Aspiration, Abjection and Precariousness: The Neo-Liberal Educator's desire for compliance.

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Abstract:	Aspiration has come to play a central role in the British Government's approach to educational underachievement. This paper revisits research conducted in the 1970s by Paul Corrigan (1979) and Paul Willis (1977) to examine the impact of neo-liberalism on the school life of young teenagers. The behaviours of working class children as described by Corrigan and Willis have become increasingly regarded as problematical by policy makers and school leaders. This paper discusses the impact of the measures to enhance 'student aspiration' by using quality assurance measures such as benchmarking. The paper explores how teenagers now live much more abject and precarious lives than the teenagers that Willis and Corrigan investigated. The conclusion reached is that in an education context abjection is imposed on those people who do not fit into the regulatory ideal of achievement via aspiration. The mechanisms that help to bring about this precarious life are identified with reference to Foucault, Kristeva, Agamben and Butler. Educational research into leadership, school improvement and school effectiveness is said to have been complicit in the facilitation of neo-liberal practice into school life and effective schools are schools that are effective in achieving neo-liberal objectives.

Aspiration, Abjection and Precariousness: The Neoliberal Educator's desire for compliance.

There is a body of philosophical work derived from people such as Julia Kristeva, Georgio Agamben and Judith Butler, that indicates that life under neoliberalism has become increasingly precarious; characterised by a greater sense of abjection, feelings of liminality and uncertainty. However, there has been only limited empirical research into abjection as a lived process within an educational context. In the 1970s Paul Willis and Paul Corrigan cast new light on how working class children made the transition from school to work. In the process of doing this both Willis and Corrigan described forms of resistance in school and the processes of identity formation working class boys embraced. In contrast to the schools described by Willis and Corrigan, one of the central roles of the neoliberal school is to undermine the processes by which working class children traditionally adopted a working-class culture and identity. Such forms of behaviour that Willis and Corrigan described would not be tolerated in school today and such forms of behaviour would now be seen as a form of low aspiration embedded in personal failing.

Although Kristeva, Agamben and Butler address very different concerns, elements of their work can be brought together to explain that the state has a preferred way in which it would like the subjectivity of the child in school to develop. Throughout the whole of their school life young people are subjected to forms regimentation devised by those in power, penetrating their very bodies, forcing them to internalize new habits of conduct. All children in school are subjected to forms of regulation and surveillance and pupils who are seen to be without ambition will be identified and subjected to support to help them improve by enhancing 'aspiration'. Those children who choose to reject that support, and choose not to embrace improvement run the risk of falling into precariousness and abjection.

The aim of this paper is to focus on the use of the term 'aspiration' in current British Government education policy and to draw upon what Agamben, Kristeva, Butler and others have said about abjection and precariousness, to identify the role of 'aspiration' in the transition from stability to precariousness and to suggest how precariousness is propagated and maintained in the lives of students and teachers.

Low aspiration is often identified in British Government policy documents as the root cause of underachievement. Michael Wilshaw, in his then role as head of OFSTED explained: "Poverty is no longer an excuse for poor performance"(Wilshaw 2013:3). Wilshaw goes on to state that only 35% of white girls from low income households and 26% of white boys achieved 5 GCSEs at grades A*- C. Wilshaw states that there is no reason why such pupils should not be able to achieve, and he broadly blames their failure on a lack of aspiration. Wilshaw was also reported to have said:

"Boys from white working-class families are growing up with no hope of a decent education or career because of an 'anti-school culture' …. generations of children in deprived areas are doomed to underachieve, thanks to an erosion of traditional community values and parents failing to set boundaries" (Roberts 2012 no page number).

