could not fail they would relax and have fun with their learning. Some adults contemplated children would; “talk lots more, have fun and still learn” (ASF36-09) “have fun and thrive” (ASF36-31), “relax and learn more” (ASF36-16), “be themselves” (ASF36-25) and “have more fun at school” (ASF36-34) “be more relaxed” (ASF46-17). One adult answered she thought children would, “not learn, achieve, rise to challenges, develop, grow or even be happy” (ASF46-08).

Children commented that if they could not fail they would “sit and relax” (CSF10-36), “smile” (CSM12-21), “be happy” (CSF08-18) and “spend less time on school work and go and have more fun” (CSM14-28).

In summary, the data indicated that some children in this study felt stressed by tests and the pressure to achieve high standards. Arc disliked competing against smarter children whilst Penelope and Juliet mentioned not wanting to disappoint parents and fear of failure as motivating factors to perform well in tests. Penelope identified that some of her friends were punished by their parents if they did not get good marks on tests. Tarco said he could get a lecture if he did not do well at school. The data depicted that tests were integral aspects of schooling and Charleston in particular felt suspicious about the constant record keeping in schools. Some adults and children suggested that tests kept children motivated to learn whilst others thought that without tests children would still study, take more risks in their learning, attempt more things and have fun.

#### 5.4.3.1. Discussion of data related to ‘Testing’

Testing and evaluating children by defined measures or norms is consistent with the key attributes of the dominant framework (Prout & James, 1997; Wyness, 2006b) by

consolidating that children lack ontology. Parents may fear their child failing or not achieving ‘normal’ progress in schools and so they can put pressure and expectations on children to perform. Achieving at high standards can be stressful for some children as Angus (2006) also found. An omission from the data was any adults or children identifying children refusing to complete tests as an ‘option’.

The responses from the question, ‘what would children do if they knew they could not fail...’ indirectly explored the possibility of schools without tests. Various children and adults seemed aware that not all children needed tests to motivate them to learn and study and that tests may actually limit children’s motivation to learn. A key phrase running through this data was that without tests children would be more confident to try ‘new things’.

Adults who set, administer and mark tests, are inadvertently normalising their view of what is important knowledge over children’s knowledge and this is consistent with the distinguishing of adults in opposition to children feature of the dominant framework (Prout & James, 1997; Wyness, 2006b). Children’s knowledge, or lives experiences is often not valued as a result (see Austin, Dwyer, & Freebody, 2003; Cook-Sather, 2006a; Fielding, 2001; Fullan, 1991; Holdsworth, 2005; Oldfather, 1995). Charleston was aware that nearly everything he did was recorded and that at times the record may have reflected a teacher’s bias against him and therefore may not even be a true indicator of his abilities. In this light constant tracking may be at the discretion of the teacher, which can limit children’s agency to change this track record. Arc was the only person that mentioned the competitive culture of testing where he was compared against smarter peers in schools. The next section extends some of the key ideas from this section by presenting data related to the way that some children and adults wished they could learn in school.

#### **5.4.4. Wishful learning**

The preceding subsection addressed what children and adults did not like about the learning in school, including homework and testing, and this section looks at what children and adults wanted children to learn in school. It provides data from various sources including Penelope’s

input in a group discussion, interviews with Charleston, Agent Sprat, Hamish and Semaj, and responses to the following survey and interview questions:

- Children wished their teachers knew...
- And the interview questions: How would you describe schools to someone who has never seen or heard of them before?
- How would you like to teach and learn in school?

The data on wishful learning was sorted around two primary themes, children wanting more interactive teaching, and children wanting more personalised learning. I begin this section with an excerpt of an interview with Charleston describing schools to a person who had never seen or heard of them. He identified the differences in goals as a criticism of learning in schools:

*It's an institution designed to educate people to prepare them for later life in theory but as with all faculties it seems to have degraded because both parties of teachers and learners, don't have the same goals and that stereotypes are set upon the students to make teaching easier, more manageable. (Charleston, interview, 10/7/07)*

According to Charleston teachers and learners do not have the same goals. That could mean just because teachers aim to teach the stereotypical child does not necessarily mean that learners want to learn what teachers want them to learn. To further understand this point in our group brainstorming session Penelope clarified that learning in school should;

*... not be about teachers teaching but children learning. (Penelope, Group discussion, 4/7/07)*

The answers related to teaching and learning indicated that some adults thought that children wished their teachers knew how to make learning more fun (ASF36-25), interactive (ASF26-26) and interesting (ASF46-17; ASF36-25). Some adults said that children would wish their teachers knew: “how to make subjects interesting” (ASF46-28), “to play more games”

(ASF36-11) and another said, “how to make classes more interactive” (ASF26-26).

Some children responded they wished their teachers knew, “how to make work more interesting” (CSM13-25) and fun. An interview question asked the co-researchers how they would like to be taught and learn in school. Semaj compared fun and dull learning when he relayed:

*[Learning was] really, really fun when we got to do all hands on stuff like we did slideshows and a year term one overview. We did all that stuff which was actual real work but it was fun. Now we're doing a lot of, we're doing a lot of reviewing over books like our next topic is reviews and we have to read poems and do reviews on them. It's kind of really dull. (Semaj, interview, 9/7/07)*

Penelope, Brice and Agent Sprat wanted to be taught:

*... more hands-on stuff. (Penelope, interview, 13/12/07)*

*... more excursions for interesting places like where you still learn things, for example, history-bone digging. (Brice, interview, 13/12/07)*

*... in a fun way and learn in a fun way with hands-on activities – even going to a different room creates a different atmosphere. It's boring if you do the same thing over and over again. (Agent Sprat, interview, 7/3/08)*

Hamish expressed that he liked having autonomy of choice in relation to his learning. He stated that children liked;

*... having the freedom to choose what they go on about in ILP [Integrated Learning Project] ... Free choice. (Hamish, interview, 6/7/07)*

Cildru agreed with Hamish in her comment that she wanted,

*... more choice about stuff where everyone would pick and everyone would be more accepting of what they learn. (Cildru, interview, 10/3/08)*

The next emerging theme explored the view that children wanted teachers to know more personal information about them to make learning more relevant to them as individuals. An adult averred that he wished teachers knew, “more about the children individually, their academic problems” (ASM36-18) and another succinctly said, “what they do outside of school” (ASM18-29). Some other adults suggested that they thought children wished their teachers knew more about what it was like to be a child today such as, “more about what interested them [children]” (ASM46-14) and other adults mentioned teachers should know, “how to think like them, having a child-like sense of humour” (ASM46-32), “how to relate to their sense of humour” (ASF36-35), “more about the latest pop music” (ASF46-24) and “what it is like to be a child” (ASF26-22; ASF26-15; ASF36-07).

Some children wanted their identity to be recognised by the teacher. One child expressed this clearly that he wanted his teacher to know, “my interests so then they know what I like to make the lessons more fun” (CSM12-31). Another child wished her teacher knew, “what my personality was like outside of school” (CSF11-15). Related to this an aspect of school that Charleston disliked was,

*... how everyone is treated the same generally, no matter what class you're in. (Charleston, interview, 10/7/07)*

Agent Sprat and Brice wanted to know the relevance and purpose of learning for their lives now:

*I'm sick of not being told what we have to use the stuff we do in Maths but not know when we use it in life. Why learn something when I don't use it. He told us he would tell us next year but what if we're not here next year we will never know. (Agent Sprat, interview, 5/7/07)*



*... [he wanted to be] told what the learning is good for. When you ask they [teachers] don't tell you what you're learning for – the purpose and relevance behind it. (Brice, interview, 5/3/08)*

In summary, several adults and children from this study wished that learning in school could be fun, interesting, interactive and relevant to their individuality. Hamish, Semaj, Penelope, Cildru and Agent Sprat wished learning could either be more fun, interesting, 'hands on' with more excursions and a variety of different activities to choose from. Charleston disliked that everybody was treated the same and some children and adults wanted more individualised learning that accommodated children's personalities. Brice and Agent Sprat wanted to know the relevance of their learning to their lives now.

#### 5.4.4.1. Discussion of data related to 'Wishful learning'

As adults generally plan and direct the learning in schools (Thomas, 2002) children have limited opportunity to do anything other than conform to the 'practices' of their teachers chosen for them (see Wyness, 1999). Some adults and children from this study wished that teachers could make learning more fun. Cildru and Hamish wanted to use their agency to choose what learning they invested their energy and time in. As results from the T.L.R.P. Projects (2003) found, both the teacher and children benefited from including children in their own learning. The student voice movement is campaigning for children to be consulted in their learning.

Several adults and children in this study wished for teachers to cater learning to suit each child's needs and personality. This finding substantiates similar conclusions from other research with students in high schools that wanted teachers to recognise their realities (Smyth, 2004; Marquez-Zenkov, et al, 2007). Connected to this, Brice and Agent Sprat wished they were told why they were learning certain material and when they would apply the information or skills in their lives (see Holdsworth, 2005). This future orientation of learning is reflective of the dominant framework (Prout & James, 1997; Wyness, 2006b) where children as developing adults would use the skills and knowledge when they have the rational competence of an adult. This thinking can unconsciously devalue the important contributions

children can make as people today. The next section presents data related to the outcome of learning and testing in schools, which is successful.

#### **5.4.5. Being successful**

This section on being successful provides perspectives on why learning and success at school are important to the high achieving, middle-class, co-researchers and some other children and adults in this study. The data was sourced from Alice's interview with a female adult, interviews with Julliet, Penelope, Charleston, Leroy, Arc, Semaj, Brice, Alice, Hamish, Agent Sprat, Cildru and Tarco and responses from two survey questions that asked:

- What do you think most children's goals are for the next 12 months?
- What do you think most children hope to have achieved in ten years?
- And the interview question: what makes you feel proud?
- Alice interview question: Describe your experience of going to school?

The data is organised around three key themes; good marks as a source of achievement, the purpose and importance of school for the future and getting a good job.

The first theme that became evident was that for many co-researchers and respondents getting good grades was a source of achievement. Julliet, Leroy, Charleston and Penelope commented they felt proud at school;

*When you get good marks in assignments that you've worked hard in.  
(Julliet, interview, 10/7/07)*

*I like doing well in things... [He felt valued and respected] at school people  
are quite nice to me and I really fit in and everything. (Leroy, interview,  
10/7/07)*

*Generally doing well in things, things like getting fairly good marks at school. (Charleston, interview, 10/7/07)*

*... when I do really well at school or something, I get a really good mark like I got, I did really good in music so I was very chuffed about that. (Penelope, interview, 9/7/07)*

A question on the survey asked children and adults what children wanted to achieve in 12 months time. The most popular response from both children and adults was getting good grades/marks (CSF14-08; CSF14-23; CSM10-38; CSF9-05; CSM14-27; CSF12-41; CSF14-04; CSF10-36; CSF15-12; CSM14-07; CSM15-40; ASF36-09) or passing subjects (ASF26-26; ASF36-21; ASM18-29). These adults observed that in twelve months time children would want to; “do well at school” (ASF46-28; ASF36-23; ASF36-01), “be good at school” (ASF46-20), “to complete their school year with good exam results” (ASM46-32), “pass subjects at school, go out with friends as often as possible” (ASF26-26), “to do well at school and have many friends” (ASM26-03), “get through school, do well at sport” (ASF36-33).

In the next twelve months a few children wanted to; “to stay in the top set for all my subjects” (CSCSF13-09), “great HSC results” (CSM16-24), “a good HSC, do well at school” (CSF14-22) and “a good end of year report, to continue doing well in violin” (CSM13-29).

The second theme that became apparent from the analysis of the data was that schools were important institutions to help children succeed in life. Some adults on the survey surmised the purpose of schools from a child’s perspective; “school gives them the educational skills to succeed in life” (ASM46-32), “to learn, grow and succeed as adults” (ASF36-09) and “to teach them knowledge and life skills to help them to achieve success” (ASF36-01). An adult who was interviewed by Alice commented about the importance of school in children’s lives:

*Like a school is one of the most or the most important thing that happens to a child is to get an education, so every effort should stay to make that experience as positive as possible... at the other end where people come*

outside education and they fall through the gaps and have yucky things happen to them and most of those people that that's happening to haven't had a good education. (AIF-01)

These children on the survey said the purpose of school was “to teach kids how to succeed in life” (CSM13-37), “helping us become smarter and more aware for a better future” (CSM14-28). All of the co-researchers were successful at school and valued having a ‘good’ education to secure flourishing futures and ‘succeed’. Leroy, Arc and Semaj explained the importance of school in their lives:

*School means a lot because without school you couldn't do well in life. (Leroy, interview, 10/7/07)*

*School is very important as it means getting a good job and good future... It teaches you the values and skills for life... it can be hard work and complicated. (Arc, interview, 10/7/07)*

*It is important. But it's not like if, um, if you don't do it like lots of bad stuff is going to happen. It's not on the, it's like, um, all perfectly bad if you do one thing wrong it's all going to come down. It's got an even spread if you do something really, really bad then something bad is going to happen after that. (Semaj, interview, 9/7/07)*

Brice, Penelope, Alice, Hamish, Agent Sprat and Cildru noted the importance and/or purpose of schools in their lives:

*I think it's very important that I go to school and get good grades. (Brice, interview, 10/7/07)*

*It's a place where, you know, you go to learn and prepare for later life. (Penelope, interview, 9/7/07)*

*It's really important to me. I love school... [the purpose is] like to learn so that when you grow up to be quite an intelligent human being so we can act in society and agree with each other. (Alice, interview, 9/7/07)*

*It's pretty important because mum works at my school, dad's in education. So school's a pretty big part of my life... [The purpose is] to help us in later life [How?] to give us the skills to go out there and actually be something. (Hamish, interview, 6/7/07)*

*Probably get us through life. Learn more. (Agent Sprat, interview, 9/7/07)*

*It's a place where you go to learn. It's against the law not to go. (Cildru, interview, 6/7/07)*

The final theme that became obvious from the data was that schools prepare children for getting good jobs. Some adults concurred that the purpose of schools was to prepare children for the workforce, “to learn what you need to get a good job” (ASF46-06), “to learn and get a job” (ASF36-16), “to gain skills to get a great job” (ASF36-31), “to learn to read, write and prepare them for working as an adult” (ASF36-35) and “to teach children valuable life skills for their future careers” (ASF26-26).

Some children also focused on schools as preparation for a future working life as these children stated; “so we can learn and so we will be able to get good jobs when we're older” (CSF12-16), “to educate kids so they can apply for jobs”(CSM14-27), “to get the knowledge you need to get go out and get a job” (CSF09-05), “ to teach kids skills that they will need in the workforce” (CSM15-13), “to get children ready to get a job, to be educated” (CSF11-15), “to educate students and give students a chance to learn new things and get a good job” (CSF14-23) and “to prepare us for the working force” (CSF13-17). Brice articulated that the purpose of schools was,

*... to get a job and to get good grades. (Brice, interview, 10/7/07)*

An excerpt of an interview with Tarco where he discussed the significance of school to help him acquire his aspiring job further clarified the point:

Researcher: How important is school in your life?

*Tarco: Pretty important I want to become a Zoologist and you need really hard marks*

Researcher: You already know what you want to be, great!

*Tarco: Yep, or an animaltronics person that makes things, I've already done a design of a walking triceratops (Tarco, interview, 10/7/07).*

Further to schools preparing children to get a job, the most prevalent responses by both adults and children concerning what children would want to achieve in ten years time were “achieving in school” (CSM13-29; ASF36-01), “attend university” (CSF12-41; CSM14-07) and “getting a job” (CSF14-08; CSM10-38; CSM16-24; CSM13-25; CSM15-40; ASF46-05; ASF26-30; ASM18-29; ASM26-03)

In summary, the data presented in this section identified high marks as a source of achievement for Juliet, Leroy, Charleston, Penelope and a few children and adults from the survey. Similarly, Leroy, Arc, Brice and Tarco as well as several adults and children pointed out that school was necessary to do well or succeed in life. Related to this, Leroy, the female adult Alice interviewed and Semaj to some degree, pointed out that if you do not do well at school bad things may happen. School was important to Brice, Hamish and Alice who loved it. Penelope and Hamish concurred with several adults and children that school prepares children for later life. Cildru described school as a place to learn where legally children have to attend. Brice, Arc and Tarco agreed with some children and adults by noting that schools help people to get a good job.

#### 5.4.5.1. Discussion of data related to ‘Being successful’

Academic achievement can be based on the educational framework of right or wrong, of success or failure (Christensen & James, 2000). One theme that filtered through the data

related to learning in schools and testing was the sense of achievement that being successful at school brought to Penelope, Juliet, Leroy and Charleston and several participants. I have already mentioned that all of the middle-class co-researchers were successful at school and so this was not a surprise that some would be achieving high standards. These co-researchers' success vindicates other studies that found children from affluent and middle-class backgrounds were socialised within a family culture that valued education and the futuristic benefits (see Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Kaufman, 2005) thereby, achieving greater scholastic success (see Williams et al, 1980; 1993). Unfortunately there was no data from this study that could provide perspectives on how children who were not successful at school or those from lower class would feel about school success (see Ainley et al, 1995; Comber & Hill, 2000; Connelly, 2004; Considine & Zappalà, 2002; Williams, 1989; Willis, 1977).

The data indicated that the majority of adults and children focussed on children achieving success at school in the form of good grades. In looking forward twelve months and ten years many adults and children wanted to achieve success at school, go to university, and get a good job that paid well. As a possible consequence, some children may view the legitimacy of constant evaluation and judgements as necessary preparation for work and for becoming an adult. Achieving good marks in tests reinforces the influence of the dominant framework where children's reality today is overlooked for the future benefits that will be reaped as an adult (see Christensen & James, 2001; Devine, 2003). This practice then emphasises the understanding that childhood is preparation for later life when children 'become' an adult 'being' (Prout & James, 1997; Qvortrup, 1994; Wyness, 2006b). There is a clear omission of data countering this notion and attesting that schools help children have better lives now as children. The next section presents data concerning children's lives today and the influence of technology.

## **5.5. Technology and the co-researchers**

Related to the previous data it was commonly regarded that schools prepare children for later life. This section on technology and the co-researchers provides data on how technology has influenced the co-researchers as a way to understand their present lives. This data was sourced

from interviews with Charleston, Hamish, Penelope, Alice, Arc, Brice, Leroy, Tarco, Agent Sprat, Juliet, Cildru and Semaj in response to the interview questions:

- Is there anything you want to tell adults about being a child today?
- How do you spend your time?

The data is organised into two themes; adults recognising children's reality and using technology.

When the co-researchers were asked what they thought adults needed to understand about children today Charleston, Hamish, Penelope and Alice wanted adults to recognise their reality and how different it is to adults' experiences of growing up. Charleston advocated this in the following way:

*[He felt] the pressures of um, being moulded into an image, something... Well, I guess the fact is 'cause we're the um sons and daughters of the Baby Boomer generation – they [adults] really didn't have the media that we have and um, really as far as coping goes they don't really know what to do as such because um, because usually we learn through experience and they really haven't experienced our growing up and in the early stages of development being told what to do and what to think by the media which we can access very easily. (Charleston, interview, 10/7/07)*

To better understand children Hamish thought adults should:

*Hamish: Watch more children's TV then you'll [adults] understand us.*

Researcher: Okay. Any examples?

*Hamish: Family Guy and stuff like that because it comes from kids. Kids like it and it brings back kiddie days... It's basically an adult Simpsons but it's got the basic idea about kids.... we always watch TV and we feel like kids but they [adults] always forget about being kids. (Hamish, interview, 6/7/07)*



Penelope and Agent Sprat reinforced the notion that children have different lives than adults:

*I think they [adults] need to um, understand that like we have very different lives to what they had like when they were children, so like, with all of the tech things, MSN and everything, it's very different from when they were young. (Penelope, interview, 9/7/07)*

*I want adults and teachers to know how hard it is being a kid and what we have to go through and our ideas about what we want to do, not what they want us to do... I think that if adults and teachers knew how fun computers and electronics can be they can make the classroom a much more enjoyable place to be. (Agent Sprat, interview, 9/7/07)*

Arc and Leroy depicted the technology that they felt were important to children;

*The computer I think MSN, like MSN, like games programs on the computer like on the Internet like MySpace and MSN which is an Internet game. (Arc, interview, 10/7/07)*

*Leroy: Text messages, Myspace*

Researcher: How do you use that?

