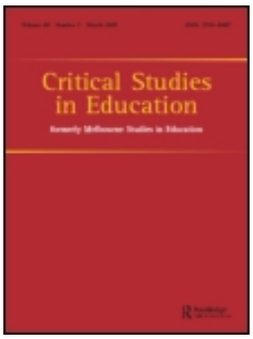

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# Life chances, lifestyle and everyday aspirational strategies and tactics

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# Life chances, lifestyle and everyday aspirational strategies and tactics[1]

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The notion of raising the aspirations of socially disadvantaged students is a key policy strategy in for enhancing such students' participation in higher education. However, this strategy runs the risk of being simplistic and ineffective unless it is informed by research on the links between aspirations and such students' changing life experiences particularly with regard to the many, often subtle, ways that power and privilege operate. This paper draws on an ethnographic study of young men in schools in regional Australia and shows how their everyday knowledges inform their aspirations. de Certeau's concepts, 'strategy', 'tactic' and 'spatialized knowledges' assist us to understand the knowledges boys pursue, resist, cling to and relinquish in relation to the shifting knowledge imperatives of their everyday lives. There are two main sets of knowledge they deploy; knowledge about life chances and lifestyle. Each involves diverse strategies and tactics.

**Keywords:** aspiration; boys' education; masculinity; rural education; spacial inequality

## Introduction

> Addressing aspiration means increasing the desire to attend university and putting it firmly on the 'radar screen' of potential higher education participants while they are still at school. (Australian Government, 2008, p. 40)

This Australian Government report, commonly known as the Bradley Review, points out that socio-economic status and rural location are two significant factors influencing students' aspirations to attend university. It shows that around the world there are significant differences between the university aspirations of high- and low-SES school students and between rural and urban; although how low SES and these different localities relate to each other is not considered. An implication running through this Report is that aspiration and its elevation amongst groups who are 'under represented' in universities are relatively straightforward matters. This implication is common in the policy literature. For example, a similar notion of raising the aspirations of socially disadvantaged students is a key policy strategy in the UK for enhancing such students' participation and success in higher education (David et al., 2010).

As Burke (2009) points out, this strategy runs the risk of being simplistic and ineffective unless it is informed by research on the links between aspirations and such students'

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changing life experiences particularly with regard to the 'hidden intricate operations of power, privilege and inequality' (p. 40). Other similar and well warranted critiques of such policy discourses are emerging and, on the basis of these, quite a number of recent attempts have been made to enrich the concept 'aspiration' as it is deployed in the higher education and social inclusion policy literature. Further, some evocative suggestions for alternative inclusive curriculum practices are subsequently arising.[2] In comparison, our purposes here are quite humble. We offer an example of the sorts of research called for by Burke in which we consider the matter of 'aspiration' from the perspective of school education, drawing on ethnographic research with school boys located outside of Australia's cities (Kenway, Kraack, & Hickey-Moody, 2006). In so doing we have two purposes in mind.

Our first purpose is to provide a research-based problematisation of the commonsense view of aspiration that is implicit in the pertinent policy discourse.[3] In this view educational aspiration is understood as the desire or ambition to achieve conventional notions of educational success, particularly a university education. One implication here is that educational aspiration is a disposition, an attitude, a psychological and individual state. Yet, with regard to the boys who are the subject of this paper, we will show how complex and diverse aspiration is and how it is rooted in social, cultural and spatial inequalities. In laying out this complexity we have a second purpose. This is to illustrate why the *normalization of aspiration*, which is implicit in such policy discourses, is such a problem. Indeed, it can be inferred from our research that such normalization is a form of 'symbolic violence', which downplays the systemically unequal strategies, and tactics of aspiration that school students adopt in their everyday lives. While it is not possible for us to say what these strategies and tactics are for similarly located girls or for students from different locations, we can certainly infer that they will be rooted in social, cultural and spatial inequalities.

