

Issue 2: Education and Learning

# Warwick Sociology Journal

**Editorial team:**

Olivia Boulton  
Elliot Bullock  
Rosa Coleman  
Claire Corp  
Adam Gayton

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*Warwick Sociology Journal*



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Issue Two: Education and Learning.

(Eds)

Olivia Boulton

Elliot Bullock

Rosa Coleman

Claire Corp

Adam Gayton

University of Warwick

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Any queries should be directed to: [SociologyJournal@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:SociologyJournal@warwick.ac.uk)

## Issue 2: Education and learning

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## Editorial Introduction

The second issue of the Warwick Sociology Journal is based around the central theme of Education and Learning. This covers a broad range of topics which invoked a wide-range of responses from students and staff both from within the University of Warwick and from outside. This is a significant topic because education and learning is something that constantly influences people throughout their lives and in a variety of institutions, not simply during their compulsory education. The different ways people have interpreted this topic is a clear indicator of this fact.

This collection of articles presents a variety of approaches on this theme; the first two pieces alone range from a satirical critique of the structural issues within the higher education system from a feminist standpoint, written by an academic within the department, to a small-scale study of toy choices within early years education with a view to finding out whether they help to enforce gender differences and stereotypes.

The first article, written by Lambert, offers an account of the author's involvement within the feminist education collective, FAAB (Feminists Against Academic Bollocks). This article outlines the group's criticisms of the academy and explains how through 'serious play' they found a new way to portray their ideas whilst challenging the conventional methods usually found at academic conferences.

Following this, Self reports on her own ethnographic research on how the interactions between the staff and children in a pre-school environment may reproduce gender stereotypes, particularly focusing on the choices made when it comes to toys. The socialisation that young children are subject to in their early education is an extremely important part of their development and has been of particular interest to feminists in ensuring that young girls are not socialised into conforming to a stereotype that may disadvantage them in later life.

The next piece then turns the focus away from individual accounts and research, as Sheppard offers a brief discussion and reflection on the writing of Louis Althusser. Specifically, his theory of ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus is discussed and the way in which this relates to the education system, which can be seen as a form of social control. Some critiques of Althusser are then

presented, highlighting some of the ways in which his theory proves inadequate, particularly in looking at the labour market in contemporary society.

The next two submissions from students are comment pieces. Corp's article discusses the topic of unpaid internships and whether or not they are a useful tool for learning, or if they are just a way of exploiting those who can afford to work for long periods of time without being paid. Internships are often accepted as an invaluable source of experience and knowledge for students, something that can set them apart from others, some of whom may not be able to partake in them due to financial restrictions. This means that there are certain people who are being continually disadvantaged through this practice. Corp argues that unpaid internships are an elitist phenomenon that perpetuate class divisions and do nothing to help the more limited social mobility of the lower classes.

The shift then changes to the university campus as Cant writes about activism stemming from labour struggles, neoliberal agendas and the marketization of universities. He specifically talks about the success of the 3 Cosas campaign based at the University of London which fights for sick pay, holidays and pensions. The importance of small-scale campaigns and the positive impact they can have on specific problems of marginalisation of certain groups is highlighted, and also how this can bring about the union of students and workers in these more radical campaigns.

Thank you for taking the time to read our second issue of the Warwick Sociology Journal, it has been great hearing from you and we've really enjoyed putting this issue together.

Olivia and The Journal Team

## Serious Play with/in the Academy

Cath Lambert



Image 1: FAAB perform 'RAE Deep, Bureaucracy High', BERA 2003

*What followed was funny, engaging, moving; involving pastiche and parody, rewrites of classic comedy sketches and favourite musical anthems ... and also quiet statements in lyrical language of the pain that working in higher education can cause. As a bitterly funny commentary on the elitism of higher education, and the collusive ways in which we as academics are complicit in the competitive practices of research selectivity and as a defiant enactment of the politics of refusal – it was simply glorious! As individuals these are women academics who have made major contributions to the theoretical literature dealing with post-compulsory education; but in breaking out of its theoretical conventions they used (and parodied) theory in ways that gave hope, certainly to me, and judging by the riotous applause, to most of the audience. This was certainly not the usual reaction of a group of academics at a BERA [British Educational Research Association] symposium. Why it was so important, I would argue, is that it connected theory and practice, and showed that we can act, and can defy the seemingly endless ways in which the practices of higher education seek to compartmentalise us and our students.*

*Sue Clegg (2005:126) commenting on FAAB's performance at BERA, 2003.*

*Introduction: enacting a politics of refusal*

Earlier this month (February 2014) Diane Reay wrote a piece for Discover Society (<http://www.discoversociety.org/>) entitled *From Academic Freedom to Academic Capitalism*, in which she reflected on her involvement in FAAB (Feminists Against Academic Bollocks), a feminist

educational collective which between 2003-2007 devised and performed sketches, poetry, satire, scholarship and song at academic conferences including *British Educational Research Association* (2003), *Discourse, Power, Resistance* (2004), *Gender and Education Association* (2005 and 2007), *American Educational Research Association* (2006) and the *Society for Research into Higher Education* (2007).

I was also a member of FAAB, along with Louise Archer, Jacky Brine, Valerie Hey and Carole Leathwood. Diane Reay's (2014) article sent me rifling back through files, photos and film documentation of those years. Happy memories mingled with the recognition that, as she notes, it is neoliberalism rather than feminism that grows ever stronger in education and that as academics we are ever more complicit. FAAB, and its specific form of 'enactment of the politics of refusal' (see Clegg 2005 above) represents possibilities for resistance with/in the academy. We defined FAAB as offering, 'a collective performance for individualistic and performative times; a critical commentary on performativity in higher education, and new and old orthodoxies in contemporary educational research'. Significantly, we also drew attention to the importance of fun and humour as key resources through which to propose and enact a politics of hope and encouragement by creatively presenting alternative ways of thinking about, and engaging with, educational policy, politics and praxis. In this article I reflect on the rebellion which FAAB's feminist, performative approach enacted, in the hope that it might serve as a siren call for other brave, hopeful, joyous, serious, fun interventions into contemporary educational concerns.