*Leroy: Um, well we have friends on Myspace and we can leave messages and probably MSN's as well. (Leroy, interview, 10/7/07)*

Brice articulated the purpose of computers in his life;

*I think, um, computers are very important to kids because you can work and have fun on it like doing the same thing. (Brice, interview, 13/7/07)*

Alice acknowledged how she used technology in her life mainly to support her music interest;

*Well, I don't really watch the TV that much and I rarely use the computer unless it's for school, and Google is really my last resort for anything... I now download more music than I did last year. (Alice, interview, 9/7/07)*

Leroy valued his computer differently and similar to Tarco used the computer for games;

*I like my computer a lot... Play games, um, just any game. I play lots of different games, shooting games. (Leroy, interview, 10/7/07)*

*Jurassic Park Professional, um, Zootica 2 and that's it, they're the games I like... sometimes I do powerpoint presentations, um what else, the Internet, sometimes I use the Internet. (Tarco, interview, 10/7/07)*

Julliet clearly demonstrated how she used the Internet to learn knitting and the importance of her iPod:

*I can't cast off - I learnt it off the Internet or something... I just like listening to music my iPod which is my life, um, I like, I don't really like trendy kind of stuff I like more individual stuff. (Julliet, interview, 10/7/07)*

Hamish considered himself the;

*DVD king... I have awesome computers. I can fix anything... I ran the computers for Years 5 and 6 at... [his primary school]. (Hamish, interview, 6/7/07)*

Semaj and Cildru used the computer as a tool to help them create;

*I do a lot of computer stuff like mixing music on the computer with synthesizers and I make small games. Like um, kind of Pacman style games. (Semaj, interview, 9/7/07)*

*I recently made up my own web page... You know Dove's inner beauty ad. I had to do an ad and I decided to do one like that so I had the picture of me and the same picture of me again... and I've altered the second one so I like made my eye bigger and paler like you know all of those ads and stuff like.*  
(Cildru, interview, 6/7/07)

In summary, Charleston, Hamish, Agent Sprat, Penelope and Alice wanted adults to respect their media saturated reality that is different to the way adults grew up. Outside of school Brice, Alice, Julliet, Leroy, Agent Sprat and Tarco used technology for leisure. Leroy and Arc used technology for communication, Julliet used it for informal learning and Cildru and Semaj used it to create technological things. Hamish could fix any computers.

#### **5.5.1. Discussion of data related to 'Technology and the co-researchers'**

The co-researchers had different experiences than adults' growing up especially related to technology (see Buckingham, 2006; Montgomery, 2007; Tapscott, 1998). This means their realities today are different and more engaged with technology. Julliet's *ipod* songs reflected her identity and when playing games, instant messaging, creating or learning the co-researchers had choices, responsibility, controlled the pace, content and their level of engagement with these experiences (see Buckingham, 2006; Montgomery, 2007). This connects to previous data from this study and other researchers' data (see Austin, Dwyer, & Freebody, 2003; Cook-Sather, 2006a; Fielding, 2001; Fullan, 1991; Oldfather, 1995) that highlight the different learning in schools that ignores students' knowledge, experiences and perceptions. Charleston, Hamish, Penelope and Alice wanted adults to recognise their different reality to understand children better to provide more meaningful and relevant learning as Agent Sprat pointed out (see Marquez-Zenkov et al., 2007). The next section summarises the key findings from the data in this chapter.

## 5.6. Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the data related to how structural practices in some schools impact on children's lives to provide perspectives on the research question; how do the structural practices in schools impact the agency of the children in this study? Data from the co-researchers, children and adults who participated in this study were presented as interrelated themes: 'Space and Place' and 'Learning and Success'. In this summary a synopsis of some of the main points from the data are presented (Table 6 in Appendix 3 provides a summary of the co-researchers' perspectives).

In regards to 'Space and Place' the survey data demonstrated that a lot of children and adults recognised there were few, if any, spaces just for children in some schools. In accordance with Foucault's (1979) architectural composition of space it is arguable that the allocation and use of space is one structural practice in some schools that limits children's capacity to exercise agency. Children therefore operate within the largely adult supervised and determined spaces in some schools. These restrictions could imply that children lack ontology (Prout & James, 1997; Wyness, 2006b) and as such are less capable than adults by needing adult supervision.

In relation to codes of conduct various adults, children and co-researchers thought that children were expected to behave properly, follow rules, wear a uniform and respect their teachers in schools. The data clearly indicated that it was normal for adults to have accepted authority to impose rules where children were mostly required to unquestioningly conform, even to rules identified by adults and children as silly. Children's lives in schools are therefore limited by these ingrained expectations and normalcy of conformity that superseded threats of punishment as a motivating factor for children behaving properly.

In relation to 'Learning and Success' in schools the data showed that some children and adults described the learning in their schools as boring, irrelevant to children's lives and individual interests with few, if any spaces for children to know more than their teachers. Most children had little freedom of choice and were expected to achieve to high standard. Fear of failing tests and not wanting to disappoint parents, added stress to some co-researchers as some

parents put pressure on children to get good grades. Homework further extended the link between home and schools and the accumulation of assignments caused stress in school for some co-researchers and children. The traditional style of learning in some schools was considered a structural practice that reinforced adults' natural authority and superior knowledge to define, regulate and test children's learning, similar to the dominant framework. The co-researchers shared only a few incidences of collaborating with teachers on the content of learning. This collaboration was between a student child and the teacher as an adult. A possibility that was missing from the data was collaboration of learning between teacher and teacher, one simply younger.

In data related to how children wanted to learn, a lot of children, co-researchers and adults mentioned that children wanted learning to be fun, interesting and hands-on where children were consulted in their learning thus making it pertinent to the real interests and personality of the children. Some co-researchers wanted adults to recognise their technological saturated experiences of growing up. In a seeming paradox, some co-researchers could identify aspects of school they would change, including segregating disruptive students however, complied to expectations as they valued the futuristic benefits school offered them (see Table 6 – Appendix 3). For these middle-class co-researchers conforming to structural practices in schools may be a conscious decision to secure a brighter future.

The surprising aspect from the totality of data presented in this chapter is how commonly both adults and children recognised schools as a sometimes happy, discriminatory, regulatory and yet necessary place for children to learn. Many were aware of inequalities and yet accepting of them. Few suggested that learning in schools could be enhanced if teachers were expected to 'behave properly' and respect children as people and as expert teachers within their own lives. In the absence of a system to question injustices in schools, I have discovered that it appears safer for the co-researchers, adults and children to question the structures within schools in a research study than to actually challenge and possibly change these structures in reality.

Succinctly, some of the data illustrated that certain adults and children within this study described the practices in schools as: adults supervising and limiting children's access to spaces; adults imposing rules that regulate children's behaviour and dress; and by adults directing children's learning with primarily teacher directed activities, regular testing and homework. These structural practices ultimately constrain children's power and agency. Most children participated and conformed to these practices to achieve high marks, get a good job and be successful in life. The data denoted that the ultimate motivation for some children conforming in schools is fear of failure in school that correlated to failure in life. Therefore, in relation to the allocation of space, expected behavioural codes and the content and style of learning there appears few opportunities for children to change existing practices nor initiate action of their own choosing. The next chapter extends the data presented in regards to learning by adding the social dimension to children's experiences of school.

# Chapter 6: Children's agency within relationships with adults in schools

## 6.1. Introduction

This chapter is closely linked to the preceding results chapter as structural practices influence the context and parameters of relationships between adults and children in schools. As I examined the data I discovered there were a number of discourses in the way adults positioned children and children positioned themselves in relationship with adults. These multiple constructions of what the adults and children wrote or said in the data linked to children's position and power within the structural hierarchy of schools. Generally, the data indicated that children's relationship with adults in their schools impacted some children's learning and the way children were included in decision-making processes within their school (Table 7 in Appendix 4 presents a summary of the co-researchers' perspectives).

Data in this chapter is presented to provide perspectives on the research question: how do relationships in schools between children and adults affect the agency of the children within this study? In providing perspectives on this research question the data are presented as a series of three broad categories and minor associated themes developed from frequently used key words and phrases. The three broad categories are: 'Child, teacher and relationships'; 'Making decisions'; and 'New possibilities'. The first category; 'Child, teacher and relationships' presents data pertaining to how children and teachers get along and the way 'good' or 'bad' teachers enable or inhibit children to be agentic within the classroom. The second broad category, 'Making decisions' considers how children are included or excluded within school and decision-making processes, the choices children get to make in class and what decisions children would like to make in school. The third broad category, 'New possibilities' identifies suggestions for adults and children sharing power in schools and shows ideas for an ideal school. The first section delves into how the relationships children had with teachers effected children's learning in school.

## **6.2. Child, teacher and relationships**

Children's relationship with teachers was touched on in section 4.2 where data was shared concerning the behavioural expectation that children should respect their teachers. Guided by the data this section adds breadth and complexity to understanding children's relationships with teachers. To dissect children's relationships with their teacher further data in this section is organised around two main themes; 'Getting along' and 'Good or bad'? 'Getting along' includes the importance of children's relationship with their teachers and 'Good or bad' details disparate images of teachers and its impact for children's learning. The first subsection introduces the importance of children's relationship with their teacher.

### **6.2.1. Getting along**

Data indicated that children's relationships with their teacher could influence children's enjoyment of school, learning and motivation to participate. This subsection provides data from the following survey questions:

- Do children get along with their teacher?
- How important is it for children to get along with their teachers?
- Children wished their teachers knew...

The data is broken down into two themes that became apparent from the analysis; the importance of children's relationship with their teacher and who was responsible for the relationship between teachers and students.

The first theme from the data addresses the importance of the relationship between children and teachers. Survey data showed that most adults and children concurred that children's relationships with their teachers were significant. Some children explained why getting along with their teachers was important for children. Two children responded that they wanted their teachers to know, "that they [teachers] have played an important role in my education" (CSM16-14) and "I get along with teachers well, this is very important because they are a major influence on our lives" (CSM15-13). Data showed that for some children getting along



with their teachers improved their motivation to attend school as these children mentioned, “most of the time I do [get along with the teacher], it is important or I won’t want to go” (CSF13-03) or “I get along with most teachers and it is important to how you feel at school because if you don’t get along you won’t enjoy school” (CSM14-27).

Several adults and children linked the importance of children’s relationship with their teacher to effecting children’s learning. Some adults said, “yes it is important, the relationship between teacher and pupil may impact significantly on life-long learning” (ASF46-08), “if you trust and respect your teacher than you are more likely to learn well and try new things” (ASF36-33) and “most children get along with most teachers it is extremely important to children’s feelings of safety, confidence and success” (ASF36-07). Another adult clarified, “I believe it makes a huge difference to how children learn, their confidence and willingness to participate if they get along well with their teachers” (ASM36-18).

One child linked the relationship to the atmosphere of the class, “it is important to how I feel because it makes a more relaxed atmosphere which is easier to work in” (CSM16-04). Further to this two children stipulated that if they did not like the teacher they did not like the class, “it is important as the less you like a teacher, the less you like the subject they teach (in many cases, not all)” (CSF15-33) and “not all of them, it depends what the teacher is like, because if I don’t like the teacher then I don’t like the class” (CSM14-28). Other children agreed explaining further, “yes, if you don’t get along then you might not listen to what they are teaching you” (CSF14-08), “[I get along with] most of them, makes school more bearable” (CSM13-25) and “some [teachers] don’t really encourage or help kids and that’s really important” (CSF12-16). A child also mentioned, “it’s important because otherwise classes would be a misery” (CSM12-32).

The second theme from the data was concerned with who was responsible for the relationship between teachers and children. These examples showed that for these adults the onus for a child’s relationship with their teacher was on the pupil with one exception. An adult said, “children should respect their teachers and to this end I think most children get along with their teachers. If a child doesn’t respect then they will find it difficult to learn” (ASM36-10).

A different adult said, “it is important, many children have behavioural problems and this prevents them getting on with teachers” (ASF46-05). In contrast one adult believed, “not all children and teachers get on or teachers and teachers – this is part of life. However, as teachers are adults the onus is on them to lead by example” (ASF26-22).

A few adults thought that children and teachers’ relationships depended on their personalities. One adult avowed, “depends on personalities – on both sides. Yes a year with a teacher that they don’t get along with can be a disaster” (ASF46-24) and another adult said, “children don’t always get along with all teachers there can be personality clashes, this can make children not want to attend and cause stress” (ASF36-01). One more adult commented, “depends on teachers, depends on child” (ASM36-19).

In summary, the data in this subsection showed that most adults and children in this study concurred that children’s relationships with their teachers were significant to their interest in learning and how children would feel in their classroom. Adults and children in this study also believed that relationships between children and teachers were very important as they could positively or negatively affect a child’s security at school, desire to learn and preference for some subjects. Several adults proposed that children were responsible for their relationship with teachers and children should respect their teachers. A few adults thought that the relationship between teacher and pupil varied depending on their personalities.

#### 6.2.1.1. Discussion of data related to ‘Getting along’

Some adults and children saw connections between children’s desire to learn, motivation to succeed and their relationship with the teacher. There were differing accounts of who was responsible for the relationship between children and adults. As previously mentioned in section 4.2 in some schools children were expected to respect teachers and so if this was true then being disrespectful would be the responsibility of the child. However, if teachers were responsible for the relationship they created with children then a child being disrespectful may be more indicative of the way the adult was treating the child. Either way opportunities for children to exercise their agency is limited or expanded depending on the relationship

developed between the teacher and the child. Rigid boundaries between adults and children support the dominant framework philosophy as children lack ontology (see Lee, 2001; Quinn, 1992; Qvortrup, 1994; Wyness, 2006b) whilst presenting a stereotypical view of ‘the child’ as a composite. Lee (2001) and Prout (2005) contend that with advances in technology and the Internet new relationships are developing between adults and children not confined to old perceptions of childhood (see Montgomery, 2007, Wyness, 2006b). The new sociology of childhood provides a new way of viewing children, by seeing them as a cultural collective within their own right (Qvortrup, 1998, 2002). As social actors this group could create mutually empowering relationships between adults and children in school that could shift some limiting ideas of children (see Corasro, 2005). It is this conception of childhood that challenges schools to develop frameworks to support opportunities for children to invoke change through action. The data in the next section provides characteristics of teachers that children and adults described as nice or nasty.

### **6.2.2. Good or bad?**

How teachers view childhood will influence their treatment of children within their classes. I am presenting data derived from Agent Sprat’s journal, interviews with Juliet, Penelope, Cildru, Semaj, Agent Sprat, Leroy, Charleston, Arc and Hamish and responses from the following interview and survey questions:

- Do children get along with their teacher?
- How important is it for children to get along with their teachers?
- Children wished their teachers knew...
- The thing that annoys children most about schools is...
- The thing children love about school is...
- And the interview question, tell me about your school.

Two disparate images of teachers became apparent from the analysis of the data, the teacher as good or the teacher as bad. Generally, children and adults in this study thought good

teachers were nice and supportive and bad teachers were authoritarian and unfair. The image of the good teacher is discussed first.

#### 6.2.2.1. Good teachers

The data showed that some children described characteristics of a good teacher as someone who cared and was nice and interesting. One child said, “yes the teachers care and like to know how I feel” (CSF12-01) and another said that at her school, “the teachers are nice” (CSF08-18). One child loved school because of the, “interesting teachers who teach me things” (CSM13-37). Semaj described good teachers as nice, funny and supportive:

*... in my school there are a lot of nice teachers like the PD/H/PE teacher he is really funny... we have a lot of fun with him... It's easy to do anything when there's positive support... we've got a really good teacher... like if you do something wrong... he's got lots of positive encouragement. (Semaj, interview, 9/7/07)*

Julliet, Penelope and Leroy add to Semaj's understanding of a good teacher. Julliet and Penelope thought good teachers were passionate and Leroy thought they created supportive learning environments:

*It would be good to have a teacher for certain subjects that is more into their subject... more passionate, understand what we're talking about. (Julliet, interview, 10/7/07)*

*I had a very good Science teacher... he's obviously passionate about Science so he gets, he tries to get everyone else passionate about Science... it does depend on the teacher, and the teacher has to be passionate about what they're doing. (Penelope, interview, 9/7/07)*

*It's really easy to concentrate. The teachers are good at my school, they really encourage learning. (Leroy, interview, 10/7/07)*

Other data also pointed out that some children and adults liked teachers who created supportive learning environments where they felt encouraged and accepted. Adults remarked that in relationship with teachers, “children should feel valued and accepted” (ASM36-19), “as long as the teacher is fair, consistent, nurturing and caring” (ASF36-31). Another adult noted that children got along with teachers, “provided teachers have developed positive relationships with students, learning is all about relationships” (ASF46-06). Another adult said, “some teachers make it a point to be more approachable, that in turn helps children to feel like they mean something and may help them approach study more positively” (ASF26-30).

Several children said, “yes I do get along with my teachers, they are all nice and supportive” (CSF14-11), “my teachers help me to feel better and learn, they encourage” (CSF15-12). Other children commented, “I get along with my teachers, this is important because you can ask them anything you want without feeling stupid” (CSF13-09), “I feel more comfortable when I am in a class that has a teacher that I get along with” (CSF14-04), “I think it is easier to learn if you get along with your teachers” (CSF13-17) and another child observed, “I get along with all my teachers, I believe this to be important as it creates a positive learning environment and enables me to easily approach teachers” (CSF17-10). Interviews with Penelope and Semaj revealed that these co-researchers had positive relationships with some teachers that they could question them. Penelope did mention that she,

*... always question my teachers about everything, especially Mr Morris in Science. (Penelope, interview, 9/7/07)*

Semaj also commented how he argued with one teacher,

*... like one time I said that the Titanic was a conspiracy we argued for like a long time. It was pretty funny. (Semaj, interview, 9/7/07)*

In terms of respect in relationships with teachers two children had slightly different perspectives. One child commented that she got along with teachers who respected her, “I get along with teachers who respect me, this has a positive effect on my feelings at school as it creates an atmosphere more conducive to interactive learning” (CSF16-02). A different child appreciated teachers who stood up for her, “yes you always have your teachers on your side – they will stick up for you when you need it” (CSF13-06).

In the analysis of the data it became apparent that not all children thought teachers were nice. The following data presented teachers as unfair and dominating.

#### 6.2.2.2. Bad teachers

Children and adults did not use the term ‘bad’ to describe some teachers and their relationship with children. What they said in the data represented the opposite to what some other children and adults articulated a ‘good’ teacher to be and so I have combined these to be representative of a ‘bad’ teacher.

Hamish, Arc and Agent Sprat positioned teachers as undisputedly being in charge. Hamish thought that teachers were at school to,

*... show the kids they’re the boss. (Hamish, interview, 6/7/07)*

Arc commented that he would like to have authority like a teacher,

*I would like to be the teacher so I can discipline, not be disciplined. (Arc, interview, 13/12/07)*

Agent Sprat in his journal relayed starting high school and the way some teachers changed and became more autocratic:

*It was very exciting going to high school at first because we were treated nicely and I was about to meet new friends and teachers. The teachers were*

*nice and friendly at first but after a few days they started acting like they would for other older classes, not a year seven class. (Agent Sprat, journal entry, 2007)*

Charleston described how one teacher limited his learning opportunities:

*I also do public speaking and the teacher who runs it, uh last year she gave me one public speaking competition, there's been about 15 in just this city and she gave me just one. (Charleston, interview, 10/7/07)*

In having this dictatorial power some teachers developed frightening relationships with their students. One adult agreed that, “sometimes [children] are afraid of teachers and doing the wrong thing because teachers discipline other kids so much of the time” (ASF36-25). Some children wanted a chance to voice their opinion without repercussions. One child mentioned the most annoying part of school was, “the ceaseless attempts to repress students’ freedom of expression” (CSF16-02). A few children mentioned that if they knew they could not fail they would, “tell the teachers there is no point doing the task that they set me”, “tell the teacher I was smarter than him” and if no-one was watching these children would, “tell the teacher who blocks websites a thing or two” (CSF13-03) or “blow up the boring maths teacher” (CSM13-37). An interview with Julliet, revealed that in regards to learning she did not feel she had a voice to question a frightening teacher she described;

*Sometimes you think whatever the teacher is saying is completely wrong but yeah, you can't quite say it like that... everybody is petrified, not petrified but a lot more intimidated by the teacher. (Julliet, interview, 10/7/07)*

In a similar thread Cildru commented at the perceived unfairness of discipline she received:

*... 'cause a teacher comes in 2 people are up at the blackboard one is trying to rub off and one is trying to scribble and she goes both of you, you both are getting a yellow slip and I go 'I'm just trying to rub off her scribble' and she*

*goes – ‘No you're both getting yellow slips’ so that's, I'd like to make that decision [whether to get punished or not]. (Cildru, interview, 6/7/07)*

The data depicted that another characteristic of bad teachers was the eking out of what some children and adults considered unfair discipline. When asked, ‘do children get along with their teachers?’ three children replied, “no I don’t get along with the teachers as they have STUPID rules” (CSF12-41), “I think my teacher is quite unfair” (CSF11-39) and another child got along with most teachers “... it is important so the teacher doesn’t pick on you” (CSM12-31). One child said the most annoying aspect of school was “when Mrs C yells at the naughty boys she hurts my ears” (CSF10-35). In a journal entry Agent Sprat explained how some teachers disciplined children and in an interview discussed the unfairness of the discipline/merit system at his school:

*And then when the teachers got mad some of the peers in my class started talking back. Then for those students it was category card after category card and suspension after suspension and whenever the teachers had our class they made it feel to us as if the teachers had to be there which wasn’t good for the tension. (Agent Sprat, journal entry, 2007)*

*Well there’s the merit system which is something I like but I think it is a bit unfair if you deserve it and if you’re away the day she was going to give them out, then you come back the next day and say I was supposed to get one yesterday. One of my teacher’s says “Bad luck you weren’t there to get it. (Agent Sprat, interview, 9/7/07)*

Julliet commented that teachers needed to be consistent and fair in their enforcement of rules:

*Teachers all need to advise on the same rules rather than some teachers thinking that this is right or not and then you get detention for having a red hair [clip]. (Julliet, interview, 10/7/07)*



Linked to the notion of unfairness the data verified that some bad teachers disrespect children. Two adults thought that the most annoying thing about school for children was “teachers who do not treat them with respect or as young adults” (ASF36-09) and “teachers who treat them as children” (ASM36-10). Another adult commented, “the older they get the more differences of opinion. It [getting along with their teacher] is very important as children feel they are treated unfairly, unequitably and without compassion” (ASF36-35). These children felt most annoyed at school, “when teachers are disrespectful or don’t want to listen” (CSF12-41) and “teachers who don’t respect the students” (CSF13-09). Agent Sprat explained how his teacher makes his class feel;

*Our maths teacher makes us feel like dirt. We can't even look behind us or sneeze or cough without getting yelled at. (Agent Sprat, journal entry, 2007)*

Julliet further explained that teachers needed to understand that while students have to show teachers respect children want it reciprocated:

*They [teachers] sometimes don't understand that respect comes to people other ways... they think they're better than you even if, yeah it can get annoying... especially 'cause I'm in most of the advanced classes they expect too much of you sometimes and treat you like you're 4 years old. (Julliet, interview, 10/7/07)*

Concisely, the data showed that some children and adults in this study constructed some teachers and subsequent relationships with teachers as good or bad. The data indicated that for some children a good teacher was someone who cared, was nice, funny and passionate and who created positive learning environments where the children felt encouraged, valued and respected. Semaj and Penelope pointed out their experiences of these learning environments included spaces for children to question the teacher. In contrasting data, bad teachers were authoritarian who used their power to intimidate and control children by eking out punishment that some children and adults perceived as unfair. Julliet explained that in her experience of relating to authoritarian teachers she had no voice or recourse to influence learning or to

question the teacher. The data showed that some children resented being treated disrespectfully by these ‘bad’ teachers.