This paper draws from our 'place-based global ethnographies' of out-of-the-way-places in Australia. These ethnographies examined youthful masculinities and gender relations with regard to place-identity, social inequality and injustice, work, knowledge and leisure in four marginalized, stigmatised, romanticized and exoticised places beyond the metropolis in Australia. These places are Eden (a coastal fishing and logging town), Morwell (a coal mining and power generation town), Coober Pedy (a tourist and opal mining desert town) and Renmark (a country town servicing viticulture and fruit production). Each place has experienced the effects of economic, social and cultural globalization. Our three-month ethnographic fieldwork in each location involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with 36 young people of diverse class, ethnic and racial backgrounds. For 6 weeks, 24 males were each interviewed weekly and 12 females were interviewed fortnightly. Loosely structured focus and affinity group discussions were held with mothers, fathers, community members, teachers and youth and welfare service providers. Informal conversations were held with a range of local people. All participants' names used here are fictional. Field research also involved participant observation at a variety of community and youth-specific locales (e.g. schools, youth clubs, beaches, main streets) and events (e.g. sporting matches, discos, local carnivals). Our ethnographic archive for each place included local government records, commissioned reports on local issues – particularly local economies, the coverage by local newspapers of local events and statistical analyses of each locality by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Our archive also contained film, television, print and Internet media artefacts, which represented places beyond the metropolis in 'developed' Western countries.

## Strategies and tactics

Our conception of aspirational strategies and tactics draws on the thought of de Certeau (1984) and so it is necessary to provide an elaboration, albeit brief, of de Certeau's notions

of spatialized knowledges and their associated strategies and tactics as ways of knowing and being. For de Certeau, spaces are trajectories of knowledge as well as physical and social areas. He explores the ways that knowledge is spatialized and does so from two main perspectives — above and below.

Knowledge from above is achieved through the 'map' and the 'tour'. 'The first [the map] is of the type: "The girls' room is next to the kitchen." The second: "You turn right and come into the living room".' He continues, by stating that 'tour' or 'itinerary' style descriptions of places and spatializations of knowledge 'are made for the most part in terms of *operations* and show "how to enter each room"' (de Certeau, 1984, p. 119). Tour knowledge is 'how to' knowledge; it steers people along predetermined routes and shows them how to behave along the way. Both maps and tours help to control the ways in which spaces are utilized, thought about, seen and moved within. The map and the tour regulate knowledge and power. Spatialised knowledge strategies and strategists draw on map or tour knowledge, on the grids of knowledge laid down by those with the power to map space and direct movement through it.

de Certeau (1984) contrasts the map and the tour with less or unregulated knowledges that arise from below, through the intimacies of the immediate, the body, the street, the moment, the corporeal senses. Knowledge from below is not readily mapped or steered and is the space of tactical knowledge and knowers. It is:

> Beneath the [cartographic, strategic] discourses that ideologize [sic] the city, the ruses and combinations of powers that have no readable identity proliferate; without points where one can take hold of them, without rational transparency, they are impossible to administer. (p. 93)

de Certeau (1984) places more cultural value on tactical knowledges and views from below than above, he celebrates the 'poets of the streets', those whose movements subvert map and tour knowledge in the everyday. He summarizes the tactic by saying 'The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power' (p. 37).

In short, strategies are knowledges of spatial and embodied control and tactics are knowledges of embodied, embedded and temporal resistance. Strategies and tactics constitute each other, as the strategy is the exteriority of the tactic (de Certeau, 1984, p. 37). We will argue that different aspirational strategies and tactics run through the two main sets of knowledge that the boys of our study deploy: knowledge about life chances and lifestyle.

## Life chances: aspirational strategies and tactics

'Official' school knowledge can be likened to de Certeau's (1984) map knowledge. It is an atlas of knowledge trajectories, a command geography. It identifies a set number of knowledge grids and shows how they intersect. But official school knowledge can also be likened to the tour guide-book, for it 'sends' students along these predetermined grid lines. Indeed, it conventionally sends certain social class groupings of students along particular lines. It also ascribes more merit to certain lines on the grid than others and, in so doing, helps to distribute students' life chances.

### *Boys with aerial vision*

Some boys have what we call aerial vision: they see school knowledge from above and within a broader and somewhat fluid socio-economic context. They strategically chart their

own tours through the full range made possible on the maps of education. de Certeau (1984) explains a strategy in the following way:

> I call a *strategy* the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serves as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed. (pp. 35–36, emphasis in original)

In the manner akin to this, these boys scope knowledge strategically.