Wilshaw does not view the rejection of opportunities the school offers as a legitimate choice by working class pupils or that articulating that choice to be appropriate expression of their pupil voice. Wilshaw's simple division of the school population in high and low aspirers and his rejection of the working-class child's voice, in Agamben's terms operates in schools, as a sovereign exception. The state decides which student voice is illegitimate and those people who choose a life that rejects the school's conception of aspiration are seen as falling outside of legitimate social life. In policy documents there is a stability of representational practice in relation to aspiration and as such the ideas presented are not solely the ideas of any one individual author. Social relations impinge upon interpretation, speech and text and this imposition and exclusion allows other voices to be silenced by institutional means and their speaker encouraged to rethink their interpretation. Underpinning

Wilshaw's observation are several assumptions that are common within neoliberal approaches to education, as Prideaux explains, such approaches: "rely upon a belief that a morally acceptable social generation of 'motivation'—through the provision of 'opportunity'— can sufficiently fuel and satisfy 'aspiration' to inspire a renewed social order based on feelings of 'obligation' alongside those of 'responsibility' … each show a conscious concern with order and norm. In this way, it is presumed that the extreme inequities of a polarized society could be overcome with a concomitant attainment of 'social cohesion' … order and norm thus relate to a process of exclusion and a superficial appearance of 'self-marginalisation'" (Prideaux, 2001:86).

It is assumed that the parents of white working class boys underemphasise the importance of 'self-crafting' as the route to social and economic progress. Such parents are a threat to the moral economy and fail their children.

Aspiration is understood in terms of fulfilling ambition, achieving, improving and developing the confidence needed to achieve personal, academic, and career goals. There is also the underpinning assumption that to be without aspiration is to lead a life without value or meaning and with an underpinning feeling of helplessness. However, aspiration does not have a single meaning but depends upon a range of contextual features, such as power, that guide interpretation.

There are surface regularities that are organised around and make continual reference to 'aspiration' within policy documents and statements about good practice in schools. The Green Paper 'Support and Aspiration' (2011) for example contains both the cause of problems and possible solutions to underachievement. The account of aspiration contained within the Green Paper (2011) together with several policy documents, guidance for good practice and political speeches upholds a distinct understanding of the meaning and significance of aspiration and the problems that come about when aspiration is not present.

In May 2015, the British Government published a statement which explained that children from poorer households are: "far less likely to get good GCSE results. Attainment statistics published in January 2014 show that in 2013 37.9% of pupils who qualified for free school meals got 5 GCSEs, including English and mathematics at A* to C, compared with 64.6% of pupils who do not qualify" (DfE 2015:2). The statement went on to explain that: "it is unacceptable for children's success to be determined by their social circumstances" and that the Government "intend to raise levels of achievement for all disadvantaged pupils and to close the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers" (DfE 2015:2).

However, for the Government this "vast gap between rich and poor is not pre-ordained" and in the White Paper 'The importance of teaching' (DfE 2010) gives the examples of Finland and Canada where the attainment gap between social classes is much less significant. The White Paper also points to the example in United Kingdom of: "Chinese girls on free school meals for example – who significantly outperform the national average" (DfE 2010:30).

In the Government's 'aspirational approach' (DfE 2010:30) to education, the role of the education system is to enhance social mobility chances and raise young people's aspirations. This 'aspirational approach' is based upon the assumptions that social background does not shape or determine educational outcomes and that the low aspirations are the key factor preventing any student from succeeding. Government policy is also based upon the assumption that teachers are responsible for the motivation of the students they teach and the 'good' teacher can raise aspiration.

'Support and Aspiration' (2011) focused on children and young people with physical impairment and additional learning needs however assumptions are made about the aspirations of all students and this provides a benchmark for judging student performance. The Green Paper is based upon the assumption that aspirations and hopes all the children and young people are rooted in a: "desire to become … independent and successful in their chosen future, and, to the greatest extent possible, the author of their own life story" (DfE 2011:2).

Poor quality teaching is identified as a central factor in a student's underachievement: "families are made to put up with a culture of low expectations about what their child can achieve at school" (DfE 2011:4). This approach was more fully explained in 'The Importance of Teaching' (2010): "we will introduce an indicator in performance tables which will give parents clear information on the progress of the lowest attaining pupils" (DfE 2010:29). Schools and colleges should generate: "a strong sense of aspiration for all children" and "Good teachers instil an ethos where aspiration is the best reason for children to avoid harmful behaviour" (DfE 2010:29).