#### 6.2.2.3. Discussion of data related to ‘Good or bad?’

Learning in most schools is influenced by the relationships between teachers and pupils. These relationships can influence the degree to which power is shared between adults and children in schools. The data indicated that good teachers treated children as people and developed relationships with children that encouraged and enabled their capacity to take up agency by providing spaces for children to question and collaborate, thereby embodying the tenets of the new sociology of childhood and the student voice movement (see Cook-Sather, 2006b; Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2006; T.L.R.P., 2003). Contrarily, bad teachers controlled children and expected all children to conform to the teacher’s request unquestioningly with no recourse for unfair treatment. These teachers would not recognise or provide spaces to enable children’s agency due to their dictatorship style of relating with children. Adults unquestioned authority over children in schools can be interpreted as a right granted by the State or government synonymous with a key feature of the dominant framework (see Prout & James, 1997; Qvortrup, 1998). The next section discusses children’s decision-making opportunities in school.

### **6.3. Making decisions**

The way that adults included children in the decision-making processes in their schools and classes reflected how adults shared power with children. I am interpreting opportunities for children to make decisions indicative of children’s agency within their classes and school.

The themes that surfaced from the analysis of data have been arranged into three primary themes related to decision-making; ‘Included or excluded?’, ‘Choices, choices’ and ‘Having a say’. The topic ‘included or excluded?’ provides data on how children were included or excluded in decision-making within their schools. The theme ‘choices, choices’ depicts data concerning the decisions children got to make at school and in class. The final theme ‘having a say’ presents data regarding decisions children would like to make in their schools.

### 6.3.1. Included or excluded?

This data presented in this section concerning how children were excluded or included in decision-making processes at their schools were sourced from interviews with Charleston, Cildru and responses from the following interview and survey questions:

- Can you describe areas where children are given the opportunity to make big decisions?
- How are children included in decision-making at school? (eg. ‘Student council’)
- What, if anything, would children like to have a say about at school?
- And the interview question; what decisions do you make at school?

As indicated above I wrote ‘student council’ in brackets next to the question, how are children included in decision-making at school? This may have influenced the results to this question. The data has been arranged to elicit these perspectives and trends by focussing on children’s inclusion in the SRC, children’s inclusion in various clubs and children’s exclusion from decision-making processes.

The data verified that the most widely held belief by both adults and children in this study was that children were included in decision-making processes at school through the SRC. Adults tended to list multiple ways children were included in decision-making or wrote ‘student council’ with little explanation (ASF36-01; ASM26-03; ASM36-19; ASF36-31; ASM18-29; ASF46-17; ASF46-24; ASF36-34; ASF36-16; ASF36-33; ASF36-12; ASF26-15; ASF36-11; ASF36-21; ASF36-09). One adult did explain, “school councils, very proactive in many schools – SRC” (ASF46-05).

Some children also wrote student council without explanation (CSM13-37; CSM14-28; CSM13-25; CSM14-27; CSF12-01). Several children described the function and value of this council; “through our SRC – you tell them your idea and they take it to the SRC” (CSF13-06), “we have school student council groups which cater for different aspects of school” (CSF14-23), “the student council puts forward ideas for fundraisers/improvements” (CSM16-14), “I

am a member of the SRC and we make suggestions for improvements to the school” (CSM15-13), “our student council has a democratic view on decisions for the school” (CSF11-39) and “there is a student council where people can express their ideas” (CSF12-30).

The data revealed that not all children and adults valued the SRC. Some children and adults felt that this was tokenistic and only represented a few children. Two adults said, “student council but I feel it has limited impact on things” (ASF26-30) and “Student Representative Council – only effective for the kids who are up front and involved with the SRC” (ASF36-25).

A few children commented; “the SRC (Student Rep Council) are supposed to ask us what we want but they never do” (CSM12-34) and “there is a student council, though I have yet to see them act” (CSF16-02). Some children concurred that the SRC represented only a few children, “we have a SRC, but I believe it to be more of a token council – head girl and head boy are involved in decision making” (CSF17-10) and “kids in SRC get to make decisions for us. I think they should have comment boxes in the office so anybody can say what they think and have ideas” (CSF12-16).

The next theme that came to light from the analysis was that some children and adults mentioned other ways children were included in decision-making such as children volunteering and being consulted in focus groups. These adults commented; “they are frequently given opportunities to volunteer for special roles in class, or to debate decisions about activities” (ASM46-14), “student council to some extent, playground consultation allowed for input from every child” (ASF46-06) and “students are always included through focus groups and/or surveys about big changes at this school (e.g. changes to pastoral care structures, uniforms, etc...)” (ASF36-07).

These children cited organising events in the school, “running things like 40 hour famine, organising days and events (with permission of course!!)” (CSF15-33) and “the activities such as masses, fetes, gala concerts, all have children running and contributing to them” (CSF14-

11). One child commented that he felt included in decision-making by completing evaluation forms, “sheets are given out on evaluation of topics/term or semester” (CSM16-24).

Another theme that came forward through the analysis of the data was a few adults and children did not feel children were included much, if at all in the decision-making processes at their high schools. These adults also expressed this sentiment by stating, “not very much” (ASF36-27) and “I believe that those little bodies have little influence over any major decisions in the school” (ASM36-10). An adult noted that children were included in the decision-making processes by “feedback through parents” (ASF36-23). One child succinctly said, “they’re [children] not” (CSF12-41). Charleston noted that he did not get many opportunities to make decisions and described his exclusion in decision-making at his high school by stating:

*Very few [decisions] if any... one thing we didn't get to choose our classes last year... because we were forced to do a language last year for whatever reason and... our entire home room we were with for the rest of the year were chosen by what language we chose which is a pretty pathetic system, I mean it just doesn't make sense... (Charleston, interview, 10/7/07)*

Similarly, Cildru commented that she got annoyed at school after discussing decisions she got to make;

*I get really annoyed at school a lot. When I talk about it I get annoyed um, but when you're there you don't really know it's annoying. (Cildru interview, 6/7/07)*

The final theme that became apparent from the data were the reasons why children were excluded from decision-making processes. Adults only gave these justifications, “I don’t believe that students should have a great role in decision making at school” (ASM36-18) and “children expect to be included and contribute, they should not be pressured to make big decisions too soon” (ASF46-08). In answering a different question on the survey regarding

big decisions children made, some adults defended children not having power to make decisions, “many children don’t understand or aren’t hindered by the complexities of life so they see it as easy” (ASF26-22), “they have to be guided by adults with experience” (ASF46-05), “too young yet” (ASF46-20) and “big decisions are usually vetted by parents financially, safety or for plain reasons such as ‘cause I say so!” (ASF26-30).

In brief, most adults and children in this study thought that children were included in decision-making through the SRC. Some children and adults valued the SRC as an opportunity to express their ideas whilst others felt that the SRC was tokenistic and ineffective. Several adults and children identified other ways children were included such as organising fetes and surveys. A few adults and one child did not think children were included at all in decision-making and Charleston recounted his exclusion in decision-making. Some adults specified that children should not be included in decision-making because they were too young, and inexperienced.

#### 6.3.1.1. Discussion of data related to ‘Included or excluded?’

The data represented mixed perceptions of the way children were included in decision-making processes within their schools. There was contrasting data related to the effectiveness of the SRC to represent children’s opinions and lead to action (see Cox & Robinson-Pant, 2003; Osler, 2000; Leren, 2006). Irrespective of the effectiveness of the SRC, children are largely mediated through adult-defined groups thereby limiting children’s ability to engage in action of their own choosing, findings verified by Bland and Atweh (2007). Related to this point, a few adults and children did not feel that children were included in decision-making processes and if they were then they did not have much, if any, influence over the outcomes of decisions (see Cox & Robinson-Pant, 2003; Osler, 2000). Other adults did not think children should be included in decision making processes because they are too young, inexperienced and did not need the pressure of making decisions (Durkheim, 1982). This attitude reflects the sentiments of the dominant framework that produces binary assumptions when adults as ‘beings’ are compared with children as ‘becomings’ (see Quinn, 1992; Qvortrup 194; Wyness, 2006b). The next section elaborates on the decisions children actually get to make in their schools and classes.

### 6.3.2. Choices, choices

The data in this, 'Choices, choices' section narrows the focus from how children are included in decision-making processes to what choices or decisions children got to make in their school and in their classes. I have compiled the data in this section from interviews with Semaj, Charleston, Hamish, Cildru, Agent Sprat, Alice, Arc, Penelope, Leroy, Brice and Juliet and responses to the following survey and interview questions:

- How are children included in decision-making at school? (eg. Student council)
- And the interview questions; what decisions do you make at school?
- What decisions do you get to make in class?

The data is organised around decisions children got to make in school and decisions got to make in class. The subsection 'Choices in school' presents data related to the decisions children got to make in school and is further broken down to the themes of children choosing electives and participation in extra-curricula activities. The subsection 'Choices in class' shows data about decisions children got to make in class and was themed around productivity decisions in class, structural decisions in class and no decisions.

#### 6.3.2.1. Choices in school

The first theme from the data was Brice, Penelope, Leroy, Arc and Semaj identified choosing their electives as decisions they got to make in their schools. They commented:

*We get to choose what sport we go to... we get to choose um, three subjects.  
(Brice, interview, 10/7/07)*

*We get to decide... electives in Year 9 and we get to decide what ones we  
get... also decide like in Year 11 and 12 you decide subjects that you want to  
study. (Penelope, interview, 9/7/07)*

*You can have your choice of what you want to do just like electives and everything. (Leroy, interview, 10/7/07)*

*You get to choose what subjects to do even though there are some rules we have to follow. (Arc, interview, 10/7/07)*

*You get to decide, I think all your electives when you're in Year 12. I think in Year 8 you can choose a language out of French and Japanese. When you're in, I think Year 11 and 12 you get to choose when you do all the other periods and stuff like that so you get to choose your curriculum yourself. (Semaj, interview, 9/7/07)*

Cildru and Charleston described how they technically got to choose their electives, however were overwritten by teachers at their schools. They stated:

*... to a lesser extent what classes I do, because I'll put/ nominate and then they'll go that one and that one we don't have enough people and you can't do that. (Cildru, interview, 6/7/07)*

*We got to choose our electives at the end of last year - Year 8. The only thing I really wanted to do was drama for 10 years and they're not having a class next year. And I had music as well I got to choose which is good but three-quarters of the class can't read music, 8 people in the class don't actually play an instrument, there's one drum kit, something over 80% of the guitars don't have 6 strings. (Charleston, interview, 10/7/07)*

The second theme that became apparent from the data was that children could choose their participation in extra-curricular activities. Hamish, Cildru, Agent Sprat, Arc and Semaj described their decisions to participate in activities when they expressed:



*Participating in things, eg; school musical... the choice of subject in ILP (Independent Learning Project). (Hamish, interview, 6/7/07)*

*What clubs I join, what I do during lunch, recess, before and after... where you sit is an important one as any. (Cildru, interview, 6/7/07)*

*Well you get to choose, um, house captains. And at sports carnival you're not like made to do a run or whatever. (Agent Sprat, interview, 9/7/07)*

*What I want to do during breaks. (Arc, interview, 10/7/07)*

*We get to decide if we're in the musical, the band, the orchestra, the school team for netball, rugby, soccer, running, athletics. (Semaj, interview, 9/7/07)*

Penelope pointed out that she got to make lots of decisions including the friends she makes:

*If you want to do any sports at school or instruments, I do clarinet and there's lots of opportunities in school to do, to make decisions... there's also the decision of like your friends who you make friends with. (Penelope, interview, 9/7/07)*

Leroy took a slightly different stance by focussing on choosing his opinions and choice of behaviour;

*You really get to make your opinion at school... you don't have to have something, you don't always have to do something. (Leroy, interview, 10/7/07)*

#### 6.3.2.2. Choices in class

The first pattern that stood out from the data was that in their interviews Brice, Hamish, Leroy, Semaj, Julliet and Alice described decisions they got to make in class related to their productivity. These examples will clarify what this means:

*In geography we get a sheet that's got questions on it and we get to choose which questions we do first. In which order we do the questions. (Brice, interview, 10/7/07)*

*A few, like maybe if there is a bunch of topics what topic you choose, a partner who you go with. (Hamish, interview, 6/7/07)*

*Just say you are doing a quiz or something with multiple choice, then you can have your choice of what you think the answer would be. (Leroy, interview, 10/7/07)*

*Well they're not really big decisions... if you finish something early you decide what you do. (Semaj, interview, 9/7/07)*

*We do a lot of discussion and share and stuff, which aren't really decisions but we discuss what we personally feel. (Julliet, interview, 10/7/07)*

*We get quite a lot of decisions to make. We don't actually know they're decisions, like I mean, in some cases if you are in an art class you can like decide for example what colour to paint something and then at assembly you can decide if you want to make a speech at assembly. You can decide if you want to put on a performance at the assembly. You can make a decision to talk to a teacher about something. (Alice, interview, 9/7/07)*

A second theme from the data related to the planning decisions children got to make in class. Penelope discussed:

*The teacher gives you a choice saying you can do this bit of work or this bit of work, and everyone is like going for the easier one. (Penelope, interview, 9/7/07)*

Some adults suggested that children were included in decision-making within their classes by; “choice of topics to study as a class, school sport choices, decorating classroom, assignment choice” and “in classrooms to develop rules/curriculum” (ASF26-22), “classroom decisions on how to structure day, activities” (ASF36-35) and “what happens in class, how things are taught, the concept of play, interactive activities, fun, safety, democracy” (ASF36-11). At Agent Sprat and Penelope’s schools students were included in deciding the content in Art or excursions;

*So at the beginning of the year they ask us, um, what kind of things we like to do and what kind of excursions we like to go to. They try and fit that in. (Agent Sprat, interview, 9/7/07)*

*For Art, we do like two Art courses we can pick, the teachers went around and scored what each of the students wanted to learn and sort of made an Art course up by putting everyone's sort of what they wanted to do together, I mean they already had a curriculum but they modified it to make it a bit more fun and what we actually wanted to learn. (Penelope, interview, 9/7/07)*

In contrasting data, Agent Sprat and Tarco said they did not make any decisions in class and Cildru clearly noted she did not get to make any decisions in class;

*Not really because they've [teachers] already designated what class, where you sit what you're doing and how fast you're going to do it. (Cildru, interview, 6/7/07)*

In summary, the data in this section on ‘Choices, choice’ depicted that within their schools Brice, Penelope, Leroy, Arc and Semaj identified choosing their electives as decisions they got to make. Cildru and Charleston stated that they were given the opportunity to choose their electives, however were not always given their choices. Hamish, Cildru and Semaj noted they could decide what activities to participate in. Penelope mentioned she could choose her friends and Leroy said he could choose his opinions. Brice, Hamish, Leroy, Semaj, Julliet and Penelope described decisions they got to make in class related to their productivity or ways

they completed the teacher prescribed activities. Penelope added that she had helped decide part of the content of an art course. A few adults in this study suggested that some teachers consulted and included children in making decisions on what they teach, in developing rules or on the structure of the day. Cildru said she did not make decisions in class.

#### 6.3.2.1. Discussion of data related to ‘Choices, choices?’

The decisions the co-researchers got to make in their school such as choosing electives for two co-researchers was different from actually getting to study the topics they wanted to. Taking action to get their decision was outside of their power in school. In these two instances teachers maintained the power to grant or override these decisions, thereby granting only superficial decision-making power to the two co-researchers in this study.

In class some co-researchers described; choosing what question to answer first or who to go with or what colour to paint something or discussing their feelings, or choosing what to do when they finish work as making decisions. One insinuation from this data I would like to make is that the almost trivial decisions some co-researchers mentioned had little influence on others. Related to this point Bragg (2007a), Hickey and Fitzclarence (2000) and Sarason (1996) found that consulting with children in classes can be a challenge for teachers who depend on traditional hierarchies of power to maintain order. I suggest that what is most absent from the data are ‘important’ decisions children actually made within their classes or schools that were of any consequence. Data related to decisions children would like to make is the focus of the next section.

#### **6.3.3. Having a say**

This section on children ‘having a say’ presents data related to decisions children would like to make at their school. I have drawn the data from interviews with Charleston, Cildru, Hamish, Alice, Tarco, Julliet, Arc, Leroy, Agent Sprat and Penelope and the responses to the following interview and survey questions:

- What, if anything, would children like to have a say about at school?
- If children were principal for a day, how would they improve or change their school?
- And the interview question; Are there are decisions you would like to make at school or in class?

The data is organised around the broad themes that children wanted to have a say on: learning choices, choice of teachers and other decisions.

#### 6.3.3.1. Learning choices

The data pertaining to choices children and adults wanted to have a say on have been organised around the following themes; selection of subjects, the type of learning, reducing tests and homework.

Children and adults specifically indicated they would like to have a say on the subjects they study. Two adults thought that children would like to have, “subjects and tools they use” (ASF36-34) and “subjects that interest them” (ASF36-35).

A few children said, “I would let all years select their subjects” (CSM12-34) and “electives, I want more say in those” (CSF13-03). One more child commented that she would, “start investigations into learning strategies for more appropriate division of students (according to learning style), start negotiations with nearby schools to facilitate wider subject choice” (CSF16-02). Charleston, Cildru, Hamish, Arc and Alice reiterated these sentiments when they commented they would like to have a say on:

*The choice of what classes to go in. (Charleston, interview, 10/7/07)*

*I'd like to make the decision of exactly what classes I get to do. (Cildru, interview, 6/7/07)*

*... which class we are going to have, later on we get to do that but if we had it earlier on it would have been better. (Hamish, interview, 6/7/07)*

*I'd like more choices of the subjects you can do. (Arc, interview, 10/7/07)*

*I'd like to decide what DT [design and technology] classes to do - we have these DT elect classes, there's cooking, sewing, metalwork and woodwork/drawing and electronics. And we just get put into one and I'd like to be able to decide what one to do. (Alice, interview, 9/7/07)*

Children also commented on their choice of fellow classmates. One child noted, “I would like to have a say on the people in classes (grade all academic classes)” (CSF13-06). A child that Alice interviewed said he would also like all classes to be graded, “stream all classes so all the like top kids are in all of the top classes, it happens now but some of the other classes are pretty dodgy” (CIM-01).

Some adults and children said they would like to make decisions on what and how they were taught. One adult described this as, “the way in which they learn, for example, I don't think many kids enjoy or benefit from the traditional ‘chalk and talk’ style of teaching” (ASF36-07).

The following adults suggested that children would want to change their learning by having more, “opportunities for open discussion on things, subjects that interest them” (ASF36-35), “probably by implementing less structured lessons and a more practical approach to learning” (ASM36-18), “have more outdoor learning, i.e. excursions and less structured formal structure”, “more flexibility and choice in learning activities” (ASF46-06) and “do more things they enjoy” (SF36-33).

A few adults stated that children would want some choice of “which learning activities they complete; which sport is done” (ASF46-06), “more interesting relevant lessons” (ASF36-16), “how they spend their time, what type of activities they do” (ASF36-33) and to “give kids

more freedom with activities” (ASF36-25). A few adults figured children would want, “less work and more play, more hands on interesting subjects” (ASF26-30), “more free time, less class time, less homework, less rules” (ASF36-09) and “they would shorten class times, make classes optional” (ASF26-26).

