Transition Education, Student Contestation and the Production of Meaning: Possibilities and Limitations of Resistance Theories

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Transition Education, Student Contestation and the Production of Meaning: possibilities and limitations of resistance theories

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ABSTRACT One of the major developments within the sociology of education is the recovery of the role of human agency within what had previously been considered to be determining structures. This article looks at one aspect of such agency, namely the meaning production engaged in by a group of largely working-class students within transition programmes in three secondary schools in New Zealand. Their contestual industry in receiving, reinterpreting, re-creating and rejecting meanings provides valid spaces in which critical and conscientising education can occur. It is argued, however, that this same activity hardly warrants the optimism evident in contemporary educational discourse relating progressive change at the micro-level of the school to changes in the larger social formation. Some of the factors which subvert the transformative potential of contestual and resistant activity are therefore explored.

I. Introduction: resistance and the production of meaning

This article presents an ethnographic case-study of the messages given and received within transition-to-work programmes in three secondary schools in New Zealand. The central focus is the exploration of the significance of student responses to these messages for the development of a radical approach to education and pedagogy. In the search for a theoretical paradigm to inform the complex and creative fields of student responses to the inculcation of specific ideologies, the complementary insights of 'reproduction' and 'resistance' theories were found to contribute to the understanding of the process of acceptance, accommodation, modification and rejection of messages.

'Correspondence' or 'reproduction' theories—as developed and exemplified by the work of Bowles & Gintis (1976), for instance—have drawn on the contributions of French structuralist theoreticians such as Althusser and Bourdieu to emphasise the macro and structural dimensions of educational institutions in the context of society. Within this perspective, schools are considered to reproduce
both the forces and the relations of production in the interests of the capitalist class. The first schools 'achieved' by providing different classes and social groups with the knowledge and skills they needed to occupy their respective places in a labour force stratified by class, race and gender. As for the relations of production, these were reproduced mainly through the maintenance and development of a 'legitimate' ideology and set of behaviours and patterns—in the service of the dominant culture and its ideological interests.

A second and complementary tradition in radical educational scholarship—what has been loosely referred to as 'resistance theory(-ies)' (Aggleton & Whitty, 1985; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Viegas Fernandes, 1988)—has appropriated the advances made by reproduction perspectives over liberal theorising in linking education to economic, cultural and ideological processes on the one hand, and inequality on the other, but moving on from that to explore the role of human agency. Drawing mainly on the works of Gramsci and (some interpretations of) Althusser, resistance theories have de-emphasised orthodox Marxism's structural determinism—so evident in reproductive accounts—to stress instead "the contested nature of domination, the prerogatives of agency and voluntarism, the relative autonomy of some sectors or institutions of society, and the idea of hegemonic limits rather than determined necessity" (Burbules, 1986, p. 302).

Various ethnographic 'micro' accounts which placed the researcher inside the school (inter alia Willis, 1977; McRobbie, 1978; Connell et al., 1982; Anyon, 1983; Jones, 1986) revealed quite clearly that while mechanisms of social and cultural reproduction might be efficient, they are never completely or necessarily so, and that they always meet with elements of opposition. The link between reproduction and resistance theories has been clearly articulated by Viegas Fernandes (1988, p. 172) who points out that the more sophisticated our knowledge is of the ways in which schools carry out their social and cultural reproduction, "the easier it will be to define the spaces of possible intervention, the potentialities and limits of resistances to that reproduction".

This continuum—or, rather, dialectical relationship—between reproduction and transformation-oriented resistance is played out at various levels within the schools—in this particular study, it is the level of ideological inculcation which is portrayed. Through reproduction-oriented messages and structures, the schools in question attempt to define meanings and futures for groups of working-class students: through active contestation of such messages and structures, these students attempt to impose their own meanings and experiences on what the school has to offer. Thus, while reproduction theories help illuminate what the schools are about, resistance theories are better placed to account for the students' responses to the schools' practices, relations, curricula and messages.

It is this linkage which can do justice to the students' active negotiations of tensions and contradictions between their experience of home, leisure, school and the workplace on the one hand, and the structural constraints surrounding such activity on the other. However, before giving details of the reproduction and production of meaning on the part of students, it is important to give an account of some recent developments in the articulation of resistance theory. This will not only serve to establish a theoretical framework from which to interpret the subsequent ethnography, but also to present a dictionary of 'keywords' to establish a common semantic field for terms which have been frequently but
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idiosyncratically used, and which refer to the dynamics involved in the process of 'resistance'.

While early work within resistance theory has been marked by "a lack of intellectual rigor and an overdose of theoretical sloppiness" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 104), subsequent critiques have led to an increasingly sophisticated articulation of the concept of 'resistance', most notably in the work of Aggleton (1987) and more recently of Viegas Fernandes (1988). These authors and others have addressed some of resistance theory's weaknesses, among these being the tendency—clearly evident in Willis' (1977) work, for instance—to focus on class domination, without giving due attention to resistance against gender, racial and ethnic inequality. Resistance theorists have also been criticised for launching too readily into optimism without sufficiently articulating the constraints which limit and subvert the transformative potential of resistance. This lack of appreciation for the dialectical interplay between resistance on the one hand, and social and cultural reproduction on the other is evident in a relative lack of development in the identification of specific transformative spaces within schools. Neither has there been much evidence of the crucial move from theory to practice in the production of counter-hegemonic curricula and pedagogic practices which effectively challenge the reproduction of various forms of social inequality through schools.

In the search for a more precise articulation of resistance theory with transformative action, recent formulations have moved away from the initial near-euphoric and indiscriminate appellation of any and all oppositional behaviour within schools as representing 'resistance' and a challenge to capitalist social relations (cf. Hargreaves's critique, 1982). Instead, radical authors have now more soberly and cautiously begun to generate "a grammar of modes of challenge" (Aggleton & Whitty, 1985). Through a series of distinctions Viegas Fernandes (1988), for instance, draws on various authors working with resistance theories to distinguish first between "contestations" and "resistance", and then to qualify the latter term as "partial vs global" (addressing one or both levels of social and cultural reproduction), "potential vs effective" (in terms of provoking hegemonic or counter-hegemonic effects), "latent vs manifest" (when such resistance is subjective, or else expressed in attitudes, behaviours and actions which aim at counter-hegemonic objectives), and "individual vs collective". In each of these oppositions Viegas Fernandes (1988) identifies the second item as the most likely behaviour or attitude to lead to the explicit political goal of resistance theory, namely the transformation of social (division of labour along gender, class and race lines) and cultural (inculcation of dominant ideology) reproduction and the creation of more equitable structures [1].