For the Government, low aspiration is deeply embedded in some communities: "In far too many communities there is a deeply embedded culture of low aspiration that is strongly tied to long-term unemployment" (DfE 2010:29). If unchecked, such communities can generate: "sink schools with chronically low aspirations, poor behaviour and a culture of failure" (DfE 2010:51).

In Agamben's terms, the measures that the Government announced to enhance levels of achievement focus on the use of quality assurance measures and make use of forms of audit to underpin discursive structures that pressure teachers to follow the government's aspirational approach including:

- Imposing a requirement on all schools to publish details on how they are using the pupil premium and the impact it is having.
- Schools will be held accountable "for the achievement of disadvantaged pupils through Ofsted inspections and performance tables" (DfE 2010:45).
- "performance tables can reward this raising of aspirations" (DfE 2010:45).
- Personal Social Health and Economic (PSHE) education can be used to highlight "the importance of respecting individual autonomy" (DfE 2010:45).
- "We will benchmark our pupils' performance against the best" (DfE 2010:45).

- The Government are also of the view that Academies "help raise aspirations" (DfE 2010:63) and avoid the generation of "sink schools with chronically low aspirations, poor behaviour and a culture of failure" (DfE 2010:51).

The British Government's Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has also expressed concern about underachievement in schools. In a statement DfBIS explained that excellence in teaching matters in terms of both a student's attainment and enhancing social mobility chances. For students to fulfil their aspirations they need: "accessible and clear information to judge teaching quality across courses and disciplines" (DfBIS 2015:18). Moreover: "It is particularly important to help pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds understand their choices because their family and social networks can lack the experience and knowledge to help them achieve their aspirations" (DfBIS 2016:57). Moreover, inequality will only be reduced if "more students fulfil their aspirations and progress on into their chosen careers. Excellent teaching needs to flourish across the sector; lacklustre teaching and unacceptable variability in quality need to be addressed" (DfBIS 2016:13).

DfBIS research indicates that: "aspirations and attitudes play a significant role in determining the application rate of the white male disadvantaged group to higher education … White disadvantaged young people, male and female, are more likely than their disadvantaged BME counterparts to want to leave full time education; have poorer attitudes towards school and their academic work; believe that the best jobs do not necessarily go to those who have been to university; and say that it is harder for them to improve things for themselves compared to their parents" (DfBIS 2016: 37).

Lord Young (2014) in his report 'Enterprise for all: The relevance of enterprise in education' explained: "My concern is to do as much for young people who leave school with low aspirations that blight the rest of their days as to broaden the horizons of those who have done well" (Young 2014:15).

Aspirational discourse

Drawing upon Kristeva's notion of intertextuality and Foucault's concepts of episteme, statement, discourse, archive, genealogy. Intertextuality becomes not simply the way in which texts are read through other texts but acts as a mechanism for discursive change and impacts on the redefined discourse of individuals. How we interpret objects and events and set them within systems of meaning is dependent on discursive structures. It is the discursive structure that defines the field of vision and makes something significant. From this perspective the government's aspirational discourse arranges the vision into a narrative and it is difficult to think outside of the narrative if that narrative is supported by institutional and cultural organisations. Statements are ways of speaking or texts that are presented as 'serious' and contain a truth claim. Discursive systems about underachievement change over time and as such our understanding of the real changes with it. The episteme is a set of statements that are brought together in discursive structures, in this case which formulates a culture, or a system of institutional support for the idea that low aspiration leads to failure. It is these systems of support which allow us to think about issues in a legitimate fashion. Discourse underpins practice in that it shapes the way we think about underachievement. This may not be a true interpretation of the 'real' but an it an interpretation that is regarded as convincing.

Abjection is not simply an enduring role imposed on an exploited and unknowing victim; abjection involves the neoliberal state actively sustaining a social symbolic network in which the victim finds their subjectivity is exposed to a 'constituting' set of processes potentially leading to a 'constituted' identity. The neoliberal state does not see itself, or take responsibility for the processes of self-formation; rather the neoliberal self is encouraged to conceive of themselves as formally responsible for the processes of becoming that they go through; our sense of self, our subjectivity and our position in society are assumed to be a result of our personal activity and as such people are assumed to guilty for how they end up and the circumstances in which they find themselves.