FAAB was born out of our outrage about the following state of affairs:

- Global and national neoliberal education policies are having devastating effects on (amongst other things) academic institutions, academics, students, educational research and gender equity (Leathwood and Archer 2004; Leathwood and Read 2009; Reay and David 2005).
- As feminists, we are located as simultaneously inside/outside contemporary neo-liberal academic practice and this location is further complicated by our inclusion and exclusion from the language of neoliberal and managerial discourse in higher education (Archer 2008; Hey 2005).
- We are both positioned by and participate in the managerial and often masculinist repertoires of organisational restructuring, prescriptive pedagogy and audit that characterise compulsory and post-compulsory education across national arenas (Blackmore 2000; Davies 2003; Morley, 2003).

- The increasing privatisation of higher education is leading to increased casualisation of academic labour with gendered, classed and racialised effects (for recent debates see <http://ucuanticas.wordpress.com/>).
- Some of the stuff going on in contemporary educational policy and practice, normally under the auspices of 'modernisation' and 'audit', is so dark and ridiculous that parody seems the most appropriate response.

*Yes, it's fucking political: FAAB finds its voice*

Full of productive rage, the six of us discussed how to best communicate our own and others' critical work around these pressing concerns. At the same time we questioned the implications of our contradictory investments in both resisting and enjoying the hegemonic language of academic practice. In the end, I don't think we said anything that we would not have said in mainstream academic papers. But our methodology was to be different ...

We began with a song by Skunk Anansie: 'Yes, it's fucking political ... Yes, it's fucking satirical' (listen at <http://www.skunkanansie.net/album/stoosh>). Then we started singing ourselves. Tina Turner's 'River Deep, Mountain High', Gloria Gaynor's 'We Will Survive', Nancy Sinatra's 'These Boots are Made for Walking' and many classics from the British music hall tradition (an early showcase for women's subversive, political performances) were given new lyrics and thus transformed into feminist critiques of educational policy and practice.



*Image 2: FAAB perform 'My Ole VC', GEA 2005*



We collectively wrote, rehearsed and performed several scripts full of songs, satirical sketches and poetry at educational conferences as papers or symposia. The non-linear, multi-vocal and mixed-genre format we adopted posed a challenge to conventional methods of doing, writing, analysing and presenting (educational) research. It refused to conform to modes of academic delivery that often privilege the authority of one voice or way of speaking, and can constrain and regulate our critical and emotional responses (Denzin 2000). The songs in particular disturbed the serious, regulated order of the institutionalised space of academic knowledge production and introduced disquiet, laughter and an embodied expression of collective emotion, not just from the performers but from audiences too, as Sue Clegg's opening quote illustrates.

### *The Class Sketch: Classification and Framing*

One of the most popular sketches was The Class Sketch. Taking our inspiration from the 1960s satirical comedy series The Frost Report, featuring John Cleese, Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00hhrwl>), which highlighted the elitism of the British class system, our adaptation focused on some of the structural inequalities in the organisation and resourcing of UK universities, ranked according to their degrees of research 'excellence'. The ranking criteria we used were taken from the UK's 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (see <http://www.rae.ac.uk/>) which generated the following 'quality profiles' for the research activity of universities:

**4\*:** Quality that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour

**3\*:** Quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour but which nonetheless falls short of the highest standards of excellence

**2\*:** Quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour

**1\*:** Quality that is recognised nationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour

**Unclassified:** Quality that falls below the standard of nationally recognised work. Or work which does not meet the published definition of research for the purposes of this assessment

(Available at <http://www.rae.ac.uk/aboutus/quality.asp>. RAE has since been replaced by the Research Excellence Framework see <http://www.ref.ac.uk/>).



Image 3: FAAB perform 'The Class Sketch', AERA 2006

In our version, our 'top professor' played by Valerie Hey, to the top left in the pictures above and below, tells the audience, 'I look down on *them* because I am a 4\* professor of academic distinction. I have European funding, a *large* ESRC grant, three research assistants, an administrator and an unlimited conference allowance. I am the editor of a number of high impact journals. I am the world-leading George Orwell Chair of Educational Dystopias (GOD-ED)...' and the others, representing '2\*' and 'unclassified' institutions respond, looking up and down as they reflect on their 'place' within the hierarchy. The final words go to the staff at the 'unclassified' institution. Our male 'unclassified' academic academic, played by Carole Leathwood, says, 'I'm from a new university. We're unclassified and I know my place. I look up to them both ... But while my university is poor, we are honest, hard-working and committed to widening participation and social justice. I *could* look down on them, but I don't. On the other hand, I look down on her [his female colleague]. No, I don't! I mean I wouldn't, of course I don't! We have an equal opportunities policy! And anyway, we're both in the shit'. His female colleague, played by Diane Reay, bleakly responds: 'I know my place and it's a hard place to be. I seem to look up to all of them - when I have the time. I have a full teaching load, I'm programme director for the teacher-training course and I have a PhD from 1990 that I'm still trying to publish from. I collaborate with him. We are both in the shit but I'm the one that cleans it up'. Despite its added complexity our sketch lacked the additional and interconnected layers of in/equality accounting for 'race' and ethnicity, age and dis/ability, which would more accurately represent the stratified and tenaciously elitist nature of the UK's higher education landscape.