Thus 'resistance' is likely to be more effective than 'contestations' in achieving this goal since it is defined with reference to modes of challenge directed against relations of power structuring relationships between groups. Both Aggleton (1987) and Viegas Fernandes (1988) draw on Bernstein's (1982) theory of classification and framing to distinguish between 'resistance' and 'contestations'. The first refers to "counter-hegemonic social attitudes, behaviours and actions aimed at weakening the classification among social categories and which are directed against the dominant power(s) and against those who exercise it (them), having as a purpose its (their) redistribution in a more equitative way" (Viegas Fernandes, 1988, p. 174). 'Contestations', on the other hand, refer to those
"protests, demands and provocations exclusively oriented against the principles of school control (school framing)" (Viegas Fernandes, 1988, p. 174). In Bernstein's formulation, social reproduction depends on the maintenance of insulation (strong classification) between categories; hence there is much more transformative potential in 'resistance', since this is directed at the source of social control, i.e. dominant power relations. The transformative potential of 'contestations' is weaker because these are not addressed at the principles of relations between categories, but at the principles of communication or particular sets of interactional practices in a particular location (e.g. school) which constitute the communicative context. At school, where strong classification often exists among teachers (transmitters) and students (acquirers), contestations would refer to those activities aimed at weakening the transmitters' control over, for instance, the selection, organisation and assessment of knowledge.

Aggleton (1987) points out that what might first be contestual may become resistant, and that in other instances contestations follow a reproductive logic by reinforcing existing power relations. Since most of the student responses to school and teacher messages documented in this ethnography had a contestual rather than resistant nature, it is important to point out that, following Viegas Fernandes (1988, p. 174), contestations are included within the boundaries of resistance theory because "when articulated with other social practices, in different contexts and situations, [they] can, in some cases, lead to the discovery and the challenge of the source of social control—the relationship of dominant power—and, as such, be changed into resistances".

The generation of a grammar of resistance is meant to help radical educators in their task of identifying student oppositional behaviour, evaluating its transformative potential, and politicising and organising the "penetrative consciousness" of individuals and groups who grasp aspects of the nature of power and control relations. These modes of challenge can be played out within the same set of power relations, such as the school ("within-modality effect": Aggleton, 1987), or else extending in their outcomes within different sets of power relations ("across-modality effect"). In other words, resistance theory looks at the wider social formation, holding that resistance which becomes collectively articulated and which finds expression in social action within one particular sphere can be transported to other sites (Bowles & Gintis, 1981).

This elaborated version of resistance theory serves as a backdrop against which the meaning production of various groups of students—described in ethnographic detail in section III of this article—can be highlighted and analysed in terms of its counter-hegemonic or reproductive logic. In a reflexive exercise in the final section, the data are critically examined in order to explore both the transformative promise and limits of resistance theory. At this point, however, it is important to give some details of the research and methodology background to contextualise both the data and the theoretical discussions of the first and final sections of this article.

II. The Study

The data utilised in this study draw from a larger ethnographic research project which the author undertook throughout 1986 in three secondary schools in a provincial city of the North Island of New Zealand (Sultana, 1987). The focus of
this study was to critically appraise the formal and informal school-to-work messages given by the structures, content and pedagogy prevalent within three rather different educational establishments, and the sorts of reception such messages were given by students. While Glaser & Strauss's (1967) Grounded Theory Methodology was utilised in the collection of data, the insights of the phenomenological roots of the 'new' sociology of education (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Schutz, 1971, 1972) were appropriated to move away from the positivistic approach to knowledge prevalent in the original research model.

The study also made use of the strategy pioneered by Osborne et al. (1982) in their Learning in Science Project (LISP), in that four particular phases structured the data collection. Firstly, the intended messages of schools and teachers were collected: this was done through a critical appraisal of texts, syllabi and other official material (e.g. schemes of work, school magazines and/or newspapers, celebratory publications for anniversaries marking School Foundation Day) published by the different schools, as well as through pre-lesson/unit accounts given by various teachers. Fifty teachers (23 female) were interviewed individually at least twice—often up to 10 or more times—throughout the year.

Secondly, the actual messages transmitted were noted. Such messages given by teachers were generally recorded by the researcher in classrooms, assembly halls and staffrooms, during parents' evenings, as well as on work exploration sites, school recreation camps and field trips. Occasionally, during interviews, students reported the messages that teachers gave them—in such cases, the researcher attempted to achieve 'triangulation' of evidence, having further interviews with other students and teachers as well as organising further observation sessions. In all, over 151 classroom sessions (including social studies, career and transition education programmes, English, history, economics and secretarial studies) were observed and analysed.

Thirdly, the nature of the reception afforded by students to such messages, i.e. the extent to which they accepted or rejected them, was given priority. 370 students (187 female) were interviewed in post-lesson/unit sessions either individually, or in groups which never exceeded five persons.

Finally, towards the end of the school year, teachers were invited to attend feedback sessions where the various mismatches noted between the transmission and reception of messages could be discussed in a critical manner. This action-research element of the enterprise provided an explicit space for the challenging of hegemonic ideas, using as basic material the data from the lived experiences of students.

The organisation of the analysis into 'intended', 'actual' and 'received' messages provides a more searching examination of the realities of the curriculum than does a lot of other research in this area. It moreover highlights the extent and dynamics of the resistance and contestation afforded by students to school messages. The crucial difference which distinguishes the LISP study from this is that the former generally takes the legitimacy of the given curriculum for granted. In contrast, 'Schooling for work in New Zealand' (Sultana, 1987) considers that schools are political sites involved in the construction and control of discourse, meaning and subjectivities, and that the meanings generated within such sites cannot be divorced from the socio-economic context in which they are situated (Giroux, 1982). The study therefore asks questions which are central to the 'new' sociology of education, attempting to make explicit the content, form,
structure and framing of what counts as knowledge in the classroom as well as whose interests this knowledge serves.