Abjection and alterity.

Kristeva (1982) views abjection in relation to the construction of a psychic and social identity of the Other. Abjection is understood in terms of limits of an acceptable self and shapes our ability to imagine the Other. Abjection not only characterises the Otherness of a person but encourages us to think of the Other by reference to things we are disgusted by. As such abjection precedes all other attributes of the Other. As Judith Butler explains, the abjected: "fall outside the human, indeed, constitute the domain of the dehumanized and the abject against which the human itself is constituted" (Butler 1990:111). In an education context abjection is imposed on those people who do not fit into the regulatory ideal of achievement via aspiration. Such individuals are faced with mechanisms that marginalize and exclude helping to generate what most of us would regard as ways of living that are 'unliveable' within 'uninhabitable' zones of abjection.

Abjection is then a product of the neoliberalisation of citizenship; the legal defining of populations as the 'interiorized other' (Butler and Spivak 2007:16). People without aspiration become the abject, 'interiorized other' of the school system. Citizenship is two faced: "the bearer both of subjection to sovereign power and individual liberties" (Agamben 1998: 125). Abjection is the imperative force of sovereignty (Bataille 1934); the taking away of human dignity (Krauss 1996). Abjection shapes our understanding of inequality, our perceptual field by correcting and regulating our subjectivities. Individuals who are perceived to be without aspiration are imagined as anti-citizens who reject the self-scripting, entrepreneurial, conception of selfhood promoted by the neoliberal educator. People with low aspiration are viewed as an abject classless class of vulgar and tasteless tragicomic individuals. In a similar fashion to Fanon and Bhabha's analysis of the techniques of colonial and post-colonial forms subjectification and governmentality (Gill 2008). The disciplinary forces of sovereignty via its processes of social inclusion and exclusion produce abject populations who are to blame for their own exclusion. From Blair's Government, onwards neoliberalism has been presented as form of market driven egalitarianism – rhetoric of individualism, mobility and choice. Those individuals who choose not to actively engage with this rhetoric become 'national abjects' and include such people as: bogus asylum seekers; illegal immigrants; chavs. National abjects function as

a subjectifying force: “in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed” (Bhabha 1983: 18). Neoliberal governmentality regulates social life by exercising control over the intimate interior of the consciousness – neoliberalism reconfigures the relationship between the individual and the polity by inducing anxiety and promoting self-governance. For Butler (1993:3) abjection is not a “permanent contestation of social norms condemned to the pathos of perpetual failure” but “a critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility”

What is a precarious life?

Giorgio Agamben’s understanding of the biopolitical nature of modernity may appear to be long way away from issues of aspiration, school improvement and school effectiveness. However, the mechanisms of the precarious life he identifies, taking his starting point from Foucault’s concept of bio-power, are also to be found in current education policy and practice with its emphasis of the poverty of aspiration. For Agamben (1998) Foucault’s analysis of power was concerned with political techniques – notably the role of the police, by which the state assumes care of individuals and secondly the technologies of self. The state no longer wants to control those people who are a threat to the state but wants to exert control over the whole population using technologies of power. In Agamben's terms the people who reject what the school has to offer run the risk of becoming the *homo sacer* – and our perception of school refusniks has much in common with our perception of the refugee, asylum seeker and prisoner in the concentration camp – they are all people who live in a ‘zone of indistinction’. They are all *homo sacer*, pre-judged human victims who, are included only to be excluded from political life. The presence of the *homo sacer* generates forms of anxiety that become central to modes of subjectivation within neo-liberalism; such anxiety gives way to forms of precariousness. Even the most intimate areas of our lives - biological functioning and sexuality have become politicised. One is born as a citizen of a given country - birth then

acquires biopolitical consequences. The school can be identified as the point or intersection between what Agamben calls the juridico-institutional and the biopolitical models of power.

To combat fear and anxiety the neo-liberal self is expected to develop a capacity for risk management to combat social, political and precarization. In these circumstances forms of living together and common approaches to political action are not regarded as valid solutions to the perceived problems we face.