These children wanted to have more; ‘hands-on’ activities, “have more practical lessons in every subject” (CSF12-30), “I personally think our school should take more excursions outside of school, example: camp, fun activities etc” (CSF11-15), “build an educational chook pen and organise more excursions” (CSF11-15) and “put more fun in learning because when you’re at school the more fun you make the work, the easier it is to learn” (CSF09-05). Agent Sprat, Tarco and Julliet wanted to decide:

*I'd like to learn in a fun way. I like 'hands on' activities. (Agent Sprat, interview, 7/3/08)*

*To choose whether to do the maths now or later. (Tarco, interview, 10/7/07)*

*What subjects you do and how much of each sort of thing... give students a say in how they learn, not necessarily what they learn... probably have more interesting forms of information other than books (computers, interactive whiteboards). (Julliet, interview, 10/7/07).*

Penelope explained that whilst some content is decided by the Board of Education she said she would also like to have a say on how she learnt:

*I'd probably like to have a bit more say in what we actually, like with English especially we're doing these 2 novels and it's so boring, I'd probably prefer to do like, be able to do like maybe have a vote on what we actually like, it has to be non-fiction and we could all discuss what we wanted to read... not the actual, what we actually learn because obviously that's sort of determined by the board. (Penelope, interview, 9/7/07)*

The following adults said children would want to have, “less assessment tasks – more time to do assessment tasks, not so much emphasis on exams” (ASF36-21) and change “how their work is appreciated and assessed, their timetable” (ASM46-14). One child agreed she wanted to, “get rid of half yearly exams and make it only end of year exams” (CSF14-23).

Some adults and children stipulated children would want more play or free time. One adult suggested children would want to “have more ‘fun’ lessons” (ASF36-27), and have more computer and play time” (ASF46-05). An adult also advised that children would “increase free time” (ASF36-02), “extend lunch and recess” (ASM18-29) and have “long lunch for lots of play” (ASF36-16). One adult proposed children would “have more computer and play time” (ASF46-05).

Related to the notion of time to play one child suggested an afternoon sojourn, “I would have a huge free time for the school to relax after a lot of work. We could even have a nap time – for everybody!” (CSF11-39). Another child wanted to “have shorter days and longer break times” (CSF14-08).

Homework was also an important issue for children and adults. Two adults said, “less homework” (ASF36-31) and “the high volume of homework, getting teachers to communicate with each other so the homework is manageable and not overwhelming” (ASF36-09).

Arc wanted to make decisions on how much homework he got and Penelope wanted some input into the type of assignments:

*I'd like to decide how much homework we get. (Arc, interview, 10/7/07)*

*... maybe just like have a bit more say on the assignments that we get and make them a bit more fun and more child-friendly, we sort of get a bit, you know, boring just research this and answer these questions. (Penelope, interview, 9/7/07)*



### 6.3.3.2. Choice of teachers

In this subsection ‘choice of teachers’ the following themes became apparent in the analysis of data; children choosing their teacher, increased respect for students by teachers and fairer discipline.

Some children and adults wanted children to choose their teacher. Some adults also proposed that children would want to decide, “choice of teacher” (ASASF36-02) “who their teacher is” (ASF26-15), “choose teachers” (ASF26-15) and “which teachers” (ASF36-01). Other adults advocated to, “get rid of boring teachers” (ASF36-25) and “remove all “dinosaur” teachers and bring in fresh and young teachers who are in touch with the youth of today – no more Frank Sinatra – kids want Wolfmother! [Australian hard rock band]” (ASF36-12).

For some children it was simply stated they wanted to decide, “what teachers I have” (CSF09-05) and “the class structure, who is in your class and what teachers we have” (CSM15-13). Some other children wanted to remove the boring teachers, “I’d get rid of all the boring and mean teachers and get good, interesting teachers” (CSM13-37) and “get nice teachers” (CSM10-38). Julliet expressed her desire to have more say on the teachers she got:

*... like more decisions about what teacher you get - I mean my teacher's good but he's so boring and sometimes it just drags on and it would be good to have a teacher for certain subjects that is more into their subject... have younger teachers who understand children more than older ones [teachers].*  
(Julliet, interview, 10/7/07)

Charleston had the same opinion and added a different angle by suggesting that teachers could choose their students. He said:

*Maybe the choices of what teachers I have, maybe the teachers to choose the students they want to have. (Charleston, interview, 10/7/07)*

Agent Sprat wanted to be able to change teachers if they did not get along;

*Maybe if there's like a teacher that doesn't have a good relationship with you maybe you could ask to move to another class and start afresh with a new teacher. (Agent Sprat, interview, 9/7/07)*

In relation to discipline some adults thought children would want fair discipline, "... fairness and equity of discipline" (ASF36-35), "make things fair" (ASF36-33), "treat all students in an equal manner" (ASF3602), "to make things fair for everyone" (ASF36-27) and one more adult said, "make classes more relaxed, more social, not have teachers yell" (ASF36-01). Another adult mentioned children would, "relax some discipline and encourage more student participation in decision-making" (ASM36-10). One adult specified that children would like to decide, "how teachers talk to them, how they are punished" (ASM18-29). Three adults commented on the rules, "rules – some are stupid" (ASF46-24), "less rules" (ASF36-09) and "they would abolish rules" (ASF46-05).

If children were principal for the day some would allow children to have a voice. These children specified, "I would be easy going and allow the students to have a fair say to help me improve the school" (CSM14-28) and "I would let students have a say on what they want, that way, everyone would benefit" (CSM13-29). Leroy wanted to have a say in his learning:

*If they [teachers] said that you had to write something in your books that you already know and you definitely wouldn't forget it. Then you say, 'No I don't want to write it in'. (Leroy, interview, 10/7/07)*

Cildru wanted to have a voice when getting disciplined so that her side of the story would be listened to and respected. She said;

*In class I'd like to make the decision of whether or I'd like to have a bit of a say in the decision like whether or not I get punished. (Cildru, 6/7/07)*

#### 6.3.3.3. Other decisions

Other decisions children and adults included were choosing their uniform, changing the school environment, better canteen or not change anything.

Several children and adults indicated that some children would like to decide and influence their uniform. An adult mentioned that if children were principal for the day they would have “no uniform” (ASF36-16) and “they would make every day a mufti-day” (ASM46-32).

Some children wanted to “change our uniforms” (CSF13-17), “get rid of blazers” (CSF12-01) and another suggested, “add a fun thing for the kids for example remove uniforms” (CSM14-27). A child wanted to have a say on “our uniforms, they are so long and I hate that” (CSF13-17). If some children were principal for the day they would “improve uniform and assemblies” (CSM13-25) and a different child would “ditch the idea of only wearing navy blue hair ties, no black head band (what kind of rule is that?)” (CSF14-23). One more child said that he would not be, “as strict on uniform” (CSM15-40).

In relation to the school environment some adults stated that children would want to have a say about, “the ‘decoration’ of the school” (ASM26-03), “better toilet facilities” (ASF36-07) and “more green plants, more play equipment” (ASM26-03). Another adult mentioned children would like to decide, “where they can play” (ASF46-06).

Children’s comments included; “the school is very dilapidated at the moment and isn’t as clean as anyone would have hoped, the school definitely needs more government funding” (CSM13-29), “more shade, I get sunburnt, warmer jumpers in winter” (CSF15-12), “more gardens” (CSF12-41) and “the stairs, it makes it very inaccessible for people in wheelchairs or on crutches” (CSM16-04).

Some children said that if they were principal for the day they would, “significantly lower canteen prices” (CSM15-40), “by getting better food at the canteen” (CSFM10-38) or “more healthier food in the canteen” (CSM12-31). One child wanted to have a say on the fundraising

for her school, “where fundraising is directed, the SRC only fundraise for the gym” (CSF15-12).

A few children and one adult indicated that they would not change their schools. One adult decreed, “no need, school is perfect” (ASF46-20). These children liked their schools and if they were principal for the day they would change “nothing” (CSM14-27; CSM14-07). Other comments included; “I like my school” (CSM12-32) and “nothing much, everything is ok” (CSM13-25). Another child said she did not want to change her school except for one minor adjustment; “I love my school, I wouldn’t change anything dramatically, except the award “colours” system which doesn’t accurately award the students” (CSF17-10).

In summary, the data depicted in this section, ‘having a say’ that the majority of children and adults wanted to choose how and what they learnt. Specifically, many adults and children in this study thought a number of children wanted to; choose their subjects, make their learning more interesting, interactive and less structured, with less tests, more play and possibly have rest time, reduce the amount of homework and make the homework activities more stimulating. Some children and adults remarked that children would like to choose their teacher. Agent Sprat proposed that if a child did not get along with their teacher that he/she could go to a different class. Several children and adults also thought that some children would like to choose more respectful and fairer relationships with their teachers where children’s opinions were considered valuable. A few children and adults thought some children wanted to make decisions in their schools like change their uniforms, improve their school environment by adding shade and disability access, add more plants and trees, have better food at the canteen or make no change at all to their school.

#### 6.3.3.4. Discussion of data related to ‘Having a say’

In this section ‘Having a say’ the data depicted that most children and adults in this study thought children wanted to make decisions in their learning and/or choose their teacher. Linked to the data from the previous section these are areas where children are not included in decision-making. It is interesting to discover the decisions some children and adults suggested were more influential and ‘important’, such as deciding what and how they learn, improving

the school environment, than the decisions children actually got to make in their learning and in the school.

In a similar line of thinking, several adults and children suggested that some children would like to decide on fairer discipline where for some children and adults ‘fair’ meant that children had a voice and could say no to a teacher or have their side of a story heard (see Devine, 2003; Osman, 2005). This happening would mean a significant shift in how power was distributed in schools and the way the adult-child relations were enacted by children and adults (see Devine, 2002; Fielding, 2006; Pedder & McIntyre, 2006; T.L.R.P., 2003). The next section explores some new possibilities for schools beginning with adults and children sharing power.

## **6.4. New possibilities**

I categorised this data as ‘new possibilities’ because it related to future directions of schooling. The data in this section is organised around two broad categories, sharing power in schools and the ideal school. Sharing power in schools presents data considering how children and adults could share power in schools, predominantly through the SRC. The ideal school data shows the few children and adults who responded wanted to improve the structures, teacher relationships and/or resources in their high schools.

### **6.4.1. Sharing power**

In this section on children sharing power with adults the focus is on the future to how this equality could eventuate. The data came from responses to one question on the survey:

- How could teachers and children share power and decision-making at school?

The data is divided into two prominent ways that children and adults could share power, through the SRC principally or negotiated learning. Conversely, an adult not sharing power with children was another theme.

The first theme from the data was that more children than adults suggested that children and adults could share power within the school through the SRC (CSM15-13; CSM12-32; CSM13-25; CSF12-01; CSF13-09; CSM14-27; CSM16-24; CSF17-10; ASF36-02). One adult suggested the SRC and labelled it “democratic SRC” (ASF36-11). These responses from children exemplified this point; “through the student council, which involves cooperation of students and teachers” (CSM1614) and “SRC reps do things towards well being of the school” (CSM15-40).

A second theme of sharing power within the school was that children mentioned student clubs whereas adults called them forums or open discussions. Adults noted discussions where children and adults could talk forums or meetings. Some adults stated, “forums that include both teachers and students to discuss any situations and their solutions, unless it’s about safety, compromise is the key” (ASF26-30), “hold regular meetings where children are encouraged to make suggestions” (ASF36-34) and “through class, grade and school committees based on merit or chance not on popularity voting” (ASF36-35).

Different adults stated children wanted to share power with adults by having “student leadership” (ASM26-03), “leadership teams of students with teachers” (ASF36-02), that involve “more communication less dictating” (ASF36-01), “frequent discussions” (ASF46-24) and “involve the whole community” (ASF36-31). Another adult advocated, “voting system for important student issues” (ASF26-22), “having intra-active participation on how a school could be run discussion groups”. One more adult proposed children sharing powers with adults in many ways that she believed could make some adults uncomfortable:

In a myriad of different ways that most school executives and teachers would be uncomfortable about – democratic SRC and captain elections, class consultations, and group agreements, brainstorming sessions. (ASF36-11)

One child wanted to share power with the principal, “there could be a committee of students that gathers with the principal every now and then and organises activities” (CSF12-30). A child identified clubs, “many of the student clubs that are in place are good examples of equal

power” (CSM13-29) and another child verified that consultations or groups that meet with teachers would help equalise the power:

Ongoing consultation between teachers and students to create a joint understanding of issues such as; litter, discipline, classroom environment. To be undertaken with friendship and class groups, individuals and clubs with teachers, administration and the school board with the goal of a more dynamic and equal balance of power. (CSF16-02)

The third theme of sharing power was within classes. The majority of adults and a lot of children indicated that adults and children could share power within their classrooms by including children more in class decisions and discussions. Many adults thought children would want more consultations to share power in regards to their learning, as these examples demonstrated; “negotiated lessons, co-operative learning” (ASF46-17), “negotiated lessons and assignments” (ASF36-16) and “reliable and consistent consultations” (ASF36-33). Some other adults explained; “within the classroom children can be part of developing their own learning plans, choosing how to demonstrate what they have learnt” (ASF36-07), “more student based learning” (ASF26-22), “teachers could decide broader areas and let students work or choose within these boundaries” (ASM36-10) and “providing opportunities for children to share knowledge on how they learn best not how teachers think they learn best” (ASF36-12). An adult said, “have ‘meetings’ where all kids are involved at class level, let all kids be involved in decision making, give them more responsibility” (ASF36-25). Another adult proposed sharing power through discussions:

Rules developed through real discussion and collaboration and then teachers trusting the decisions and allowing them to be trialled. Sometimes teachers think this process is too time consuming. (ASF46-06)

A few children wanted both parties to understand how each other thought, “if the teachers got taught how we think and we got taught how they think” (CSF13-03) and “children could help a teacher by telling them activities to help understand certain things” (CSF14-23).

Some other children suggested improved listening between children and teachers, “by every teacher and every student listening to what each other’s ideas are and expanding on them” (CSF14-11) and “teachers could listen more to what the children think and how they feel about certain issues” (CSF14-08). Some more children identified sharing power between children and adults through discussions where adults asked children what they thought; “by letting us know more things and asking what we think about it” (CSF13-17), “they could have meetings so everyone can get a say” (CSF12-16), “have class discussions and talk about the possibilities of the decision and make sure everybody has a say” (CSF11-15) and “by working together, letting everyone have a say and then together picking the best choice” (CSM14-28).

The final theme from the data was that some adults questioned or qualified sharing power with children. An adult added his perspective by responding, “the question is the extent to which power should be shared, some would dispute that” (ASM46-13). Similarly, the following adult questioned adults and children sharing power, “they can’t [have power] because adults are there to guide children. They can consult but the power must be with adults” (ASF46-05). One more adult agreed that adults needed to restrict the decisions children were allowed to make:

An open dialogue should help the problem but we have to be careful the teachers are not constantly referring decisions to the students – there has to be some teacher leadership on curriculum and behaviour issues. (ASM46-14)

These adults indicated that adults could share power with children by containing it within adult defined boundaries. A different adult said that children should not be burdened by big decisions, “teachers are in loco parentis and children should not be expected to carry the burden of big decisions” (ASF46-08). Two different adults remarked that for shared power to occur, “you’d have to lose the hierarchical structure first” (ASM36-19) which means children and adults should, “talk to each other on a more level basis” (ASF36-21).



One final comment by a child who said that children and adults sharing power would not happen, “I don’t think they [adults] ever could [share power], the government would never allow it” (CSM12-34).

In summary, most children and adults suggested that children and adults could share power through the SRC primarily, followed by in class inclusion, student club or forums and meetings. Most children and adults thought power could be shared in classes by more open communication that involved teachers listening to children and including children in discussions and decisions to negotiate their learning. One adult questioned the extent that adults wanted to share power with children and another adult thought that for shared power to happen the existing hierarchy in schools would need to be removed. Some other adults limited or questioned the amount of power children that should be granted observing that teachers as adults are leaders and that children needed to be guided and protected from the burdens of making decisions.

#### 6.4.1.1. Discussion of data related to ‘Sharing power’

The data in the section on sharing power showed a myriad of possibilities that would be aligned with the literature from the new sociology of childhood and the student voice movement (see Beare, 2002; Blishen, 1969; Burke & Grosvenor, 2003; Feinberg, 2007; Fielding, 2007b; Green, 2005; Hanna, 1985; Holdsworth, 2005; Leren, 2006; Mintz, 2003; NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005; Rudduck, 2006; T.L.R.P., 2003; Verity, 2008; Warner, 2006). Both children and adults nominated more democratic approaches to school and class organisation that would ultimately improve relationships between teachers and students (see Hannan, 1985; Holdsworth, 2005; Mintz, 2003). Key aspects for adults sharing power with children included; more cooperation, frequent discussions, improved communication where children and adults listened to each other to better understand each other, giving children more responsibility, including children more by asking their opinions and finally, teachers and students working together to negotiate learning. These democratic principles would involve children and adults making decisions together. In this light children would have some autonomy to use their agency and power in collaboration with their teacher. The next section shares data related to the ideal school.

### 6.4.2. Ideal school

Data in this section presents what adults and children wanted for future schools. The data is sourced from responses to the survey question;

- Design your ideal school or learning centre.

In creating their ideal school some adults and children either drew pictures or described their ideas in text. The ideal school category is divided into themes from the data; improving or adding to the school infrastructure, more resources and changes to the learning including better relationships with teachers.

The first theme that became apparent from the analysis of the data was that some children and adults wanted their ideal school to have improved or different infrastructure. An adult described children’s ideal school as “comfortable and decorative - homely” (ASF46-28). Some adults wanted children’s ideal school to have different spaces for learning. A few adults suggested, “indoor and outdoor learning spaces” (ASF46-06) and “outdoor and indoor learning areas, more computer labs, state of the art science labs etc.” (ASF36-09). A different adult (ASM46-32) drew children’s ideal school as having an abundance of natural environment that all the classrooms overlooked (see Figure 5). I included this figure as it was different to the way schools presently look.

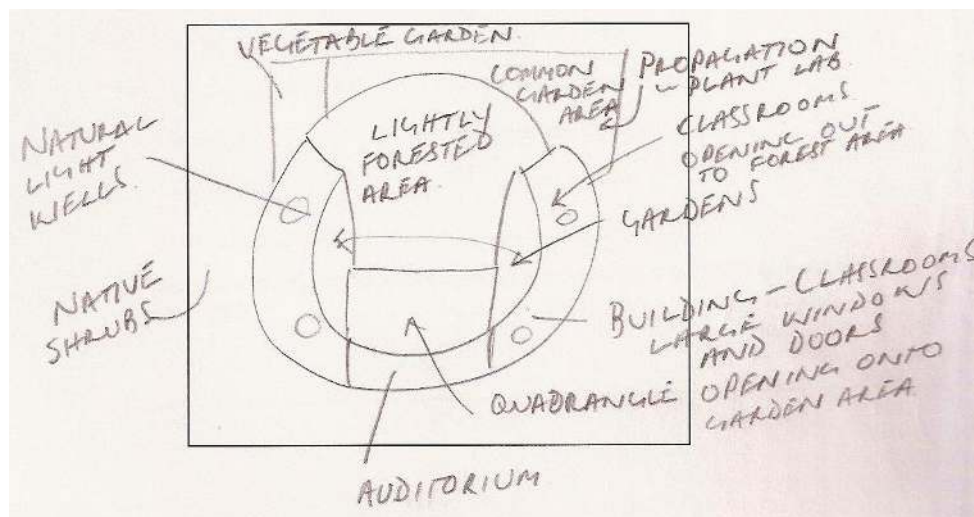


Figure 5: An adult’s version of children’s ideal school (ASM46-32)

One child wrote that the existing infrastructure and amenities should be improved, “we should have cleaner bathrooms which don’t stink so much. In the canteen we should have new food each month” (CSF12-16). A different child wanted her ideal school to have satellite TV, fun classrooms and an outdoor area (CSF12-30). One child drew a picture that had an ice-cream shop, pool, tree and BBQ area (CSM12-21). Two other children drew a pool in their picture of a school (CSM10-38; CSF12-16). Another child drew a tall building that had lifts where each floor was designated to a specific grade (CSF11-39). Another child wrote she wanted, “a school with spaces just for kids to hang out and have fun but teachers can still go and supervise” (CSF14-11). A different child wanted her ideal school to have a skate park, be next to the beach and have access to a football field with a multi-story learning complex (CSM15-13).

A further theme from the data was that some people wanted better resources in their ideal schools. An adult listed the resources she thought children would want in their ideal school, “comfortable furniture, flexible seating arrangements, easy access to technology, eg; computers, TV, DVD, cameras etc., space and light, flexible times” (ASF36-07). A different adult wanted “more multi-media resources” (ASF36-09). One child simply wanted, “desks with comfy chairs” (CSF15-12) and another wanted a bean bag (CSF08-18).

