Social Capital and the 'Socially Just School'

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Abstract

This paper argues that growing inequalities make it imperative that schools reinvent themselves around the issue of social justice. Through a case study of an Australian primary school, teacher-based forms of social capital are explored revealing progressive pedagogies to be an important precursor to the 'socially just school'.

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The Issue

The key idea being tentatively advanced here is that some students from complex and disadvantaged backgrounds don't have access to social capital (Bourdieu, [1986] 1997) consistent with the middle class values around which schools are constructed. This case of 'schools that don't fit the students' (Deschenes, Cuban & Tyack, 2001), means that students from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds lack access to forms of social capital (Smyth, 2000) necessary to succeed at school and beyond.

School success depends on the existence of "supportive ties" and there is an unequal distribution of opportunities "for entering different social and institutional contexts and forming relationships with people who control . . . valued institutional resources" (Stanton-Salzar & Dornbusch, 1995, p. 116). While this absence is most evident in high schools, in terms of alienation, disengagement, and dropping out (Smyth, et., al, 2000), these conditions are incubated in primary schools.

If there is any validity in such argument then the challenge for schools is to (re)invent themselves in ways that work against student disadvantage. One way to approach this is through the heuristic of the 'socially just school, which coalesces around a number of key ideas, in which schools :

- Articulate their purposes;
- Advance a concern for social injustice;
- Continually (re)focus around learning;
- Pursue a culture of innovation;
- Enact democratic forms of practice
- Are community-minded;
- Display educative forms of leadership; and
- Engage in critical literacies (Smyth, Lawson & Hattam, 1998, pp. 115-124).

I want to explore, with a moderate level of skepticism, what Croninger & Lee (2001) refer to as “teacher-based forms of social capital” (p. 550). The claim could be made that when disadvantaged schools have high levels of teacher-based social capital, then they create institutional resources in the form of:

... emotional support and encouragement, information and guidance about personal or academic decisions, and additional assistance with schoolwork (p. 550).

Making institutional relational resources available to all students takes on particular urgency in a de-industrialised 'rust- belt' state like South Australia, where a genteel slide into poverty is being accompanied by almost half of state schools falling within an increasing gradient of poverty and disadvantage.

Against this background, I want to pursue several research problematics in one school:

- what is meant by the notion of the socially just school?
- how does the socially just school create a reform agenda *against* the devolved neo-liberal agenda being imposed from outside of schools?
- how does the socially just school work *for* students struggling with personal narratives of disadvantage and social disruption?, and
- how does the socially just school work to positively advance teaching as a relationally rich discourse for such students?

Social Capital: a Key Theoretical Concept

The sociological category of social capital has been described as “one of the most successful ‘exports’ from sociology during the past two decades” (Portes, 2000, p. 1). While it might rank as “one of sociology’s most popular theoretical exports” (Dika & Singh, 2000, p. 31) it has also been labelled as “a fad”, propelled by policy makers as “a quick-fix solution to social and economic problems” (p. 31). Portes (1998) put it that “. . . social capital has evolved into something of a cure-all for the maladies affecting society . . . [bringing with it] an unusual baggage of policy implications [that] has been heaped on it” (p. 2)

Having been conceptually hijacked and “conceptually stretched” (Portes, 1998, p. 1), “from an individual asset to a feature of communities and even nations” (p. 1), the notion of social capital appears in need of some serious rehabilitation.

