

RADICAL EDUCATIONS

Popular Culture and Representations of Education

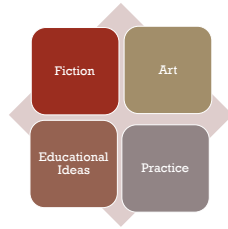
WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CULTURE?

- Culture has a broad definition
- Williams (1983) '*works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity*'

SO WHAT IS 'POPULAR'?

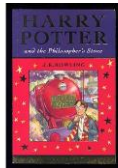
- Storey (2001) 'culture that is widely favoured or well liked by many people...mass culture produced for mass audiences'
- Popular culture is what remains when high culture is removed
- Also popular culture is the 'site of a struggle between "resistance" of subordinate groups in society and the forces of "incorporation" operating in the interests of dominant groups in society' Storey (2001)
- View based on those of Gramsci and 'hegemony' - set of values and assumptions through which a social class can exert dominance
- Commercialism - high and popular culture definitions no longer really relevant

- Maxine Greene *'The public school and the private vision'* (1965)
- Some commentators e.g Giroux concerned with critical pedagogy and how popular culture embodies alternative voices about curriculum and considers the way popular culture has a pedagogical impact
- Popular texts offer constructions of reality that compete with those offered by academic, state and professional discourses about education



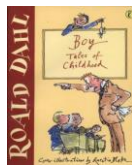
VERSIONS OF POPULAR CULTURE- BOOKS

Literary fiction –
often aimed at children



- Biographies – often show how people have been shaped by their educational experiences

- Also written by teachers *'My posse don't do homework'* Louanne Johnson (1992)



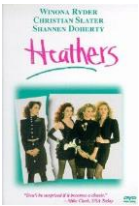
"I do have a blurred memory of sitting on the stairs and trying over and over again to tie one of my shoelaces, but that is all that comes back to me of school itself."
Roald Dahl

"There were a few teachers who just did not like me because of my face. Once, I was told to stand in the corner until I cheered up. The attitude was, 'Oh, for God's sake, what's the matter with him?' But it's just a natural expression."
Jack Dee



CINEMA

- Educational institutions, learners, educators have always featured strongly in films
- All tells us how society represents teachers, learners and the educational process
- What is the being represented here?



'The way popular culture constructs its own curriculum in the movies through the on screen relationship between teacher and pupil...General knowledge about the relationships between teachers and students, knowledge beyond the scope of the personal or anecdotal is created by constructs of popular culture played out in the mass media'

Dalton (1995)

TEEN FLICKS

Protagonists generally at college or school and films usually cover themes such as sexual experience, sporting subcultures, friendships, exams and grades etc



Problem?

Quite a benign picture of young people in comparison with films of previous generations.

Suggestion that wit energy and good fortune young will triumph over adversity



CYBER CULTURE

- Creation of new cultural forms and social products – cyberspace representation of educational experiences
- Blogging, YouTube?? Education is continuously on show
- Cyber culture is a unique marketplace – offers potential for marginal alternative culture to be popularised through global communication



COMICS & CARTOONS

- Acts on a young and impressionable readership
- Moved from static form to television
- Significant ones – Beavis & Butthead, The Simpsons, King of the Hill, South Park
- What does this tell you about adult education?



- Barthes (1964) – print cartoons in newspapers contributed to great debate by Callaghan 'such cartoons act as an indicator of public perception'

- Modern cartoons markedly different to static ones

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"I saw the bright light and the tunnel, but they sent me back because I haven't finished paying my student loans."



TELEVISION AND RADIO

- 24 hour global medium
- Dramas, reality shows etc
- Education – though not as popular as other areas, has still become a staple of the tv programme e.g. Soap operas (but rarely in the educational establishment) *Grange Hill*, *Teachers*, etc
- Other views of education through drama series show the other side of education – *Ahead of the Class*, *Hope and Glory*, the myth of the 'super-head' dedication and charisma saves the failing school
- Spoken-word radio not as popular but there are some representations of education there.



POPULAR MUSIC

- Hundreds of relevant songs over the years
- Cultural significance of popular music as a cultural signifier
- 'without doubt popular music is a primary, if not the primary leisure resource in late modern society' (Bennett 2001)
- Young people among key consumers therefore should be aimed at them
- Themes – anti-school, anti-teachers, alienation and isolation, racism and violence, bullying and oppression, idealisation and nostalgia for education, drugs in school, temporality, relationships and sex.