There were several references to improvements in learning in ideal school design. One adult wrote, “learning centres with choice of activities” (ASF46-06). A different adult drew a mind-map that described children’s ideal school as:

Safe, smaller classes, more than one staff member assisting with individual needs, colourful (happy) classrooms, noisy (healthy) classrooms, choice, (positive reinforcement), more computers and resources for schools (funding) praise, consistent staff, encouragement, making learning fun, student/staff welfare, teachers being sensitive to student’s needs. (ASF36-31)

A few adults wanted the learning environment of children's ideal schools to include more respectful relationships between children and adults - "one of respect both children for teachers and teachers for children" (ASF36-01) and another suggested, "teachers as facilitators as well as explicit teachers" (ASF46-06).

A child wrote she wanted her teacher to be, "nice and caring – not an old dinosaur. The teacher gets involved with your school work and teaches you in a fun way while you learn" (CSF13-06). Another child drew a picture of a classroom that included: people who know the answers to questions; headphones for those who like to listen and learn from CD's; books; lots of computers and science labs; where children got to choose curriculum, however sport was compulsory. She added at the bottom, "this way you get the education you deserve" (CSF13-03). A different child drew a classroom that had learning areas for reading, listening, writing, kinaesthetic, visual and hands on work where the teacher walked around and was "nice" (CSF13-06). Another child drew a classroom essentially full only of computers (CSF14-04). One child elaborately described her ideal learning centre:

Outcome based – All skills achieved are documented. If a skill set is entirely mastered, an appropriate award is given. Each student works in a private bay as described already which remains theirs throughout school. And teachers are available at all times in slightly larger bays to go over work, explain concepts etc... No timetable is set and there are no fixed due dates. No uniform, but a dress policy. Options for attending specific tutorials, clubs, shows, labs, or sports classes. Individuals set their own pace and are not given the option of disruption. There are no set classes as all children are given control over their educational program on the understanding that all qualifications require them to achieve certain outcomes. (CSF16-02)

Finally, one child drew a mind-map of her ideal school that incorporated a lot of the themes:

Classrooms - computer labs, up to date classrooms, latest technology; gym - fully functioning; subjects – art, design and technology, maths, science, english, commerce, dancing, drama, modelling, fashion design; homework – 20 mins worth from 1 subject; tests – end of year tests only; gym - fully functioning; fun areas – art studios, science centre, garden patch, petting zoo, pool; theatre room – pop corn, candyfloss machine, cinema sized screen, ice-cream/ice lollies; canteen – vegetarian friendly, healthy and not expensive; toilets – fully automated toilets, scented toilets and change rooms. (CSF14-23)

In summary, the data pertaining to ideal school showed that some adults and children would like to have improved infrastructure of their existing schools, such as clean toilets. Some children and adults wanted to add to the infrastructure. Children more commonly wanted to add spaces for fun and play like a skate park, pool, theatre room or barbecue area whilst several adults focussed more on outdoor and indoor learning centres with more gardens and nature. In regards to the learning in their ideal schools many children and adults wanted nice, respectful teachers who facilitated. Some other children and adults advocated for more choices, for children to choose to attend classes and to choose the curriculum. Some children and adults wanted more resources in their ideal school, better science labs, comfortable furniture, more computers and more multi-media resources.

#### 6.4.1.2. Discussion of data related to ‘Ideal school’

A lot of the suggestions for ideal schools bear close resemblance to schools today with slight adjustments – either in buildings or learning or resources. The majority of responses were keeping these basic structures of schools in one way or another. What was missing from the data was anything radically different from the present system. Even the children’s suggestions of a pool, theatre, skate park all were drawn or written as additional to a traditional school environment with buildings and playgrounds. The one adult drawing (see Figure 5) I included is the only example of a ‘physically’ different concept of school with round buildings. The implication is that children and adults in this study struggled to develop an ‘ideal school’ that varied much from the familiar notion of what a school looks like. Maybe a ‘learning centre’ or

at least another word for 'school' might break that common reproduction of schools as they presently are. The next section provides some key findings from the data.

## **6.5. Summary**

The previous chapter demonstrated how traditional practices in schools impacted children's behaviour and learning in schools. Data in this chapter has been organised to provide perspectives on the research question, how do relationships in schools between children and adults affect the agency of the children within this study? Data was presented in the following themes: 'Child, teacher and relationships'; 'Making decisions'; and 'New possibilities'. This chapter summary provides a broad outline of some main themes from the data (Table 7 in Appendix 4 presents a summary of the co-researchers' perspectives).

The data in the first section 'Child, teacher and relationships' reflected both positive and negative perceptions of children's relationships with teachers. Two inter-related key findings were presented: children's relationships with their teachers were significant in shaping a child's enjoyment of subjects, desire to learn and willingness to participate in class; and a lot of children got along with all or most teachers depending on their good or bad character. Good teachers used support and encouragement to enhance children's learning whilst authoritarian teachers used fear and reprisals to coax or coerce children into conforming to their prescribed learning agenda. An inference from this is that 'good' teachers act in accordance with the sentiments of the new sociology of childhood that enables children's agency and 'bad' teachers operate from the dominant framework influenced position that constrains or doesn't recognise the capacity for children's agency. Either way children's agency was limited or expanded depending on the personality of the teacher who largely defined the learning atmosphere and how, if at all they shared power with children. Children had little to no recourse if they do not get along with a teacher nor if they thought the punishment was unfair.

In the section 'Making decisions' the data makes apparent that adults in school determine the extent and impact of children's inclusion in decision-making processes within their school. A

key finding was the majority of adults and children in this study nominated that children were included in decision making in their schools through the SRC, however its effectiveness in creating change was contentious. Differing opinions in the data centred around the authenticity of the SRC to create change as adults usually moderated the outcome or action of such forums. A few co-researchers were not included in decision-making at all and others had opportunities to make personal decisions in their schools and classes like controlling their own behaviour, and choosing to participate in extra-curricular activities, their electives and their productivity in class. These decisions highlighted the lack of opportunities children had to make influential decisions and revealed the minor status of children to make a difference. As such children were not given true autonomy or agency to make decisions and take the actions they consider important within schools and classes. A few adults gave reasons as to why children should not be included in decision-making ranging from children's inexperience, age, lack of understanding and their need for adults to guide them. These were all synonymous with conservative and traditional views of schooling that have emerged within the philosophies of the dominant framework.

A key finding from the subsection 'Having a say' data showed that most children in this study would like to have a say about their learning including the choice of teachers with some wanting teachers more in touch with children's lives. There was a disjuncture between the decisions some children got to make in their schools and classes and the decisions some children would like to make. The decisions some children got to make were predominantly personal, meaning the outcome of the decision affected them, such as choosing electives, what subject to take, what question to answer on the test. Some of the decisions many children would like to make were influential, meaning their impact affected other people in the school like teachers, and peers. The issues were matters of consequence for the children.

Data concerning 'New possibilities' revealed that some children and adults would change the hierarchy of traditional schools to make them more democratic where children could have an equal say to adults within the school and within the class. In these models children would have space to achieve goals of their choosing. Contrasting this and reflecting the dominant framework, some adults attested that adults should maintain power to guide children and not

burden them with the responsibility of making decisions. Most ideal school designs consisted of slight adjustments to the present system with improved learning, improved or additional infrastructure and/or new resources. One key finding that resonated through some of the creations were children wanted to make choices in their learning and change the relationship between children and adults (see Table 7 in Appendix 4 for a summary of the co-researchers' data in relation to children's relationships with adults in schools).

In examining the entire data presented in this chapter there are two key elements missing and one interesting discovery. The first key element missing is evidence of children making 'decisions' of consequence in their schools or classes. The second aspect missing from the data is the co-researchers', children and adults creative imagination of an alternative to the present structures within most schools. Clearly, children want to matter in schools and have power to make decisions and yet most of these new decisions would only marginally improve the present system thereby, inadvertently reinforcing the present structures that further accentuates the power dynamics and the absence of alternatives to schools.

The totality of data presented in Chapters 5 and 6 presents a picture of compliance and acceptance of schools. The co-researchers could clearly see through the illusory veil of the structures in schools and could question such practices and offer articulate insights into their expertise at going to school today. However, I have observed that, these middle-class, high achieving co-researchers knew they lacked power to negotiate the structural practices of the system and choose to use their agency complying, in order to 'play the game' of school for their own personal gain (see Coomber & Hill, 2000 and section 5.4.5.1.). In the present school structure the co-researchers were assured of future success and job security and as such they lacked motivation to act and change the system. In the absence of any viable alternative to schools that would offer such assurances of success, the present system fulfils their needs. I have discovered that until children and adults have more experience of engaging with adults on equal terms without prejudice and expectation, as the Internet has provided, then the illusory idea that adults know more and as such maintain the right of power to control children's experiences and learning in schools is perpetuated.



Succinctly, some of the data illustrated that children's relationships with adults influenced children's agency by impacting children's motivation to learn and by limiting and restricting opportunities for children's inclusion in decision-making processes within schools and classes. These relationships ultimately constrain children's power and agency as children want to make decisions regarding how they are taught and by whom. In the ideal schools some adults and children want more respectful relationships with shared power, open communication and better understanding between teachers and children and more negotiated learning. Children's limited agency in the present system however, operates within these adult defined relationships that are strengthened by a lack of recourse for children to change this way of operating in school that is necessary for their future success.

The final chapter draws connections between hegemony, structural practices and relationships between children and adults that constrain or enable children's agency within their schools.

# Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

## 7.1. Introduction

This final chapter reviews the research questions, adds a hegemonic perspective to the data, suggests recommendations and proposes concluding remarks. This written report thus far has presented understandings of children's agency and position in schools and society as informed by critical social theory and the sociology of childhood framework. Specifically, Gramsci's notion of hegemony, the dominant framework and the new sociology of childhood, provided a variety of perspectives on the perpetuation of inequality in children's relationships with adults in schools and in society.

This study occurred at a significant time in late modernity when the inception of the Internet and other technology is changing some traditional constructions and boundaries of what it means to be a child and an adult in society. Within schools, old constructions like the commonly perceived binary assumptions of the dominant framework that had positioned children as incomplete or becoming adults, are now being challenged. The new sociology of childhood provides new understandings of childhood by advocating that children are social actors who are influenced by and who use their agency to influence organisational practices that form structures within schools.

The main task of this study was to understand children's capacity for agency to initiate action of their choosing and create change (Prout & James, 1997; Lee, 2001) within the modes of organisational practices or structure that maintain order and regulate social interactions within the institutional structure of schools (Giddens, 1984, 1993). Qvortrup (1994, 1998) contends that these organisational structures within schools reflect a conception of childhood. Therefore this study was investigating children's agency within the organisational practices that contribute to the structure within the institutional structure of schools that reflect a perception of the structure of childhood. The intricacies of this perspective ignited my curiosity and prompted the three research questions to see what the influence of structure was

on children's agency in schools. A review of the data presented that provide perspectives on the research questions is discussed in the next section.

## **7.2. Reviewing the research questions**

The collaborative design of the research reflected key aspects of the new sociology of childhood namely, positioning children as a cultural collective and valuing their capacity to be social agents. The co-researchers' participation in this research demonstrated their capabilities as social actors who took action that influenced the design and data of this study. In doing so, this research created a space for the children as co-researchers to participate in critical discourses about their lives and exercise their agency as a means for understanding children and their relations with adults within schools. Their participation prompted the methodological research question; how can children be effective co-researchers in an adult defined research project?

Conducting the collaborative research with the co-researchers allowed me to model new ways that adults who support the role of children as social actors to engage with children in the co-construction of research knowledge (see Bland & Atweh, 2007; Fielding, 2001; Holdsworth, 2000; Mitra, 2001; Oldfather, 1995; Osberg, Pope, & Galloway, 2006; Quiroz, 2001; Soo-Hoo, 1993). My teaching experience with the Tournament of Minds had provided me with a deep respect for children's agency and so the co-researchers' ability to be agentic was presumed at the outset. Whilst I maintained some power, control and responsibility as the principal researcher I created spaces for the co-researchers to share power and negotiate within the research design how to use their agency. I built rapport and provided regular opportunities for the co-researchers to share their opinions and have real responsibility to design and orchestrate important activities within the study. The co-researchers were valuable to the research process and their input mattered. This simple space with genuine power allowed us all to reconstruct relationships as teacher-teacher, where all parties respected the value of the life experiences and knowledge each individual brought, irrespective of age. Consequently, the data provided evidence that they felt they had been authentically included, which appears different to their experiences in school (see Devine, 2003; Fine, Torre, Burns,

& Payne, 2007; Marquez-Zenkov et al., 2007; Quiroz, 2001; Smyth, 2007). See Chapter 4 for extracts from the co-researchers discussing how they felt differently in their roles with this study in comparison to their roles within the school system.

Data presented in Chapter 5 provided perspectives on the following research question; how do the structural practices in schools impact the agency of the children in this study? The structural practices or culture of a school help to construct the structure of schools, which include; the rituals, routines and social practices that politically influence how space, time and social processes are organised within the everyday workings of schools (see Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Joseph, 2008; McLaren, 2003; Willmont, 1999; Wink, 2000). Findings from this study demonstrated that children's actions were limited to operating within adult supervised and dominated spaces (see Christensen & James, 2001; Devine, 2003). In these spaces children were mostly expected to respectfully conform to adult defined rules and requests (see Christensen & James, 2001; Cullingford, 2007; Devine, 2003; Farrell et al., 2004; Osler, 2000; Potter & Briggs, 2003). Children were also expected to succeed in tests and conform to learning activities that were considered by some respondents to be impersonal and irrelevant to children's lives (see Austin, Dwyer, & Freebody, 2003; Cook-Sather, 2006a; Fielding, 2001; Fullan, 1991, 2001; Holdsworth, 2005; Oldfather, 1995). Some children and adults wanted children to be able to change their learning and have more fun, for content to be more relevant and hands-on and wanted more respectful relationships with teachers based on fairness, consultation and an appreciation of children's lives (see Cotton & Griffiths, 2007; Devine, 2003; Fine et al., 2007; Marquez-Zenkov et al., 2007; Quiroz, 2001; Smyth, 2007). Some children and adults recognised there were few spaces for children to change these experiences or question a teacher's authority or practice (see Osman, 2005; Wyness, 1999). The co-researchers particularly articulated that school was important and that success at school correlated to success in life (see Christensen & James, 2001; Devine, 2003). As such, the co-researchers were critical of children who disrupted their classes and consequently their learning.

Data cited in Chapter 6 provided perspectives on the following research question; how do relationships in schools between children and adults affect the agency of the children within

this study? The data signified that the extent to which children's agency was taken up by them in class depended significantly on the personality of the teacher (see Cullingford, 2007; Potter & Briggs, 2003). In relation to children making decisions within the school data showed that children had limited opportunities to make decisions and take action of consequence within the constructed decision-making bodies such as the SRC (see Arnot et al., 2004; Bland & Atweh, 2007; Cox & Robinson-Pant, 2003; Osler, 2000; Rudduck & Flutter, 2004). Some adults explained children's age, lack of understanding and experience, and their need for adults to guide them as reasons children should be excluded from making important decisions in schools (see Arnot et al., 2004; Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2007a). Even though adults felt this way data indicated that children wanted to be consulted on their learning and choice of teacher (Leren, 2006; Osler, 2000; Rudduck, 2006). Adults and children were asked to create an ideal school and their depictions included schools that were more democratic where children could have an equal and ultimately change the relationship between children and adults (Blishen, 1969; Burke & Grosvenor, 2003; Green, 2005; NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005).

The data presented explores the influences of structural practices and relationships in schools between the broad social categories of adults and children. However, the co-researchers represented middle-class, high achieving students and thus, their data lends support to the notion that within the social category of childhood certain distinctions appear based on class. The co-researchers demonstrated their ability to reflexively monitor their agency (see Devine, 2003) in schools and make structural constraints work to their advantage (see Comber & Hill, 2000; Hatcher, 2000). The co-researchers' desire for the streaming of classes and better teacher management of disruptive students is consistent with the largely middle-class ideas that value the future rewards of schooling (see also Devine, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Williams et al, 1980; 1993) as opposed to working-class children who do not (see Ainley et al, 1995; Connelly, 2004; Considine & Zappalà, 2002; Williams, 1989; Willis, 1977).

The data was arranged to ascertain how the organisational practices or structure of a school either limit or constrain children's capacity to exercise agency. There are many perspectives

to the structure versus agency debate including Marx (1975 [1843-1844]) and Durkheim (1933) who proposed that structures determine people's agency, Weber's (1978 [1910-1914]) contraposition advocating that people's agency constructed structures and Giddens' (1984) who incorporates both perspectives by recognising that people's agency within structure reproduces and can alter the structure itself. The next section extends the findings from this section and adds a hegemonic perspective to the structure versus agency debate and the exploration of the study outcomes.

### **7.3. Exploring hegemony through structure and agency**

This section explores how hegemony still operates in schools through structures or organisational practices that ultimately limits opportunities for children to use their agency. This contention is linked to and supported by the tenets of the dominant framework. The new sociology of childhood is presented as an alternative philosophical framework that could reframe hegemony by changing current school structures to accommodate and encourage children's agency. This approach would assist adults in schools to construct new perceptions of childhood.

As an invisible mechanism of control and regulation the presence of hegemony in schools is only evident through the organisational practices and subsequent relationships between children and adults. The strength of hegemony is its subtle influence to manipulate people's false consciousness and normalise experiences to the extent that people actively consent to their own subjugation (Gramsci, 1971). Reflecting on the data I will discuss some presumed *effects* of hegemony that *implies* its existence by presenting some children's experiences in schools as common sense (Gramsci, 1971) or 'normal'. This idea of 'common sense' was considered expressive of children's false consciousness (Fay, 1987). The findings of my study has many similarities to the past work of Gramsci and in many ways illustrates that hegemony still exists and continues to operate in schools maintaining adults' power and impeding opportunities for children to exercise agency. The first section connects the strength of hegemonic influence with the principle understandings of the dominant framework.

### **7.3.1. Investigating structure as hegemony through the dominant framework**

Prout and James (1997) and Wyness' (2006b) description of the 'dominant framework' represents traditional and conservative views of childhood and organisational practices within schools (see my description of this construction of the dominant framework in Chapter 2). Discussions in this section interpret the study data through a hegemonic lens to argue that the rigorous system of control and regulation in schools informed by a dominant framework limits opportunities for children to exercise agency and potentially change these structural practices and relationships with adults. To validate this stance the data is organised around Lukes' (1974, 2005) three propositions that describe how systems, such as schools used structure to manipulate the false consciousness of the oppressed and uphold hegemony. The three propositions relate to the following organisational practices in schools: the exclusion of the oppressed in decision-making power; the accepted social arrangements that disadvantage the oppressed; and the disregard of the real interests of the oppressed.

The first proposition stipulated by Lukes (1974, 2005) is that the oppressed as a collective have little decision-making power or 'non decision-making' power over the organisation of the social system and as such any potential issues identified by them are not considered part of regular management reviews. It was clear from the study that children were aware of the trivial nature of the decisions children got to make in class and in schools. While the SRC was specific instance of a decision-making structure set up to support children's input some children and adults described the SRC as tokenistic (see Cox & Robinson-Pant, 2003; Osler, 2000) rather than a place where children's grievances could be shared without repercussion. This supports the notion that children did not have any 'non decision-making' power (see Lukes, 2005). In these schools there was little to no actual space for children to exercise agency in the form of decision-making responsibility thereby nullifying possibilities for change. Children's exclusion in the organisation and management of schools presents a limited view of children and childhood, predicated by children's perceived lack of ontology (see Qvortrup, 1998).

Lukes' (1974, 2005) second proposal stated that within a system where hegemony is operating particular sets of social arrangements are legitimatised, including the right that

some groups will benefit more than others and those who are in these positions of power are in affect making decisions on behalf of everybody. In these instances, the oppressed viewed the legitimacy of those in charge and the freedoms that this legitimacy offered in terms of behaviours (see Devine 2003; Osman, 2005; Wyness, 2006b). In the data this proposition was apparent by the following arrangements that normalised adults as the authority figures and decision-makers in schools by defining: the allocation and use of space; rules and punishment; and children's learning (see Devine, 2003; Christensen & James). Data pointed out some children were expected to oblige learning requests even if they knew more than the teacher (see Thomas, 2002). The data further reflected this sentiment as some co-researchers, children and adults noted that power was represented in the way teachers had more freedom of movement and did not have to wear a uniform. Some children and co-researchers indicated that the rigid and unequal boundaries between adults and children meant they had little or no opportunities for children to question any unfairness (see Cullingford, 2007; Devine, 2003; Potter & Briggs, 2003; Pradham, 2007). This links to the first proposition that since children are excluded from decision-making responsibility adults' power and privileges are secure. Teachers, by virtue of their adult status, have presumed a position of power and authority over children, which in turn endorses the binary assumption that positions children in opposition to adults (see Cannella, 1997; Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998; Prout & James, 1997; Wyness, 2006b).

