

Using portraiture to script the voice.

ROB08533

Janean Robinson
PhD Candidate
School of Education
Murdoch University
J.Robinson@murdoch.edu.au

Abstract

In this paper, a creative yet scholarly process is employed in analysing students' lives as they share their experiences and understandings of the Western Australian Behaviour Management in Schools Policy (1998, 2001, and 2008). In adopting the metaphor of 'painting', a 'palette' is discovered, comprising a careful selection of 'paints' taken from field notes, student transcripts, journal jottings and vignettes of ethnographic data. In addition, a 'canvas' is stretched, consisting of the many sheets of paper, sketched and scribbled on forming a scaffold on which to hang the stories and experiences. Against this backdrop, the 'literature' assists in building the shape. The picture which emerges is then displayed in order to be appreciated, interpreted and understood because within it and no longer hidden are the various layers revealing the complexity of students' lives and histories within a large secondary school. These emergent scripts (portraits) serve to provide a counter-narrative to the official images and memories constructed for and on behalf of students themselves.

It was the voices that 'spoke' once again from the transcripts as I began to 'paint them into the picture'. I think of the paints as the starting point to (re)create pictures of the lived realities of students (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 88). In the process I adopt the role of storyteller, 'painting' student interpretations of their various realities. It is the intention that the observer will discover the beauty and a "moment of pleasure" (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 23) from these portraitures and in a small way move beyond the limitations of the written text in order to create a new vision.

Introduction

This paper begins by taking the theme of the conference, "changing climates and education for sustainable futures", and thinking about the children presently in schools and how they are/are not being nurtured and sustained within an economic rationalist climate. Corporate managerialism (a private sector form of business management) has been adopted by the public education system in the name of efficiency and economics (Lingard, Knight & Porter, 1995, p. 84). The market provides politicians with all the benefits of being seen to act decisively without wearing the consequences when things go wrong. So when there seems to be a problem with student behaviour, it is not a problem the governments want to see, the blame can be placed on the school then onto the student; "the good will survive, the weak will go to the wall" (Gerwitz & Ball, 1995, p. 1). School image thus becomes very important in such a competitive market, so schools draw more attention to tokens which display academicism, performance and discipline. Consequently there is more emphasis on test results, provisions for academically gifted and talented students, uniforms and exclusion of those students not conforming and /or

performing (Gerwitz & Ball, 1995, p. 138). Although presently there is much discussion focusing on technical matters which make schools more effective, there has been very little debate about what schools are really about and who should be allowed to participate in the decision making as to what goes on in them (Gewirtz, 2000, p. 354). It is my intention, in writing this paper to stir some 'movement', some 'discussion' and ignite the debate around this issue.

For these purposes I adopt story telling as a means of illuminating lives. Allende (1991, p. 158) explains the evocative nature of storying:

There are all kinds of stories. Some are born with the telling; their substance is language, and before someone puts them into words they are but a hint of an emotion, a caprice of mind, an image, or an intangible recollection. Others are manifest whole, like an apple, and can be repeated infinitely without risk of altering their meaning. Some are taken from reality and processed through inspiration, while others rise up from an instant of inspiration and become real after being told.

Stories provide a means of creating the melody of a song, expressing feelings, capturing the moments of shared experience, listening, watching, waiting and learning. At the same time, this storying evokes the imagination to enable us to think otherwise about students and their learning. Greene (1995, p.3) stresses that, of all our cognitive abilities, "imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities."

By drawing upon the creative practice of using vignettes and portraiture, I have discovered the power of weaving students' interpretations, understandings and realities of school life throughout my analysis. The 'data' (student stories collected from 40 embedded interviews) now becomes the 'the picture which speaks', no longer a faint shadow in the background, somehow there but not visible among all the facts and figures. Leistyna (2003, p. 107) confirms that "the real challenge is for educators to be willing to create dialogical spaces where lived experiences and worldviews can be heard." It is also my purpose to create some of this space. I have used each portrait title to express a powerful theme that echoes throughout the interviews. Voices of two Yr 10 students, Bec (female) and Kaz (male), interviewed by me (Jan), illustrate their lived school experience:

Title: It's like I don't care anymore

Jan – which rules do you think are too harsh?