Image 4: FAAB perform 'The Class Sketch', BERA 2003

The Class Sketch received laughs of appreciation and recognition every time it was performed, however the most intense laughter and gasps of disbelief were always reserved for the bit where, by way of explaining the UK context to an international audience, we simply presented the RAE rankings as listed above. These criteria for assessment, which many of us are obliged to take so seriously in our daily working lives and that in turn shape our individual and institutional research trajectories, were suddenly exposed as ludicrous. For us, the potency of The Class Sketch lay in the effects of enacting resistance within the very discursive set of practices in which we were (and still are) ourselves deeply invested and implicated.

Many of the sketches, like The Class Sketch, spoke to wider educational and political issues but were deeply rooted in our own localised experiences of working and studying in UK universities during this time. New Labour's policy-making thus provided rich material for much of our work, such as a series of interviews between media interviewer 'Jeremy Laxman' (performed by Louise Archer) and politician 'Tony Flair' (performed by Carole Leathwood), replacing Laxman with 'Barry King' when we performed in the US. These exchanges provided a critique of the marketisation of education, highlighting the deployment of certain discourses and values and the interplay of global and local politics, economics and educational policy-making. Here is an extract from the performance at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Conference in San Francisco (FAAB 2006):

**Barry:** We're back with our guest the President of the United Kingdom

**Tony:** Oh well, hhh I wish! but not quite ...

**Barry:** I'm sorry, we're back with *Prime Minister* Flair. Mr Flair, in a recent interview, President George W Bush said 'we live in a competitive world and we better make sure the future of this country has the capacity to compete in that world' - Would you go along with that?

**Tony:** Yes, absolutely! What we are trying to create is a world-class education system that will really enable us to compete in the global education market. And we feel confident that our policies constitute real value for money and will deliver.

**Barry:** Ok, but if we're the winners in this competition, what about the other guys? Who's going to lose? Someone has to lose, right?

**Tony:** Well that's the beauty of it: ultimately we're all winners. This is a win-win situation. Free trade and GATS will allow us to share our excellence with other countries - so people in developing world, for example, will benefit by being able to buy our expertise.

**Barry:** So these countries don't have their own education systems? I mean, you're not just going to blaze in there like John Wayne and take out the local sheriff, so to speak? What will happen to their own education systems?

**Tony:** Well, Barry, I obviously don't liken myself to John Wayne. In fact, it's more like Saving Private Ryan, if anything – we're going in there to *help*. I mean the problem is, too many people seem to want to just stand in the way of progress. We're trying to think outside the box here – we're equalising through globalising.

**Barry:** And this global education business must certainly makes a dollar or two!

**Tony:** Well, it makes sound economic sense, if that's what you mean.

**Barry:** So tell us about your vision for world education. You've got a plan to make it better, right?

**Tony:** You're darn right! My vision is one of excellence - I'm committed to excellence, totally committed to excellence. After all, today's young people are tomorrow's future. We have a strategic portfolio to operationalise – we're 'world-streaming' our educational vision. We're totally committed to driving up standards, not only in our own back yard, but in everyone else's back yards too. Boundaries are just fences you haven't yet stepped over – and we're trampling down the global neighbourhood's herbaceous borders!

**Barry:** Well, that sure is a vision!

*Four Academics: things can only get better?*

The final piece I discuss here was based on Monty Python's 'Four Yorkshiremen' sketch. (see <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/nov/19/monty-python-five-favourite-sketches-video>). In the original, four Yorkshiremen compete with their stories of the bad old days. We transposed the setting to an academic conference where academics from different types of institutions compared the increasing hardships of their working lives over a glass or two of wine. The sketch highlights in particular the work intensification experienced by many working in the sector. At the same time as

acknowledging and challenging the deterioration evident in many aspects of higher education and the legitimate feelings of anger and indeed despair felt by many staff and students, we also wanted to poke some gentle fun at the culture of complaint often apparent in academia. I have reproduced the sketch in full.



*Image 5: FAAB perform 'Four Academics', GEA 2005*

The scene: Four academics are sitting together at a conference.

First: Aye, very passable, that, very passable hot fork buffet.

Second: And nothing like a good glass of Chateau de Chasselas, eh?

Third: You're right there.

Fourth: Who'd have thought thirty year ago we'd all be sittin' here, in the middle of the week, drinking Chateau de Chasselas, eh?

First: Since I've been at Jack Russell University I'm glad if I get chance at work for a quick cup o' tea.

Second: A cup o' cold tea.

Third: Without milk or sugar.

Fourth: Or tea.

First: In a cracked cup, an' all.

Fourth: Oh, we don't get cups at Dogsboddy University. We have to drink it out of rolled up copies of the Times Higher.

Second: The best we can manage is to suck on a piece of damp departmental tea towel.

Third: But you know, we are happy at Mediocre University, though we are poor.

First: *Because you are poor!* My old Head of Department used to say to me, 'Funding doesn't buy you happiness'!

Fourth: Aye, 'e was right.

First: Aye, 'e was.

Fourth: I am happier at Dogsboddy University and we've got nothing. We work in these tiny offices and the computers keep breaking down.

Second: Offices! You are lucky to have offices! We work all in one room, all twenty-six of us, no furniture, half the floor is missin' and we are all 'uddled together in the corner for fear of falling.

Third: Eh, you're lucky to have a room. At Mediocre University we work in t' corridor.

First: Oh, we dream of working in a corridor. Would be a palace to us. We work in an old water tank on a rubbish tip. We come in every morning to find rotting fish in our pigeonholes. Office! Huh.