Lukes' (1974, 2005) third notion assumed the wants and preferences of the oppressed become a by-product of their participation within the system and may not reflect their real interests. Data from the study illustrated that within schools children are expected to 'behave properly' or conform to wearing a uniform and follow rules – meaning that as a group within schools, children are all treated the same (see Qvortrup, 2002). The expectation that children conform to school rules makes regulating dress and behavioural codes easier for adults and where those who may challenge the system are positioned in the minority, marginalised and receive punitive actions. Conformity in this situation is then normalised (see Foucault, 1972). The study also clearly showed that the learning designed by the teachers and the 'school authority' largely ignores children's reality and individuality (see Austin, Dwyer & Freebody, 2003; Cook-Sather, 2006a; Fielding, 2001; Fullan, 1991; Holdsworth, 2005; Oldfather, 1995) and as



one co-researcher observed it ensures that children are treated the same. I would argue that this evidence reveals that the structure and organisational practices of surveillance, punishment and more importantly reward in school helps to maintain the norms and prevents children from developing their real interests or conceptualising alternative arrangements (see Femia, 1981; Pitsula, 2001; Scott, 1990). Additionally, teachers' authority and organisational practices in traditional schools are so common they appear legitimised by the State (see Prout & James, 1997), which subsequently normalises all of the propositions.

Legitimising the argument that the hegemony in schools supports adults' authority over children continues when you consider the centrality of schools to children's future (see Christensen & James, 2001; Devine, 2003). Some of the co-researchers and some children in this study articulated that failure at school meant failure in life. The idea that school was the primary way for children to learn to be successful in life, normalises the organisational practices and relationships that designates adults' authority to regulate this path to success. This future reward is the incentive Tilly (1991) describes to explain why subordinates comply to hegemony. Therefore, it was not fear of punishment that maintained hegemony in schools, for the children in this study, rather it was fear of failure. This begins to explain why the data showed that some co-researchers and other children and adults were critical of children who challenged the system as they disrupted the learning and therefore the road to success for these co-researchers and other children. The middle-class co-researchers valued school and were successful at school and although they questioned certain practices and could suggest aspects to change they were not committed to become 'organic intellectuals' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 10). I point out that whilst the co-researchers did not overtly challenge school structures the co-researchers were aware of the hegemony operating and manipulated it by working within its confines to satisfy their own needs and future aspirations (see Tilly, 1991).

Data presented in relation to hegemony verify that organisational practices in schools, or structure directly and indirectly impact children's capacity for agency, thereby supporting the structural determinist stance of Marx and Durkheim. Similar to findings from Giroux (1999, 2004) and McLaren (2003) this section has argued that children's marginalisation in schools exists however, unlike these critical theorists who focussed their research on disempowered

children who resisted conformity, the co-researchers in this study were successful children who accommodated hegemonic practices and manipulated them to suit their future purposes. In this way this study extends the notion of hegemony from focussing on oppressed children who operate in an adult world where adult/child relationships are bounded by the philosophical thinking of a dominant framework that does not recognise children as social actors, to new ways of understanding children operating and relationships with adults in schools offered by the new sociology of childhood framework. This alternative framework provides new ways of understanding how structure and agency can operate in schools and rather than making children invisible in the social structure it reinserts children in the discourse of schooling as significant contributors to the maintenance of social norms.

### **7.3.2. Investigating agency as counter-hegemonic and the new sociology of childhood**

Discussions in this section interpret data utilising the tenets of the new sociology of childhood framework to explore the structure, agency debate as dimensions that can disrupt hegemony through counter-hegemonic discourses. The new sociology of childhood promotes alternative ways for schools to move forward by legitimating and creating spaces for children's power and agency to be recognised as a valuable part of school today.

The organisational practices discussed in the previous section operate to strengthen hegemony and minimise acts of resistance or counter-hegemonic discourses. However, hegemony is powered by consent and as such can be negotiated and contested. The co-researchers, together with many adults and children questioned the way things were in schools and imagined viable alternatives to their present situation in schools (see Blishen, 1969; Burke & Grosvenor, 2003; Green, 2005; NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005). Data showed that a few adults and children questioned adults' 'silly' rules and adult authority. Some children and adults advocated that children could be smarter than adults. The production of the DVD by the co-researchers was an act of agency designed to showcase the results of the survey and disrupt the dominant hegemony in schools (see Fay, 1987).

Lukes (2005) said the power of hegemony was to mislead through false consciousness. The presumption I make is that the co-researchers' data shows that these children could clearly

articulate the way adults maintained control in their schools indicating that they were not misled by their false consciousness. The fact that these successful co-researchers were questioning current school practices and relationships implies that through technology they now have experiences of learning that makes experiences in schools not 'normal'. This view is substantiated by data from the co-researchers who wanted adults to recognise their technological reality and make learning more relevant to their modern lives (Marquez-Zenkov et al., 2007; McLaren, 2003).

The salient point is that schools have not changed to meet demands and changing patterns of modern society as the Internet and technological advancements have outmoded traditional learning and autocratic relationships between adults and children (see Buckingham, 2006; Elkind, 1981; K. McDonnell, 2005; Montgomery, 2007; Postman, 1994; Wyness, 2006b). Lee (2001) and Prout (2005) describe that boundaries are blurring between adults and children (see also A.C.M.A., 2007; Atweh, Christensen, & Dornan, 1998; Blanchard & Moore, 2010; C.E.R.I., 2008; Herther, 2009; Jukes, McCain, & Crockett, 2010; Montgomery, 2007; Pew Research Centre, 2009; Prensky, 2001; Rideout, Foehr & Roberts, 2010; Small & Vorgan, 2008; Tucci, Mitchell, & Goddard, 2006; Valkenburg, Schouten & Peter, 2005; Weber & Dixon, 2007; Willis' et al, 2006). In the data several children and adults recognised that children in schools did not want to be ruled by fear and dictators, they wanted responsibility, choice, respect, to negotiate and cooperate with teachers (see Devine, 2003; Fine et al., 2007; Marquez-Zenkov et al., 2007; Quiroz, 2001; Smyth, 2007; Wyness, 2006b). This data is indicating that children developing counter-hegemonic discourses challenges organisational practices and disrupts the hegemony by illuminating the false consciousness, which can then open up new possibilities and spaces for children to contribute to education reform.

It is this interactive relationship between structure and agency adopted as a tenet of the new sociology of childhood (Giddens, 1984) that recognises children's agency as social actors can contribute to changing the structure of traditional schools and the structure of childhood within them (Fielding, 2006; Holdsworth, 2005; Leren, 2006; Levin, 2000; Osberg, Pope, & Galloway, 2006; Rudduck, 2007; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000; Sinclair, 2004; Smyth, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). For schools, supporters of the student voice movement and the new sociology

of childhood are showing how schools can change and build new relationships based on reciprocity for the mutual benefit of both children and teacher (T.L.R.P., 2003). Harrison (2002) articulates this change in the following way:

Perhaps these young people would have a different relationship if they were stakeholders in their own learning environment, involved in the creation, management, and ultimately the success or failure of their own schools. You cannot give a person the responsibility to operate an institution at the same time as you make him a prisoner. You cannot remove all responsibility for a person's environment and expect him to want to be there. (Harrison, 2002, p. 63)

Therefore, to move forward adults in schools need to construct new visions for schooling that involves letting go of traditional organisational practices to allow children to democratically contribute to the school structure with real responsibility to make important decisions and co-construct their learning (see Fielding, 2007b; Hannan, 1985; Holdsworth, 2005; Mintz, 2003; Verity, 2008; Warner, 2006). The conduct of this research modelled how adults could share power with children. The co-researchers described their participation in this collaborative research as fun because it was a real project where they had a valued role, were respected, had responsibility, power and control to make real decisions (see Fielding, 2001, 2006; Mason & Urquhart, 2001; Mitra, 2006; Oldfather, 1995; Soo-Hoo, 1993). New relationships with adults need to be based on negotiation, shared power, reciprocity and mutual respect that allow spaces for children to be agentic (see Leren, 2006; Osler, 2000; Rudduck, 2006). It is by building substantial changes in what it means to be a teacher and a student in schools that new ways of school structure can evolve without hegemony (see Fielding, 2006). The next section comments on differences between traditional schools, founded on structures of control and democratic schools, built on supporting children's agency.

### **7.3.3. Structure versus agency**

I concur from the data that hegemony is weakening in traditional schools built on conservative structure thereby creating a small space for new organisational practices in these

democratic schools founded on children's agency. I propose the new sociology of childhood as an alternative framework to open new possibilities for mainstream schools.

This thesis is positing hegemony as a generative or casual mechanism that serves to maintain traditional and conservative operational practices or structure in schools (Willmont, 1999) by inhibiting spaces for children's agency and possibilities for change. In these traditional schools adults maintain the social order and the organisational practices preserve the unequal distribution of power. However, changing the structure of traditional schools may be possible as evidenced by these successful co-researchers and other children and adults from this study questioning the hegemony, thereby reducing its strength. As experiences outside of school are broadening possibilities due to technological advances, particularly the Internet once rigid boundaries between children and adults are blurring (see A.C.M.A., 2007; Atweh, Christensen, & Dornan, 1998; Blanchard & Moore, 2010; C.E.R.I., 2008; Herther, 2009; Jukes, McCain, & Crockett, 2010; Lee, 2001; Montgomery, 2007; Pew Research Centre, 2009; Prensky, 2001; Prout, 2005; Rideout, Foehr & Roberts, 2010; Small & Vorgan, 2008; Tucci, Mitchell, & Goddard, 2006; Valkenburg, Schouten & Peter, 2005; Weber & Dixon, 2007; Willis' et al, 2006). Children are experiencing empowering relationships with adults based on autonomy and respect where they are given responsibility to create and learn without old conventional boundaries (see Montgomery, 2007; Slevin, 2000). These new experiences mean that adults' rightful authority to control and regulate children's learning and behaviour in traditional schools is no longer 'normal'. Similarly, Fay (1987) described consciousness as false when it failed to account for the life experiences of group members and when these self-understandings were contrasted with a superior alternative.

This study, that adopted the tenets of the new sociology of childhood, provided the co-researchers with experiences of utilising their agency that did not centre around technology per se. As such, I designed the research to merge the methodological approaches with my beliefs about children's agency. Therefore, the process of engaging with this research topic outside of a specific school alleviated the potential limitation on children's agency, due to possible fear of repercussion on their future success, and broadened the scope to include their chosen participants' understandings of school life experienced by children today. This

negotiated research enabled a space for the co-researchers' agency to directly impact the structure of the research through the production of the DVD. The only difficulty in addressing this topic will be in publicising the findings and the model of this research design to teachers, principals and educational administrators.

The new sociology of childhood offers another perspective that recognises the dualism of structure and agency in schools. In democratic schools children and adults collaboratively develop the structure and organisational practices democratically. These relationships are based on reciprocity and trust between children and adults and as such children can exercise their agency without the high degrees of adult supervision, control and authority. The structure of these schools are changeable and changing depending on the needs of the people - teachers or students. This philosophical approach offers endless possibilities for schools to change and evolve as structure is not prescriptive and therefore hegemony is unnecessary. Figure 6, below summarises the differences between traditional schools built on structure and democratic schools built on agency as indicated by the results from this study.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>Traditional Schools Structure</p> </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Dominating ideology School as a site to maintain social structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children expected to conform and ‘behave properly’</li> <li>• Children expected to unquestioningly obey and respect teachers</li> <li>• Children have few arenas to voice grievances</li> <li>• Teachers plan children’s learning</li> <li>• Teachers role is to teach and child's role is to learn</li> <li>• Learning ignores children’s individuality and reality</li> <li>• Teachers have more freedom of movement and freedom of dress</li> </ul> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p>Hegemony maintains structure and limits children’s capacity to exercise agency</p> </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Philosophical framework The dominant framework</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>Democratic Schools Agency</p> </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Dominating ideology School as a site to support individual agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are given opportunities to negotiate rules and behaviour</li> <li>• Adults and children share power and collaborate democratically together</li> <li>• Children can question adults decisions and voice their concerns</li> <li>• Learning is co-constructed between teacher and child</li> <li>• Children and adults are simultaneously viewed as both educator and learner</li> <li>• Children are viewed as a diverse group with individual strengths and differences</li> <li>• Children are respected as social actors and allowed equivalent freedoms as adults</li> </ul> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p>Children’s agency operates within the collaboratively designed structure of school</p> </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Philosophical framework The new sociology of childhood</p>
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Figure 6: Traditional schools versus democratic schools

As evidenced by this study, this summation in Figure 6 suggests that whilst the co-researchers were compelled to subscribe to the present boundaries of school they also demonstrated their ability to question and share power with the researcher for the intention of improving children’s schooling experiences. The co-researchers created the DVD to educate others about this study because they wanted schools to change and believed change was possible in

schools. Therefore, coupled with the current literature this study provides new understandings and insights into how adults in schools can move schools forward to produce the knowledge workers of the future (A.C.D.E., 2004) and become more relevant to children's modern lives. From a practical point of view such understandings may be used as a warning to current educators as to where schools need to change. The next section identifies some possible areas that would extend this research.

#### **7.4. Recommendations for further research and future schools**

A challenge for mainstream schools is how to build new organisations and structures, which take into account children's agency. The literature review provided examples of isolated schools changing their structures and relationships with children. What is needed is more research evidence that embraces the new sociology of childhood and validates children's agency as valuable members of schools. More research data could shape adults' and children's ideas and expand possibilities for shaping future schools. One recommendation for further research would be to co-research with children from these isolated schools who are taking up the challenge to determine children's perceptions of their power and agency. This would provide data to assist adults and children in identifying structural practices and relationships that children find empowering.

Another possible area of research that would extend the scope of this study would be to include more culturally variable research as this study investigated a small sample of predominantly wealthy children from western schooling. Another recommendation for further research that relates to the transformative intent of this study would be for adults to revisit schools for a period of time with the same restrictions and freedom granted children. This may provide some interesting ideas of how the limiting effects of hegemony can feel for children.

A final recommendation for further research would involve giving children as co-researchers the freedom to research the aspects of school they would change, without the adult confines of



a school environment or adult research project. This would truly recognise children's agency and power by giving them authentic autonomy and power.

It has been suggested in the literature on the student voice movement that teachers would benefit professional development (Devine, 2002; Bragg, 2007a) to support them in developing more democratic relationships with children. I suggest that pre-service teachers to undertake courses in the sociology of childhood that show the new sociology of childhood framework as one philosophical platform that may propel school change forward. This education or re-education could redefine rigid boundaries between teachers and students and help teachers make sense of children's lives. The next section summarises my final comments.

## **7.5. Concluding comments**

To conclude, this study contributes to the process of reconstructing and reinserting new ways of thinking about childhood into schools. This study has argued that children's agency within traditional schools is confined within adult-defined organisational parameters. Conversely, informed by the new sociology of childhood and the way that structure and agency are intertwined, it is recognised that children can play an agentic role in helping traditional schools evolve.

The traditional school as a social structure limits opportunities for children to use their agency through structures that reinforce the dichotomy between adulthood and childhood. These limitations are incongruent with the agency children are afforded in late modernity due to the Internet, other technologies and cultural practices where the boundaries between adult and child are blurring and becoming indistinguishable. To take this one step further the hegemony operating within schools maintained these traditional boundaries by misleading children through the development of false consciousness. This thesis argues that children's false consciousness, presented as a lack of agency is no longer as powerful in constructing children's experiences as they become aware of their own power and the conditions that have maintained adult power within schools. Adults' having absolute authority over children is no

longer 'normal' or common sense as experiences outside of school through technologies provide alternative ways for children to share power *with* adults.

To recognise these shifts within society, schools and the adults within them, need to rethink the ways organisational structures reproduce hegemony and seek to accommodate new ways of supporting children's agency. The promising aspect is that through initiatives, such as the student voice movement and children as researchers, some isolated schools are becoming places where children and adults can teach and learn from each other. These new democratic schools involve adults sharing power and responsibility with the students therefore reinforcing children's role as social actors. Schools that engage with children in rethinking and changing their structure and organisational practices will contribute to the utopian dream of making schools places where children are active contributors and decision-makers, taking responsibility for their own learning and the learning of others, including adults.

The thesis from this study is that for schools to reflect modern society, old structures and practices that normalised adult authority over children need to be replaced by democratic practices that respect children. In this way adults and children in schools can collaboratively find ways of creating and shaping schools and the place of childhood within them. This approach encapsulates the apothegm that children are the future by their participation in the present.

Papert (1993) stated that if a teacher from the 19<sup>th</sup> century compared a school from their era to a school in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there would be few physical differences. I would add as a result of conducting this study there would be few hierarchical changes in the expected relationship between adults and children also. My study has peeled open the physical environment of schools to look underneath and explore the layers of power that are played out in the everyday lives of adults and children in schools. What I have found is that even though in society, children are beginning to be recognised as significantly contributing to the shaping of society, traditional schools still operate from a view of childhood reminiscent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The conduct of this research and my T.O.M. experience as a teacher involved me sharing power with children and both experiences showed me that there are other possibilities – adults and

children can easily learn from each other if adults are willing to let go of old ideas about childhood. I would like to conclude with an analogical thought; people will not know how tall a tree could grow once it has been cut down. Similarly, under the present regime of adult control, supervision and authority in schools, some adults may never know how educated children could be if let to grow because like trees, most children have all but been cut down.

In 1935, John Maynard Keynes wrote:

The real difficulty lies, not in the new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones, which ramify, for those brought up as most of us have been, into every corner of our minds. (Keynes, 2009 [1936], p. 4)

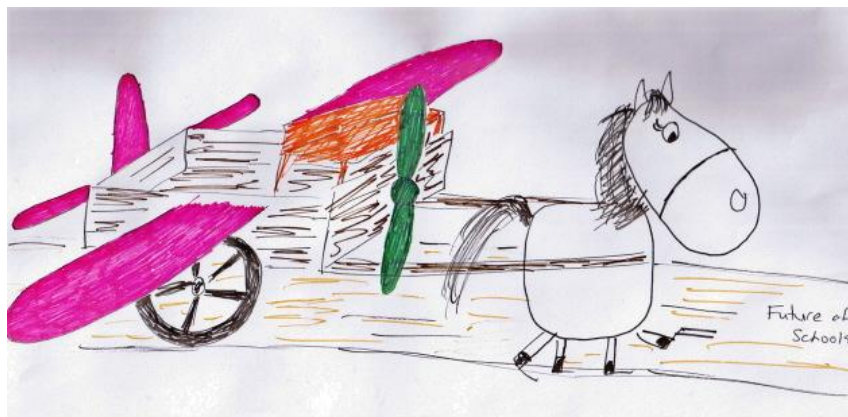


Figure 7: Educational Change (Rose, 2006)

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## Appendix 1: Timeline of Research

This table provides a timeline and outline of the main research events to show the development of this study.