Such questions were explored in three secondary schools which were purposely chosen to represent different and contrasting educational climates. It was posited that this choice would maximise the possibility of the exposition of schools as sites of struggle over meaning, and that "the common-sense values and beliefs that guide and structure educational practice are not \textit{a priori} universals, but social constructions based on specific normative and political assumptions" (Giroux, 1982). Two of the schools, All Girls' High and Co-Ed High, were large state schools catering for most if not all the city's ethnic (mainly European, Maori, Pacific Island and Asian) and social class groups. The former school had a particularly developed understanding of feminist issues as affecting secondary schooling. The latter led the region in its attempts to develop a multicultural approach to education. All Boys' College differed from the other two in various ways: it was an integrated Catholic school and it catered for predominantly Pakeha (European) and middle-class males. It was also the smallest school in the sample, having a population of 450 compared to the 950 for the girls' school, and 1400 for the co-educational one.

As has already been intimated in the introductory section, this article focuses on the contestual activity of groups of students following only one particular curricular initiative. While in the larger study there were various instances of resistance and contestation of messages, in this context and due to limitations of the article genre, only one such set of episodes—that referring to meanings and messages transmitted, received and reconstructed within transition education programmes—is explored. These episodes are chosen because they reflect themes which were found to be more subtly communicated in the mainstream work education programmes, for it was observed that in times of "legitimation crisis" (Habermas, 1976), the covert curriculum and agenda often become overt. This is especially true of those structures which, like transition education programmes, serve a control function.

Also, it is mainly the kinds of contestations which students marshal against the inculcation of the dominant ideology that are described. Accounts at the other level of the reproduction of—or resistance/contestation to—the sexual and social (class/race) division of labour are explored in other contexts (cf. Sultana, 1988a, b, 1989a, b).

Data referring to transition education programmes were collected from seven teachers, 70 students, throughout 35 transition lessons, and over 50 visits to work exploration sites which included garages, restaurants, old peoples' homes, hospitals, textile factories, food and clothing stores, farms, veterinary clinics, and an airport.

III. Transition Education: the context for messages

Enough has been written about the official discourse surrounding within- and post-school transition education programmes [3] to justify the summary description of the transmission of messages and meanings, leaving the exploration in ethnographic data to the more relevant and revealing student contestations. In any case, the latter necessarily reflect the former, for in rejecting or modifying received messages, the transmitted messages become self-evident. This statement
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holds true for all except those meanings transmitted by what can be referred to as 'non-messages', or what Eisner (1985) calls the 'null curriculum'. Williams (1977) makes the point that within this 'selective tradition', silence is pregnant with meanings. In the larger study, students were on various occasions found to object to non-references to key issues in their lives [4].

Transition education programmes, both within and post-school [5], have burgeoned since the creation of mass youth unemployment in various countries, and it is in this wider context that they must be viewed [6]. The initial official discourse surrounding transition training—which, as will soon become evident, filtered down to the curriculum-making endeavours within the three schools in question—can be linked to the rise of a 'new vocationalism'—a set of educational agendas which hinge around the idea that the provision of continued in-school, and new post-school training and education programmes will provide a much closer link between schooling and work, as well as a more highly skilled, flexible and adaptable workforce. Such provisions are also seen by the 'new vocationalists' as a means to lessen unemployment since young people 'choose' training rather than work. Moreover, as young people become more highly trained, and as they explore various working sites, they will be better able to make choices about their employment.

Such a discourse serves the interests of a state in crisis. As Carnoy (1977) has pointed out, it is much easier to address youth and education and blame them for the crisis rather than look at the source and try to address the economy. In New Zealand too the state attempted to export its crisis outside the economic and political spheres, and various documents set out to formulate the problem of unemployment as a problem of young people and education. Scott et al.'s report on transition education provision states for instance that "Secondary schools need to ask why so many young people are leaving the school so obviously ill-prepared for adult life" (1985, p. 15). New Zealand employers, like their counterparts elsewhere, found young people to generally lack "one or more of the following: clear ideas on the career they wish to follow; motivation and job-seeking skills, realistic employment aspirations within their capacity and adequate numeracy and literacy" (New Zealand Employers' Federation, 1983, p. 2).

The transition programmes observed in the three schools in question were similar to transition programmes elsewhere [7] in that they revolved around a number of key ideas which structured the ensuing messages. These ideas and assumptions are introduced in a critical manner below so that the account of the students' reactions in the subsequent sections is appropriately contextualised.

(a) All three schools set out to identify students 'at risk' of unemployment. Young people were construed as being deficient in cognitive and social skills and therefore in need of 'compensatory' education. Even without addressing the thorny questions of whether valid and reliable criteria exist to correctly identify the 'at risk', or whether such an attempt is at all ethically justifiable, the separation of transition students from mainstream ones in itself constructs very negative meanings. Through its very form, transition education structures and promotes the separate school and reinforces the lower status of the 'non-academic' student.

This separate school has a very identifiable membership. In the three schools observed, over 90% of transition students shared a disillusionment with mainstream schooling, were eager to enter employment, and came from low socio-
economic backgrounds. Three were wards of the state, 12 wanted work in order to stop being a financial burden on the family, five were arrested throughout 1986 for shop-lifting or ‘converting’ cars, two joined the city’s street kids.

Many were Maori or Pacific Islanders. Of the 17 transition students at All Girls’ High, six were Maori and two Samoan; of the 41 transition students at Co-Ed High, 14 were Maori and one was Samoan. While all three schools set out to help transition students “develop in self-confidence and self-esteem”, the physical, symbolic and educational space they were allotted contradicted and foiled the declared humanistic intentions. As students from the mainstream observed, “Those on transition are mainly Maoris”, and “They're the rejects’ . . . that’s what we call them! The dumb class!” (Fieldnotes, 1/10/86, p. 1345).

(b) The deficit model described above in itself brings the problem of unemployment down to the individual level, and encourages a blame-the-victim approach. In the three schools observed, ‘Personal development’ took the form of the editing of the self to match the profile of a perfect prospective employee: the main agenda was that these students had to somehow change the way they acted, spoke, dressed and thought even for the tantalising promise of a job. Such an imposition of normative, stylistic and linguistic parameters, disabled young people, for their experiences and cultures were neither recognised nor made use of in the educational encounter.

(c) The creation of a separate space within the school often led to its appropriation by mainstream teachers for their own particular ends. Students who proved difficult to control in the mainstream classes were channelled to transition programmes, thus funnelling away those who consistently questioned the legitimacy of schooling. First for school, then for society generally, transition programmes functioned as a holding pen of the ‘unmotivated’ and the potential ‘delinquents’.