Social capital as proposed by Bourdieu ([1986] 1997) refers to “the benefits accruing to individuals or families by virtue of their ties with others” (Dika & Singh, 2002, p. 32). There are other views of social capital, which brevity dictates I omit (see Coleman, 1988). Bourdieu's conceptualization appears to be the most helpful here because of its attention to social reproduction and symbolic power. He focuses on “structural constraints and unequal access to institutional resources based on class, gender and race” (Dika & Singh, 2002,

p. 34). Institutional resources refer to “the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to the possession of a durable network of essentially institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Dika & Singh, 2002, p. 33). For Bourdieu, the essence of social capital lies in “relationships that allow the individual to claim resources possessed by the collectivity” (p. 33). The dominant class, it is argued, uses social capital to reproduce solidarity and maintain its dominant position:

The existence of a network of connections is not a natural given, or even a social given . . . It is the product of an endless effort [at the institutional level] . . . to produce and reproduce lasting, useful relationships that can secure material or symbolic profits . . . In other words, the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term . . . (Bourdieu [1986] 1997, p. 52).

Bourdieu argues that “a continuous series of exchanges [occur] in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed” (p. 52) in an “alchemy of *consecration* . . . [that] is endlessly reproduced . . . [and which] presupposes mutual knowledge and recognition” (p. 52). While acknowledging the importance of Bourdieu, it is the notion of teacher-based social capital that particularly interests me here (Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Croninger & Lee, 2001)

Inserting teachers into the picture requires a cultural production view of teachers as active agents who use available cultural resources to construct educational activity. But teachers, especially in disadvantaged settings, are not completely free agents “but also the involuntary recipients of cultural resources not necessarily consistent with the manifested aims of [their] educational activity” (Neuman & Bekerman, 2001, p. 471). This is a view well understood by some who work with cultural diversity:

Minorities whose cultural frames of reference are oppositional to the cultural frame of reference of . . . mainstream culture have greater difficulty crossing cultural boundaries at school to learn. (Ogbu, 1992, p. 5)

Teacher-based social capital, therefore, works at countering the norms and values of schools serving and promoting traditionally "dominant Anglo Saxon cultural standards" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 2). The attempt is to construct supportive relationships that overcome "barriers", "impediments" and "entrapments" that make participation in schooling problematic for disadvantaged students.

Understanding how some schools make the resources available to disadvantaged students through “engaging pedagogies” (McFadden &

Munns, 2002) requires a “network analytic approach” summed up as follows:

The structural features of middle-class networks are analogous to social freeways that allow people to move about the complex mainstream landscape quickly and efficiently. In many ways, they function as pathways of privilege and power. Following this metaphor, a fundamental dimension of social inequality is that some are able to use these freeways, while others are not. A major vehicle that allows for use of such freeways is an educational experience that is strategic, empowering, and network-enhancing (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 4).

The conceptual value of an educational view of social capital lies in identifying the conditions under which some students use social capital to achieve their interests. Put succinctly:

To possess social capital, a person must be related to others, and it is those others, not himself [sic], who are the actual source of his or her advantage (Portes, 1998, p. 7, emphases mine).

If we can understand how dominant groups use such properties, then it may be possible to try to pursue similar conditions in less advantageous settings –

notwithstanding questions about how durable such ties might be when pursued pedagogically.

The Setting and the Research Approach

“Hillsview” was one of several schools in a multi-sited studyⁱ of how the policy of the fiscally devolved self-managing school was impacting at the level of teaching, learning, and teachers’ work. Hillsview was chosen because it was working to keep alive a set of ideas and practices around social justice, in a wider educational policy context that had officially expunged such emphases.

At the time of the study Hillsview, a government primary school (years K-7) had just opted into becoming a self-managing school. It had 367 students and 43 staff, 80% of the students were “schoolcard holders’ and eligible for government assistance; it was officially classified in the 30% of most disadvantaged schools in the state; 65% of students came from homes in which English was not the first language. There were 37 Aboriginal students, 38 students on individually negotiated curriculum plans, 200 children had moved in and out of the school in the year before the study, and there had been a 30% turnover of teaching staff.

The study spanned 18 months, with eighteen key informants – the principal, the school leadership team, teachers, Chair of the Governing Council, and a group of students. “Conversations with a purpose” (Burgess, 1988) lasting up to an hour, on 2–3 occasions, occurred after observing classroom teaching situations, so that teachers had the scope to talk about their professional biography and narrative identity, and how they were making sense of their work. The findings of the study were “checked out” with the whole staff of Hillsview in a professional development workshop.

