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Education, the formation of self and the world of Web 2.0

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Education has long been considered as playing a part in the construction or formation of self and identity. The processes of education and formation, being historically and culturally shaped, display the concerns and features of time and place. One of the distinguishing and influential features of contemporary western societies is communication technologies. Some features of the role of these technologies in self-formation and the construction of identity is discussed in this paper together with a reflection on the role that traditional forms of schooling might continue to play in rooting self and identity in a real, embodied world.

Keywords: self-formation; Bildung; social identity; web identities; online identities

The western 'self' and education-some historical markers

Education has long been associated with the project of the formation of individuals or 'self'. The production or development of stable dispositions of character and action is of obvious personal, social and political importance, and education is an important public arena and instrument, through cultural interaction and linguistic shaping, in the realisation of this project. In this important reading of the term, education is a change process by which 'self' and identity are realised (Wiszniewski and Coyne 2002).

The notion of the western 'self' has a long and complex history (Taylor 1989) and so what follows are merely a few historical markers that should help to frame the later discussion. First however, it is important to point out that the focus here will be on the social construction of self and the self as agent. This is not to deny the importance of physically and psychologically based conceptions of self, but to affirm that aspect most relevant to a public and moral understanding of education. Also, it is probably worth pointing out that this focus on self as 'in-relation' and agent permits the interchangeable use of self and identity, where identity is understood as 'own-ness', 'being oneself' (Priest 2006) or authorship identity in the way in which Ricoeur uses his term 'ipse-identity' (Ricoeur 1992).

In the classical Greek world education was recognised as a guided and directed process by which an ideal public and political self was constructed for the *polis*. At the same time it also constructed an individual's self-understanding. For Plato, the learning for liberty, nobility and beauty of the young male aristocrat was a moulding of human development in culture to the eternal, true form of the ideal man (Plato 1955, V,7). For Aristotle too, the complete citizen emerged as a result of the realisation of innate potentialities in the activity of practical wisdom that educates desire, but is always aimed at the ideal of the virtuous individual (Aristotle 2000, VIII, 1–3). Underpinning both approaches, though different in their means and methods, is the construct of a substantial, culturally stable notion of the social, acting self.

Despite its obvious cultural constraints in its intimate association with the values and requirements of the Greek city-state and the complete disregard for the formation of female

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selves (not to mention slaves), this classical self and the view of education as a moulding to an ideal self enjoyed remarkable longevity. Even despite the revolution of the Enlightenment and the project of modernism, this classical view persists into the present in certain faith-based education. However, it is in these intellectual movements that we see the emergence of the European sense of self that has informed much of political and educational thought of the last two centuries.

Descartes, rejecting the authority of his teachers, posits the foundations of the modern notion of self in the radical substance dualism of mind and body (Descartes 1994, I, 215). The modern self is affirmed as the root, or ground, of all knowledge which is not to be found in either objects or books. The things of the intellect, characteristic of the human self, come from reason and not from the senses. Selfhood is identified with the exercise of reason in the intuitive grasp of first principles and the application of the method of deduction (Descartes 1994, I, 217). As a consequence, education of and for the self consists of the development of reason; the most human of all attributes. The modern sense of self is in clear contrast to Aristotle's notion of the individual, constituted by matter and form with its fulfilment in self-realisation. Descartes regards most of this 'modern' being as a machine, subject only to the laws of physics and the other natural sciences (Descartes 1994, I, 315). Modern subjectivity is born here in the tense dichotomy of a mind of ever greater interiority and an empirical body increasingly medicalised and instrumentalised. The attempts by Kant to resolve these tensions between idealism and empiricism result in a more nuanced notion of self in which self can either be known or postulated in three ways: first as the logical ground of apperception, then empirically as a 'phenomenal self' and finally, as the 'noumenal self' necessary to explain the demands of morality and moral action (Kant 1997, B407–8). At the core of Kant's investigation, however, is the belief both in the universality and transparency of self.