(d) Each transition programme observed had a classroom component and a work exploration component. During classroom sessions, transition teachers set out to offer their students a ‘relevant curriculum’. Teachers placed an emphasis on ‘preparation for adult life’, a focus which had several implications. They assumed unproblematically that they were knowledgeable about the realities of the ‘adult world’ these adolescents were about to enter. They also assumed that students’ lives were somehow irrelevant, preceding and differing from the real adult life. In a series of oppositional messages, students were told overtly and covertly that the referent was ‘adult behaviour’. While transition students were characterised as ‘immature’ and ‘irresponsible’, adults were good workers who gave “a day’s work for a day’s wages”, who co-operated with their employer and who, in their daily lives, upheld the status quo. This reified view of adults led to the prevalence of a notion of education which upheld the adapted person as the one and only model for prospective workers.

The attempt to provide a ‘relevant curriculum’ was also translated into lessons which were often characterised by minimal preparation and content. It disqualified students from bodies of abstract knowledge from which they could draw interpretations of their life experiences.

(e) Transition teachers presented the work exploration component of their programmes as an educational venture intended to help students discover which occupations they wanted to do. For this reason, teachers insisted on calling the project ‘work exploration’ rather than ‘work experience’, and changed the stu-
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dents’ placements every six weeks or so. Generally speaking, teachers not only failed to recognise the structuring forces which limit ‘choice’, but they also failed to penetrate the contradictory nature of their practices when they consistently placed students to ‘explore’ jobs in the secondary sector of the labour market, reproducing class, ethnic and gender divisions in the very jobs that were made available. Teachers were moreover often observed defining the ‘realistic’ and ‘appropriate’ occupational trajectories for their students.

(f) Since transition education is primarily concerned with the future relationship of young people to the production process, it would seem logical to expect the development of an approach which includes a critical analysis of the world of work. This world, however, was brought into the classroom in order to teach, reinforce and inculcate those attitudes which employers usually identify as valuable in workers. Compliance was therefore encouraged overtly—through injunctions that unless they learned to do as told, they would never be accepted for a job—and covertly—through a hierarchical student–teacher relationship and coercive and disciplinary pedagogic styles. Here was a programme which set out to be different from those offered in the mainstream, but which exhibited those familiar qualities of top-down management, the compulsory performance of tasks which had no real meaning or utility to the students, and the imposition of punishment. All were justified by transition teachers as necessary because through them, students were being prepared for the reality and demands of the work force. ‘Preparation for work’ in these terms became the moulding of correct behaviour and attitudes, so that these students could learn to fit into the established way of things.

In these programmes, with even more emphasis than those in the mainstream, teachers almost always presented students with a conservative picture of work, ideologically weighted towards the needs and criteria of employers. In this world, work was either very positive (self-fulfilling, professional work) or negative (factory work). It was normal and ‘common sense’ for work to be paid differentially and to be structured hierarchically. Employers were presented as benevolent beings who provided work and to whom employees owed not only their livelihood, but also their respect for, after all, employees depended on employers’ ‘mercy’ to gain employment in times of economic depression.

There was no analysis of industrial relations, of the rise of unemployment, of the conflict of interests between the employer class and the working and non-working classes, or of the conditions of work in New Zealand society. There was moreover hardly a hint that this world of work was not ‘natural’, or that alternative arrangements could be envisaged. As in the curricula of various other countries [8], the three New Zealand schools studied presented an idealised view of industry, urging students to foster an understanding—and acceptance—of the wealth-creation process, equating progress with industrial growth, consumerism and the new technology. While Co-Ed High and All Girls’ High teachers generally gave progressive messages, the first related to ethnic issues, the second to feminist ones, it was often the ‘industrial impulse’ rather than the ‘democratic’ one—to use a dichotomy most recently formulated by Carnoy & Levin (1985)—which gained the overwhelming priority.

Students and the Production of Meaning

The reception students gave to the above meanings and messages was observed to
have a temporal dimension: while at the start of the school year (i.e. February) students accepted many of the definitions and messages explicitly or implicitly communicated by the transition programmes, contestation was the rule by the end of the year.

In early interviews it became obvious that students owned 'the problem' and the implied label 'deficient'. They generally agreed that their vulnerable position on the fringes of school and of the labour market was entirely due to their lack of commitment to mainstream schooling: "We just kept getting into trouble, and didn't do school work" (Fieldnotes, 17/3/86, p. 415). Transition students therefore accepted the channelling out of the 'real school' as deserved and natural—that the problem was with them and not with the type of schooling they were receiving. They generally also accepted to defer their entry into the workforce in order to learn the cognitive and cultural skills which they were being told they lacked. Often they used the same vocabulary which their teachers used to indicate the qualities they lacked, and which they agreed to cultivate in order to get closer to the goal of employment which had so far eluded them. Moana, a Maori student following a Co-Ed High transition course, described how effective the programme was in changing her attitudes. Without that sort of training,

You get in a shitty mood, and you take it out on the boss. And then everything goes kaput eh! . . . Here they really try to help you change your attitude towards people, and how you dress, to try and . . . what did she call it? . . . Mature yourself or something? Now when I get brassed off at work, I just walk into the toilet and hit the wall . . . and then I come out. (Fieldnotes, 3/3/86, p. 288)

These students also generally accepted the blame-the-victim approach to unemployment encouraged by the very existence of transition programmes. Typical comments made by transition students were that "Most don't get jobs because they muck around too much" (Fieldnotes, 15/4/86, p. 606).

Contestation

This acceptance of the definition of the problem did not last long into the year, however. Students' negotiation of transition—its programmes and its messages—was above all characterised by contestation. Their contestation of messages, while remaining bound to the context of school control/framing, assumed various forms. Thus students were observed selecting, filtering, re-elaborating and reconstructing some messages in such a way as to affirm their dignity or their needs; other messages and meanings they rejected outright, opting instead for those meanings embedded in social sites and relations outside of the school. A number of the more important contestations at the level of ideological inculcation are considered in turn.