For Judith Butler (2004) individuals are attached to others, but this does not mean that we are merged with the community or that we are without boundaries. The body is a site of both desire and physical vulnerability. Butler wants to identify the conditions under which a grievable life is established and maintained and the mechanisms of exclusion and practices of effacement. Each person is constituted politically in part because of the social vulnerability of our bodies. In addition, our attachment to others means that we are exposed to risk and violence. There is a link between discourse and dehumanisation in Butler's work, and we see the same relation reproduced in relation to pupils in schools who are perceived to be without ambition. This discourse is silent and melancholic in that we assume no commonality, no common bodily condition with those without ambition. Such people have fallen outside the moral economy and outside of the Western conception of the human. Their presence reminds us that we all live with the risk of vulnerability. Exclusion and effacement have been rationalised on the grounds of 'self-defence'. Butler also argues that governmentality should be understood as a:

"mode of power concerned with the maintenance and control of bodies and persons, the production and regulation of persons and populations, and the circulation of goods insofar as they maintain and restrict the life of the population" (Butler 2004:52).

Neo-liberal forms of governance involve increasing insecurity whilst arguing that there is no alternative. Isabell Lorey also explores the argument that governmentality is primarily about

governing people rather than territories. Governmentality does not consist of primarily in being repressive or explicitly exploitive but is based upon an internalised self-discipline.

Like Butler and Agamben, Lorey also points to significance of self-control as a key factor that serves to regulate a person's own precariousness. Individualisation is a form of isolation and is concerned with the ways in which individual people constitute their inner being using their imagination. Governance is concerned with what Foucault described as the 'conduct of conducts' and the emphasis is on the interiority of the person and the forms of self-referencing that they engage in. Subjectivation is positioned ambivalently; on the one hand self-determination or self-creation and on the other hand, subjugation and obedience. As individuals, we have mixed, ambiguous and often contradictory feelings about the world around us, including ourselves. Precarization is a contested field in which is different from traditional forms of exploitation as it relates to subjective desires. Forms of biopolitical-governmental power are not easily perceived as an aspect of neo-liberal restructuring because they often appear to be personal, rooted in our own personal responsibility as self-made, free decisions. These techniques of self-conduct contain "active modes of self-exploitation as well as forms of voluntary self-precarization" (Lorey 2015:106).

Precarity is linked to inequality through Othering: "the construction of dangerous others, positioned respectively within and outside the political and social community as 'abnormal' and 'alien'" (Lorey 2015:14). Such others threaten the norm and are characterised by their illness, filth and criminality. We are often fearful and anxious by the presence of such others but also by the vulnerability we share with them. Aspiration promotes security and takes the form of 'biopolitical immunization' that we need to stabilize and heal any aspects of self that we judge to be contaminated and at the same allowing us to exclude those who cannot be integrated by judging them to be beyond neutralization.

Aspiration for working class pupils means rejecting their parents' values, attitudes and beliefs, no longer wanting to be working class and wanting instead to be upwardly mobile. Building the capacity of the school to tackle this poverty of aspiration has become one of the central preoccupations of

the neo-liberal educator; to identify pupils with low aspiration and place them within a 'zone of indistinction'. The neoliberal reforms of schools are intended to improve schools and make them more effective. However, the unforeseen consequence is that those pupils who choose to lead a life that does not conform to the school's conception of aspiration are likely to find themselves within a 'zone of indistinction'.

The behaviour of the boys in Corrigan (1979) and Willis's (1977) studies would not be tolerated in schools today; such behaviours have become demonised; as reflected in figures from popular culture such as Wayne and Waynetta Slob, Vicky Pollard and Lauren Cooper (Am I bovvered though? ... Look, face, bovvered?) or the cast of reality television show 'Geordie Shore'.

Nombrilisme and self-critique have become part of the social fiction of how to lead a successful life within neo-liberalism. Consequently, within the neo-liberal condition, individuals are experiencing new forms of anxiety-provoking precariousness; as many young people make the transition from 'lads' to 'chavs'. Young people for example, are educated to view themselves as highly self-reflexive human agents engaged in projects of self-assembly, in a world which appears to hold any number of meaning-endowing narratives from which young people are free to choose. Personal problems such as lack of money are no longer defined as public issues related to economic inequality but are experienced as internal psychic conflicts and are perceived as embedded in personal failings.