Kaz – when you work and can't talk to anyone, or being separated into groups not of your own choice, – sometimes if you are late, then the teacher kicks you out and we don't learn anything for the whole lesson

Jan – how long is late?

Bec – like even if you are 30 seconds late,

Jan – where do you go?

Bec – just outside or

Kaz – to upper school

Jan – have you had a behaviour card?

Bec – I have had heaps of them, so it's like I don't care any more. I try to be good but the teachers don't seem to care. It is so annoying. I try but they don't accept it. Like normally I don't do my work, but now I am trying, but like yesterday I got kicked out for saying that I had an itchy eye and then I got sent to upper school for the whole day, and that was only second period. Teachers just piss me off, like I do try and they don't accept it, it is hard for me, like I have been like that since year 4. Hell naughty, getting into trouble with teachers. The consequence of breaking any silly rule is that you can get detention for 15 minutes at lunch and for not wearing uniform you get an hour detention after school on a Tuesday.

Jan – Does that make people wear uniform?

Kaz – Most people, but there are those who don't even come to school because they don't want to wear it. Some don't care and just wear what they want. I wish the teachers were not so strict. Some do not even want to be here; like our last teacher will just give you work, write a lot of stuff on the board and then will just give us a textbook.

Bec – yeah, then he tells us to 'just write this down', then he will go to this page, write the questions down, these numbers, and then he just goes out of the room for about 30 minutes.

Although nothing extraordinary or dramatic is necessarily occurring in this dialogue, it is the portrait of the person, the Yr 10 student that is contextualised. It is the intention here to disrupt many of the myths and stereotypes about young people and question labels of 'deviance' and 'at risk'. These are students who are often struggling to learn within an exclusionary system, yet trying to establish their own identities. They do not have home lives that are necessarily conducive to middle class compliant and conforming values. Some do not even live at home or have access to uniform. Leistyana (2003, p. 122) calls on society as a whole to question our larger social formations and policies that "have produced a culture of survival, materialism, and deviance" and that we need to change this way of looking, thinking and acting. An example could be to address the commodification of student identities within the logic of capital and popular culture (Leistyana, 2003, p. 122).

We hear similar issues and concerns in a conversation between two other Yr 10 students, Casey (female) and Fin (male).

Title: Listen to my side please!

Jan – so tell me about behaviour?

Casey – doing as you are told, being good

Fin - or sometimes being bad, depends what teacher you have,

*Casey - some teachers we are good for, others, some teachers get you angry, so **we want to be bad for them because they make you mad***

*Fin– he does **not listen to your side of the story***

Casey – if you do something wrong, he will send you out of the class for the rest of the period, he doesn't tell you off, he just tells you to get out; so if he says don't talk, then we just talk to piss him off.

Fin – if you are just the slightest bit late, he sends you out, and sometimes when you don't do anything, because it is someone else doing something, he will just send you out.

Casey – and he does not let you talk.

Title: We are monitored, but for dumb things

Casey – we get into trouble for wearing a white stripe on our pants - that is pretty stupid!

Jan - Does this sending to buddy class get recorded?

Casey – yeah, on SIS. (Student Information Systems) – detention 'sucks', like for recess and lunch, because that is the only time that you get to be with all your friends. Then when they give you detention - that is a strong punishment. You don't get anything to eat either, as you are not allowed to go to the canteen.

Fin – they should listen to what the students have to say about what they want. What rules and what needs to be done.

Jan – really bad things sometimes get ignored or they are too hard to deal with

Fin – yeah, like the little things get picked up

Casey – yeah, then when something really bad happens, you don't get caught for it. That is really dumb