Fourth: Well, when I say 'office' it's just a hole in t' ground covered by a sheet of tarpaulin, but it's an office to us.

Second: Our 'ole in the ground got closed down. We've had to move all our stuff and go and work in a lake.

Third: You are lucky to have a lake. There are a hundred and fifty of us in our Department working in a shoebox in t' middle o' campus.

First: *Cardboard* box?

Third: Aye.

First: You are lucky. We've worked for the last three months in a paper bag in a septic tank. We get in to work at six in the morning, eat a crust of stale bread from the canteen, do a fourteen-hour day, week-in, week-out, for sixpence a week, and when we get home we mark essays and write funding bids till our eyeballs ache and we fall asleep standing up.

Second: Luxury. We have to get to the lake for six in the morning, clean the lake, eat a handful of 'ot gravel, lecture for twenty hours a day for tuppence a month, come 'ome and mark essays and write funding bids till our eyeballs bleed and then beat ourselves round the head for not hitting targets, if we are lucky!

- Third: Well, of course, we 'ave it tough. We have to get to our shoebox at twelve o'clock at night and lick the campus clean with our tongue. We have two bits of cold gravel to eat, work twenty-four hours a day for sixpence every four years and when we get home we mark essays and write funding bids till our eyeballs ache, bleed, leap out of our sockets and travel back to work on their own. Then we whip ourselves nearly to death with back copies of *The Sociological Review* for not publishing in the right journals.
- Fourth: Right. I have to get up in the morning at ten o'clock at night half an hour before I go to bed, drink a cup of sulphuric acid, work twenty-nine hours a day at the office and pay the Vice Chancellor for permission to come to work, and when I get home I kill myself, and my colleagues dance about on my grave singing *Things Can Only Get Better*.
- First: Well, they've got a point. But it's nice to get away from it all once in a while, eh?  
Can't complain.
- All: Aye.

*Conclusions: the importance of serious play*

In this short article I have introduced FAAB's origins and methodologies and shared a few of our many performance pieces. Against the pressure to seek out authoritative and fundamentalist solutions to the complex contradictions with/in which we live and work, FAAB's performances suggested and enacted a set of localised and contingent responses. In this way, we aimed to create spaces of possibility for re/imagining alternatives, engaging in critical and supportive dialogue, and expressing individual and collective feelings of despair as well as, of course, hope. FAAB's approach was risky on a number of levels, not least because it might fuel the denigrating discourse of women as 'frivolous' and not to be taken seriously as academics. However we were keen to explore the radical possibilities of fun, and the potential, as well as the costs, of attempting to reclaim laughter as a serious resource. As Judith Butler (1990:x) notes, 'laughter in the face of serious categories is indispensable for feminism ... without a doubt, feminism continues to require its own forms of serious play'. We located our work within a genealogy of others who, in different contexts, utilise the subversive potential of dialogue and humour as powerful strategies for expressing serious and urgent political and intellectual concerns (Bahktin 1981; McWilliam 2000; Downe 1999; *The Guerrilla Girls* 2012), our intention was to create not only a *politics*, but also a *poetics* of education, which would be transgressive in form as well as in content (see Lambert 2005). The performances exploited

the potential of humour as an intellectual resource and drew attention to the embodied possibilities and affects of feminist interventions. As Pamela Downe (1999:68) notes,

Humour has the power to reveal social ambiguities and cultural contradictions, conditions and contexts that may go unnoticed in everyday activity ... Beyond revealing cultural processes, humour has subversive potential in that it can weaken the dominant ideology by meticulously representing its absurdities and, in so doing, exposing them to ridicule.

The examples of FAAB's performative interventions which I have presented and discussed here went some way, I would argue, towards this kind of exposure, revealing and challenging some of the interconnected cultural, discursive, policy and economic mechanisms through which our universities and our selves are transformed to serve the interests of capitalist accumulation and reproduction. I hope that this discussion can serve as both a reminder of the powerful resources we (still) have at our disposal, and as a provocation for others to engage in some forms of serious play.



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**“Mummies can drive the bus too” Early Years’ Staff and Child interactions within the Pre-school setting: An Ethnographic Study.**

**Becky Self**

The construction of the self, gender identity and sex role stereotypes cannot be understood without analysing socialisation pressures and the impact of environmental influences. Environmental influences include sites of primary socialisation, such as: the family, peers, caregivers and Early Years’ Staff (Fagot, Rodgers and Leinbach cited in Eckes and Trautner, 2000). Research suggests care giving patterns differ on the basis of the child’s gender (Lewis 1987), due to preconceived stereotypes, which provide an outline for gender norms and acceptable behaviours.

There has been a growing concern over the differential treatment of girls and boys and the implications this has on gender identification. Feminists in particular have been interested in the impact of differential treatment, as it has been argued that reinforcing gender stereotypes influences career choices later on in life. Such career choices have been described to benefit men with regards to horizontal and vertical segregation, as women are steered into lower paid, caring and domestic roles, and men to higher status and higher paid occupations (Boraas and Rodgers 2003; Hole and Levine 1971; Blakemore and Centers 2005; Farrell 2005).

Due to these concerns, the main research focus was on toy choice, and activity engagement/encouragement, as methods of conforming to/breaking down, gender stereotypes. The questions addressed by this research were: **Do Early Years’ Staff choose gender-appropriate toys for children, or do they choose 'cross-gender'/neutral toys?** And **Does the level of encouragement/engagement Early Years’ Staff offer children, differ depending on the 'gender appropriateness' of the activity they are part taking in?**

These questions were addressed by a Micro-ethnographic observation over the period of one week in a pre-school setting. Over this period qualitative notes were made on all observable child and staff interactions. Pursuing an ethnographic study enabled me to become immersed within the setting whilst observing (Bryman 2008).

