In the work of tony sewell in

Economics, Trade

In this essay I will argue that school as a formal education system hasan insufficient awareness of learning, which significantly contributes to theacademic failure of young students. It is also important to note that academicfailure within these institutions does serve as an accurate indicator of achild's overall ability to learn.

Thereare several reasons for arriving at this viewpoint which are highlightedthrough the work of Tony Sewell in GeneratingGenius: Black boys in search of love, ritual and schooling (2006) and GillianEvans in Educational Failure and workingclass White Children in Britain (2006). By providing the opportunity forblack boys schooling in the UK to attend a summer education scheme in Jamaica, Sewell (2006) demonstrates how practical learning styles, and thereorganisation of an individual's social and material environment has thepotential to awaken the academic ' genius' within. In a similar manner, Evans(2015) emphasises social class as a key factor in addressing underachievementwithin schools in which " white working class boys aredoing worst of all compared to any other group of young people in the country"(Evans 2015: 9). This finding is surprising to many because it disruptsthe dominant narrative that race, and namely institutional racism, is thegreatest hindrance to academic achievement for young schoolboys in formaleducation systems. NonethelessEvans' classroom participation in Pokemon affairs draws attention to aparticular kind of intelligence among white middle class boys despite poor academicperformance. This leads us to question the ways in which formal educationsystems might reap better results once taken-for-granted assumptions aboutlearning are dismantled and revised in order to meet the potential of itsoccupants. Notably,

categories of race andsocial class have played a large role in contributing to debates surroundingacademic success among children.

However, by drawing greater attention tosocial class, it becomes evident that itis the most significant factor in understanding educational failure, largelybecause it challenges our emphasis on race. Evans highlights that only 16% ofwhite working class boys were achieving 5 GCSEs in which " white working classboys are the worst performing ethnic group in the country" (Telegraph 2016). This disturbs the notion that the current education system only disadvantagesrace in which a large proportion of the debate only focussed on institutionalracism and the underachievement of African-Caribbean boys. It also displays thefact that African-Caribbean boys who are failing also happen to be from workingclass backgrounds. It suddenly becomes very clear that white, black and Asianboys from working class backgrounds have a lot in common, and more in commonthan focussing on race allows for. To only focus on race is to focus ondifference however, by focusing on class, greater similarities can be drawn.

Inthis way, we can better challenge the formal education systems and thetaken-for-granted assumptions about learning. This is not to argue thatinstitutional racism does not matter but rather that there are also broaderissues relating to social class that also significantly contribute to how well studentspass through formal education. Lave's (1982) focus on learningemphasises that there is a rich variety of learning processes in which formaland informal learning are integral to every form of education. Formal learning canbe understood as teaching that takes place through systematic,

formalised andexplicit verbal and written communication. This is often presented through schooleducation systems which function in a highly specific and institutionalisedsocial environment. Notably, any form of learning that does not align with thelatter is often deemed informal. However as humans have an advanced capacityfor learning, it is important that we do not restrict the ability to learn toone particular social sphere, but instead observe and review many differenttypes e.

g. at home and at school. In addition, we should be mindful not to fallinto the assumption that the learning process is natural lest we take it forgranted. There are deep structures that humans are involved in, and it is thecontent of the interaction and environment that influences the outcome of thelearning process. Institutions must therefore recognise the value of informallearning, review the form of participation required in classrooms, and examinethe possible reasons why the current formal education system is not prosperousfor all students.

HIRSCHFELD In the process of childhoodlearning, anthropologists have been guilty of over-estimating the role ofadults and under-estimating the role of children. However, to understand howthings become cultural knowledge, we must be attentive to how children processinformation, because it is these cognitive processes that help us to understandadult life. For example, Hisrchfeld (2002) highlights how well knowngames such as ‘ Cooties (US) have become children’s unselfconscious culture, andare reproduced without adult intervention. Cooties can be defined as “ a socialcontaminant that pass

from one child to another, a form of interpersonalpollution” (Hirschfield 2002: 617), and while cooties are invisible, cootiechildhood practices are not.

Ascooties are used as an offensive weapon and aim to exclude and stigmatiseparticular children, it shows that children have the ability to engage in asystem where individuals are strategically regulated through space. This game is solely enacted by andexperienced by children, and it is important that we credit them with the sortof intelligence, talent and agency required to practice such games. TOREN Similarly, Toren (1990)demonstrates that children are not passive recipients of the socialisationprocess but actively make sense of hierarchy. In Fiji, a child’s first experience of the classification of socialhierarchy is through materiality. They are able to co-operate and participateeffectively by bowing to the adult seated in the highest chair whilst adultsbow because he is the highest ranking in society. Despite their being a difference inunderstanding between adults and children, it highlights that children have thecapacity to successfully and effectively make sense of their social settings, and respond accordingly. Possessing the proficiency to act in an acceptablemanner, as a child, is indicative of how well children are able to process andlearn information.

It would beunfortunate to overlook this ability and underestimate the potential ofchildren to employ advanced intersubjective skills. EVANS In order to better organise formaleducation systems, school based-learning tasks must therefore incorporate asimilar form of participation required of children outside of school. It is not that all working classchildren do not have

the capacity to learn or participate appropriately inclassroom settings, but that rather, there is a select number of those who dostruggle, who must be accounted for and considered.