Social Justice and the Policy Tension

This study was attempting to contribute to a “more sophisticated sociology of education . . . of how inequalities are produced . . . [and] the institutional character of school systems and the cultural processes that occur in them” (Connell, 1994, p. 126). As Connell put it, teachers are central to improving the circumstances of disadvantage as “the workers most strategically placed to affect that relationship . . . [and we must] bring teachers’ work to the center of discussions of disadvantage” (p. 143).

The prevailing policy view that children in poverty suffer from a cultural and psychological deficit, and that what is needed are various forms of compensation is argued to be a “false map of the problem” (Connell, 1994, p. 130). Rather, the deficit resides with educational policy makers, educational

systems, and to an extent schools. We need to “re-map the issues” (p. 133) by starting from the cultural mismatch between what schools as instruments of state power are trying to do, and the lives, histories, circumstances and aspirations of disadvantaged children.

Teachers can appear to keep social justice alive when they recognise and deal with the mismatches and misrecognition between school culture and the lives and experiences of students labelled as ‘disadvantaged’. Such teachers would claim to be ‘doing social justice’ when they deal with the misunderstandings Freebody, et al, (1995) refer to as “interactive trouble”, picking up on the crucial “cues” students miss in school because of the “privileging of pedagogical routines” (p. 296) to which they are unaccustomed. Issues of power are interrupted when the dominant view of the way schools are supposed to be is challenged.

There is a tension created by contemporary external educational policy reforms based on a policy fantasy around rating, ranking and ‘education by numbers’ (league ladders and cross-school comparisons), the notion that schools are no different from supermarkets or breweries, and the expectation that schools should take on the garb and mantra of the business sector around choice, markets, management, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness. Often teachers’ ways of thinking about the issues confronting them are framed quite differently, around indigenous, local or vernacular

theories and practices of having to deal with the diverse, often fractured, and fragmented lives of children, through keeping alive the issue of social justice. These two lifeworlds are often incommensurate.

Some Broad Themes Around the Socially Just School

The case study, employing ethnographic methods, was an instance of “disruptive pedagogies” (Weis and Fine, 2001) in a school attempting to interrupt wider social hierarchies of advantage.

Current attempts to define, prescribe, measure, calibrate and domesticate teaching through management practices entrenches and exacerbates disparities by working against the most disadvantaged students because “good teaching in disadvantaged schools . . . requires maximum flexibility and imagination” (Connell, 1994, p. 138), with the challenge being “how to institutionalize ‘good teaching’ in disadvantaged schools” (p. 141).

It is important I say something about how the ‘voiced data’ from the teachers has been organised in this paper. In the attempt to try and hear what teachers had to say, I have thematised and presented the data as ethnographic extracts with minimal interruption and interpretation, to allow teachers’ voices some space to ‘breathe’ (Marcus, 1998).

This was a complex story not easily captured in a brief space, but I will speak to a provisional constellation of elements pointing in the direction of a teacher-based approach to social capital within the wider heuristic of the socially just school. In particular, I will deal with: “Whole School Commitment” because of its centrality; and, three elements from each of the themes of “Relationships” (social learning; valuing students; ‘hanging in’), and “Curriculum” (success; fostering optimism; broadening opportunities).

Commitment Across the School

Policy neglect, atrophy and obfuscation meant that teachers at Hillsvieview had difficulty naming or recognising social justice as a category, and when they did, they appeared to operate largely from a cultural/psychological view of disadvantage, as illustrated below:

Interviewer: What does this school focus on in terms of social justice?