At the apotheosis of modernism stand Hegel and his theory of the dialectical self. In a move that was to have significant consequences for much twentieth century theorising on the self, Hegel argues that self is constituted only in the mutual recognition of other subjects as members of a moral community. Much of later thought on the constitution of subjectivity in Marxism, phenomenology, existentialism and postmodernism has its origin in the analysis of the particular dynamic of the master–slave dialectic that Hegel uses to illuminate the process by which the self is formed in the struggle for recognition that occurs in the encounter of two subjectivities (Hegel 1977, 190). It is this dynamic of the universal and the particular in history and culture that provides a foundation for a transformative notion of self.

Education played its part in the modernist revolution towards self-sufficiency, self-sovereignty and empowerment in the idea and practices of modern liberal education. In its more Cartesian or loosely Kantian form, the principal aim of education becomes first and foremost, the development of reason in the service of ever greater self-transparency. Reason is no longer simply associated with grasping intuitive truths but more importantly, after Kant, with the conditions of possibility, and structuring, of perception (Kant 2007). It is regarded as the unifier of emotions, needs, desires, actions and thought. As such, it is the obvious faculty to be developed by education. This is achieved by induction into rational thinking and logic, both of which are best exemplified in the 'bodies of knowledge' as the best that has been thought or designed. It valorises autonomy, self-reflection and an engagement in understanding how human beings structure the world in their knowledge.

The Kantian notion of self and the concomitant understanding of education as the development of reason and autonomy have had considerable influence particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world (Peters 1973). On the mainland of Europe in contrast, Hegel has had the greater influence particularly on the educational understanding of self. The central notion in this understanding is that of *Bildung*, of education as self-formation in transformation. Most significantly for

understandings in Marxism, and certain strands of contemporary postmodernism, this process is a dialectical one. One comes to self and identity in the often tense, conflictual relationship between the individual and culture. Culture is, in the Hegelian sense, the 'Other' of the individual, an external source making demands on her/him but at the same time reflecting the individual to him/herself as a cultural being. Education is, in this view, not a matter of natural, linearly programmed or programmable development which either occurs simply by facilitation or by the development of ever more sophisticated instruments to 'grow' teaching and learning. It is a process in which the individual's understanding of self in self-reflection is negated in the reflection of culture. In this encounter, the individual is forced to re-draw and re-constitute herself in the 'negation of the negation' before coming to some acceptable dynamic relationship of self and culture. It is process of tension, negation, re-imagining and aesthetic construction and re-construction. Finally, for Hegel at least, if not for some of his followers (Žižek 2006), this process finds an ultimate synthesis or harmony in the realisation of the project of history.

Contemporary 'selves' and education

This very brief background to the notion of the self provides a frame against which contemporary understandings can be drawn. With some of these understandings at hand, it is then possible to examine, in an admittedly speculative manner, some of the challenges to, and possibilities and tensions in our conventional understandings that appear with the emergence of the 'digital ego', 'the virtual identities' and the 'second lives' of cyber lives. Education is challenged in the era of multiple selves, virtual identities and personae, since its traditional role in self-formation or self-development *can no longer rely on a stable, or even singular, notion of self.*

At the dawn of the digital era, the philosophy of self and, to an extent, the philosophy of education could identify the ontological and epistemological features of a small number of dominant views of the self. These views suggest that subjectivity and self could be founded in either the certainty of empirical or sense data or in the rational structures of human reason and self-knowledge. In the first of these, the empirical self is the experience of self as object. I can gather and process sense data (perceptions) about myself and this sense data can be used by the natural sciences, including psychology, to predict behaviour and control health and the environment. At the core of this materialist view with its instrumental epistemology is a model of the human self as a machine, albeit an exceedingly complex one. This view of the self proposes a neutral, non-ideological approach to understanding human beings. The resulting notion of education is of a technical process to be increasingly 'effective', 'productive' and 'flexible' as required by a regime of perfomativity. The objection raised by its opponents is that this approach denies the inherently moral and political aspects of education and reduces it to the service of external aims rather than a relational transformation of self.

The second view of self is the 'internal' model of a person's mental reflexivity. As indicated above, this can take two forms: that of the Cartesian ego or of the Hegelian dialectic of interaction of 'internal' and the 'external'. In both cases, the self is more than a Humean bundle of experiences, and personal identity has a stronger base than the epistemological criteria for experience in memory.