Boys with aerial vision are highly reflexive about their life chances. They are preoccupied with what they need to know, do and have available to them in the present to be secure and successful in later life. Whatever specific knowledge they, the school and sometimes their parents think they need, they subscribe to – and more besides in some cases. Formalized and credentialized knowledges are understood as central to their biographical projects of getting on.

Frank North, aged 16, from Eden, is a typical scopic strategist. He has crafted an identity around being smart and skilled according to map knowledges. Frank says 'I should be able to go to year 12. I am pretty confident that I would be able to do that'. He wants 'something to do with plants. I was thinking National Parks and Wildlife, or just working in the Ministry of Health.' He is making sure he chooses the right subjects, is using 'work experience' to further his ambitions and making the most of both his father's and the school's support:

> Oh, I saw . . . our head of placements this year, and got a sheet of the electives we would need next year, and I should be doing biology, agriculture, geography and I will probably do French still. I might do drama because I need another elective.

For 'work experience' he and his father 'rang up National Parks and Wildlife and booked him in. He has already got a 'mini biology degree certificate, which doesn't really mean much, but it still looks good', he says.

Like Frank, boys with aerial vision understand the macro geographies of school knowledge and plot their best routes to success on the grids of knowledge/power. They can think geometrically, they observe intersections, trends. They have foresight. Their life-lines are connected to future opportunities through the logic of 'if' – 'if I do this now, then . . .'. They understand cause and effect and operate in terms of actions and consequences. Boys with aerial vision are thus often good readers of the economic trends in their locality and these are also becoming part of these boys' knowledge narratives. In Coober Pedy, for instance, tourism and service industries are on the rise. Tommy Logan, aged 15, has a part-time job at the Breakaways café, but will stay at school through to Year 12 when he hopes to get a local apprenticeship to become a chef. He knows what knowledge is a good investment if he wishes to continue to live locally.

### *Gridlocked boys*

There are various ways in which boys become gridlocked on schools' map knowledge. One set of gridlocked boys knows the doxa about the value of aerial vision but can't work the grid. These gridlocked boys know *that* they need to stay at school, work hard and 'get an education'. Indeed, such notions have an almost mantra like status for them. They

place a high degree of trust in the education system and in the capacity of qualifications to translate into work. However, they know a great deal less about the expert and abstract systems associated with education, training and employment than do the highly strategic boys with aerial vision.

Shawn Rodgers, aged 13, from Morwell, is typical of such boys. Shawn is aware that qualifications are important in securing work. He explains:

> Like, if you have a degree as a mechanic, they would get jobs in Morwell just like that. . . . On the TV it says jobs are so hard to get and stuff like that. It is because people haven't got degrees or anything like that, or they don't know anything about their jobs.

In order to encourage him to stay at school Shawn's father has him on an incentive scheme. He explains this as follows:

> None of my brothers, nobody in my whole family-my dad's family and my mum's family-they haven't gone past Year 11. So I am going to try and beat that. And Dad has given me a deal. If Peter, that is my older brother, had gone past it, he would have got $600, and Paul, if he had passed, he would get $900, and if Mark had passed he would have got $1200 and then if I pass I get $5500. So I am going to try and pass.

The trouble for Shawn is that neither he nor his family knows much about school knowledges or how education systems work.

Knowing the geography of school knowledge is essential to leveraging life chances. Such gridlocked boys recognise the commands of the map, but the operational knowledge in the educational tour guide-book is far too coded for them. It requires the sorts of cultural capital they and their families do not have. These boys' spatial stories are social class stories of a command geography that keeps them in their place. Most often, they and their families simply don't occupy a place that allows them to take an aerial view of knowledge.

Other boys only read certain maps of school knowledge, take local tours and cannot or do not see the complex geographies of possibility so well understood by those with aerial vision. They only tour the maps of their socio-economic place, but do not read these maps as fixing them in their place. Trajectories to other places are not part of their life. While they are on the map of strategic knowledge, they are also gridlocked.