Teacher: The emotional intelligence stuff is really big here – coping with getting the children to feel good about themselves; getting strong locus of control; dealing with all those other issues that perhaps children from other schools already come with – that cultural capital which they already have at [Middle Class School]. Here they don't have that

emotional stability or resilience to get through in lots of ways. We provide that in the classroom. This school is really strong at catering for those particular aspects of children's' development.

This is social skills development – helping them put their poor home backgrounds into perspective – showing them that there is also a loving, caring and nurturing way in spite of all the world violence and abuse.
(#12, 24/10/01, p. 1)ⁱⁱ

The interviewer, struggling for a more sociological view, put it back to the teacher:

Perhaps poverty is not being specifically named. Maybe there's a whole lot of words being used as code words e.g. emotional intelligence that might be a label for addressing poverty? (#12, 24/10/01, p. 4)

Notwithstanding, Hillsvie teachers saw social justice as being at the centre of everything they did, even though they might not label it as such:

I guess I don't have a definition in words – it's the way I work . . . I'm always examining that and thinking, 'Have I got the child's and family's needs?' – I think I'm getting better at it. . . (#6, 26/9/01, p. 1)

The importance of placing social justice in the centre of the frame was put in these terms:

In our teacher talk we talk in terms of disadvantage. What does that mean? This school's values are about fairness, dignity and quality. We talk about trying to improve the learning outcomes given the socio-economic disadvantage of the kids (#1; 5/7/01, p. 1)

I say to the teacher: "Where does this kid come from? Where does this kid learn best? How do you do that? We look at kids' profiles and why they are not engaged in learning. What's their life outside of school like? (#1; 5/7/01, p. 9-10)

Another teacher struggled hard to define it, too:

It's just part of everything you do, especially the area I'm in (Special Needs Co-ordinator). You build up a really good relationship with the kids . . . find out who they are, so you can say 'How is Aunty-so-and-so's baby going', because that's the most important thing in their life at the moment. You get to know what they're bringing into the school (#3, 27/9/01, p. 3)

As an educational policy imperative social justice has been expunged, or to use Dwyer's (1995) terminology, there is a "policy vacuum" (p. 266) – a kind of policy deafness expressed by one teacher in this way:

I was at a conference a few weeks back and a principal said it was almost like you don't mention the word social justice any more. It was a big thing when I first started teaching 11 years ago, especially in [disadvantaged] schools. Now it has almost been brushed under a carpet. . . It *has* to be alive in these schools, otherwise we wouldn't be able to cater for these kids. It's not one of those things that sticks out like . . . (#8, 27/9/01, p. 5)

The question of how schools like Hillsvue sustain a discourse around social justice is a complex one. The kind of teachers who find this work challenging and satisfying appear to thrive on the "forceful pedagogy" (Weis & Fine, 2001, p. 498) necessary to create "counterpublics" (p. 499) or "opposing strategies" that amount to an "alternative voice to the deafening victim mentality" (p. 509):

. . . people genuinely want to work with these kids (#16, 25/10/01, p. 1)

A number of teachers at [Hillsvue] have been in disadvantaged schools for most of their working lives. Lots of people here still work with a

social justice headset. Schools like this attract . . . people who still wish to talk about social justice and do something about it . . . (#1; 31/5/01, p. 1)

One teacher who had been at Hillsvue for 17 years, seemed to capture the way social justice for these teachers was expressed in terms of individual students:

I don't look at social justice anymore – I just look at the kids as they walk in the room . . . I never make an assumption that the children who are coming to the room are coming with any particular skill, any particular knowledge, any particular experience or even any particular language background. Any task they do I try and give them the tools to succeed . . . (#4, 26/9/01, p. 1)

Teachers at Hillsvue were not animated by a sophisticated theoretical view of social justice, which made analysis more difficult. They appeared to be activated by what Ayers, Hunt & Quinn (1998) refer to as “teaching for social justice” where “no teaching is or ever can be innocent – it must be situated in a cultural context, an historical flow, an economic condition” (Ayers, 1998, p. xvii). As Ayers (1998) put it:

Teaching for social justice demands a dialectical stance: one eye firmly fixed on the students – What are they? What are their hopes, dreams and aspirations? Their passions and commitments? What skills, abilities, and capacities does each one bring to the classroom? – and the other eye looking unblinkingly at the concentric circles of context – historical flow, cultural surround, economic reality. Teaching for social justice is teaching that arouses students, engages them in a quest to identify obstacles to their full humanity, to their freedom, and then to drive, to move against those obstacles (p. xvii).