Mediating in some way between the extremes of the empirical bundle and the metaphysical ego (Cuypers 2001) theories are recent neo-Aristotelian models of self. These take as their starting point the criticism that strongly empiricist or idealist notions of self neglect the idea that the commonsensical concept of the person is that of a dynamic agent related to the public world (Wiggins 1987). Both aspects are important here. First the self is agent, capable of acting out of its own desires and will in what Davidson calls 'intentional agency'. Beliefs and desires are causally effective but they can also be understood, interpreted and incorporated into a reasoned

and reasonable explanation of an individual's action. Secondly, self is also related to the public world, not just the private. But this is not the world of the natural things of the physical sciences, this is the world of politics, community and the social. Whereas the notion of self had become either evermore personal and interiorised or more objectified, the Aristotelian model calls for the return to the fundamental and primitive notion of the self as public person that is not reducible either to 'mind' or to a 'body'. The agential self, acting in a reasoned and public manner, is an interesting construct against which to view the virtual self. Educational thinking, informed by these models, promoted the aims of self-knowledge in reflection on learning and on community education.

All of these views, however, came under sustained and robust critique in the post-structuralism of the 1980s. The critique claims that all foundationalist or logocentric philosophies of the subject are inadequate as they fail to acknowledge the radical historicity of the subject (in the case of metaphysical ego models) and the radical fallibility of our knowledge (in the case of empiricist models). The result is the rejection of the whole project of the autonomous, self-transparent self. What remains is either no notion of 'self' or an impotent one formed through external forces as a social, cultural and historical construct. These forces include the well-known objects of twentieth century investigation: language, social and economic forces, the Freudian unconscious, or Foucault's 'discursive formations'. In essence, there is no 'I' who speaks, no 'self' that results from any immediate self-knowledge. All of my knowledge and all of my utterances about myself and the world cannot escape the realm of ideology. My culture and history speak through me.

In this post-structuralist world, the role of education in self-formation is quite different to that belonging to the era of a universal, free human nature. Formation in these earlier contexts is a moulding within a pre-existing ideological frame. The formation of the autonomous self was executed by educational processes that practiced rational thought, logic, reasoned judgment using the traditional bodies of knowledge as exemplars of these processes. The cultured, communitarian self of *Bildung* was promoted by an education in the arts and sciences that emphasised the progress in history of society as a whole and the contribution and responsibility of the individual in this communal process. The postmodernist world changes this utterly. In the wake of the well-rehearsed critique of Lyotard, Foucault and others, these 'grand narratives' of the self, and consequently of the grand principles and philosophies of education, suffer rejection.

This has resulted in many places in one of two reactions. On the one hand, local and particular notions of self, often based on ethnic, social and racial identity are constructed and education is re-aligned and designed to promote these new identities. Thus, education looks different if the 'self' is male, female, black, white, European, African and so on (Gotz 1995). Alternatively, education retreats from the traditional task of self-formation and confines itself to the refinement of teaching and learning instruments that operate within the prevailing discourse but does not question the goals to which these methods are directed. Against these two trends, however, and almost in a post-postmodernist vein, some authors read in the rise of the social networking of the world of Web. 2.0 the re-emergence of a new 'universal' self but with quite different features.

The self of the cyber-world

The multiplicity of selves, or the fragmentation of self, characteristic of postmodernism is perhaps best exemplified in the multiple virtual selves of cyberspace. The world of Web 2.0, in particular, heralds a number of significant changes in how we view, use and think about technology as a formative force in new domains of social and personal interaction. The newest forms

are no longer restricted to the textual spaces of blogs and wikis, which while holding information and representations allow for only limited social interaction. The development of rich environments in which participants can construct 'second selves', known as avatars, permits levels of interaction and agency that challenge traditional ideas on self-formation.

Assuming, as we have, that identity and self are forged in large part in social interaction then these spaces are *new sites of self-formation* (Turkle 1996). Information and communications technology is no longer merely a matter of an educational tool, either as a surrogate tutor or as a huge source of information, if not knowledge. It now impinges on one of the core self-understandings of the educational process which is the development of self and identity. Thus, it is worth examining some of the differences between self-formation in the real and in virtual worlds in order then to comment on the ways in which formal education might respond to this new situation.