A different set of gridlocked boys is only willing to invest their intellectual and emotional energy in highly specific curriculum spaces. These are usually directly related to further training, paid work or sport – practical, technical or physical knowledges. For these boys, worthwhile knowledge is usually not associated with what they call paper work; with 'too much' writing, 'too much' theory and/or with being indoors. One difficulty for such boys arises when they become aware that the school does not necessarily value and reward highly the knowledge they like and the things they can actually do. Indeed, some observe that although they have skills, the school sometimes has no idea about them and assesses them according to tests that cannot demonstrate their skills. For instance, Nigel Watkins, aged 15, of Eden, explains that 'A mate of mine is useless at schoolwork' and fails all the tests. But 'he knows every part of a motor, you just can't imagine it, he knows everything.'

Boys who are gridlocked in maps of practical knowledge often think schools don't give them enough 'hands-on', practical, job-related knowledge. Indeed, much of the time, schools are seen to dispense useless knowledge which can really only be tolerated if it is at least enjoyable - like Physical Education, for example. A difficulty for the school, of course, is the boys' withdrawal of consent in the subjects they do not approve of or enjoy. This can be accompanied by an 'I don't care, I don't want to try, don't push me' attitude. A vicious retracing of a worn, narrow road may arise: the less they care, the worse they do

and the worse they do, the less they try. There may be a causal paradox of relevance here. It is possible that some boys want the school to prepare them for the jobs that are in fact dwindling or that require additional skills that these boys do not have and are unprepared to gain. Yet, having locked themselves into particular knowledge grids, these boys find it difficult to take up other/othered knowledges that they may have previously stigmatised, but which may have more 'pay off' in the longer term. These boys do not understand the logic of 'if'. Rather, they think in terms of 'there is'. They only tour the maps of their socio-economic place and cannot read these maps as fixing them in place. The choices these boys make only occur within the neighbourhood knowledges they understand. They don't read the atlas.

These three sets of boys all might be said to have a strategic orientation to aspirations. In one way or another they construct their aspirations in relation to the education system's grids of power/knowledge. But there is more to it than this. In de Certeau's (1984) words:

> It would be legitimate to define the *power of knowledge* by this ability to transform the uncertainties of history into readable spaces. But it would be more correct to recognize in these 'strategies' a specific type of knowledge, one sustained and determined by the power to provide oneself with one's own place. (p. 36, emphasis in original)

For de Certeau (1984) then, a strategy can also be understood as 'the establishment of a break between a place appropriated as one's own and its other' (p. 36). Making 'one's own' place involves spatializing knowledge. For these strategists, it involves the construction of both spaces they can read and of their place in such spaces.

### *Sensory tacticians*

Some other boys refute the strategies associated with aerial and neighbourhood vision. They go off the map of school knowledge and tactically make their life chances from their out-of-school experience. Because they refuse to surrender to map knowledge they are beyond the command of the school. Their knowledge arises from the micro-worlds of intimate community. These boys seek to build life chances outside school or below the school's scopic visions. They hold the view that 'you have to make your own future'. They are intent on invention through the use of their own social, sensory sensibilities, they are sensory tacticians.

Such sensory tacticians grasp the complexities of the intimate and immediate, they grasp opportunities. These boys know how to read for practical possibility. They generate -and live in- 'actions that multiply spaces' (de Certeau, 1984, p. 118). They distrust the singularity and abstractions inherent in school map knowledge.

There are two main overlapping ways that sensory tacticians seek to enhance their life chances: through part time work undertaken whilst at school and through building networks and reputation. Terry Vincent, aged 14, from Morwell, is not waiting for work, he cannot afford that luxury. He is out hustling for work-experience and generating his own part-time paid work. Terry is the sort of boy who evades the all-seeing eye of the school, he does just enough work to get by and teachers overlook him. But outside of school he has adopted some highly successful tactics of necessity. His parents are in dire financial circumstances and the money he gets from part-time work is an important component of the family income. He believes strongly in the importance of 'experience and references' in getting further work. He has even established his own 'small enterprise':

> I have got tons of references from past jobs. I used to work at the Shed, used to do a paper round. There was several things that I did. I even did my own things like cleaning wheelie bins and stuff, and I did that for about a year. Yeah, I used to charge $4 per bin. For a spray, a wash and everything.