(a) Contestation of goals for transition. As Stronach & Weir (1983) have pointed out, many transition programmes started off with the intention of educating students to find, fit into and keep jobs. This focus changed when transition teachers faced the paradoxical situation of preparing students for jobs which, because of increasingly high levels of youth unemployment, simply were not there. Emphasis was therefore placed, as in the three schools observed, on 'personal develop-
ment’. Despite teachers’ intentions to redefine the goals of transition, students consistently emphasised the first and utilitarian goal, calling the programmes by their older name of ‘pre-employment’ rather than ‘transition’. All transition teachers observed insisted that their programmes were not to be used as “job-getting agencies” (Fieldnotes, 3/4/86, p. 536). However, students who joined the programme did so for two reasons: to get out of mainstream schooling and to get a job. In view of the latter goal, they looked towards work exploration and reconstructed the meaning of that experience in their favour. While teachers, at least at the level of official discourse, emphasised the educational nature of work exploration, seeking to give their students different experiences of labour so that they could then ‘choose’ their future, students looked at the whole enterprise as a back door to employment. Work exploration provided opportunities in two ways. First, it placed them on the shop floor, the site where the hiring of and firing from jobs in the secondary sector are often carried out. As one Co-Ed High student said: “Through the work experience, we might get the first chance. If someone leaves, you might be the first one they’ll try, because they know you” (Fieldnotes, 3/3/86, p. 280).

Secondly, each placement gave them a reference based on an evaluation of work habits and attitudes. The references were invaluable as powerful and convincing proof to employers of their standing as workers. Students who normally symbolically vented their anger and frustration with schooling on any form of paper, kept employers’ references neatly in envelopes. They knew that for the sorts of jobs they could aspire to, ‘attitudes’ mattered more than school grades. The reference would show “how you’re working . . . what you’re like”, “if you get to work on time, your attitudes and manners”, “how you adapt to the people, and how your personality is, because you might be a really bad-tempered person, and not able to take orders from your boss” (Fieldnotes, 3/3/86, p. 281).

Transition students were found to have developed a formula for job-getting, one which recognised the power of ‘experience’ and ‘contacts’. They thus reconstructed the meaning and goals of transition education in their favour. They were aware that their transition teachers knew many employers: indeed, teachers had whole lists of these so that they could place their students for work experience. Referring to one transition co-ordinator, a student said: “She knows a lot of people . . . she can get us jobs” (Fieldnotes, 26/9/86, p. 1310). In other words, these students knew they did not have the social capital—in terms of contacts with employers—to secure themselves a job. But they also recognised that the networks established by their transition teachers could act as a substitute. They hoped to gain employment more easily by riding, so to speak, on the comet’s tail of school contacts. While students might not have realised that transition programmes did not create jobs at the macro-level (Nash, 1984), at the level which counted for them—the individual level—the programme seemed to be unlocking jobs.

(b) Contestation of the targeting of transition. Teachers targeted their transition programmes at those believed to be ‘at risk’, i.e. non-academic, problem students who were believed to lack cultural and cognitive skills to survive in the world beyond school. Two groups of students contested this targeting, first those from the mainstream, and secondly those who had been chosen for the programmes.

Mainstream students felt that their school life revolved around the abstract and
the academic, and that they were almost totally divorced from the material and practical demands of life outside school. They compared themselves unfavourably with the "rough and ready" transition students, expressing anxiety about "coping with life's demands" such as banking, budgeting, car mechanics, filling a car with petrol. "You feel silly. That's part of what makes you scared, because you're afraid you're not going to cope when you're out there" (Fieldnotes, 18/3/86, p. 440).

Such comments, made at all three schools by senior, academic students, seem to suggest that transition knowledge may not have been aimed at those who needed it most. Interview data show that it was the academic, often middle-class and protected group of students who expressed the need for the sorts of skills and knowledge which transition education had to offer.

A second contestation came from the group of students who had been targeted as needing transition: these shared little of the anxiety academic students felt about facing life, for their material circumstances had thrown them pell-mell into it. What gave them cause for worry was not that they lacked the survival and living skills necessary to effect the transition from school to work, but rather that there were mysterious, impersonal and overwhelming forces preventing them from carrying out that all important transition. Their access to the wage, their need for independence and for relieving the financial burden felt by their families were all being threatened by unemployment. As one Co-Ed High Maori student said:

I look back at my parents...they pay the house, the food and the power for us. So I felt sorry and I said: 'I want to find a job, man, and help the family in paying things'. So I'm looking forward to getting a job. (Fieldnotes, 3/7/86, p. 291)

It was ironic to hear transition teachers lecturing about the road code to students who had been driving (and converting!) cars and heavy vehicles for months if not years; or teaching about flatting when many of them had been fending for themselves since their early teens; or be taught how to change car tyres, handle sexual relationships or give the correct change when they were past masters out of experience! On one occasion for instance, a transition teacher tried to quieten down the class in order to teach them about "the city's resources". Replied one student from the back of the class, winking at his friends and laughing: "I don't only know about them Miss...I know how to use them" (Fieldnotes, 28/7/86, p. 1017).

(c) Contestation of the label 'deficient'. Because transition students generally considered themselves capable of effecting the transition from school to work, given the chance to do so, they increasingly contested the implications embedded in the compensatory education their teachers were offering. The contestation was especially strident at All Boys' College, where students did not volunteer to join transition programmes but were, as a rule, referred by teachers. One such student described his efforts to get back to the mainstream, and to redefine himself as capable. He wanted "to show the Principal that I can do something at school...that I'm not as thick as he thinks" (Fieldnotes, 21/3/86, p. 477). Another student from the same school recounted his struggle to get himself out
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I've been trying to get out of transition ever since I was in the third form. This year I decided I was going to work really hard...bust my guts, and get out. They just stuff you there to get rid of you. It's like going down in quicksand! Basically, I can't get out and there's nobody to help you get out. (Fieldnotes, 23/7/86, p. 983)

(d) Contestation of the 'relevant curriculum'. Transition teachers' claim that their programmes were relevant to students' needs does not seem justifiable when one notes the extent of 'wagging' (truanting) indulged in by students, or their obvious show of lack of interest when they consistently strolled in late into the classroom. Notebooks in which students were supposed to keep the useful knowledge learned during the transition sessions were either non-existent or in tatters by the end of the year. Not only was the transition curriculum generally considered to be irrelevant by students, but they also found that it failed to acknowledge central aspects of their lives and cultures. This applied to their use of language, their dress and manners, their attitudes and behaviours. One said:

For me, I have to swear to get my point across. Like, if I'm really hecked off or something, I don't go around saying 'Oh golly jeeze!' and all this...I just go 'Fuck me!'...because that's the only way I know of getting my point across at the moment...And that's not accepted really. (Fieldnotes, 15/4/86, p. 611)

The general insensitivity shown towards this and other elements of working class youth culture ended up by defeating the humanistic aims so fundamental to the discourse surrounding transition education. By highlighting supposed defects, compensatory education strategies destroy rather than encourage self-confidence and esteem:

Claire: It gets really annoying when in class we're put down all the time...