One of the most immediate differences between the real self and its actions and that of the virtual self is *the disconnect between spatiality and temporality and the identity of real and virtual selves* (Cragnolini 1999). The particular import of this difference lies in the connection to moral action and agency. Particularly for Aristotelian virtue ethics, the connectedness of embodied subjects and the real, experienced outcomes of human action are pivotal for the development of moral agents. A key feature of Web 2.0 is the possibility of constructing personae online that not only have no physical connection to real selves but significantly can be radically different to their real origins. Online personae, though directed by a real will, can be of different age, sex and ethnicity from their authors, with potential consequences to the author's sense of self. It could be argued, of course, that this has always been a feature of any medium of communication and people have always 'constructed' themselves in letters, telephone conversations and latterly in emails and blogs. However, the personae of MUDs (Multiple User Dungeons) and MOOs (online virtual reality systems) for instance allow for self-construction in a qualitatively different way. Online personae are used to chat, make friends, have sex and even get married, but they are also used to stalk, sexually abuse, torture and kill. The level of attachment to these personae can be so strong, and the prospect of them being expressive of self and identity so challenging that there have been calls for avatars to be accorded moral significance (Wolfendale 2007). At the very least, the possibility arises that moral sensitivity could be influenced and informed by these virtual encounters.

In a second significant move, the Web 2.0 world has re-organised the sites of social interaction in a way *that weakens the connection between the physical and social place* (Meyrowitz 1997). In the past, the self was forged in the space in which social interaction and physicality were concomitant and the physical features of interactions in glances, gestures, sounds and touches conveyed and exchanged large amounts of information as signifiers of meanings. In real conversations, knowing gender, age and status of the speaker can and does influence the import of what they have to say. The dynamics and cultures of traditional educational encounters, particularly in the formative years, have relied greatly on the power of these factors in speech acts. Our selves were, or still are, to some extent a construct of the norms and narratives of our local community. But these geographically and culturally based communities are giving way to interest-based communities, changing the definition of neighbour and posing challenging questions about new understandings of responsiveness, accountability and inclusion (Brothers 1997). Such information about Web actors, agents and communicators is, for the most part and for the time being at least, not available. Perhaps some of the informational deficit will be filled with the possibilities afforded by teleconferencing and the development of better webcam technology. However, the current or likely technologies of the near future still can convey only information provided by two of the five senses and not with any guarantee that even this information has not been manipulated. The role of the other senses in social interaction may not be as well

described by psychologists but there is good evidence from anthropology that, certainly in the past, this type of information has played a significant part in the forging of human contacts and relationships. The consequences of not having this information due to a lack of physical presence may not be estimable for a long time after its disappearance.

Of concern also to sociologists, political philosophers and educationalist is a third feature of Web 2.0 interactions, *the conflation of the public and private spheres* (Habermas 1989). In the past, the self was structured to some extent at least in the polarity between the public and the private. The private sphere, initially identified with family, small community, church and club life, is, as Putnam phrases it, about 'bonding' (Putnam 2000). The private is an exclusive sphere often geographically confined, in which mutual understanding and intelligibility is secured by the use of a common language that it rooted in a shared world of experience. It is characterised also by high levels of mutual trust and commitment.

The public sphere, long associated with the media and the sphere of political debate, is, also to use Putnam's metaphor, about 'bridging'. In the public sphere mutual intelligibility cannot be assumed but has to be constructed carefully employing listening, negotiation, interpretation and correction. It attempts to encompass people across social, political and religious divides. While the private sphere functions as a space of trust, care, intimacy and the fulfilment of the needs attached to these, the public sphere is necessary in order for the needs of the individual to be recognised and acknowledged as legitimate in the wider collective. In this way the individual can attempt to secure the public and social conditions necessary for a flourishing life. Obvious examples of movements within the public sphere are the civil rights movement and movements for educational reform.