Terry has a host of ideas about how the locals might provide work experience for local kids:

> Probably just offer small jobs. Like, the bowling alley could say 'Oil the lanes, $2 a night' or something like that. It is 20 lanes up and down with the machine, pretty easy, and say $2 each time you go up and down. Do that everyday. Just small things to get kids going.

According to Terry, you need to know how to create opportunities in your own immediate spaces.

Some boys who refuse school map-knowledge are busy in and outside of school building up their life chances according to the age old premise 'Its not what you know but who you know'. Such boys invent opportunities through 'know how' about 'know who' and in a sense they subvert map and tour knowledges, which are normally about 'know how' and 'know what'. Sport and extended families play important roles here, as Nigel Watkins argues, 'I reckon if you play footy, or if you are in the footy or the soccer club or some club like that, if you know heaps of people it would be easier to get a job because you just ask everyone if there is any work going.' Simon Jackson, aged 15, also from Eden, is deliberately tactical about leaving his personal imprint. He thinks getting ahead for boys is about actively networking and deliberately seeking to get a good name through part time work:

> Being polite to people, they really appreciate it. Then it goes on to someone else, they tell someone else, and it goes on. People come in and they actually know you and they talk to you by name. It is a way to get your name around so that you can get a job later on. Oh, some days you just feel like staying at home, but you have got to do it, so you put your mind to it and go to work. You can't just do a no-show. It is sort of really hard [to get work]. It depends on if you have got a name around the town. If you haven't then you've got no hope. But if you have got a good name and your name is around then, yeah.

These sensory tacticians craft their life chances through the materials immediately on hand in the spaces they know how to maneuver.

**Lifestyle: aspirational strategies and tactics**

Lifestyle is about the 'identification of self in material things' and about viewing such things as 'extended expressions of self' (Featherstone, 1992, p. 83). The term 'lifestylization' refers to the ways people's lifestyles express their politics through aesthetic choices (Featherstone, 1992, p. 35). To focus on students' lifestyle is to see what erupts on the 'street' level of the school where student cultures and subcultures of lifestyle performance proliferate. While for the school this bustling space is 'impossible to administer' (de Certeau, 1984, p. 93), it contains its own micro-geographies of strategies and tactics.

For certain schoolboys, a focus on lifestyle involves the elevation to a high order of priority such things as the image, the look, the pack. Boys who focus on lifestyle refuse to privilege the education system's map or tour knowledge in their reflexive identity-production. Instead, they draw on the knowledges necessary to accomplish valued forms of embodiment, display, sets of social connections and disconnections, ways of occupying

space, linking to leisure. These boys may still complete their schoolwork and think occasionally about their futures, but such matters do not have the affective lure of lifestyle knowledges. Lifestyle boys are more interested in the present than the future, in immediate than delayed gratification, in lifestyle now, rather than life chances for later.

Understanding cool codes is everyday lifestyle knowledge embedded in place. In all the schools in our localities, there are hierarchies of cool masculinity and different subcultures of coolness. Knowing what cool masculinity is and where one fits in relation to cool hierarchies and subcultures is an important aspect of school knowledge. The strategy, here then, is to establish a relationship between boundaries and belonging, insiders and outsiders. Indeed, strategies involve thinking in powerful packs. They involve pack knowledge – how to belong, differentiate, patrol. Life style strategists speak from and to collective subject positions.

### *Cool cartographers*

The school's cool cartographers are the dominant boys whose strategies normalize their own versions of cool and enjoy the visibility of their power. Coolness is embodied, spatialized. It's a style of walking, talking, wearing clothes. It's the places where young people do or don't hang out. It is a temporal rhythm, a pace of speech, movement, contact and response. Its defining features require certain kinds of knowledge. Knowing what is or isn't cool fuels an impetus amongst boys to change their life in order to 'be' cool or to have a position on various incarnations of cool. Some young men position themselves against dominant local ideas of cool. Others try hard to fit into a cool pack, but find coolness easier to recognise than reproduce. They hover on the margins of packs. Whatever a boy's take on cool, it's hard knowledge work. Cool is a powerful ideal, not soft or insubstantial.