Sustaining a pedagogical mindset with which to counter the unequal opportunity structures, as the teachers saw them, meant having the school-wide collective commitment to forming institutional relationships that might make a difference. Teachers at Hillview, therefore, seemed to be trying to actively imagine and invent their teaching identities in an overall school context, against a policy imperative that was about accountability, measurement and numbers – an issue on which teachers had quite a different ‘take’.

Beyond Education by Numbers . . . It's About Relationships

The paperwork involved in this job [Special Needs Co-ordinator] is unbelievable. We are audited all the time. It's all a big numbers game . .

. money game. . . having an understanding of where that child is coming from and what they bring into the school – that’s what social justice means to me, and in terms of special education that’s everything (#3, 27/9/01, p. 5-6)

Hillsview was grappling with what Paugam (2002) called a “spiral of precariousness” – an accumulation of factors that contributed to family poverty, including: losing, or not having a job; a reduction in, or diminished participation in social life; and, a weak or non-existent support network. While still a long way from confronting structural constraints of disadvantage and unequal access, in practical terms, these teachers saw themselves as providing the relational foundations necessary for successful schooling for these children, through:

- social learning;
- valuing what students brought with them;
- “hanging in” and not giving up on them;
- empathy for the circumstances of these students;
- creating an environment of emotional stability and consistency; and
- acknowledging poverty as a central issue.

Three of these were prominent.

Social Learning. To be successful at school students need to be able to access the opportunity structures made available by the school. For disadvantaged students this can present a problem because of their “limited opportunity structure” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 201).

Success in schools depends upon “learning how to *decode the system*” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 13); understanding the rules of how schooling works; fathoming the “cultural logic” (p. 13); and, becoming “successful consumers and entrepreneurs” (p. 10) of schooling – something that was difficult in this context. While demonstrating signs of a cultural/psychological view, one teacher put it:

... it's about teaching them. . . to get the most out of the situation . . . I say to the kids: 'I'm here to teach and you're here to learn. You have to use me to your very best advantage to get as much out of me as you possibly can'. We negotiate class rules at the start of the year and that's really important because then they have ownership of that . . . we divided the rules up into teaching and learning, safety, respect for all . . . and within that there's things that we follow . . . and that's negotiated, and we discuss that . . . The aim is to get the children to think about their behaviour and to stop and think before they act in the future . . . to look at what's appropriate . . . to make them feel part of the school and the class (#14, 24/10/01, p. 6)

Valuing Students. One of the most significant “exclusionary structures” militating against the accumulation of social capital is the “institutionalization of distrust and detachment” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 17) – the subtle, and not so subtle, ways schools convey to students that their backgrounds and cultures are not valued. On the contrary, engaging pedagogies, establish consistency, minimise contradictory messages to students, and provide an affirmation that the school attaches importance to the attributes students bring with them. This surfaced repeatedly at Hillsview in the form of mutual respect. It occurred at the individual and collective level, and was evident in the climate established in the classroom, and in the physical environment and surroundings of the school. According to the teachers:

. . . the relationship [with children] is really the key to your survival in the school. I work on gaining the respect of the children, and likewise show respect to them (#14, 24/10/01, p. 1)

The more you get to know these kids the more they’ll open up to you and respect you. They need to know you to respect you. (#16, 25/10/01, p. 4)

You need to show kids respect and earn it back. . . Working on relationships is really important. This is the key to survival and success in a school like Hillsvue (#14, 24/10/01, p. 2)