Findings from the study challenged previous literature as Early Years’ Staff chose toys for children allocated on the basis of convenience, educational need and availability, rather than preconceived gender stereotypes. This meant toy choices were either gender-appropriate, cross-gender or gender

neutral. Also, the findings suggested that Early Years' Staff became involved in activities regardless of the gender-appropriateness. Involvement seemed to be based upon the children's needs in terms of them not knowing what to do, if they were being disruptive, if they needed help or if they approached the Early Years' Staff/practitioners. Lastly, Early Years' Staff did not attempt to alter the gender-appropriateness of activities that children were part taking in. Boys and girls were not encouraged to behave gender-appropriately, rather as they chose to.

During analysis, activities and toy choices were analysed in relation to 'masculine-preferred', 'female-preferred', and 'gender-neutral' categories based upon Blakemore and Center's (2005) evaluation. Vehicles, construction toys, and male dressing up clothes (based on occupation) were classed as 'masculine-preferred'; whereas dolls, the home corner, cookery and female dressing up clothes were gendered as 'female-preferred.' Toys and activities of an educational basis such as reading, counting and writing were coded as gender-neutral.

Encouragement and engagement were based upon Fagot's (1978) research. Firstly, upon whether or not Early Years' Staff joined in with activities and secondly, whether they attempted to alter the activity. Attempts to alter the activity were gaged subjectively, via the use of body language, language, common senses, and success in changing the activity, making the study hard to replicate (Reinharz 1992). As well as this, reasons for altering the activity were also analysed. If the activity became more educationally beneficial then the feminisation of teaching as well as 'gender-appropriateness' was also taken into consideration (Fagot 1978).

Findings were then discussed in relation to the context in which they occurred, and the implications this had with regards to pre-existing research. This methodology was preferred to tallying, whereby the number of times gendered/neutral toy choices were made and Early Years' Staff joined in or altered activities, would be recorded. The main reasons for this preference is because inevitably not all interactions could be recorded due to the number of staff and children, meaning numerical results would give an inaccurate picture. As well as this, due to my epistemological stance I believe this form of knowledge undermines human interaction and cannot effectively be used to research human action as an 'analytical mentality' and that context is needed (Bryman 2008).

My main focus was upon Early Years' Staff and child interactions only, due to the methodical issues of time and size constraints. The main two questions I investigated were: **Do Early Years' Staff choose gender-appropriate toys for children, or do they choose 'cross-gender'/neutral toys?** And **Does the level of encouragement/engagement Early Years' Staff offer children, differ depending on the 'gender appropriateness' of the activity they are part taking in?**

Firstly, when observing toy choices I discovered that children predominately tended to decide the toys they wish to play with by themselves. The gender-appropriateness differed within each observation. For example, on entry to the pre-school on the first day there was a gender divide between the toys chosen by girls and boys. The boys tended to begin by playing with the large sit-in vehicles and bikes; whereas the girls tended to begin by playing with more passive toys, for example the paints. However, when observing another session all the children began by playing with the large sit in vehicles and bikes. According to Eisenburg, Murray and Hite (1982) children make toy choices primarily based upon what the toy can do, rather than on the basis of gender stereotypes. This could offer one explanation to why individuals differed so much in terms of toy choice, as they found different aspects of the toys attractive.

As well as this, children tended to socialise more with others of the same sex (McCandless and Hoyt, 1961) which evidently influenced the toy choices they made. Within my observations I noted large groups of boys playing with the den, trucks and the computer; and groups of girls playing with the dressing up clothes, music and bricks. Eisenburg, Tyron and Cameron (1984) state there is a match between peer interaction during play and sex typing of toys. Thus, peers could be more influential when choosing toys than Early Years' Staff, offering another area for further research.

Furthermore, Early Years' Staff became involved in choosing toys for children when children either did not know what to play with, or when children needed to allow another child to play with the toy they were using. Toy suggestions seemed to be based on the principles of what toy was free, convenience, and what toy suited the child's needs, rather than on the basis of gender. For example both boys and girls were asked by Early Years' Staff if they would like to play with the construction toys and the shopping board game. This goes against Lamb et al (1980) and Fisher-Thompson's (1993) opinions that Early Years' Staff prefer children to play with gender-appropriate toys.

Furthermore, in regard to altering activities, the observations suggested that Early Years' Staff tended to conform to choices made by children, (both gender-appropriate, cross-gender and neutral). For example, when boys chose to engage in shopping role play this was supported, and when girls role played as male superheroes such as Spiderman this was also supported. Also, Early Years' Staff did not attempt to feminise all activities to make them more educationally beneficial, as Fagot (1978) and Serbin et al (1990) imply. For example when children showed an interest in power rangers this was incorporated into singing 'Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes', to make it more accessible for some children, particularly the boys. Another example observed, was the turning of the book corner into a den. This made it more attractive to males in particular, although staff

encouraged both boys and girls to use it. This would imply that activities don't have to be feminised to be educational as Fagot (1978) suggests. It also shows the feminisation of teaching is not an issue in terms of Early Years' Staff and activities, contrary to what Carrington and McPhee (2008) claim. However, this cannot be said for other problematic aspects associated with the feminisation of teaching, such as the lack of male role models (Carrington, Tymms, and Merrell, 2008).

However, the observations suggest that no encouragement/engagement was given to children working on the computer, and that only boys engaged in this activity. This could potentially be problematic due to the association and cultural bias of males and technology (Lage 1991). It is unlikely to reflect a negative attitude towards girls and computers as Culley (1988) suggests, due to the fact that boys were not encouraged to engage in computer activity either. However, this could insinuate a problem with the feminisation of teaching, and/or the lack of computer education within the staff.