Since the 1988 ERA schools in the UK have been named and shamed if the pupils they teach underachieve in relation to a range of benchmarks. The mission of the school is to change the pupil who rejects what the school has to offer by breaking resistance and enhancing 'aspiration'. By doing so the school undermines the traditional ways in which working class children give meaning to their place in the wider society. Children from working class backgrounds should have aspiration to want

to leave the working class. Working class pupils should no longer be proud of their class origins and should no longer embrace forms of merit that Willis's 'lads' aspired to in the 1970s.

However, because the counter-hegemony is now rooted in consumption which is not emancipatory but simply ties the pupils more tightly to the neoliberal project; as such corrosive forms of consumption take their starting point from the same neoliberal assumptions as contemporary school culture. Ironically such consumption driven resistance also legitimizes marketization and affirms forms of individualisation that stress a culture of personal failing as the root of inequality and the superior status of the effective consumer. In the emergent moral economy, an individual is expected to engage in the consumption of desirable brands and 'designer labels' and young individuals in particular who are unable to participate in the celebration of consumption run the risk of been stigmatised and having their comparative inadequacy publicly identified. The neoliberal moral economy contains within it a celebrity culture that is built around forms of conspicuous consumption that is seen to be central to the public persona of entertainers, footballers, TV and film stars; attractive people whom we should aspire to be like with high incomes, and a life constructed around style and pleasure.

Rather than adopting the cynical view that people leading a precarious life are duped consumers who internalise and essentially play out a script dictated by the market. The starting point for this argument is Foucault's understanding of the relations between power and knowledge and how later commentators (Butler, Agamben, Bourdieu and Lorey) who have developed an understanding of a precarious life in which the central mechanisms for its continuation are seduction-repression strategies which appear to be rooted in conceptions of fun, playfulness and humour but which displace older modes of integration, social cohesion and cultural legitimation.

From this perspective 'education' is not simply the transmission of knowledge and skills to participate in the labour market. Young people are subjected to forms regulation contrived by people in power in an effort to get students to internalize new habits of conduct. And, equally significant, those occupying the new positions of school leadership are expected not only to be responsible for the surveillance over young people, but are judged in terms of their ability, as skilled practitioners in making young people internalize the new habits of conduct.

The effective school is one that successfully deconstructs the anti-school cultures of the 'lads' and undermines their local traditions upon which their identities were built in the 1970s. A situation of precariousness—precarite—cannot be dismissed as cultural deprivation or lack of cultural capital. As this understanding of precariousness was initially explored by Pierre Bourdieu (1998) in relation to the growth of The Precariat. In Bourdieu's terms, there has been a significant shift in the habitus leading to new forms of practice that constitute a precarious life.

The Neo-Liberal Educator

Research into Education Leadership, School Improvement and Effectiveness focuses on educational outcomes as a product of inadequate leadership, poor teaching or related pedagogic activities in school rather than as a product of factors external to the school, notably unequal access to educational opportunities or indeed the personal choice of the learners. David Reynolds observes that the effect of social class for example, is very small, accounting for only 3% of differences between pupils (NCfTL 2010). As Andy Hargreaves suggests, the effective schools: “take ownership of the problems and reject the notion that the school itself can do little or nothing because it is somebody else’s responsibility to provide a solution” (Hargreaves 2010:9). The social context is not regarded as something that should prevent schools from been effective (Rassool and Morley 2000). Teachers, not parents or communities or wider social inequality, are judged to be responsible for

student outcomes' (Larsen 2010: 216). However, as Raffo and Gunter (2008) point out: "the evidence that the historical links between social exclusion, low educational achievement and limited life chances have been broken is hard to come by" (Raffo and Gunter 2008:406).

In addition, these approaches educational research emerged while neo-liberal governments came to power in Europe and North America. Underpinning assumptions are that all children want to be successful in school, success in school leads to greater opportunity and social mobility, which again are things that all children should want irrespective of the social class or family background. These approaches focus on how inside school-based factors such as leadership, classroom management teaching is the most important influence on student achievement. There is a corresponding under-emphasis on the social context of the school and mechanisms of social exclusion found in the wider society. There is also an under emphasis on the pupils' choice of life project and processes of becoming.