It might seem at first glance that the world of social networking belongs squarely in the public sphere. However, the world of Web 2.0 is a different public space. If the traditional public spaces analysed by the Frankfurt School and later by Habermas were those of the nation state, the public space of the Web is a global one. The Web is, along with economic globalisation, one of the principal engines in the globalisation of the public sphere. This transition has, or is to have, a number of new features and pose a new set of challenges in two areas of particular interest to educational debate; first, the *normativity* of globalised spaces and secondly, some of the potential of globalised public spaces.

With regard to the *normativity* of globalised spaces, Beck (1999) points to the distinction in history between what he terms first and second modernity. The overriding normative idea of first modernity was the rationalisation of the social world. Only by understanding the structures and dynamics of the social world is it possible to engineer progress, secure social solidarity and employment and to establish liberal, individual rights. However, this rationalisation is clearly founded on the shared social values of the Enlightenment. Beck claims that far from entering a postmodernist era at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we are experiencing a second modernity (Beck and Lau 2005). This second modernity, no longer based on the same values, is currently struggling to discover or identify the very values at its core. As Beck puts it this is 'not an age of the decline in values but the age *of* values' (Beck 1999, 13). Most importantly, this is an age that has not yet developed its normative ideas. On the contrary, our times are marked by the radical contingency of our social and work lives. This is the age of risk and uncertainty. Certainly one possible normative idea lies in the new freedom of globalised spaces and new possibilities for democracy. In this new freedom, there may well be opportunities for individuals to form themselves in ways not previously possible and thus achieve the modernist goal of individual emancipation through learning to speak, think and understand knowledge in new ways. The power to change politics that lies in these possibilities is not lost on governments, for example, who are known to be suspicious of the citizen empowerment that can ensue from global communication communities (Nassef, Danowitz, and Goodman 1995).

On the other hand, new freedoms can be used to indulge fantasies, desires and intentions that are not directed to either the development of a moral self or of a democracy. It is possible now to construct public spaces and societies 'in your own image' in ways that, ironically perhaps, while being global can constitute at the same time, a narrowing of interest and concern, a polarising of attitudes and a solidification of prejudices (Parsell 2008). The spaces of Web socialisation display these features of the age in a clear manner. Networks and groups that are formed are transitory, fragile and often based on trivial interests rather than committed values. On the other hand, there is evidence that, in the construction of online persona or avatars, there is a large degree of attachment to the avatar as the expression of self and identity as well as interactions and personal effects and consequences for participants (Wolfendale 2007). Avatar life and agency could have an effect on the real life of an individual identifying strongly with their 'second life' and the moral questions that arise in these encounters. It is of particular concern to imagine the situation in which, while not pertaining yet, is a definite future possibility, an individual cannot tell whether they are interacting with another human partner of with a robot. Negotiating the normativity of these future spaces of agency and moral action is a daunting but pressing demand.

On the other hand, it would seem that the future is not completely overshadowed by a debilitating anxiety and dread. As Beck points out in the more general context of globalisation there are possibilities in the new world of Web 2.0 for the formation of new types of individuals 'in the joyful and creative taking of risks' (Beck 2000). Cyberspaces are, not without reason, strongly associated with the postmodern phenomenon of the *homo ludens*: the human being can sample a rich variety of cultural options in their self-formation without being bound as tightly as in the past to traditional forms of socialisation. Johnson holds out the hope that that such individuals would be able to develop 'a constitutional wariness towards the practices of control and discipline' (Johnson 2006, 109).

This theme of control and discipline forms the last of the challenging themes for education suggested above. It has been discussed for some time that computer mediated communications (CMCs) and cyberspace in general can possibly give rise to new forms of governance (Crook, Pukulski, and Waters 1992). Two forms of this governance are of particular relevance to the discussion on self-formation. First, there are the external impinging factors of privacy, surveillance and censorship of the Web 2.0 world. Considering each briefly, privacy is associated with two important educational concerns, the possibility of intimacy and the formation of close relationships (Giddens 1991) and the promotion and nurturing of democracy (Raab 1997; Beetham 1992). Surveillance, or at least its possibility, is of importance not least as the individual has little control over the information that they provide in social network situations and even the suspicion of surveillance can be sufficient to inhibit honest and full communication (Crossman 2007; Lyon 2001). Open surveillance is conducted with state approval in many countries to collect data on website visits, with the prospect that this information could be used to target defined groups. Finally, while high-profile cases of Internet censorship and filtering in places like China are well documented, many, including many educators, are likely not to be aware of the degree to which government agencies throughout the world are actively censoring and filtering content (Deibert et al. 2008).

