

Silencing the everyday experiences of youth? - Issues of subjectivity, corporate ideology and popular culture in the English classroom.

MEd (Research) thesis by Glenn Savage

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Education (Research) at Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia, May 2006.

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

Glenn Savage - May 2006.

This study investigates the influence of popular culture texts on the subjectivities of young people and argues that critical pedagogical practices need to be further deployed by English teachers in response to the corporate-driven nature of popular texts. Three levels of synthesized information are presented, using data analysis born of a quantitative survey and in-depth interviews with a group of secondary English students in Perth, Australia.

Firstly, I argue that popular culture texts constitute the predominate form of consumed textual material for young people and that these texts are increasingly defined by corporate ideologies and branding. Secondly, I investigate the influence that these popular culture texts have on the subjectivities and everyday social experiences of young people. I argue that the ideologies and discourses in popular texts position young people to assume subjectivities that are increasingly defined by branding and corporate ideology, and that these texts often have a normalizing effect. Hence, I argue that young people's social currency is often defined by the extent to which individuals demonstrate an alliance to the ideologies of popular media, and that individuals who deviate from such popular norms often experience subjugation and exclusion within peer and social settings. Constructivist notions of subjectivity and an analytical framework heavily influenced by Foucauldian theory inform this theorization. Thirdly, I finalize my argument by dealing pedagogically with subject English and areas of it that hold relevance in terms of the integration and analysis of 'the popular'; including critical literacy, multiliteracies and critical pedagogy. I argue that a commitment to critically analyzing popular culture texts in the subject is lacking and that students feel many English teachers are "out of touch" with the everyday realities of young people and their popular culture influences. I argue that such failures risk producing students whose everyday experiences are silenced and who are unaware of the ways they are being positioned to adopt certain corporate-driven subjectivities.

Methodologically this study is informed by principles of critical theory, cultural studies, discourse analysis and a commitment to position the often-silenced student voice as a prime analytical tool. Aspects of autoethnography are deployed through punctuating personal narratives that feature within this text in order to illuminate the journey of self-realization and fundamental self re-evaluation I have traveled throughout the production of this research work.

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