Contemporary approaches to school improvement emphasise firstly, the importance of capacity building in schools and secondly, the importance of cultural change in schools bring about and maintain school improvement. Fullan (2001, 2002a) argues school leaders can enhance the effectiveness of the schools in which they work if: "they continually work on the five components of leadership – if they pursue moral purpose, understand the change process, develop relationships, foster knowledge building, and strive for coherence- with energy, enthusiasm, and hopefulness" (Fullan, 2001: 7). Research into effectiveness has significantly helped to establish the neoliberal belief that schools rather than social inequality are the key to making a difference in pupils' lives and their future life chances (Reynolds et al., 2001).

As Dimmock and Tan (2015) rightly point out that: "broader socio-cultural contextual variables that influence student and school performance – such as race/ethnicity, diversity in classrooms and schools, parenting processes, socio-economic environment and resource equity (e.g. class size, types of programme offered, compensatory education and social mobility) are ignored" (Dimmock and Tan

2015: 5). A view also found in Tienken and Mullen (2014). If the school is well managed and has clear and effective leadership then children who do not achieve five GCSE's at grade A* to C, including English and Maths, it can only be concluded that child was either unwilling or unable to achieve. The most commonly cited reason for such underachievement is the child's lack of aspiration; such children are flawed consumers in the educational market place.

School effectiveness research has been described as practical and pragmatic in nature (Teddlie and Reynolds 2010) and few researchers have questioned the limited attention given to questioning the underpinning neoliberal assumptions (Mortimore 1992; Reynolds et al 2011; Scheerens et al 2001; Scheerens 2013). This lack of attention to underpinning assumptions means that neoliberal assumptions about market principles, and the associated suppositions of self-sufficiency, personal initiative, individualism, self-regulation, new public management, institutional competition, parental choice and the value of benchmark driven performative regimes are rarely questioned or reflected upon. The limited critical reflection means that school effectiveness research comes to legitimises neo-liberal ideas and uncritically reproduces neoliberal discourses about the personal origins inequalities as an unforeseen consequence of attempting to make schools more effective in neoliberal terms.

School effectiveness researchers leave themselves open to the suggestion that they are part of the neoliberal project in relation to public services. This research shares the underpinning neoliberal assumptions of individualisation, focusing on educational outcomes as a product of the activities in school rather than as a product of factors external to the school, notably unequal access to educational opportunities. The research is also concerned with the role of effective individuals in leadership positions, finding more effective ways for schools to build capacity within a competitive market for education and 'do something' about the poverty of aspiration.

Neoliberalism also emerged at the same time as growing inequality and very seductive forms of consumerism. Neoliberalism also emerged at the same time as a new form of moral economy that

criminalises some forms of working class forms of behaviour. Neoliberal approaches to public policy, seductive forms of consumerism and new forms of moral economy combine to provide the foundations for a potentially precarious life; a life in which inequality is viewed as a personal failing and not because of wider processes of exclusion. Seductive forms of consumerism within neo-liberalism has also impacted on forms of pupil resistance in schools. Pupils seek to generate self-worth and value through their investments in style, an approach that school leaders use to place pupils within marginalized and disadvantaged social positions. Such forms of consumption driven resistance are interpreted positively by young people and are used as tokens of esteem to distance themselves from the school's conception of aspiration; an approach that merely ties the young person's life to the neoliberal project by another route. Young people who successfully participate in the consumer market and who are seen to have achieved in consumer terms have fulfilled a different set of aspirations. Young people who cannot afford the tokens of esteem are not judged as victims of a system of inequality but as lacking in good taste.

Such young people are viewed as 'flawed consumers' who lack aspiration in terms of personal style and the personal qualities such as good taste needed to be successful in the market place of self and identity. They are perceived as individuals who do not successfully consume because they are worthless.

Those young people who are 'seduced' by contemporary consumerism use the acquisition of material goods as the basis for resistance in school and use style to undermine teachers who present themselves as people who are both without style but who claim to know better. However, conformity in school does not provide guaranteed progress or a life free from precariousness but both the 'seduced' and the 'repressed' both are potentially on the path to a precarious life.