It's the relationship stuff . . . not just what is coming out of your mouth – it's the climate within your room – how the children react – it's the key to successful literacy – the things you do incidentally or one-to-one rather than as a whole class (#4, 26/9/01, p. 4)

I take a lot of notice of their background but I don't assume things from their background. There is poverty for all sort of reasons e.g sudden disruptions in marriages, drug and alcohol abuse, aboriginality –and you can't attach behaviours and learning to a particular category. It's much more complex. To me it's getting to know the kids (#4, 26/9/01, p. 1)

'Hanging in' with the kids. Creating the circumstances for the creation of social capital at schools like Hillsvue, meant trying to move beyond “institutionalized superficiality” of relationships in schools, that equate to “transitory attachments” – to establishing “trusting attachments” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 18). Relationships of the latter kind were a crucial precursor to ‘real’ learning, even if the two were often inseparable in practice. What was clearly being worked against were the “fragile and temporary relationships”

which mask “hierarchical power and institutionalized inequality” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 19).

Again, while we might have some argument with the psychologistic ring to it, for these teachers it was hard to advance without first getting the child in their presence and having a shared understanding from which to converse:

[Working on] the ‘emotional intelligence’ . . . That’s what our kids need to develop resilience. . . it’s the stuff that we need to do first for our kids to be successful, and that takes a lot of time (#11, 27/9/01, p. 3)

I work very hard at developing relationships with kids and apologising to them when I get it wrong [gave an example of a disruptive student who could well have been suspended/expelled if she choose to follow the letter of the law. She persisted with the student and observed gradual improvement in his attitude/behaviour] (#11, 27/9/01, p. 3)

It’s about hanging in with kids – making sure they come to school – driving to their houses ‘Good morning Harry, come on let’s go to school’ (#3, 27/9/01, p. 5)

Unless you know what’s happening in children’s lives, and what they’ve been through, you don’t understand why they are behaving in the ways

that they are e.g. why this child isn't coming to school. I talk to them about how important it is to keep coming. 'Look at the improvement we've seen because you were here every single day last week' (#3, 27/9/01, p. 3)

Kids can see that if they come to school they will improve. We chase up kids if they have been away for a while. Need to understand why they are not attending and address that if possible (#3, 27/9/01, p. 5)

Sometimes it meant being consistent and persistent even when little in the way of immediate tangible results emerged:

There are days when you don't feel positive, but it's important to be consistent – that's very important. Many of these kids come from such uncertain lives that you are the only constant that there is in their lives. It's not a bed of roses. Sometimes you are being so positive and it still doesn't work (#5, 26/9/01, p. 3)

Stanton-Salazar (1997) refers to this as teachers being "consistent sources of emotional and social support" (p. 18) and without it students display an "ambivalent attitude toward the established order" (p. 18). Educational anthropologists like Erickson (1987) refer to this as students withdrawing their political assent to learn.

It's the Curriculum, Stupid

According to Connell, the curriculum is the battleground where the theories and politics of knowledge meets classroom practice “ in complex and turbulent ways” (Connell, 1998, p. 84). A curriculum that was accessible, meaningful and inclusive of the lives of these students was expressed by teachers in different ways – the “inclusive curriculum”, “success-oriented learning”, “participatory classrooms”, “special needs programs”, and “student voice”.

You want every single one of them [students] to feel that they are valued, and that to me is what social justice is about. What they are bringing needs to be included in the curriculum. That’s what being Australian is about, too (#5, 26/9/01, p. 4)

There were six sub-themes that emerged from Hillsvew that exemplified what it meant to pursue curriculum justice within the socially just school:

- experiencing success;
- fostering optimism;
- broadening learning opportunities;
- curriculum rigour;

- empowerment and participation; and
- pedagogical flexibility.

Because of space limitations I will deal only with the first three of these.

