"This is not for them": Material-Discursive Practices and Constructions of Identities in Post-Colonial Mauritius.

*Vijetta Bachraz
Australian National University, Australia

The aim of this paper is to explore material-discursive practices, human and non-human, which seek to transform 'the child' into 'a pupil' whereby identities are imagined, reproduced, contested and repositioned in the post-colonial island state of Mauritius. The preliminary findings presented here emerge from an ethnographic study undertaken for the completion of a doctoral thesis investigating the experiences of public primary schooling for children aged between six and ten years, in two contrasting neighbourhoods. Using a range of qualitative methodologies such as neighbourhood walks, photo elicitation, drawings, classroom observations, interviews and focus groups, this study sought the perspectives of children, their parents, teachers, community workers and government officials. The findings suggest that children’s identities and positionings within the educational system have deep entanglements with the island’s colonial history, the political landscape and the politics governing pedagogical practices and the contents of the curriculum. By employing Pierre Bourdieu’s theoretical lenses and Karen Barad’s neologism of intra-action, this paper seeks to explore the relationships between these different human and non-human ‘agencies’ as they intra-act to construct ‘pupils made to measure’ and sometimes generate alternative constructions in the "space of possibles”(Bourdieu, 2000).

Keywords: Materiality, Discursive Practices, Education, Constructions of Children’s Identities