Student Identities

Their perceived experiences leave these students feeling that they are not valued, that they are excluded from real consideration in the learning process. My analysis here becomes a process in which experience is valued; it includes a vision for learning to be 'otherwise' and exposes student realities in place of one constructed for them. These students believed that the arbitrary administration of discipline made little sense and many found it to be humiliating. They had volunteered to participate in this research project after having a briefing at a Year Assembly. By the following week, the year leader had selected 4 students from 10 classes; 40 young adults from the Yr 10 cohort were prepared to contribute their understandings to my research. Was it a desire to be with their friends or rather, a deep frustration against the system, or merely a wish to do something different that tempted so many to volunteer? Those that had their hands up first and had their forms ready were interviewed. Many others wanted to participate. I had chosen Yr 10's as the cohort as this is the age group (16/17 year olds) in which most homogenous grouping is possible, plus many of the conflicts and contradictions between the policy and the students' interpretations draw to a critical point. This voiced research provides therefore the conditions by which the students reclaim their own stories and begin the struggle to "challenge those powers that attempt to silence them" (Nagle, 2001, p. 10). It is in using the convention of narrative

story evolving from and honouring co-participants voices that a stronger textual orientation is possible whereby personal experience promotes agency (Kamler, 2001, p. 48).

Usher and Edwards (1996, p. 147) explain that “as subjects, we create and re-create ourselves through stories that are told and we ourselves figure as the characters in the drama”. A neutral stance is not taken here in the telling of these stories; in fact, I use them to generate (reconstruct) a research story picture. I am their artist, their stories my paints. As a participant/observer and creator of images and stories, I endeavour to inspire alternative visions and practices so that young people might become critically engaged learners who are not constrained by the punitive and alienating consequences of ‘behaviour management’.

Presented below is a comprehensive student portrait script portraying the power of discovering student identity through story. As Brown (2001, p. 128) states “public schools are sources of identity, constituted within webs of power relationships that frame the choices and aspirations of youth.” The major themes that I have chosen to highlight as they continued to echo throughout the analysis and creation of the student portraits are:

‘the need to listen to our side of the story’,
‘we are bored’,
‘we are alienated [sent out]’ and
‘we are monitored’.

Keeping these themes in mind helped me to analyse the many contradictions appearing between the policy and what students were experiencing. It was also in part what provided the impetus for the writing of this paper; an urge to sustain and nurture the concerns and reactions of these students as they struggled with many of the sanctions and rules enforced upon them. One is often left with the baffling question as to whether many of these policy practices that play out in the school actually do end up having any important impact on changing student lives or in helping them to learn or understand about their place in the world.

*Title: **Painting an image beyond the written text***

Setting: Serene Senior High School. Monday 12-1pm, 11th June 2007

Cast:

Shane (lead)

Jan (Me, the interviewer)

Cate and Stu (fellow Yr 10 students)

Background Information:

Shane has been chosen as the lead, yet really all the characters in this script portray an element of the ‘alienated’ from mainstream in terms of the culture of their school. They are left out because they do not comply according to the way they dress and the way they communicate. They are also alienated

because their family lives in some cases are so haphazard and fragile, so hanging on the edge of what is considered 'sound', secure and the family nuclear dream that it contrasts starkly with the pedantic and trivial codes of conduct and interactions that they encounter in their daily lives at school. I have chosen Shane as the lead, because he struck me as someone who was really trying to fit in, to please the authorities, to get along. He did not have an outright rebellious attitude. Despite these qualities, he was still located on the outside and struggled to be allowed the privileges of other 'class members'. What is particularly outstanding in this profile is that he finds solace and acceptance during and throughout the interview, by discussing and interacting with peers who at some levels were experiencing the same alienation; he also worked to look to the future of their lives and their schooling with a sense of hope. It was moving for me to experience their struggle to break away from patterns of despair that were part of their everyday family lives. Even while attempting to positively change their lives, I witnessed their appreciation and respect for their families and for each other as they coped as well as they could in such adverse conditions. It is for their enduring tenacity that I have named them 'survivors'.

Note: 'Good Standing' is a school policy as a component of the Behaviour Management Plan.

Shane- if you haven't explained with a note why you are out of uniform then you get detention. Like Mr R. (Manager Student services) came up to me earlier, then I explained, "look I don't know where my shirt is, I think my sister might have stolen it off me because I don't live with her anymore, and I need to buy a new one."

Shane - yeah, that is how you get 'good standing' back. You do detention. But you also need 3 sheets for behaviour and attendance.

Jan - do you think this helps your behaviour and attendance?

Cate & Stu - NO.