Denise: And when you're going out to work and that, that's not teaching you, sort of...if you're being put down all the time, saying 'Shut up', you know, because it's not right...then you're really not going to have any confidence, or the initiative to go out and work, because you're scared that you'll always be put down...it's not the best thing to boost us up a bit, you know. (Fieldnotes, 2/5/86, p. 695)

Transition students found various aspects of the relevant curriculum—such as job interview techniques and skills—"common sense", that if one didn't know about that "you must be so bloody thick it's unbelievable!" (Fieldnotes, 2/5/86, p. 704). The transition curriculum content was moreover considered to be at times crucially "off the mark" on a number of issues, and transition teachers were often thought to be "not clued in". Students felt, for instance, that their transition teachers were wrong when they put so much emphasis on neat and correct letter writing as a job application technique. They go their jobs differently: "You don't prepare all that stuff...all those letters and stuff...You go up to people...If they know you, then you're pretty well right" (Fieldnotes, 9/10/86, p. 1442).

The lack of relevance of the transition curriculum is clearly described by students from All Boys' College in the following excerpt which is quoted at length
because it captures the shop-floor culture in which these particular students lived, and which none of the teachers seemed to appreciate. Paul works as a panel beater during his work exploration sessions, Kevin is a sprayer and general help at a private airport, and Emmy is a 'hand' with a house removal firm.

**Paul:** I'm treated like one of them... they call me names and everything, and I know them really well now.

**Kevin:** You've got to sort of 'blend in'. You've got to do what they do, otherwise you're rejected by the gang. Like when they send you for an errand, you can't just say: 'I don't know where it is'. You've got to try and find out.

**Emmy:** And you've got to swear too. At school you're not allowed to swear. But there you can do whatever you want to... you just swear and 'f' 'f' 'f' one after the other for half an hour if you want to... nobody would mind.

**Paul:** Because you're not with people your own age, but, you know, with fellas who know everything, done everything.

**Emmy:** Yeah... and when we're in the truck and they stop for a beer, and I say 'Hell! I can't' because I'm under age, they look at me... a girl and all the fellas fling off, so you fling off and try to do better. You start walking after her and all this... It's really pervert at times!

**R.S.:** At school, in transition, you are told a lot about work aren't you?

**Kevin:** Yeah... but you don't take no notice of that! 'Be on your best behaviour, otherwise they'll tell us!' But everybody gives me a hard time, so I give them just as much back, and they reckon I really work well.

(Fieldnotes, 21/3/86, pp. 480-484)

Such an excerpt reveals transition teachers' inaccurate perceptions of the real world of work. It shows the real stuff which 'transition-to-work' entails—where for boys it is often through a trial-by-maleness that they have to prove their worth by participating in sexist and macho-type behaviour. It also reveals that these students perceive the transition curriculum as largely irrelevant and inaccurate, located as it is in cultural values and realities different from those that they experience in their everyday lives. Moreover, rather than lacking an appreciation of the world of work as the discourse of transition programmes assumes, these students have a lively, and from their point of view, realistic understanding of it. For them, as for transition students in other schools, the only positive thing about the transition meetings at school was that through them they could satisfy their needs for companionship and rest. When asked whether they enjoyed coming to transition classes, one replied: "Yes! Working for eight hours a day makes you tired!" (Fieldnotes, 3/3/86, p. 296).

(c) Contestation of work exploration. It was suggested earlier that transition students liked the days on work exploration most of all, not particularly for any educational returns, but because they felt that it might lead to a job. The fact that they were not paid for long hours of work and effort did not seem to pose a problem
as long as there was what they thought to be a fair exchange of goods: free work in return for a reference, possibly a job, and time out of school. So, as a student put it, "In a way, they're helping you and you're helping them... in a way, it's a fair deal" (Fieldnotes, 2/5/86, p. 692). So, when jobs did not materialise after a length of time in free labour, contestation to work exploration became more and more pronounced. Some students felt that employers were exploiting them, and the fact that they were ready to put up with personal and financial exploitation for the tantalising expectation of a job did not extinguish the students' sense of injustice and anger:

**Shawn:** I just don't like watching my mates getting their pay. I just look away and hope they'd come to me and offer me just five dollars. You work for eight hours for three days... for nothing.

**Fred:** I hate it when sometimes... when they get you to do the dirty work. Like one of them spills oil in the garage, and 'Hey!' they go, 'Come here! Clean this up!'... And I hate that. They're sort of using you. (Fieldnotes, 3/3/86, p. 289)

Some of the problems with personal exploitation here refer to processes frequently found on the shop floor, where the junior is given a hard time and is often assigned the 'mundane' jobs to do as a sort of initiation into the workforce. However, students, changing their work site every six weeks, had to go through this initiation ordeal over and over again, as if rehearsing a passion play without the salvation of a permanent job ever in sight. Michelle became very bored "stamping about a thousand envelopes a day" (Fieldnotes, 10/10/86, p. 1462). Adriana was not allowed to serve customers in the boutique; she just stored boxes at the back of the shop.

Students felt that work exploration handsomely served the needs of employers. The latter were keen to get this source of free labour. The manager of a large retail store told one transition teacher enquiring about the progress of a student: "I don't want to sound mercenary, but if you have more students to send, we would be pleased to have them" (Fieldnotes, 27/3/86, p. 523). Denise, a transition student from All Girls' High, recounted how at her placement, a restaurant in town, there were three transition students from other city schools. She commented: "I reckon employers and firms get it sweet out of these courses. They get all their work done free... it's slave labour!" (Fieldnotes, 2/5/86, p. 706).

**IV. Discussion**

The extent of contestation documented within one particular type of educational programme provides important empirical evidence to buttress theoretical claims that schools are sites of struggle over meaning. Despite the 'banking' nature of the education offered within the three schools observed, students refused to be the passive receptacles of knowledge their teachers willed them to be. Rather, as Gramsci noted (Entwistle, 1979, p. 66), learners are active beings, capable of restructuring the knowledge they receive and using it for their own ends. The contestation engaged in by these transition students confirms Gramsci's belief that students refashion knowledge according to their individual conscious-
ness which reflect the social and cultural relations to which they are exposed (Gramsci, 1971, p. 35).