The second form of governance that can be associated with the new technologies and their formative influences is that form of self-governance and disciplining identified by Foucault (Foucault 1977, 1979) in which individuals shape and form themselves within self-imposed constraints that promise to make them more useful, effective or, for many young people, acceptable and 'cool'. These little coercions, whose origins are often not identifiable, act, as Foucault claims, on the body and on behaviour. In the traditional arenas of socialisation and schooling, these shaping and disciplining forces could, for the most part, be identified, examined and

critiqued. The cyber-versions of these mechanisms, however, are much more difficult to locate and lie outside the realm of influence or even understanding of a different generation or group. Here again there is evidence of forces of self-formation and identity construction that while they may appear in the public domain are, in fact, in the control of small groups and communities.

Self-formation and education in the world of Web 2.0

The world of Web 2.0 then is not simply one of new technologies that can be harnessed instrumentally by education in the pursuit of traditional aims, in particular of the aim of modernist self-formation. Self-formation, always a matter of constitutive relationships, occurs now in the context of a new and different set of ambiguous relationships. The 'real' self and the avatar find themselves in a relationship of mutual constitution. Both are subject to the fragile and peculiar relationships with other objects, artefacts and virtual others and a thorough analysis of the structure and underlying forces of these relationships that invites theorising beyond descriptive studies will be needed in the future. One suggestion that seems worthy of inquiry is that the energy behind these relationships is the desire, never fulfilled, to objectify the fundamental fantasy at the core of a person's sense of self (Zizek 2006). The loss of the unitary subjective experience of self either to fragmentation or to notions of multiple selves demands compensation. The challenge to the function of traditional education as a process of self-formation of individuals and citizens is thus set. Classical notions of inducting young people into fixed bodies of knowledge that represented the distilled understandings of a culture about what it was to be a subject or individual in that culture are no longer tenable. That universal subject or individual no longer exists and the once dominant metaphors, myths and practices of modernity no longer have their potency. However, the first challenge from the world of virtual selves is whether education still regards itself as playing a self-formative role and there is a need for a wider and detailed debate in education that might address this fundamental question. Should it be the case that the project of self-formation remains part of at least some sectors of formal education then what has gone before can point to ways in which education can respond.

New education for new selves

First, the engagement with the networked world and with the narrative construction of selves and identities that occur within it has to acknowledge the formative power of the medium and understand its dynamics. It is unlikely that the traditional forces and practices of formal education will be able to displace the cyber-forces and so a confrontational position with regard to the social-networked world would seem to have little prospect of success. On the other hand, the unquestioning and uncritical acceptance of this new social force would represent a deeply 'un-educational' response. It is much more the case that formal educational practices and schooling can complement, augment and critique the processes of social self-formation at work in the Web 2.0 world. In a real sense, formal education can make a significant contribution to the formation of individuals precisely by not attempting to do those things that have become the domain of the new technologies. In the areas of 'content delivery' and skills development, virtual environments may well be more effective than traditional educational spaces. But these latter spaces have a privileged place with regard to the physical and temporal nature of selves. Traditional education can provide public spaces in which individuals can both experience their physical selves and those of others and the embodied nature of learning. Embodied selves are phenomenologically different to the narrated selves of social networking. The qualitative difference of being with people in a room, of seeing their gestures, touching and even smelling are powerful factors in bonding and rejection. The tensions and dilemmas that

embodied experience entail are unique to these real situations and are the material of real educational dialogue.

The unmediated spatiality and temporality of shared public educational spaces also allows a unique experience of stability and constancy in development and gradual change. Sharing time and space with the same group of people in a class, sometimes over years, allows for relationships that can grow and change against a backdrop of social stability. In contrast, even though the information uploaded to networks has a certain persistence (boyd 2007), the relationships of social networking and 'second lives' do not seem to demonstrate these features, or at the very least, it is as yet too early to be able to analyse their stability and constancy over time.