In conclusion, the study answered the question: **Do Early Years' Staff choose gender-appropriate toys for children, or do they choose 'cross-gender'/neutral toys?** As observations showed, children tend to make the majority of toy choices on their own or under the influence of peers. However, when Early Years' Staff did choose toys for children they seem to be allocated on the basis of convenience, educational need, and availability. This meant they were either gender-appropriate, cross-gender or gender neutral. Contrary to belief that only/mainly gender-appropriate toys are chosen for children by Early Years' Staff (Lamb et al 1980; Fisher-Thompson 1993). This in turn influences the construction of gender identity and the appropriateness of certain behaviours.

As well as this, when answering, **does the level of encouragement/engagement Early Years' Staff offer children, differ depending on the 'gender appropriateness' of the activity they are part taking in?** Observations showed that Early Years' Staff became involved in activities regardless of the gender-appropriateness. Involvement seemed to be based upon children's needs in terms of them not knowing what to do, if they were being disruptive, if they needed help or if they approached Early Years' Staff. Thus, undermining Fagot's (1978) opinion that involvement is based upon the gender-appropriateness of the activity.

Similarly, Early Years' Staff did not attempt to alter the gender-appropriateness of activities children were part taking in. Boys and girls were not encouraged to behave gender-appropriately; rather they chose to. Also, instead of feminising activities to make them more educational as Fagot (1978) and Serbin et al (1990) imply, children's interests were taken into consideration to enable them to relate to the activities and therefore gain more from them educationally.

Therefore, this research indicates that Early Years' Staff do not conform to gender stereotypes in terms of toy choice and activity engagement/encouragement; instead they focus on what is educationally best for the individual child, regardless of gender. As well as this, it would seem that Early Years' Staff do not have as much influence on gender identity, sex role stereotypes and career choices later on in life as previous research suggests (Boraas and Rodgers 2003; Hole and Levin 1971). However, this conclusion cannot be affirmed without a longitudinal study, as the career choices of these children may not reflect gender stereotypes, as this is beyond the scope of this research. Lastly, it is important to note that the conclusions cannot be generalised for all Early Years' Staff, as this study only focuses on one pre-school, meaning that others may incorporate gender stereotypical socialisation.

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## **Althusser and Education: a discussion of the Ideological State Apparatus**

**Katie Sheppard**

Louis Althusser is a French neo-Marxist scholar who is referred to when speaking about ideologies in relation to the state. In this discussion there will be close reference to his most famous work 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an investigation' (1972) in reference to the education system. First an outline of his theory will be discussed followed by closer analysis of the extent to which his theory can be applied to an understanding of the education system.

For Althusser (1972) the concept of ideology is defined as 'the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group' (Althusser, 1972:262) and he believes that there is one dominating form of Ideological State Apparatus in the mature capitalist society: the education system ideology. The reason he believes it to be a leading form of oppression is because it has replaced the previous roles of the Church. Previously the religious institution had the power to control knowledge and morality but with the rise of secularism in capitalist society the state gained control to educate the masses. The state regulates education at its disposal with the 'obligatory audience of the totality of the children in the capitalist social formation, 8 hours a day five or six days a week' (ibid. 261).

The practices of schooling put forward by Althusser (1972) give reason to believe that the education system is part of the ideological state apparatus because 'it takes children from every class at infant school age...it drums into them...a certain amount of "know-how" wrapped in the ruling ideology or simply the ruling ideology in its pure state.' The association with the phrase 'it drums into them', in my opinion, has associations with violence and therefore supports the notion that ideological state apparatus can be enforced through the use of physical violence. Your status in wider society depends on what type of 'know-how' knowledge you are taught. The school provides the ideological knowledge they deem to be necessary to fulfil your position in society. This can range from your future being a production worker, a white collar worker, a small or middle executive or, if you are part of the ruling class, you will be educated to the top of the hierarchy as an intellectual. The power the state has to define the level of knowledge an individual should have is evidence that the education system is part of the Ideological State Apparatus as it reproduces a variety of unskilled and skilled workers necessary for capitalism. The state succeeds in reproducing this social formation

because of the naturalisation of inequality and portraying the school as a 'neutral environment' (ibid. 261).

The concept of Althusser's ideological state apparatus can still be used when analysing today's education system because of the type of knowledge that is taught and the emphasis on certain subjects i.e. great importance is placed on Maths, Science and English and to some extent less so on other subjects like Arts and Technology. Sir Ken Robinson, who heavily criticises the education system through a number of TED Talks, argues that the education system is killing creativity (Sir Ken Robinson, 2006) as students are subjected to strict forms of teaching and learning and are rarely given the opportunity to adapt study or teaching methods to suit academic needs. The government have the power to dictate what knowledge should be taught and how it should be presented; therefore it can be argued that the education system is part of an ideological state apparatus because the power of teaching is in the hands of the State's Department of Education.

Althusser's theory is one that I personally agree with however, there are some critiques to mention in relation to his argument.

Firstly, Althusser implies a passive and deterministic view of man (Sarup, 1978:151) as he believes teachers 'do not even begin to suspect "the work" the system forces them to do' (Althusser, 1972:261). He also assumes that they are unaware that 'their own devotion contributions to the maintenance and nourishment of this ideological representation of the schools' (ibid. 261). Even though the National Curriculum forces teachers to teach certain types of knowledge, the extent of their willingness or acceptance can be challenged through strikes.