Date	Research Activity
4 <sup>th</sup> July, 2007	<p>Pizza party initial meeting where co-researchers and their families gave their informed consent to participate. Journals and first disposable cameras were given out. The co-researchers were free to choose how they wanted to participate in this research. We discussed possible collective actions and we decided to produce a DVD.</p>
5 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> July, 2007	<p>Initial interviews conducted individually with the co-researchers at their homes.</p>
11 <sup>th</sup> July, 2007	<p>First full day of collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-researchers returned cameras.</li> <li>• As a group we brainstormed and discussed schools</li> <li>• The group decided to make two surveys, one for adults and one for children.</li> <li>• The co-researchers completed and discussed a draft survey I had devised to introduce sample questions and data analysis</li> <li>• In self-selected groups the co-researchers began to outline some survey questions.</li> <li>• Charleston withdrew from the study</li> </ul>
13 <sup>th</sup> July, 2007	<p>Second full day of collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I conducted photo-elicitation interviews with the co-researchers in pairs as one videoed whilst the other was being interviewed.</li> <li>• In self-selected groups the co-researchers creatively explored new possibilities for schools, analysed results from the draft survey and put the data into excel, composed questions for the two surveys and interviews.</li> <li>• Sample adult and child surveys were compiled</li> <li>• Group reflection and discussion on the research process</li> </ul>

14 <sup>th</sup> July – 9 <sup>th</sup> October, 2007	I liaised with the co-researchers individually as I distributed the surveys for the co-researchers to deliver and collect. I also gave out the second disposable camera.
10 <sup>th</sup> October, 2007	<p>Third full day of collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This morning Leroy and Juliet withdrew from the research and gave permission for surveys they had distributed and collected to be included.</li> <li>• The co-researchers chose their analysis teams and began to collate the data. A lot of pie graph conversions were done today.</li> </ul>
11 <sup>th</sup> October, 2007	<p>Fourth full day of collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More data was collated and the teams began to put the data into Excel to make tables and graphs for preliminary analysis.</li> <li>• Donna attended to introduce and assist with Excel.</li> </ul>
12 <sup>th</sup> October, 2007	<p>Fifth full day of collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Donna attended and introduced storyboards for filming</li> <li>• The groups continued to collate and analyse the data.</li> <li>• One group began on their script.</li> <li>• Group reflection and discussion on the research process</li> </ul>
13 <sup>th</sup> Oct – 12 <sup>th</sup> Dec, 2007	I met with the co-researchers in their teams at one team member's house to finish analysing the data.
13 <sup>th</sup> December, 2007	<p>Sixth full day of collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In groups of three the co-researchers began to conduct photo-elicitation interviews with one person interviewing, one person being interviewed and one person filming.</li> <li>• Planning day where the co-researcher teams worked on their storyboards and script writing for the DVD.</li> <li>• The groups that did not finish were asked to email me their final script and storyboard</li> </ul>

4 <sup>th</sup> January, 2008	<p>Seventh full day of collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Filming day where some teams directed and filmed their skit. Two full skits were filmed and one part of another.</li> <li>• Donna attended and helped with the filming</li> </ul>
23 <sup>rd</sup> January, 2008	<p>Eighth full day of collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some co-researchers attended and we filmed one team's skit.</li> </ul>
3 <sup>rd</sup> February, 2008	<p>Ninth full day of collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Donna attended and introduced some editing techniques for their skits.</li> <li>• Filmed one skit and finished filming the other parts.</li> <li>• All skits have now been filmed and some groups began editing.</li> </ul>
4 <sup>th</sup> Feb – 6 <sup>th</sup> March, 2008	I dropped off my laptop to the co-researchers in their teams so the team could finish editing their skit.
7 <sup>th</sup> Mar, 2008	I filmed the introduction and conclusion with Agent Sprat.
7 <sup>th</sup> Mar – 18 <sup>th</sup> Mar, 2008	Final interviews conducted individually with the co-researchers at their homes.
8 <sup>th</sup> Mar – 28 <sup>th</sup> April, 2008	I dropped off my laptop to the co-researchers in their teams so the team could finish editing their skit. All editing was finished by the 28 <sup>th</sup> April and interview transcripts had been member-checked by the co-researchers.
July 20 <sup>th</sup> , 2008	<p>Final Full meeting</p> <p>All of the co-researchers and their families attended another pizza party to view their edited skits on the DVD. Since this date two skits have been edited further as has the introduction and conclusions.</p>

Table 6: Timeline of research

## **Appendix 2: Interview and survey questions**

### Co-researchers' Initial Interview Questions

#### A Child's Lifeworld

1. How do you spend your time?  
Where do you go? How do you get around?  
Who do you spend a lot of time with?
2. Tell me about yourself as if I had never met you  
Family  
Physical characteristics  
Important relationships  
Feel good about yourself  
Feel valued and respected  
Proud of  
Something about you that nobody knows
3. What would you like adults to know about what it is like being young today?  
Pressures  
Culture  
Media  
Fears

#### My School

4. Tell me about your school  
What do you like about school?  
What do you dislike about school?  
Involvement  
Importance in your life  
Make you feel  
School culture – kids and/or teacher's perspective  
Purpose
5. How would you describe 'schools' to a person who has never seen or heard of them?
6. What decisions do you make at school?  
Degree of importance  
Level of influence  
Any decisions like to make

#### Researching Research

7. What would you tell someone about this research and what it involves?
8. What are you looking forward to in doing this research  
Other ways to share information about your experiences/life



Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Co researcher's Code: \_\_\_\_\_

### Survey for Child Research Participants

The purpose of our questionnaire is to understand your life and your experiences of school.

#### Section 1- Demographics

Please fill in the following questions:

1. I am \_\_\_ years old.
  
2. I am a Boy / Girl (*please circle*)
  
3. I am in year \_\_\_\_ at school. (*students only*)
  
4. I have \_\_\_\_ adults in my home  
    \_\_\_\_ sisters  
    \_\_\_\_ brothers

#### Section 2- Life in General

These questions are to help other people understand your life.

5. Please tick the areas of your life where you get to make decisions.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decorating your room   | <input type="checkbox"/> sport you play       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What you watch on T.V. | <input type="checkbox"/> who your friends are |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hobbies you do         | <input type="checkbox"/> what you wear        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What you eat           | <input type="checkbox"/> where you play       |

Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. Can you describe a big decision you have you made in your life?

7. What do you want to achieve in the next 12 months? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. What do you hope to have achieved in 10 years time? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

9. If you could be an adult who would you like to be? Why \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

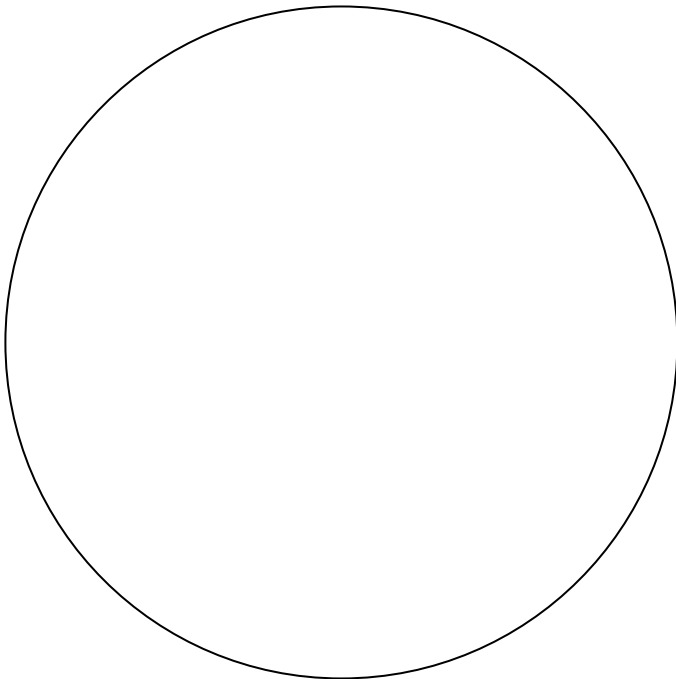
10. Who do you think has the power to change the world? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

11. How would you like to change the world? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

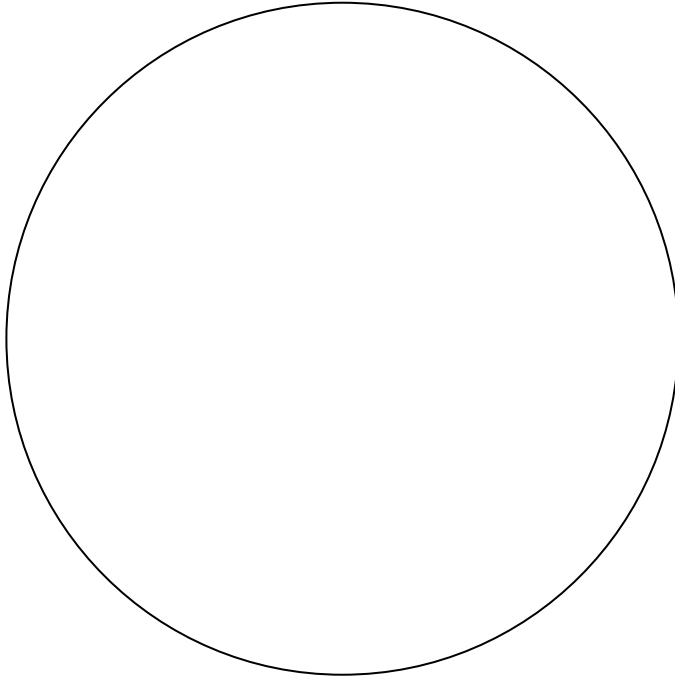
12. Make a pie graph indicating the actual time spent doing the activities listed for your typical week:



**Activities:**

- School
- Work
- Friends
- Family
- Sport
- Computer
- Other \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please specify)

13. Please make a pie graph indicating the time YOU WISH YOU COULD spend doing the activities listed for your typical week:



**Activities:**

- School
- Work
- Friends
- Family
- Sport
- Computer
- Other \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please specify)

14. Please fill out the table related to the activities mentioned above.

<i>Favourite activity:</i>	<i>Least favourite activity:</i>	<i>Most favourite place to be:</i>	<i>Least favourite place to be:</i>
<i>Who with:</i>	<i>Who with:</i>	<i>Why:</i>	<i>Why:</i>

15. From the list below, tick three activities where you feel most confident.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Hanging out with friends     | <input type="radio"/> Watching TV          |
| <input type="radio"/> At home with your family     | <input type="radio"/> Playing video games  |
| <input type="radio"/> Playing sport                | <input type="radio"/> Surfing the Internet |
| <input type="radio"/> At school                    | <input type="radio"/> Relaxing by myself   |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify) _____ |  |

16. In what relationships do you feel most powerful and why?

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17. Besides your parents who are the most important adults in your life? Why?

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18. Rank from 1-8 the following influences in your life (1 being the most influential).

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Parents/Family               | <input type="radio"/> Internet                 |
| <input type="radio"/> Friends                      | <input type="radio"/> Celebrities/Idols        |
| <input type="radio"/> Teachers                     | <input type="radio"/> Government               |
| <input type="radio"/> T.V. Shows                   | <input type="radio"/> Fashion magazines/trends |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify) _____ |  |

### **Section 3- School Life**

These questions are to help adults understand what it is like to go to school.

Please finish these short sentences

19.The thing I love about school is \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

20.The thing that annoys me most about school is \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

21.I wish my teachers knew \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

22.If no-one at school was watching I would \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

23.If I knew I couldn't fail I would \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

24.What things are important at school? Please tick the most suitable response.

	Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Very Important
Children making decisions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children fulfilling their dreams	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children being a leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children doing work they like	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children socialising with friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

25. What do you believe is the purpose of a school? How do you think teachers view the purpose of school?

My View	Teacher's view

26. What is expected of you at school?

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27. If you were the Principal for a day, how would you improve or change your school?

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28. Describe or draw any spaces at school just for kids – outside and inside?

Inside Spaces	Outside Spaces

29. Do you get along with your teachers? Is this important to how you feel at school?  
Please explain

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30. Tick the learning style(s) that works best for you:

- Visual       Writing  
 Listening       Kinaesthetic  
 Reading

31. Do teachers accommodate your teaching style in lessons?(circle) Yes/ No

32. What 2 subjects do you value most? Why? (eg. Maths, Art, English)

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33. How are children included in decision making at your school? (eg. Student council) \_\_\_\_\_

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34. How could teachers and children share power and decisions making at school?

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35. What, if anything, would you like to have a say about at school.

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36. How do you think most teachers at school would describe children?

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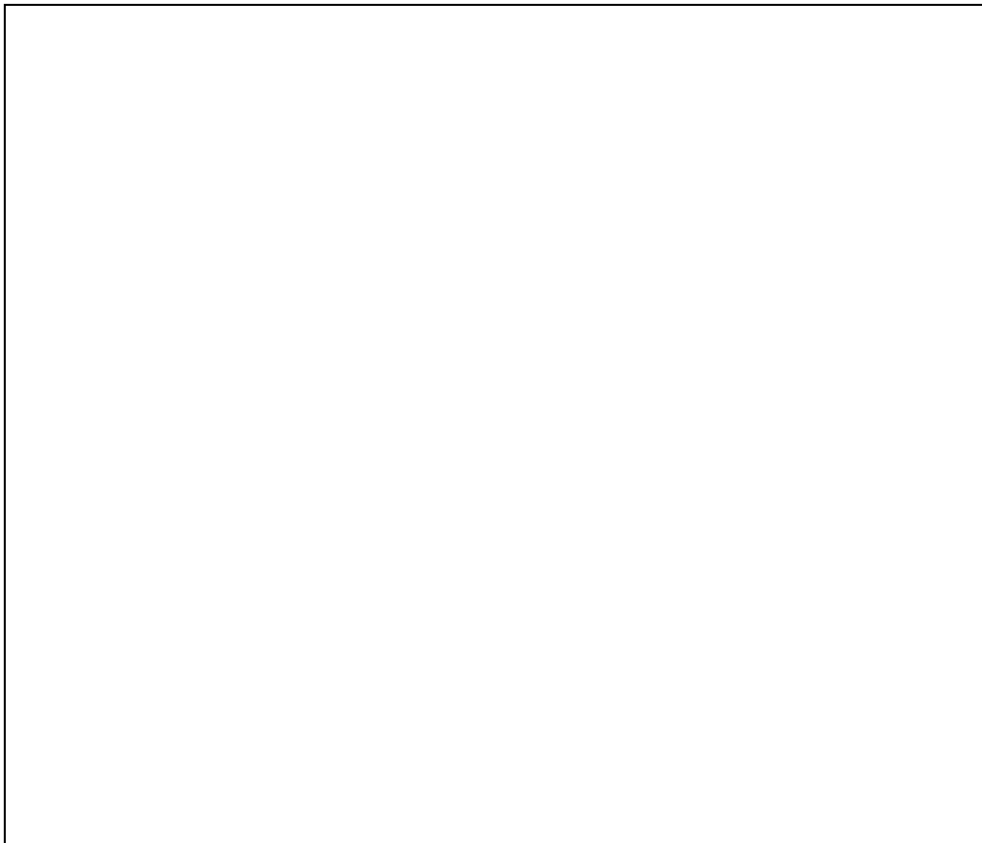
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37. How do you think most adults OUTSIDE of school would describe children?

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38. Design your ideal 'school' or learning centre if it could be anything.







7. What do you think most children's goals are for the next 12 months?

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8. What do you think most children hope to have achieved in 10 years time?

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9. If children could be an adult who would the majority like to be? Why

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10. Who do children think has the power to change the world? \_\_\_\_\_

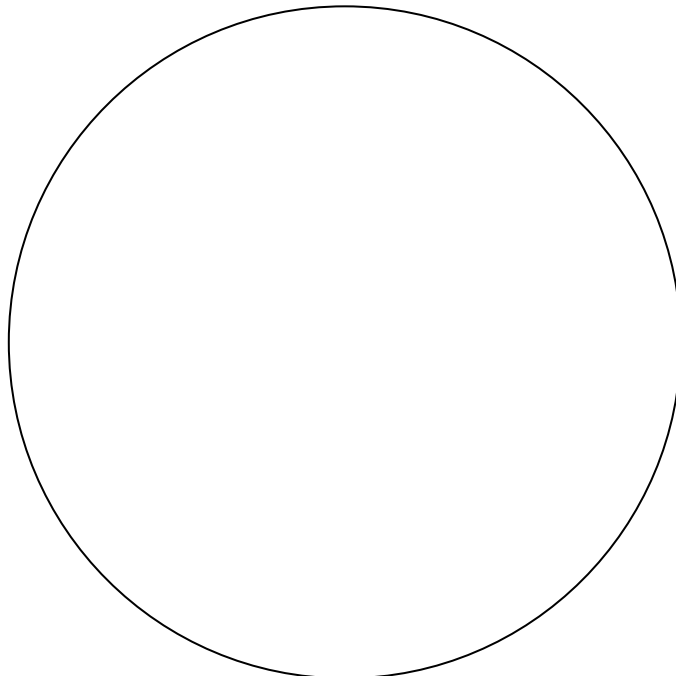
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11. How would children like to change the world? \_\_\_\_\_

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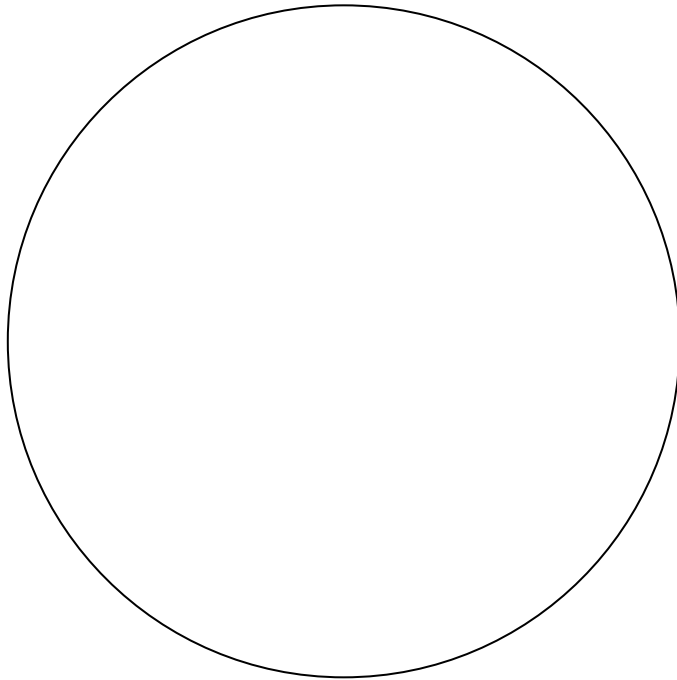
12. Make a pie graph indicating the actual time spent doing the activities listed for a child's typical week:



**Activities:**

- School
- Work
- Friends
- Family
- Sport
- Computer
- Other \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please specify)

13. Please make a pie graph indicating the time CHILDREN WOULD WISH THEY COULD spend doing the activities listed for a typical week:



**Activities:**

- School
- Work
- Friends
- Family
- Sport
- Computer
- Other \_\_\_\_\_ (Please specify)

14. Please fill out the table thinking for a child.

<i>Favourite activity:</i>	<i>Least favourite activity:</i>	<i>Most favourite place to be:</i>	<i>Least favourite place to be:</i>
<i>Who with:</i>	<i>Who with:</i>	<i>Why:</i>	<i>Why:</i>

15. From the list below, tick three activities where children would feel most confident.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Hanging out with friends     | <input type="radio"/> Watching TV          |
| <input type="radio"/> At home with your family     | <input type="radio"/> Playing video games  |
| <input type="radio"/> Playing sport                | <input type="radio"/> Surfing the Internet |
| <input type="radio"/> At school                    | <input type="radio"/> Relaxing by myself   |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify) _____ |  |

16. In what relationships would children feel most powerful and why?

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17. Besides your parents who would be the most important adults in a child's life? Why?

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18. Rank from 1-8 the following influences in a child's life (1 being the most influential).

- |  |  |
|--|--|
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| <input type="radio"/> Teachers                     | <input type="radio"/> Government               |
| <input type="radio"/> T.V. Shows                   | <input type="radio"/> Fashion magazines/trends |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify) _____ |  |

**Section 3- School Life**

These questions are to help adults understand what it is like to go to school.

Please finish these short sentences

19.The thing children love about school is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

20.The thing that annoys children most about school is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

21.Children wish their teachers knew \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

22.If no-one at school was watching children would \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

23.If children knew they couldn't fail they would \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

24.What things are important at school? Please tick the most suitable response.

	Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Very Important
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Children fulfilling their dreams	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children being a leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children doing work they like	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children socialising with friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

25.What do children believe is the purpose of a school? How do children think teachers view the purpose of school?

My View	Teacher's view

26.What is expected of children at school?

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27.If children were the Principal for a day, how would they improve or change their school?

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28.Describe or draw any spaces at school just for kids at school – outside and inside?

Inside Spaces	Outside Spaces

29. Do children get along with teachers? Is this important to how children feel at school? Please explain

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---

---

30. How are children included in decision making at school? (eg. Student council)

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31. How could teachers and children share power and decisions making at school?

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32. What, if anything, would children like to have a say about at school.

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33. Whose responsibility is it to take care of the school? Why?

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34. Design your ideal 'school' or learning centre



## Interview Questions - Alice

### Life

1. What do/did you like to do in your spare time (as a child)?
  - Places and things you do/go with friends
  - Places and things you do/go with family
  - Play any sport
  - Belong to any community groups eg; scouts
2. What do/did you and your friends like to do when no adults are around?
  - School
  - Home

### Social

3. Describe some big decisions you have made in your life, as a child.
  - Where you go and who you go with
  - Spend money
  - Relax
  - Sports
  - Who influences the decisions you make?
  - Any decisions you wish you could make?
4. Describe spaces/places in your life that are/were 'kid's' spaces?
  - What made/makes it a 'kid's' space?
  - School
  - Home
  - Outside
  - Shops
5. Describe times when you have felt free and powerful as a child?
  - School
  - Home

### School

6. Describe your experience of going to school?
  - Positive
  - Negative
  - Relationships with teachers
  - Learning
7. How does/did school make your life better today?
  - The way you feel about yourself
  - How valued you are
  - Skills you learn that you use
  - Knowledge you use
8. Name three things/decisions that would/could have improve school for you.



## Co-researchers' Final Interview Questions

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### This research

1. Describe your role as co-researcher in this research.
2. How important has your role as co-researcher been?
3. What parts of the research did you find valuable? Why?
4. What would you change about the research?
5. What would you like to have known before we started the research that would have helped?
6. What have you learnt from being a co-researcher?
7. How have you been able to apply the skills/knowledge to any other areas -if at all?
8. How would you describe your participation in this research 'tokenistic' or 'authentic'?  
Why?

### General Research

9. If you could conduct research what would you do? Why/How?
10. What advice would you give adults/me doing research with young people?
11. What are the benefits/disadvantages of having children as co-researchers?
12. What opportunities would you like to see for children as co-researchers?

Any comments or questions

## Appendix 3: Survey data used in DVD

The survey data the co-researchers used in each DVD section is represented in tables.