Boys who are the school's hegemonic cool cartographers are usually big, good at prestigious sports, well liked by the 'prettiest' girls, sociable 'party guys' who ooze independence, control and certainty. Cool binds boys together in culturally and socially coded packs of insiders and outsiders and encourages them to think in packs.

But there is a strong link between cool and commodities. 'Cool' commodities are often items that well-off, mainstream young men have access to – items that are put forward as markers of their wearer's supposed individuality and autonomy. However, they are more appropriately read as markers of ascription to brand label aesthetics and their links to pack culture.

Knowledges that reflect or express the commodification of cool, capitalize on the existing advantages of the boys who can afford cool commodities. These knowledges normalize the 'cool' boy's privileges and suggest that their ontological superiority will lead to further success and supremacy as their life moves on. Simply put, the commodification of 'cool' is a strategy, a knowledge system that is put to work mapping aesthetics, geographical and social spaces in order to support the interests and advance the egos of the young men who have the privilege to choose cool commodities. But the perverse indignity here is that while money and things can be a big part of being cool, they don't make cool altogether. To imagine that cool can be purchased and assembled is to misread the map. Hegemonic coolness involves the invisible and apparently effortless stitching together of various dominant forms of capital – financial, cultural and social. The status of the hegemonic cool cartographer is not easily acquired. Indeed, to try is to fail.

### *Sub-cultural cool boys*

There are also many subcultures of cool masculinity in our different schools. These tend to consist of young men who do cool differently from the dominant cool cartographers. They

have their own cool codes which involve strategic cultural practices operating through the construction of firm boundaries. While profoundly controlling and inflexible, these cultural strategies are also tactical responses to the boys who normalize hegemonic cool.

The coolest boys are usually members of dominant socio-cultural grouping. In Coober Pedy, for instance, there is a strong Greek population. Greek traditions and festivals feature prominently in the town. This strong Greek cultural presence has a significant impact on youthful masculine identities and relationships. At school there is a large group of Greek boys who consider themselves 'the best' at soccer and attracting girls – the important things in life for these young men. According to these football enthusiasts, other boys, envious of their soccer skills and panache with girls, 'wannabe Greeks'. This desire for Greek ethnicity illustrates the ways in which cool can be related to ethnic cultural groupings. Boys in Coober Pedy wannabe Greek because it means being incorporated into a cool, heterosexually active, culturally endorsed social sphere.

But Coober Pedy's 'Homeboys' have developed a sub-cultural cool. According to Christian Young, there is a group of Coober Pedy boys who watch so many 'black African American movies' they have come to 'think they are Homeboys' and behave badly at school. Homeboys draw their knowledge about coolness partly from US TV but also from Hip-Hop and RnB culture. This knowledge is aural and kinaesthetic — rap music, baggy pants and bandanas. Being a Homeboy requires specific ways of moving (a sloping walk, using expressive hand gestures), specific ways of talking (vocabulary such as-'dope' [good] 'yo' [hey] 'bitchen' [excellent]). In all these respects Homeboy culture can be seen as an aesthetically didactic strategy associated with the commodification of cool, no less grid-like than the school curriculum.

But as Riley Stephens, aged 14, from Coober Pedy, explains, the Homeboys in Coober Pedy are mainly Aboriginal boys. This particular articulation of cool is about being black, minoritarian and challenging white authority through the use of a defiant black culture of masculinity. Homeboy culture involves the art of the black tactician, for being a 'Homie' is a means of protection from the attacks of other 'cool' boys, particularly the Greeks. Tactics are ways of coping with dominance. de Certeau (1984) explains the 'dialectic of the tactic' as 'resulting from combat at close quarters, limited by the possibilities of the moment, a tactic is determined by the absence of power just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power' (p. 38). Homeboy culture is grounded in an 'absence of power' and aims to counteract this fundamental absence. It has evolved from the resonant image of the angry, hard-done-by young man, rhyming with his mates to pass the time. This is a nihilistic, reactionary culture, but it is also a mantle of resistant visibility for the individuals it enfolds. Homies in Coober Pedy are fighting back against dominant, white, better off kinds of cool.