Evans argues that theworking class child is often at great disadvantage in comparison to theirmiddle class counterparts as a result of the parent-child interaction displayedin the home. She explains that working class parents “ focus on other kinds ofcore values which tend not to hinge on the development at home of success informal-learning-type tasks” (Evans 2005: 7). Whereas, intensive parenting bymiddle class parents often includes investing time and resources into ensuringtheir child is deemed ‘ clever’, and so results in “ the precocious developmentin children of proficiencies in formal learning type skills” (Evans 2005: 8). Bothapproaches to parenting can neither be judged as good nor bad but are made evidentwhen education systems reward children for excellent class participation andcontribution. This highlights the fact that, often, the ability to meet the formof participation required in formal learning settings is the standard at which anindividuals learning capabilities are measured. By viewing the classroom asparticular situation, Lave and Wenger’s (1991) situated learning theoryhighlights what forms of participation take place within it. The theory emphasisesthat humans actively learn how to participate appropriately. For example, Evans’ethnographic account in “ Pokemon and Peers” demonstrates how her ability todraw Pokemon characters enthused the class and caused many to request drawingsfor themselves.

Noting that Evans was previouslydisregarded and ignored by several ‘ disruptive’ class members prior todisplaying her skill, it soon became apparent that her drawings paved access toclass peer relations and granted a legitimate way to participate. As Pokemonwas valued among students Evans could participate in a socially meaningful wayand engage in a highly specific form of participation as a result of hercompetence. While disruptive class members failed to participate constructivelyin the formal learning style taking place in the classroom, their willingnessto participate in Pokemon affairs highlights that learning is not subject tothe formality of the classroom but also presents itself in informal matters. Italso shows that institutions must learn what forms of participation aremeaningful to schoolboys in order to stimulate participation.

As children enthusiastically tradePokemon cards, we witness how a highly specialised sphere of exchange creates aform of competitive economy between children. Evans describes how childrenplace the most value on rare Pokemon shinies in which the acquisition of suchgrants social prestige and influence. Reputation is also gained by skilful tradingand maintaining a buff collection. This is reinforced as Evans’ daughter pleadsto buy another pack of Pokemon cards from the store, noting that hers does notcontain any shinies. This illustrates that as children develop competence, theybegin to embody a particular set of cultural values expressive of what peoplein this community of practice are striving for and are oriented towards. Evans’daughter was dissatisfied with her cards because she identified that theabsence of a Pokemon shiny would reflect poorly on her social presence withinthis particular community. This is a result of the fact that she has

embodied anethical disposition as the emergent outcome of participation, which in turn helpsher to define what is good to do in order to become, and what is not. Thisexample teaches us that children actively learn what is required of them inparticular social situations and can successfully meet the demands of theirenvironment when required.

Similar to the example in Fiji by Toren (1990) andplaying Cooties, we see that children are capable of engaging in complexsystems that mandate the capacity to learn actively. Arguably, it is not thatdisruptive children are un-teachable or unwilling to learn, it is the form ofparticipation and the learning style that is presented within classrooms thatis unappealing, and so this generates resistance. Evans (2005) shows that whileschoolboys resist the dominant form of participation, they actively participatein trading Pokemon cards on the basis that this form of participation isseemingly more valuable to them. Whereby, the sulky behaviour displayed bydisruptive members of the classroom is an oppositional stance and a form ofresistance to the participation otherwise expected. In order for ‘ disruptiveschoolboys to enjoy and be receptive to classroom assignments, the classroom taskmust be meaningful to them.

SEWELL Sewell (2009) also identified thatunderachievement among black boys was not a sincere reflection of theirpotential. While others labelled them “ the lost tribe” (Sewell 2009: 3), Sewellwas persuaded that they were the next generation of scientists anddoctors. With such, he initiated “ TheGenerating Genius” programme alongside his charity, in order to raiseaspirations among young black students, and demonstrate that they are

able toachieve academic success in a new material and social environment. Theprogramme consisted of an intensive three-week course at Imperial CollegeLondon and provided boys (aged 12 onwards), from failing schools, practicalexperience of science, engineering and medicine. The success of the programme showedthat by investing in the academic potential of young ‘ failing’ black schoolboys, they are able to attain the same academic achievements as their racialcounterparts. The launch of Generating Genius asa summer programme at the University of the West Indies enabled participants torecreate the self. As the sense of selfis emergent and is predicated on the material properties of an individualsenvironment, as well as the inter-subjective elements they are engaged with, the programme was able to challenge the social history of young blackschoolboys.

Noting that the individual and the world are mutually specified, itproves difficult to separate the person from their social relations andreoccurring habitual acts, unless they are given the opportunity to rewrite theconditions of their existence. By travelling from the UK to Jamaica, the youngschoolboys were able to dispose of the temptations to engage with gang cultureand could instead participate in a new social learning environment that highlighted” the fun and responsibility of campus life” (Sewell 2009: 2). In doing so, theyoung schoolboys also