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Youth, Insecurity and Education: Guest Editorial

Robin Simmons and Paul Thomas

HudCRES, University of Huddersfield, UK.

R.A.Simmons@hud.ac.uk

d.p.thomas@hud.ac.uk

This Special Issue was inspired by an international seminar held at the University of Huddersfield in the summer of 2015. Featuring leading academics from North America, Australia, and Europe as well as the UK, the seminar sought to explore shifting notions of security and insecurity, particularly in relation to the lives of young people, and the implications of social, economic and political change both for them and the practitioners charged with engaging or re-engaging 'at risk' youth in learning. This Special Issue contains papers written or co-written by four of those who took part in the Huddersfield seminar – Sara Carpenter, Shamim Miah, Tiago Neves and John Smyth – and is edited by the organisers of that event. But its scope also extends beyond those contributors and the Special Issue brings together seven papers which draw on work carried out in northern and southern Europe, Canada, China, Australia and the USA.

The research upon which the papers are based focuses on schools, work-based learning, and youth work settings and draws on a range of quantitative and qualitative approaches, including survey methods, policy scholarship and different forms of ethnography. The remits of the different papers deal not only with questions of social class, race and ethnicity, but also with different policy formations and initiatives in particular national and international contexts. What is clear though is that all the papers are linked by a critical thread which runs throughout the Special Issue: a critique of the ways in which neoliberal policy and practice increasingly dominate both schooling and society more broadly, albeit in different ways in different contexts and locations. It is, as Harvey (2005) argues, evident that the growing incursion of neoliberalism into everyday life exacerbates inequality and drives division but, as this Special Issue shows, also produces increasingly insecure experiences and prospects for a growing proportion of young people across the globe. This, as Sara Carpenter points out in the first paper in this Special Issue, can take multiple forms but includes different aspects of social, economic, political, cultural and physical insecurity.

Carpenter's paper examines the use of logic models within AmeriCorps, a civilian national service programme in the USA. This initiative, which effectively uses hundreds of thousands of 18 to 26-year-old volunteers as low-cost labour, allows local government and voluntary sector organisations to run a variety of interventions which propose to tackle social inequality and disadvantage at the local level. Drawing on data from an institutional ethnography of a 'Kids First' programme, a school-based intervention which uses AmeriCorps volunteers to provide classroom support, after-school events and a range of other activities to work with pupils deemed to be underachieving, Carpenter problematises the use of logic models in the programme planning process. These, she contends, work both to obscure the structural roots of inequality and to shape the interventions of youth workers at the

individual level. It is through such technologies that Carpenter argues we can begin to understand how neoliberal policy shapes interventions at the community level, and how programmes such as AmeriCorps serve to produce and shape neoliberal subjects. This, she contends, applies both to those charged with the delivery of such programmes and those who are objects of their intervention.

The second paper, by Andrew Hodgkins, also deals with the North American context, although its focus is on work-related learning and, in particular, the precarious learning-to-work transitions of aboriginal youth in northern Canada. Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and, the concept of vocational habitus in particular (see Colley et al. 2003), Hodgkins uses Burawoy's (1998) extended case study method to examine young aboriginal workers' socialisation into the world of work via pre-apprenticeship programmes in the oil sands mining industry. Whilst aboriginal youth can, in many ways, be considered to be 'at risk' - for example, in terms of low educational attainment, early parenthood, engagement with the justice system and other dimensions of disadvantage - they are also targeted as a source of racialised labour by companies keen to appease resentment over dispossession and environmental damage of traditional lands. In this context, past identities must, Hodgkins contends, yield to new attitudes and dispositions 'right for the job' if aboriginal youth are to achieve individual success in the labour market. The paper examines the microsocial processes and macrosocial forces involved in such practices, and explores the multiple tensions through which it is argued racialised youth become objects of neo-liberal globalisation.

Shamim Miah's paper *The Muslim Problematic* deals with the ongoing pathologisation of Britain's Muslim communities. It focuses particularly on concerns about the so-called Islamification of state schools which came to a head with the so-called Trojan Horse affair in 2014, an event which marks a significant moment in the embedding of the security agenda in UK schools. This is perhaps one of the most notable illustrations of the way in which notions of security and insecurity have been recast under neoliberal regimes, and it is useful to place events within a broader historical context in order to understand both their general direction and specific detail. In the UK, social protection measures which are now referred to both in political and popular discourse as welfare were, at least for the second half of the 20th Century, generally known as social security and drew on social democratic understandings of the relationship between the state, individual and society. Since the turn of the millennium there has, however, been a reconceptualization of security in terms of external and internal threats posed to liberal Western democracies, especially in relation to radical Islam and Muslim youth in particular. Specific incidents underpin this shift. 9/11, the 'war on terror' and ensuing political instability in the Middle-East provide the backdrop to the contemporary security agenda, whilst the 2001 northern mill-town riots, the London bombings of 2005, and notions of increased ethnic segregation have all been presented as evidence of the supposed threat posed to British society (Thomas and Sanderson, 2011). Miah considers that the UK Government's Prevent strategy – which effectively amounts to the introduction of counter-terrorism measures into the educational mainstream – represents an important milestone in the nature and function of the neoliberal state, and it is through such policy discourses that young Muslims are increasingly seen both as 'risky' and 'at risk'. Or in other words young Muslims are now seen by the state as a potential threat to others, both physically and ontologically, whilst also being viewed as personally and individually vulnerable to the forces of radicalisation themselves (Heath-Kelly, 2013).