Secondly, Harbison and Myers (1962) evaluate the extent of Althusser's argument about the education system depending on the social class of the child in order to assign them to learning certain types of knowledge for their future job. They challenge this concept because they found that 'there is no precise relationship between occupations and educational background' (Pasi, 1977:341). In other words 'one cannot be sure whether an administrator or manager must have a university degree' (ibid. 341). Althusser's argument is too static in the sense that he fails to take into account the idea of social mobility.

Another reason to challenge Althusser's argument can be seen by referring to contemporary society's labour market. Increasingly there is a transition from a demand for unskilled labour to a need for a technologically specialised workforce. The education system 'must transform itself from

an elite prep school into a mass terminal school in time to absorb the pressure from below' (ibid. 347). This is another challenge on the relationship of the education system and social mobility because in the 1918 National Education Association Report in the United States, teachers were told to bear in mind that 'they were dealing with a "heterogeneous" high school population destined to enter into all sorts of occupations' (ibid. 348). Society no longer has fixed social class roles within society and as a result the education system as part of ideological state apparatus is not as dominant as they do not produce a mass working class sector because they are now arguably 'substantially similar to the middle class in so far as education goes' (ibid. 348).

From outlining Althusser's argument that education is part of the ideological state apparatus, it can be concluded that education is included in the ideological state apparatus in so far as the state has the power to decide what is knowledge and what needs to be taught; however, the dominance of the education as an ideological state apparatus, in my opinion, has been weakened by the change in the demands of the economy i.e. the need for skilled workers compared to the masses of unskilled workers that were need in the post war period.

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## **Unpaid internships: learning opportunities or exploitation?**

### **Claire Corp**

University students today are highly encouraged to seek out forms of professional experience such as internships or work placements during their time at university, understanding them as a pathway to greater employment prospects. These opportunities can be greatly beneficial for improving employability; a study conducted by the National Council for Work Experience found that over 40% of graduates considered the right work experience as more valuable to their employer than their qualifications (Trades Union Congress, 2010). Internships can often be valuable educational opportunities which impart vital knowledge or skillsets, and which allow the individual to gain greater social and human capital. As such, it can be understood as to why undertaking these placements is encouraged; however an element of controversy is added in the case of unpaid internships. It can be questioned as to whether unpaid internships can truly be seen as a beneficial learning opportunity, or whether they are a means of exploitation, and an inhibitor to equal access for social mobility. This paper argues that whilst internships can certainly offer valuable educational experiences, in the case of unpaid internships these opportunities are only available to the financially affluent, and as such ultimately perpetuate class divisions due to the financial commitments involved.

Work placements characteristically involve a strong educational element which can be a unique opportunity for the individual to access previously inaccessible sets of knowledge. In this manner, internships can be regarded as a valuable means of acquiring specialist knowledge and skill sets, which can provide a unique opportunity for learning about the individual's chosen sector through hands-on experience. The knowledge and skills acquired through an internship can be seen to act in a complimentary manner to what has been learned through traditional modes of education. An internship can allow for the application and testing of prior knowledge, and which can provide an opportunity to confirm or challenge textbook derived education (Westerberg and Wickersham, 2011). These means of professional experience can therefore provide students or graduates with on-the-job experience, and can often act as a transitional pathway from university to employment. As well as providing access to knowledge sets, it can also be speculated that these professional experiences can add to the employability and value of the individual. It can be argued that through

these educational opportunities, internships can be regarded as a means of increasing the individual's social value. By increasing their personal skills and knowledge, and through the gaining of professional contacts and networks, it can be argued that the intern increases both their human and social capital (Stuber, 2009). These are beneficial elements which are present in both paid and unpaid internships; however it can be argued that in the latter, these perks are only afforded to the social elite. In the case of unpaid internships, it can be argued that these placements are not fair and meritocratic, as they are only accessible to those from financially affluent backgrounds.

Unpaid internships are a controversial issue, as they can be argued to be accessible only to those who are privileged enough to afford them. The socio-economic status of the applicant has a significant impact on the individual's capacity to undertake an unpaid internship, due to the lack of financial recompense. These placements can typically last for several months; during which time the individual is receiving no income from their primary placement, whilst still needing to sustain their living conditions. It has been estimated that undertaking a placement in London for an average of 3 months would require the intern to pay approximately £3,000 in rent; a significant sum of money that not many have easy access to (Intern Aware, 2014). We can clearly see how these financial commitments involved in undertaking an unpaid internship result in only those from affluent backgrounds having the means to afford to apply. Lawton et al argue that many talented and qualified people lack the means to pay for unpaid internships, meaning that 'certain industries and professions continue to be dominated by people from particular backgrounds, perpetuating inequality and dampening opportunities for social mobility' (Lawton et al, 2010:4). It can therefore be seen how these opportunities are not meritocratic by being accessible primarily to those from affluent backgrounds, and consequently can be argued to only improve the employment prospects of those who are from a higher socio-economic class. This also has significant impacts for employability prospects; a study on graduate employability reported that the most effective job search technique involved utilising contacts established during work experience placements undertaken whilst studying (Blasko et al, 2002). This demonstrates that unpaid internships can reinforce inequalities along the lines of social class, and only aid those already in elite positions. Placements that don't pay their interns can also be argued to be exploitative, by taking advantage of the aspirations of young people and ignoring laws on minimum wage for the benefit of the organisation. Some writers argue that unpaid internships are legitimate due to the individual's initial lack of value to the workforce (Razavi, 2013); however this doesn't justify the unequal access to these opportunities and the self-perpetuating cycle of inequalities this creates. The intern adds value to the workforce, while receiving none of the payoffs and potentially jeopardising their own financial

situation. Whilst it could be argued that the information and experiences learnt through these placements is enough to offset the financial consequences; this argument is not sufficient to account for the unequal access to social mobility that internships can provide.