Shane- no it just makes you angry, filling out this sheet everyday. So you don't want to come to school so you just stay at home.

Jan - Does that make you rebel or do silly things?

Shane- if we don't do it, we get in more trouble and don't get good standing back. If you don't have good standing then you don't get to go on excursions or anything.

Cate - Or the river cruise.

Shane - and we have one coming up so that is why I want to get it back, I want to go. I lost my good standing only after 3 weeks of school starting. I haven't got it back yet either.

Jan - you don't come across as people who would do things to annoy the school.

Stu – it is not hard. Like attendance, if you have 3 unexplained, you lose it. But sometimes the teachers just forget to mark the roll. You come late, so they don't mark you present.

Shane– like at home, I have had these blue letters sent home just about my attendance, and I have been getting into lots of trouble at home, because the teachers have said that I haven't been there when I have. They put in absent, and then my parents think that I have been 'wagging' [absent from school].

[Note-Shane calls his caretakers, 'parents', at this stage in the interview. Later it is revealed that they are actually his grandparents who are his legal guardians]

Shane – one time the teacher thought I was on drugs! Because I was having fun, being stupid, maybe I laid down on the ground. She said, "go to the nurse, you do not seem right." Then I came back and the teacher was asking me if everything is alright, and I said, "Yes, there was never anything wrong." She said she thought I had to be on drugs or something!

Stu & Shane – that is the problem, teachers NEVER LISTEN to your side of the story. They always think that they are right.

Shane – like in science, she will put a projector on, then we have to just copy it down quickly, before she changes to the next sheet, we are just writing and copying words, we are not taking anything in and she is not explaining it to us

Stu – then she talks while we are writing! What is the point in doing that? You can't look, write, understand and listen at the same time. Especially for us guys, I can read, but it is not something I like to do.

Shane – to use a book, you need to take time to understand; when you are speed reading you just skim and get a few key words for that question.

Shane – I am the eldest of 8 kids (or is it 9?). My family is so confusing; it is like a trivia game or something. I have so many step-parents and parents, now I live with my grandparents. It is a lot easier there. Just me and my two younger brothers. Sometimes they drive me mad.

Jan – do you think that sometimes when things get hard at school that your home circumstances are not taken into account?

Shane – sort of, overall I am quite lucky. But how I was saying earlier, how I have moved house, to my grandparents, not with my parents, so my school top is obviously lost somewhere around there. When I was going to buy a new one (oops, I have already spent the money today), I explained to the manager of student services, but he said I would still have to do 'upper school'

Stu – they (the teachers) all seem to think that we have life easy at home. They think that out of school is easy, so we should just come happily to school every day. Do our work and don't talk. If you hold all that stuff in, you get nowhere in life. You are then going to be miserable. Me and Jemma (like her life is not too good at the moment at home), so I talk to her like today, I was going to meet her out the front, so I went to class to explain to the teacher, but then I wasn't allowed out again. They all think it is easy, she is hardly ever here.

Shane – it is easier now that I am living with my grandparents and I can get on with my schooling, but when I was living at my Mum's it wasn't easy because of the lifestyle there. It was really bad. The teachers didn't understand that, I was getting into trouble all the time, because of things like not waking up on time or getting to bed late. My mum is slack, she did not care if I went to school or not. Even though it is okay to have a day off school, it is not good 2 days out of every week. It gets really boring. That is why I changed that and I moved out, so I could do better. So far it is working.

Stu – **this school needs to listen.** Like I got into trouble by Ms Ch, she rung up and spoke to Dad to come in for a meeting. Then she rang up my mum, and I said you can't do that, they have both just separated, that is going to cause problems putting them into the same room at the same time. She said 'I'm sorry', but didn't ring up and tell Dad not to come. I live only with my Mum. So my Mum and Dad both still came, and yeah they argued in our interview. I had warned her, but afterwards she said 'sorry' and gave me lollies. My dad, whilst he was here, said he wanted all the newsletters and stuff sent to his house as well, and then my Mum rang and said 'please don't do that.' The lady at the front office said 'alright', but we will just ring him and ask. Obviously he is not going to say, 'no I don't want them'. So then they sent them to him anyway, they should have listened....now my Mum and I have to drive around there every week to gather the mail out of his box. He has nothing to do with it and he should just keep out of it, he thinks he can just butt in.