Neoliberalism, as David Harvey (2005) explains, takes different forms in different national and international contexts and Lucia Lin Liu's and Ailei Xie's ethnographic study of 'at risk' youth is set

against the backdrop of intense social, economic and political change in southern China. Whilst, as Liu and Xie explain, the rapid shift in China to a marketised economy has, for some, brought increased wealth, educational opportunities and international connections, it has also driven inequality and insecurity, especially for those from poor and rural backgrounds, where young people are particularly vulnerable to the vicissitudes of an increasingly individualised, competitive culture – which, in many ways, runs contrary to the ethos of Confucianism upon which much Chinese tradition is based (Lian, 2014). For vulnerable groups, the consequences of this may include early school dropout and involvement in gang culture - although Liu and Xie argue that young people's engagement in ostensibly deviant subcultures may, at least in some cases, help provide a degree of resistance to material inequality even if this effectively constitutes a process of 'muddling through' rather than effective, organised class struggle. Whilst such processes have been debated extensively in various Western contexts, there is less research on youth subcultures in the Far East, and Liu's and Xie's paper therefore begins to address an important deficit in the literature.

The next paper, by Spruyt et al., also deals with processes of inequality in schools, although in a European context, and focusing specifically on truancy, a phenomenon occurring most often amongst pupils from socially and materially deprived backgrounds. Based in the Flanders region of Belgium and using mixed methods, including data from a survey of over 4,000 year 9-12 pupils and in-depth qualitative interviews with occasional and frequent truants, Spruyt argues that the current emphasis on registration and the aim of early detection and intervention in cases of truancy is, in many ways, counterproductive. The research presents four key findings: first, registration systems in Flanders are most efficient in detecting truants when they no longer care about getting caught; second, such systems tend to miss a crucial phase in the development of truancy; third, registration systems are largely disconnected from broader school policies and systems; and, finally, such systems, it is argued, effectively serve to create a track record which follows pupils and blights education careers thereafter. This is not to say that Spruyt et al. believe that registration and monitoring of absenteeism is a bad thing *per se*. Instead they argue that the pressure placed upon schools to adopt mechanistic (and under-funded) anti-truancy measures individualises and pathologises a phenomenon which is actually rooted in much broader social, economic and cultural processes. Control systems, it is argued, can never be effective if questions of social bonding and the underpinning causes of truancy are overlooked.

The penultimate paper, by Neves et al., focuses on transitions from school to university and draws on in-depth analyses of national data bases in Portugal, spanning a total of 13 years. Whilst the relationship between social and economic disadvantage and educational attainment is well established within the sociology of education, Neves et al. provide a number of important insights into how social inequality in access to higher education can be intensified and exacerbated under certain policy regimes. This, they contend, is particularly important in the case of Portugal, one of the most unequal societies in the Western world and a nation where the higher social classes have benefited disproportionately from the massification of higher education. Such patterns, it is argued, are reinforced both from 'above' and 'below'. The paper shows how, on one hand, private-sector secondary schools - attended mostly by those from affluent backgrounds - inflate student grades in order to provide fee-paying students with unfair advantage in access to higher education. Whilst, on the other hand, it points to the ineffectiveness of the Portuguese system of compensatory education, especially in bridging the gap in academic performance between the less privileged and their more advantaged peers. Although we have long known that education cannot compensate for society

(Bernstein, 1977), it can, as Maxwell and Aggleton (2014) show us, nevertheless be used both to drive and camouflage the reproduction of inequality. Neves et al. vividly demonstrate in this paper how the market pressures associated with neoliberal policy regimes can, at least in some cases, lead to the corruption of ostensibly neutral systems of educational selection and progression, further advantaging the elite in what is already a highly unequal playing field.

The final paper in the Special Issue, by John Smyth, returns to the Anglophone context. Using his own brand of critical policy scholarship, and drawing on a range of contemporary and classic studies, Smyth argues that schools as social institutions produce a classed learning identity which systematically advantages some students, whilst disadvantaging others. Whilst Smyth recognises that schooling is not always smooth and unproblematic for more middle-class pupils, he also argues that they tend to widen the gap between those who fit and those who do not. For Smyth, Anglo-Western schools are nowadays largely constructed around neoliberal agendas where discourses of individual meritocracy mean that rewards flow to those most able to out-compete their peers, and schools themselves are judged against each other according to performative standards based upon various measures of pupil attainment. The resulting social and institutional pressures mean that young people from working-class backgrounds then often find themselves in inhospitable places.

Smyth's paper first explores what is meant by a classed learning identity, how it is formed and its importance, especially for disadvantaged working-class pupils. It then explains why an explicit focus on social class in schooling is still necessary. Smyth then goes on to argue that the forms of resistance with which some young people engage allows them to re-author their lives in a different discourse, and the paper provides a number of illustrations of how young working-class people attempt to speak back to the institution of schooling. Here Smyth draws on critical race theory to argue that it is possible, at least in some cases, for working-class pupils to create a counter-narrative to what might otherwise be deterministic story of misery and failure. Taking a lead from Solorzano and Yosso (2001) he argues that it is necessary to draw upon positive aspects of working-class culture and to accentuate the possibilities in their lives, rather than dwell on pathological or deficit-ridden conceptions. It is through such an approach that he believes it is possible to understand young people's experiences of risk and insecurity in the neoliberal school.

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