All our schools include cool tacticians who deliberately construct themselves through a form of anti-school and anti-majoritarian cool. Further, cool subcultures usually have an antagonistic relationship to each other. Indeed, one of main sources of anxious pleasure for young males is the fighting that goes on between cool and other packs. A tactic is 'a manoeuvre "within the enemy's field of vision"' (de Certeau, 1984, p. 37). Tactics are timed and positioned in relation to a dominant power and are inventive, often spontaneous responses to the exercise of control. They have little or no capacity to amass power:

> [the tactic] . . . must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the propriety owners. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse. In short, a tactic is an art of the weak. (p. 37)

For de Certeau, then, tactics involve the spontaneous development of guileful ruses. They require crafty ways of getting away with actions that go against the grain of dominant

cultural formations. A guileful ruse may be a disguise or mantle of invisibility donned by the tactician in order to escape the scrutiny of the strategist's all-seeing eye.

### *Cool refugees*

These boys invent their lifestyle beyond the cool boys' lines of vision and deploy spatial tactics of survival in order to have a liveable life at school. Friendship is most important to all boys. Without friends at school, they feel very exposed. Certain knowledges are central to making and keeping friends, the more vulnerable the boys, the more fundamental or urgent their need for such knowledge. Friendship groups usually adopt a standpoint on cool – they are cool, they try to be cool, they don't care about cool and so on. These positionings in relation to cool involve choice, chance and necessity and relate to what boys think they can or must do

Some boys are only peripherally on the cool radar, and then only negatively. These include boys who have no apparent aspirations to belong to any cool pack or who may have tried and failed. They may be loners or rejects. The boys peripheral to the cool radar, have usually mastered the art of protecting themselves from the pack, and have probably needed to do so in order to survive socially.

Such boys are not the sort of tacticians who master the critical arts of timing and articulating fleeting, contextual power plays. Rather, these young men are too vulnerable to think on their feet with such efficiency. They have quietly, gradually built their lives through 'clever tricks of the "weak" within the order established by the "strong"' (de Certeau, 1984, p. 40). Yet the art of these boys' tactics is in the slow, silent, unnoticeable ways that they carve out an inhabitable space for themselves. The computer boys of Eden are an example of such slow-motion tacticians. Their daily movements at school are determined by their knowledges of spaces of survival-a cultural, rather than economic kind of survival. These boys hang out in the library and use the library computers during lunch hour. They are safe from judgement, abuse or attack there, as it is well and truly outside the cool kid's line of vision. Such spatial positioning is the guileful ruse. Young men whose lifestyle knowledges pertain to computer technologies, gaming, Internet use and online cultures are happy to be considered library 'squares'. Such discursive constructions keep them safe from the imperatives to be 'cool' and, protected from the cool kids' field of vision by their irredeemably 'square' identity, they enjoy their computers in relative peace. The example of the 'library squares' illustrates how complexly intertwined relations of space and social status are, and how implicated ideas of 'cool' are in such economies of space.

If they are without companionship, life can be lonely for young men outside the cool kids' line of vision. Frank Chigetto, aged 15, from Morwell, says he doesn't fit in with the 'cool' boys. Frank, like a number of other young men we spoke to, talks about hanging out with the girls because it was easier to fit in there. This gender-relation is based on safety and it is notably non-sexual, boys look to girls for a space where they are not bullied. While girls can be just as ferocious as boys when it comes to bullying, often girls who are not invested in cool will befriend boys who have similar values. These groups have easy-going approaches to aesthetics and each other. Yet, the cool boys can see this disregard for cool as offensive. Frank is bullied a lot. He talked about bullies and the ways in which they try to exert power over him and attempt to make him do whatever it is they want him to do. Frank is very aware of the ways in which power and coolness are spatialized. He has constructed a lifestyle in which he is protected from spaces where the strategies of cool kids are brought into play. For example, Frank doesn't go to the 'Karma hall' because it is full of 'mean' cool people. He talked about being beaten up, but carrying on his peaceful

approach to life, he refuses to hit back because he does not believe in violence. Such acts of resistance are brave feats indeed, in the context of hegemonic cultures and pack logic of school cool.