In the United Kingdom, from the 1988 Education Reform Act onwards there has been a series of measures introduced by Thatcher, Major, Blair, Brown and Cameron to bring about school improvement and 'build capacity' in schools, by enhancing school leadership and school

effectiveness. Approaches that take their starting point from the free market and the state's withdrawal from economic and welfare activity (Harvey 2007). Since the publication of Willis (1977) and Corrigan (1979) this consumption driven nombrilisme has for many people put an end to the traditional intellectual and cultural foundation of Western civilization. Nombrilisme and self-critique have become part of the social fiction of how to lead a successful life within neo-liberalism. Consequently, within the neo-liberal condition, individuals are experiencing new forms of anxiety-provoking precariousness; as many young people make the transition from 'lads' to 'chavs'. Young people for example, are educated to view themselves as highly self-reflexive human agents engaged in projects of self-assembly, in a world which appears to hold any number of meaning-endowing narratives from which young people are free to choose. Personal problems such as lack of money are no longer defined as public issues related to economic inequality but are experienced as internal psychic conflicts and are perceived as embedded in personal failings. Violence in schools, ADHD and incorporation of tokens of esteem into self as a form of resistance and the increase in NEET or status zero/status Zer0 young people; are all manifestations of the same neoliberal processes that lead to a precarious life. The concept of the NEET most clearly contains the negative subtext of having "no status" - as the young person is not in employment, not in education not in receipt of benefit.

Since the 1988 ERA schools in the UK are named and shamed if the pupils they teach underachieve in relation to a range of benchmarks. The mission of the school is to change the pupil who rejects what the school has to offer by breaking resistance and enhancing 'aspiration'. One of the central roles of the neoliberal school are to undermine the underpinning conception of merit within working class culture that the boys in Corrigan and Willis's studies expressed. By doing so the school undermines the traditional ways in which working class children give meaning to their place in the wider society. Children from working class backgrounds should have aspiration to want to leave the working class by accepting what the school has to offer and embrace mobility chances. Working class pupils should no longer be proud of their class origins and should no longer embrace forms of merit that Willis's 'lads' aspired to in the 1970s. Moreover, because the counter-hegemony is now

rooted in consumption which is not emancipatory but simply ties the pupils more tightly to the neoliberal project; as such corrosive forms of consumption take their starting point from the same neoliberal assumptions as contemporary school culture. Consumption driven resistance legitimizes marketization and affirms forms of individualisation that stress a culture of personal failing as the root of inequality and the superior status of the effective consumer.

Conclusion

In the 1970s the boys in Willis's and Corrigan's research left school with a coherent working class identity and looked forward to life of manual labour that they were pleased to embrace. The values, attitudes and beliefs of the boys that Willis and Corrigan described would no longer be tolerated in school today. The neoliberal project as it manifests itself in school today, undervalues the agency of the individual pupil who wants to choose a life, culture and set of aspirations that does not conform to a neoliberal conception of aspiration as found within school benchmarks. Today pupils behaving like Willis's lads are likely to find themselves within a 'zone of indistinction'; excluded, 'diagnosed' with ADHD and Othered by forms of precarity linked to inequality generally assumed to be brought about by personal failing. The neoliberal educator blames the victims who suffer the most from the consequences of neoliberalism. A set of institutional arrangements have been put in place to allow schools to build capacity and provide to conditions for pupils to move towards the state's preferred conception of the citizen or subject. To move in this direction is to be seen to succeed. The focus is on controlling and restricting the role of the teacher as intellectual who attempts to enhance student voice. The neoliberal project controls and restricts the role of the teacher in facilitating the students' critical understanding of how their personal problems are public issues. Rather schools have enhanced their capacity to generate feelings shame and personal inadequacy in pupils who do

not conform. This theory and research has the unforeseen consequence of adding credibility to the neoliberal narrative. Well led schools perform well in the market place for education, improving schools improve against the benchmarks imposed by governments and effective schools are schools that are effective in achieving neoliberal objectives.

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