Jan – do you think that these types of situations are the same for many of your schoolmates?

Shane – not necessarily, the only thing that is in common for all of us, is that the teachers JUST DON'T LISTEN.

Stu – then you shout at them, and you get into trouble for shouting ...at them not listening to you!

Shane – then they shout at you, you feel really belittled, when you are sitting down and they hover over top of you, shouting.

This is provocative work that sets out to 'trouble', 'disrupt' and 'disturb' the common sense assumptions and practices carried out in the name of behaviour management policy. Chapman (2007, p. 158) explains that by engaging in portraiture, "the role of the researcher has a personal dimension that cannot be severed from the researcher's professional interests". One's own identity becomes exposed and explicit through the research. The painting is hung for all to see, diminishing the chance of detachment or researcher objectivity. Chapman (2007) elaborates:

The decisions made, relationships formed, narratives that represent people's lives are deeply connected to the past and present experiences of researchers and their epistemologies concerning the research topic and participants. (p. 158)

Self reflexivity in research storying:

In order to survive this rich yet at times overwhelming immersion, a process of 'reflexivity' is pivotal. It is also a mode of thought by which "we explode our fantasies about ethnographic texts being copies of reality" and "deflate what we hold about absolute truth and objectivity" (Foley, 2002, p. 473). During the analysis component of this research, it is the silent pauses, the sacred moments, the spaces between the words where one is able to find new knowledge and understanding about inquiry as it 'appeared'. This capacity to reflect on ones values, practices and knowledge so they are no longer taken for granted is defined as an enabling moment of praxis, a turning point (Thompson & McHugh 1990, p. 31). New spaces have thus been opened up to allow those silent pauses, a breathing point, almost motionless. Time to stop and look and think about what it is that is happening when such policy and practice is implemented that has little or nothing to do with learning and social justice and in fact may be creating harmful and irreparable relationships for children within our society. So yes, there is much of 'self' invested in this work, the self that is a researcher, the self that is parent, the self as community, the self as teacher and the self that was a student and child witnessing and experiencing unjust actions in the name of self correction and discipline. Chapman (2007, p. 162) captures the essence of what I wish to express in my acknowledgement of the power of portraiture and reflexivity as research methodologies; "researchers move beyond depictions of the half-full or half-empty glass to interrogate the students' perceptions and behaviour that are floating around in the water".

The portrait below continues to expose the themes of the last profile but also elaborates the extraordinary trust and respect these students have for each other. In the process of transcribing this script the reflexive process and discovery of portraiture emerged as a powerful tool in my research journey. My intent is to display the emotional capacity and revelations that are possible when students feel safe and welcomed; it is only then that they become free to share lived experiences as they realise they are not alone in their struggles. I also anticipate that the portrait provides an opportunity to 'shift' ones understanding of these young people who are encountering daily the

controlling and complying practices of behaviour management whilst surviving adverse conditions at home.

Title: ***Roast Chicken 'n' Gravy for Tea***

Mon, 25th June

Jemma joins the group. This time 'Stu' has been kept away from being interviewed. He is in trouble with Student Services. 'Jemma' was away at the first interview because of family issues.

Jan – could I start with Shane & Cate telling Jemma what we talked about last time (Jemma was sick on our last visit, but had really wanted to be at the interview)

Shane – well we talked about school, how the system works, behaviour, and the behaviour cards... actually I got one of them.

Jan– is that since my last visit?

Shane – yeah, because I was late to class. I lost my good standing. So we talked last time about what happens when you lose your good standing, how you get behaviour cards, and how Cate got kicked out of her old school.

Jan – what was your new behaviour card for Shane?

Shane – I was late in the morning, had lost my good standing more than 3 times, had not done anything to get my Good Standing back, so I got this behaviour card, where you tick off every class that you got there on time. I have done that so far.

Jan – so it is like 3 strikes and you are out?