The tactics of the subordinate lifestyle boys are at once spatial and temporal. In a space that is not their own, these tacticians articulate alternative moments and power relations. Such occasions of dissent occur at opportune times. Indeed, to play a tactic is to bet on time (de Certeau, 1984, p. 39). Tactics might involve a quick escape, fleeting alliance or temporary imprint. They may involve novel juxtapositions that undercut dominant narratives or 'facts' and produce something original and politically minoritarian. Overall, tactics are moves of response to strategic acts within a space defined as 'other' by those with the power to 'other'. Hence they invariably also involve knowledge of ways to protect oneself from the forces of an outside that threaten to consume a person, cultural group or body of knowledge.

## Conclusion

The narratives and taxonomies we have offered point to the highly diverse and complex aspirational strategies and tactics that boys adopt. When it comes to the boys who focus on their 'life chances', we identified three sets of aspirational strategists. But only one set, that consisting of boys with aerial vision, is able to successfully navigate the education system's knowledge geography. These boys clearly have the greatest *means to aspire* to university study.[4] Their family's social class ensures that they adopt knowledge strategies that pay off. But let us also remember that the geography of the school curriculum favours such strategies. In contrast, the first set of gridlocked boys has the strategic aspirations but their class location ensures that despite their ardent desires, they lack the strategic means. The second set of gridlocked boys is eager to enhance their life chances but their working-class strategies are out of sync with the school's grids of prestige, knowledge and power. The cool refugees may well have the means to aspire to university study, but their life at school can be made such a misery that these means are severely diminished by their need to mobilize tactics of survival. On the other hand, if such tactics involve educational uses of computers and the library, they may have the potential to enhance these boys life chances.

The aspirational strategists amongst the boys who focus on knowledge about life style are the cool cartographers. Their strategies are primarily linked to the command economy of youthful commodity aesthetics and embodied performance. They are not much inclined to aspire to achieve highly according to the commands of the school's knowledge maps and grids. Like the sub-cultural cool tacticians they are inclined to aspire in the here-and-now not the long term. Both groups want cultural and/or sub-cultural power and prestige on the tough turf of the school and the locality. Their peer packs are much more interested in street smart than school smart. University education is not part of peer pack logic because it is not central to the identity and power struggles they are most interested and involved in. Nonetheless, the cool cartographers often have a social class location that enables them to switch their aspirational strategies to focus on life chances when it matters most. In contrast the sub-cultural cool tacticians can usually only continue to mobilize the tactics of the weak. In contrast, the sensory tacticians who focus on life chances do have an eye to the future and are very smart about it. But they do not see education as central to their plans. It is off their horizon of aspirations.

In sum, we have shown how these diverse aspirational strategies and tactics intersect with the knowledges 'from above' provided by the maps and tour guides of the formal

school curriculum which names and frames aspirations and seeks to control students' ways of being and seeing. Additionally we have shown how aspirational strategies and tactics also intersect with the knowledges 'from below' that arise from what might be thought of as the streets of the school and neighbourhood, but which also involves commodified and mediatised forms of embodied youth culture. In so doing we have pointed to the importance of recognizing aspiration's social, cultural and spatial foundations. Our framework provides fresh grounds upon which alternative educational practices of thought and thoughtful practices might be developed.

## Notes

1. We thank the Australian Research Council for funding this three-year study and Palgrave for permission to reprint selections from Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody (2006).
2. We refer here, for example, to the corpus of work of different research teams at the University of South Australia, particularly that of Trevor Gale, Sam Sellar and Lew Zipin.
3. It has been necessary to provide similar problematisation with regard to the notion of 'choice' and university study (see Reay et al., 2005).
4. We deploy the concept 'means to aspire' rather than the increasingly popular 'capacity to aspire' (Sellar, 2010; Zipin, 2010). Although those who are developing this concept do not intend this, nonetheless the term 'capacity' has psychologistic connotations. We think our term better captures the manner in which aspirations arise from *means* that are unevenly distributed in circumstances that are systemically unequal and unjust.

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