Experiencing Success. Navigating a pathway to an alternative future involved students learning to confront “barriers” and cross “borders” to participate in the mainstream world of learning. Teachers acknowledged the stressful nature of this transition for many students, and tried to maximize opportunities, while minimizing the “psychic costs” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 22), so they could experience success.

Unless learning experiences can be constructed in a way that minimize “anxiety, apprehension, or fear” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 24) then it becomes too hard, and the institutionalized exclusion of the school prevails. Putnam (2000) refers to this as the creation of social capital through bonding: “the links between like-minded people or the reinforcement of homogeneity” (Shuller, Baron & Field, 2000, p. 10).

Teachers gave examples of how they structured their teaching to try to ensure success:

We try hard to come up with programs that encourage them to pursue some ambition. You hear a lot of kids here saying 'Oh, why do I need to learn this because I'm going to go on the dole when I leave school anyway'. You really have to get those kids out of that thinking. You have to have high expectations of kids . . . (#9, 27/9/01, p. 1).

I do simple goal setting e.g. 'what is it that you think we should be working on?' They know what they are good at and what they need to improve. I show them how they are improving throughout the year (#3, 27/9/01, p. 3)

. . . if they don't feel good about coming to school and feel good about themselves, then the rest of the things don't happen (#5, 26/9/01, p. 4)

. . . we focus on achievement every day of the week – day in day out – always positive to the children – always celebrate anything that they can do. If there is negative behaviour I always try to reverse that. It's about getting the kids into a mindset that says 'Yes, you can do it'. 'Yes, you can have a go – you can keep on trying – in the end you'll get there' (#5, 26/9/01, p. 2)

. . . just getting the mindset – so many kids come to school saying 'I can't do it, so I'm just going to shut down'. It's just saying that they can do it,

and fostering what they can do – a focus on the positives (#5, 26/9/01, p. 2)

Fostering a Sense of Optimism. While teachers spoke of trying to transcend inter-generational contexts of diminished expectations, there were difficulties with trying to foster a middle class “ideology of individualism” that encouraged “competition, self-sufficiency, autonomy, and meritocracy” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 31). Individualized choice and personal responsibility atomizes the process and pushes the burden for making wrong choices in self-contained ways back onto individuals, making it seem as if decisions are made in a calculating way. Reality suggests that advantage accrues from unacknowledged “empowering networks . . . [of] social capital” (p. 31):

For privileged children, it provides an institutionally endorsed explanation for their success, while obscuring the network mechanisms that systematically engineer their advantage. For nonprivileged children, it acts to undermine the support flowing from family and community sources . . . and muddles their awareness of how important help-seeking behavior, supportive ties to peers, and collaborative learning are to their long-term success (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 31).

Teachers from Hillview spoke of their counter measures it in these ways:

Parent's expectations are low – a recent comment from a parent about girl in class: "She'll be pregnant by the time she's 13". That may well be okay for her but she needs to know that there are other choices. We are talking about third generation unemployment in the area – very young parents. Maybe those parents themselves didn't have any other options. (#12, 24/10/01, p. 2)

I have just finished an activity with the children . . . "I am a success because". We had a huge brain storming session and broke into small groups and talked about what makes someone successful. . . If you sow the seeds early you can tell the children that there are jobs out there. A lot of children here believe that staying at home being on the dole . . . is a job they actually want to do when they leave school. (#12, 24/10/01, p. 2)

But, there was also a strong sense of affiliation to and pride in their school, even when the external circumstances were literally tearing down the community:

One thing that 's unique is the pride this area has in the school – people are proud to live in this area and they never move. They don't want to move even when their houses are disappearing [reference to the

redevelopment of the area around the school and its gentrification]. (#4, 26/9/01, p. 2).