Shane – yeah, I had to also do detention for that (lunch time). Me and some of my mates. (I should note here, that Shane, is very calm and not bitter as he says this....it is like a matter of course for him)

Jemma – I had to do that too heh, oh, yeah, mine was for being out of uniform.

Jan – how does that feel pulling out the behaviour card in front of your class mates?

Shane – sort of easy really. Lots of people get them

Jemma – yeah, like seriously, who wears uniform all the time?

Jan – does it then become like a positive thing to have one?

Shane – for me it is helping me get to class on time because I do not want another detention.

Jan – why did you not used to get to class on time?

Shane– talking to friends between classes

Jan – not because you did not want to go?

Shane – neh

Jemma– if you don't want to go, you pretty much don't go

Cate – you wag.

Jemma – last year I only came for a ¼ of the year

Jan– because you did not want to be here?

Jemma – I just could not be bothered

Jemma – I hell want to meet your mum, Shane

Shane– no you don't

Jemma – isn't she a 'Crow's' supporter?

Shane – no, that is my Nan

Jemma – but there are other reasons why I want to meet your Mum and you know what they are.

Shane – yes, yes...I know

Cate – so why do you call her your 'Nan'?

Shane – because she IS my Nan!

Cate – I call mine 'Noni' and grandad 'Popi'

Shane – mine is 'Pop'

Cate – I only see my Noni, the others abandoned me.

Shane – I am the eldest out of 8 others

Jemma – I'm the.. Uh.. No I am not the eldest out of my Mums kids, but the youngest out of my Dad's kids.

Cate – that does not make sense!

Shane – yes it does!

Jemma– my Mum and Dad were together when my Mum was 12 and dad 14 , they were together till he was 17, then they broke up, my Dad had 3 kids (twins and me and another before the twins) then got back together with my Mum.

Cate – I don't get it. Is your Mum not really your Mum?

[Shane tries to reassure Cate, it eventuates that he is in a similar situation, so understands what Jemma is trying to explain]

Shane [trying to distract Cate] – have you dyed your hair Cate?

Jemma – ok...they had Cameron, Dane and Rachael and then he went back with my Mum and had me.

Cate – now I gotya

Jemma - Then my Mum cheated on my Dad, my Dad died, then my Mum had 4 other kids and then my Mum died.

Cate – wow, you have a lot of brothers and sisters!

Jemma– yeah and I talk to.... 3 of them... [a stillness]

Cate – interesting...

Jan – were you always living here?

Jemma – I was born in 'Avon'.

Shane – same

Jemma – just a different side of 'Avon'.

Jan - Have you ever been punished at school?

Jemma – yes, in Primary school both my parents were busted right, then I refused to go out with this guy, so he started saying things about my Mum and I have a very bad temper, so does my brother, ... {Cate tries to come in here with her own story] so I got suspended for that and he did not get into any trouble, so I got two chairs and put them through the window, broke a computer – then got suspended. Then a month later the same guy did exactly the same thing.

Cate – I hate it when they do that.

Jemma– so I tried to get him, but he is a guy, twice the size of me

Jan – what year were you in?

Jemma – Year 7 and two days after that was the graduation excursion and they suspended me and would not let me go to the excursion.

Jan – had you been there from the start?

Jemma– from Yr 5 because it was a new primary school. On Monday I had an interview at the school. They wanted to let me go to the excursion but the teacher would not let me into her class and she called me a ‘slut’ and a ‘bitch’, so I got wild and threw some more chairs – then I was expelled.

Jan – yes, I can imagine you were going through a lot at home.

Jemma – yes, and I am very close to my little brother.

Shane – I bashed a guy in Yr 6, I remember when I was in Yr 6, and my Mum was going to court and probably going to gaol, and did go to gaol. That day I was sitting in school really depressed then this guy said “what is wrong with you, get over it, just cause your Mum is going to gaol” then I just knocked him off his chair and beat the ‘crap out of him’.

Jemma – I have pictures of my Mum when she was in gaol. We have so much in common [talking to Shane].

Jan - can I ask about prisons, do you mind me asking?

Shane– sure, that is cool

Jan – Has your Mum finished her sentence?

Shane – yeah, she was in there a year – her sentence was for 2, but one year was probation (good behaviour). That was in 2003

Jan– how was that for you?