This paper has sought to discuss the educational benefits of undertaking an internship, and the effect this can have for social mobility. Whilst the experiences gained and information learnt through an internship can be greatly beneficial to the individual's social capital, in the case of unpaid internships this can be seen to be limited to only those who can afford to undertake these placements. It can therefore be seen how not recompensing interns for their work can be seen as perpetuating divisions of social class; and as such this paper advocates for an end to unpaid internships. Paying interns for their work ensures that these educational opportunities can exist in a way that acts according to the meritocratic principles, and doesn't exploit the individual solely for the benefit of the organisation.



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## **United we stand - but what kind of unity? UCU and IWGB**

### **Callum Cant**

Labour conditions in the Neoliberal University have recently become the focal point of struggles. In the future there is the prospect of a UCU marking boycott, and university campuses have seen strike action on a large scale. This turn of events has remobilised student activism, and provided it with a new focal point: staff-student solidarity has been one of the key elements of the student movement in 2013/14. Across many university campuses, too numerous to mention, we have seen students providing concerted support for a labour struggle that is at the forefront of higher education politics. Occupations, protests, blockades – all of these forms of resistance to neoliberal educational reform have been deeply influenced by the fight for better working conditions. In this context, UCU (the Universities and Colleges Union) seems to be the dominant organisational force. However, there is a concerted move towards an alternative form of union organisation currently underway within some politically active communities. The 3 Cosas campaign is an alternative approach to what is becoming a renewed mainstay of political resistance on campus. The labour situation is changing fast, and it is imperative we consider all the forms of action driving that change. With that in mind, the 3 Cosas campaign offers an illuminating perspective from which to think about the conflicts underway in higher education.

So, what is the 3 Cosas campaign? It is a campaign asking for 3 things [cosas] for outsourced cleaners at the University of London: sick pay, holiday pay, and pensions. It's organised by the IWGB union (Independent Workers of Great Britain), a union that calls itself 'a worker-run union organising the unorganised, the abandoned and the betrayed' (IWGB, 2014). It began in 2012, fighting for the living wage. Originally cleaners had begun to organise as part of UNISON, but the campaign broke away in April 2013 when it felt the democratic structures and resolution for action of the union was insufficient. Since then the campaign has been committed to strikes and militant union action. Along the way it has won incredible victories. The living wage has been achieved. Pay that had been withheld for 3 months, which had led to workers being kicked out of their homes and struggling to feed their families, was repaid. Working conditions that actively victimised vulnerable immigrant labour were fought against overturned. As regards the 3 things [cosas] themselves. Sick pay has been awarded, there has been an increase in paid holidays to 21 days a year, and a pension scheme has been offered (although the scheme is still nowhere near sufficient).

It is a campaign that began with workers, which then came to be supported by students in the form of the University of London Union. It is a campaign that cares about the most vulnerable workers who were feeling the worst pressures of neoliberalism: the reduction of people to staff, of staff to outsourced staff, of outsourced staff to exploitable resources. It is a campaign based on parochial, local demands. It is a campaign committed to radical action, unafraid of unofficial strikes and disciplinary measures. And as a result of all these conditions it has been remarkably effective. When we compare 3 Cosas and UCU actions, we can see a few clear differences. For a start, 3 Cosas is organised on a much smaller scale. Secondly, it is more disruptive, using picket lines to turn away deliveries, and is afraid of agitating management. Thirdly, the workers concerned are generally more vulnerable. This shows the necessity of differentiating between larger scale national pay disputes, which seem to be somewhat remote and atomised from the student population, and small scale radical union action, that has key student participants. I don't mean to suggest that either is irrelevant – both forms of action raise different potentials and opportunities, and it is not a question of choosing between them.

However, there are a few conclusions that an awareness of differing responses to the labour situation in universities offer to student activists. At this moment in time the university is an institution characterised by being on the border line. At once it is both public and private, commercial and educational. Ever since the Dearing report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997) if not earlier, we have been moving from one model of education to another, and we are still in the midst of that movement. Because of this process, higher education has not had a stable idea of itself for a long time. The popular syndicalist student slogan, used recently during strikes by the Sussex against Privatisation campaign, 'the University is a Factory, shut it down' (Sussex Against Privatisation, 2014) seems to me to miss this point entirely.

I have spent a lot of energy acting in support of strikes, and I have no intention of diminishing their importance, but striking in support of better working conditions is not a total response to a situation that is essentially one of flux. Strikes are part of a coherent political response that wants to dispute the marketization of education - that is beyond doubt. But as the 3 Cosas campaign shows, labour struggles can vary hugely, and there is no solid ground upon which a single unionised struggle can be contested. What the university system in 2014 demands is an understanding of the complicated and obscure dynamics of the neoliberal university. The response to that understanding will include staff-student solidarity, but may do so in alternate forms. The IWGB and UCU are just preliminary examples of how unions can fight – a diversity of tactics in the labour struggle will help us more

effectively fight the market's encroachment on education. But we are not trying to simply shut down a factory, we are trying to overcome a system designed to hide its real operation from us.



*3 Cosas Campaign picket line at Russell Square, London.*

*The 3 Cosas campaign visited the University of Warwick as part of a national speaking tour on the 17<sup>th</sup> of February, and an audio recording of the talk is available via the PPU Warwick Facebook page, or by request from [warwickagainstprivatization@gmail.com](mailto:warwickagainstprivatization@gmail.com) . Alternatively go to <http://3cosascampaign.wordpress.com/> for more details.*

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