It would be facile at this point to argue—as well one might—that the fact that students are “active theory builders and relatively autonomous, certainly active participants in their own development” (Hogan, 1982, p. 62) presents an open door through which critical education can be introduced. While such conclusions [9] are undeniably more optimistic than reproductive accounts, and they do indeed speak with a “language of possibility” (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985) regarding the establishing of more equitable and democratic social arrangements within and outside school, resistance theorists need to be more specific about their effectiveness in bringing about such progressive change. There have been too many ‘Monday morning chapters’ which conclude with a rousing appeal enthusing over the resistances and contestations successfully identified by the ethnographer, while one is left almost entirely in the dark as to whether these spaces, these cracks in the structure, do actually modify if not radically transform reality in favour of progressive ends.

Possibilities

It is on both the possibilities and limitations of resistance theory that I would like to focus in my discussion and conclusion. Starting with the possibilities first, the action research phase of the project made ample use of the lived experiences of students within and outside the school, so that the ethnographic material became a channel for the students’ voice, otherwise conspicuous by its absence in teacher deliberations about school policy and practice.

Within the three educational communities there were varied responses by teachers and school principals as well as boards of governors to feedback sessions regarding not only transition education programmes, but wider questions relating education to power and politics. At All Boys’ College, the principal accepted most if not all the critiques made by the researcher, but admitted that he had little hope of engaging his conservative staff and even more traditional board of governors in a critical dialogue with texts from the ethnography. However, the damaging effects of transition courses and the extent to which they acted as selective structures channelling low-achievers into a separate, low-status space with the school were confronted. Excerpts from interviews with students helped to highlight problems of elitism and racism within the school, and educational programmes aimed at fostering biculturalism were planned as a direct result of the research study.

Following various feedback sessions, Co-Ed High staff decided to use the research data to guide them in moving from the liberal humanism which inspired their transition programmes as well as most of their other educational practices to a more progressive and critical mode of schooling. A teacher made the following comment:

Yes, I’ve got to agree with you... We mean well but we’re too wishy washy, not facing up to the hard facts, not sufficiently analysing the underlying patterns that cause our problems. (Feedback Fieldnotes, 12/3/87)

All Girls’ High staff were especially resistant to critique, initially suggesting that
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the researcher had not been "objective", and that he had interviewed the "wrong students". Various ethnographic examples, similar to the ones reported in this study, were critically discussed with small groups of teachers in turn, leading to a recognition of the limits of the dominant liberal discourse at school, and the structural violence perpetrated unawaresly on groups of students identified by their class and ethnicity. While the researcher cannot claim total responsibility for subsequent changes, it is significant to note that in the year following the research project, trade union education became an important component of work education courses and bicultural classes were introduced.

Perhaps it is at this micro-level that the impact of resistance theory seems to be most felt. Pollard (1984) is of the opinion that this is realistic when taking into consideration the very nature of ethnographic work, which the culturalist roots of resistance theory encourage. The movement towards "discursive consciousness" (Giddens, 1976) in itself makes an immediate and particular contribution: being with teachers, talking to teachers, working with teachers—these are essential if a researcher wishes to influence school practices. Apple (1982) has expressed the view that impacting at the micro-level is in itself a correct strategy because of the need to develop counter-hegemonic activity as a social movement in workplaces such as schools and classrooms. The question is whether the concerted efforts of transformative researchers working in a variety of educational settings are actually bringing about greater scholastic and social change agendas which resistance theory ambitiously sets out to achieve.

Constraints

The contention in this article is not that resistance theory has no value in bringing about change, but rather that there are several constraining factors which to a greater or lesser extent subvert the potential that the theory has. This recognition need not lead to a language of pessimism which Freire (1972) identifies with structure-maintenance attitudes, but rather it ought to lead to a politically acute and realistic evaluation of the theory so that there is an advance forward. There have been various indications that all is not well with radical academic practice as it is currently being formulated. Ethnographers have consistently pointed out that students' oppositional behaviour—the key element providing the energy for the unleashing of transformative activity—often follows the logic of reproduction in its rejection of intellectual work. As Willis (1977) and McRobbie (1978) among others have suggested, such a rejection signifies the loss by working-class students of an opportunity to decode the ideologies and structures that constrain them, as well as to break out of the reproductive track regarding their future labour-market positions.

There is also a growing sense of impatience with the apparent inability of work within the resistance theory mode to actually come up with the promised results. One wonders whether other ethnographers have questioned—as the present one has—the justification of the expenditure of so much time, money and effort in this kind of research when compared to the actual change in school practice that is brought about. This might partly be a problem of methodology. Burbules (1986) notes that there is a need to move "from accounts that seek to analyze resistance, and the possibilities of effective resistance, to those that seek to promote resistance", in itself a crucial development both at a theoretical level and
a political level. However, one wonders how many such researchers would be allowed to do that sort of work within educational establishments!

The same sense of urgency regarding direct political action within schools can be discerned in the recent work of Freire. The author of the ‘dialogic’ and ‘non-directive’ approach to education has, in his latest publication, unequivocally stated that when the educator begins the dialogue, “he or she knows a great deal, first in terms of knowledge and second in terms of the horizons that she or he wants to get to” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 103). This is a significant departure from the much less directive concept of the teacher–student’s introduction of ‘hinged themes’ in the educational encounter, as described in Freire’s best known work (Freire, 1972, p. 92).

A politically direct approach to education would certainly be more acceptable to oppressed groups within schools—it is no wonder that in New Zealand, for instance, Maori educators, after an initial investment of hope in ‘new’ sociology perspectives, have now turned to what can only be called ‘revolutionary change’ approaches rather than reformist ones, clamouring for the resources and the right to organise their own separate schooling and economic development (Walker, 1984; Sharples, 1986). While radical academics might be willing to wait patiently for change, those who suffer the material consequences of oppressive schooling might want more results, more quickly, and with more certainty.

There are rumblings too from other quarters within the radical camp: if Whitty (1987) dismisses Lauder et al.’s (1986) critique, he does appear to agree with those authors’ major point, namely that, in Whitty’s own words, “there remain major problems in linking explanatory theory to radical practice” (p. 114). Lauder et al.’s dissent with the idealism surrounding the concept of resistance is symptomatic of a wider query about the optimistic claims of resistance theory. Nash (1987, p. 39) refers to this “hopelessly romantic” and “compulsory optimism”, due to a “political ethics of intention” which insists in believing that “if the theory is correct the practice must be adequate and its effects historically inevitable”. Wexler et al. (1987) go one step further, suggesting that critical pedagogy may actually operate to replace politics. They argue that “the harm is that in the name of change-interested critique, the meaning of education is turned away from historical practical action” (p. 229).