The importance of the embodied nature of human experience is made most clear in the bodily consequences of deliberation and action. It would seem now more than ever, a demand on education that human beings learn about and from the physical consequences of moral agency. Decisions and actions have real physical effects on self and others and educational settings, with their privileged position of both experiencing these effects in a safe environment and analysing and critiquing them in a public way, can be places of real moral learning and engagement.

In opposition to the new univeralism of global technologies, and the hegemonic technicality of 'teaching and learning', there remains a possible space for formal education as the mediator of the norms and narratives of local and particular community. The engagement and rootedness of schools and colleges in the lived realities, aspirations, tensions and difficulties of their communities can help to anchor self-formation to social and political realities and diversity in a manner that may not be present, or possible in constructed cyber-worlds. In these engagements lies the educational opportunity, particularly for young people, to experience and learn from the exercise of power in age, gender and status relations.

With regard to the conflation of the public and private spheres in the Web 2.0 world, education, in schooling and its formal institutions, can play a useful role in highlighting and enacting the distinctiveness of these two spheres. Educational settings can be spaces in which the personal and private is affirmed in its importance for intimacy, continuity of sense of self and the construction of future selves. This latter project, for instance, often overlooked in an age of immediate need satisfaction, has always had a place in educational thinking. Education is not confined to the understanding of a present self or an immediate world but also quintessentially about what might be, or could be in the future. The preservation and non-disclosure of a private sphere can be an important factor in ensuring the freedom necessary to construct future selves (even if this consists only in ensuring that future employers cannot familiarise themselves with youthful excesses).

It could also be argued that formal educational settings allow for the possibility of a clearer and more immediate experience of an unmediated public sphere and the learning ensuing from these experiences. The demands made in living and working with fellow pupils or students in the confines of physical spaces, bodies, sets of power relations and vying interests are different in their immediacy and unavoidability than in arenas of virtual social interaction. In contrast to the public sphere of global networks, the 'modernist' public sphere of education can also include those who do not have access to social networks or 'second lives' and whose voices therefore are not heard on the Web. Educational reform in recent decades in many countries has aimed at achieving a greater representation of 'voices' in curriculum and practice designed to educate a generation in the multiplicity of cultural perspectives on self and the world in a way that promotes understanding, thoughtful critique of self and other and the abilities needed to live shared fulfilled lives Learning to understand, negotiate and act in these settings is an acknowledgment of the primacy of that 'being-in-the-real-world' or the 'involvement whole' (Introna 1997) that we are always in and that is always prior to any kind of mediated socialisation.

Of particular interest to sociologists of education and educators generally will be the effects on future generations in education of the disciplining and governmentalities of cyber-lives. Previously society could, with some confidence, expect that a generation emerging with some success from formal education had, through its rituals, habits and customs internalised a shared set of practices and attitudes most of which were useful in a society where identity is associated with tasks, abilities and functions (Bauman 2004). In the future, it is likely that formal education will lose (if it has not done so already) its privileged role in the moulding of the self-governing citizen. For one, the information held by institutions on individuals, discipline record, exam results, club membership, and so on, will no longer give the relatively comprehensive picture it once did. The traditional hierarchical power structures of schools and colleges face an added challenge as a result of young people experiencing and negotiating the more fluid socialisation forces of the cyber-world. This is not to suggest that cyber-lives are not subject to forms of discipline or that these new forms of are less oppressive and more benign than traditional ones. These developments do, however, invite an examination of the forms of governmentality particular to the educational encounter.

Conclusion

It is likely that the new virtual worlds created by new technologies will have real effects on how human beings in the future construct self and identity. These effects could well become evident in areas of moral sensitivity, political engagement and human relationships. If education is to retain or affirm its self understanding as a transformative process in which self and identity is realised then it would seem that it could best constitute itself as a space of complementarity and critique in which the construction of self, or selves, can occur in recognition of the formative influences of the new technologies but in the context of 'first-lives' of physicality, physical relationality, politics, suffering and agency. Alternately, should it become merely a service industry for skills, competencies and 'smart knowledge', it could well be the case that the virtual world proves to be more efficient, effective and economical for the job, and thus the new educational 'real'.

Notes on contributor

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