At school they taught me how to be
 So pure in thought and word and deed
 They didn't quite succeed
 For everything I long to do
 No matter when or where or who
 Has one thing in common, too

Pet Shop Boys – It's a Sin (1987)



FEMINISM

- Schools & colleges are places where gendered identities are constructed and patriarchal power is reinforced
- Curriculum, achievement of both boys and girls, impact of family on education, socialisation and social interaction, role models, behaviour of teachers
- Laura Mulvey (1975) key psychoanalytical based work on representations of women in film
- Educational representations– shifting representations of girls (particularly in US) and female teachers
- Stereotypical teacher spinster vs. schoolboy fantasy
- Problematic portrayal of female authority in education



HEGEMONY & CULTURAL STUDIES

- Antonio Gramsci – highly influential in fields of cultural studies and education
- His emphasis on importance of education arises from his conception of praxis and how to build a society counter to this
- Some thoughts... does popular culture contribute to a set of hegemonic beliefs about education? Education is a socialisation process which by definition sustains the hegemonic process?
- Ideas and values of dominant groups in society become accepted as 'common sense'
- Culture as praxis – fluid
- Transitions and conflicts identified partly by way in which education is represented in popular culture



IDEOLOGY AND EDUCATION

- Louis Althusser (1918-1990) – work lies between structural Marxism and rise of social theory of non-Marxist models
- Ideas are still current in discussing education and are relevant to popular culture and education
- Outlines Marx's view of society – *infrastructure* and *supra-structure*
- Infrastructure – The economic base of forces of production
- Supra-structure – 2 levels or floors
Political-legal & ideological

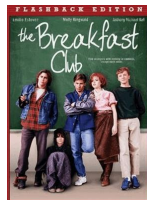


- Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) Govt, army, penal system etc
- Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) Distinct institutions, can be private as well as public e.g. Education, family, communications
- RSAs function by repression and violence and ISAs by ideology
- Schools & education takes children and inculcates them with ideology then at the age of 16 are 'ejected into production' (Althusser 1969)



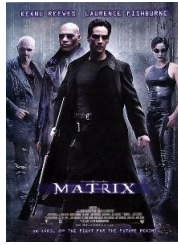
POWER & DISCOURSE

- Foucault – discipline in schools is founded on a level of compliance that is as much accepted by the students as it is enforced by the teachers (1980)
- Popular culture and focus of education on conventional classroom and traditional lecture theatre
- Also obsession with grades and achievement – closely linked to fulfilment of the self, grades determine what they can be – not the education



HYPER-REALITY

- Term coined by Jean Baudrillard – blurring of boundaries between material and representational
- 20th century society – has lost ability to distinguish between what is real and what isn't
- How is our understanding of the world constructed by material reality? To what extent is it created through representations – story, film, tv, news?
- Since all experiences are constructed through mass culture, how can we distinguish what is real?
- Education in popular culture defines boundaries – categories in school for example. Reality of this is far less obvious than how it is depicted in popular culture. How is school affected by this categorisation?



- Popular culture reflecting the traditional view of individuals bettering themselves through education
- Representation of educational norms of society



TEACHERS AND TEACHING

- How do we define 'good' in popular culture? What makes a saint or a hero?
- Issues of saintliness and heroism permeate social and cultural awareness
- How do teachers fit into this view?



'An individual of elevated moral stature and superior ability who pursues his goal indefatigably in the face of powerful antagonist(s). Because of his unbreached devotion to the good, no matter what the opposition, a hero attains spiritual grandeur even if he fails to achieve practical victory.'

Bernstein (2002)



- What about the real world?
- Most teachers – their strength is more psychological and emotional
- *'A new form of pedagogical text – not simply reflecting culture but actually constructing it.'* Giroux (2002)



- Education situates hope in the hands of teachers – essential for a heroic display
- But...where there is hope there is also disillusion
- So...In society we construct teachers as heroes or villains
- A binary world good vs. Evil
- Giroux (2002) 'A pedagogy of representations'



'Struggles over popular culture, for instance, represent a different but no less important site of politics. For it is precisely on the terrain of culture, that identities are produced, values learned, histories legitimated, and knowledge appropriated. Culture is the medium through which children fashion their individual and collective identities and learn in part how to narrate themselves in relation to others.'

Giroux (2002)



- 1950s – the advent of the 'teenager' as a social construct, rebellious to authority
- Strength in numbers in the classroom but conflict can be problematic to isolated individuals – teacher has the power
- Links to traditional socio-political process of education
- Revolution and rebellion the preferred options.



- Foucault (1975) – power and authority exerted through observation and control but it is also transient in nature
- In other words power not defined so much by role of the teacher but on the relationship they have with the students.
- Power is assumed rather than held by a group or particular individual



- How does reality of classroom equate with popular culture?
- '*Good teachers are projected on the screen as bright lights in schools of darkness*' Dalton (1995)
- Good teacher is the outsider and challenge the system
- Alternative curriculum and pedagogy only model for Hollywood
- Is this fair?



- Power however is still with the teacher – never on the individuality of the student.
- Teacher-centered view of education