A symptom of the impasse that resistance theory is currently facing is the theoreticism of a number of its exponents, a retrenchment in theory and grammar/dictionary production of terminology (Vieges Fernandes, 1988, provides a most recent example) rather than reports of successful transformative action resulting from resistance and contestation. If parallels can be drawn with literary fields, the predominance of grammars and dictionaries indicates the drying up of creative inspiration. Artemus Ward (1872) catches the meaning of what is being suggested in his question: “Why care for grammar as long as we are good?”

The following are some of the most prominent constraints which were noted for their ability to limit and on occasion totally subvert the transformative potential of the active part students played in creating meanings.

(a) Contestations such as those described in the ethnographic section above were noted to have an accommodatory function in that they lock students and teachers in oppositional stances, with members of each camp separately creating meanings to suit personal needs without ever coming together to critically examine their disparate experiences. Since meanings can be developed in isola-
tion within the same social field, the illusion of communication can be sustained in the very midst of dissension.

(b) As noted in the Introduction, resistance theory needs the help of politically literate educators to help students realise the political potential of their resistant and contestual activity. For a number of reasons, this necessary dependence on teachers is a critically weak foundation for resistance theory to build on. Even without making appeal to structuralist–functionalist theories of the class-location of teachers and their ultimate allegiance to the middle classes, it is naive in the extreme to expect teachers to encourage activities which will rock their routinised, 'recipe' knowledge at a time when so much else in their professional life is being so extensively questioned. As one teacher said after the present researcher suggested forms of critical education and pedagogy as alternative practice: "If we make it so obvious to the students that the problem is with the system, then we're going to have a lot of angry young people on our hands" (Fieldnotes, 11/6/87).

Data from the project reported in this study do not uphold the hopes, like those expressed by Cole (1984) for instance, that the deepening legitimation crisis will help teachers pass from 'practical' to 'discursive' consciousness. Many were observed to be withdrawing into technicist views of education, investing their energies in surviving rather than in creatively engaging in a critical appraisal of their work.

(c) Another constraint which was noted to consistently abort the transformative potential of the contestations and meaning-making of both students and teachers was the crucial question of livelihood. The recognition of the absolute value of having and keeping a job, and especially so in a time of crisis (Wilson & Wyn, 1983), meant that individuals privatised—rather than politicised—their contestation out of fear of jeopardising access to a job. The following of resistance theory to its logical end requires a readiness to oppose 'capital rights' at a moment when the employing class is in a particularly strong position. This demands a degree of courage which few can be expected to muster. Even the most progressive teacher observed throughout the year felt that critical education and contestation could, in practice, entrap individuals in peripheral positions of the labour market. She spoke of this dilemma, referring to a student who had accepted many of her progressive messages and who, on finding herself in the workforce, "was unable to tolerate the bullshit, and she's having real difficulties fitting into work structures which are going to say 'You must suppress yourself'." She concluded:

If you don't prepare kids to accept their lot, then when they go out to work, they're actually going to have some really serious problems... It is not our job to produce a person who fits nicely into the conveyor belt, and yet, if they want to survive, they will have to fit. (Fieldnotes, 3/10/86, p. 1392)

(d) Related to the notion of livelihood is the wider notion of structural economic constraints on contestual activity. Even when schools followed a transformative agenda—at Co-Ed High in favour of Maori and Pacific Island students, and at All Girls' High in favour of the access of female students to high status, traditionally male enclaves—the class, gender and ethnic division of labour halted the transformation, keeping it within the confines of the school. Students were thus aware that while progressive schooling might influence and change their ideas, it did not necessarily have the same effect on labour markets [11]. Even if
the school does influence students to form new attitudes and to envisage new life plans, structural processes can continue to prevent school success from being translated into a different power and status structure in the overall economy (Yates, 1985).

If, at the micro-level, resistant and contestual activity allow a certain degree of optimism—in terms, for instance, of their exploitation by radical researchers to give students and teachers a political conscience—the chances that any of the resulting transformative change will be exported from the school to other sites within the public sphere appear to be rather slim. The increasing awareness of the relative weakness of resistance theory at the macro-level need not necessarily signify its demise: it does signal the need, however, for critical educators and researchers to acknowledge that the cracks which resistance opens up in the structure are often swiftly and efficiently repaired, and that the edifice which has proven so resilient as to withstand such shocks as those inflicted by massive unemployment needs much more direct political action if it is to be moved. Gramsci's well-known and oft-quoted phrase regarding the subjective state of an organic intellectual, one guided by a "pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will", needs perhaps to be grafted onto a realism regarding the body politic, a realism leading not to compromise but rather to more specific and effective transformative strategies within and outside of schools.

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NOTES

[1] Walker (1986) suggests, however, that in the long run, hidden resistance is more effective than that which is manifest because the latter generally leads to the students' jettisoning of investment in education, and hence jeopardising access to knowledge and skills which may allow them to move away from reproductive tracks vis-à-vis occupational trajectories. Those students whose resistance is latent 'comply' with a resistant spirit, go through the system successfully and—like Gramsci's 'organic intellectuals'—are better placed to transform that very same system.

[2] In New Zealand, private schools became integrated into the state educational system in 1975. Under the Integration Act, private schools receive financial aid from the state, are supervised by State School Inspectors, and are allowed to keep their 'special character'.


[4] For a fuller account of the significance of this logic of non-events, where it is in the absence of certain messages that ideology is made manifest, see Sultana (1988a).

[5] New Zealand has generally imported its educational models and structures from Britain (Cumming & Cumming, 1978), its 'Mother Country'. Its versions of post-school and within-school training and transition schemes have very similar declared aims and strategies, a similar formula-
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In New Zealand, youths constitute the single largest group who are registered unemployed. Teenagers in fact represent 16% of the working-age population but make up nearly 40% of the registered unemployed. Unemployment is also structured along race and gender lines. Almost 15% of the Maori labour force are unemployed, against 6% of non-Maori (Statistics Department, 1986). Forty-nine per cent of Maori students become unemployed on leaving school (Department of Labour, 1984). Preliminary figures for the 1986 Census (Statistics Department, 1986) show that overall, the unemployment rate for women is currently 9%, for men 5.2%.


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