Broadening Learning Opportunities. It is insufficient to explain disadvantage as residing entirely inside, and therefore able to be managed by the school. There is a wider social context of “exclusionary social forces” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 20), like race, class, gender and ethnicity. It is not simply that these children have been excluded from a range of experiences. What is missing is the opportunity to develop supportive relationships with other adults, organizations and bodies outside the school; often their relationships – with school authorities, police, the legal system, childrens’ services, welfare agencies, drug enforcement bodies – have been antagonistic and fractious in nature.

Teachers at Hillsvew were often able to describe strategies that amounted to transcending worlds created by “politicized” and “problematized” exclusionary forces. Being more inclusive meant bringing students into the centre of the frame, so that they experienced self-worth:

A lot of the students here have a boundary of several blocks that they move happily and securely within. Many kids don't have knowledge/ experience of rural/natural environment e.g. birds, the fact that sea water is salty etc. . . (#4, 26/9/01, p. 3)

We want to give these kids as many opportunities as possible to experience new things. (#9, 27/9/01, p. 2).

It's really important for us to try and provide them with as many opportunities as we can that they normally wouldn't have in their life outside of school . . . the experiences they have in classrooms . . . outside the classrooms . . . with other adults, because they don't have the opportunity to build very good relationships with people outside the school within their family (#14, 24/10/01, p. 2)

I'm planning to do some work with the kids on futures . . . how they see themselves in one year, five years, twenty years . . . looking at

themselves . . . from school years to adulthood. I just want to see how they perceive that (#13, 24/10/01, p. 6)

I also want to look at fear . . . the places they go to . . . the places they feel safe . . . where they are not allowed to go and why (#13, 24/10/01, p. 6)

These comments seem to indicate attempts to extend social boundaries by “learn[ing] to negotiate, and participate in, multiple and simultaneously existing social worlds” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 21). This ability to enable students to participate in multiple worlds, seemed to animate some teachers to provide a kind of “context of ‘apprenticeship’ relationships with a variety of agents” (p. 22). There are echoes here of Putnam’s (2000) notion of “bridging” in which social capital is built up between heterogeneous groups, and while there is the likelihood of tension because of fragility, there is also a greater chance of fostering “social inclusion” (Schuller, Baron & Field, 2000, p. 10).

Conclusion

This paper set out to explore the argument and some evidence about the plausibility of the link between social capital and teacher-based forms of social capital in the context of a school teaching for social justice. Descriptions were presented of a primary school that was pursuing an ensemble of progressive pedagogies. In the latter part of the

paper, in trying to make sense of the data, I chose quite deliberately to draw extensively on Stanton-Salazar's (1997) rendition of teacher-based social capital, leaving players like Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam to be drawn into the conversation at another time and place.

While at one level it could be argued that the evidence showed a school that had traversed some considerable distance in embracing a set of progressive views about social justice in a wider educational policy context that had lapsed into silence around redressing social disadvantage, at another level, it was hard to portray the school as realistically having moved seriously beyond holding and enacting a cultural/psychological view of disadvantage; for example, by ascribing to an 'emotional intelligence' view of social justice.

While not disparaging of the considerable efforts made by the teachers and the school, this highlights the more sobering realisation that as researchers we are still only in the early exploratory stages of what notions of teacher-based social capital might look like, it features and identifying characteristics, en route to exploring possible relationships it might have to social capital more generally, and indeed, what contribution (if any) it might make to redressing social disadvantage through notions like the socially just school. While there is a strong element of truth in Croninger & Lee's (2001) statement that: "Young people who face economic and social hardships at home are especially dependent on schools for support and guidance if they cannot find these forms

of social capital elsewhere in their lives” (p. 549), it is still less than clear precisely how it is that teachers go about constructing access to the necessary resources. For the moment, while “intuitively appealing” (Croninger & Lee, 2001, p. 572) as a construct, the challenge for a notion like teacher-based social capital lies in how teachers can make realistic progress with it, how it can be connected to issues of the socially just school, and as researchers, how we can better understand if/how they do it.

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