Shane – bad, like she was in prison for my birthday, Christmas and everything.

Jan – do you think that it was a fair punishment?

Shane– yeah, pretty much

Jan -What about you Jan?

Jemma– yeah, my Mum went in various times for a lot of different things.

Jan – how was that for you?

Jemma – I was 6 years old, so I was allowed to stay overnight with her.

Shane – Yeah, the same.

Jemma –there were these houses and playgrounds, I think it was Corridale Prison

Shane –Yeah, did it have a fence with no barbwire?

Jemma [becoming very excited too] YEAH

Shane – that was so good...OH MY GOD, our Mums went to the same prison!

It had actual little houses, little kitchens,

Jemma- yeah, they had TV and everything,

Shane – they had their own rooms and about 4 people under one roof.

Cate – did they have a fridge?

*Shane – yeah, **I had roast chicken and gravy for tea***

Jemma – yeah, I remember when I stayed over, they had face painting and were taking pictures and stuff of all the people in the house. They were professional photos. That day I remember because I was supposed to see my Dad. I had not seen him since I was like 2 months old. But Mum did not know that he had died. He had died 3 years previous and she only just found out that day. I hated my Mum.

Cate – I watched a really sad movie this morning.

Jan- Why did you hate your mum?

Jemma - I did not like my Mum because she lied to me. She said that I would get to meet my Dad. I got really excited, but he didn't come.

Jemma - I was kidnapped; when I was two years old.

Shane – are you serious?

Jemma- yeah, I was on the news and everything.

Cate- by who?

Jan – was this in Avon?

Jemma - no – I was over here, a month after I was born. My mum was still with my Dad at the time. My mum was 19 when she had me so she still went out to party and stuff. So she left me with my Dad's sister. [lunch siren goes, fortunately Jemma continues with this story]. My Dad was in gaol in Melba. So they took me to Melba. {Don't tell anyone}. I was on the news and everything. The police in all states were looking for me.

Shane- whoa, that is major!

Jemma – Then after my Dad saw me, he wrote a letter to my Mum saying how gorgeous I was and how much he missed her and stuff...that is how they found out where I was.

Jan- wow, what a powerful story to finish the session!

Thank you so much....

Jemma -you are hell in shock [looking at Cate]

Jan – you all have stories

Jemma – I have heaps

Shane – we have so much in common

Jan – hopefully you get a chance to share some of them

Author/Interviewers Postscript

Now I am using these 'scripts' / 'voices' ten months later and feel a sense of something – I don't know what words to use, but it is an acknowledgement, an awareness, that I probably will never see these people again, yet, in their two interviews they have provided deep insight into their worlds. Creating this script is a reliving of their stories; their sacred spaces, their combined interactive knowledge's and shared experience become part of my being.

I turn to the experience of Wexler's ethnographic research on student voice and social life in high schools (1992) to assert that:

The participants speak and I record and selectively re-present their voices. But to pretend that this is simply a dialogical construction of the facts of the case would be arrogant, exploitative and deceptive. I hear their voices in my ears, and I speak my words, conditioned by my place in historical social movement and by the language and analytical resources available to me. (p. 2)

The complexity of using this methodology is that it defies the dominant rationalist model used in behaviour management policy. Within this discourse student misbehaviour is often considered pathological, arising from a breakdown in organisational systems (Thomson & McHugh, 1990, p. 28) therefore needing a quick 'nip in the bud'. Student 'isolation' from others, more often than not, is implemented as the most efficient and simple solution to 'problem' behaviour. It is my argument, however, that such a 'solution' merely creates further behaviour problems; complex issues cannot always be solved by simplistic procedures that incite long-term disaffection with the 'system'. Leistyna (2001, pp.121,122) warns that blaming youth for a world they did not create, yet are caught up in, only reinforces oppression. Instead, he advises educators, to "forge critical partnerships" with students and connect "in substantive and politically influential ways."

Limitations of the scope of this study, including the 'one-sided' use of student voices as my data source means that this paper cannot pretend to offer any definitive answer to a serious phenomenon occurring in our schools. I realise that there are shortcomings and issues of power that need consideration. Yet, as McLeod (2000, p. 49), argues no research can really claim to provide a complete and full account of the subject.