(n= number of responses)

### 'Introduction' (Patricia Rose and Agent Sprat)

Adult surveys			Child surveys	
	Adult distributed	Adults returned	Child distributed	Child returned
Surveys	55	35	66	41
Return rate %	Adult – 64%		Child – 62%	

Table 7: Survey rate of return

### 'Erasers War on Education' (Arc and Penelope)

1. Data collected in response to survey question: 22

If no-one was watching activity	% adult responses (n=43)	% child responses (n=36)	If no-one was watching activity	% adult responses (n=43)	% child responses (n=36)
Continue to play/play all day	20	6	Be disruptive/wild/mess around	12	41
Continue to learn/arrange own activities	5	0	Bully/hurt each other	9	0
Establish own rules and communities	5	0	Act the same as when being watched	5	32
Be destructive/damage school or property	5	0	Work harder	2	0
Talk more	12	3	Leave school	2	3
Relax/enjoy themselves	7	3	Be more confident	0	6
Do less work/go off task	16	6			

Table 8: What children would do at school if no-one was watching

2. Data collected in response to survey question: 32 (Children's survey only)

Q32: Children's most valued subjects	% child responses (n=75)	Q32: Children's most valued subjects	% child responses (n=75)
English	23	Computer/Technology	8
Maths	21	History	4
Music	9	Cooking	1
Art	16	Drama	1
Sport	4	Commerce	1
Science	11	Japanese	1

Table 9: Children's most valued subjects

3. Data collected in response to survey question: 30 and 31 (Children’s survey only)

<b>Q30: Preferred learning style</b>	<b>% child responses (n=96)</b>	<b>Q31: Teachers’ accommodating learning style</b>	<b>% child responses (n=39)</b>
Visual	27	Yes	69
Listening	17	No	13
Reading	20	Sometimes	18
Writing	22		
Kinasthetic	14		

Table 10: Children’s learning styles and teachers’ accommodation of styles in lessons

4. Data collected in response to survey question: 19 and 20

<b>Q19: What children love about school</b>			<b>20: What is annoying about school</b>		
<b>Aspect of School</b>	<b>% adult responses (n=44)</b>	<b>% children Responses (n=59)</b>	<b>Aspect of school</b>	<b>% adult responses (n=44)</b>	<b>% child responses (n=46)</b>
Friends	51	42	Homework and assignments	20	22
Learning new things	10	20	Tests	0	9
Sense of belonging atmosphere	2	3	Troubling teachers	7	11
Comfort of routine	4	0	Bullying	7	9
Fun activities/subjects	6	12	Repetitive classes	5	4
Helpful, dedicated and fun teachers	6	7	Repression of students' freedom of expression	0	2
Recess and lunch/bell to go home	6	7	Rigid structure for learning	14	9
Playing	2	0	Students spoiling class	5	24
Developing their creativity	2	2	Strict rules	23	2
Getting good marks	0	5	Discipline system	0	2
Mixed Classes	0	2	Popular groups	2	4
Hard work	17	0	Being crowded	0	2

Table 11: What children love and get annoyed about school

**‘Little Sister’ (Cildru)**

1. Data collected in response to survey question: 33 (adult only)

<b>People Responsible</b>	<b>% adult responses (n=39)</b>	<b>People Responsible</b>	<b>% adult responses (n=39)</b>
Whole school community	56	Students	5
Government – Dept Education	13	Staff	10
School Council	3	Principal	13

Table 12: People responsible for looking after the school

2. Data collected in response to survey questions: 7 and 8

<b>Q7: Goals for 12 months</b>	<b>% adult responses</b> (n=45)	<b>% child responses</b> (n=67)	<b>Q8: Goals for 10 years</b>	<b>% adult responses</b> (n=73)	<b>% child responses</b> (n=72)
Get good grades	56	28	Work - get a job	25	35
Improve at hobbies, dance, sport	13	17	Chn don't think that far ahead	1	0
Be with friends	2	23	Have friends	11	3
Save money	5	10	Be happy with life	14	10
Be with family	2	3	Be wealthy or rich	11	6
Go on holidays	0	6	Have a family	4	4
Be happy	6	4	Excel at sport	3	8
Buy and get things	5	3	Get driver's license	4	8
Survive /stay safe	5	6	Buy a house or car	8	6
Work	6	0	Achieve at school	19	20

Table 13: Children's goals in 12 months and 10 years time

3. Data collected in response to survey question: 9 (Data included in 'Professor Smart')

<b>Aspiring Adult Figure</b>	<b># of adult responses</b> (n=63)	<b># of child responses</b> (n=52)	<b>Aspiring Adult Figure</b>	<b># of adult responses</b> (n=63)	<b># of child responses</b> (n=52)
Themselves	12	3	Teacher	1	3
Not sure	0	6	Prime Minister	1	3
Movie Star	5	5	Artist	1	0
Not like an adult	0	1	Famous/ celebrity	5	0
Astronaut	1	0	Pretty person	0	2
Doctor, Magician, Zoo Keeper (1 each)	3	0	Someone who helps people	0	2
Good personality	0	2	Smart person	0	3
Ninja Master	0	2	Rich Person	1	6
Sport Star	8	4	Policeman	1	0
Mum or dad	11	7	Pilot	0	1
Other family member	3	0	Popstar/singer	7	2
Super hero	3				

Table 14: Adults that children aspire to be like

**‘Professor Smart’ (Semaj, Tarco and Brice)**

1. Data collected in response to survey question: 17

<b>Important adults</b>	<b>% adult responses</b> (n=55)	<b>% child responses</b> (n=53)	<b>Important adults</b>	<b>% adult responses</b> (n=55)	<b>% child responses</b> (n=53)
Teachers	31	20	Parents' friends	7	11
Neighbours	4	0	Extended family	4	22
Youth group leaders	2	2	Close family	36	9
Friends	5	8	Godparents	0	2
Grandparents	0	24	Team coach	7	0
Any good people	0	2	Babysitters	4	0

Table 15: Important adults in children’s lives other than parents

2. Data collected in response to survey question: 29

<b>Children getting along with teachers</b>	<b>% adult responses</b> (n=34)	<b>% child responses</b> (n=36)	<b>Children getting along with teachers</b>	<b>% adult responses</b> (n=34)	<b>% child responses</b> (n=36)
Yes	38	47	No teachers	3	8
All teachers	3	8	Depends on personality	21	0
Most teachers	23	31	Sometimes	0	6
Some teachers	12	0			

Table 16: Children getting along with teachers

**‘Spocks and Spucks’ (Alice)**

1. Data collected in response to survey question: 1 and 2

<b>Adult Surveys</b>					<b>Child Surveys</b>				
<b>Age range</b>	<b>% adult surveys returned</b>	<b># of adults</b>	<b># of men</b>	<b># of women</b>	<b>Age range</b>	<b>% of child surveys returned</b>	<b># of children</b>	<b># of boys</b>	<b># of girls</b>
18-25 years	3%	1	1	0	8-9 years	4%	2	0	2
26-35 years	14%	5	1	4	10-11 years	12%	5	1	4
36-45 years	54%	19	3	16	12-13 years	40%	16	8	8
46+ years	29%	10	3	7	14-15 years	32%	13	6	7
					16-17 years	12%	5	2	3

Table 17: Age and gender demographics

5. Data collected in response to survey question: 12 and 13 (Q12 data also included in ‘Little Sister’)

Q12: Actual time spent doing activities			Q13: Wish time could spend doing activities		
Activity	% adult responses (n=132)	% child responses (n=135)	Activity	% adult responses (n=125)	% child responses (n=138)
School	28	27	School	14	18
Family	14	13	Family	4	14
Friends	9	8	Friends	21	14
Work	7	7	Work/homework	15	4
Sport	10	7	Sport	13	10
Computer	8	7	Computer	14	8
Hobby	5	11	Hobby	10	14
TV	19	9	TV	0	9
Relax/ Leisure	0	11	Relax/Leisure	9	9

Table 18: Children’s actual and wishful weekly activities

6. Data collected in response to survey question: 15 (referred to as 13b)

Activity	% adult responses (n=101)	% child responses (n=121)	Activity	% adult responses (n=101)	% child responses (n=121)
Hanging with friends	21	23	Playing video games	10	4
At home with family	22	27	Surfing the Internet	8	5
Playing sport	12	8	Relaxing alone	5	12
At school	3	9	Playing music/dance	2	4
Watching T.V.	15	7	Reading	1	1

Table 19: Selected activities children felt most confident participating in

**‘Thank Goodness You’re Here’ (Hamish and Agent Sprat)**

1. Data collected in response to survey questions: 5 and 33 (children’s survey) and Question 30 (adults’ survey)

Q5. Selected decisions children make at home	% adult responses (n=38)		% child responses (n=41)		Q30/33: Decisions children make at school	% adult responses (n=48)	% child responses (n=42)
	Ticked	Left Blank	Ticked	Left Blank			
Decorate bedroom	82	18	78	22	Subject choice Yrs 9-12	2	5
What sport to play	82	18	88	12	Evaluations on topics	0	2
What show to watch on TV	63	37	71	29	Various Clubs	6	14
Friends	87	13	98	2	SRC	53	56

What hobbies to do	71	29	98	2	Voting school/class captains	10	14
What clothes to wear	71	29	88	12	Not much	2	2
What to eat	42	58	68	32	Class rewards	2	0
Where to play	45	55	68	32	In class decisions	19	7
					Committees	6	0

Table 20: Decisions children make at home and at school

2. Data collected in response to survey question: 27

If principal what children would do	% adult responses (n=64)	% child responses (n=49)	If principal what children would do	% adult responses (n=64)	% child responses (n=49)
Improve school environment	11	16	Improve the canteen	0	8
Have fewer rules	11	7	Have less homework	8	10
Have a practical approach to learning	11	12	Have more free time	26	4
Include more enjoyable activities	9	14	Choose teachers	5	12
Change/remove the uniform	3	7	Increase respect for students by teachers	16	10

Table 21: What children would do if they were principal

**'Conclusion' (Patricia and Agent Sprat)**

1. Data collected in response to optional survey question: 38 (children's survey) and question 34 (adults' survey)

Ideal School Comments	Frequency Adult	Frequency Child
Outdoor and indoor learning areas	2	1
Comfortable furniture	2	3
Homely	1	0
Flexible seating arrangements	1	0
More multi-media resources and easy access to it (DVD, computers, cameras)	2	1
Space and light	1	0
Flexible times	1	0
More computer labs	2	0
State of the art science labs	1	1
Vegetable gardens	1	1
One of respect both children for teachers and teachers for children	1	0
It's at the beach	1	1
Making learning fun	1	1

Colourful (happy) classrooms - decorative	2	1
Safe	1	0
Smaller classes	1	0
Noisy (healthy) classrooms	1	0
Consistent staff	1	0
Student/staff welfare	1	0
Teachers being sensitive to students' needs	1	0
Nice caring teachers	0	1
Spare learning spaces	0	1
More than one staff member assisting with individual needs	1	0
Choice	1	0
Praise (positive reinforcement)	1	0
Learning centres with choice of activities	1	1
Teachers as facilitators as well as explicit teaching	1	0
Clean toilets	0	2
New food in the canteen	0	2
Pool	0	4
Satellite TV	0	1
Skate park	0	1
Ice-cream shop	0	1
BBQ area	0	1
Elevators	0	1
Theatre room	0	1
End of year tests only	0	1
Personal outcome based learning in own bays – no timetable, uniform, no set classes	0	1
Students' own fun space and teachers can supervise	0	1

Table 22: Ideal school comments



## Appendix 4: Summary of the co-researchers' data and structural practices in school

MM denotes the data was from Mind Map brainstorming sessions (see pages 138, 144)

Co-researcher	STRUCTURAL PRACTICES			
	Purpose and value of school	Space and place	Learning in schools	Technological children
Julliet	School was linked to boring education (MM). Felt proud getting good marks in assignments	Liked friends, clubs and open spaces connected with free periods, recess, lunch, art and sports (MM). Disliked uniforms and closed spaces associated with boredom and teachers (MM)	Considered school long, with tests and lots of steps (MM). Some learning was boring like copying out of textbooks. Felt stressed by tests and did not want to disappoint her parents	Learnt how to cast-off in knitting from the Internet and loved her <i>ipod</i> , describing it as her life
Cildru	School was a place where you learnt and you had to go to by law	Questioned uniforms for teachers? (MM). Hated having to go to the library if it rained	Wanted more choice about stuff and for everyone to be more accepting of what they learnt	Made her own web page. Used the computer to create an advertisement where she changed images of herself to show the signs of aging
Alice	Loved school and thought it was important for children to learn so they would grow up and become intelligent human beings	Questioned uniforms for teachers? (MM)	Liked the school music program. She thought some teachers taught in a boring mono-toned voice	Only used the computer to download music and used <i>Google</i> as a last resort
Penelope	School was a place where you went to learn and prepare for later life. Liked to do well at school. Felt proud getting good marks, like in music	Commented on strict dress code. Relaxed in school holidays with no assignments or homework	Stressed about drowning in assignments. Liked assignments that were fun. Did not want to fail and noted some of her friends' parents put pressure and punished them if they did not do well at school. She liked Art because the teachers modified the curriculum to include students' interests. Thought school should be about children learning not teachers teaching. Wanted learning to be more hands-on	Thought that children's lives today were very different to when adults were young with <i>MSN</i> and tech things

<b>Co-researcher</b>	<b>Purpose and value of school</b>	<b>Space and place</b>	<b>Learning in schools</b>	<b>Technological children</b>
Brice	Thought it was very important to get good grades at school in order to get a good job	Questioned uniforms for teachers? (MM)	Wanted to know the relevance and purpose behind learning. Wanted learning to involve more educational excursions, like history bone-digging	Liked computers because children could work on them and have fun
Arc	School was linked to boring education (MM). School was important to get good job and good future. It taught the values and skills for life. He said it could be hard work and complicated	Liked friends, clubs and open spaces connected with free periods, recess, lunch, art and sports (MM). Disliked uniforms and closed spaces associated with boredom and teachers (MM)	Considered school long, with tests and lots of steps (MM). Felt pressured competing in tests with smarter students and not always turning out best. Thought there was too much homework	Thought important technology for children was computer, Internet and <i>MSN</i>
Charleston	Described school as an institution designed to educate people as preparation for later life that had become degraded as teachers and learners did not have the same goals. Felt proud getting good marks	Disliked being in the spotlight and felt almost paranoid as everything he did was recorded and that record was influenced by the reputation of the student. Also disliked that everyone was treated the same no matter what class they were in	Commented that creativity or imagination were not encouraged at school. Didn't like test scores being reflected on his report. Disliked that children who did not value the futuristic benefits of school were mixed with those who wanted to learn	Felt the pressure of being moulded into an image. Felt that adults had different childhoods as they did not have the media telling kids how to be that kids can access very easily
Leroy	School meant a lot because without school you couldn't do well in life. Liked doing well at things and everybody was nice to him at school	Teachers may not know there are always kids who don't want to learn and who think it's cool to go against school – disliked too much homework	Disliked the needless volume of homework	Loved his computer and played games Mentioned text messaging and <i>Myspace</i> as important technology for kids
Agent Sprat	Thought that school helped us learn more to get us through life	Disliked kids who do bad things and disrupted his learning in English and Maths as he was falling behind. Thought the merit system was unfair as he missed receiving an award because he was absent	Disliked not being told how to use Maths. Thought learning was boring if you did the same thing over and over again. Liked that at his school the teachers asked what type of excursions they want to go on and tried to accommodate them. Wanted learning to be fun with hands-on activities, even going to another room	He wanted adults to know how hard it was being a kid and to recognise kids' ideas about what they want to do, not what adults want kids to do. He thought that if adults knew how fun computers could be they would use them to make more enjoyable classrooms

<b>Co-researcher</b>	<b>Purpose and value of school</b>	<b>Space and place</b>	<b>Learning in schools</b>	<b>Technological children</b>
Tarco	School was linked to boring education (MM). He wanted to be a Zoologist or animaltronics person and so needed high marks	Liked friends, clubs and open spaces connected with free periods, recess, lunch, art and sports (MM). Disliked uniforms and closed spaces associated with boredom and teachers (MM)	Considered school long, with tests and lots of steps (MM)	Played games on the computers, did powerpoints occasionally and used the Internet
Semaj	School was important where if you did something really, really bad then something bad would happen	School was fun if you did the right thing and bad if you did the wrong thing	Liked real learning activities that were also fun rather than some dull book reviews	He used the computer to create <i>Pacman</i> style games and synthesise music
Hamish	School was important as his mum worked at his school and his dad was in education. Thought school gave us skills for later life so we could go out in society and actually be something	Thought that there was stereotypical image of kids misbehaving and said this was not true as most kids don't just want to muck up	Liked choosing his learning in ILP. Thought kids wanted to have free choice	Thought adults should watch kids' TV to understand children because adults forget to be kids. He was the DVD king, had awesome computers, could fix anything and ran the computers in his primary school

Table 23: Summary of the co-researchers' data and structural practices in school

## Appendix 5: Data summary of the co-researchers' relationships with adults in schools

MM denotes the data was from Mind Map brainstorming sessions (see pages 138, 144 )

Co-researcher	RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADULTS		
	Child, teacher, relationships	Making decisions	New possibilities
Julliet	Teachers were linked to the word boring (MM). She sometimes thought what the teacher was saying was wrong and wouldn't say anything. She described one teacher as petrifying. She wanted teachers to be consistent when enforcing rules. She was annoyed that some teachers thought they were better than children by treating children like they were 4 years old	In class she got to discuss and share her opinions, which she said weren't decisions.	She wanted to choose what subjects she did, how much of each subject and for students to have a say on how they learn with more interesting forms of information other than books (like computers, interactive whiteboards). She wanted to choose her teacher and desired younger teachers who understood children more than older ones
Cildru	Teachers control and are sometimes nice or mean (MM). She disliked unfair punishment like when she was rubbing off another child's writing on the blackboard and got detention	In school she got to choose classes however, did not always get to do them if there were not enough people. She could choose what clubs to join and what she did during lunch and recess. Cildru declared that she didn't make any decisions in class as the teachers decided where to sit, what to do and how fast to do it	Wanted more say for kids-subject choice and uniforms (MM). Wanted more choice on the classes she got to do. She also wanted to decide if she got punished or not.
Alice	Teachers control and are sometimes nice or mean (MM)	In class she chose what colour to paint something, whether to give a speech or performance at assembly and whether to talk to a teacher or not. She decided what bit of work to do in Art	Wanted more say for kids-subject choice and uniforms (MM). She wanted to decide what Design and Technology elect classes she got to do.
Penelope	Teachers expected her to cope with the homework workload and manage her time. Her Science teacher was passionate and she questioned him all the time. She thought teachers should be passionate about what they're doing	She got to choose her electives in Years 9, 11 and 12. At school she could choose to do any sports or instruments and who you make friends with.	Wanted learning to be more hands-on stuff. She also wanted to have a say on what non-fiction books they read in English by giving students a vote. She did note that the Board of Education decided on what she learnt. She wanted more child-friendly and fun assignments

<b>Co-researcher</b>	<b>Child, teacher, relationships</b>	<b>Making decisions</b>	<b>New possibilities</b>
Brice	Teachers control and are sometimes nice or mean (MM). Teachers do not tell children the purpose and relevance behind the learning.	He got to choose the sports he went to and three subjects. In class he chose which questions to answer first.	Wanted more say for kids-subject choice and uniforms (MM).
Arc	Teachers were linked to the word boring (MM). He wanted to be the teacher to discipline instead of being disciplined	He got to decide some subjects even though there were some rules to. He got to choose what events he did during breaks	He wanted to decide how much homework he got and more choice in the subjects he was able to do
Charleston	He was annoyed that a teacher only gave him one public speaking competition out of about 15 possible events	Got to make very few decisions, if any. He thought it was a pathetic system that children did not choose their class. He chose his electives in Year 8 and wanted drama and they weren't running it. He disliked the lack of resources and mixed ability of his music class	Wanted to choose the classes to go in and his teacher. He also proposed that the teacher may want to choose their students
Leroy	Described the teachers at his school as good because they encouraged learning and made it easy for him to concentrate	He got to choose electives and everything including his opinion. He said you don't always have to do something. In class he chose his answers on multiple choice quizzes	He wanted to be able to say no to writing something in his book that he already knew
Agent Sprat	Disliked that some teachers didn't want to teach his class. Described how some Year 7 teachers changed from being nice by handing out suspensions that created tensions and felt like these teachers had to be there. His Maths teacher made his class feel like dirt	Got to choose house captains – no decisions in class	Wanted learning to be fun with hands-on activities, even going to another room. He also thought students should be able to move to another class if they did not get along with their teacher
Tarco	Teachers were linked to the word boring (MM)	Did not get to make any decision in class	He wanted to decide whether to do the maths now or later
Semaj	The PD/H/PE teacher is good, fun and nice with positive encouragement and support. Thought it was funny to argue with a teacher	He got to choose a language in Year 8 and the curriculum in Year 11 and 12. He could choose if he joined the musical, band or the school sporting team. In class he chose what he did when he finished work	None
Hamish	Some teachers aim to show kids they're the boss.	He got to choose his participation in things like school musical and subject in ILP. In class he chose what topics and who his partner was.	Thought kids wanted to have free choice. He wanted to choose classes earlier in school.

Table 24: Data summary of the co-researchers' relationships with adults in schools