Conclusion

Children are learning in a culture which is treating them as 'commodities' and providing very little, if any, experience of democracy in action (Gewirtz, 2000, p. 366). As the year ten participants in this research reveal, their 'learning' environment offers scant opportunity for them to develop their creativity, autonomy and desirable democratic values. It is difficult then or almost impossible for them, their teachers and schools to be expected to engage in genuine democratic processes, practices and language. Noddings (1998) believes that if we are concerned with moral outcomes then most episodes of critical thinking must start with the arousal of feeling. She advises (p. 163) that we must "care about the people, causes, and problems to whom and to which

we will apply our thinking skills.” This writing can be seen as an active struggle for understanding and recognising the lived meanings of student life worlds and their socio-cultural context. Even though I can only catch glimpses of that world because of my position as adult, researcher and ‘other’ – it is my intention to give voice to these young students who are caught in a school of ‘unlearning’ – an environment that does not allow the unfolding of their inherent potentialities. Through my scripted brush strokes, I hope their words and actions paint an everyday reality and awareness of a changing climate calling for alternative pedagogies and practices in education for a more sustainable future.

Please note that all student, school and teacher names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

REFERENCES

- Allende, I. (1991). *The stories of Eva Luna*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Brown, E. (2003). Freedom for some, discipline for "others". In K. J. Saltman, & Gabbard, D. (Ed.), *Education as enforcement: The militarization and corporatization of schools*. (pp. 127-151). New York; London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Chapman, T. (2007). Interrogating classroom relationships and events: Using portraiture and critical race theory in education research. *Educational Researcher* 36(3), 156-162.
- DET. (2001). *Behaviour Management in Schools*. Retrieved 5/8/2007. from http://policies.det.wa.edu.au/our_policies/.
- DET. (2008). *Behaviour Management in Schools* Retrieved 30/7/08. from http://policies.det.wa.edu.au/our_policies/.
- Foley, D. E. (2002). Critical ethnography: the reflexive turn. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 15(5), 469-490.
- Gewirtz, S. (2000). Bringing the politics back in: A critical analysis of quality discourses in education. *British Journal of Educational Studies* 48(4), 352-370.
- Gewirtz, S., Ball, S. & Bowe, R. (1995). Markets, choice and equity in education. Philadelphia: Open University Press:
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: essays on education, the arts, and social change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Horton, M., & Freire, P. (1990.). *We make the road by walking: conversations on education and social change*. Philadelphia Temple University Press.
- Kamler, B., & Fine, M. (2001). *Relocating the personal: a critical writing pedagogy*. Norwood, S. Aust.: Australian Association for the Teaching of English.
- Leistyna, P. (2003). Facing oppression: Youth voices from the front. In K. J. Saltman, & Gabbard, D. (Ed.), *Education as enforcement: the militarization and corporatization of schools*. (pp. 103-125). New York; London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Lingard, B., Knight, J., & Porter, P. (1995). Restructuring Australian schooling: Changing conceptions of top-down and bottom-up reforms. In B. Limerick & H. Nielsen (Eds.), *School and community relations:*

- Participation, Policy and Practices* (pp. 81-99). Sydney: Harcourt Brace.
- Mcleod, J. (2000). Metaphors of the Self: Searching for young people's identity through interviews. In J. Mcleod & K. Malone (Eds.), *Researching Youth* (pp. 45-56). Tasmania: ACYS.
- Nagle, J. (2001). *Voices from the Margins: The stories of vocational high school students*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Noddings, N. (1998). Ethics and the imagination. In W. Ayers, M. Greene & J. L. Miller (Eds.), *A light in dark times: Maxine Greene and the unfinished conversation* (pp. 159-169). New York: Teachers College Press
- Thompson, P., & McHugh, D. (1990). *Work Organisations: A critical introduction*. Hampshire: McMillan Education Ltd.
- Usher, R., & Edwards, R. (1994). *Postmodernism and education*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Wexler, P. (1992). *Becoming somebody: Toward a social psychology of school*. London; Washington, D.C.: Falmer Press.